

Youths and Community Development in Nigeria

Ayuba A. Aminu

*Department of Business Management
University of Maiduguri-Nigeria*

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v3n7p27

Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of youths and community development in Nigeria. It states that Nigerian rural sector is characterised by abject poverty, neglect, poor coordination and supervision of rural development programmes. It also submits that Youths are engaged in continuous efforts in mobilizing rural youth for community development and self-help projects. The paper finally identifies problems associated with youths community development programmes and concludes that success can only be achieved if the whole community is committed.

Keywords: Youth, Community, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Youths have a great role to play in community development in Nigeria as they are being considered to be the active working group. But the structural characteristics of our economy that have marginalised the majority of the youths have also widened the gap between the rural youth and those in the urban centres. With the abundant human and natural resources available in Nigeria, if fully utilized can reduce the level of poverty and improve sustainable human development.

One eminent problem Nigeria is facing today is how to tackle income disparity between urban and rural centres especially in youth situations. Youths have a solution to the problem, if they will mobilize their fellow youths to embark on community development and self-help projects that will make them compete among themselves. Already some communities in Nigeria have formed their Youth's Community Development Associations (YCDA) long ago for the improvement of their living conditions. The various governments in Nigeria have in the past introduced various community development programmes for the benefit of all citizens irrespective of sex. Programmes includes: Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA), Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) etc. However, these programmes seem to have achieved little.

Women in government in Nigeria especially, the former Nigerian First ladies Messrs. Maryam Babangida and Maryam Abacha introduced "Better Life for Rural Women" and "Family Support Programme" respectively. These two programmes were meant to improve the life of rural women and supported the improvement of female youths living conditions in the society through appropriate community development activities. These two programmes really helped the rural female youths to understand and embrace self-help projects to educate their fellow youths in the rural areas.

Community Development

Community development is the process whereby the some citizens mobilize their members so as to

map out a strategy of improving their community through collective efforts. Collective efforts mean the ability to have full participation of members to be able to make use of their local resources in order to improve their living condition and standard. But the United Nations (1963) defined community development "as the process by which efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities to integrate them into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress". Therefore, the United Nations definition of community development implies the participation of both the community and the government.

Hillman (1960) has however defined community development as the method of helping local communities to become aware of their resources in such a way as to satisfy some of their needs and in so doing, acquire the attitudes, experiences, and cooperative skills for repeating this process using their own initiatives.

Position of Youths in Community and Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria

'Youths are great assets in the society'. This statement is true because youths have played a great role and are still playing an important role in community and rural development. Many Nigerian youths live in the rural areas and have been trying their best to improve their status through the community development programmes. The issue is that youths need to participate actively in community development as they will one day become self-sufficient.

Most of the youth's community development programmes are meant to achieve the following objectives.

1. to make youth to be self-reliant through self-help projects
2. to ensure that youths are fully integrated into the nation building through community development.
3. to encourage youth communities to co-operate with government and non-governmental organizations for the upliftment of their fellow youths.
4. to educate and stimulate youths groups to accept change for the improvement of their living standard.
5. to mobilize youths to be aware of the importance of the formation of Youth cooperative groups.

In the case of rural development, youths have a role to play because most youths live in the rural areas and the aim of the formation of youth's community development programmes is to improve rural development. Kumar (1981:162) stated that rural development is "a movement designed to promote better living conditions for the whole community through active participation of the people themselves". This signifies that rural development can only succeed when it is duly accepted by the people. Decree No. 4 of 1986 establishing (DFRRI) has defined rural development as a process through which rural needs are identified, human and mental resources mobilized and exploited to meet rural needs such as food, raw materials, roads, water, electricity, schools, health facilities etc and economic social participation and economic self-reliance in the community.

However, the disparity in the rural and urban development in Nigeria can be said to be attributable to the apparent neglect by government for not discouraging the rural-urban drift. Ballara (1981) and Oyaide (1989) agreed that one of the factors responsible for the rural-urban migration is the absence of basic social facilities in the rural areas. It has also been equally argued that most problems of large cities are caused by rural-urban migration (Ani 1999:66).

The Role of Youths in Community Based Organisations

In most rural areas in Nigeria, various types of community based organisations exist. But the thriving organisations now are the ones formed by youths. In the southern part of Nigeria, youth community based organisations have been in existence. It has also emerged in Northern Nigeria especially among the Christian based communities. Efforts are being made to encourage the Youth Muslim Ummah to integrate into the formation of youths community organizations. But the essence of the formation of the Youths community based organisation is to supplement government efforts in community development projects. These organisations are the closest to the people at the grassroots level, because the organisations are formed by the members of the community themselves.

Like any other community based organisations, youths community based organisations enhance community development through:

- Development, promotion and implementation of development projects sustainable for the benefit of their communities.
- Mobilising members of the community for national development.
- Strengthening community resources management.
- Improving the general skills of youths to be productive.
- Promoting a sustainable human development
- Encouraging the participation of the marginalised communities in the promotion of rural development that affects them.
- To ensure proper accountability of the community resources.

Youths and Self-Help Projects in Nigeria

In an effort to accelerate rural development through youths participation cannot be over emphasized as youths are deeply involved in self-help projects in various local governments in Nigeria especially projects that involve Trade, Commerce, Home Economics, small and medium term enterprises and agriculture. These self-help projects can be classified into two: Government Aided Projects (GAP) and Non-Government Aided Projects (NGAP). Government aid projects are those executed with the assistance of the government in either finance or material resources while non-government aid projects are those executed solely with collective effort of community members.

In recent time, youths have realised the importance of self-help projects in improving the way of life and living standards of their communities. Such self-help is collective efforts of the community to ensure that their efforts are based on their initiatives to achieve maximum benefit with or without the assistance of government.

Some of the contributions of youths in community development projects include:

1. educating the rural community on the use of improved seeds or farming techniques through the Young Farmers Club.
2. clearing and draining of drainages/culverts
3. sinking of ordinary dug-out wells
4. renovation of clinics, health centres/dispensaries in the rural areas
5. construction of rural feeder roads
6. Assistance to the less privileged in the society and
7. other community programmes include; Youths clubs enlightening fellow youth and women on HIV/AIDS, Women and Children trafficking, child labour and VVS.

One is now convinced that the youths have contributed much to community development in Nigeria. But the belief still is that, Nigerian rural sector is characterised by abject poverty, neglect, poor coordination and supervision of rural development programmes. These factors have resulted in the inability of both the government and Youth's organisations to achieve meaningful rural development through community development. There exist a number of problems militating against the advancement of co-ordinated community development programmes in Nigeria.

Problems Associated with Youths Community Development Activities in Nigeria

Problems associated with community development activities in Nigeria are the same as the problems faced by youth's development projects. These problems are:-

1. Lack of adequate funding
2. Lack of basic equipment
3. Execution of sub-standard projects
4. Fraud, dishonesty, and corruption among members/leaders
5. Politics, rivalries and envy and
6. Inability to accept change in traditional and cultural practices

Conclusion

Youths have a great role to play in community development in order to accelerate rural development. Government should also encourage the formation of Youth's Community Development Programmes (YCDP). Bwala and Aminu (1996:133) further stated that the objectives of community development are the establishment of organised systems of social services in order to make people self-reliant and to participate actively in national development.

Youths formation of community based organisations and self-help projects does not necessarily mean it will lead to the achievement of the goals of rural and community development unless the community is very much interested in development. This is supported by Olatunbosun (1977) who opines that ... a development program will not be of help if it is designed by those who have no knowledge of their problem and operated by those who have no interest in their future.

References

- Ani, A.O (1999). *Toward Rural Development: A conceptual Model for Rural-Urban Balance in Nigeria*. In: Undiandeye, U.C, Bila, Y and Kushwaha, S. *Sustainable Agricultural Development. Principles and Case Studies in Nigeria*. Maiduguri. Mainasara Publishing Company.
- Ballara, M (1981), *Women and Literacy: Women and World Development Series of the Joint UN/NGO Groups on Women and Development*. London. Zed Book Limited.
- Bwala, M.H. and Aminu, A. (1996). "Community Development and Rural Transformation in Nigeria." *Educational Forum. A Journal of Educational Studies*; Vol. 2, No. 2.
- Hillman, A. (1960): *Community Organisational Planning*. New York: Macmillan.
- Kumar, A. (1981): *Principles and Practice of Adult Education and Community Development*. In Anyanwu, C.N. (ed). Ibadan. Abprint Publishing Company Limited.
- Olatunbosun, D. (1977): *Crisis in Development. Keynote Address to Rural Development at Village level in Savannah Environment of Nigeria*. ENDA (UN). Dakar and CAEES. Zaria . Ahmadu Bello University.
- United Nations (1963): *Report of the Conference on National Development, by an Adhoc Group of Experts appointed by the Secretary General of the U.N*. New York.