

Gender Differences in the Role of Local Leaders in Rural and Community Development in Delta State Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines gender differences in the role of local leaders in rural and community development in Delta State Nigeria. Data were collected from 272 randomly selected respondents from the study area. Data analysis revealed that male local leaders executed higher number of projects than their female counterparts. It was found that local leaders were generally involved in community development in the study area. The result also revealed that the role of the local leaders in rural and community development is influenced by their gender.

Key words: Gender differences, local leaders, community development, role, Delta State Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Community development is the process of improving the general wellbeing of members of a community. In doing this, community members need to be actively involved. Uwakah urged that if we consider community and rural development as operational problem then the key to success are participation and total involvement of the people concerned and the sharing of the benefits of rural development. He strongly believes that successful rural development requires involvement of everybody and for this reason advocated the full participation of various village development unions, age grades, individuals, churches and philanthropic organisations in the prosecution of the different but urgent task of rural development. Obibuaku (1983) observed that planning should be with the farmers or rural people and not for them. This is because plans handed down from above, no matter how technically sound would never command the necessary local support that the local people would give to programmes in which they were a part. From the foregoing, it is obvious that participation in the development process is essential for any progress in the development of the nation and particularly the rural areas. Only government or organisation in which the whole people participate fully can satisfy all the exigencies of the social state.

Francis stated that if real community participation and management are accepted as essential to the global thrust toward community development, it must be recognised that concepts of empowerment and equity cannot end at the water source. Traditional power structures can be threatened by new latrines, pumps, hospitals, etc, which benefit the poor. Communities who learn to build latrines or safe water will go on from there to

better other aspects of their individual and community lives. People cannot be motivated to participate and manage only up to a given point in a given direction. Encounter may therefore be the other side of the participation coin. Structures for self government, extending from village urban communities to the highest levels of national planning, become essential if community participation in community development is to be sustained as a reality which can lift the quality of community life. India's National Drinking Water Mission (NDWM) is an expression of such a structure, initiated by a major policy decision to assign the responsibility for rural water and sanitation to the ministry of agriculture and Rural Development. The mission umbrella facilitates a total mobilisation of scientific and technical forces, with clear roles for the agency and for communities, the mission strategy demands people's participation at the village, district, state and central levels, with state assemblies and the national parliament as final monitors and evaluators.

Nguru remarked that in Thailand, the remarkable success in achieving decades goals offers another pointer, through sanitation projects which reflect a bottom-up decentralised approach that responds to community's requests without imposing or imploring. Project funds go directly to elected district committees to which village committees apply after discussions based on local perceptions of need. The political implication of this cannot be minimised. There is an enormous reluctance for policy makers and bureaucracies to sacrifice dependency-building practices, which have so far provided political clout and leverage. The will for such change is therefore a crucial element, without it participation is impossible and without community participation there can be no way to ensure that project

which is safe at the end of a hardware system will remain safe until it is ingested by the people. The real nut and bolts of this effort will therefore, not be found within the delivery system, but in the ability of users to operate and maintain projects. Such ability will require a massive effort at building users participation and awareness. The key element were effective decentralisation. One of the basic conditions for the success of a project is that the community perceives the need for it.

National campaigns will therefore, need to be concerned above all with the strategies of participation. Twenty years ago, it was believed that a well installed by a team of experts was enough. Today, it is known that success depends on the communities being involved in the planning, siting, installing and maintenance of its projects. The consequence of limited involvement of communities/villagers in planning, locating and constructing facilities is a limited sense of ownership and responsibility which leads to limited understanding of the value of the facility or the desire to maintain it. Working with non-governmental organisations, women, local self-government institutions, teachers and schools must be critical elements in a new project mix, which is necessary for effective community development.

Community participation according to Butcher (1998) implies a process whereby control of the project becomes a communal responsibility rather than a situation in which project staff determine the agenda. The ability to share and delegate will not come easily, attitude that have become ingrained over decades of centralised approaches will not change overnight. Administrative gate-keepers will not surrender their controls slightly and people whose apathetic dependence has become a source of political gain for others cannot quickly shake off the past and accept responsibility for their future. Yet eighties and nineties have demonstrated again and again that such change is possible and it is to that change that community based organisation and other members the of community must address themselves.

Another crucial issue in popular participation in community development and the success of programmes/ project is the woman factor. Recognition that no single element was more crucial than the actual involvement of women was a platform of the 1977 Mardel plata conference (Butcher, 1998). Participants stated in the strongest possible terms that such a partnership cannot consist of token involvement, token participation by women, token decision making by community representatives. It was further stated that as a mark of recognition of the vital role of women as users, managers,

acceptors and change agents in community development they (women) should be involved at all levels of development activities.

In order to guarantee that women's key roles at the local levels are recognised, promoted and supported, necessary commitment should be taken to facilitate an active participation in national and international support activities. This includes activities such as policy development and decision-making, project preparation, planning, implementation and management, monitoring and evaluation, advisory consultancies, community development and health education. The conference offered a harvest of constructive experience. In west Bengal (India) the women's co-ordinating council (Calcutta) has acted as a bridge between the state Public Health Education (PHED) and village citizens in the construction of sanitary latrines, establishing the much needed rapport between villagers and government engineers. In Srilanka's Anuradhapura water supply and sanitation programmes, the involvement of women as implementers contributed significantly to the success of the project through changing attitudes regarding use of tube well water, sanitary latrines, changing other health behaviour and community participation. In Indonesia 800,000 women volunteers are working to help protect children's health in 57,000 villages. Women water minders have proved more reliable than men in Lesotho while in Bangladesh and Pakistan, domestic latrine projects in Slum areas reflect the initiative of women volunteers. Hand pump machines drawn from women volunteers in Sri-lanka, India, Kenya have proved their competence in a sector far removed from their traditional roles and attitudes in these societies (Butcher, 1998). Involving women in project management must reflect the considerable variation, which exist within the developing world in the social situation of women participants and in their needs and attitudes. Different approaches may be necessary where women are actively involved in economic production such as in the Surigo rural water supply project in the Philippines, or where women have no apparent role in decision making either at home or in the community as in Pakistan's safe water (WSS) in Sind Kashmir, or where female headed house-holds predominate due to out migration of male workers or other social circumstances as in parts of Africa. This variety must be reflected in planning for women's participation, with budgets which realistically reflect the time, financial and personnel, essential towards activating such involvement that in all this, however, the need for partnership with men is essential so that the responsibility for community development does not become yet another burden in which men do not share.

Thus in many developing societies, one must enlighten men first in order to reach the women, a factor that deserves careful attention in the 1990s. Carolyn stated that the concept of community participation is taken to mean that the community plays an active role in its own affairs by sharing and exercising political and economic power. World bank experience with community participation has given rise to the following definition. An active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development project rather than merely receive a share of project benefits (Evans, 1996). This definition places participation in the context of a development project or programme, emphasises participation by beneficiaries rather than external personnel, stressed the involvement of beneficiaries in-group and refers to a process rather than a product. Recent reports of the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Water and Sanitation for Health project (WASH) points out that the concept of community participation may have considerable potential for improving development planning and sustainability.

On one hand, in most developing countries, the role of local leaders have been hindered by apathy, lethargy, poverty, ignorance as well as low level of living which have negated the benefits of self-help and therefore, the undue insistence on the communities local leaders initiative would amount to insisting that the sick should start curing himself first before a doctor is called in. Self help in community development is related to the local leaders and their citizens participation in development efforts of the community by playing active roles in community decisions, knowledge of local issues, attendance at public meetings, related attempts to influence proposed measures through individual or group actions which involve men and women leaders of the community. It also entails belonging to groups and committees and financial contributions toward community programmes through a process of social action and true participation of local leaders.

But unfortunately, this is not so because it is known that in most communities, the extent of individual participation as well as the role of local leaders in community development is dependent on their perception of the share of the anticipated benefit, which will accrue to them as individuals. Also most rural and community development efforts of the local leaders lack the required philosophical foundation as a result of the conspicuous absence of local leaders and total community participation since agents of community development are government functionaries who do their best to whip up enthusiasm among the people and hand out development programmes to community members and their local leaders (Ijere, 1992).

Based on this, communities are not allowed to identify their problems and goals nor analyse their own needs. Experts and chiefs as well as community leaders are always taken for granted in decision making, while existing organisations are not utilised in dealing with problems as people and the existing institutions are not mobilised. In the same vein, the local leaders of the youth organisations, age grades and women groups are hardly invited during programme initiation. It is the politicians who sit in councils to decide the policy and do the budgeting for rural areas even though they reside in the urban areas. It is the politicians also who implement and quarrel over sharing of the cakes as they interpose legal, social and economic prejudices and obstacles to prevent the local leaders and their citizens from competing with them and what little training opportunity that is on ground is usually grabbed by the politicians without special considerations of the special needs of the local leaders and their subject.

In some occasions also the male leaders prevent the female leaders from competing with them without consideration of the special needs of women and their high potentials in community and rural development. Some other factors which have been discovered to hinder women local leaders effective participation in community and rural development programmes in Delta State include the demands of domestic activities, lack of information related to women leaders eligibility for participation in development programmes, scarcity of fore-women to assist the women leaders, lack of transport to work sites combined with time constraints and lack of pilot projects that are labour based with special, emphasis on women participation.

The broad objective of this study, was to assess the role of local leaders and the issue of gender and participation among local leaders in rural and community development in Delta State. The specific objectives were to ascertain the role of local leaders in Community and Rural Development Projects and identify the number and types of rural development projects executed by male local leaders and female local leaders of the various communities in Delta State; determine gender participation among local leaders in community development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study area is Delta State, which is stratified according to the three agricultural zones namely Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South. Five local government areas were randomly selected from each of the zones to give a total of 15 local government areas. Two communities were randomly selected from each local government area to give 30 communities. From each

leaders and five other leaders (Chiefs) were selected to give 180. Then 10 leaders cutting across local groups and associations were then selected to give 300. On the whole, 480 respondents were involved in the study however, 335 questionnaires were retrieved and only 272 were valid for data analysis. Structured questionnaire and interview schedule were the instruments used for data collection. Data analysis was by the use of frequency, percentage, mean and Z-test.

Information collected on role of local leaders in rural development was based on an 11-item statement with a five point rating scale of strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), undecided (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point). A mid-point of 3.00 was established and decision rule was thus: any mean score that is less than or equal to 3.00 signified disagreement item statement on role of leaders, while a mean score that is greater than 3.00 signified agreement with item statement on role of leaders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community projects executed by the male local leaders:

Table 1 shows that male local leaders executed a total of 1-8 projects in some communities with a percentage score of 93.8 while some communities had 9-16 projects executed by the male local leaders having a percentage of 6.2. It shows that in most communities in Delta State, that the number of projects executed is still very low and need to be improved upon.

To support this view, Oni and Bello stated that the level of people's involvement is generally low. This is because the planning of community development programmes have always been done at the top where the elite, directors and commissioners are involved without the people who know their problems better like the local leaders of the communities. Table 2 showed that the female local leaders executed 1-4 projects in most communities, with percentage score of 89.3 while 5-8 projects were executed in some other communities with a percentage score of 10.7.

From the findings, it was observed that the female leaders executed very few projects in most communities. This could be attributed to the impediments posed by the male leaders against women's active participation in developmental processes and in decision making. Ijere (1977) reiterated that although women constitute more than 50% of Nigeria's population, they are excluded or even marginalised by the leadership systems of most communities.

Comparing this with that of males, it is observed that the male leaders executed higher number of projects because of their superior economic power as well as their domineering nature in the community development process by attracting developmental projects to their communities. Also putting efforts together by making personal contributions to ensure that developmental projects are executed in their communities. In the words of Butcher (1998) another crucial issue in popular participation in community development and the success of programmes/project is the woman factor. Recognition that no single element was more crucial than the actual involvement of women. As a mark of recognition of the vital roles of women as users, managers, acceptors and change agents in community development, they should be involved at all stages of development activities. Continuing, he said that in order to guarantee that women's key roles at the local levels are recognized, promoted, supported, necessary commitment should be taken to facilitate an active participation in national and international support activities.

Table 1: Distribution of number of projects executed by male local leaders

No of projects	Frequency	(%)
1-8	255	93.8
9-16	17	6.2
Total	272	100.0

Source: Survey data (2003)

Table 2: Distribution of the projects executed by the female local leaders

No of projects	Frequency	(%)
1-4	243	89.3
5-8	29	10.7
Total	272	100.0

Source: Survey data (2003)

Table 3: Mean distribution of the role of local leaders in rural development

Roles	Mean scores	Remarks
Arrange for funds in the from of levies, donation, to finance projects	4.23	Agree
Formulate policies in community matters	4.21	Agree
Determination of feasible projects based on the available resources	4.33	Agree
Determination of feasible projects based on community needs and priorities	4.23	Agree
Developing plan of administrative structure in the community to get community development done	3.97	Agree
Mouthpiece of the community	4.10	Agree
Provide the liaison between the government and rural people through information dissemination and educating the people on government intentions and objectives of community development	4.04	Agree
Awakening the political consciousness of the people	4.05	Agree
Link between the government and the rural people for effective and efficient participation by all in community development projects.	4.06	Agree
Evaluate decisions, goals and procedure for goal attainment	4.35	Agree
Coordination and supervision of community development projects	4.15	Agree

Table 3 shows that local leaders agreed that they were involved in arranging for funds in the form of levies, donations, to finance community development projects (mean = 4.23), helping community to formulate policies in connection to a wide variety of matters affecting the community (mean = 4.21), helping in the determination of feasible projects based on available resources (mean = 4.33), helping in the determination of feasible projects based on community needs and priorities (mean = 4.23). They also agreed that they organize by developing plan of administrative structure in the community (mean = 3.97) they act as the mouth piece of the community (mean = 4.10), they provide liaison between rural people and the government through information dissemination (mean = 4.04). Local leaders also help in awakening the political consciousness of the people (mean = 4.05), they help communities to evaluate decisions, goals and procedure for goal attainment (mean = 4.35) and they coordinate and supervise community projects to ensure adequate execution (mean = 4.15).

The findings on the roles of local leaders are in line with Adesope and Asiabaka (2002) who stated that a local leader is one who has some specific characteristic that have made him very invaluable in his locality. The findings of the present study showed that local leaders in the study area have concern for their community hence exhibit leadership role that will engender progress. It is pertinent that local leaders be consulted before a community project is embarked upon. This will give legitimization by way of support which will make other members of the community believe in the project and show solidarity. Local leaders exert reasonable level of influence on the people they lead. They are therefore, useful in passing on information and helping to plan and execute development projects thereby gaining the trust of the people.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the gender of the local leaders and their role in rural and community development.

The result from Table 4 showed that there was significant difference between the gender of the local leaders and their role in community and rural development. This was based on the z-test result. From the table, female local leaders were 85 in number, while the male local leaders were 187 in number. The mean role of

the female local leaders was 50.952 with a standard deviation of 2.035 and variance of 4.142 while that of the male local leaders was 43.446, standard deviation of 5.74 and variance of 25.751. The difference resulted to a Z-value of 17.322 which was significant at 0.05 level. The hypothesis was therefore, rejected because there was a significant difference in the role of the male and female local leaders in rural and community development.

The result proved that the role of the local leaders in rural and community development is influenced by their gender. It showed that women do not play the same level of leadership role with the men in community and rural development. Butcher (1998) states that there is need for the partnership between men and women in community development so that the responsibility for community development does not become yet another burden in which men do not share. Thus, in many developing societies, one must enlighten men first to reach the women.

CONCLUSION

The role of the local leaders in community and rural development cannot be overemphasized as they have been found to be veritable agents of development in their communities but it is obvious that community and rural development require huge expenditure and capital investment. It is the task of the local leaders through community development to determine the direction of growth of the communities, to set goals for development, to devise means of achieving these goals, to evaluate progress periodically and to revise goals and programmes where necessary. It is also the role of the local leaders to arrange for funds in the forms of levies, donations etc, to finance community development projects, determine projects that are feasible based on available resources and on community needs and priorities develop administrative structure to get community development done, act as the mouth piece of the various communities, provide liaison between the government and rural people, awakening the political consciousness of the local people and assist in the co-ordination and supervision of community and rural development projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that male and female local leaders have been greatly involved in the initiation, implementation, co-ordination, evaluation and supervision of community projects which will increase the sense of ownership among the leaders and make them to play greater role by way of encouraging further projects and

Table 4: The Z test result of the significant difference between the gender of the local leaders and their role in rural and community development

Variable	N	Std. deviation	Variance	df	Z	Decision
Females	85	2.035	4.142	270	17.322	Reject
Males	187	5.074	25.751			

* Z- value significant at 0.05 level

mobilizing the local community members for more project execution. There is need to motivate the local leaders by ensuring limited government intervention in community projects except at the level of assistance by releasing fund to complement the efforts of the local leaders and their subjects and by ensuring that projects are initiated by the local leaders in association with their community members so that the enthusiasm which is required for successful project execution were present among the local leaders and their subjects. The local leaders and their subjects cannot mobilize all the resources needed for the development of their communities. They need assistance and this should come from the government, corporate individuals, wealthy persons and international donor agencies, so that community and rural development activities will be an easy task for the local leaders and their subjects.

There is need for public enlightenment among the local leaders and their subjects. For this reason, the public enlightenment unit and other departments of the local authority should not only concern themselves with adult literacy but also with practical demonstrations by way of visual and model forms. Also, local committees composed of various political and social shades of opinion should be established in the communities, It is therefore, imperative for local authorities to be fully involved in community development projects during the very early stages of the discussion for such projects at community level.

It is also clear from this study that local leaders and their subjects need financial assistance, however, the financial support need to be accompanied by training in technical, organizational and adult literacy. Such support and training function would best be undertaken by intermediary organisation, the identification and building

of organisations of a scale and capacity suitable to mediate between state and community levels should therefore be a priority. It is necessary to involve women or their representatives effectively in the process of community development. While achieving the task with the involvement of women and their leaders, we should not bring about disparity among people in terms of possessions and profit. Care should be taken to ensure effective participation of all sections of the community, in order to maintain social equilibrium and the required high morale.

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