



Threats to community participation in grass root governance and development: Perspectives of elites in modakeke–ife, osun state, Nigeria

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Abstract

Grass root development is a complex process and involves warm, gradual and considerate efforts. Community participation is a requisite to attaining this form of development. Democratic governance which could have encouraged community participation has hindered it in several measures based on how it is been practiced in Nigeria. The paper explores the perspectives of Modakeke–Ife community elites on threats to community participation in grass root governance and development. Qualitative data from 30 adult elites in the three wards of Modakeke revealed that the people of the community are sidelined in decisions affecting them. There is still suspicion of favouritism in governments' approach to development of the community. In conclusion, to encourage better community participation there must be more representation of the people, trust and confidence in the government.

Keywords: community participation, grass root governance, development, elites, perspectives, threats

Introduction

Development is a more inconclusive concept with its social, political and economic facets. It is the qualitative and quantitative positive transformation of the lives of a people that does not only enhance their material well-being but also ensures their social wellbeing, including the restoration of human dignity (Osagie, 1985). The assertion is that development is a warm, gradual and considerate process in its attempt to alleviate man's economic and technological standard or conditions without disregarding or disrespecting any aspect of man's existing social, cultural and political values. However, before any meaningful development can occur especially at the grass root level, active community participation must be catered for. In other words, development cannot be divulged from culture.

The notion of community participation in development initiatives has widespread currency. It is argued that the involvement of local people can lower the cost of achieving a given objective and can result in development initiatives that are consistent with their preferences (Uphoff 1986, Ostrom 1996, and Klitgaard 1997, and Narayan 1998) [28, 19, 14, 18]. Moreover, such participation can assist in information pooling about exchange opportunities, to improve the transmission of individual reputations, and build institutions that allow the poor to act collectively in their own interest - all features of strengthened social capital (Coleman 1998, Collier 1998, Glaeser, Laibson and Sacerdote 2000, Mansuri and Rao 2004) [9, 12, 16].

While advocates of community participation are careful to note the importance and potentials of local elites in capturing resources relevant to cross-community interactions and development; there is an overwhelming impression based on the practice of modern democracy in many African countries, Nigeria in particular that community participation is less fruitful and should be cautiously involved in the development process. A reflection of this belief and perception by the Nigerian government and the Oil exploration companies could be found in

the manner the Niger Delta has been handled in the recent past. However, the lingering crisis in the region and the peculiarity of the region to the Nigerian economy is gradually influencing the conventional approach of top down development process. Generally, community participation is yet to be fully enshrined in the practice of democracy in Nigeria. Community participation in the development process is not alien to many African countries as histories have confirmed communal coexistence and obligations before the colonial period. Several years after Nigeria's independence, the practice of democracy has farther taken governance from the people. One among the consequences is the loss of confidence in government. Although it is not the principles of democratic system of governance that have created this apathy, but the practice. It is acceptable that democracy is still young in the country, but the present practice especially at the Local Government levels (grass root) has negative implications on development.

Studies have shown the practice and benefits of community participation in project initiation and implementation as demonstrated by some international donors, such philosophy has not gained ground in the Nigerian government approach to development. On several occasions the print and electronic media have publicized governments' activities at improving the lives of those at the grass roots, but the situation differs when those at the grass roots are questioned on what their perceptions are in times of government readiness to involve the community in the development process. This paper explores the perspectives of community elites on the impediments to community participation and developments at the grass roots and raised issues for further research.

The Concept and Types of Community Participation

Definitions of community participation range from expansive to narrow, encompassing multiple or single life domains (e.g.,

domestic, leisure, work), or arenas (e.g., social, political, economic), and the term is used either as an overarching concept or as a subcomponent of social inclusion. The absence from empirical research of consistent conceptual frameworks (Cobigo, Ouellette-Kuntz, Lysaght, & Martin, 2012; Overmars-Marx, Thomése, Verdonschot, & Meininger, 2014; Simplican *et al.*, 2015; Verdonschot, De Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, & Curfs, 2009) [7, 20, 29, 25] combined with interchangeability of terms has created a conceptual maze.

Most of the conceptualizations of community participation are based on the World Health Organization's (2001) [31] International Classification of Functioning (ICF) framework. For example, in Verdonschot *et al.*'s (2009) [29] review of empirical findings about community participation, it is defined as “the performance of people in actual activities in social life domains through interaction with others in the context in which they live” (p. 304). Similarly, Dusseljee, Rijken, Cardol, Curfs, and Groenewegen (2011) [10] define community participation as “performing daytime activities while interacting with others” (p. 4). These conceptualizations are broader and less prescriptive than the presence/participation binary based on the principle of normalization. They also give significance to activities in addition to place and social interactions. However, approaches based on the ICF definition (World Health Organization, 2001) [31] do not consider the qualitative aspects of activities, where they occur or with whom, or subjective experiential elements of community participation.

As it has become clearer that experiences of being in mainstream places, often simply referred to as “the community,” are not “unambiguously virtuous” (Bates & Davis, 2004; p. 201) [2], more attention has been given to choice and the subjective aspects of community participation (Milner & Kelly, 2009; Simplican & Leader, 2015) [17, 26]. Hall (2013, p. 259) [13] for example, considers community participation to entail subjective feelings, a sense of belonging and social relationships, which he views as a transformative process where a person “moves towards a sense of attachment and belonging to proximate and distant others.”

More recently, researchers have begun to disrupt the binary between community presence and participation using ideas about *encounter* and the diverse and fluid social networks that characterize modern cities (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011, 2015; Bredewold, Tonkens, & Trappenburg, 2016; Laurier & Philo 2006; Wiesel, Bigby, & Carling Jenkins, 2013) [30, 21, 5]. They can be fleeting and singular, such as an exchange in the supermarket queue, intermittent, such as recognition and greeting by the proprietor or other patrons at a local shop, or longer and episodic, such as regular exchanges with other participants in a yoga class. There is potential for such convivial encounters to develop into lasting or deeper relationships (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011) [30]; however, encounters are important in themselves. Gestures such as a nod or a wave “contribute to a sense of recognition and of ‘feeling at home’ in a neighbourhood” (Bredewold *et al.*, 2016; p. 3381) [5]. Convivial encounter as a fluid conceptualization of community participation brings together core components identified in other perspectives without embedded normative assumptions. Seen by Simplican *et al.* (2015, p. 25) [25] as a way to “modernize” community participation, the concept of convivial encounter avoids reference to the kind of continua frequently relied on by other understandings of community participation. It accords equal value to diverse combinations of

place, interaction and activities but incorporates an experiential element of conviviality or pleasantness.

Simplican *et al.* (2015) [26] suggest that lack of conceptual clarity may be an explanatory factor that impedes effective service design and delivery by hindering communication, understanding of goals and agreement among stakeholders. In programme logic terms, making clear the underlying theory of change—the central proposition about the way change comes about for target/s of the intervention that informs its strategies or actions is important to success (Clement & Bigby, 2011; Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004) [30, 15, 3].

Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory posits that observability of outcomes and absence of complexity about meaning are important to policy and programme implementation (Reidy, Swerisson, & Bigby, 2010; Rogers, 2003) [6, 17]. For example, the multiple and often unclear purposes, without measurable outcomes, of day centre programmes may account to some extent for their limited success in facilitating community participation (Simons & Watson, 1999; Simpson, 2007) [15, 26]. Moving beyond programme design, a socio-ecological approach can also be used to analyse the plethora of obstacles and facilitators of the interactions between people and their environments at the core of community participation (Amado *et al.*, 2013; Simplican *et al.*, 2015) [25, 2]. Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory posits that observability of outcomes and absence of complexity about meaning are important to policy and programme implementation. It must be noted that mechanism of creation of Wards Committees, local groups, self-help groups and so forth provides the structure for citizens’ participation. Institutions of local government are highly participatory, primarily by virtue of their close interface with local communities. It enables ownership of local development initiatives, which contributes to successful implementation of local development initiatives (Community Participation: Types, Process and Facilitation, 2017). Participation, in order to be meaningful, requires institutional capacity of the local governments to come up to the aspirations of local communities. Fiscal strength constitutes the most important parameter of institutional capacity. Citizen and Community participation, therefore, becomes an imperative in strengthening fiscal strength of local government through generation of local government revenue and efficient allocation of the locally raised resources to various local development initiatives. Community Participation aims at involving the citizens in municipal functions, e.g., setting priorities, budgeting provisions, etc. They provide for the participation of citizens in the decision making process on local issues (Community Participation: Types, Process and Facilitation, 2017).

Types of Community Participation

Participation can be viewed from different perspectives and there are several types of participation. They include:

Passive Participation: People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened through unilateral announcement by administration.

Participation in Information Giving: People participate by answering questions posted by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches and do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings.

Participation by Consultation: People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views and may modify these in the light of people’s responses but do not involve them in decision-making.

Participation for Material Incentives: People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash, or other material incentives, yet people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.

Functional Participation: People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project after major decisions have been made.

Interactive Participation: People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and formation or strengthening of local institutions.

Self-mobilisation: People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and the technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used (Community Participation: Types, Process and Facilitation, 2017).

Methods

An exploratory study design utilizing qualitative methods of data collection was employed. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted. Thirty informants were selected from the community and among adult elites. The rationale for selecting the elites was influenced by their perceived roles in influencing the development process especially at the community level. Although elites actions could at times be functional or dysfunctional. However, whichever direction, their decisions and influence are usually imperative to communal developments especially in democratic dispensation.

Informants and Procedure

Interviews were held with the elites that indigenes and currently based in Modakeke-Ife Community. They were recruited based on their educational background and influence in the community. As such purposive and snow balling techniques were used in recruiting the informants for the study. The informants were selected on the basis of level of education and residence. A total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted. Only adult elites who are indigenes and presently residing in the community were selected. The in-depth interviews were held in the informants’ residence or locations identified and convenient to the informants. Of the 30 informants, 8 were women while the rest (22) were men. Occupational wise, about 50 per cent were civil servants, 40 per cent were retirees and only about 13.3 percent were self-employed. The ages of the informants ranged from 40 to 70 years. Only adult’s elite residents in Modakeke-Ife community were considered. As such the candidates were purposefully selected. The issues discussed were related to problems perceived by elites as negating community participation in the various development programmes of the government at the three tiers of government in Nigeria (Federal, State and Local).The interviews were held in English Language. The in-depth interview was pre-tested during an in-depth

interview held an expert in community development and social research and thereafter readjusted for the main field work. The results from the pre-test are not included in this article. All the in-depth interviews were tape recorded (with consent) and transcribed. Interviews lasted for about 30 minutes on average.

Informed consent

Participants were formally briefed on the study objectives and the importance of revealing relevant information. Their consent was sought before the commencement of each of the interviews and they were assured of treating information given in strict confidence.

Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was done for the in-depth interviews. The researchers read through all the interviews several times to ensure proper comprehension of informants’ responses. Analysis was done manually. The themes that emerged were further systematically analysed for commonalities.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the informants

Variables	Frequency/per cent	Frequency /per cent
	Male	Female
Age in years	55.5	
	8.6	
Married	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Christian	10 (33.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Islam	12 (40%)	6 (20%)
Civil servants	10 (33.3%)	5 (16.7%)
Self-employed	4(13.3%)	-
Retired	9 (30%)	3 (10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In relation to the table 1 above, there were more males (73.3%) than females (26.7%). All the informants were married. On the basis of religion, 60% of the Participants (males/females) indicated Islam, while only 40% claimed Christianity. The difference in the religious affiliations of participants may be attributed to the high prevalence of Muslim than Christian in Modakeke- Ife community. Other relevant information is depicted in the table.

Results

Qualitative results were obtained through thematic analysis of participant’s responses to the in-depth interviews.

On the meaning of development and community participation In all the in-depth interviews, the concept of grass root governance, development and community participation were extensively discussed.

Extract 1: In-depth-interview with a 45 year old male informant

... development can be an action aimed at improving the lives of the people. Such actions could be from the government or an organization or people (self – development), you know! It can also be viewed as the changes that occur to human beings to better their living conditions. That is a change from one form to another, while Community participation is a situation whereby community members are involved in social development of their area

i.e. when men and women, young and old are taxed to develop their areas. It may also mean the involvement of the people of the community to determine or voice out what they need in the community for their development.

Development as earlier stated involves a process. However, many of the informants perceived it as a collective issue that should be jointly conceived and executed by the government and the governed. Below extract depicts one of such opinion.

Extract 2: In-depth-interview with a 69 year old retiree in Modakeke-Ife.

...development in this community is rather based on the community alone if not before the advent or prior to the time before this community was carved out from Ife North Local Government in 1987. This was before the crisis that engulfed Ife area (Modakeke – Ife Crisis). It was the people that used to think on what to do as their developmental projects especially when they have perceive that some powerful individuals would not allow their demand from government to materialize or get assistance from the government. It was through our self-effort that we built the Town hall, Police station, majority of our schools (both primary and secondary schools), Post office and so forth. So, development in Modakeke community has mainly through community efforts, if not because of the creation of Ife East Area Office that has brought some changes to our development.

Before the creation of the area office, it is the Modakeke progressive union (MPU) that handles development in this community. MPU has assisted us in paying the salary of our monarch (The Ogunsua of Modakeke-Ife) since the last crisis in 1997 and up till now that the communal crisis between Ile-Ife's and Modakeke-Ife crisis has ended. Other developments done by the MPU are the construction and grading of road-networks in Modakeke (community based) and some other things.

We handle the development of this community by the community members with the notion in Yoruba saying that say that “Eleru nii gbe nibi to ba gbe wiwo”. Meaning that it is the owner of the load that carries it where it is heavy.

Involvement of the community in decision making in Ife East Area Office on projects implementation

Extract 3: In-depth Interview with a 54 year old women leader

...to be frank, the people in this community are not allowed to decide on what projects to implement in the community even the amount to be paid for the issuance of birth certificate. We are not informed about the amount to be paid, we are told the amount and we are paying it now, in spite of the agitation by the people to reduce the amount been paid for the birth certificate. Therefore, the people in the community are not allowed to partake in the development of the community.

...but, Ife East Area Office in Modakeke community can-not be blamed for not involving the people of the community on the development of any projects because the monthly allocations they are receiving are less compare to other local

governments due to the fact that they are not full fledged local government. This greatly handicapped them in doing big projects that can consume big amount. But I am very sure of their collaboration with Police Community Relations (PCR) and Police Relations Committee (PRC) and vigilante which aimed at providing security against thieves in the community called “Alo kolohun kigbe” (thieves or armed robbers). So, Ife East Area Office is doing whatever at their capacity to help the community.

... since the inception and creation of Ife East Area Office, we used to handpick three people to represent the people in the three wards which is undemocratic. Apart from this, it is grossly under-represented because the community is so large that the three wards are not enough. I want you to realize that Modakeke is the sixth largest community in Osun State, which is evidenced in the last 2006 census in Nigeria. Do you want to tell me that the sixth largest in population in Osun State will be represented by three people in the three wards? It is grossly under-represented. Since the people are not fully represented, there is no way three men in an Area Office can decide on what project they can embark on in the entire community that will be representative of the people. So, whatever the Ife East Area Office even does, it must be noted that, they have done that without adequately consulting the community. If people have been informed or consulted in deciding on what projects to implement, perhaps, may be they would have advised them better. So, I don't belief that in project implementation, they have really involved community in deciding on what to do.

On factors militating against grass root governance and development

The issue of corruption in the high places even at the local government level ranked highest. One participant observed as follows among other things. Below is the extract-

Extract 4: In-depth-interview with a 49 year old female informant

...money for developments is usually kept in the politician's personal accounts in overseas countries because of their selfish interest. The lack of transparency and accountability by the majority of those elites in political position are so rampant. Other factors are nepotism, lack of proper planning by the government, unemployment problem, non-chalant attitudes and abnormal behaviour, and lacks of morals among others are the aftermath of the colonial rule.”

On differences or discrepancies in the involvement of both sexes on decision making on the types of projects needed in the community.

The extract below explains more on the view of the participants on this.

Extract 5: Differences or discrepancies in the ways women and men are involved in deciding on the types of projects needed in the community

...definitely, there are discrepancies or differences going by what I have said earlier on. There were no projects meant to be done where we heard that both men and women are

seriously involved. You see, this people (the politicians), it is whatever that pay their pockets they will do. The politicians would want to use less than half of the money of any project and do it haphazardly and pocket the rest money. So, involving people is tantamount to exposing their deals.

...though there is women leader in Ife East Area Office who represent women group as politician. She is an agent to other women politicians in the community when it comes to distributing something like grinding machines, deep freezers and so forth to themselves and not for the benefit of the whole society vis-à-vis men group in the community. Although 30% of the available posts are given to the women, while the rest 70% are for the men in Ife East Area Office (that is the available post is shared in ratio 1 to 3 of the existing three wards in the society).

On how community participation could be better encouraged in the community

Extract 6: In-depth interview with a 62 year old male in Modakeke, Osun State, Nigeria

... you see for this community participation to be grassroot based, the community must be divided into various manageable size of wards i.e. in to ten or more wards. Because the three existing wards are inadequate, but if there are more wards, the councilor in each ward when they come together will definitely create ideas and opinions that will benefit the community as a whole. I believe the wards must be delineated to avoid handpicking of the councilors which is not democratic. This will in essence allow proper democratic ways of voting to be done easily. Also of importance is the regular meeting of the legislative arms of Ife East Area Office. This will give the people and the councilor of each ward the opportunity to receive feed back on whatever decision is taken and done in the community. We thank God for the existing peace in the community. So, I would also want the peace to continue. And at the same, whenever our community asks for something from the state government, it should be considered on merit and not to be taken go ahead from somebody. So my advice to people is to maintain peace and harmony with their brothers in Ile-Ife. Community participation is not only a fundamental part of democracy, it also ensure that better decisions are made as local people know their community and local difficulties and strengths. Government programmes and actions will then be based more clearly on the reality of people's lives. It is on this ground that community participation could better be encouraged.

... meetings should also be held often by the representatives of the compounds as it used to be done monthly in Akoraye Palace in Modakeke to disseminate and receive information on the needs of the people of the community. This will not only conserve the limited resources (not to waste our resources), but will also let the people of the community to say what they want for the community development by themselves. It is very important to have full participation of community in any project in order to have full utilization of the limited resources. For instance, a borehole constructed in Iraye junction, Modakeke was neglected because it was constructed on the highway, which is risky for children to

fetch water. If the community has been informed before its construction, the management would have been told a better place to locate it. And finally, development cannot be divulged from our culture, the case of the construction of the low-cost houses built at the outskirts of the most of our towns in Nigeria by Alhaji Shehu Shagari government had been neglected and abandoned by the Yoruba of the southwestern Nigeria. While the Hausa / Fulani ethnic group in the North accepted the low-cost houses because it was part of their culture to live in secluded area. So, it is good and better to link our culture with development in the African societies. Other benefits derived from community participation are that it gives a sense of belonging and people are unlikely to embezzle funds for projects that are for the good of their communities.

Discussion

The discussion was based on the research findings on community participation and grassroot development in Africa.

First and foremost the study revealed that the description of development in Modakeke community is rather based on the community development (self-effort) alone because of the belief of the people of the community that (in Yoruba) saying that "Eleru nii gbe nibi to ba gbe wiwo". Meaning that it is the owner of the load that carries it where it is heavy.

The study also revealed that the people of the community are not allowed to partake in the development of the community except the case of Police Community Relations (PCR) and Police Relations Committee (PRC) and vigilante, which aimed at providing security against thieves in the community in collaboration with the Ife East Area Office.

Other findings that emanated from the study are on the fact that there were no projects meant to be done where both men and women are seriously involved because the politicians will never do whatever would not pay their pockets.

Finally, the findings highlighted how community participation can be better encouraged as in dividing the community into various manageable sizes of wards to avoid crude idea of handpicking the councilors, which is not democratic in order to allow proper democratic ways of voting to be easily done. There must also be a regular meeting of the legislative arms of Ife East Area Office; so also with the people and the councilor of each ward to give them opportunity to receive feed back on whatever decision is taken and done in the community. The peace must continue to be reigned, at the same time, whenever the community is asking for something from the state government, it should be considered on merit and not to be taken advice or getting go ahead from somebody. Meetings should also be held often by the representatives of the compounds as it used to be done monthly in Akoraye Palace in Modakeke to disseminate and receive information on the needs of the people of the community. It is on this ground that community participation could better be encouraged.

Conclusion

The findings from this study led to the following conclusion: Development is the changes that occur to human beings to better their living conditions. That is a change from one form to another, while Community development is a situation whereby community members are involved in social development of their

area. Description of development in Modakeke community is mostly based on the community development (self-effort) because of the belief of the people of the community that, it is the owner of the load that carries it where it is heavy.

Moreover, the people of the community are not allowed to partake in the development of the community except in the area of Police Community Relations (PCR) and Police Relations Committee (PRC) and vigilante, which aimed at providing security against thieves in the community in collaboration with the Ife East Area Office. Also, there were no projects meant to be done where both men and women are seriously involved because the politicians would never do whatever would not pay their pockets.

Finally, among the factors highlighted on how community participation can be better encouraged is by dividing Modakeke community into various manageable sizes of wards to avoid handpicking of the councilors, which is not democratic to allow proper democratic ways of voting to be done easily. There must also be a regular meeting of the legislative arms of Ife East Area Office to give the people and the councilor of each ward the opportunity to receive feed-back on whatever decision is taken and to be done in the community.

In addition, the peace must continue to reign, at the same, whenever the community is asking for something from the state government, it should be considered on merit and so on and so forth. It is on this ground that community participation could better be encouraged.

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