

Prospects and Problems of Non-Governmental Organizations in Poverty Alleviation and Community Development in Gombe State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The World Bank sponsored Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), launched in 1990 envisaged a world free of poverty by the year 2015. The North-East (where Gombe State is centrally located) is experiencing significantly higher poverty and lack of progress in poverty reduction efforts. With coming to end of 2015, much still need to be done to attain the MDGs. With over 62.6% Nigerian population still very poor, there is need for a continuous search for alternative planning & development options that would help ameliorate poverty and sustained our dream for a world free of poverty and wants. This study examines the prospects and investigates the constraints of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in poverty alleviation and community development. Literature review, questionnaire and interview methods were used for the study. The findings revealed that: finance, continuity of projects/programmes, conflicts and insecurity were the major problems confronting the NGOs. An interesting revelation is that majority of the respondents indicated that they wait for the NGOs or Government to initiate poverty alleviation programmes/projects. The implication is that the community dwellers need attitudinal change necessary for self reliance. The prospect of NGOs in poverty alleviation and community development in the study area is very bright due to rapid population growth & increasing poverty levels with the attendant positive effects on urban planning and regional development. The study recommends that NGOs should (1) form an association to enable them work together, and utilize social capital in their operation/services. (2) seek to explore avenues for funding from donor agencies. Finally, the Government needs to address some of its short comings.

Keywords: Community development, poverty alleviation, NGOs, Gombe, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Bank sponsored Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), launched in 1990, envisaged a world free of poverty by the year 2015. However, with the recent data released by The World Bank (2014), it would appear that, growth and poverty reduction are primarily urban phenomena in Nigeria. In rural areas, growth is slower; poverty is higher while poverty reduction is even slower. The new living standard estimates, imply a stronger divide between the North and Southern Nigeria. The North especially North-East (where Gombe State is centrally located) where this study was carried out is experiencing significantly higher poverty and lack of progress in poverty reduction efforts. With 2015 gone, much still need to be done to attain the Millennium Development Goal. With over 62.6% Nigerian population still very poor, there is the need for a continuous search for alternative planning and developmental options that would help ameliorate poverty and sustained our dream for a world free of poverty and wants which would positively impact on urban planning and regional development.

This research is aimed at contributing to a way forward. Besides, little attention is given in the literature to the activities of the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). As a result, scanty literature is available in this regard. Accordingly, an investigation into the structure, programmes/projects, activities, constraints/problems as well as the prospects of the NGOs in poverty alleviation and community development presents an interesting opportunity for research in order to enable us hold the NGOs to standard in Gombe State. This could elicit the necessary synergy among the built environment professionals including urban and regional planners to confront the challenges of poverty and community development in Nigeria in general.

Although, attempts were made in the past by successive governments to ameliorate the problem of poverty and enhance community development, which include; the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in (2001), and the recent Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (Sure-P), launched by the President Jonathan administration appear not to have had any serious impact on the prevalence of poverty and want in Nigeria. The above scenario has been succinctly described by Baba (1988) as portraying failure at all levels of government in tackling poverty and community development. Perhaps this situation motivated Yusuf (2015) study which concluded that no significant achievement can be recorded in Nigeria in terms of poverty alleviation without incorporating the NGOs to achieve overall improvement in the living standard of the vast majority who reside in the rural areas. Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

(1) to investigate the prospect of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) towards poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe State,

(2) to identify the constraints militating against Non-governmental Organization (NGOs) in poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe State with a view to enhancing community development and poverty alleviation. The outcome of the study would help in the determination of the areas of support and/or partnership with donor agencies. It is hoped that the study would also serve as a guide to all agencies involved in community based poverty alleviation. The study is envisaged to contribute to the evaluation of self-help projects especially the pro-poor ones. Also, the study's contribution to knowledge, society and humanity would further propel efforts geared towards alleviating poverty and want.

Research Questions

1. What are the prospect of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe state?
2. What are the constraints/problems militating against Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe state?

Location

The Study area is located between latitudes $9^{\circ} 30'$ and $12^{\circ}30'$ North and Longitude $8^{\circ} 45'$ and $11^{\circ} 45^0$ East. It shares boundary with Bauchi State to the West and Taraba State to the extreme South West while Adamawa State lies to the South. It also has source frontiers with Borno State to the East and Yobe State to the North. Gombe State lies at the centre of the North-East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. It is also well linked by truck 'A' roads about 150Km from Bauchi, 225Km from Yola, 280Km from Jalingo, 250Km from Potiskum, and 310 Km from Maiduguri to the East. Gombe, the State capital is along the Port-Harcourt-Maiduguri railway line. The Gongola River allows for some level of navigation at the peak of the raining season. This is most significant at the North of the Dadin-kowa Dam.

The relative location of the study area (Gombe State) is shown in Figure 1, (map of Gombe State, extracted from map of Nigeria) showing Gombe State with eleven (11) Local Government Areas. Gombe State has an estimated population of 2.8 million people (NPC, 2008) made up of different people with many languages. The prominent ones being: the Fulanis, Hausa Tangale, Tera, Bolawa, Kanuri, Wurkun, Waja, Jukun, Jara, Pero, Tula, Chamawa, Lunguda, Dadiya, Kamo, Awak, Kanuri, etc. The people are mainly subsistent farmers and livestock rearers.

The bank of the river Gongola provides opportunity for dry season irrigation farming which is gaining more ground among the people in recent years. Gombe State is strategically position in the centre of the North-East sub-region. As a result, a significant number of the people are into trade and commerce. Although some people are into the civil service, a great number of them combine their profession with arable farming as well. The people are hospitable, while the emirates and chiefdoms have rich cultural heritage which include colorful traditional festivals, dances, music and costumes (Yusuf, 2015).

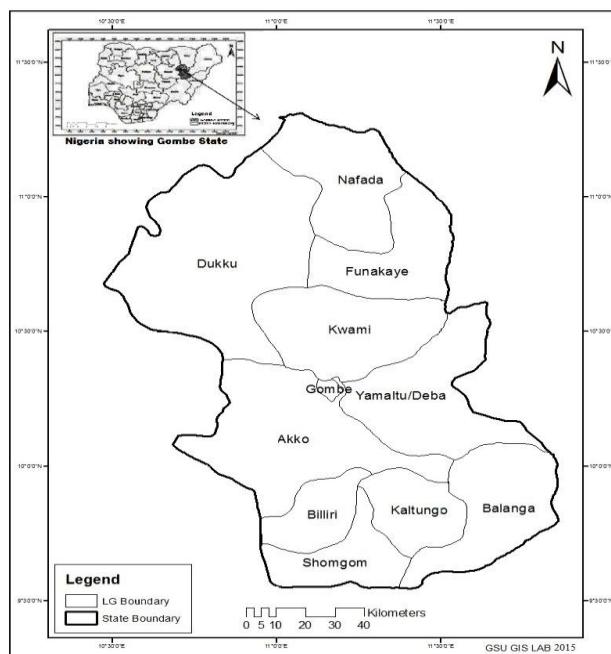


Figure 1: Location map of the study area showing the Eleven (11) Local Government Areas
Source: Gombe State Ministry of Lands (2015).

Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature with regards to community development and poverty alleviation. It reviewed previous and present governments' attempts at rural development.

Past Attempts by the Federal Government to Develop the Rural Areas

Nigeria's attempt at poverty alleviation and rural community development has been a multi-faceted and multi-institutional approach. Nigeria still has high poverty rates (World Bank, 2014). The country's performance is at odds with the general international trend of poverty reduction when compared to other countries experiencing rapid economic growth like Nigeria. The followings are some of such efforts;

National Directorate of Employment (NDE).

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was set up in 1987. The objective was to curb wide spread unemployment and its attendant social ills. It was to implement the recommendations of a national committee on strategies for dealing with mass unemployment situation in the country, and its associated poverty levels. Though the directorate still exists, it has not been able to tackle the unemployment situation in the country, or engender small scale industrial development; graduate employment and agricultural development. This implies that the cardinal objectives of its formation have not been realized. The failure of the programme may be attributed to lack of necessary resources and the political will to actualize the noble dream.

Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BLFRD)

The Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BLRD) was launched in 1987 in Abuja out of the concern for the plight of our rural dwellers and in particular the women due to structural imbalance in the economic opportunities and social infrastructure between the rural and urban areas. The program could not address the structural imbalance identified before it was launched. However, BLRD was able to draw awareness to the plight of the rural woman. The BLRD also failed because it could not ameliorate the incidence of wide spread poverty ravaging the rural dwellers who constitute a vast majority of the people of the Nigerian nation. The situation has also reached a stage where a great majority of the people of Nigeria lives below poverty line or are able to spend less than one dollar per day. This has necessitated a new thinking and search for alternative approach to poverty alleviation and community development

River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA)

This approach was a comprehensive and integrated rural development initiative anchored on the major River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) to consolidate on the Green Revolution Program of the Federal Government of Nigeria. It was to provide enough irrigation water for dry season farming, urban & rural water supply, and provision of improved farm inputs, seedlings and technical support to farmers to aid holistic and integrated rural development. The approach also failed because of massive corruption, poor administration and committed extension services. This has led to the need for alternative approach to rural community development.

Although the attempts mentioned are not exhaustive, they however project a common image of the massive failure of government attempts at poverty alleviation, and rural community development.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The United Nations (UN) has been in the vanguard of fighting poverty around the world, with concerted but dynamic policies. In 1990, the un-abating world poverty situation reached a frightening level which led the United Nations to declare and launch the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This international collaboration effort against poverty was necessitated by very high profile and trend of poverty situation the world over. East Asia countries of China, North Korea, South Korea, and Mongolia had attained (60%) poverty level in their population by 1990. Sub-Saharan African (SSA) followed with 57.4 % of its population remaining poor, while South Asian countries like Bangladesh and Afghanistan remain 49.5% poor (UN, 2009c).

The United Nation (UN), through the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) launched a programme aimed at reducing extreme poverty and hunger around the world by half by the year 2015. The United Nation (UN) vision for a world without poverty was anchored on the Millennium Development Goal which would serve as a frame work to strengthen local policies with vigour. It was also to address the negative impact of poverty on the poor people of the world, and envisaged to provide opportunity for the enrolment of all children into schools especially those living in rural communities. In addition, it was to serve as an avenue to reduce inequality on education, based on gender, ethnicity among linguistics and religious minorities. It calls for greater political will to muster reduction in maternal mortality especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (MDG 2008a).

The debt relief obtained from the Paris Club was earmarked for the pro-poor project and programs toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are to: - 1) Eradicate poverty and hunger; 2) Achieve universal primary education, 3) Promote gender equality and empower woman; 4) Reduce child mortality; 5) Improve maternal health; 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7) Ensure environmental sustainability and; 9) Global partnership for development. However, it is pertinent to explain some of the common concepts used for the study.

Community. This is a group of people living under the same environment but with common interest. It can be in an urban or rural area. (Ilesanmi, 2013).

Community Development. Means “participating in decision making and collective actions, leading to an agenda of social changes regarding equality, social inclusion and amelioration of poverty” as defined by Brain (2006). It is also a process of rural transformation where both the people and the government aim at bringing socio-economic and cultural changes in the way of life of the people through their own initiatives (Ilesanmi, 2013).

Rural Area. This refers to any place that is having less than 5,000 inhabitants with limited or absence of social amenities.

Poverty alleviation. May be understood in the form of developing a range of assets that will reduce the vulnerability of the poor to physical, economic and social shocks. Poverty alleviation is partly a process of increasing income and economic stability which enables fulfilment of basic needs and access to different kinds of services (Sachs, 2005).

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): refers to a Non-Governmental actor that is not a part of government or a non -profit organization. Non-Governmental Organisation may be funded by a foundation, business or private individuals. Some avoid formal funding altogether and are run primarily by volunteers. According to the United Nations, any kind of private organisation that is independent from government control can be termed an (NGO). Non-Governmental Organisation provided it is not a profit, not for criminality and not simply an opposition party and their areas of coverage cuts across all spheres of life (Steve, 1997).

Research Methodology

Three approaches were used for the study; literature review, questionnaire and interview methods. These were complemented by published and unpublished works sourced from agencies like the ministry for youth and women affairs, social development, community development records, magazines, journals, etc. However, a pilot study was first undertaken which enables the identification of the existing development oriented Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of the study area and the validation of the research instrument for the main survey.

The questionnaire was subjected to construct validity. Construct validity according to Trachim (2006) refers to the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from the operationalizations of the study to the theoretical constructs on which they were based. To achieve this, the initial questionnaire was given to some 5 project managers of the NGOs for their inputs/adjustments to achieve face and content validity and to identify the factors noted in the literature review for a more reliable result. Some words were substituted and more lucid ones adopted e.g the “projects” of the NGOs was substituted with contributions because some NGOs revealed their results were not tangible. The pilot study revealed that there are sixty- one (61) registered NGOs in Gombe State, out of which (21) NGOs, representing (34.4%) were selected using systematic random sampling technique. The (21) NGOs sampled in Gombe State with their acronyms are presented in appendix A.

Systematic Random Sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from the total population of registered NGOs (61) that have poverty alleviation and community development as their area of interest as enshrined in their project document. This gave rise to twenty-one (21) NGOs, representing (34%). The first in every three (3) NGOs was randomly selected and investigated accordingly in order to avoid bias in the choice of the NGOs.

SWOT analysis was another approach integrated into the questionnaire which also enabled the collection of data on the strength, opportunities, weaknesses and threats inherent in the efforts of the NGOs towards poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe State. As a result of which a compendium of strength, opportunity, weakness and threat (SWOT) matrix was developed to aid the understanding of the NGOs' problems and prospects (Figure 2) at a glance. For an organization to have prospects of achieving its goals/objectives, the driving force must out-weigh the resisting forces. However, Organizations are able to move from their current reality to a preferred future position where the prospects could be higher. Ilesanmi (2002) corroborated this approach in determining the prospects of any organization, stressing that, prospects is positive expectations in several areas of concern and endeavors.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Occupational Status of the Respondents from the Community Dwellers

Majority of the respondents (232) are arable farmers indicating 58%, 72 respondents are traders (18%), 60 are civil servants (15%), while 36 respondents (9%) live in other means of livelihood such as blacksmiths, traditional barbers, Islamic scholars, tanners, water vendors, mat and cap makers. The farmers indicated that traditional local skills are still in use. However, the study revealed that only one sampled NGO was involved in training to improve the rural farming techniques which is a problem. The implication is that more NGOs are needed in this regard because the bulk of the livelihood of the communities relies on agriculture. In addition, the existing NGOs have a responsibility to improve on capacity building of the farmers in the communities.

Gender and educational status of the Proprietors of the NGOs in Gombe State.

The study revealed that over 80% of the sampled NGOs (i.e. 17 out of 20) are owned by females; while 20% of the NGOs are owned by males who were Secondary School leavers. On the other hand, the females are all graduates; two of the female proprietors have Postgraduate degrees, while two others have Postgraduate Diploma in Social Works. The study further revealed that the females are all retired civil servants. Personal observation of the documents of the sampled NGOs' revealed that the financial records of the NGOs have always been audited. This indicates some level of transparency, accountability and commitment as well as competence, an indicator that the prospects of the NGOs towards poverty alleviation and community development are bright.

Distribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) by Local Government

Areas in Gombe State.

Observation of the records of the sampled NGOs in the study area revealed that their activities and contributions are more prominent in the southern senatorial zone of Gombe State which comprised: Balanga, Billiri, Kaltungo and Shongom Local Government Areas (LGAs) as illustrated in Figure 11. This may not be unconnected with early missionary activities and settlement in these communities. Figure 11 illustrate the skewed distribution of the NGOs. The proliferation of the NGOs in the southern senatorial zone of Gombe State is considered a major problem. This meant that efforts should be made to establish more NGOs in the northern senatorial zone, or extend the activities of the registered NGOs to the Northern zone made up of Nafada, Dukku, Kwami, Funakaye and Gombe LGAs because of the prevalence of poverty.

Source of Funding Non Governmental Organizations in Gombe State.

The sampled NGOs in the study area indicated that 45% have access to international development partners funding to carry out their activities. However, 30% of the funding comes in form of grants from companies in Gombe, while public spirited individuals contribute 25%. In addition, few of the NGOs disclosed that they are at the verge of generating some resources from service provisions, such as consultancy on writing grant winning proposals, seminars, computer training and counselling to ameliorate their financial Problems and sharp drop in the exchange rate of the Naira. 55% of the NGOs do not have access to external financial support from development partners. In fact they do not appear to understand the necessary criteria, modalities and technical requirements. This could be an avenue for government support or intervention to enhance the financial capability of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and consequently their contributions to community development and poverty alleviation.

Prospect of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Poverty Alleviation and Community Development in Gombe State

Determination of the prospects of the NGOs in community development and poverty alleviation in Gombe State was analyzed and presented in the form of SWOT matrix Figure; 2.

| | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| | Strength Helpful to NGOs | Weaknesses Harmful to NGOs |
| Internal Origin | <p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available manpower • Commitment, competence and integrity of staff and leadership • High public awareness level • Availability of development partners and support • Partnership • Accountability • High level of organizational efficiency • Social capital development. | <p>Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak ICT infrastructure • Lack of continuity of projects and programmes • Shortage/Exit of critical staff • Lack of adequate resource • Lack of networking |
| External Origin | <p>Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase research interest on NGOs' activities in (Gombe State) general. • Poor performance of government at all levels. • High level of poverty. • High level of awareness in the communities • Increase in investment opportunities in Gombe State • Partnership with National Orientation Agency (NOA) by NGOs in Gombe State • Growing population • Stability of government • Present government reforms • Good infrastructure development • Public support | <p>Threat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak and fluctuating currency (Naira) in foreign exchange market. • Insecurity. • High cost of media and publicity • Proposed tax on external donor agency funds. • Poor community involvement during conception • Poor public services |

Figure: 2 SWOT Matrix (Source: Field Survey, 2014).

III. CONCLUSION

This study appraises the Prospects and Problems of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in poverty alleviation and community development in Gombe State. The study identified the following as constraints/problems militating against the Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) in their efforts towards poverty alleviation and community development which has implications on urban and regional planning: finance, continuity of projects/programmes, lack of electricity, availability of time, conflicts and insecurity among others.

One of the interesting revelations of this study is that majority of people in the community interviewed stated that they wait for the Government to initiate or implement poverty alleviation programmes and projects aimed at poverty alleviation and community development. The implication of this finding is that the community dwellers in the study area need attitudinal changes necessary for self reliance. This will discourage reliance on Government to provide basic necessities to cushion the effects of poverty and enhance community development.

Finally, the study revealed that the prospect of Non-Governmental Organizations in poverty alleviation and community development in the study area is very bright as indicated by majority of the respondents. Also, rapid population growth, increasing poverty levels in the communities, and the inability of government at all levels to live up to expectations brightens the prospects of NGOs towards poverty alleviation and community development with the attendant positive effects on urban and regional planning and development in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. It is recommended that the NGOs should seek to work with requisite consultants to obtain the necessary funding and also form an association to enable them work together, and utilize social capital in their operation/services.
2. The NGOs should customize successful models of community development and poverty alleviation from other parts of the world. The Government needs to address some of its short comings.

3. The NGOs' activities, through networking and inter-personal communication are capable of improving their prospects towards poverty alleviation and community development in the study area. This has implications for Urban planning and regional development.

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