Extension Education's Role towards Community Empowerment in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Over time extension education is supply-driven with little or no consultation with the community members, participants, clients or partners whom the innovation and other related empowerment activities is intended. The linear model of community empowerment of top-down approach has been the dominant process of holistic sustainable development in Nigeria, resulting in failed processes towards ensuring self-dependence economically, socially, psychologically and politically. Recently, community driven development (CDD) have come to be considered as most appropriate towards sustainable community empowerment. Utilization of these techniques by the extension educators was found to have increases the community members' knowledge and ability to make their own choices and decisions on each and every developmental program and projects. Community members assumed a central role and become key players in activities that will affect their lives such as: needs assessment, planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. This paper examined the roles of extension education towards community empowerment in Nigeria: issues, challenges, and prospects. These issues and challenges include political system, gender, population, funding, training, and re-training, competencies, and manpower. The paper also recommends government proactive measure in terms of legislation, funding and more employment and also the communities to form self-help groups as a way of empowering themselves internally in collaboration with the extension workers working with them.

Keywords: Extension education, community, empowerment, issues, challenges, prospects.

Introduction

Extension education is the key towards community empowerment in Nigeria based on the fact that the activities in the system are holistic in nature. Extension education was viewed to mean different things to different scholars at different point in times. According to Dukku (2004), extension education is a system that provides knowledge and skills to rural people (farmers) informally with the aim of influencing their decisions towards life, which will increase their general living standard. Extension education adopts in formal ways of empowering the rural farmers to enable them identify their problems and solve the problems in their own way, using their local resources with slight scientific modifications (Abu-Mus'ab, 2009).

Moreover, the process of community empowerment requires that enlightenment and technological advancement should be at the forefront; as such, extension work is required in all socio-economic components for sustainability and holistic development (Asiabaka, 2003). Community empowerment isa condition which enables more people in a community play active role in the decisions that affect them (Community Development Index [CDX], (2008).

Ability of community members identify and solve their problems by themselves using available local resources without external influence directly or indirectly is termed community empowerment (Nzeribe, 2011). In another dimension, community empowerment was argued as a process or an outcome of a process (Zimmerman, 1988). Moreover, in whatever form it manifested, the observable characteristics is for the community to be self-dependent in all ramifications such as decision making, confidence, inclusive, organized, cooperative and influential. However, the aforementioned are directly associated with putting community development values into action, these values are learning (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective), equality, participation, cooperation and social justice (CDX,2008).

In Nigeria today the numbers of empowered communities is very little and are linked to poor implementation of extension services, while some scholars argue that policy issues, political instability and poor training are the major factors hindering community empowerment. Moreover, the factors surrounding poor performance of extension personnel in community empowerment is directly associated to the challenges encountered during program or project execution, these challenges are multi-dimensional, but prominent among them includes political system, rapid increase in population, competency of the personnel and their adequacy, training and re-training and the challenge of coping with modern technology through ICT. It is in view of the above that this article reviews some of the issues and challenges bedeviling the system through personal experience and review of literature.

Types and Forms of Extension Services in Community Empowerment

Extension education is conducted in different areas of community life, however, some scholars argue that specificity in the conduct should be linked to the major work of the educators or the dominant service provided in the community. Based on the above assertion, in community empowerment programs prominent manifestations are observed in the following key sectors namely Agriculture, Health, and Consumer, Adult literacy, Community work, Industry, Self-Help and other Social services.

(1) Agricultural extension service

It's an effective mechanism and system or services which directly help farmers to help them (FAO, WFP & IFAD, 2012). In this situation, farmers are exposed to various educational approaches, procedures, techniques and methods to equip them towards utilizing improved farming practice, production capacities and enhance their income level, and in the long-run uplift their social, economic, psychological and political status (Anderson, Wilson, Mwansan & Osei-Hweide 1994). Moreover, extension services in the agricultural sector performs educational function which the cardinal principle of providing information which improve the knowledge, skills and positive attitudinal change towards agricultural innovations (Rivera et al., 2002). Davis (2008) argue that the process of extension in agriculture has changed tremendously from technology transfer to more dynamic facilitation and holistic life improvement activity with the farmer, clients, participants or partners and their family as the focal persons. Binor et al. (2006) stated that agricultural extension work is a partner to all stakeholders, organizations and interested groups that support, facilitates and assist the farming communities involved in agricultural production. With the aforementioned partnership exchange of knowledge and skills can easily be done consciously and unconsciously without stringent set up.

(2) Health extension services (CHEW & JCHEW)

This aspect of extension services was viewed from the perspective of preventive measures against infection and community based primary health care services. Health extension work is aimed at increasing awareness through enlightenment campaigns and community education to empower community members about existence of particular diseases, preventive measures, first aid and possible curative measures. Moreover, it also embraces the issues of maternal mortality, ante-natal, post-natal, nutrition, sanitation, environmental protection and fuel utilization. Health extension work also enhances community members' utilization of available health facilities and how to get one in place in case of absence through liaising with NGOs or forming Self-help groups. It increases the rate of healthy community members and reduces cost of health delivery from both sides of the government and the citizens (Suleiman, 2009).

(3) Consumer extension service (CES)

This component of extension work deals with educating the end users of a particular product the dos and don'ts; it also encompasses the protection right of the consumer.

This aspect of extension work is new in developing countries, however in emerging economies of Asia like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia they are performing a wonderful role in consumer education and protection, to the extent that all finished products must specify in clear terms the conditions at which the consumer is likely to request for refund or change of a particular item if deemed not satisfied. Consumer extension work in Nigeria can be observed through the activities of NAFDAC, SON and CPC that are responsible for regulating and ensuring high quality products are allowed into the markets, but due to high proliferation of corruption, even the enlightenment is not effective to the consumers talk less of enforcement of laws by the violators. Example is paying PHCN bills with fixed charges of N775.00, Petroleum pump price of N107.00 against the N87.00, different measure with same price of a commodity and many more. Furthermore, effectiveness of this component empowers the community members to challenge any unlawful act legitimately and its failure increases ignorance of the community members towards their rights as end users of finished products or service receptors.

(4) Industrial extension services (manuals)

This aspect is a new emerging component in extension education, though it was argued to be in existence for long, however it recognition and inclusion in extension studies is under review. The proponents of this component state that, is that aspect of education that takes care of the need of community members in terms of how to perform a task/activity related to a product such as electronics, farming equipment's and other related devices (Sani, Turiman, Ismi & Zoharah, 2015). Moreover, manuals found accompanying electronic devices, cars, trains, ships, weapons, farm machineries and other sophisticated gadgets, which contain instructions on how to operate them without organized induction training, is another form of extension education. However, it has a limitation of facilitating adoption and only semi and highly literate individuals can use such knowledge.

Furthermore, looking at this component in the area of community empowerment, this article argue that, it enhances the capacity of community members to be aware of genuine and sub-standard products, it creates avenue by which members of the community are challenged to seek for more knowledge to fall into the category of semi or highly literate individuals and it reduces the cost of maintaining or servicing a particular gadgets sine instructions on how to perform the task the embedded in the operation manual or instruction.

(5) Adult literacy

This is one of the basic components of extension education in many developing countries Nigeria inclusive. Majority of the adult population in rural communities are illiterate (UNDP, 2013), this affects the rate at which enrolment in growing and in the long run affects holistic development of such communities. Adult Literacy refers to all conscious efforts towards increasing the capacity and ability of community individuals in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values within the range of 18 years and above (Sani, Turiman, Ismi & Zoharah, 2015). According to UNESCO (2004) adult literacy and adult education are synonyms which are define as 'an educational process for adults'. Moreover, the whole programs are geared towards clarifying distortions in communication mainly favoring "why," "how," "when," and "where" as well as "what for".

In addition, adult literacy is a teaching and learning process which has no restriction in terms of what, when, how and where to teach or learn, but recognizes the needs, interest and aspirations of the participant or clients. Moreover, it deals with civic, political, trade, vocation, technical and cooperative education activities which are aimed or targeted towards developing independent and critical judgment and implanting or enhancing the abilities required by each individual in order to cope with changes affecting living or working conditions, by effective participation in the management of social affairs at every level of decision making process (UNESCO,1986. p. 7).

Extension education in Nigerian communities' focus more on adults because of the influence they exert and position many occupying the society. This gives a clear picture of transmission of good ideals and principles that will make the community a self-dependent and enhancing sustainable holistic development. Adults in all communities are trainers and role models, as such if they are placed at high level of literacy, the assumptions of having less problematic society and rapid developing institutions. Moreover, community culture, values, needs and aspirations are easily transformed into attainable objectives when the level of adult literacy is high cognitively, affectively and in psychomotor.

(6) Community/Social work

This is another important aspect of extension education that pursues holistic societal development in the context of social system. This aspect deals with the sociological mutual cohesion of the community members, what bind them together and how they can co-exist despite socio-economic differences.

Moreover, in social work the community harmonious being, relationships and differences are treated as one of the strength that will foster sustainable unity. Furthermore, community empowerment through extension education is being undertaken through four major interrelated fields namely community development, community education, community organizing and community resource mobilization and management.

(i) Community development: It is a process that deals with improving the capacity and potentiality of the immediate environment using available local human and material resources. The processes mainly starts with community need assessment to translating the ideas into action, and in the long run evaluating the actions and bearing the consequences with possible adjustment to ensure the community become better than it was. In addition, it is concern about the social, economic, political and psychological wellbeing of all the community members (Bashir, 2014; Asnarulkhadi, Ndaeji,& Nobaya, 2013)

(ii) Community education: This is similar to what other scholars viewed as community conscientization (Bichi, 2010). It has to do with increasing the capacity and capability of community members' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It deals with the individual differences existing within the community members and their groups. Moreover, community education is conducted in three different but interrelated phases; it starts with changing the mind set of community members to make them build the habit of seeking for knowledge and other empowerment processes to help them value the resources in the community. Secondly, the community members have to also have a first-hand information about the existence of the two 'worlds', the one they are in and the one that they are not in, and also the differences that exist between them, this phase also give them a highlight on how to maintain good relationships and prevent themselves from all external oppressions. Thirdly, this phase enable them utilize all they acquired in the first and second phases and be able to change their way of living, it involves activities like management, mobilizing, planning, communication and human relation.

(iii) Community organizing: This aspect refers to process of bringing people with different background within the same locality to struggle for community needs and aspirations. Community organizing is a process that involves so many activities, ranging from educating, integration, social investigation, problem spotting, ground work, meeting, role play, mobilization, evaluation, reflection, participation, partnership, felicitation and setting up of the self-help group (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007), farmer organization (Bajoga, 2011), farmer associations, farmers clubs, cooperative society (Brain, 2014).

(iv) Community resource management: It is a process of ensuring sustainability of subjects and objects beneficial to the host environment. The resources here include land, minerals, talents, potentials, humans, animals. The process is tedious locally, but it involves identifying, coordinating, sorting, grading packaging to minimize waste and encourage long-term usage. Extension education utilizes all the aforementioned community or social work activities to enhance members' capacity and ability to make good decisions about themselves, family and the community at large. The community is said to be empowered when the occupants can be able to initiate, decide, implement, monitor and evaluate such ideals they feel can improve their living standard and facilitate sustainable development of their communities.

(7) Self-Help and volunteerism: Extension education in community empowerment promotes self-help and enhances volunteerism spirit to increase the mutual cohesion among members. Self-help is a mutual conscious effort initiated by community members to provide for themselves what they feel is important and is inadequate or lacking (Abu-Mus'ab, 2009). Volunteerism simply means sacrificing resources by individual community members for others to benefit without expecting a reward (Sani, Turiman, Ismi & Zoharah, 2015). The two concepts share so many things in common in terms of origin, practice, and evaluation; though differ operationally because self-help is more of a group activity while volunteerism is individualistic. However, in whatever form they manifest, as a result of extension activity, the communities record more positivists and become more dependent in terms of developmental issues.

Roles of Extension Education in Community Empowerment

The roles of extension education towards community empowerment are numerous and multi-dimensional, apart from being a problem solver, motivator and resource linker, he/she undertake the following depending on the specific area of operation, culture of the community, values and aspirations. Thus: -Needs assessment (awareness creation, sensitization & facilitation), resource mobilization, project planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation based on community driven development (CDD) ideals and principles. Moreover, the community members are involve in all stages of the community programs and projects.

Issues in Extension Education towards Community Empowerment

Extension education in relation to community empowerment in Nigeria is bedeviled with so many issues that are being discussed at different levels by different scholars at different point in time. Some of the resolved issues include the negative effect of HIV/AIDs that kills most of the extension personnel in the cause of their duties as a result of multiple sex partners without protection (FAO, 1994), poor technology adoption because of illiteracy level and clientele or participants orientation.

Moreover, in Nigeria the emerging issues includes legislation as regards whose responsibility is among the three tiers of government (Federal, state and Local government), resources provision (Human & Material), collaboration/partnership, research, duplication, information and communication technology (ICT) and gender. The issue related to gender is one of the major issues that was given much attention in terms of analysis and research, the concern is directly associated with the need to engage women directly into developmental issues globally. In addition, women in agriculture and health are mostly cases that facilitate women engagement fully and ensuring sustainability.

The above identified issues are yet to be resolved as many scholars have hold divergent views as what, how, when and even why. However, these discussions create avenues by which the scholarly community members engage all and sundry to towards improving the lives of others in the community putting into considerations the culture, values and aspirations.

Challenges in Extension Education in Community empowerment

(A) Political system: The greatest challenge of extension education in Nigeria is the political system. The system has the following faulty features and it remains in that condition for long which leads to total decay of the whole system.

- The system is unstable, turbulent, selfish, corrupt, infested with chronic and deeply rooted with tribalism, nepotism, unpatriotic and sectionalism. In schools cultism and sexual harassment (Uzoagulu, 2009), kidnapping in the Niger-delta region and presence of Boko Haram in the North-east (Sani, 2014).

- Misplacement of priorities example is placing more value to political office holders at the mercy of intellectualism, paying senators/house of reps members more than a professor who train citizens to be good.

- Instability and start a fresh syndrome which leads to non-continuation of programs and projects started by predecessors due to different political parties or political rivalry no matter how important the project is to the citizens

- Immaturity, weakness and even loose thereby allowing very few opportunist to determine priorities of the majority even if they were not in the same world together before election.

(B) Population: Rapid increase in the number of youths and adults in the communities is another challenge in extension education especially towards community empowerment. According World Bank (1994) the ration of extension personnel to client or participant should not exceed 1-800 or 1000 all things being equal. Presently, in some Nigerian states, the ratio is up to 1-4000 and even above, which resulted to poor management by the available extension workers (Kalusam, 2013).

(C) Manpower and competency: Another prominent challenge in extension work is the adequacy of the manpower available and their competency. Public extension departments or units in most of the states and local governments in Nigeria are no longer employing graduates as extension workers with the complain that their pay is high, rather the agencies employ Diploma or High school certificates that has lower capacity to do the job. Moreover, they hardly cope with the challenges attached to the task which results to poor projects implementation due to low competency as a result of their half hazard training.

(D) Training &re-training: Another major challenge in extension education towards community empowerment is pre and post training of the baseline service providers (extension workers). In Nigerian context this aspect is neglected at all levels except one undertaken by international development partners like UNICEF, UNDP, MDGs, and FAO. Moreover, majority of the extension personnel cannot perform a simple task of group formation, teaches a simple transplanting of seedlings, cannot counsel clients or even organize a simple demonstrations of new innovation (Sani, Turiman, Ismi & Zohara, 2015), this is directly associated with insufficient exposure to technical content and process during training.

It is very prominent to note that, extension personnel cannot facilitate community empowerment beyond their knowledge and skills, because nobody can give what not anyone has. Research results indicate that the quality of extension worker makes a significant difference in community empowerment (Ball & Bass, 2010).

(E) Dearth of extension facilities and infrastructure: Infrastructure and facilities available for extension service in Nigeria is grossly in adequate. Laboratories, libraries, workshops, viewing centers and demonstration plots are in short supply and generally ill-equipped. Moreover, the training institutes and colleges expected to produce competent personnel for the task are also battling with overcrowded student-teacher ratio with results into producing half-baked graduates with no technical skills at all.

(F) Funding: Funding of extension activities has been neglected by the concern authorities through lack of adequate legislation that directly identify who is responsible for what, the extension service was left in the Ministry of Agriculture at the state level with only a unit in Federal ministry of Agriculture, in some instances, some state governments push the extension activities to local governments education and social services department. Moreover, private extension services is been undertaken by some organizations in Nigeria, but studies shows they link the services with advertising their products (seeds, fertilizer, drugs etc) and only those who show interest to buy benefits from the scheme.

According to Sani, Turiman, Ismi and Zoharah (2015) recommended funding of extension service to be included in the exclusive list of Nigerian budget; this will strengthen its significance in empowering majority of the citizen especially those in the rural communities who are more in need of the services. Moreover, linkages between public and private agencies in funding extension work will open more opportunities for the beneficiaries and empowerment sustainability will be ensured.

Prospects of Extension work in Community Empowerment

Community empowerment through extension education in Nigeria has a bright future and will continue to yield positive results if the requisites of the system are put in place by the concern authorities and other stakeholders' exercise commitment as at when due. Issues raised are receiving intellectual attention in terms of research and recommendations will further explore the areas requiring short, medium, and long term solutions. Moreover, extension work was found empowering various communities economically, psychologically, socially and politically which in the long-run produce a community that has large number of citizens that make good decisions, rational in their thoughts/dealings, highly responsible, self-dependent and qualitative leaders. In addition, this kind of communities will have specific prospects of employment generation, selfless service (sacrifice), volunteerism, sustainable peace

Conclusion

Extension education is the bedrock and key to community empowerment but they are faced with numerous challenges in Nigeria which if properly addressed would go a long way in reducing poverty, enhance capabilities of community members and facilitate sustainable development. The issues being scholarly discussed will further explore the areas that require short, medium and long term solutions, which in the long run will make the community more viable and dependent economically, socially, politically and psychologically.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions made the following recommendation are made:-
1. Demand-driven extension should be emphasized at all levels to enable the clients' needs, interest and aspirations are considered.
2. More extension personnel have to be employed at all community levels to ensure adequate recommended ratio between extension worker and community members or participants or clients.
3. The government should as a matter of urgency came up with a legislation that will specifically identify among the three tiers of government (federal, state, LGAs) who is responsible for extension services and at what level.
4. Community members should form voluntary groups in collaboration with extension workers at their domain so as to pursue all their needs with unity in diversity.
5. Extension personnel should utilize all avenues to strengthen the linkages between public, private agencies and NGOs to supplement community empowerment activities.

6. There is need to develop a highly technical extension training institutes with specific specialization in community enlightenment, community organizing, community education and community mobilization.
7. Enhancement of the capacity of all stakeholders in community development effort on the usage of ICT will ease the activities and facilitate objectives achievement within the shortest possible time.

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