

LOCAL CAPACITY EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN BEECHIVE COMMUNITY OF OBUDU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The nexus between local capacity empowerment and rural livelihoods is examined in the paper. Local capacity empowerment in terms of building local district capability, promoting social capital, engendering community participation, awareness creation and social entrepreneurship promotion are found to be crucial issues in strengthening rural livelihoods. Decades of development experiences have exacerbated disparities among communities in Sub-Sahara Africa with some recording greater level of socio-economic wellbeing compared to others. Thus creating alternative paradigm becomes developmentally expedient. The local capacity empowerment as a strategy empowers rural dwellers by strengthening livelihood diversification that encourages system interdependence and cooperation with development actors within the community.

Keywords: *Public administration, capacity, empowerment, rural, livelihoods*

INTRODUCTION

Livelihood encompasses the relationship between human survival and environment. It implies the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and all activities required for a functional and positive means of living in the rural area (chambers & Connag, 1992). It makes rural poverty reduction as the cardinal issue. Rural livelihoods relate with well being and capabilities. Sen (1987) perceives capabilities as “what people can do or be with their entitlements”. This goes beyond the material concerns of food in-take or income. Rural livelihood explores the intrinsically valued elements of “capability” or “well-being”. The rural dwellers resilience in the face of stresses and shocks is key to both livelihood adaption and coping (Davies, 1996).

Rural people’s livelihoods are vital in national, regional and local economies because of the potential market for increased demand for consumer goods and services. Their potential contribution to or drain on available local resources as a dynamic and growing part of the local economy engendering employment, tax revenues or even as a stagnant sector demanding welfare support for a poor segment of the population is highly acknowledged. Rural dwellers derive their livelihood from small scale agriculture. Majority of them depend on activities of peasant farm households as a way to tackle poverty. The rural economy is sustained on the various livelihood activities of these rural dwellers. Although the rural dwellers are crucial in the development of national economics, they are subjected to poverty, causing excessive pressures on urban areas through rural-urban migration, national, regional and global economies and the environment.

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, per capita agricultural growth is low and negative with increases in incidence and severity of rural and national poverty and increasing pressure on limited natural resources. Therefore, the need to improve their quality of life and to extend their control of life and to extend their control over their environments, resources and destinies has become very important.

Efforts to enhance the quality of rural life have been through macro policy interventions. The government’s strategies of improving rural livelihoods have included creation of states and local government areas. The mobilization of people for local participation in planning and implementation of community development projects to create new centres of development and reduce rural-urban drift have not yielded expected results. The National Development Plans of Nigeria from 1975-1985 and rural development programmes such as Operation Basin Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authorities, Agricultural Development Projects etc have stressed the need to address the impoverished condition of rural dwellers (Egbe, 2014). Despite the potentialities of the rural environment considering its

workforce, contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the estimated private sector investment of N1,632 million in the 1970-1974 in the Second National development Plan, only N246 million or 15% was expended in rural development. The same observation in the Third and Fourth Development Plan periods (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1970-74;Egbe2014).

Initiatives and strategies designed to enhance rural livelihood by ameliorating poverty have largely failed (Enyi, 2010). The welfare of communities has not improved. This presupposes the need to select appropriate means to meet the needs of various communities. It implies that designing an approach to meet the aspirations of out locality must inevitably point towards local capacity empowerment. The early approaches were based on obsolete trickledown theory where the main beneficiaries were supposed to diffuse information and motivate the rural dwellers.

Locality capacity empowerment translates to expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increases the community's authority and controls over the resources and decision that affect their lives. Locality empowerment programs could result to enhanced rural livelihoods through improved incomes of the poor and non poor, improved basic needs (shelter, health and nutrition), changes in income distribution and decreases in inequities, diversification of income sources, changes in income security increased yields, changes in consumption and diet, improved quality of life etc (Nkpoyen, Mbat & Bassey, 2014).

Locality capacity empowerment implies that the dwellers are their own assets the role of the external agent is to catalyze, facilitate or support the community in achieving wellbeing in terms of both quality of life And material living conditions. It implies community ownership and action that aims at social and political change (Baum, 2008). This empowerment occurs in different dimensions. However, the dimensions examined here are building local capability, promoting social capital, awareness creation, engendering participation of community organization and entrepreneurship promotion.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how building local district capability is associated with rural livelihoods.
2. To determine how promoting social capital is associated with rural livelihoods.
3. To demonstrate the association between awareness creation and rural livelihoods.
4. To investigate the extent to which empowerment through participation impacts in rural livelihood.
5. To determine the link between social entrepreneurship and rural livelihoods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local capacity empowerment and rural livelihoods

Local district empowerment is community capability building and power sharing among the groups of people who are bound by common interests (Nikkhah & Redman, 2010). It is a social process that helps people assume control over their own lives by building capacity for social change. The process involves enhancing the community's capability to make choices and transform those choices into desired action and outcomes (Auspen, 2005). Community empowerment as a multidimensional concept is associated with the power to make decisions on matters that affect communities and individual lives to cause positive change create social solidarity (Samah&Aref, 2009; Abiche, 2011:58) community. The community exercise real choice and gain increased control over their environment.

The concept of empowerment has permeated the policies and programmes of Non-Governmental Organization(NGOs), bilateral and multilateral institutions. It focuses on power and its distribution in the process of social transformation power viewed as a necessity for radical change and confrontation. Power is the basis of community wealth, powerlessness is also the basis of the community poverty (Abiche, 2012). Locality empowerment thus has positive implications for rural livelihoods by strengthening and energizing rural socio-economic wellbeing.

Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living (Chambers & Conway, 1997). Barret & Brown (2002) observed that livelihoods is an important element in rural development theory and practice since it covers numerous concerns and permits the inclusion of people's activities and assets in taking cognizance of the manner they support themselves. In other words, the focus is not strictly on economic, income generating or formal activities.

The rural economy is characterized by peasants' livelihoods. The rural people themselves are involved in part time farming activities not commercial or cooperative farms. They engage in multiple small scale economic activities and enterprises in the informal economy and such activities depend heavily on family labour with relatively little use of capital. Even with rapid urbanization, 70-75 percent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas with their livelihoods largely dependent on agriculture (DFID, 2002). Livelihoods assets are very crucial in local capacity empowerment. The poor rural dwellers have assets. Empowerment is meant to work from their strengths and assets and de-emphasis weakness and problems. In the process, dependency is minimized. The people have different kinds of asset (or capital) livelihood strategy and income.

Rural livelihoods focuses on participation and responsiveness of end users. Livelihood is the way people make a living (Hawkins, 2009). Therefore, understanding different livelihood objectives of rural households and managing different assets are very important. Rural livelihoods focus on agriculture and small farming systems but the need for farm household diversification into non-farm activities is seen as crucial too. This is so because the breakdown of traditional coping strategies has rendered many people vulnerable to crisis associated with their incorporation into the market economy (Elliot, 2006).

The starting point in empower communities by giving them more resources and authority to use these flexibly. This process cannot depend forever on emergency funds or short-lived donorprogrammes. It must necessarily be embedded in a permanent institutional structure. Moreover, top-down plans and donor-driven investment programmes have been less successful. A few approach built on a vision of prosperity through the empowerment of local communities is required (Gatti & Fisman, 2000). Research indicates that a “lack of empowering approaches in the past may have left a legacy of people and communities, feeling disillusioned, cynical, ‘apathetic’, disinterested, angry, confrontational and over consulted”.

The basic theoretical question that this paper sought to address was: to what extent has local capacity empowerment been able to sustain rural livelihoods? Many development agents use the technique of community empowerment to create sustainable livelihoods. Abiche, (2012) reported that the Ethiopian Kale Haywet Church (EKHC) which has over 7,000 local congregations and seven million members is one of those agencies. The church has been involved in socio-economic development for the past two decades through it community – based development prorgame (Yacob, 2010). As an NGO, promoting the creation of ideas and the capacity building of members, the EKHC served as the source of information on linking social capital and community empowerment to create sustainable livelihoods.

The top bottom approaches of the past decades failed to work as expected. Attempts by national governments to modernize traditional rural populations with the aid of international organizations and experts led to thousands of projects and piles of technical reports but little in the way of tangible achievements. The conception and maintenance of development programmes were frequently top-down. Completed projects were rarely sustained by the communities themselves and such dependency has local capacity reduced empowerment (Mehcy & Kabbani, 2007).

Several years of development experience especially the modernization approach has exacerbated disparities among communities in Sub-Sahara Africa and has promoted the search for the alternative development parody such as local capacity empowerment. The alternative approach is inclusive in that it encourages popular participation, grassroot initiation, indigenous

and acquired knowledge- based collective thinking and community/ personal action. The search for a new model to enhance socio-economic wellbeing through livelihoods diversification that encourages system interdependence and cooperation with all development actors is inevitable (World Bank, 2002).

Building local district capability and rural livelihoods

Capacity includes the ideas of both containing (holding, striving) and ability (of mind, of action). Capacity implies that a community can act in particular ways: it has specific faculties or powers to do certain things. These capabilities may relate to a number of aspects of community functioning, but in the context of community building, they are all concerned with ways to promote or sustain the wellbeing of the community and its components – individuals, informal groups, organizations, social networks and the physical environment (Aspen, 2005).

Building local capability is what makes communities “work”. It is what makes well functioning communities function well. According to Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh & Vital (2001) building local district capacity involves the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given locality that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the wellbeing of the community. This has a way of positively affecting rural livelihoods. It may operate through informal social processes and or organized efforts by individuals, organizations and social networks that exist among them and the larger systems of which the community is a part (Chaskin et. al, 2001).

Local communities are differentially endowed with resources that residents can draw on to enhance rural livelihoods – for example, services, physical infrastructure, housing, jobs, education and income. All these collectively and concretely bring about enhancement in the rural livelihoods of the neighbourhood (Jargowsky, 1997). Messay (2009) observed that building local capability building induces rural wellbeing since it focuses on local reserves of commitment, skills, resources and problem-solving abilities often connected to a particular development programme or utilization. It emphasizes the participation of individual community members in a process of relationship building, community planning, decision making and action Munslow (2001). Based on the literature on related constructs such as community competence and empowerment, community capacity is “the community’s ability to pursue its chosen purposes and courses of action” (Hardina, 2003). Scholars such as Kretzman & McKnight (1993), De & Swanepoel (2000) & Bekele (2008) agree that building local capability building results in improved standard of living of the members.

Promoting social capital and rural livelihoods

Social capital are resources communities' possess in the form of institutions, networks, association, values and norms. The networks, norms, a collective asset, relationships, governance structure and participatory processes are the avenues through which social capital is expressed (Putnam, 1993; World Bank, 2002). Putnam (1993) views social capital as norms of generalized reciprocity, networks of civic engagement, social trust to reduce defects and uncertainty and provide models for further cooperation of the society. The World Bank (2002) reported that institutional social capital is very vital for community networks. Warren (1999) stressed that social capital embraces indigenous and local knowledge, the poor's man asset that can be invested in survival to promote food, provide shelter and achieve a degree of control over their own lives. It is a unique form of people. Generated knowledge rooted in particular place and set of experiences existing to facilitate a better state of livelihoods.

Woolcock (2000) agree with Moser (1996) and Narayan (1997) that communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability than those without. Edwards (2006) observed that social capital is where people share a sense of identity, hold similar views; trust each other and reciprocally do things for each other. This is felt to have an impact on the social, political and economic nature of the community. Narayan and Pritchett (1997) and Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2000) assert that social capital comprised a set of resources that can be accessed by membership in a group organized around resources (whatever they may be) and these resources bring enhanced economic rewards and rural livelihoods. According to World Bank (1999), Woolcock (2000) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000) social capital is necessary to connect the poor to mainstream resources, improve access to wider markets and formal credit system. Social capital in a community includes institution, relationships, attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Thomas (2008) argues that poverty is "not only an indication of a lack of resources, but fundamentally, about the lack of awareness on the part of a people of their own role in the fight against poverty".

Putnam (2000) describes different forms of capital, for example, physical capital such as physical objects; human capital as individuals and social capital as connections among individuals/ social networks: the norm of reciprocity and trustworthiness arising from them are necessary elements for sustainable rural livelihood. Social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems easily by greasing the wheels that allow the community to advance smoothly and creating a flow of information exchange and community connectedness needed for sustainable rural livelihoods.

Awareness creation and rural livelihoods

Sensitization is considered a process of learning to perceive social, political and economic realities. Community empowerment places emphasis on a people – centered development approach. Bodja (2006) argues that the emergence of empowerment as a development is associated with the overall shift to alternative development as policies that emanated from mainstream development failed to deliver result that reduce underdevelopment. Hardina (2003) avers that empowerment efforts should focus on improvements in rural livelihoods.

Oakley (2001) observes that greater participation democratization and capacity building mean little unless poor people also have greater economic ownership and control. There should be institutional mechanisms for flow of information exchange among the community. These mechanisms should support poor people and citizens' access to information, foster inclusion and participation, ensure accountability and invest in local organizational capacity (World Bank, 2002).

Empowerment through participation/capacity and rural livelihoods

Local capacity building involves working with poor and marginalized people to identify capacities needed for self-reliance and enhancing skills for rural livelihoods (Munslow, 2001). It is easy to empower the poor for enhanced livelihood, by strengthening their capacity to engage in development through community (Monaheng, 2000). Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) admit that the raw material for community building empowerment is the capacity of individual members. May weak communities focus largely on the deficiency aspect of capacity building rather than the capacities of its members. What builds a powerful community for better livelihoods is the capacity of its members. To be a powerful community, people in the community must be considered as partners and producers in the development discourse. Community empowerment requires systematic and participatory capacity assessment (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Participation significantly advances the process of employment which translates to improved rural livelihoods.

Participation as an end enables others, especially communities to have greater capacity to work together to solve problems. It indicates authentic and true participation (Dalelo, 2006). This has the tendency to enhance rural livelihoods. Participation builds confidence and solidarity among rural dwellers. It responds to local needs and changing circumstances. As a community empowerment process, participation presupposes the building up of influence or involvement from the bottom up (Melkote & Steeves, 2009). Nikkhah and Redznan (2010) suggest that local capacity empowerment should encompass capacity building and start at individual level. Individual level capacity includes skills, knowledge, consciousness and awareness, hope, action

and beliefs that affect changes in wider social structures and processes that result in increased rural resources, livelihoods and opportunities.

Social entrepreneurship and rural livelihoods

Social entrepreneurs search for and create local opportunities to rural livelihoods improvement through social, human and economic development. Small entrepreneurial initiatives have evolved to massive scale in some communities in Bangladesh, India, Egypt, South Africa etc. (Eelos&Mair, 2005). Social entrepreneurs create social impact and enhance income generation. Entrepreneurial development, among rural women as an empowerment process helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increases their decision making status in the community. The micro-entrepreneurships are strengthening rural dwellers' livelihoods for improved quality of life.

Entrepreneurial opportunities facilitate rural livelihoods by empowering rural dwellers with independence, increased respect and social status foster the establishment of savings groups to generate capital, encourage self-reliance with vulnerable households and create social capital through informal and formal groups (Young, 2006). This approach considers human values and challenges conventional approach to development and poverty alleviation. It adopts more inclusive ways to elevate the livelihoods of the marginalized rural dwellers (Abiche, 2012)

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Sustainable livelihood Approach

The sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) is a way to improve understanding of the livelihoods of poor people. It draws on the main factors that affect poor people's livelihood and the typical relationships between these factors. It can be used in planning new development activities and in assessing the contribution that existing activities have made to sustaining livelihood (IFAD, 2010).

The two components of the SLA are: framework that helps in understanding the complexities of poverty; set of principles to guide action to address and overcome poverty. The SLA framework places rural poor people at the center of a web of interrelated influences that affect how they create a livelihood for themselves and households. Closest to the people at the centre of the framework are the resources and livelihood assets that they have access to and use. These could be natural resources, technologies, their skills, knowledge and capacity, their health, access to education, sources of credit or their networks of social support. The extent of their access to those assets is strongly influenced by their vulnerability context, (economic,

political, technological) shocks, (epidemics, natural disasters, civil strife) and seasonality (prices, production, employment opportunities). Access is also influenced by the prevailing social, institutional and political environment, which affects the ways in which people combine and use their assets to achieve their goals. These are their livelihood strategies.

Rural people are the major focus of attention rather than the resources they use. SLA identifies the main constraints and opportunities faced by poor rural dwellers as expressed by themselves. It seeks to support poor people through local capacity empowerment. Rural people are able to take advantage of capacity empowerment avenues such as building local capability, promoting social capital and social entrepreneurial promotion to enhance rural livelihood. Thus, SLA is people-centred (it analyses people's livelihoods and how they change over time. The rural dwellers themselves actively participate in the process); holistic (acknowledges that people adapt many strategies to secure their livelihoods and that many actors are involved); dynamic (it seeks to understand the dynamic nature of livelihoods and builds people's capacity), building on strength (relies on rural people's perceived strengths and opportunities. It supports existing livelihood strategies); forging micro-macro links (highlights the need for policies to be informed by insights from the local people and by their priorities.); broad partnership and aims for sustainability.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BECHEEVE COMMUNITY OF OBUDU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

Obudu Mountain Resort is located in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It lies between latitude 602113011 and 602213011 N and longitude 90221011 and 90221451 E. The mountain resort occupies an area of 10459km² and a height of 1576m above sea level (CRS Tourism Bureau, 2010).

It is a tourists' locality and has experienced increased tourists visits and patronage. The host people, the Beehive community were mainly farmers and hunters but are now becoming more interested in tourism-related activities like jobs in hotels, sales of food, drinks, honey, yoghurt, handcraft and other local products, engagement in transportation and tour-guiding services. The presence of the tourism in the area has also provided basic amenities like schools, electricity, security, accessible roads, financial and communication facilities (Amalu&Ajake, 2012). However, most of these amenities exist around Obudu Cattle Ranch.

The hotels in Obudu Mountain Resort have enjoyed increased tourist patronage from 593 tourists between 2000 to 1383 tourists' patronage from January to December, 2009 (Amalu&Ajake, 2012:3). However, the people of Beehive community have not experienced

community empowerment through capacity building, social capital promotion, awareness creation, social entrepreneurship, community participation etc.

These community dwellers have experienced occupational change from the hitherto farming, hunting and animal rearing to tourism-oriented activities of providing accommodation, security jobs and transportation services, sale of honey, and hospitality related services. The people employed in tourism servicing industry earn low wages for services provided. Amalu&Ajake (2012) observed that this formal employment has not improved their standard of living because their earning hardly support their household needs. This is a factor in the prevailing poverty of the community. Since the shift to tourist-based occupation has not fostered the attainment of social and economic improvement, local capacity empowerment has become necessary. These various dimensions of empowerment, including indigenous people's participation are closely linked to the derivation of livelihood. Most tourism destinations are located in regions originally inhabited by local people. This has affected their source of livelihood.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study, qualitative approach viz. focused group method was adopted. The categories of discussants were involved. These were the adult male discussants, adult female discussants and youth. Altogether, there were six (6) sessions in all. The discussants were seated in rectangular and in some locations, semi-circular position. It comprised the moderation (Researcher), recorder and note taken. The minimum number of participants was eight while the maximum was twelve. The various sessions were done at the convenient location and time of the discussants. Each session lasted about 60-90 minutes. The age bracket of participants was between 18 years and 50 years. The eligibility criteria also included those who have been living in the community for the ten years and above. The FGD guide (protocol) had four sections based on the themes of the study. Altogether, sixty three community members were involved.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The discussants generally admitted that some community members now engage in multiple sources of livelihoods in addition to what was the main occupation earlier. They agreed that they are able to utilize environmental resources in particular ways to improve their wellbeing individually and in groups. Through harnessing of community resources, especially with the honey production, they are living well. There are many things to do now to obtain extra income to cater for their household needs. Honey production is very viable and provides immediate cash. Our resources here are our strength and our neighbours envy us. "We are able to build

capacity by consistently improving our means of livelihood. Some of us are also wage labourers, hawking, trading, providing transportation services such as motorcycles, keke, taxi etc". "We rely on our capabilities and resources to make a living. Honey production has helped to build our local capability and improve our survival opportunities"

The adult male discussants reported that although their capability for enhanced livelihoods has been supported by the tourism sub-sector, it has slightly altered their commitment to their traditional occupations. The youth session corroborated the opinion of the adults that "the formal employment in tourism appears to be drawing away people from the farming sector". "People are relying on the honey related productive activities and other non-farm services. Our desire is to ensure that we live well without concentrating on one occupation".

The discussants reported that social capital services as an adaptive strategy for improved livelihoods. "We are members of associations and community groups too. This membership enhances our coping and adaptive means. We are able to access community resources better because of relationship we have established". Through these networks created, "we are able to interact and bring about desired improvement in the social wellbeing of our people". The discussants stated that "we are now more interconnected with our local environment through tourism than we were before. Many people are engaged in non-farm activities".

The discussants reported that empowerment through participation has helped to improve their skills and encourage them to harness their resources. "We are able to improve our condition by increasingly being involved in decisions regarding exploitation of our community resources. We share ideas, work together, identify problems and collectively work with this strength of togetherness".

The youth admitted that "we often make conscious effort to be involved in accessing community resources and benefits. Although sometimes our community leaders try to dissuade us. But we find out that being involved in issues pertaining to community governance helps us improve our lives".

In the domain of social entrepreneurship, all the discussants unanimously concurred that opportunities to be involved in small businesses have been very helpful in providing household income not only for those with families but also others. The women discussants particularly emphasized that "entrepreneurship enables them to exert a certain level of influence in household matters because of economic autonomy. We are self-reliance in that it has reduced our dependency on our husbands or men". The youth discussants reported that "social entrepreneurship is a guarantor of self-employment".

CONCLUSION

Local capacity empowerment is a form of poverty reduction in its own right. Institutional capacity already exists in communities but this has been cloaked by the absence of local empowerment in its ability to solve problems. The assumption is that communities that have survived by solving their own problems in challenging economic, social and political conditions have significant capacity to put their experience and skill to work once they are empowered. Thus, local capacity exists, but can only be harnessed by empowerment through building local district capability, promoting social capital, awareness creation, local participation and social entrepreneurship.

Once it is clear that communities have the power to address their livelihoods needs, the people will be energized to organize and work out solutions. So the process of community empowerment is capable of supporting the people's livelihood initiatives from below. Improving rural livelihood requires processes that help people strengthen their capacities and functioning, that eventually enable them take charge of their local affairs instead of sustaining the culture of dependency from external agencies. Local capacity empowerment is a strategy to foster rural livelihoods by harnessing community capacity building, improving social capital, and creating awareness, engendering indigenous participation and promoting social entrepreneurship.

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