

The Theories of Community Development: Lessons from a Rural Community in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the various development theories and concepts that have guided the community development practices. These concepts examined included the notion of community development, participation, empowerment and mobilization, and how they inform one another in terms of practice with particular reference to Irasa, a predominantly agrarian community in Ekiti State, Nigeria. An instrument tagged 'Questionnaire on Development' was used to obtain information from 30 randomly selected respondents. Results obtained revealed that Community Development Projects (CDPs) could be exploited for the provisions of basic amenities to enhance the quality of life of community dwellers. The involvement of all stakeholders in CDPs planning, implementation and sustainability was obtained. These attributes contributed to the successful implementations of several CDPs in the community. This bottom-up approach tends to suggest the use of modernization theory in Irasa community, the study area.

Keywords

community development; projects; rural community; Ekiti State; Nigeria



I. Introduction

Recent initiatives are conscious of the global failure of externally driven projects, lack of project sustainability and resource constraints (Streeten 1995). Also all executed rural development initiatives (in agriculture, water supply and sanitation, education, health, etc.) have failed woefully (Jimu, 2008). Thus Mohammed (1989) opined that rural communities should be active agents in meeting developmental needs rather than waiting for the central government and other outside agents to provide what might be lacking. Hence a shift in development thinking towards community or participatory approaches (Streeten, 1995) now abounds. This contemporary thinking is influenced by the participatory paradigm, which rests on devolution of decision-making power (Jimu 2008) that involved the participation of all stakeholders in the community (Kayode and Adedokun, 2019; Adedokun and Kayode, 2019). This means of making development possible at the level of a community is referred to as community development, as the rural dwellers themselves 'get into the skin' of the development (Amal *et. al.* 2019).

Community development (CD) is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems (Maser, 1997). Community wellbeing (economic, social, environmental and cultural) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots level (Maser, 1997) and often partner problem solving (Dellati *et. al.* 2019). CD was viewed as a process for the marginalized and excluded to gain self-confidence in joining others and to contribute in activities to change their situation and tackle the issues that face their community (CPA, 2001). Maimunah (1999) described CD as a process of community activities planned and organized in order to increase the standard of living in a social, cultural and spiritual setting through

creativities and active participation of the individuals in the community with minimum help from outside.

De Beer and Swanepoel (2001), traced the origins of CD to the experiences of community improvement and social welfare in the US and UK in the 1930s where CD focused on improving the welfare of rural communities. Thus, the purpose of CD, according to CDX (2009), is to build communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. Annon (2019) opined that CD work seeks to actively engage communities in making sense of the issues which affect their lives, setting goals for improvement and responding to problems and needs through empowerment and active participation.

Ekiti State, Nigeria, is situated in the south western part of the country. Over 70% of her population of her population of 2,398,957 were rural dwellers who are mainly engaged in agricultural activities. Thus, the study being reported here examines the theory of community development as the new paradigm, using Ilokun community of Ado-Ekiti as a case study. This community, where series of community development projects were recently executed, is situated at about 10kilometres along Ado-Ekiti - Iworoko-Ekiti Road in Ekiti State, Nigeria, is an agrarian local community.

II. Theoretical Framework

A number of CD theories and concepts that have guided the CD practice include the centre-periphery theory, the diffusion theory, the growth pole theory, the decentralization theory (Bonye and Aasoglenang, 2013)and the modernization theory (Nkwede and Samuel, 2014).

2.1 The Centre-Periphery Theory

This theory specifies the development contradiction and structural differentiation between spatial settlements of the centre, termed the “metropolis” and the less developed countries termed the “periphery”. This concept believed that the global economy is characterized by a structured relationship between economic centres, which rely on political and trade relations, to extract the economic surplus from the subordinate, peripheral countries.

This theory, according to Jorgen (2003), is also relevant in explaining development patterns in a country in terms of urban-rural divide. It explains whether there is convergence or divergence in development between the centre and the periphery and the factors associated with the ‘success’ of core regions or the different success-stories in peripheral areas. The theory assumes that well endowed regions will have the opportunity to develop further if they take advantage of the resources of other regions. The theory however discourages competitions among spatial regions and allows the state to take total control of the distribution of resources for development. Also, the relative economic advantages of the centre serve as the pull factors thereby encouraging migration from the periphery to the core.

2.2 The Diffusion Theory

This theory described the adoption of innovation in the development of a community. Thus development takes place through innovative diffusion (Yates 2001). This theory attacks conservatism and encourages conservative region /districts/communities to develop. It also discourages the sustainability of endogenous knowledge systems and institutions. There might be collective interest to preserve some indigenous beliefs and systems which are serious targets of innovative ideas and projects.

The Growth Pole Theory

This theory described the spread effect in the hierarchy of development. It is believed that development in specialized designated areas (poles) will spread benefits to peripheral districts. The theory assumes that growth does not appear everywhere at the same time, but it manifests itself in “points” or “poles” of growth with variable intensity and spreads through different channels with variable terminal effects on the whole of the economy (Perroux, 1950). Thus the beneficial “spread effects” from growth poles would eventually induce development in the remaining peripheral areas. Also, its geographical base will bring about structural change in other places.

The Decentralization Theory

This theory described the process of sharing power between the central government, and the regional and local governments such that the central government transfers power, functions, competencies, and means to the regional and local governments at the grassroots. This theory encourages participatory nature.

2.3 The Modernization Theory

The modernization is an economic theory that is rooted in capitalism. The proponents of modernization theory felt that the rest of the World needed to look unto the western model of modernity and pattern their society like the west in order to progress (Nkwede and Samuel, 2014). Modernist believed that the internal factors in rural areas, such as illiteracy, traditional agrarian structure, traditional attitude of the rural dwellers, the low division of labour, lack of communication and infrastructure, lack of ambition and so on, are responsible for their underdevelopment. The concept of modernization incorporates the full spectrum of transition and drastic transformation that a tradition society (rural areas) has to undergo in order to become modern (Huntington, 1971). The development of rural societies is measured by the extent to which there is improvement in the standard of living of the rural dwellers in terms of improvement of the quality of available infrastructures and modern facilities/equipments. Thus the concepts examined in this study include the notion of CD, participation, empowerment and mobilization, and how they inform one another in terms of practice.

III. Research Method

An instrument tagged ‘Questionnaire on Development (QOD)’ was used for data collection. Visits were made to the community where the instrument was administered on 30 randomly selected respondents. The data obtained were set of respondents were analysed by using Likert rating scale as follow:

- SA - Strongly Agreed - 4 Points
- A - Agreed - - - 3 Points
- D - Disagreed -- - 2 Points
- SD - Strongly Disagreed -1 Point

The scores obtained above were weighted to get their means and the means interpreted as follows:

1.0 – 1.49 = SD

1.50 – 2.49 = D

2.50 – 3.49 = A

3.50- 4.00 = SA

The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics especially frequency, means and percentages.

IV. Discussion

The questions answered constituted the basis for the results. Table 1 revealed that all members of the community and government were involved in CDPs. The respondents asserted that governments should not be left alone with the provisions of basic amenities in the community. Also, respondents believed that the provisions of basic amenities will enhanced the quality of life of dwellers in the community hence CDPs does not discriminate between indigenes of the community and the non-indigenes.

Table 1. Mean rating of the responses of respondents on community development projects (CDPs) in Irasa, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

S/n	Statement	Frequency of Responses				N	Total	Mean	Interpretation
		SA	A	D	SD				
		4	3	2	1				
1	CDPs should be borne by governments only	-	3	12	23	30	38	1.27	SD
2	Only the indigenes are concerned with CDPs	-	-	4	28	30	32	1.07	SD
3	All members of the community and government were involved in CDPs	116	3	-	-	30	119	3.97	SA
4	CDPs will enhance the quality of life in the community	120	-	-	-	30	120	4.00	SA

Table 2 shows mean rating of the responses of respondents on planning of CDPs in the study area. All members of the community were involved in the identification and planning of CDPs in the study area and these activities were carried out democratically. Costing and procedure of attainment of the set objectives were not restricted to the community leaders.

Table 2. Mean rating of the responses of respondents on planning of community development projects (CDPs) in Irasa, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

S/n	Statement	Frequency of Responses				N	Total	Mean	Interpretation
		SA	A	D	SD				
		4	3	2	1				
1	All members of the community were involved in the planning CDPs	112	3	2	-	30	117	3.90	SA
2	CDPs to be undertaken were democratically agreed upon	108	9	-	-	30	117	3.90	SA
3	Costing and procedure of attainment were restricted to community leaders	-	-	4	28	30	32	1.07	SD

The results also revealed that implementation committees were put in place on each of the CDPs (Table 3). These were carried out by members of the community as selection or nomination by government or governmental agency was not tolerated. Funding difficulties were experienced on the CDPs as some community members did not made prompt contributions. All the CDPs projects embarked upon in this community were supported by the Ekiti State Community and Social Development Agency (EKCSDA).

Field observation revealed that three major CDPs were recently embarked upon in Irasa community. These are a motorized borehole water project, construction of a maternity centre and construction of drainage. In each of these projects, the community contributed 10% of the total cost of each project.

Table 3. Mean rating of the responses of respondents on implementation of community development projects (CDPs) in Irasa, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

S/n	Statement	Frequency of Responses				N	Total	Mean	Interpretation
		SA	A	D	SD				
		4	3	2	1				
1	Implementation Committees were put in place	112	6	-	-	30	118	3.93	SA
2	Committee members were selected by government	-	-	2	29	30	31	1.03	SD
3	Funding difficulties were experienced	16	66	8	-	30	90	3.00	A
4	Government / Govt.	120	-	-	-	30	120	4.00	SA

	agency contributed financially to the CDPs							
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The mean rating of the responses of respondents on sustainability of the CDPs were shown in Table 4. An operation and maintenance committee is put in place for each of the CDPs. Members were dwellers of the community who were selected by members of the community. Also, the members of this committee function without receiving stipends or honoraria.

Table 4. Mean rating of the responses of respondents on sustainability of community development projects (CDPs) in Irasa, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

S/n	Statement	Frequency of Responses				N	Total	Mean	Interpretation
		SA	A	D	SD				
		4	3	2	1				
1	Operation and maintenance committee is put in place	120	-	-	-	30	120	4.00	SA
2	Members of this committee were selected by government	-	-	16	22	30	38	1.27	SD
3	Members are being paid stipend or honoraria	-	3	8	25	30	36	1.20	SD

V. Discussion

This study demonstrated that the ‘good’ of the community, as Giddens and Pierson (1998) asserted, the interconnectedness of individuals and the societies or communities to which they belong. Participation in CDPs is good for the residents of the locality, allowing them as principal stakeholders to influence the development path of their locality. It has now been realised that the roles of the government and other outside agents have been to inspire and stimulate local initiatives that have the potential of improving community welfare. Thus the top-down approach to planning and implementation of development projects has to give way to the bottom-up approach that will be able to stimulate active community participation to achieve what Neocosmos (1998) termed development through negotiation.

The results obtained in this study area revealed that participation in CDPs is aimed at the provision of essential facilities that would enhance the quality of life in the community. Participation was voluntary, participatory at the various phases of the projects. The CDPs have direct impacts on the community dwellers. It is bottom up in nature and dwellers participated in projects’ conception, planning, implementation and

sustainability. All these tend to suggest the utilization of modernization theory in this community.

The projects executed in Irasa were observed to have promising improvement on the health conditions of the community and supply of water (Kayode *et. al.*, .2019), impact positively on control of erosion on her major road and make it useable at all seasons (Kayode and Adedokun 2019). In conclusion, the Irasa approach to community development is being recommended for utilization in the efforts to develop the rural areas of Nigeria.

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