

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND APPROPRIATE CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ACCELERATED AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study is on capacity assessment of human and institutional resources needed for planning and management of rural development at the local government level in Nigeria. The ultimate aim is to provide the basis needed for adopting meaningful policy measures geared towards the building of local skills and capacities for planning and managing rural development at the decentralized levels. The findings of the study revealed that capacity building in relation to accelerated and sustainable rural development at the local government level in the past has shown the following characteristics: failure to build capacity which can be sustained; failure to address critical national/local objectives; capacity building not treated as a priority, which must be a continuous process/efforts; lack of formulation of coherent strategies with a realistic time frame. The study concludes by observing that for capacity building to improve at this level of government in Nigeria, the following measures must be adopted as a way forward: capacity assessment/profile; analysis of the existing capacity problems; assessment of past approaches to capacity building; strengthening the existing system; technology transfer; etc.

Key Words: *Local Government; capacity building and sustainable rural development*

Introduction

Social and economic development should enable a people to realize their full potential, building self-confidence, dignity and fulfillment. It should free people from the evils of want, ignorance, deprivation and exploitation; and correct existing imbalances and injustices in the society. This people-centred vision of development involves the full utilization of all available material resources and the full participation of the various people in the community for their own development. The necessity for the full participation of the people derives from the experience which shows that there is a greater chance of success if institutions provide for popular participation, local leadership and decentralization of authority (World Bank, 1975:90-98). Furthermore, research evidence from a UNDP evaluation of 200 rural development projects executed in developing countries in the 705 communities, demonstrates that the poorest communities cannot rely on the central government to meet their needs. This study concluded that the efficient delivery of services to rural communities must depend on effective organization at the community level in order to have meaningful interaction with the delivery agencies in the establishment of priorities (UNDP, 1979:104; See Rondinelli, 1981:133). Past experience shows that the Federal Government of Nigeria applied a top-down (supply driven) approach to planning and management of rural development programmes resulting in the marginalization of the grassroots beneficiary communities. This has resulted in the under-development of the rural communities; thereby, forcing more qualified people to migrate from the rural communities to the major towns and cities where, as most people say, “it is happening”. Consequently, most highly qualified professionals at community level migrated to the urban areas, leaving only a handful behind. The overall impact of this dearth of professionals at the local level has compounded the problem, making development at that level an impossible task.

Governance in Nigeria is based on a three-tier political structure namely: federal, states and local governments. The local government structure is known to have the weakest capacity to initiate and manage rural development programmes due largely to inadequate human resources. Consequently, available local government resources for rural development are inefficiently utilized for the purposes intended, thus leaving the people in the local communities in a state of perpetual poverty and under-development. Most communities lack the basic amenities to function at the minimal human level. Functional schools, health care centers, good roads, clean drinkable water, small-scale industries, etc. are not available in most communities. This is disappointing in a country that has earned in twenty-six years, over 200 billion dollars from the exploitation of oil. In spite of this enormous financial resource, the average per capita income of Nigeria in 1996 was at the same level as 26 years ago. 1996 World Bank report (14733-UNI) concluded that “Nigeria is a paradox... Rich but the people are poor.”

The reason for acquiring poverty in the midst of plenty is not far fetched. People are the engine of development, which accelerated and sustainable rural development are enhanced by community participation. Most of the rural development plans in Nigeria are support driven from the federal level, taking very little account (if any) of grassroots. Where inputs are made by the grassroots people, financial resources required for rural development is not made available in the quantum required. And where the resources are sufficient, the human capacity to manage accelerated and sustainable development are grossly inadequate. With increased devolvement of powers to the local government areas in the country, it is imperative to strengthen local capacity in planning and management of accelerated and sustainable rural development. This will be a good response to the

initiative contained in the Country Strategy Note (CSN), the Country Cooperation Framework (CCF) and the 2006 Annual Review of UNDP-assisted programmes which affirmed that at least 50 percent of programme resources in Nigeria are to be targeted to the local community level activities; in recognition of the need to move rural development closer to the needy people.

There is no doubt that the human capacity at the local government level is limited to manage accelerated and sustainable rural development programmes. Thus the focus of this paper is to discuss local government and appropriate capacity building for accelerated and sustainable rural development.

For local government and appropriate capacity building, the 1976 Reform firmly established local government throughout the federation as the third-tier of government. The structure and functions of the local government are contained in Section 7 of the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Accordingly, local government is seen as the first level in the national rural development process. Any rural development activity that ignores the first level (local government) is doomed to failure.

From the provision in the Constitution, it can be seen that local government is assigned wide ranging responsibilities in the areas of Education (UPE), Healthcare (PHC, NPI), Social and Community Development, Sanitation, Agriculture, Rural Water Supply and Economic Development. Besides the constraint of finance, these responsibilities demand from the local government system a high level of performance (concrete results) which, from every indication, is far beyond its present level of competence. This then, is the reason being the growing concern and urgent need for capacity building at the local government level.

What is Capacity Building?

To begin with, we can define *capacity* as the capability of a person, an institution or organization to perform a given task effectively, efficiently and on a continuing basis and with reduced dependence on external resources.

Capacity building is therefore concerned with human resource development (people), institutional development (local government system) and the overall policy environment within which the local government (as public service organizations) operate and interact. Capacity building can also help to determine the efficient utilization and allocation of human resources among competing demand(s).

Local Government and Capacity Building

From past experience, it is common knowledge that the local government has the weakest capacity to initiate and manage rural development programme. This is due to the fact that the quality and quantity of human resources available at the local government level is seriously insufficient. Most of the officials are performing their functions without the relevant qualifications to perform effectively. As a result, available resources for accelerated and sustainable rural development are inefficiently utilized for the purposes intended, thus leaving the local governments today without a reasonable number of qualified Accountants, Engineers, Medical Doctors, Property Valuers or even Economists.

Strategies for Capacity Building in Local Government

It has become imperative to adopt urgent measures aimed at raising the executive capacity profile of local governments if they are to fulfill the rural development role which has been assigned to this level of government. These measures include:

- Staff development at local government and community level must be intensified.
- Training in planning and management of rural development must be hastened as this will form the basis upon which the local government human capacity will be strengthened.
- Training to be undertaken through on-the-job, in-service and academic methods through joint collaboration between the federal, state and local governments, donor agencies, foundations, NGOs, CBOs, SMOs, etc.
- Conduct of a staff audit as a first step with a view to determining areas where there is excess capacity and shortfalls which are to be addressed.
- Utilize critical expertise that is available from the pool of retired state and federal officers in designated professional areas for specified periods on contract basis.
- Carry out recruitment of suitably qualified persons to improve the quality of staff available at the local government level.

Conclusion

The experience in capacity building in relation to accelerated and sustainable rural development at the local government level in the past has shown the following characteristics:

- Failure to build capacity which can be sustained
- Failure to address critical national/local objectives
- Capacity building not treated as a priority, which must be continuous process/efforts
- Lack of formulation of coherent strategies with a realistic time frame.

Consequently, for capacity building to improve at the local government to ensure accelerated and sustainable development the following measures must be adopted as a way forward:

- Capacity assessment/profile
- Analysis of the existing capacity problems
- Assessment of past approaches to capacity building
- Strengthening the existing system
- Technology transfer

Finally, there are two critical issues related to capacity building at the local government level for accelerated and sustainable rural development namely: capacity retention and capacity retrieval.

Capacity Retention involves keeping those trained in critical areas in the local government; curtailing *loss* through *brain-drain*; keeping them constantly exposed to new knowledge, tools and techniques in their various fields and providing conducive work environment as well as the tools to work.

Capacity Retrieval entails making concerted efforts through policy measures to *retrieve* or bring back home those who have out migrated.

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