

Assessment of Participation in Afforestation Programme and Relationship to Empowerment

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Abstract

This study analyses the rural community's perception, participation and empowerment towards afforestation program. These factors are highly correlated, and can affect rural communities to manage afforestation program in rural areas. The primary objective of this study was to determine the relationship between perception, participation and empowerment. Questionnaire surveys were carried out with 150 participants of afforestation program in Toshia community northern Nigeria. The data was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The results showed that there was a linear relationship between participation and empowerment. ($r=.564$, $p=0.001$) In order for rural community to effectively empowered, their participation needs to be fostered and encourage through community mobilization.

Key words: Perception, Empowerment, Afforestation program, Participation

1. Introduction

In recent years the development agencies worldwide has began to incorporate empowerment of the poor rural community's residents, participatory empowerment, gender equality and development, as strategy for alleviating poverty in the less developed nations worldwide. This shows recognition on the part of the development agencies that the process of social development is facilitated if the beneficiaries are involved in decisions making and implementation process. Moreover, it has been belief that once rural communities are empowered, development becomes sustainable. Empowerment ideas focus on initiating community participation in development process, the concept has been introduced and

developed since 1980s and now is practice globally. However, the participatory development is intended to result in empowering rural communities involved in the process of decision making.

Participation and empowerment are in close relations (Rappaport 1987; Zimmerman and Rappaport1988) Bretty (2003) suggested that participation is a process in which empowered people partnership with one another to assist themselves in identifying their problems, needs aspirations and mobilizes their resources and to assumed responsibilities to manage and to control the individuals, groups and community actions that they initiate by themselves .In this aspect participation is looked upon a process of empowerment through participation in the development activities and this will give raise to ability to developed, plan and to make decisions which are essentials for themselves. William (2001) view participation as a process of empowerment in which involved rural community in the process of identifying their problems and make decision so as to implement an activities that can contribute to sustainable development.

Empowerment is an avenue of individuals, organizations and community capacity to change. It's concerned with addressing the issues of oppression and helping individuals and groups to take an active part in decisions that affects their lives. Fawcett et, al (1995) revealed that empowered individuals, groups and community had the capacity to enhance and influence decision and change social life. The participating community have more control of their social life and as a result the level of success in attracting the needed resources to implement their plans and take actions. Reid (2000), thus involvement and community participation in developmental activities leads to empowerment and to gain control over their own lives

Studies had shown that there is significant relationship between participation and empowerment Oakley 1991: Ong 2009). The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between perception, participation and empowerment of the participants in afforestation program.

2. Method and Material

The measurement of the relationship between perception, participation and empowerment in the context of community participation in afforestation program was carried out with 150 participants of afforestation program in Toshia, northern Nigeria. in three (3) wards in the adjoining village of Toshia in Yunusari local government of Yobe State in the North Eastern Nigeria, from September 2011 to March 2012. ((1) Bulamari, (2) Afunori, (3) Kasuwula, for this study, the unit of analysis is the participants of the afforestation program. Participants in this context are the people who participated in raising tree seedlings in the community. Participants were chosen because the sample is believed to be a representative of the communities involved in afforestation program. The study used survey design in which questionnaire was used to collect the data. The socioeconomic, demographic variables Data were collected, questions were developed base on literature review of the measurement of relationship between perception, participation and empowerment. A four point likert scale that range from (1)'never involved', (2)'rarely involved', (3)'seldom involved' and (4) 'often

involved' was used. The questionnaire contained structured close-ended questions and participants answer the questions base on the scale that best answered the situation. The data was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation analysis performed to ensure that the assumptions of normality and linearity are not violated

3. Results

Table: 1 Analyses of the relationship between perception, participation and empowerment

| Variables | r | p |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|
| Empowerment(Y) | | |
| Participation(X ₁) | .564** | .000 |
| Perception(X ₂) | .614** | .000 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussions

As depicted in table.1 Linear relationship exist between participation and level of empowerment of the respondents ($r = .564$, $p = 0.001$). The findings disclosed significant correlation between participation and empowerment which indicates that as the participation of the respondents on afforestation program increases, the empowerment increases. The analysis had revealed that participation of the respondents in the afforestation program had contributed about 56.4% to their level of empowerment. Therefore it can be argued that not all participation will lead to empowerment. Others empowerment are explained by either voluntary or spontaneous participation. This result was supported by Ong, (2009) who suggested that community participation in development project has significant relationship with their level of empowerment. Hence participation is seen as a process of empowerment through the involvement and intervention of the community in the afforestation program.

The correlation between perception and the level of empowerment was significant ($r = .564$, $p = 0.001$). This showed that there was positive linear relationship between perception of the afforestation program and the level of the respondents' empowerment. In addition, the results revealed that integrative empowerment was positively associated with the respondents' perception in the afforestation program. Both perceived and emotional empowerments were positively associated with the perception. According to Fardausara (2006.) People are empowered when they perceived that their environment provide opportunity for growth and access to power. This perception of empowerment may improve their productivity and quality of life (. Mayberry et, al 2008).). Perceptions of empowerment influence participants' feeling on meaningfulness of what they do and have impact on their empowerment. Thomas and Tyman, (1994) are in the view that perception and empowerment explained a significant rating of performance. Spreitzer (1995) reported that a positive relationship exist between perception

and empowerment as such people who perceived are empowered and have better performance. This indicates that perception significantly influenced empowerment.

Perception of the respondents and their level of participation were found to be correlated ($r=.614, p=0.001$). This revealed that as the Perception of the respondents increases, so does the level of participation. However, the result showed that the early experience of desertification and desert encroachment was an element through which the respondents perceived participation in the afforestation program because, they experienced economic hardship after desert encroachment. The respondent's perception and participation coincided with their desire to improve community's wellbeing. This finding concurred with previous studies which suggested that perception and participation of people in the community development programmes improved their wellbeing by clearly demonstrates volunteering efforts (Nelson, et al, 2004). Furthermore, the attitude and the self efficacy that feature participants' perception of the desert encroachment have been identified as an important factor that affects their motivation, interest and performance in afforestation program. In addition, their perception facilitates participation in rural community work.

5. Conclusion

The study shows that most of the respondents' perception about desert encroachment and desertification, in the community were favorable towards participation in afforestation program. Desertification had reinforced the community's perception about afforestation program and subsequently more than 50% participated actively in the grassroots initiative for the afforestation program in their rural community afforestation program and this entails more self developed skills and ability to make decisions that affect their life. Participation and perception became good medium through which the community utilized their resources to strengthen their effort toward addressing menace of desert encroachment and sustainability. In conclusion community's perception on afforestation program should be intensify and encourage as a good opportunity for the community development.

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