

Analysis of Rural People's Perceptions on Local Leaders' Roles in Community Development in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed rural people's perceptions on local leaders' roles in community development in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to: determine the perceptions of the respondents on the roles of their local leaders in community development; and, identify the roles played by local leaders in community development. Multistage random sampling technique was employed in the selection of the districts, wards, villages and respondents, which were involved in the study. The Cochran proportionate sampling technique was also employed in the selection of the respondents. Frequencies and percentages were used to address objective (i), while the Likert Scale rating technique was used to address objective (ii). Results indicated that only three of the local leaders' roles studied were not perceived by the respondents as the roles of their local leaders. Though the rest of the roles were actually perceived as local leaders' roles, the findings of the study revealed that very few of the respondents really perceived each of the roles as their local leaders' responsibilities. Similarly, the analysis on which of the roles were actually being played by the local leaders show that only very few of the respondents agreed that their local leaders is performing their leadership roles. It was concluded that majority of the respondents have the wrong perceptions on the roles of their local leaders. Thus, majority of them did not understand most of the roles that are really the functions of their local leaders. Following the fact that they do not understand their local leaders' roles, they were also not able to really know whether their local leaders are performing their leadership functions or not. It was concluded that the local leaders in the study area are not performing most of their roles as community local leaders, which made it difficult for the respondents to perceive their leaders' roles. Similarly, results of the study also informed a conclusion that the extension workers have not done their work of educating the rural people on what the roles of their local leaders are. Based on these conclusions, the major recommendation made was that, agricultural extension workers should intensify their efforts towards educating the rural people on the roles of their local leaders. The local leaders on the other hand should be encouraged by the extension workers to do more on their roles or functions. This can be done by organizing workshops, seminars and symposia on the subject matter.

Key words: Analysis, Rural people's perceptions, Local leaders' roles and Community development.

INTRODUCTION

Community development has been one of the concerns of many governments, nongovernmental organizations and agricultural and rural development agencies. It is considered as a process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of government

authorities to improve the economic and social conditions of the community, integrate these communities into the life of the nation and enable them to contribute usefully to national progress (Adeniyi, 2008). Community development is also defined by Ajayi (1995) as a social

process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world. Thus, community development needs to be sustained across generations as well as in all rural areas. From these definitions, it is obvious that for community development to happen there must be, among others, the need for coordination which in turn requires leadership. In addition, in the context of this study, leadership is needed at the local or community level so that there will be a meaningful coordination of activities, events and even resources. Leadership and community development are closely associated.

One of the keys to successful efforts in developing communities is the presence of leaders. Kouzes and Posner (1995) also define leadership as the ability to mobilize people towards a shared vision, while encouraging individual development in the process. Gardner (1990) considers leadership as the process of persuasion used by an individual (a leader) to encourage an individual or a group to pursue the objectives held by the leader. Taking into cognizance the aforementioned definitions of leadership, it is obvious that some individuals in a given community, social system or social unit are expected to be saddled with the responsibility of leadership. Such individuals, when associated with the local areas, are referred to as local leaders. Thus, local leaders are people that can influence and direct the activities of individuals or a group of people towards the achievement of their target goal. They constitute a part of the power structure in the community and may also belong to one higher economic or social class or the other. Local leaders are those who ensure that progress is made in line with group needs (Mgbada and Agumagu, 2007). Some villagers look up to such individuals for advice or consultations and other community members even tend to imitate them. They may not be very high in the society and they may not be too low either. They are usually sociable, generally interested in their community's problems and have the wills to help solve the problems if possible and when necessary. They are people with integrity and repute.

This group of people is usually expected to be sincere and trustworthy and should be liked and trusted by their own people or followership. In order to be able to work effectively towards the attainment of community development, there is need for not only the local leaders to know their roles, but also more so for the followership to have the right perception, knowledge and understanding of the roles of their local leaders. This requirement is very essential if the two parties are to work smoothly and hand in and towards that achievement of some set objectives and goals. Furthermore, it is imperative for the followership, in this case of the study, the rural people, to fully have a more or less uniform perception of the roles of their local leaders in order to relate better with them without any unnecessary misunderstandings or confusions over their respective functions or roles. Since most rural people,

majority of who are farmers, are usually illiterates or less educated, there is a high probability that they may not have the right perception on their local leaders' roles. Extension workers and community development experts need to have good or clear ideas on this vital issue. More importantly, since extension workers are also adult educators and trainers there is a need for them to investigate this phenomenon in order to ascertain if there is a need to create awareness on the roles of local leaders or to organize training for the rural people on same. It is therefore, against this backdrop that this study was designed to investigate whether or not the rural people in the study area have the correct perception on the roles of their leaders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For over many decades now, governments, nongovernmental organizations and other philanthropists have been making concerted efforts to see that rural communities have become developed. Taking into cognizance, therefore, the importance of the roles which local leaders are expected to play towards the development of their rural communities, rural people need to cooperate and work hand in hand with their leaders. It is understood, however, that if the rural people have the right perceptions on their local leaders' roles in community development issues, they will hold their leaders responsible and also remind them of the need to pursue their rights for them should the need arise. However, if the rural people themselves do not have the right perceptions on the roles of their local leaders it is very likely that some community development opportunities may escape them in the event that the leaders fail to perform their roles. It is imperative, therefore, that rural people should have a good understanding of and the correct perceptions on the roles of their local leaders. Agricultural extension workers and rural development experts should also have a clear knowledge on whether or not the rural people have the right perceptions and understanding of the roles of their local leaders. This knowledge will enable them to give the appropriate advice or make proper plans towards organizing educational programmes that will help the rural people know what the roles of their local leaders are if they have not known them earlier.

The extension workers may not perform this function properly if they have no thorough knowledge of the rural people's perceptions on what their local leaders' roles are. Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) have identified some important roles that are supposed to be performed by local leaders in community development. These were used in this study to examine whether or not the rural people have understood their local leaders' roles in community development. To the best knowledge of the researcher, no such study had been conducted in the study area in order to investigate this important subject matter. Therefore,

considering the relevance of this knowledge to extension workers, rural people and other community development organizations, there was the need for the study to be conducted in order to understand the real situation on ground. Therefore, the study was designed to analyze the respondents' perceptions on the roles of their local leaders as they relate to community development with a view to closing the knowledge gap that may be found to exist.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to analyze rural people's perceptions on local leaders' roles in community development in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to: (1) Examine the roles being played by local leaders in community development in the study area; and (2) Ascertain the perceptions of the respondents on the roles of their local leaders.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The result of this study will provide important information on rural people's perceptions on their local leaders' roles in community development activities. Researchers and students will use the findings of the study to develop and design future studies related to the work done in the study. Policy makers will also be properly guided by the findings of the study during the formulation of policies pertaining to rural community development. The findings will also serve as valuable guides in the planning of community development programmes and projects. They will also ginger the rural people to participate meaningfully in community development activities by alerting their leaders when they seem to be failing to perform their functions. Extension workers will use the findings of the study to educate rural people on their local leaders' roles, particularly those roles which they might not have perceived as their leaders' responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

Michika Local Government Area is situated in the north eastern part of Adamawa State, Nigeria between latitude 10°36' N - 10°40' N and longitude 13°21' E- 13°35' E. It shares boundaries with Madagali Local Government Area to the north, Lassa Local Government Area (Borno State) to the west. Other local government areas that the study area has common borders with are Mubi-North and Mubi-South Local Government Areas to the south. It is also bordered with the Republic of Cameroun to the east. It has a land area of about 142,199 km². Michika Local

Government Area is divided into 8 districts, 16 electoral wards and 145 polling units, with a total population of 155,238 (N P C, 2006). The dry season of the area lasts for a minimum of five months (November to March), while the rainy season spans a period of six months (April to October). The average annual rainfall of the area ranges from 900 to 1,050 mm. Agriculture is the main stay of about 80% of the inhabitants of the local government area (Adamawa State Government Diary, 2016).

Sources of Data and Methods of Data Collection

The analysis was done using the data generated from the primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained from the respondents using a validated and well-structured questionnaire. The secondary information was obtained from journals, the internet and government approved records. Other data were retrieved from the respondents' farm and small business records.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Multistage random sampling technique was employed in the selection of the districts, wards, villages and respondents concerned with the study. The respondents were proportionately sampled. In other words, justified numbers of the registered farmers from each of the selected villages in the rural area were selected as samples for the study. In the first stage, six wards were randomly selected out of the existing ten. In the second stage, two villages were selected from each of the two largest wards and one village from each of the remaining four wards. In order to ensure fair representation, the respondents were selected in the third stage using the Cochran (1977) sample size formula. The total number of the respondents that were interviewed was 120. The number of the respondents that were selected from each of the selected village was determined using the Cochran (1977) formula. The formula is expressed as

$$nh = \frac{Nh \times n}{N}$$

Where: nh = Number of respondents to be selected from each selected village. Nh = Total number of registered farmers in a selected village. N = Total number of registered farmers from all the selected villages. n = Total number of the questionnaires intended to be distributed to the respondents, Table 1.

Methods of Data Analysis

Frequency distribution and percentages were used to analyze objective i and the Likert type scale was employed to analyze objective ii. The respondents' perceptions were analyzed using statements that explained the roles of their local leaders in community development, against which

Table 1. Showing selected districts, wards, villages, farmers and respondents.

Wards	Villages	Farmers (Nh)	Respondents (nh)	
Tumbara-Ngabili	Kwapale	28	8	
Michika 1	Tumbara/N	50	14	
Madzi	Madzi	57	16	
	Kubur/S	37	11	
Moda/Dlaka	Moda	44	13	
	Dlaka	83	23	
Jigalambu	Tudun/Wada	45	13	
Tsukumu/Tillijo	Jigalambu	78	22	
Total	7	8	N = 422	n = 120

Source: Field survey, 2017.

the respondents scored marks. A five point Likert type rating scale was used. In this case, depending on the number used to score against a stated local leader's role, the following perception descriptions were allocated to the values 5 = very strongly agreed; 4 = strongly agreed; 3 = undecided; 2 = strongly disagreed; and, 1= very strongly disagreed. In order to take a final decision on the respondents' perceptions, the average response score point for all the responses for each statement was calculated. Therefore, the overall decision on their perceptions was made based on whether the average response score point was greater than, equal to or less than the average of the five rating points (that is, $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 = 15 \div 5 = 3$). This was done by means of simple addition and division. In this case, if the average score point for all the responses made by all the respondents was greater than 3 (that is, 4 or 5), it meant that the respondents had perceived or agreed that the statement is one of the roles of their local leaders. However, if the average score point was less than 3 (that is, 1 or 2), it meant that the respondents did not perceive or they did not agree that the statement is one of the roles of their local leaders. If, on the other hand, the average score point is equal to 3, that showed that the respondents did not know whether that statement is one of the roles of their local leaders or not. In other words, they neither agree nor disagree that the statement represents one of their leaders' roles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Roles Perceived by Rural People as Being Performed by their Local Leaders

Table 2 shows the statements of roles that are supposed to be played by the local leaders in community development and the respondents' responses on whether the roles are being played or not. About 13% of the respondents had indicated that their leaders do ensure cordial relationship among them towards effective and efficient participation in rural community development

activities. This shows that only a very small number of the respondents have that indicated their local leaders have performed or played this role. The role of acting as liaison between government/non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance, diffusing information and educating rural people on government/non-governmental intensions for the community was ascertained by 12% of the respondents as being performed by their local leaders. About 10% indicated that their local leaders do ensure that every material or financial assistance from the government and or non-governmental agencies reaches the people intended. This also shows that majority of the respondents do not usually access or obtain the available assistance. Only 10% also indicated that the role of enforcing compliance to government laws is being performed by their local leaders.

Other roles indicated by 7% of the respondents in each case as being played by their local leaders are: coordination and supervision of all rural development projects in the community to ensure that results are achieved; monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation; providing information to the rural people on where and how to obtain farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides credits and seeds. This is quite a small number when compared with the entire number of the respondents. Organizing fund raising meetings and developing project proposals for funding by the community was identified by only 5% of the respondents as a role being performed by their local leaders. These roles played by local leaders as indicated by the respondents are very important towards community development and sustainability of agricultural production, but in all cases, only just a small number recognize their leaders as performing the roles. Taking into cognizance these low percentages of the respondents who consented to the fact that their local leaders have been performing the roles studied, it could be deduced that such respondents cannot contribute meaningfully enough in the struggle towards rural community development because they do not even know that their local leaders are performing their functions. This becomes especially true because Ronald (2004)

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents based on their understanding of the roles played by their local leaders.

Roles played by local leaders	Freq.	Percentage
Acting as a liaison between communities and government.	98	12
Organizing fund raising meetings.	45	5
Diffusing information and educating rural people.	98	12
Ensuring cordial relationship among people.	109	13
Providing information on inputs etc. to the rural people.	57	7
Developing project proposals for funding by the community.	40	5
Making decisions on different issues affecting the community.	95	12
Monitoring and evaluation of projects.	55	7
Ensuring all assistance reach the targeted people	86	10
Coordination and supervision of all rural development projects	60	7
Enforcing compliance to government laws.	82	10
Total	825	100

Source: Field survey, 2017. *Multiple responses observed.

Table 3. Statements on local leaders' roles and their response mean scores.

Statement of the Roles of Local Leaders	Mean Score
Liaison between government and non-governmental agencies.	4.5
Organizing fund raising meetings.	3.7
Inform and educate rural people on government intensions	4.5
Ensuring cordial relationship for effective and efficient participation	4.7
Guide on how to obtain farm inputs	1.7
Development of proposals for funding by the community or government	1.8
Local leaders settle household's disputes.	1.7
Monitoring and evaluation of projects to ensure proper implementation.	3.6
Develop of work plan for community projects.	3.6
Ensuring all assistance from government reach the targeted people.	4.1
Coordination of different rural development projects in the community.	3.8
Promotion of political consciousness.	3.7

Source: Field survey, 2017.

argued that local community leaders' roles include planning and conducting community programmes, communicators, resource-linkers and managers among other roles and that the leader's role is to influence and provide direction to their followers and provide them with the needed support.

The fact that majority of the respondents do not know that their local leaders are playing these roles also implies that the leaders are either not playing their roles in most of the communities or only very few community members are being carried along. It could also be possible that the majority of the respondents are not even aware of what the roles of their leaders are. On the part of the leaders, the reason only few respondents acknowledged the role performance could be attributed to the fact there may be poor planning, existence of some communication gaps and a possible lack of proper linkage between the leaders and the community members. In either case, community development efforts may suffer some frustrations or bottlenecks that could lead to poor planning and eventual failure, Table 2.

Rural People's Perceptions on the Roles of their Local Leaders

Table 3 shows the perceptions of the respondents on whether the roles listed are the functions of their local leaders or not. The statement which indicates that local leaders ensure cordial relationship among people for effective and efficient participation in community development programmes has a mean score of 4.7. This implies that the respondents have agreed to the role as the function of their local leaders. In this regard, they have correctly perceived the role as one of the responsibilities of their local leaders. This therefore gives the impression that if their local leaders fail to perform their functions as facilitators of cordial relationship among community members, they can be called upon by the community people to do their work. Whenever this happens, it is very possible that community development works will be successful.

The table also shows that the role of diffusing information and educating rural people on government/non-

governmental organizations' intensions for the community was scored 4.5. This means that the respondents have perceived this function as the role of their local leaders.

The role of liaising between government and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance was scored with a mean of 4.5. This shows that the respondents have also accepted that the above statement is one of the roles of their local leaders. Similarly, all the roles studied have response mean scores greater than 3 with the exception of the roles of providing information to the respondents on where and how to obtain agricultural inputs, local developing proposals for funding by the government or nongovernmental organizations and settling household's disputes, which were scored 1.7, 1.8 and 1.7, respectively. This means that the respondents do not perceive these three roles as the roles of their local leaders. The lack of correct perceptions of local leaders' roles by community members can cause serious problems which are capable of causing a setback in community development. This is true, for instance, where there may be conflicts occurring between community members that need to be resolved by the local leaders. Once this kind of intervention is not perceived by the community people as a local leader's role, he may not be allowed to settle it. This is because, to the rural community member, that is not the business of the local leader.

The role of negotiator or mediator is extremely important, since conflicts will frequently occur among members, neighbors, youth groups, political groups and other groups. Though the performance of this role by local leaders is very essential, it could also, as argued by the authors, trigger additional problems because these may involve fights between groups of different races and or religions. Therefore, they can be very volatile and may erupt into bigger conflicts. The results therefore, show that the existence of this improper perception in the study area is a potential problem to community development. From the results presented in Table 3, exactly 75% of the roles studied were perceived by the respondents to be their local leaders' roles. Only 25% of the roles were indicated to be perceived as not the roles of local leaders, even though they are actually the roles of local leaders. It is also shown in the results that even the roles perceived to be local leaders' roles were perceived to be so by only very low percentages of the respondents. This shows that only very few respondents understood the roles of their local leaders. This scenario therefore, implies that even when the local leaders are not performing their functions, majority of the respondents do not and will not know. This can lead to losing many community development opportunities since the local leaders may not be called to their responsibilities in the event they fail to perform them because the majority of the respondents do not know their local leaders' roles.

This position concurs with the report of Bell and Evert (1997) in which they noted that within many rural

communities today, local leaders are concluding that if economic and community development is to occur, it is their responsibility to make it happen. It is therefore, very apparent and imperative too that rural people really need to have the right perception on their leaders' roles, otherwise, their communities may be lagging behind at the detriment of community development because, to a large extent, local leaders are part and parcel of community development success or failure as the case may be. It is also important to state here that there may be a serious community development problem in the study area because of their lack of proper perceptions of their leaders' roles as depicted in Table 3. This deduction is supported by Wilkinson (1986) who reported that by ignoring local leaders and actors, we disregard those who make decisions, provide leadership, and instigate community action, thereby missing the mark of community development itself. It is therefore, probable that only when rural people correctly perceive the roles of their local leaders that they will work reasonably hand in hand with each other to achieve community development goals. This argument is also supported by the report of Israel and Beaulieu (1990) who noted that actors, associations and actions (the three elements of the interactional perspective) provide the basis for assessing the degree to which community leadership roles are being performed within the local arena and the relationships that might exist among the actions.

CONCLUSION

Majority of the roles studied have been perceived by the respondents as their local leaders' roles in community development. This is a very important factor in facilitating community development activities because it will always enable the respondents to work hand in hand with their local leaders. Some few roles were not perceived as the roles of the local leaders. This negative perception constitutes some serious problems such as community disunity, disharmony and factional differences. The respondents' wrong perceptions have had strong demoralizing effects on the local leaders and have been detrimental to community development efforts in the area. Since most of the roles were actually perceived by majority of the respondents, it was concluded that the local leaders in the study area are not performing most of their roles as community local leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made: (1) Agricultural extension workers should intensify their extension service delivery activities towards educating the rural people on the need for them to remind their local

leaders to do so at any time they fail to perform their roles. (2) The extension workers should also educate the rural people on the roles that they do not perceive to be their local leaders' roles. This can be done by organizing workshops, seminars and symposia. During such sessions, the rural people should be made to understand what they may be missing, in terms of community development benefits, if they fail to understand the functions of their local leaders and (3) Extension workers should endeavor to organize the rural people into farmer groups, community development associations or cooperatives in order for them to take the advantage of the multiplier effects of such groups in information dissemination and participation in community development activities in the study area.

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