

Rural Development Initiatives and the Activities of Non-Governmental Organisations (Ngos): Implication for Social Work Intervention

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Abstract: *The paper addresses the issues of rural development initiatives and the activities of non-government organizations in the promotion and development of individuals and groups in the society today. The effectiveness of the role performance of NGOs measured against their ability to engender the preconditions to the attainment of rural development objectives. NGOs are yet to wholly generate these success ingredients. This failure is due to the paradox of performance at different levels in society. The dynamics of operations of NGOs produce some latent inhibiting consequences which constrain the attainment of anticipated grassroots development. Thus, this paper identifies some of these shortcomings and concludes that concerted global research efforts are needed to understand better these nascent but elusive problems and to offer management strategies. The paper further shows that despite the existence of NGOs across the nation, their activities show their desire to propagate and run their agenda of creating wealth for their organization. It is recommended that most social workers and social development experts should be involved in rendering professional services through NGO activities in order to enhance development in society.*

Keywords: *Rural, Development, Initiatives, Activities, NGOs, Social Work, Intervention.*

I. Introduction

Rural development is the need and desire of every government and people geared towards experiencing quality life and living in society. This is been encouraged by different individuals, organizations and government institutions at different levels in society. NGOs perform services principally designed to create development, empower people and transform lives, but certain flaws and shortcomings are paradoxically noticed amongst them in the course of their operations. It is therefore argued that these flaws are the outcome of their operational procedures and have the capacity to constrain the attainment of the advocated roles in rural development for which they stand for in their original conception. It therefore makes it easy to conclude that rather than seen as, non-profit making development agents, they are really business agencies to help themselves and their sponsors achieve certain material and socio-economic gains in their operating environment as well from their donor or sponsoring nations. It is along this line that this paper seeks to explore these organizations and the intervention strength and processes of the practicing social workers in society today.

The global concern for speeding rural development or achieving diverse rural transformation in the developing countries was unprecedentedly expressed before the 1970s and emphasized in the 1980s by the avalanche of international and local conferences and workshops to x-ray this aspect of developmental partners. Organizations and institutions' publication of new journals came into existence during this period solely for the promotion of this enterprise. Such spirited efforts were prompted by the mocking failures of the past approaches efforts and processes to rural development (Famoriyo, 1989; Aremo, 1983; Aina, 1990; Ering, 2010). Recent global discussions and researches as seen above clearly confirms the effective strategy to overcome the failures of the "lost development decade" of the 1980s, which is designed to seek the active involvement and participation of the affected people themselves in the development process (Ukpong, 1990). The over centralized strategy of the top-down approach which conceives development process as a paternalistic and ritualistic activity of the government is no longer considered appropriate. Accordingly, the active participation of the local people in their activities is seen as a necessary measure for success (Durning, 1989).

However, in their "broadest conceptualization, the NGOs are fundamentally hailed for their unique capacity to enhance participatory development initiatives" (Editors, 2006:6). The last decade in particular has witnessed profuse efforts to place NGOs' wish up on the public agenda as a veritable instrument of development intervention (Aina, 1996). The disturbing issue however, is that not only in the advocated capacity of NGO is exaggerated, but such claims are often made without paying attention to the real inhibiting problems NGOs actually face in the field on the course of carrying out their supposed philosophy of intervention. The unrestrained propagation of such a position is quite dangerous and misleading, to professional strategy in rural

development initiatives and measures, especially as certified by community development experts. As persistently acclaimed, advocacy and practice are two worlds apart, sometimes without a bridge (Ukpong, 1990). Indeed, a closer assessment of the operational areas reveals that most of the NGOs engaged in the implementation of development projects are rural oriented, although their operational headquarters, as would be expected are usually located in key urban centers of the country. The NGOs that undertakes activities in the urban areas, more often than not, are those that are involved in such projects that are being sponsored by foreign NGOs towards the development of urban slums. Surveys and researches have shown that these localized NGOs engage different individuals to render these helping services to their targeted population despite poor professional competences. The end result most times are that there are often derive interest or gains and rewards from the supplies of the International donor Agencies to the intervening NGO and the expected vulnerable targeted groups for support.

II. Literature Review

A brief literature shall be reviewed that are relevant to the issues of the activities and contributions of Non Governmental Organizations in our society today. This will be achieved through a conscious reviewing of both empirical and theoretical literature.

1.1. The Need For Rural Development Initiatives/Process

Different measures have been applied (theoretically and practically) by different organizations, ministries, professional bodies, etc. to initiate programmes and projects or activities to raise rural participation to achieve socio-cultural and economic development. These measures however have never precluded social workers at different levels, especially those involved in community, development services in the field and those engaged in policy formulation.

Rural development according to Ukpong (1989) is the change aimed at the definition of poverty of the rural dwellers and ultimately, enhancement of their quality of life and well-being. It is significantly a part of the overall development that creates a total wellbeing of the people in society (Agbo, 2006; Ering, 2010). Recent experiences and interactions have showed that NGOs are more frequently engaged in rural development initiatives and programmes with sponsorships by foreign donors in research and project execution. One therefore may ask why the sudden desire to engaging these NGOs? Are their services to meet their passion for quality development or an avenue to create wealth? Some scholars (Matthew, 2011; Ering, 2010; Agbor, 2003; Wilforce, 2005) have all attempted to provide answers, and differently conclude that the social workers, perform voluntary services in rural areas mostly through the deliberate provision of social development facilities to the needed areas in line with the services of the social development workers. It is therefore clear that some social workers are also employed by some NGOs involve in the provision of these services at one point in time or the other, to render mere advisory or research services without being in the programme of planning and real execution or implementation of the findings. This will have major challenges because such services will lack professional social welfare skills, hence, could result to failure within a short period of time..

According to Matthew (2011), “the activities of the NGOs in rural development are purely exploitative and a personal adventure to enmass wealth”. Wilforce (2005) see their recent engagement and involvement as an alternative and helping role to augment government’s inability to create meaningful livelihood to the rural dwellers. It is the view of this paper that these positions of the above mentioned scholars are not totally true or wrong, but each has its empirical, theoretical or scholarly merits in its own right. While they (NGOs) provide rural development services to help improve rural dwellers’ lives, they at the same time improve their socio-economic status, as they need these finances to continue in their existence and provide services. It should be clearly noted that while there are some discrepancies among these organizations, others have also assisted to attract development grants and programmes from foreign sponsors especially and hence, improving rural lives. It is on this note that clearly Ehinguamusoe (1998) defines Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) as organizations which are outside the orbit of the government in respect of the formation, funding, management as well as governance and which engage in socio-economic and cultural transformation of the society, however, without profit motive. One can also clearly articulate that this definition does not totally capture the current essence and practical activities of these organizations, as some are totally profit motive determined or driven. It is this motive driven philosophy which guarantees for them the zeal and commitment towards effective performance of rural development activities in society.

1.1.1. Rural Development And Limitations Of Ngo’s Operationalisation

Recent development in the service provisions to rural development shows the multiplicity of NGOs activities for rural development but empirical evidence does not support their purposeful growth and acclaimed developmental operations as non-profit making organizations. Africa has a common experience generally about the activities of NGOs as a major operational element in rural development initiatives which is the propensity to

render rural empowerment and create in the rural people a sense of rural development drives and sustainability (Ebong, 1990; Asu, 2009; Abasiokong, 1982). This is the experience for most rural development initiatives and programmes carried out by NGOs and which are against the objectives of participation and beneficial utilization of projects/services to improve the well-being of the rural people. This failure is noted for government's programmes beginning from the farm settlement projects of the 1960s, through the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of the 1970s and the Basin Development Programme of 1980s to the DFRRI projects and to the "SURE-P of 2012 (Ukpong, 1991; Altungo, 1992; Ojua, 2012; Jackson, 2012). It is equally common to notice that failures are observed in the grassroots development initiatives of NGOs at different levels due to poor planning and lack of professional expertise knowledge (Altungo, 1992).

It is observed that most NGO operators engage in these services as part of their activities to diversify their ways of creating wealth by liaising with different government and non-governmental bodies/agencies operating as foreign donors with the view to carrying out their assisting activities in developing societies. They source for funds to implement or execute these programmes and report directly to the donor agencies about the outcome (successes or otherwise) of the projects. This reveals that attention and compliance to rules of operation are given more to the donor agencies than the plight of the primary group or host government, hence, creating poor relationship and cooperation problem.

The strict operations of NGOs are not regulated in terms of progress and achievements, hence, there is greater tendency to fail, than regulated government establishments. This is not only because NGOs are a recent phenomenon, hence the little attention to their operations but also mainly because of the subtleties underpinning their informal operations. This situation has often worked against the NGOs themselves in a manner that is even least understood by many of these organizations today. This can rightly be traced back to the dynamic nature of their operations against their set down responsibilities to development. For this reason, we contend that the constraints faced by NGOs in their rural development initiatives are ironically, the paradoxes of their performance. Their lack of impactful performance is not due to inadequate monetary resources as often erroneously assumed. The reason is that their activities are strictly economic and most times to make profits in projects embarked upon whether or not these are successfully executed. But it is even more important to identify these constraints because given the nature of their origins; they are elusive to many ordinary eyes. This is so because it is difficult to draw a precise distinction between the larger and better organized groups commonly seen as Action Groups and Non-Government Organization's activities. To a greater extent, irrespective of some of these identified challenges, the NGOs have come to boost development complimentary initiatives of government and attracted more foreign investments geared towards development of the rural areas. Since they are privately owned, their operational flaws make target achievement difficult, due to some of the following reasons that are not exhaustive.

2.1.2 Lack of reporting spirit to Host Governments:

NGOs with international or foreign sponsors seem not to be controlled by the state or home governments in terms of work description, needs and funding, hence, pose as threats to the powers of the home authority. This has severally created mistrust, bad blood, suspicion and oscillates confrontation, cooperation and subjugation. The current that appears constant, however, is that of suspicion, distrust and misrepresentation is always the order of the day. It is a well known fact that every NGO owes accountability to its initiators, sponsor and beneficiaries due to their financial, strength and assistance. In a way, foreign NGOs and sponsors operate in the line of multinational companies with little or no accountability to the host country. Local NGOs, the CBOs as indigenous organizations owe their obligation to the local people who are the initiators and the beneficiaries and not to the government. As local NGOs develop, the imperative of seeking the support of foreign NGO becomes compelling. Increasingly, too, local NGOs are urged to undertake networking if they must succeed, and this no doubt places elements of enmity within NGOs (Ukpong, 1989). Seen in this light, the host governments sometimes initiates control mechanism on these NGOs through financial control and specifications on staff employment and salary placement.

Experiences have shown that since terms of operation and control come from the funding bodies; the call for vital and sensitive information from the local NGOs which exposes the helplessness and vulnerability of the local people, as well as disparage their dignity to the international world is clearly noticeable (IWTC, 1989). An assessment of the standard application or proposal forms delivered or received from foreign NGOs reveals the level of submissiveness to external command which is a "fact of life", about the existing local and foreign NGOs. It is clear that "he who pays the piper dictates the tune", you can't control what you don't sponsor effectively.

Most importantly, government have resented to this mode of operation as a threat to its political autonomy and a subtle form of deepening the dependency of its people by outsiders. Government sees the activities of some of these NGOs as contradictory to its sovereign interest, and also, as been inconsistent with its policies. This usually leads to Government's covert attempt to limit the powers and activities of NGOs and

hence, affect their expected impact on the society. The implication of this framed antagonism on cooperation and coordination are only too obvious, and creates a concern for all development experts. Generally, one conflicting thought is that various government organs have been committed enough to these services by engaging social workers and other community development experts in carrying out rural development services in the needed areas.

2.1.3 Uncoordinated, Competitive and Fragmentation of Organisations:

The proliferation of NGOs in Nigeria and Africa at large is both phenomenal and a great concern especially in respect to their operations. It is however difficult to ascertain the actual number of both foreign and local NGOs operating in Nigeria, largely because of the non-registration controlled processes by the home government and also due to the lack of an established umbrella which could operate as a coordinating body (Kartein, 1990; Editors, 1991). This however gave rise to the trend and situation for the mushrooming of NGOs, especially at local (community) level. For instance, under the DFERRI programme, each of the 100,000 communities in Nigeria is expected to form at least a CDA to jointly collaborate to service the society (Altungo, 1992). The real drawback of this development is the insularity of each NGO. The proliferation is due to the perceived opportunities NGOs offer. It is considered that the fewer those that control them and the smaller the target population, the greater the share of rewards and visibility of results. At community level, CDAs are sought for because of the leverage they give local people to determine the agenda for the development of individual community. This raises the community's identity, consciousness and provision of basic needs, among other things.

Local NGOs for instance compete amongst themselves to obtain supporting resources from both government and foreign NGOs who are seen as sponsoring agents or bodies. Some others strive to gain the recognition, acceptance and support of the programming or target community and population. Here, competition involves three types of NGOs in hierarchical order. At the bottom are the unorganized and less organized community development associations (CDAs). Above this are the few nascent bodies organized on the mould of the Northern NGOs and then the foreign NGOs. Unfortunately, cooperation between these three categories of NGOs is practically tenuous as there is no memorandum of understanding among them. Rather, there is suspicion and mistrust between them. Cooperation is also hard to attain because of the perception of incompetence and feeling of inferiority towards each other, especially the local ones.

There is certainly a lack of coordination of the activities of NGOs in Nigeria. Attempts at networking are faltering while efforts to create coordinating bodies in the country are sectoral in scope and still on the drawing board. The pioneering position on this is occupied by the Nigeria Association of Non Governmental Organization on Health (NANGO). But there are presently less than six operational NGOs registered as members to this association. The Nigerian Association of Development Organization is practically on the drawing board. The problem of lack of coordination is worse at the first level of NGOs, where the less organized CDAs of each community operate in a free hand competition, hence, the tendency for small, non-coordinated groups to illegally operate as NGOs without proper guides and control to avoid fraud.

The results of all this lack of coordination between NGOs are regrettable overlapping, paralyses and atrophy of initiatives and resources. The strategy of doing-it-alone does not permit operations on meaningfully substantive scope but on small, experimental and limited basis. The outcome is the littering of the rural landscape with dotted, disjointed projects. As Durning (1989:51) asserted, "small may be beautiful, but it can also be insignificant". What is obtainable today at the community level amongst the CDAs is to a large extent the duplication of projects, even within a community, that are grossly underutilized, uncompleted and abandoned (Ojua, 2012). This is an obvious demonstration of NGO's failure, thus diminishing public, and even some NGOs operators' confidence in the capacity of NGOS as poverty alleviation agencies. Waning confidence take as its first toll, people's willingness and enthusiasm for participation in and support for further NGOs activities. It is this glaring short comings that agencies of government and donor partners' recommend and emphasizes very seriously the strategy of counterpart funding and the bottom-top approach to community development process where rural community development inspectors with professional training take the lead of engaging purposefully the individuals involve.

2.1.4 Constituency Recognition:

Constituency recognition as a development concept simply means the acceptance by the targeted beneficiaries of the necessity for a change programme and their preparedness to firmly support it for success, as not. Not everyone supports a change programme. This occurs from two perspectives: those who oppose it because it threatens their entrenched privileged positions and those who do not understand the process. Constituency recognition is very important in NGOs operation, for it is the only guaranteed framework for participation. The importance of people's involvement or participation in development process needs not be over labour, as this is the major foundation for sustainable rural development initiative in society.

NGOs operating in Nigeria, especially the foreign ones are equally afflicted with the weaknesses of the top-down development approach. Thus far, even at the CDAs level, involvement in NGOs activities is still the preserve of the few enlightened or educated urban linked elites, as they control and direct the affairs of NGOs. The issues and dynamics of NGOs are still a mystery to the majority of the unenlightened poor. The operators of NGOs therefore allocate to themselves the role of “defending the cause of the peasants” (Musengimana, 1990:39) without ascertaining their needs and perspectives. Thus, they often times unilaterally design implement and impose projects on the poor rural communities as part of their felt needs that will result to development. These projects bear the sentiments, assumptions and preferences of the sponsoring NGOs or its leadership than the aspirations of the intended beneficiaries. Most often, the projects lack any continuity with and relevance to the cultural roots of the constituency and its felt needs. The outcome is resistance, or disregard to the project or both. Each grassroots project that fails deepens the apathy of the poor, hence, makes commitment and dedication difficult and/or impossible at the first instance.

2.1.5. Learned helplessness:

When NGOs operate as the “saviour” of the poor, as they most often see themselves do, they not only exculpate the poor and give respectability to helplessness, but exonerate them for doing nothing to improve their lot. In the main, certain operational procedures of the NGOs are such that they do not expect the poor to do much for themselves, as they are presented as rescue agents with all solutions in their possession. This presumption may not be correct because, critically some of these issues have fundamental challenges to such a level that it is quite difficult to run over them swiftly.

There are two main ways through which the operational procedures of NGOs incapacitates the poor and dwindle the opportunity for them to build their executive capacity and strengthen their local autonomy. In the first instance, NGOs operate fully in accordance with the procedures approved at their headquarters or as directed by the sponsoring agencies. Local actions are directed by the headquarters’ “standing order” which must be strictly followed irrespective of local peculiarities and demands. The foreign NGOs in particular consider their field offices and affiliate NGOs as mere hands that must take and execute orders from the headquarters. In this way, the right to full self-management and the opportunity to develop local autonomy are denied.

The opportunity to develop management capacity or enhanced leadership capacity is further constrained by the demands of NGOs. Most Northern NGOs tie their money direct to project execution and not training. The need for the development of competent indigenous management capacity remains unmet, as even the local NGOs are guilty of this neglect as well. Apprehensive of the prospect of power sharing with other capable hands and in the bid to preserve their monopoly distressing or killing the patient does not demonstrate any competence nor service on the part of the practitioner. What is required now is to appreciate the existence of the problem and urgently direct our knowledge on them, in order to create a conducive; atmosphere that will generate purposeful development measures and conditions.

1.2. Implication For Social Workers’ Intervention

Social workers perform diverse roles and responsibilities in providing hope, help and assistance as well as directions to the socially challenged in society in multi-varied dimension. Some of these roles and responsibilities are even being carried out by various staff and members of the Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) working with these people. The social worker essentially creates a professional environment for interaction with those challenged or socially deprived people. Undertake advocacy visitations and programmes that fall in line with the vision and activities of the NGO they are working with. They develop and use professional skills and methods to create acceptability and cooperation from the vulnerable targeted groups.

The social worker must create a socio-cultural environment for these interactional relationships to be handled and carried out successfully. This is imperative because each cultural group has its peculiarity in existence and operationalization. They create in the group in need the sense of capability that they are only assisted to build up their capacity to handle their needs by themselves, and not wait for free supplies every moment.

The social worker could intervene as a community social mobilizer of both humans and material resources in order to ensure quality participation and a sense of belongingness amongst the owners of the projects or programmes and the sponsoring organizations. This will create for them a sense of ownership and responsibility leading to sustainability of such programmes. The social worker act often times as a liaison officer between the NGO and the population or rural community designated for the developmental projects. In other words, professional or expertise knowledge can be provided in the course of project execution and referrals to other agencies or organizations when technical knowledge is requested for a quality work delivery.

The social workers perform diverse function in child and youth groups especially as community workers. They work with orphans and vulnerable children, the abandoned children, youth organizations and

groups to help propagate the social and cultural norms and values, as well as grant them access and sell such to them for sustainable rural transformation and development. These activities are presently been dominated by people of the different NGOs without expertise or professional knowledge on community development and child welfare services, which are strictly the responsibilities of the social work professionals.

III. Conclusion And Recommendations

The NGOs are truly a new fascinating vista of development looked at from various developmental indices and points of view. Many have already hailed them as the solutions to the long sought, viable alternative development paradigm while others describe them as the third sector of the society after the public and private sectors. The excitement that usually accompanies any new finding is yet to abate as to permit a dispassionate study of this wave-making phenomenon. There are indications of latent dysfunctions of NGOs which are scarcely admitted and discussed publicly with gusto as done with advocated roles of NGOs. Many NGOs themselves are yet to come to terms with this disquieting development. The reluctance is predicated on the hope that the liberating roles assigned to NGOs will ultimately overwhelm whatever distractions may occur, but this can only be a cautious optimism.

While celebrating the arrival of NGOs, it is more pertinent to admit the existence of problems that have occurred as paradoxes of consequence and act on them in order to maximize the benefit of this grassroots strategy. The problems are manageable and require the upgrading of the point of consideration. NGOs originated as a private endeavour and have now grown to address public interests. Their present problems must similarly receive global scholarly attention.

The study recommends that the NGOs be more encouraged to function maximally in their various activities.

There should be clear rules of operation and performance to regulate the activities of the NGOs and the respective identified projects.

More social welfare workers and development experts should be made to be part of the NGOs in terms of collaboration to guarantee professional practice, presence and intervention.

Government at all levels should create conditions of building sustainable programmes for effective capacity building for all those concerned in development work in the rural areas using modern techniques and infrastructures.

More counterpart interaction opportunities in seminars, workshops, conferences etc to be organized to create awareness and enlightenment more for the various NGO operators, on government development plans, policies and strategies.

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