

SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA: INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT

Successive governments in Ghana have since the attainment of independence in 1957 initiated many programmes aimed at promoting sustainable rural development. The Northern Region of the country has benefited immensely from such initiatives. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and International Development Agencies (IDAs) have augmented the efforts of government by making the region a focus of their developmental agenda. In spite of the profound commitment exhibited by the government and external development partners in bringing about sustainable development to the area, the Northern Region still remains one of the most deprived areas in terms of access to basic and necessary facilities and amenities. It can be argued that since rural leaders wield considerable influence over their people, their participation in rural development projects will go a long way to ensure the success of such



projects. It is against this backdrop that this article sought to identify strategies for enhancing the participation of community leaders in the development of their communities in the Northern Region. The study was undertaken in the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba district of the Northern Region. It is the belief of the authors that the results from this study can be generalised to the entire region. This study employed the mixed methods research approach where 100 community leaders were selected for interviews. The study found amongst other things that community leaders in the district lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills, which hampered their active participation in the various stages of community development. It was recommended that the capacities of community leaders should constantly be built in order to promote their active participation in community improvement initiatives.

Keywords: rural development, community leader, Ghana, participation, empowerment, capacity building

INTRODUCTION

The need to promote sustainable community development in rural areas in Ghana has constantly formed a major goal in the developmental agenda of Ghana since the attainment of independence in 1957. As a result, successive governments have implemented various programmes aimed at improving the quality of life of rural dwellers. Ghana's community development programme, which started in the late 1940s, sought to develop community leadership and encourage citizen participation through education and training of the people in rural communities to undertake activities or projects to promote socio-economic advancement based on comprehensive planning (Biney 2003). The programme, Biney argues, led to the mass-education of people, especially non-literate adults, and generated the self-help spirit of rural people in the construction of small-scale water systems for drinking and agriculture, rural roads, schools, health posts, and community centres. The generally acknowledged success of Ghana's community development programme between 1951 and 1957 was perhaps due to government's readiness to sponsor such projects. Village and Town Committees, now called Zonal Committees, were established in all villages and towns in Ghana by the government of the first republic in 1963. They were charged with the responsibility of planning and coordinating all development activities in their respective communities (Biney 2003). Campfens (1997) has observed that human development during this period was viewed primarily within the context of traditional communal forms of societal organisation. Community development attempted to integrate the group- or clan-based communities into the larger institutional systems of society. A holistic approach, which adopted and promoted mass education, self-help, and awareness programmes, aimed at mobilising individuals and groups. To address their own needs and problems, local communities were encouraged to identify these needs and to participate in meeting

them. Commins (1979) also notes that efforts were made to nurture local leadership and the development of communities' capacity overtime.

The Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) was initiated in 1986 to reduce mass poverty by providing training, work, and income through community projects for targeted groups such as retrenched workers, women and poor households (Azeem and Adamtey 2004, 17). An initiative was introduced in the early 1990s as part of PAMSCAD which was aimed at developing and rehabilitating rural housing. The programme originated within the continuation schools programme, a pilot scheme developed and funded by UNICEF in 1986 (Campfens 1997). Initially, 12 centres were established across the country which eventually expanded and consolidated and were charged with the teaching of vocational skills to school leavers so as to make them employable. These centres were later renamed the Integrated Community Centres for Employable Skills (ICCES) and gained popularity across the nation due to the low-cost housing constructed from local materials. Even though, in general, PAMSCAD failed to alleviate the economic hardships faced by the truly disadvantaged persons in society, mainly women and the poor, some analysts believe that the experiences gathered from PAMSCAD have informed the evolution of subsequent poverty alleviation programmes in the country (Azeem and Adamtey 2004). Programmes such as the Women's Income Generation Project and those operated by the Ghana Reconstruction Movement and the 31st December Women's Movement demonstrate the effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in working with communities to enhance their entrepreneurial skills for their own development. Church organisations have also complemented the efforts of government in many community development activities. One such organisation is the Brong Ahafo Catholic Cooperative Society for Development (BACCSD), which introduced programmes that help maize farmers analyse their production techniques, provide education for prospective members of the cooperative and extend credit (Campfens 1997). These efforts demonstrate that people can be adequately empowered to improve their living conditions. The Ghana government between 2001 and 2008 initiated and implemented many projects that were aimed at enhancing rural development nationwide. One such project is the Rural Enterprises Project which sought to equip rural folk with entrepreneurial skills as well as help them establish their own businesses.

However, in spite of these and many other developmental initiatives by successive governments with a view to bringing about the desired development nationwide, the Northern Region still remains one of the most deprived areas in terms of access to basic and necessary facilities and amenities. Records available indicate that out of every ten people in the Northern Region, seven are considered poor (Abu-Bakr 2004). This has prompted calls from the Northern Regional House of Chiefs to successive governments to divide the region into two. This, they believe, will speed up development in the area. Despite the deprived nature of the region,

the regional capital, Tamale, has been at the receiving end of much infrastructural development. One such infrastructural development project is the construction of a huge water reservoir to ensure constant water supply to residents. This and many other development projects have transformed Tamale into one of the fastest growing cities in West Africa to the detriment of other districts in the region. Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, which is the focus of this study, is one such neglected area in the region. Yabang (2008) asserts that Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District is a multi-generational poor area where poverty is passed on from one generation to the next. Carved out of the Bole District in 2004, Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District has seen some development projects. The construction of the district assembly offices and the upgrading of the Sawla health centre to a polyclinic are instances of development projects in the area. These projects were solely executed by the district assembly with no support from community members. It is important to note that the sustainability of development projects in any area depends to a large extent on the active participation of community members and leaders.

During the early 1990s, traditional leaders in some communities which were part of the then Bole District but now part of the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District were able to mobilise their people to embark on self-help projects that helped in transforming the communities. The Sawla Wura (chief) is said to have initiated the construction of a six unit class room block at Sawla which serves the neighbouring communities. Lineage heads as well as heads of the various ethnic groupings in the area were the vehicles for the effective mobilisation of their members for developmental purposes. Leaders of the Vagla ethnic group are said to have mobilised their members towards the sinking of a well at Tuna. This was to solve the perennial water problems they faced as a people. The educated elite also played a significant role in the developmental agenda of the area.

Communal labour represented an essential part of the lives of the people, which made it possible for communities to realise some of their development goals. Community centres, markets and health posts were constructed through the effort of community members, with the active participation of local leaders. An important question to ask is whether this zeal and dedication exhibited by local leaders in their quest to develop their communities in the past is still applicable to the present leadership. It can be said that communal labour has not received the same level of participation from community members as has been witnessed in the past. Could this be attributed to the inability of the local leadership to mobilise community members to participate in self-help activities in the district? It is against this backdrop that this study sought to explore strategies for enhancing the participation of community leaders in development endeavours in the Northern Region of Ghana.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken to explore effective strategies for enhancing the participation of community leaders in development projects in the Northern Region so as to ensure their sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory under which this study is subsumed is the game theory of participation. The game theory emphasises the rational mechanisms which serve as a basis for individual decision making in a collective action contributing to the common good (Dorsner 2004). In this respect, the game theory can help in understanding how participation and non-participation in community development activities occur with particular reference to leadership, since this study is concerned with strategies for enhancing the participation of community leaders in development activities in the northern region of Ghana. The game theory emerged as an enlightening alternative tool for capturing the rational aspects of participation and non-participation. The theory assumes that individuals have an option to be either included or excluded in development activities due to some pull or push factors. The theory identifies a number of factors that can influence the participation or otherwise of individuals in any community development endeavour. According to Dorsner, some of these factors are economic, educational, institutional, as well as social. The following are, amongst others, factors that can influence the decision of individuals to participate in development activities: level of economic development of the community, social roles and network fragmentations in the community, skills and knowledge base of the community, influence and power of interests groups, as well as the presence and impact of external bodies. One or a combination of the listed factors will either encourage or discourage individuals, especially community leaders, to participate in community development activities.

According to Holcroft cited in Eicher and Staatz (1998), rural people will only participate if they feel the benefits of the project will accrue to them. The theory according to Dorsner holds that community members' or leaders' decision to participate in community development activities depends on a rational calculus of benefits to be accrued as against the pursuit of common good. Again, the participation of community leaders in the development of their communities can be enhanced if the leaders are of the view that through their active participation some benefits will accrue to their community and themselves.

LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

“Participation” is a highly fashionable term in current development practice and is now practically a sine qua non for project funding (Dorsner 2004). “Participation”, a concept increasingly in popular usage, like the concept “community”, has a multiplicity of meanings to the point where its meaning is hard to establish (Bryson and Mowbray 1981). The World Bank’s Learning Group on Participatory Development (1994, 1) defines participation as ‘a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them’. Participation is one of the means to empower people to take part in community development. Participation is an essential part of community development and one of the factors in the community capacity building process, which allows involvement of people in the different stages of decision making (Aref and Ma’rof 2008b). According to Aref and Ma’rof (2009), community leadership is an important element of any community and vital to successful community development. Community leaders can play the role of catalysts for actualising the potential of local communities and assisting them to change. According to Sautoy (cited in Battern 1962) community development requires something more than the possession of enthusiasm, good intentions and a liking and respect for people. Sautoy contends that leaders need a wide range of knowledge and skills to be able to stimulate, educate, inform, and convince people who may initially be apathetic or sceptical about participation in community development.

Leaders’ participation may be operationally defined as the creation of opportunities to enable leaders contribute effectively to the development process of their communities. Leaders in rural communities are an embodiment of respect and as such can be a source of motivation to community members in contributing to the development process. In identifying the essence of leadership in the community development process, Kirk and Kraft (2004) opine that community leadership emphasises a collaborative, ongoing, influential process based on the relationships between people for development processes. It is true that community leadership plays an important role in realising the community developmental goals of any community, rural or urban. However, community leaders will not be successful if they do not seek the active participation of the whole community, since there can be no leadership without followers. Commenting on the need to ensure the participation of the community members in community development, Kumar (1979, 213) asserts that ‘no community development programme can succeed without the active support and participation of the people themselves. Thus, a programme should be so organised as to provide opportunities for maximum self- help. Encouragement should be given for the people to actually plan and work on the solution of problem themselves; this enables them to develop self-initiative, self-reliance and their own leadership.’

The importance of involving community members in community development is echoed by Knowles (1980, 48) when he states categorically that ‘human beings tend to feel committed to a decision to the extent that they have participated in making it’. In order for all community members and leaders to be part of the development efforts of community, there is the need to create a platform for leaders and members to be part of such efforts. Community meetings which serve this purpose will create an avenue for community leaders and members to plan and implement development activities. Rubin and Rubin (2008, 213) assert that ‘meetings are about expanding collective involvement in social change work. Information shared at meetings increases the competence of people to act. More specialized meetings build capacity by presenting knowledge on techniques. At decision making meetings organization members and leaders come together to work out action strategies’.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba district of the Northern Region of Ghana. The main occupation of the inhabitants of the district is agriculture, with limited opportunities for formal employment. The descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. This method was adopted for the study because it enabled the researchers to provide a systematic description that is as factual and accurate as possible of how the participation of community leaders in development activities would lead to the development of the district. It is the belief of the authors that the results obtained from the district can conveniently be generalised to cover the entire Northern Region. The multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study because the population was large and covered a large geographical area. Kumekpor (2002) has suggested that a major merit of the multi-stage sampling technique is that at each stage, more and more units are excluded, thus making the final sample more concise and thus less scattered than in an ordinary one-stage sampling. Five communities in the district were randomly selected. In each community, the researcher identified five leadership groups to be selected for the study. These groups consisted of traditional leaders (chiefs and elders), opinion leaders, youth leaders, unit committee members, and leaders of women’s associations. In each group, the proportional stratified sampling technique was employed in selecting participants. In all, 100 participants were selected for the study. Data was collected using the interview schedule. The interview schedule was deemed appropriate due to the fact that most of the respondents are illiterate. The descriptive narrative method was employed in analysing the qualitative data, while the quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software. Quantitative data were presented in tables.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to some listed ways of enhancing their participation in community development. This question was asked to enable the researchers to get to know the various ways of enhancing community leaders’ participation in development activities. The responses given are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Ways of enhancing community leaders participation in development activities

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Availability of Funds	(98) 98%	(1) 1%	(1) 1%	-	-
Provision of rewards to leaders	(93) 93%	(5) 5%	(2) 2%	-	-
Involvement of community members	(97) 97%	(3) 3%	-	-	-
Availability of material resources	(95) 95%	(5) 5%	-	-	-
High formal education	(17) 17%	(45) 45%	(24) 24%	(9) 9%	(5) 5%

The results from the field as indicated in Table 1 show that one of the ways of enhancing the participation of community leaders in development activities was availability of funds. A majority (98%) of respondents strongly agreed that availability of funds was a way of enhancing their participation in community development activities. One percent of the respondents only agreed, while another 1 per cent was undecided about availability of funds as a way of enhancing their participation in community development activities. Provision of rewards to leaders was another item on the list of ways of enhancing leaders’ participation in community development activities. A majority of 93 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed; 5 per cent agreed, while two per cent were undecided on the notion of provision of rewards as a ways of seeking their enhanced participation in community development activities.

When community leaders were asked to indicate their level of agreement with high formal education as a way of enhancing their participation in development activities, their responses revealed that seventeen percent of them were strongly in agreement with the statement. Similarly, 45 per cent of the respondents agreed to

high formal education as a way of enhancing their participation. Another 24 per cent remained undecided, while 9 per cent disagreed. As little as 5 per cent of the respondents were in strong disagreement with high formal education as a way of enhancing their participation.

A follow-up question was asked for the respondents to indicate what they could do to enhance their participation in community development activities. This question was asked to enable the researchers to know what the leaders themselves can do to enhance their participation in community development activities. The responses given by the respondents were organised into themes. These themes, together with their corresponding frequencies and percentages, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Views of community leaders on how they could enhance their Participation in development activities

Ways	Frequency	Percentage
Encourage community members to contribute financially towards community development	9	9
Promotion of peace and harmony among members in the community	24	24
Acquisition of leadership skills	33	33
Attending community development meetings	12	12
Acquisition of appropriate education to better understand the community's development problems	22	22
Total	100	100

Table 2 reveals that 33 per cent of the respondents believe that a way that they can enhance their participation in community development activities is by acquiring leadership skills in order to hold their positions effectively. Twenty-four per cent (24%) of the respondents were of the opinion that if they are able to promote peace and harmony among the various groups in the community, their participation in community development activities will be enhanced. However 12 per cent and nine percent believe that their attendance at meetings and encouraging community members to contribute financially towards development activities respectively will enhance their participation in community development activities in their communities.

When confronted with the question of what other stakeholders can do to enhance their participation in development activities, community leaders gave varied responses. This question was posed in order to enable the researcher to know what leaders expected stakeholders to do for them in order to enhance their participation in community development activities in their communities. The respondents gave

many responses which were organised into themes. The themes, which represent the responses from the community leaders with their corresponding frequencies and percentages, are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Stakeholders, (government, NGOs, and corporate entities) ways of enhancing the Participation of Community Leaders in Development Activities

Suggested Stakeholders Ways of Enhancing Leaders Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Promotion of peace and stability	28	28
Promotion of active participation of women leaders in decision making	13	13
Creation of awareness about the role of women in community development	1	1
Organizing training programmes for community leaders.	52	52
Educate the community on the development problems it faces	2	2
Providing funding for community development activities	4	4
Total	100	100

As depicted in table 3, the majority (52%) of the respondents were of the view that stakeholders should organise training programmes for leaders in order to enhance their participation in community development activities. Twenty-eight per cent (28%) were of the opinion that promotion of peace and stability among the various groups in the community should be the role played by stakeholders. However, a minority of one per cent were of the view that stakeholders can enhance their participation in community development activities if they educate community members on the development problems faced by the community.

DISCUSSION

It was evident from the responses given that education and training play an important role in the development of any community. The results also indicate the importance of rewards, availability of funds and materials in the community development process. It is, however, important to stress the pertinence of adult education and training in facilitating development in rural communities. The decentralised local government structure of Ghana means that, to some extent, rural communities must play an

active role in their development. The government of Ghana and its international development partners have constantly reiterated the need to promote self-help development projects in rural communities. This implies that rural communities must actively participate in identifying common development problems and also in deciding on effective ways to remedy them. This brings to the fore the essential role played by adult education in enhancing community awareness and empowerment. To achieve active and informed participation, the capacities of community leaders and members must be built. Capacity building enables people to move from the status of objects manipulated by external forces and victims of social processes, to the status of subjects and active agents of change (Albee 1995). Labonte and Laverack (2001, 30) offer a simple definition of community capacity building. According to them, community capacity building is a more generic increase in community groups' ability to define, assess, analyse, and act on health or any other concern of importance to its members. Goodman et al. (1998, 260) contend that community capacity building is a process as well as an outcome; it includes supportive organisational structures and processes; it is multi-dimensional and ecological in operating at the individual, group, organisational, community and policy levels. Community capacity building can be seen as the acquisition of the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes by community members that put them in a better position to solve the problems that affect them as a community. Community leaders can play a vital role in a community's acquisition of the necessary capacities to deal with problems of increasing intensity. One significant way of building the capacities of community leaders and, for that matter, community members is through adult education or functional literacy.

In emphasising the importance of education in development, Indabawa and Mpofu (2006,11) argue that 'it is the elements of improvement and change that bring education and *ipso facto* adult education, into the process of development'. It can be argued that education and training bring about community awareness, empowerment, and develops leadership skills. For instance, community members need education in order to realise the development burden on the government and how best they can serve as partners with government to develop their communities. In the same manner, community leaders need appropriate education to enable them to develop their leadership skills and also remain focused on their leadership roles. As a result, lack of education on the part of both community leaders and members will be an impediment in the way of effective community development. Amedzro (2000, 28), in support of the significant role of education in community development, asserts that when community members and their leaders have access to educational programmes, they come to understand issues related to the development of their communities and so they can participate in community improvement activities. Malasis (1976, 11) also espouses the indispensable role of education in community development. According to Malasis, 'education should be placed first and foremost in the service of democracy, which demands not only that citizens be protected against

arbitrary decisions but also that they take part in decisions which affect the future of the community.’ Lack of education would make it difficult, if not impossible, to identify and train community leaders to acquire the necessary skills required to effectively participate in community development activities. It can be deduced that community leaders would therefore not be in a better position to mobilise adequate resources (finances and raw materials) from organisations and individuals to embark on developmental projects. It can be argued that lack of appropriate education on the part of community members and leaders would prove to be a barrier to effective community development activities. This is because knowledge is said to be power and leadership in any organisation is knowledge-based.

CONCLUSION

It has been noted from the results that a viable strategy for enhancing the participation of community leaders in development activities is education and training. It is important to note that when community leaders have access to education and training programmes, they will come to know the various development needs of their communities and, armed with such knowledge, take action to bring about change. Education and training programmes should therefore be intensified in Northern Ghana so as to enable community leaders to actively participate in all stages of community development.

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