

Community Participation in Youth Development Programs and Projects in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical research focused on the need for Community Participation in Youth Development Programs and Projects. It discussed various components and theories of Community Development including the aims and objectives of Community Development. The paper examined various challenges and constraints of Community Development and defined Community Participation as a cure to Youth Development Programs. The paper emphasised the benefits and importance of Participation in Community Development as determinants to success in Youth Development Programs. It is believed that if the Youth Development Programs would yield expected outcomes, then it must be achieved through Community Participation in our communities.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Community Development, Programs and participation.

Introduction

Citizen participation can be approached or defined in many ways. According to Ohia State University (2003), when a citizen participates in community affairs, paying taxes, or obeying the law, he has participated in that community project. Furthermore, Emamio, (2013) posits that participation has two definitions with opposite meanings. It can either represent assigning certain decision roles to the users, where certainly they share the decision making, responsibility with the experts. The other type of participation is where there is no shift of responsibilities between the users and professional but instead only the opinion of the user is considered while making decisions. Hakanson, (1981) also states that community participation means some form of involvement of people, with

similar needs and goals, in decisions affecting their lives. For purpose of this discourse, community participation and youth program, it is necessary to identify several of these available youth programs in Nigeria.

Community Participation in Youth Development Programs

Community participation in youth programs can be viewed in various dimensions especially within the Nigeria context. In Nigeria, communities in diversities have a lot for youth development programs. Some of these programs can be classified as follows:

Youth Development and Empowerment Program Model

The aim of the youth development and empowerment model according to Jennings et al (2006) is to guide youth empowerment initiatives within the context of substance abuse, prevention of risky behavior and is based on meaningful participation of youth in community services and projects. Like adolescent psychosexual model, this model also stress on enhancement of positive social bonding and preparation for participation and involvement in the socio-economic and public affairs of the community. This model is grounded in social control theory,, social learning theory and expectations states theory (Jennings et al 2006). Kin et al (1998) earlier posited that the features of youth empowerment processes are specified core structural components that support these processes. The key issue here is multidimensional because it entails both individual empowerment and community engagement, or community partnership.

Youth-Led Research Initiatives

Youths' participation in social actions can contribute to healthier, resourceful and progressive outcome and society. It can also result in more just communities and more effective youths' contribution of their quota to the development of not only their community but the nation in general. Suleiman et al (2006: 126) posited that youths' participation in social action can help lay the ground work for more progressive society. According to them, youths' participation in social action efforts can take many forms including youths' led research, evaluation, planning, community organising, community programs or policy development. "Youths' participation in research and evaluation is a process in which young people actively participate and examine issues that affect their lives and make decisions or partake in the decision making to create meaningful change and desired transformation in their communities with respect to these issues and in the context of the unique and peculiar realities of their communities", London et al (quoted in Suleiman *et al* 2003).

When youths are involved in such conscious efforts to bring about desired change and transformation and empowerment, the results or outcome of such ventures are usually sustainable and all embracing. It gives ample opportunity to youths to harness their potentials and contribute meaningfully to the creation of healthy programs and society that can better meet the needs and create an enabling environment for the youths

to excel while simultaneously expanding their knowledge and skills which are some of the prerequisites for a progressive community, youth welfare and development. (Ugiagbe, 2011).

Increasingly, youth participation is viewed as a vehicle for strengthening young people, their organizations and their communities (Irby Ferber & Pittman with Tolman & Yohalem 2001; Flanagan & Faison 2001 as cited in Suleiman *et al* 2006). A very good area or sector for youths' participatory research initiative is health related research; agro based industrial ventures and community organizing as they affect leadership and entrepreneurial development by the youths. The health sector for example is a critical area of research in the context of youth participation and outcome. The ravaging epidemics and diseases/infections today affect the youths more than any age/group. The productive, energetic and experimenting youths full of inquisitiveness and adventures make the youth more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS scourge than any other group or age bracket, World Health Organization (WHO) (1993) recognised this importance of youth in participatory research and included youths in their call for community participation in health and outlined the ways adolescents and youths health programs require the active involvement of the youths in setting the program objectives, policy development and the allocation of resources in that regard at the local, national and international levels. Sulaiman *et al* (2006) opined that the call for youth involvement still remains crucial in the light and context of the current health status of the youths as the most vulnerable groups to HIV/AIDS scourge, drug and substance abuse and sexual dysfunctions as a result of drug and substance dependence and abuse amongst others. The youths of third world countries are even more vulnerable because of discriminatory, myopic and paradual dispositions and policies of the self-style despots and administrators in the name of government officials (Earl, 2003).

Farm Settlement Schemes

The Western Region of Nigeria launched a program of farm settlement scheme in 1960 aimed at settling graduates of the free primary education scheme on farms. The program failed partly because it recruited young unmarried school leavers whose farm roots were at best tenuous and who remained in farms until better off-farm job market opportunities materialised. The scheme was also established in the Eastern Region but failed because of traditional land tenure and ownership problems.

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The NYSC initiated by the Federal Government in 1973 was primarily designed to initiate youths into the different sectors of the economy as well as enhance national integration. The scheme, through its demonstration farms and young farmer's organization, has been able to involve the youth in agricultural practice. The Scheme has helped to enhance youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria particularly by involving non-agriculture graduates in food production. However, no program is available to sustain the interest of the corporers after their service.

The School to Land Program

This program was launched by the Rivers State Government in April 1985. The primary aim was to promote self-employment among youths especially in the area of agriculture. This was with a view to checking the rising levels of unemployment among youths especially in the area of agriculture. It was also aimed at checking the rising levels of unemployment and rural-urban migration. The program was designed to create a new king of farmers who with government assistance, expert supervision take farming as a career. As governments changed, priorities changed and the program literally died.

National Directorate for Employment (NDE)/Graduate Farmers Schemes

In 1986, the Federal Government established the National Directorate of Employment with four youth program launched in January 1987. These programs are:

- (a) The Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Program. Under this is the Entrepreneurship Development Program where business opportunities are recognized and resources are mobilised for the opportunities to be exploited. It also has the Enterprise Management Support Service Program which serves as the consultancy firm for other enterprises all over the various states.
- (b) The Agricultural Sector Employment Program: this takes care of the school leavers' Agricultural Scheme and the reactivation of dormant farm projects and other activities. In order to attract youths to agriculture through the NDC program, government supplied inputs either in cash or in kind and offered them job training assistance as well. The agricultural program was inadequately managed and sustenance was difficult.
- (c) The Special Public Works Program: This is designed to provide immediate temporary so as to utilize the valuable manpower resources in carrying out necessary public works. This includes construction and maintenance of roads, buildings and other infrastructure, environmental sanitation, land clearing and other farm support services. The program is meant for both graduates and non-graduates.

The Village Polytechnic Program (VPP) Of Kenya:

The village polytechnic program was essentially a youth vocational skills acquisition program covering all areas of mechanics. Zarraga and Green (1969), vividly described the village polytechnic program of Kenya. They stated that the village polytechnic was established in 1969 with about 280 village polytechnics in operation. The programme fell under the administrative responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. At the local level, the village polytechnics were administered by management committees working through a manager.

The Village Youth Economic Group (VYEG) Program of the United Republic Of Tanzania

The village youth economic group (VYEG) program is an innovation programme designed to overcome unemployment particularly among primary school leavers. According to Zarraga and Green (1985) the government launched the VYEG in order to integrate young people into the development process. They explained that the initial role of the program was advocacy in which regional and district youth coordinators visit villages and motivate village governments to support groups. The types of venture to be undertaken depend on the potential for income generation but the commonest enterprises in the area were those involving agricultural activities.

National Youth Employment and Vocational Skill Development Program:

This program is concerned with skills acquisition in the following trades.

Auto mechanics;
Electrical/Electronic maintenance;
Welding/Foundry/Metal Fabrication;
Carpentry and Joinery;
Leather works;
Photography;
Interior design;
Architectural Draughtsmanship;
Printing;
Computer operation;
Catering/bakery/confectionery;
Hair dressing/barbing;
Auxiliary Nursing;
Typing and short hand;
Tailoring/Fashion Designing; and
Modelling.

Apart from the above enumerated programs by the larger community, Nigeria's local community participated a lot in enhancing youth development programs. In a case of Rivers State, for instance, communities are involved in the following stimulations for youth developments:

Scholarship Schemes: Youths are always encouraged and motivated to read and work harder to qualify for Award. This project is initiated by the elites of the community for the youth. Many youths have benefited from this for the last five years like Etche and Omuma communities in Rivers State.

Village Vigilante Schemes: This was designed by the community for the youths to empower them become security conscious, these are youths between the ages of 19-30 years. This project instills into the youths the skills of leadership virtues, peace building and intelligence gathering in order to prevent violent attack, conflict, harm, crime,

stealing and robbery from the community. The youths through this medium, guide infrastructure and critical project of the village and protect lives and properties of the villagers.

Community Cultural Activity: In addition to the above, in Rivers State, Etche communities established a cultural activity known as (*Ituanya*). The community creates this opportunity for the youth to embrace virtue of leadership, self- defence, self-reliant, citizen participation and community patriotism. In fact, youth without this participation is regarded as inferior amongst his peers in the community.

Community Sanitation Program: Beside the cultural activity the community initiated the sanitation program where the youths are encouraged to promote the culture of good living in their environment to enhance life.

Community Town Halls: The community provides these facilities to facilitate training of youths for self-development, patriotism, hardworking and for dissemination of information.

Constraints to Youth Participation (Globally)

Youths account for around 55 percent of the world population (Cook 1991). They are among the most disadvantaged of groups. Often they have limited access to educational programs that are geared to their situation and needs- not surprisingly many people drop out of school. In many cases too, there is a genuine need for the young person's labor on the farm or in the home adding yet another reason why parents see little reason to keep their children in school. Young women have even greater difficulties than young men as they are often not given the same opportunities in education, training and involvement in development activities.

In summary, the major problems that affect young people across the world are those concerning peace, development, education and training, work, health, housing, family life, culture and the environment. These are reflections of the larger problems of the society.

Constraints to Youth Participation in Agriculture in Nigeria

1. Agriculture is associated with drudgery due to the dependence on hand-tools. Most farm operations, such as land clearing, seedbed preparation, planting, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting etc, are manually performed. The mechanization of most of these operations is constrained by socio-economic and cultural factors. Chief among them is land tenure system which especially in the eastern parts of the country encourages fragmentation into small-sized plots, which make mechanization difficult and uneconomic.
2. Investments in developing countries usually discriminate against agriculture. Agricultural products prices are usually kept artificially low for two main reasons.

- (a) To ensure that food is cheap for the population and that raw materials are also cheap for domestic industries.
- (b) In the early stages of development, governments in developing countries depend on agriculture for capital for investment in other sectors of the economy. As a result, taxes are usually imposed on agricultural exports as a means of generating capital funds. In recent memory in Nigeria, regional government established commodity boards which paid farmer less than the international price for their products. The difference accrued to government and was usually channelled into other sectors of the economy. Because of artificially low prices, returns on investments in agriculture were low. This discourages entry into the industry and put agriculture into a disadvantage in the national capital market. Entrepreneurship is also attracted away from agriculture into other sectors of the economy.
- 3. Backwardness of the areas where farming activities predominate. There is a lack of social amenities, such as electricity, good roads, pipe borne water, transport, and market and communication facilities. Youths are trendy and socially active and therefore find it difficult to adapt to the dull and drab existence in the areas.
- 4. Agriculture is considered a peasant occupation in Nigeria. It connotes poverty, illiteracy and backwardness. It is without social prestige. The stigma of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness is a disincentive to youth participation in agriculture.

In summary, recent research efforts have identified financial problems, lack of cooperation from parents or family members, unavailability of Extension agents, bad leadership and lack of community support as some of the major problems faced by youth programs in Nigeria.

Strategies for Mobilising Youths for Social and Economic Development

Some of the causes of youth crisis in development countries have been closely examined in the preceding section. With conscious effort, the current youth crisis facing developing countries like Nigeria will be exterminated or reduced to a tolerable level. The following strategies will enhance the contribution of youths to social and economic development:

1. **Development of Local Communities:** The ideological perspectives of development encapsulate three main definitional viewpoints. First, is the conceptual proposition which relates development to the provision of social and basic amenities by government, individuals and non-governmental organizations to improve living conditions. Second, is the view that development is synonymous with agricultural transformation and industrialization. Third, is the view that translates development to mean improvement in human capital and economic empowerment of the rural dwellers.
2. **Vocational and General Education for Youths in the Vocations:** Vocational education is an all-round educational program provided for people who have

tentatively chosen an occupation but require certain skills and general education to enhance job performance. Virtually all countries of the world crave for the educational improvement of her citizens but the differences lies mainly in the utilitarian value and vocational contents. Considering the increasing rate of graduates unemployment and idleness among the youth, the introduction of vocational education for the purpose of self-employment becomes imperative. Education is a dynamic process and should be made responsive to the changing needs of the society. The type of education that would make youths actualise their innate talents and carry on in a better way, what they already know how to do is the most useful avenue for integrating the youth into the mainstream of social and economic development. Youth vocational education program require a multi-dimensional approach involving the extensionist or sociologist, experts and general education teacher. Vocational education helps to instill self-confidence and esteem in job performance.

3. **Provision of loans/ credit facilities:** The expansion of vocational businesses among youth is greatly limited by finance. Money is needed to purchase machineries and tools required for vocational trades. Government and non-governmental organizations can come to the aid of the youth by providing credit to enable them sustain their chosen vocations. Ovwigho (2000) recommended that credit facilities could be channelled through extension agents to registered youth associations for the purpose of financing their potentialities. In essence, the latent talents of youth cannot be actualised without conscious investment in terms of finance.
4. **Formation of youth club:** The formation of youth clubs, age grade, gender specific groups, young farmers club, boys scout, girls guide, Red Cross and similar organisations are very good in directing the minds of youth towards useful ventures. Youth clubs provide forum for interaction and learning. The major objectives of youth clubs are to expose youths to various occupations as well as to instill confidence and citizenship training. Citizenship training per se enables the youths to become well-adjusted and disciplined members of the society.
5. **Self-Employment Schemes:** Self-employment schemes are abound in developing countries. The most popular in Nigeria are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) established in 1987 and Youth Development Scheme organised in 1999 by the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria. In Kenya, the most popular is the village Polytechnic Program. In Tanzania, we have the Post Primary Training Centre Program (PPTCP) and the village Youth Economic Group Program (VYEGP). In Zambia, the Youth Training cum Production Program, the Chitambo Youth Project, the Monze Youth Project and the Msekhochika School leavers' Project are the most popular. In China, the Communist Youth League (CYL) and Young Pioneers play formidable roles in project design and implementation as well as in agricultural extension services.

- 6. Recreation and Sports:** Youths should be encouraged in athletics, games and sports. A youth can become famous in athletics and games. Typical examples are the likes of Ronaldo, Marion Jones, Kanu Nwakwo, Okocha, Mary Onyali-Omagbemi, Rivaldo, Owens and Ortega. In the past, many parents do not encourage their children in games, athletics and sports but the recent world-wide interest and economic importance of games especially football has brought positive changes in the interest of parents in athletics and games. Many parents now search for football and athletics talents in their children and wards with the ultimate purpose of harnessing it for fame and financial reward.
- 7. Legislation:** Youths are not often given the opportunity to contribute their quota to social and economic development. Appropriate legislation should be made to enhance the recognition and place of youth in the society. In fact, youth development should be made an integral part of policy design and implementation at the local, state and federal levels of government. It is gratifying to note that because of the on-going campaign for youth development, many countries have made youth development a part of national policy. Youths should be allowed to participate fully in the formulation and implementation of programs and policies affecting their wellbeing. This is because the participatory technique helps to ensure commitment to implementation, and maintenance and evaluation of intervention programs.
- 8. The use of informal socialisation Agencies:** Informal socialisation agencies encompass the efforts of the family, religious organizations and individuals in mobilising youths for social and economic development. The physical, social and spiritual development of the child begins at the home. This of course explains the coterminous importance of parents in the future development of the child. Ovwigho (2000), averred that youths from well cultured homes rarely involve themselves in activities inimical to societal progress.
- 9. The use of mass media:** The mass media including the newspaper, radio and television are potent instruments of national development. Many developing countries have radio and television programs which focus on youth development. In Nigeria, for example, the vandalisation of public properties and bush burning as well as destruction of crude oil installations and natural resources have been reduced due to mass media campaign.
- 10. Formal Integration of Youth into the Mainstream of Development Activities:** The youths are very important segment of the society. Any attempt to marginalise them can precipitate resistance and upheaval. Every effort, therefore, should be made to integrate them into development activities of government and non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental and government organizations involving the various ministries, departments and extension agents should design

workable strategies for mobilising the youth to contribute to social and economic development. The youths can be reached through youth clubs existing in schools, towns and villages.

Theories of Sustainable Youth Vocational Skills Developing Programs

The following theories will help to ensure that youth vocational skills development programs are sustainable.

1. Youth Vocational skills training program will succeed to the extent to which the right beneficiaries are selected. It has been identified that many beneficiaries of youth vocational skills acquisition programs were the wrong persons. Wrong persons in the sense that they did not have the natural inclination and many have not tentatively chosen the intended skills training program as future occupation.
2. Youth vocational skills development program will succeed to the extent to which the youths are allowed to generate the skills training programs. Youths should be allowed to decide the type of skill training programs which their talent are best fitted.
3. Youth vocational skills acquisition programs will be more effective if the needs and potentialities of the community are taken into consideration. It is necessary to carry out a community survey in order to determine the needs and potentialities of the community.
4. Youth vocational skills development program will be more sustainable if adequate legislation are made to empower and recognise the place of vocational skills in the society. Laws, policies and bills should be promulgated to promote youth vocational skills acquisition in the society. This pre-supposes empowerment of youths to become self-reliant and economically useful to the nation. In the wake of youth crisis in the 80s occasioned by severe economic depression and graduate unemployment many developing countries started to fashion out policies and programs geared toward vocational skills development amongst the youths.
5. Youth vocational skills development program will be sustainable to the extent to which competent administrators are employed to run the training programs. The administration of vocational skills development program should not be left in the hands of general educators and those who have no sympathy for vocational skills acquisition. Some parents despise vocational skills acquisition and prevent their children from acquiring skills in auto mechanics, carpentry, and farming. To ensure effective administration people without substantial practical experience should not be allowed to assume leadership roles in vocational skills training programs.
6. Youth vocational skills development program will be successful to the extent to which funds are made available. The funding of vocational skills acquisition programs is different from other forms of education. Experts believe that a certain amount of money must be made available before vocational skills acquisition program can be successful.

7. Youth vocational programs will be sustainable to the extent to which they are made permanent feature of the educational system. Youth training programs in some developing countries have suffered a lot of setback due to political instability and lack of institutional setting.

Factors Militating Against Success of Youth Vocational Skills Development Program

The factors militating against the success of youth vocational skill development program include politicisation of programs; top bottom approach planning; adhoc, inadequate and inexperienced staff; and societal value system.

1. **Politicisation of Programs:** development intervention programs and social services should not be politicised. Development programs are primary responsibilities of a country to her people. Politicisation could undermine their social importance. Experience has shown that politically motivated youth programs often die with the political regime which established them. Besides, some of the youth programs were designed to serve the selfish interest of politicians without serious commitment for the emancipation of the youth from the quagmire of unemployment, idleness and frustration. Ovwigho (2000) averred that youth were often wholly blamed for their nefarious activities without objectively considering the insidious forces behind their actions. He asserted that society should be apportioned a part of the blame. It was on record that youths from well cultured homes rarely involved themselves in activities inimical to societal progress. He admonished that it was the duty of government and non-governmental organisations of harness and harmonise the existing youth associations with a view to making them more functional in meeting societal needs.
2. **Top-Bottom Approach Planning:** Most of the youth vocational skills development programs were planned using the top-bottom approach. This type of planning is usually done by the administrator or government officials without involving the intended beneficiaries. The administrator simply decides on the type of skills development program that would benefit the people. Studies have shown that most of the skills development programs embarked upon were at variance with the future vocational plans of the youth. The nexus of argument and sociological postulations are in favor of bottom-top approaches or democratic planning especially with regards to development intervention programs. CTA (2003), and Ogunfiditimi and Ewuola (1995), remarked that the top-bottom approach has a command posture of either, “take it” or “leave it”. This type of approach to development cannot thrive well in a democracy. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) is recommended in a democracy because it gives the beneficiaries the opportunity to contribute their quota to the development process. The foregoing underscores the need to involve the youths in deciding their future vocation. In essence, if the youths are involved in deciding their vocations they would show more interest and enthusiasm in practicing the vocation.

- 3. Inadequate fund/material resources:** Skill training program are expensive to run anywhere in the world. Bulks of money are required for equipment and tools. Unfortunately funds for vocational skills development programs are not often adequate to cater for these expenses. The scarcity of fund is premised on the undue emphasis by the administrators on general liberal education at the expense of vocational skills development. Sometimes, after the initial capital investment, the flow of funds becomes epileptic causing thereby causing program failure. This happens more especially when the administrator is biased against vocational skills acquisition programs. This unsavoury situation has necessitated the call for a separate department in the government ministries or parastatals to cater exclusively for youth vocational skills acquisition. Youth vocational skills development will be more effective if the administration at the local, state and national levels is made distinct from the body in charge of general education. This type of administrative arrangement will make funds and material resources easily available for effective implementation of vocational skills development programs.
- 4. Ad-hoc, inadequate and inexperienced staff:** It was discovered that most of the vocational skills training programs were run under quasi staff arrangement which does not favor continuity. In some cases, the staff was hurriedly drawn from the ministries, parastatals and educational institutions to serve on temporary basis. A situation where inexperienced and undedicated individuals are made to run the affairs of vocational skills development programs cannot bring about the desired outcome of reducing unemployment and deviant behaviors. Experts should be employed to run the affairs of vocational skills development program on a permanent basis otherwise the much anticipated technological development will remain a mirage.
- 5. Societal Value System:** Life has become so materialistic in the developing world to the extent that many youths want to acquire wealth without basic skills and citizenship training. This is because peoples do not question the sources of wealth of rich members of the society. True development cannot be achieved when material acquisition is the central attraction and prime mover of the society. Materialism becomes more detrimental when it precipitates ostentation. Ostentatious display of wealth if unchecked infuriates the youth and prepares the stage for youth restiveness. Many youths see no reason why they should work hard on the farm, workshop, industries and related establishments when others especially the leaders acquire wealth without working hard for it. There must be a revolutionary re-orientation of the societal value system in favor of industry and citizenship if the youths are to remain in the areas to carry on gainful employment. Technological development is the fabric of wealth of any nation.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to note that citizen's participation and community participation are same coins in this discourse. They are stimuli to youth development programs. In a sense, all hands must be on desk to ensure that youth development projects thrive in our time. Creation of enabling environments with sufficient stimulants, youth participation will be realized in our communities. Indeed, the environment that is hostile militarized, in justice and unemployment will always discourage youth participation in youth development projects.

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