Impact assessment of two poverty reduction projects in Nigeria confirms participation as key component of strategies for poverty alleviation

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Abstract
Incorrect Information about a problem is identified as bottleneck to problem solving. Poor understanding of the roots causes of a problem is energy and time wasting. Historical analysis of community work shows suspicion between researchers and communities in Nigeria based on poor analysis, un-fulfilled promises and poor results of development strategies caused by a top down approach.

An impact assessment of two projects in Nigeria [Zamfara Grazing Reserve and Benue Agricultural Development Program] both used bottom up approaches; provided forums for greater rapport and intensive involvement of participants. Greater dialogue between Fulani nomads and sedentary Hausas in the glazing reserve was mirrored in Benue where researchers and farmers created room for greater understanding of their common problems, generating collective ideas for solving them, developing broad ownership of solutions and putting in place credible monitoring strategies. Post implementation assessments showed high levels of sustainability in the implementing of agreed strategies. Involvement of stakeholders recognizing gender, age, cultural barriers, and socio-political differences of “community members “ helped diminish social constraints allowing the cross-fertilization of ideas. Inspired by the process and results, external partners have helped to provide communities access to basic services through enhanced participation in the process of national development. This has in turn lead to higher living standards and providing basic premise upon which the Nigeria Federal Government is expecting both the NEEDS and SEEDS to be achieved.

Introduction
The need to reduce poverty to the barest minimum has been the major concern of the world over. Nigeria has always spear headed this campaign with a view to achieving poverty reduction in Africa. However, the challenge of implementation has been enormous. No doubt, Nigeria is a great country endowed with vast economic potentials but the level of poverty has made the realization of self-sustenance far from being a reality. The federal government has mounted over the past 6 years (since the restoration of democracy) series of programs geared towards achieving poverty reduction, some of these are:
1. NAPEP -. National Poverty Eradication Program. This program has been helping the youths at all levels to acquire skills with which they can establish businesses of their own by providing funds after the acquisition of requisite skills. All the 36 states of the federation in Nigeria are actively involved in this program. Each state has designed its youth program based on need. Jigawa state for example is involved in Information Technology [IT] for its
youth empowerments program. The impact of this for the youths has been great. The state government hopes to supply the much-needed manpower in information technology for the federal Government by the year 2007. About 150 youths from Jigawa State are being trained abroad by the state Government for this purpose.

2. NSPFS- National Special Programmes for Food Security. This is a federal government co-funded World Bank Program. It is under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development/ Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [FAO] “.Its objectives is to attain food security in the broadest sense and alleviate poverty in Nigeria” It is designed to assist farmers achieve their potentials for increasing output and productivity and consequently their income on sustainable basis. “Strengthen the effectiveness of research and extension service in bringing technology and new farming practices developed by research to the practical problems faced by small farmers” and also to provide small credit financing for small scale farmers in 12 states of the federation. These outputs are delivered thro the Application of participatory methodology which enables farmers to be involved in designing and implementing their own agricultural program-choice of crop, method of production/ technical inputs and labour sources which are determined by farmers. The impact of this in the 37 operating States, including the Federal Capital [FCT] has been enormous.

3. MDGs-UN Millennium development goals] The goals and target of these national commitment are: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger, Achieve universal Primary Education, Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of women, Reduce Child mortality, Improve Maternal health, Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, Ensure Environmental Sustainability and Develop a global partnership and development. The federal government t has involved partners from the international community who are assisting in financing and provision of technical support for Federal and State Strategies designed towards achieving the millennium goal examples are: NEEDS-National Economic Enhancement Development Strategies, SEEDS- State Economic Enhancement Development Strategies, LEEDS Local Government Economic Enhancement Strategies, and UBE-Universal Basic Education. Most of these programs are needs based and so its designs and implementations are diversified commensurate with Nigerians diverse cultures. The level of achievement of each state program depends on the State Governments financial support and commitment to reduce poverty at the state level.

Objectives
The general objective of the two projects is poverty reduction.

Process
Participatory Tools and Technique was used for problem identification; designing implementations strategies as well as developing strategies for solving for both projects.

BACKGROUND; PROJECT 1
The Improved Farmer Participation in Research and Extension (IFPREB) in Benue State. A DFID/Federal Government Funded Poverty Reduction Project-1998-2001 The department for International development, (DFID) whose goal is to reduce poverty worldwide saw the need to intervene thro increased food production. The cooperative Extension Centre [CEC] an Agricultural Delivery organisation in a University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria was selected to implement the project. Preliminary scooping visits identified partner organisations as well as setting in motion modalities for the implementation of the project. The British Government was the major implementing body with support from CEC representing the federal Government of Nigeria. The project commenced in 1998 and ran thro to 2001. It has the following purpose; Enhance ability of research, training and development agencies to meet information and skills
needs of poor resource farmers [RPFs] particularly women. The main output is; improved training for poor resource farmers in three LGAs.

The process for implementation was participatory. Training and field experience was the strategy adapted by the DFID support team to develop the cooperative extension centre [CECs] and The Benue Agricultural Development Agency [BNARDA’s] capacities to train other service providers in Nigeria in participatory methodology. A participatory application of information obtained from the field through the use of PRA Tools and Techniques was carried out to address needs of various client groups in order to stimulate change in attitude, as well as refocusing objectives for change in the process of livelihood activities with a view to achieving poverty reduction.

CLIENT GROUPS

- CEC-cooperative Extension Centre, the main implementing organisation, is an extension delivery organisation who has been involved in information dissemination thro the training and visit extension. The University of Agriculture, Makurdi, created this centre.

- BNARDA-Benue Agricultural Development Agency. This also an extension delivery unit created by the Benue State Government with the mandate to transform agriculture and ensure increase food production in the middle belt as well as in Nigeria. . BNARDA works with several farmers’ blocks and cells, involving both men and women in training and visit extension.

- LGAs-Three LGAs in which communities were selected were mobilised to participate in the project. This was to ensure ownership and secure cooperation from a policy making body whose inputs will be invaluable.

- Community – members of the benefiting communities. Communities were selected thro a selection process that ensured that the poorest communities were picked, having developed with community members the criteria for selection using the wealth ranking strategy.. Each community that met the agreed criteria were selected.

PROJECT [2] THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE PASTORAL AND AGRO-PASTORAL LIVELIHOOD SYSTEM IN WEST AFRICA SOKOTO, NIGERIA

BACKGROUND

The project was sponsored by INCO-DC: International Cooperation with developing countries-1988-2003. The Zamfara reserve is a 2500 hectare piece of land located in Zamfara state ,North-western Nigeria. It encompasses three settlement communities in addition to a number of other villages located on its borders. It provides an important grazing site for the trans-humant Fulani Pastoralist. It also serves as an important means of livelihood for the settled farming communities. Administratively, it is governed by the Zamfara state government and the five local government areas in whose territories it transverses.(Tukur 2003).

PROJECT MANDATE

Generated through convention researches, G/S instruments. And participation, the project staffs are to seek solutions to the problems identified. Some of which are; Poor farming systems, encroachment into grazing areas, indiscriminate tree falling and lack of access to supplementary livestock, especially during the dry season.

PROCESS: same as in project one.

CLIENT GROUPS:

- Staff of usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Faculty of Agriculture.
• Fulani cattle herders and Hausa farmers.-Shamashalle
• Zamfara state Government-Gusua and Sokoto state government- Sokoto
• INCO DC/EU-Germany/Depth of Livestock and Ecology, Justus Lie-big University, Giessen, Germany.

Results /recommendations
Implications for Duplication for Needs and Seeds. Participation in the political and development of policies and strategies at community and LGA /added value for CEC and Danfodiyo University:

• A progression of the capacity of the staff as consultant in participatory approaches.
• Attitudinal change – openness to ideas and improved listening – taking on board other strategies and views. Improved ability to work with groups with different cultural and religious values.
• Analysis of the present situation and willingness to make significant changes to the situation being confronted. This extended beyond the immediate staff.
• Institutional relationship between Government and supervisory institutions such as religious leaders and traditional leaders to be fully engaged in order to resolve conflict.
• Gender considered in relation to relationships and gender based strictures in both creating conflict and ultimately resolving the problem.
• Skill acquisitions empowered staff.

Government:

• Participation is required to stimulate community members for community participation for full community involvement in order to get sustainable and rooted change. The old paradigm of top – down solution finding and delivery of support has been found wanting, where the feeling of ownership is absent.

At Community Level:

• Self realisation by community members – brings about awareness of their own responsibility for creating the initial problem and any long term solution requires their participation for formulating the solutions, which government in isolation cannot solve. The long-term impact assessment of the “New Technologies” in the various Benue Communities were not assessed which undermines the validity of the extension effort and possible replication in other Agricultural programs within the iddle Belt where similar agro-climatic conditions are found.

Donor Agencies:

• The imposition of externally imposed solutions was recognised after an initial engagement that an alternative methodology, process and time frame for implementation; had to be changed to accommodate the reality and challenges identified through the use of greater participation of client groups in the identification, planning and implementation of solutions to prioritised problems in the community. Both IFPREB and Sokoto Programmes missed the completion of key components of their programmes especially long term monitoring and addressing “new issues which emanated from interventions. The full uptakes of skills were not completed in both Programmes again due to time limitations.
Institutional Management Structures:

- The uphill difficulties of maintaining the level of transparency and inclusive management required for effective utilisation of the skills of CEC eventually showed the shallow gains made while the Project was in existence. The previous status quo becoming the preferred default position of a number of senior management staff who stood to benefit from the management style and un-accounted resource allocations characterised by the pre-project structure and management style. This pervasive problem was compounded by poor continuity between administrations which greatly limited the gains made during a previous administration.

Criticism Of The Speed Of [Abc] Both Individually And Institutionally And The Implications For Expectation Using The Approach. Attitude and Behaviour change the most crucial component in both Programmes is difficult to quantify in absolute terms and even more difficult to measure, in relation to the time frame for full internalisation and the achievement of the critical mass of individuals in a given organisation where change becomes self perpetuating and if difficult to turn back. This was the case in CEC where a number of gains were lost and only a few staff managed to hold on to and exhibit the professional changes associated with openness, accountability and inclusiveness key pillars in true participation.

LESSONS LEARNT FOR APPLICATION IN IMPLEMENTING NEEDS AND SEEDS.

The lessons learnt from the two projects provide a springboard upon which mistakes can be avoided while gains can be consolidated in implementing NEEDS and SEEDS.

- The gains of the two projects have been enormous. Every stakeholder has a story to tell. It is most rewarding to realise that for every problem that exists, its roots emanates from man's inability to rise to the challenge of human assistance. One focus for NEEDS and SEEDS should be to stimulate people to realise that, only them can change their situation, government can only assist in providing infrastructure and technical support.

- Implementers should note that it is the willingness of the beneficiaries to surmount environmental problems that can lead to sustained improved livelihood.

- Environmental differences and cultural believes as well as level of expose of beneficiaries determines the level of success of interventions.

- Gender concerns can be misunderstood to mean women liberation. Women liberation is a trend that is resisted at every point in developing countries regardless of its perceived benefits. Therefore her nesting the strategic roles of women in promoting developing programs should be carefully designed to carry their husbands along in order to avoid suspicions that could jeopardise the attainments of goals of interventions.

- It is useful to have a time frame for every activity however this has to be flexible to give room for time used for providing logistics, which usually eats into project time also transfers of monies are very often delayed and so eat into project implementation time.

- Managers of projects spend an enormous time developing their own capacities to do jobs that they were employed to carry out as a result of being found suitable. This again limits the time used for real project implementation while the politics of selection of project implementation teams relay more on political gains rather than spreading benefits to those who need them and Social factors pose a huge challenge to the gains of implementation, particularly when many stakeholders have to participate in taking strategic decisions that should benefit the poor.

- Change Of leadership at the Management Levels Can Pose as a challenge for continuity particularly in regards to project focus. Effective dissemination has been inadequate due to poor record keeping systems what makes non-sense of valuable information that should be shared by all stakeholders at any given point.