

DEVELOPING LOCAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH COUNSELING FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Challenges associated with local communities in Nigeria have created a need for strong and sound local leader. However, despite growing support for the development of communities of the local level, little is known about the counseling impact in the development of local leaders for effective implementation of community development projects (CDP). Consequently the need for developing local leadership skills through counseling can serve as an attempt to make a scratch on the counseling impact towards the implementation of CDP especially due to the perceived challenges associated with developing local leadership skills that manage CDP. It is against this backdrop the paper set to address local leadership roles, identification of local leadership in CDP, counseling strategy for developing local leadership for implementation of CDP, and developing local leadership skills through counseling for implementation of CDP.

Introduction

The process of effective implementation of community development project (CDP) lies greatly on effective leadership, as the principal actor's (i.e. local leaders and community development officers) serve as catalyst for community development in its different ramifications. This is due to the fact that, the local power structure (i.e. local leadership) elicits the need and enthusiasm of the people from the grassroots which serve as active ingredient for effective

implementation of CDP. Therefore, their involvement is required in the process of planning, preparation submission of the proposal for funding and initiation of the project as well as the sustenance and utilization of the project (Sa'idu 2006).

However, it is important to note that, strong or effective leadership from the grassroots help greatly towards formation of community integration, facilitate solidifying social structure and guide the community to achieve the desire change, transformation and

improvement which serve as yardstick for effective CDP in Nigeria.

But on the contrary, it is an established fact that, the greatest problem facing Nigeria is that of leadership at all levels and in the process of running any form of program. It is against this background that this paper seeks to suggest effective ways for developing local leadership skills through counseling for the effective implementation of community development project.

Local Leadership in Community Development Projects

Leaders play tremendous roles in the development of the society. Leadership as a term involves the ability to use different forms of power to influence followers' behavior in a number of ways (Tajuddeen and Abba, 2003). Therefore, for local leadership in community development project to be effective it must be transparent and accountable as well as capable of galvanizing community structures through harnessing and proper utilization of the abundant resources for effective implementation of CDP.

Local leadership in community development project implies the activity to influence local people to cooperate towards the achievement

of desirable Community Development goals (Sa'idu, 2006). The local leadership in CDP must evolve the process of directing, guiding, influencing or controlling the thoughts, feelings or behavior of other human beings in order to meet the set goals.

By and large, it is inferred that local leadership in Community Development Projects principally requires four ingredients: the leader, the led, the situation and the goal. Impliedly it directly deals with resources (i.e. human and material). Atmosphere needs and aspirations of particular organization or nation (Sa'idu, 2006).

In cognizance of this fundamental issue, for a local leadership in community development projects to foster genuine involvement or participation of people in CDP, the local leadership must be exemplary in future, trustworthy, articulation in decision making process and full of initiative, drive and energy (Omoruyi, 2001).

Local Leadership Roles in Community Development Project

In a sphere of community activities a local leadership is expected to play the following roles according to Hassan (2005).

- a- To foster participation and genuine involvement of the people in community development activities designed to improve their lives and well-being, in order to achieve these they are expected to create faith in community objectives among the community members, creates superiority of community purpose, philosophy of cooperation and success among others.
- b- Local leadership of Community Development must endeavor to help their people to identify the problems hindering their progress in a community and should equip them to be prepared to take action that would lead to the resolution of these problems.
- c- They must lead their people to appreciate the fact that success can only be achieved when they are willing to work together for the achievement of the set goals. To achieve this, it is important to involve the generality of community members in planning, execution, utilization and assessment of CDP.
- d- Local leadership must create the understanding in the people that they have

the capacities to change their situation using their own resource.

- e- Local leadership need to continually assess how things could be done better, get community members to share their responsibilities pursue their goals and work together for the achievement of goal.

Thus, the local leadership roles in community development project must attempt to promote grass root level participation and democratic decision making among the community members, build community power based relationship and enduring community organization which serves as ingredients for developing a viable and strong grassroots leadership.

Approaches for the Identification of Local Leadership in Community Development Project

Leadership in any organization can be identified using either subjective or objective (i.e. formalized) approach. In community development activities being a social process, it is expected that competent people are required to control the social, economic, political and cultural enterprise, therefore the process of identifying local leadership for community development must be objective and

participatory. But generally, Hassan (2005) suggested that Local Leadership in Community Development can be identified through the following:

a) **Position Approach:** This implies considering the different positions an individual held. In a formal authority determine his/her nomination as a leader. This approach is based on the promise that those in positions of authority or role incumbents are the real power holders in the community. But it is well known that, not all those who hold position are good or popular and that will not be effective for community development activities.

b) **The issue Outcome Approach:** In this approach leaders are identified through their involvement or participation in community development activities such as decision-making process or their roles in tackling community problem. This approach is criticized as the level of one's participation in an issue may depend on his interest or area of specialization.

c) **Reputation Approach:** Under this approach, a list of influential people in a community is compiled and a panel of selected people articulates the list, and came up with a final list which determines local leader. But this approach tends to be faulty because of its centrality and nonparticipation of majority of the people in the community.

d) **Socio-metric Approach:** Here leaders are identifying from a list of the most occurring names. Leaders are selected using this method asking the representative group or people in the community to indicate the name of the persons; they might want to call upon in the event of development, the most reoccurring name or the name with highest frequency becomes the leader to be selected. This approach is effective because of its participatory nature (Chris et al, 1994).

While these approaches held much promising future, promotes a problem solving environment and engineered solid foundation for developing local leadership skills

for effective implementation of CDP. Specifically, the approaches serve as process of bringing together all the community members to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions and build collective approaches to improve the quality of life in the community.

Characteristics of Local Leadership in Community Development Activities

A Local Leadership suppose to possess the following characteristics namely:

- a) Being Cohesive: That is, demand immediate compliance, control tightly and gives corrective negative feedback.
- b) Being Authoritative: That is, gives long term direction and vision accepts impact and gives balanced feedback.
- c) Being Democratic: The Local Leadership must work towards collaborative commitment, empowers others to act and gives feedback for adequate performance rather than clearly differentiating level of performance.
- d) Being Pace-Setter: The Local Leader need to work to his own standards, never

ignoring micro control of others because of their significant roles in ensuring the quality of the activities.

Consequently, the local leader in the community facilitates collaborative and consensus opinions among the community members as the local leaders can specifically identify and perform the following functions:

- ✓ People with varied interest and perspectives that can actively participate throughout the entire process of CDP and ensure positive outcome is obtain.
- ✓ As traditional “power brokers” they viewed other peoples those that serve as peers to meaningful community development projects.
- ✓ Promote strong local leadership within various sectors and different interest groups.
- ✓ The local leadership may break down ethnic, economic and sectors barriers, and develop effective working relationship that is based on trust, understanding and respect.

Developing Local Leadership Skills through Counseling for Implementation of Community Development Projects

Challenges associated with the community development projects have created a need for strong leaders at all levels of community development activities. The process of developing Local Leadership for effective implementation of community development project can be influenced by three factors: strategy, culture and structure (Sa'idu, 2005).

Local Leadership Development Practices

Local Leadership development practices are defined as educational process designed to improve the leadership capabilities of individuals. These practices are rooted in the training of management training program, designed to improve both individual managerial skills and job performance. Practices in local leadership development are a variant of community development practices, which are defined as interventions that are intended to enhance effectiveness or improve community structure and culture by facilitating leaders learning (Conge and Benjamin, 1999).

Conger and Benjamin (1999) outlined four general approaches to leadership development that developing the individual leader, socializing community vision and values, strategic leadership initiatives are action learning. Therefore, the content of local leadership developing program design is generally consistent with those four basic frameworks.

Counseling Strategy for Developing Local Leadership for Effective Implementation of Community Development Project

The development of Local Leadership skills through counseling envisaged the need for functional and purposeful leadership characterized by showing good examples to the followers to emulate, leadership that is transparent and accountable to the led that would galvanize local community members to harness the abundant resources and manipulates them for effective implementation of CDP.

In cognizance of this issue, the use of holistic counseling strategy for the development of the Local Leadership for implementing CDP is advocated because it will build relationships among complex elements, (i.e. the leader, the led and situation) and it promotes honest and committed leadership

that could change the psyche of local community leaders towards transforming their society through effectively and efficiently manipulating and harnessing the abundant resources for optional benefit of the citizenry (Goshe, 2006).

For counseling strategy to be utilized for the development of local leadership for effective implementation of community development project, the counseling strategy should embark on the following:

- a) Enlightenment campaign through information for the local leaders: The campaign should enlighten, mobilize and sensitize the local leaders to understand the basic developmental problems in their local community. Those counseling strategies at the same time should inculcate the virtues of the problem solving and decision making techniques to the local level leaders as well as the ability to diagnose community strengths, deficiencies and opportunities of the local leaders.

Similarly, this strategy must acquaint the local leaders on how to motivate others to be committed towards the improvement of the

community, bring about changes help them to overcome obstacles encountered along the way of realizing the set goals. This strategy could be done through counseling retreat, counseling forum, a counseling chats and so on for the local community leaders of the different levels of government.

- b) Resource utilization strategy: This approach entails the utilization of available resources towards development of the local community leaders. But it is important to note that leaders should be fully enlightened on the available resources (i.e. human, natural), their location, quantity and quality. In juxtaposition, leaders should be aware of the problems that crippled the development of the local community such as corruption, poverty, poor planning, misplacement of priority, illiteracy, huge debt, insecurity, hunger etc. This can be achieved through task oriented activities, workshop, conferences, seminars, meet the leaders approach, cross functional approach (a situation where terms of people with diverse skills

are invited to discuss issues on proper resource utilization, the location of the resources, its quantity and quality).

- c) Campaign for purposeful leadership by the counselor: This strategy entails the direct exposure of the local community leaders to the principles and practice of local leadership. These include systematic and diplomatic enlightenment of the local leaders on the nature, characteristics, expectations leadership in relation to community, development activities. Persuasively, they should be abreast with the fact that a leader needs to be emotionally intelligent, perseverance, have good human relation, social maturity, have initiative, self assured and a good decision maker.

The counseling strategy should exploit all the necessary opportunities to consciously make the local leaders realize their importance, function and influence them to serve their local community diligently and productively. Equally, the approach needs

to equip them with the skills of coordinating the various agencies responsible for the planning execution and evaluation of the community development projects.

- d) Counseling as interactive enterprise need to provide an in-depth learning and growth on the program of CDP, commitment and substantially to leadership responsibilities, the improved motivation of the local community members, increases communal etc

Conclusion

It is perhaps clear now that community development projects that lacks qualified local leadership are bound to lack sustainability. The development of local leadership is of paramount importance. Therefore, inculcating local leadership skills among local community leaders that promotes good human relationship through counseling is crucial.

Recommendations

Developing and sustaining a functioning local leadership is not an easy task and the success of effective implementation of community development activities depends on effective local

leadership. Nigeria counselors as concerned citizens needs to refocus their vision towards topical issues at the community level through facilitating the process of developing and sustaining local leadership which is capable of mobilizing the community to greater heights.

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