



Relevance Of Community Based Counseling In Enhancing Participation For Sustainability Of Community Development Programmes In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on examining the relevance of community based counseling in enhancing participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1,178 respondents comprising of major stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in community development, in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Ikwerre local government areas of Rivers State. The sample of the study consisted of 826 respondents in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Ikwerre local government areas of Rivers State. The proportionate-stratified sampling technique was used in selecting 70 per cent from each category of the population of the study. The results of the analyzed data revealed that community based counseling is a relevant strategy for promoting community participation for enhancing the sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State. The findings of the study also indicated that the problem of programme sustainability arises from the exclusion of community people in the design, planning and implementation of community development programmes that affects them directly. The study recommended that in developing community development action plans for communities in Rivers State, the Rivers State Sustainable development Agency (RSSDA) must conduct a participatory rural appraisal of community needs to ensure that communities have a say in programmes and projects that affects them as this can ensure programme sustainability.

Keywords: Community based Counseling, Participation, Sustainability, community development programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, community development has been widely accepted as the solution to most of the socio-economic challenges facing rural communities in third world countries. As observed by Adekola (2007) community development processes and programmes have become important to socio-economic growth and development. He opined that community development entails the capacity of community people to effectively transform the natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the application of their talents and labor power. This implies that the potency of community development as a strategy for improving the general wellbeing of community people is predicated on the participation all stakeholder, a substantial part of which

are the community people. Christian & Charity (2014) explains that for community participation to be successful, projects must include special components such as recruiting villagers in all phases of designing, implementing, monitoring, supervising and evaluating the project. Recruiting villagers within the context of this study entails engaging the community members' in the identification of their felt needs through several forms of interaction, approaches toward achieving these needs, and strategies to sustaining them. This recruitment is characterized by the active involvement of community members in addressing their needs. According to Jones (2007) community participation entails involving people or interest groups who are outside the formal decision-making processes of government with a view of drawing them into the decision-making process. In his view, this can be achieved through empowering community people to set their own goals in the development of their communities. Okafor (2005) concluded that when communities participate in their own project, the following are usually observed:

- i. Empowering community improves efficiency
- ii. Local participation yields better projects, better outcomes
- iii. Greater transparency and accountability enhances service delivery
- iv. It also encourages donor harmonization.

The philosophy behind a broad community participation in any community endeavor is based on the fact that, in any democratic society, the people have the right to make inputs on issues and services that affect them directly. The growing interest in using community participation to deal with development issues that affect rural people stems from the fact that many of these issues are complex; consequently, they go beyond the capacity, resources, or jurisdiction of any single person, programme, organization, or sector to change or control. Kingsley (2006) supports this view when he suggested that without community participation and collaboration, it will be difficult for development experts to understand the underlying nature of community problems or to develop effective and locally feasible solutions to address them. The emphasis on community participation resonate closely with the views of Barrera (2000) who opined that community people understand the needs, opportunities, priorities, history, and dynamics of their community in ways that professional nonresidents do not. Hence, the need to involve them in the conception, design and implementation of development programmes that affects them. The views expressed so far clearly indicate that community participation is a major foundation base for community development processes. Butterfoss, & Goodman (2016) is of the view that the exclusion of community people in the design and implementation of community development programmes presents a major challenge with reference to project sustainability. According to Ibama & Chikagbum (2017), the lack of community participation in community development programmes is associated with alienation, devaluation self, passivity, apathy, and a loss of the sense of significance, which compromise the sustainability of projects and programmes domiciled in these communities. Dogra & Gupta (2012) identified some of the factors responsible for lack of community participation to include the politics of interest groups, the eroding sense of community, and limited involvement of community residents in civic problem solving. In a related view, Barrera (2000) associates lack of community participation with attitude of professionals, elite domination, lack of expertise, lack of trained human resource, high cost of community participation. Paul (2007) supports this view when he suggested that lack of financial resources, cultural limitations, limited capabilities, capacity of local people and lack of awareness within the local communities are all factors responsible for poor community participation in community development programmes.

Practically, the problems associated with community participation cannot be solved by any individual, organization, or sector working alone. Albert (2001) espoused that only by combining the knowledge, skills, and resources of a broad array of professionals can communities understand the problems of community participation and develop effective and locally feasible solutions to address them. He suggests the use of community based counseling as a major

strategy for combating the problems of community participation for project sustainability. According to Halima Sa' & Murtala (2014), community based counseling is an important mechanism for addressing current shortcomings in community problem solving and for improving community participation in community development programmes. In their view, the counselor in this context is expected to motivate community people to believe that they have the ability to exert control over forces that affect their lives; possess the knowledge, skills, and resources to do so; and should actually be involved in making decisions and taking actions in development programmes that affects them. Daniel (2013) identified the role of the community counselor in enhancing community participation to include;

- a. Repairing the frayed social fabric that impedes community participation
- b. Establishing the connections among community members who may be currently polarized and skeptical of each other's involvement in community development processes
- c. Creating good rapport between community people and other stakeholders

Henry & Israel (2009) further outlined the role of a community counselor in facilitating community participation to include providing community people with

1. information, advice, and guidance
2. tangible aid and assistance
3. emotional affirmation and
4. encouragement and motivation

Manalo (2013) explores how community participation can be appropriated to any community-oriented intervention for the latter to become truly community-based. He opined that, in the context of counseling, making a programme community-based will require employing a variety of strategies that focus not only on direct service delivery but also on establishing mechanisms that will ensure responsiveness, accessibility and sustainability of the programme. According to Fermin & Manalo (2014), community based counseling strategies include; Counseling, Support group formation, Action research, Building structures for collective actions and Advocacy.

In recent times, stakeholders in the development agenda have come to agree that genuine community participation increases the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of development projects in a community. Yet most development projects in Rivers State do not stem from the people's aspiration and initiation as such, lack their active participation. The absence of the people's involvement in these development projects is manifested in lack of maintenance, frequent vandalism of the projects in the state and request of outrageous amounts as "matching ground" from contractors. This study therefore sets to ascertain the relevance of community based counseling in enhancing participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State. Specifically, the study attempted to achieve the following:

1. Examine how community participation promotes sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State.
2. Identify factors militating against sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State
3. Find out how community based counseling enhance community participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers state

The following research question guided the study

1. How does community participation promote sustainability of community development programmes in River State?
2. What are the factors militating against sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State?
3. How does community based counseling enhance community participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State?

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on ascertaining the relevance of community based counseling in enhancing participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1,178 respondents comprising of major stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in community development, in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Ikwerre local government areas of Rivers State. The sample of the study consisted of 826 respondents in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Ikwerre local government areas of Rivers State. The proportionate-stratified sampling technique was used in selecting 70 per cent from each category of the population of the study. The sampling technique that was adopted in the selection of the two local government areas used for this study was the purposive sampling technique. The instrument that was used for data collection was a 15 items structured questionnaire titled "RCBCPSCDP". The response option was a 4-point modified Likert scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The number of responses obtained was multiplied by the number of weights. The number of responses were added together to obtain the total weight agreement which is divided by the number of respondents to get the mean scores. The decision to accept or reject any item in the questionnaire was based on a criterion mean of 2.5 and above. While any item in the research instrument with less than 2.5 mean score was rejected. For data analysis, mean statistics was used to analyze data on the research questions. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test retest method. A total of 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered twice to a pilot group outside the population within an interval of two (2) weeks and scored. The scores obtained from the two tests were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. A reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. This showed that the instrument is reliable to be used for data collection for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: *How does community participation promote sustainability of community development programmes in River State?*

Table 4.1: Mean Response on How Community Participation Promote Sustainability of Community Development Programmes in River State

S/N	Statements	Mean	Decision
1	Programme/Project ownership	2.97	Agree
2	Transparency/ accountability	3.02	Agree
3	Protection of projects from vandalism	3.10	Agree
4	Enhance efficiency of programme/projects	2.66	Agree
5	Contribution of community resources	2.84	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.91	Agree

Data on table 4.1 shows that respondents agreed with all the items. The grand mean of 2.91 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 shows that community participation in all stages of community development promotes sustainability of community development projects and

programmes in Rivers State. The implication here is that when community people are carried along, they are bound to own and protect the programme. The transparency and accountability index inherent in the process motivates them to willingly volunteer their resource to ensure that the programme is sustained. This finding is well in line with Christian & Charity (2014) who observed that for community participation to be successful, projects must include special components such as recruiting villagers in all phases of designing, implementing, monitoring, supervising and evaluating the project. Kingsley (2006) also supports this view when he suggested that without community participation and collaboration, it will be difficult for development experts to understand the underlying nature of community problems or to develop effective and locally feasible solutions to address them.

Research question 2: *What are the factors militating against sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State?*

Table 4.2: Mean Response on Factors Militating Against Sustainability of Community Development Programmes in Rivers State

S/N	Statements	Mean	Decision
6	Elite Domination	3.07	Agree
7	Exclusion of community in decision making	3.59	Agree
8	Cultural limitations	2.77	Agree
9	Vested interest of corrupt politicians	2.85	Agree
10	Community apathy	3.51	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.16	Agree

Data on table 4.2 above shows that respondents agreed with all the items. The grand mean of 3.16 indicates that some of the factors militating against community participation for sustainability of community development programmes include; elite domination, exclusion of community members in decisions that affect them, cultural limitations, the vested interest of corrupt politicians and community apathy. This finding is well in line with Butterfoss, & Goodman (2016) who opined that the exclusion of community people in the design and implementation of community development programmes presents a major challenge with reference to project sustainability. This finding also agree with Dogra & Gupta (2012) when they identified some of the factors responsible for lack of community participation to include the politics of interest groups, the eroding sense of community, limited involvement of community residents in civic problem solving. In a related view, Barrera (2000) associates lack of community participation with attitude of professionals, elite domination, lack of expertise, lack of trained human resource, high cost of community participation.

Research question 3: *How does community based counseling enhance community participation for sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State?*

Table 4.3: Mean Response on How Community Based Counseling Enhance Community Participation for Sustainability of Community Development programmes in Rivers State.

S/N	Statements	Mean	Decision
11	Create good rapport between community people and other stakeholders	2.73	Agree
12	Build structures for collective action	3.20	Agree
13	Counseling to promote participation	3.08	Agree
14	Provide information, advice and guidance	3.09	Agree
15	Support group formation	2.95	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.01	Agree

Data on table 4.3 shows that respondents agreed with all the items. The grand mean of 3.01 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 shows that with the help of community based counseling, community people are motivated to own, protect and contribute their resource to ensure the sustainability of community development programmes within their communities. Community based counseling also plays the vital role of Creating good rapport between community people and other stakeholders, Building community based structures for collective action, Counseling to promote participation and Provide information, advice and guidance. Manlo (2013) agrees with this finding when he observed that community based counseling helps to establish mechanisms that will ensure responsiveness, accessibility and sustainability of the community development programmes. Albert (2001) further supports this finding when he observed that community based counseling is a major strategy for combating the problems of community participation for project sustainability. According to Halima Sa' & Murtala (2014), community based counseling is an important mechanism for addressing current shortcomings in community problem solving and for improving community participation in community development programmes.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that community based counseling is a relevant strategy for promoting community participation for enhancing the sustainability of community development programmes in Rivers State. Some of the factors responsible for lack of community participation in community development programmes includes; elite domination, exclusion of community members in decisions that affect them, cultural limitations, the vested interest of corrupt politicians and community apathy. The problem of programme sustainability arises from the exclusion of community people in the design, planning and implementation of community development programmes that affects them directly. However, when community members are involved in all stages of the programme, they are motivated to own the programme, protect the projects and contribute their resources for the sustainability of such programmes which they perceive to be their own. Therefore community counselors must work hard to promote community participation for programme sustainability through; counseling, support group formation, action research and Advocacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. In developing community development action plans for communities in Rivers State, the Rivers State Sustainable development Agency (RSSDA) must conduct a participatory rural appraisal of community needs to ensure that communities have a say in programmes and projects that affects them as this can ensure the sustainability of such programmes.
2. Multinationals and non-governmental organizations who are involved in community development, should ensure the presence of a community counselor as part of the project design and implementation team, as they can provide guidance on strategies relevant for mobilizing community people for participation in programmes and projects domiciled in their communities.
3. The Rivers State ministry of chieftaincy and community affairs should ensure the deployment of professional community counselors in the various local government areas who can mentor the community people through counseling, support group formation, action research and Advocacy.

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