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The Perspective of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Approach for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Unsustainable practices have the potential of eroding earth's web of life (air, water and soil) and can also promote poverty. Efforts by government in promoting sustainable development have not yielded the expected results. This paper attributed the failure to the top-bottom approach adopted by governments in planning, executing and monitoring community developmental projects. This study suggests a paradigm shift from the top-bottom approach to bottom-up approach, which implies the involvement of local people in all phases of developmental projects. This is the essence of participatory rural appraisal (PRA).

Key Words: Participatory rural appraisal, sustainable development, people, community, unsustainable practices

Introduction

Sustainable development is emerging rapidly as a field of interest at the global level because of its vital relevance to the livelihoods of billions of people and the survival of the planet-Earth. Certainly, the idea of sustainable development has become increasingly popular in the contemporary world especially after the declaration of the Earth Summit called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that was held from June 3rd through June 14 in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Definitions of the concept; sustainable development are many and varied probably because the concept is a mixture of language used by economists, environmentalists and social thinkers. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Singh and Titi (1992) defined sustainable development as a process of change in which the utilization of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological innovation and exchange and institutional change reflects both future and

present needs. Goodland and Ledoc (1987) defined sustainable development as a pattern of social and structural economic transformation (i.e. development), which optimizes the economic and societal benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future.

Generally and at the practical operational level, sustainable development means that, production processes do not over exploit the carrying and productive capacities of the natural resource base and compromise the quality of the environment, thus limiting the options of the poor, the present and future generations. Sustainable development also involves the protection of the people's basic human rights and the freedom of the people to participate in the political, economic, social and environmental spheres of their communities and societies.

In Nigeria, environment indicators of unsustainable practices are palpable. For example, depletion of fishing and aquatic resources; depletion and degradation of forest resources; depletion and degradation of arable agricultural lands; water hyacinth proliferation, unemployment and underemployment, pollution of air, water and soil; gas flare; flooding and

erosion, water supply/sanitation and desertification have been reported [NDES, 2003; World Bank Report, 1988; NDDC, 2001 and Ofomata, 1979). Social and economic indicators of unsustainable practices such as poverty, low life expectancy, high death rate, high infant mortality and high level of unemployment have also been reported (Edozien, 1975 and Iniodu, 1997).

Approaches to Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

Many socio-economic and environmental indicators identified the presence of unsustainable practices that has translated to widespread poverty in Nigeria. Accordingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria has made spirited efforts in reversing unsustainable practices through numerous policies and programmes and the provision of infrastructures. One of such Nigeria's programmes is the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). The core programmes of NDE include: Vocational Skills Development (VSD), Special Public Works (SPW), Agricultural Employment Programme (AEP), Small Scale Enterprises (SSE) and Mass Agricultural Programme (MAP). Each of the programmes has its sub-programmes or schemes. For instance, VSD has four schemes, namely, the National Open Apprenticeship (NOA), School-on-wheels (SOW), Waste to Wealth, and Resettlement.

Other programmes geared toward the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria are Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), and States Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS).

In the environmental sector, government in 1999 created the Federal Ministry of Environment. In addition government has also enacted numerous environmental laws such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act No. 86 of 1992, Petroleum Act of 1969, Oil Pipelines Act NO. 31 of 1956 amended Act 24 of 1965, Oil in Navigable waters Act 34 of 1968 and Petroleum Drilling and Production Decree No. 51 of 1969. The aforementioned regulations

and laws are geared towards ensuring environmental protection, resource conservation and community development.

Despite the introduction of all these programmes and enactment of these relevant laws in Nigeria, poverty and environmental degradation has continued to threaten the very existence of the Nigeria masses. Bardhan (1996) has argued that even when the state allocates a significant part of its budget for anti-poverty programmes and control of environmental problems, often very little reaches the objective end. He argues that this anomaly occurs because there is no organized pressure from the intended beneficiaries and the programmes are administered by a distant, uncoordinated and corrupt bureaucracy, which is unaccountable to the intended beneficiaries and insensitive to their needs.

Empowerment for sustainable development requires giving to the people and communities the true capacity to cope with the changing environment, for increased social awareness, higher levels of social and economic participation and the utilization of new insights on ecological processes of change and self-renewal. To achieve this requires a shift from the methodology of up-bottom approach to that which requires the principles of inclusiveness i.e. engaging stakeholders in a process of change and decisions. This paper suggests a methodological shift from the former approach of the up-bottom method to a new approach – The Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

PRA is a family of approaches, methods and behaviour that enables the people to express and analyze the realities of their lives and conditions to plan themselves what action to take and to monitor and evaluate the results (Chambers, 1983). Chambers, (1994) describes PRA as a growing family of approaches and methods to enable the intended beneficiaries to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and act.

PRA is the involvement of the intended beneficiaries of a development projects in the planning, implementation, monitoring and

evaluation processes. It involves talking with the people rather than talking to the people. It is a bottom-up participatory approach. PRA provides a means for empowering the poor and enabling them to identify and analyze their problems and determine their priorities. PRA approach promotes greater efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability (ODA, 1995).

PRA employs a wide range of methods to enable the poor to express their views and share information and to stimulate discussion and analysis. Chambers, (1996) enumerated PRA methods and techniques to include: secondary data review, semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, wealth ranking, direct observation, transect walk, seasonal calendar, historical profile, livelihood analysis, mapping, daily activity profile, preference ranking, and Venn / institutional diagrams.

The strength and advantages of PRA lies in its capability of promoting community's awareness and the production of a realistic action plan by community people. PRA enhances community's sense of responsibility, confidence, and ownership of externally funded projects. It also promotes sustainability because projects sited in the communities function for a longer time. PRA promotes the transfer of technology and increases the income generating capacity of the people.

How PRA can be used to Promote Sustainable Development

Although the concept of PRA is new (IDS, 1996), the idea of local involvement, which is the focus of PRA, is as old as the agricultural extension services, which initiated it. Seaman Knapp, one of America's extension pioneers once said; "What a man hears, he may doubt; what he sees, he may also doubt; but what he does, he cannot doubt" (Vitzthum and Florell, 1976). This is consistent with the Chinese proverb which says: "Tell me, I'll forget, show me, I may remember. But involve me, and I'll understand" (Burkley, 1993).

Nigeria's long involvement in development planning, directed towards environmental protection and poverty reduction and its apparent limited impact on the people and

physical environment seems to suggest the existence of major defects in the programmes themselves or in their design and implementation. Available evidence shows that all such programmes were designed at the Federal, State and Local Government levels and imposed on the local people. The results have been that of failed projects scattered across various communities in Nigeria. For example, at Orerokpe (the headquarter of Okpe Local Government Area) there are three failed water project initiated by three different government agencies.

One method of PRA (wealth ranking) can be employed in distribution of micro-credit facility to community people. Wealth ranking has been used in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa and Vietnam to identify poorer households to involve in anti-poverty programmes (Grandin, 1999). PRA is a major tool for sustainable development with the people at the centre. Focus group discussion can be employed to identify community needs and problems and hence prioritize such needs into Community Development Plan (CDP). Niger Delta Environmental Survey applied PRA in 30 communities in the Niger Delta area that provided opportunities for people to participate in the identification and analysis of key issues and produces action plan to address local problems (NDES, 2003).

In a PRA study facilitated by a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) for Igbudu and Enehen communities in Warri-South Local Government Area of Delta State using the key informant technique (a PRA tool) identified and ranked community needs (Irikefe et al, 2001). One of the key indicators of sustainable is capacity building. Adjebeng-Asem (1993) used participatory mapping in soyabean project in five States (Kaduna, Niger, Enugu, Anambra and Oyo) of Nigeria and relevant information on soyabean production and preference ranking of various diets were obtained. The participants were amazed about how much easier it was to increase their production of soyabean and hence their income.

The aforementioned strategies are consistent with elements of empowerment. Singh and Titi (1992) stated the elements of empowerment for

sustainable development to include; access to education and information; access to income and credit facilities; access to entitlements over land; access to natural resources; access to environmentally friendly technologies; access to legal reforms and access to institutional changes.

Conclusion

The top-bottom approach has been the practice in Nigeria such independence and this has not yielded the desired results. It is the view of this paper that there be a paradigm shift from top-bottom approach to bottom-up approach in sustainable development. This implies greater participation of local people, in the identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. This, of course, is the essence of participation.

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