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PARTICIPATION AS A MEANS AND END FOR EMPOWERMENT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT
The paper brought to light the connection that exist between participation and empowerment in community development. Participation and empowerment are relevant terms in any development discourse. Community development is aimed at empowering people including uplifting the quality of life they live. However, achieving this goal is challenging if community members do not actively participate from the planning stage to project execution. Different types and models of participation exist in development parlance. This paper takes a look at participation as a means and participation as an end. It demonstrates the nature of involvement which can result to empowering of community members, believing that participation as an end ensures direct involvement in project execution and enables community take charge of decisions that have direct impact on their lives. It is therefore concluded that any project that the people actively participate would lead to empowering the community. Also, different strategies exist in the development of community such as up-to-down, down-to-top and joint strategy. The paper therefore concludes that empowerment and participation are directly linked, and it is the down-to-top strategy of development in community which engenders sustainability through inclusivity.

Keywords: Participation, empowerment, development, community.

Introduction

Community involvement and upliftment of the standard of life of the people are the major focus in every community development discourse. Improving the wellbeing of people living in a particular locality is a community development strategy adopted by the masses as an alternate means since the State cannot provide all their needs. It is aimed at securing the active participation and cooperation of the people in every community project, designed to raise their standard of living and promote their development in all forms (Nnana, Abonor, Tiku, & Rita, 2024). It is a strategy or process that lay emphasis on what happen to the people socially, economically, and psychologically in the process of changing or moving from a smaller unit to a larger unit or from a pre-industrial to industrial society (Omoruyi, 2001). As a movement, it also links to authority of local governments to uplift the lives of the masses of the entire community with the active involvement of the people in the planning and execution of projects (Lazarus, Augustine, and Brian, 2024). In this sense, community development

takes the posture of a crusade or a cause to which the people are wholeheartedly committed. It lay emphasis on self-help among the people, and seeks to secure the active participation of the masses (Udoye, 2012). It involves bringing together of the people to bring their community to the path of progress.

Participation is a major part of self-help in community development programme. According to Robert and Okorie (2015), the concept emphasizes the initiative of the people as a means of stimulating the active involvement of all members of the community in the work of developing their community (Abonor, Fidelis, Paul, & Eyang, 2024). It is argued that, the main idea in community development is to enable the people make progress desired by them, through the effective use of material resources at their disposal. The success in community development programmes is therefore a function of the participation of the people voluntarily or involuntarily, mentally and physically, to create emotional attachment to the projects or facility identified as their felt-needs. Participation creates faith in common understanding among the people, and it enhances the possibility of success in the execution of programmes designed for a better condition of living in the communities. Participation has the benefit of increasing project efficiency, promote projects effectiveness, help to build the capacity of beneficiaries and also enhancing and empowering members of the community. According to (Echegu, 2018), participation promotes or builds confidence and creates a sense of belonging in the people. It is a process in which beneficiaries of development projects influence the direction and execution of such projects rather than just receiving a share of a completed projects (Ofem, Abonor, & Ubi, 2024). With this process which gives pride of ownership to the people, sustainability of projects or facilities is always assured since all major stakeholders in the community are carried along. It is on this background that this paper believes that, empowerment of community members depends on the approach adopted and the degree of involvement of the people in the community development initiatives.

Different Strategies or Approaches in Community Development

There are different strategies adopted in the development of community depending on the needs, context, and resources of the community. There is the grassroot approach (down-to-top), the top-to-down approach or expert approach, multiple approach; asset-based approach, area-based approach, spiritual-psychological approach, participatory approach, self-help and empowerment approach, and advocacy approach. Nevertheless, all these approaches are broadly classified into three namely: top-to-down, down-to-top, and partnership (Echegu, 2018). In the top-to-down approach, programmes for community development are sponsored by the government or agencies and impose on the community without much input from the community. It is an approach where the people of the community are not directly involved because everything is initiated and controlled by external experts and organizations, hence, it is a centralized planning model.

However, the down-to-top approach to community development is a model where activities are initiated and managed by members of the community for the benefit of the community (Udoye, 2012). The approach involves members of the community coming together and actively identify their needs and develop solutions to fix them. Most times, members of the community appoint or elect someone who is trusted among themselves to represent the community in handling activities and report back from time to time. In that way, government and agency including service providers only play a supportive role either as facilitators or consultants where necessary (Joann, 2017). On this note, the community plays the major role in the process of initiating development, based on the felt-needs of their community.

On the other hand, when community development is planned by both the external experts and the community people, it is referred to as the partnership approach of community

development. In his opinion, Onyekunle (2015), argued that, it is a collaborative and inclusive strategy of community development that involves building relationships between members of the community and the external experts to achieve common goals. All these strategies can be adopted by different communities at different times base on their capacity, awareness and different circumstances of the communities, including the resources at their disposal (Nnana, Abonor, Tiku, & Rita, 2024). When a community is able to define their own problems, have the ability and capacity to delve into solving it through organizing and direct participation by community members themselves, the down-to-top approach is in place (Ofem, Abonor, & Ubi, 2024). This strategy emphasizes mass participation, grassroots movements and local decision making (Abonor, Bassey, &Obue, 2024). It is an assumption that, there are benefits attached to peoples' involvement in initiating ideas since it gives rise to promoting participatory decision-making and build confidence and sustainability (Ottong, 2006). Nevertheless, anytime a community does not have the capacity to take necessary actions in developing their community, relevant agencies of government and stakeholders are advised to take over the process of development for a particular time to enable the community to upgrade in terms of awareness, acquire necessary training relevance to move the community forward in terms of development (Kanazawa, 2014). Therefore, the expert approach which is government sponsored of community development is a temporary alternative. The, joint or participatory approach comes into existence when the action of external stakeholders is joined with that of a community to improve the standard of living of the whole community with the active participation of the members of the community. It is however argued that, community development is better and closer to members of the community through the down-to-top approach instead of the other strategies or methods.

The Concept of Participation

Participation is a major concept commonly used in community development discourse. It is a central concept that directs levels of involvement and empowerment of members in community development programmes. It connotes the active involvement of individuals, groups, and communities in identifying their needs, planning, implementing, and evaluating development programmes and projects (Onyekunle, 2015). Lazarus, Augustine, and Brian argued that, participation is a cornerstone of sustainable development as it ensures communities initiatives and contribution to success (Lazarus, Augustine, & Brian, 2024). Participation ensures empowerment, builds local capacity, and promotes social inclusion, while fostering development to align with the community's needs, values, and priorities. Arguing in support of the relevance of participation in community development, Omoruyi (2001), sees participation as a process by which beneficiaries of development project influence the direction and execution of such projects rather than merely receiving a share of project benefits. It is people's involvement in decision-making process, in initiating, planning and implementing programmes, sharing in benefits of development programmes, and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (Agbo, 2000). Participation involves general effort of those who are beneficiary, pooling the needed resources to achieve their goal. On this note, participation is regarded as a process where the people initiate action, motivated by what they are able to provide and have control over. The idea of passive involvement of the people which only take place when other people have taken decisions and are in control is not acceptable in this case (Abonor, Fideli, Paul, & Eyang, 2024); this is because, the idea of participation is to encourage collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility among community members. Almost every development agency emphasized participation as key in community development and it is believed that sustainable development would not be possible without active participation (Robert& Okere, 2015). It helps bridge the gap between communities and external agencies such as governments or non-government, fostering collaboration and trust. It is a pivotal aspect of development

thinking and practice. The World Bank, donor agencies, International Development Partners, funding agencies, and major stakeholders have all agreed that development cannot be sustainable without the active involvement of the benefitting community (Aguene, 1998). However, the type of participation employed depends on the project goals, the community's capacity, and the level of collaboration desired between stakeholders.

Participation as a Means

Participation in this case is viewed as the means of achieving a target objective or goal. In this context, participation is used as a tool or method to achieve specific development goals (Abonor, Uzoh, Amokeye, &Takwan, 2024). It involves engaging community members in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development projects to ensure that these projects are more effective, efficient, and sustainable. On the other hand, Omoruyi (2001), argued that, it is a way of using the resources available in a community to achieve predetermined objectives. The outcome of participation to achieve the set objectives are more considered than participation itself. Those outcomes could perhaps result to significant improvement in the overall social and physical environment, and could meet the desires of the people. Agencies of development see community participation as a means to enhance efficiency in service delivery (Bayen, 2017). Participation in this sense is utilized to achieve predefined objectives, such as improving project outcomes or gaining community buy-in. Participation as a means improves decision-making, increase ownership and commitment, enhance legitimacy and credibility, and fosters empowerment and capacity building of members of a community (Panda, 2007). Participation as a means is common in community development activities and programmes. In this case, it is seen as an input required for objectives to be achieved. Experts have argued that development programmes would benefit if the people concerned directly participate. However, Abonor, Bassey, and Obue (2024), declared that it is also necessary for such participation not to be a mere way to facilitate attainment of development objectives, but a means to enhance the personal capacity of members of the community who are the beneficiaries. This top-to-down approach of community development, mobilizes to achieve specific development goal which is mostly directed by Government or external body. Such situation makes participation to become a mere exercise without a strong sense of purpose by the participants. Sometimes, participation is made compulsory by the agent of government just to achieve their specific goal (Joann, 2017). However, for development to be sustained, there could be strategies that can complement and nurture participation as an end through a deliberate effort of the change agent or the government.

Participation as an End

Participation as an end, emphasizes participation as a process where trust and a bond of unity among the people are built. As a process, participation is powerful, unmeasurable and in essence unable to be predicted (Bassey, Victor, Nnana, & Lazarus, 2022). As an end in itself, participation is anchored on the belief that every target group bears the primary responsibility for its own development and participation in this case is guided by the principle of self-reliance Pillay (2013). In this sense, participation is the meaningful involvement of the community which enables them to respond to` their felt-needs and change the narratives in their community (Udoye, 2012). In a more general terms, as an end in itself, participation assumes initiating active involvement of people from the down to the top. Therefore, when participation is taken as an end in itself, a programme's objectives are related to the enhancement of the capacity of the target groups to solve problems and improve their standard of living. As a result, this form of participation has been associated with developmental activities outside government circle, and the concern is to build up pressures from the community as to bring about positive change in the various structure in their

community (Zastrow, 2014). Omoruyi (2001), has maintained that, participation as an end in itself is about the process where members of a community are actively involved in the planning, utilization, and assessment of the social amenities or facilities designed for the improvement of their welfare. It is such participation that gives the people the pride of ownership of projects completed in the process of community development. In this case, success of the development objective is not of utmost essence, but the process whose outcome is the active or direct participation of the people in the development process (Agbo, 2000). In his view, Ajayi (2019), asserted that, participation in some circumstances is seen as a process of achieving individual's, personal development, self-awareness and some immediate satisfaction. Indeed, the process of participation as an end is generally believed to motivate members of a community to become more committed and ready to take part in community activities.

Table 1: Comparison of participation as a means and an end

Aspect	Participation as a means	Participation as an end
Purpose	Achieving specific project outcomes	Empowering communities for self-reliance and long- term development
Focus	Project goals and outputs	The process and capacity-building
Engagement duration	Limited to the project's timeline	Continuous and sustainable over time
Decision-making	Primarily control by external agencies	Controlled by the community itself
Outcome	Enhanced project efficiency and effectiveness	Empowered and self-reliance communities

Source: Self constructed

From the table, participation as a means is designed to achieve specific development objectives, engage community to contribute to enhance success of project, and participation is limited to duration of the project. However, as presented above, participation as an end empowers individuals and communities to build skills and capacity.

Empowerment

Another term in community development is empowerment. It is one of the cardinal goals of community development; empowering the people and improve their living condition. The concept of empowerment involves helping individuals to acquire a sense of power, or the ability to affect outcome in people's lives (Ottong, & Bassey 2009). It is a process that enables individuals, groups, or communities to gain control over their lives, circumstances, and decisions. It involves building capacity, confidence, and self-esteem to participate in and influence decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment gives people the ability to stand their ground and take position on issues (Akpomuvie, 2010). It encompasses a way of standing firm and having confidence in affairs that concern personal life and standing on one's rights (Ife, & Tesoriero, 2006), posits that, by empowerment we mean the ability of individuals, groups, and communities to take charge of their situations and accomplish their goals. By so doing, they are able to enhance the quality of their lives. Empowerment is also seen as the ability for people to recognize their strength and weaknesses, including interest. It encompasses gaining total control over one's life, socially, politically, economically, and psychologically by having access to information, knowledge, and skills. It focuses on having the freedom to make choices and take action, and having a supportive network of people, organizations and sometimes, policies that impact one's life and entire community.

Table 2: showing relationship between different Approaches to community development and their connection to empowerment

Approach	Description	Level of empowerment	Key contribution to empowerment
Top-down approach	Development led by external authorities with minimal community input	Low	Provides infrastructure or services but lacks community ownership and decision-making
Bottom-up approach	Community driven development with active participation and decision- making	High	Encourages community ownership, local leadership and problem-solving and empowerment
Participatory approach or partnership	Collaboration between communities and external agencies for planning and implementation	Moderate to high	Builds trust and inclusiveness, allowing communities to influence decisions
Needs-based approach	Focuses on addressing immediate deficiencies or gaps in resources and services	Low to moderate	Solve urgent problems but may foster dependency and overlook long-term empowerment
Asset-based community development (ABCD)	Focuses on identifying and leveraging existing community strengths and resources	High	Recognizes local potential and builds on existing capabilities for sustainable growth
Empowerment approach	Focuses on building community capacity, leadership and self-determination	Very high	Directly enhances self-reliance, decision-making power, and local leadership

Source: Self constructed

From the table above, the down-to-to Approach, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), and Empowerment Approach are most effective in promoting sustainable empowerment as they build capacity, foster ownership and strengthen leadership.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper took a look at two different types of participation namely: participation as a means and participation as an end. As shown on table 2, participation as a mean does not focus on building long-term capacity, and people are sometimes passive and do not have any control over their lives. It does not encourage sustainability because participation always ends when project is concluded. However, participation as a means encourages project efficiency. But in participation as an end, the people are directly involved in the process, and communities are empowered and self-reliant, getting power and control over decision that affects their lives.

Thus, it is participation as an end that leads to real empowerment of community members hence the general acceptance of the down-to-top approach.

Neilmank (2014), viewed participation along a spectrum with passive participation at one end and self-mobilization at the other end. Passive participation is where people are told what to do. On the other end is self-mobilization where the local people themselves are in total command. At one end of the spectrum, passive participation, and people's control is almost non-existent while at the other end. Self-mobilization, and people have almost total control over the processes while the role of outsiders is at best minimal. So, it is concluded that participation by manipulation and passive participation can't empower community, but both interactive participation and participation by self-mobilization can be highly empowering.

It has been observed that different school of thoughts are of the belief that empowerment is a function of participation, even though this is closely related to a belief in which participation is viewed as an end in itself (Neymark, 2014). However, Keyane(2014), has demonstrated that empowerment could be made possible if community participate. This is because whenever participation is used mainly as a means to create awareness, its purpose is majorly as a political tool, which does not concretely address development issues adequately.

In relationship between approaches of community development, as was addressed above, in the top-down approach, the agency in charge of development is always in control of the community's efforts. Such agency, be it government or non-government organization, always work according to their specifications and purpose with little or no input from the benefitting community. Since members of the community are not involved in the planning and execution of projects, both skill and knowledge will always elude the community as they depend on the benevolence of government or outsiders. Bearing in mind that the principle and philosophy of community development is membership participation, it therefore means that this approach or method cannot guaranty sustainable development nor empowerment. From the point of view of some development experts, this approach may be useful tentatively for a short period of time since it does not lead to empowerment of members of the community.

In the joint, cooperative or partnership approach, both the community and the government or other agencies work collaboratively to achieve development in the community. Community sometimes has more control over projects than the government or the other way round. This approach gives rise to empowerment, and moderate skills acquisition. The Community and Social Development Agency operated in most States in Nigeria is a good example of the partnership approach. In this Agency, communities apply for assistance from the Agency to enable them execute an identified project. If approved, the community provides ten percent of the total cost of the project while the Agency provides ninety percent with strict monitoring after some levels of training on project planning, implementation, and sustainability.

The next approach is the bottom-up. In this case, community members are in charge of planning of project to the evaluation, based on their felt-needs. Members have control over their decisions, their projects or programmes and are implemented by them and for the benefit of the community. Sustainability of development is assured by this approach since the community is not dependent on neither the government nor any Agency.

The bottom-up or down-to-top approach of community development is a demonstration of participation as an end, since the people are empowered and take charge of the development process directly. Many Scholars have asserted that the bottom-up approach leads to empowerment of community members and enhance community wellbeing. In the opinion of (Ofem, Abonor, & Ubi, 2024), empowerment encompasses awareness creation, self-reliance,

and decision-making power. Other approaches to community development and empowerment as shown on table two above, have different levels of impact on development and empowerment.

Summary/Conclusion

Participation is viewed as both a means and an end in the development of community. As a means, it is a tool used to achieve specific goals or outcomes, such as improved decision-making, increased accountability, or enhanced community engagement. In this case, participation is a mechanism for achieving desired results. On the other hand, participation can also be seen as an end in itself. This perspective emphasizes the inherent value of participation, regardless of the specific outcomes or goals. Participation is seen as a fundamental human right, essential for individual and collective empowerment, and a key component of democratic governance. Participation as a means and as an end are interconnected, as the process of participation can lead to outcomes that reinforce the value of participation itself.

In conclusion, participation is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be viewed as both a means and an end. Understanding the interconnectedness of these two perspectives is essential for harnessing the full potential of participation to drive positive change and promote human empowerment. By recognizing the inherent value of participation, we can create more inclusive, equitable, and just societies.

Policy Implications/Recommendations

1. Meaningful participation requires investment in capacity-building initiatives; Policies must allocate resources for training, education, and infrastructure to support active community engagement.
2. Policies should address systemic barriers that prevent marginalized groups from participating. This includes creating frameworks that promote gender equality, social justice, and the inclusion of diverse community voices.
3. There should be established guidelines that define the extent and nature of community involvement in development projects, ensuring that participation is both meaningful and goal-oriented.
4. Training programmes to equip community members with the necessary skills for effective participation, thereby enhancing their ability to contribute to and benefit from development initiatives should be implemented.
5. Establish mechanisms for open communication and feedback between authorities and communities to build trust and ensure that community inputs are valued and acted upon.

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