



Perspective on Beneficiaries' Experiences of Participation in Community-based Agriculture and Rural Development Program in Guba, Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore beneficiaries' experiences on participation in the on-going International Fund for Agriculture Development / Community-based agriculture and rural development program (IFAD/CBARDP) among farmers in Guba community in Northern Nigeria. The paper illustrates beneficiaries' experiences on how they are participating and the factors that motivated their participation in the program using qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis. Data for the study was collected from eight key informants purposely selected as being participants of the program. Although, theoretically, participation entails the full involvement of beneficiaries in all the stages of the development process, findings of the study revealed that beneficiaries' participation in the program was only evident in some stages of the development cycle. Several factors were found to have motivated beneficiaries' participation in the program but the desire for meeting tangible material benefits featured above all other considerations. However, group leadership style, workshops and seminars, the approach adopted in the program, the officials / beneficiaries relationship and the publicity accorded to the program were found to have motivated beneficiaries' participation as well. At the end, the paper recommended the active and full involvement of beneficiaries in future development initiatives in order to achieve sustainable rural development programs.

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Introduction

Beneficiaries' participation in the development process had in recent years become increasingly popular especially within development programs that are geared towards poverty reduction. In the words of Parfitt, "it is clear that [participation] has become one of the central influences in mainstream development thinking" (2004, p.737). Similarly, Michener (1998) also notes that "Today the concept [of participation] has taken on the characteristic of a panacea; academic studies and policy lauding the benefits of participation has made it one of the most widely used concepts in development (1998, p.2105). This became necessary as a result of failure of the conventional 'blue-print' or 'top-down' approach that placed emphasis on the transfer of science and technology, urbanization and industrialization as development strategies (Dichter, 2003) to adequately address rural developmental challenges due to non-involvement of beneficiaries in the development process. In such development approaches beneficiaries are often seen as 'objects' as opposed to being 'subjects' in the development process (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). As such, participation of beneficiaries was passive and prescriptive, aimed for the achievement of predetermined objectives. In contrast, the people centered or the bottom-up approach places emphasis

on peoples' participation in the development process with a view to empowering them for future self-development initiatives.

In spite of its abundant human and natural resources and being the most populous nation in Sub-Sahara Africa, 70 percent of Nigerias' 150 million people are living on less than one (1) U.S Dollar per day (Odion, 2009). This is an indication of wide spread poverty. According to the Federal Office of Statistics, as at the time Nigeria got independence in 1960 only 15 percent was recorded as the rate of poverty. However, this figure gradually increased to 28.6 percent in 1980 and by 1999 the figure had jumped to 66 percent. The current poverty level of poverty in Nigeria stood at 70 percent (CIA, 2010). The 2009 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Nigeria as the 142nd out of 169 countries surveyed. As noted by the United Nations;...Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, violation of dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe the family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence and it often implies living

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in marginal and fragile environment, without access to clean water or sanitation (UN, 1998).

Various reasons have been identified as the causes of increasing poverty trends in Nigeria. For instance, Ucha (2010) noted high unemployment rates, corruption among public officials, non-diversification of Nigeria's monolithic economy, poor educational system and laziness among people as some of the causes of rising poverty rates. Similarly, Aliyu (2003) had identified the effects of globalization, corruption, bad governance and debt burden as contributors of high incidences of poverty in Nigeria.

Before the discovery of oil in the early 70s, agriculture was the mainstay of the economy with impressive contributions of 60 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, by 2010 agriculture was contributing only 26.8 percent to the GDP (CIA, 2010). In recognition of the fact that more than 70 percent of the total populations living in the rural areas are predominantly farmers, government felt the need to revamp agriculture with the aim of empowering rural communities thereby alleviating poverty. From 1977 - 1999 no fewer than 5 national poverty reduction programs were implemented to improve the living conditions of majority poor. Among these were; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1970; the Green Revolution program (GRP) in 1980 and the Directorate of Foods Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986. Others were the Peoples' Bank of Nigeria (1989) and the Community Banking System (CBS) in 1999. In spite huge expenditure and laudable objectives of these programs, the poverty situations in the country have not changed significantly. Lack of beneficiaries' participation in the development process has been identified as the cause of failure of these programs (Ogwumike, 2002; CBN, 1998). The World Bank defines Participation as a "process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank, 1994). Moreover, beneficiary participation in rural development programs is an important pillar in people-centered development approach. It is acknowledged as a process that improves efficiency and sustainability through the incorporation of local knowledge and resources. In like manner, participation in the development process is said to bring about empowerment of beneficiaries. Being 'buzzword' participation has continued to remain a hotly contested concept, meaning different things to different people depending on the orientation of its users. The on-going IFAD/CBARDP in Nigeria that came into being in 2003 is a partnership program that sought the participation of beneficiaries in the development process in order to empower them thereby moving out of poverty. Relying on statistical and econometric designs, the mid-term

review of the program carried out in 2006 reported the success of the program in empowering beneficiaries as a result of participation in the program. However, the forms of beneficiary participation in the program and factors that motivated beneficiaries into participation still remained elusive. Authors on participation have argued that in order to fully understand and appreciate participation, the need to know 'how' and 'why' beneficiaries participated in a particular program is therefore imperative to conclude whether beneficiaries have been empowered or not (Uphoff, 1997). It is against this background this paper aimed at exploring the experiences of Guba farmers on how they are participating and what motivated them into participation in IFAD/CBARDP.

Typologies of participation

Different types of participation exist in literature as a practice. The types and levels of peoples' participation in development depend on the objectives of the program. Arising out of a study of both successful and unsuccessful development projects, Pretty (1995) presented participation in a form continuum depicting eight (8) types from the highest to the lowest characteristically. The lower levels in the continuum represented by manipulative participation, passive participation, participation by consultation, participation by material incentives and functional participation are characteristically described as a means of achieving some predetermined objectives due to non involvement of beneficiaries in all development phases. This form of participation is seen as static, passive and absolutely controllable (Hedayat & Ma'rof, 2009). Participation in this sense, is essentially perceived as a means of achieving some predetermined goals by using social and economic resources of the community for the attainment of specific and overall improvements of the community on one hand, and on the other, to achieve effective, efficient and cheap development programs (Oakley, 1991) Moreover, it has been observed that when participation is considered as a means, does not lead to alteration of existing power structure within community, the existing top-down power structure prevails (Parfitt, 2004). The higher levels of Pretty's' participation continuum is depicted by interactive participation and self-mobilization. Here, rather than seeing participation as a means, participation appears as an end where beneficiaries take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices. At this level, beneficiaries' participation is seen as a process in which beneficiaries are directly involved in shaping, deciding and taking part in the development process from the bottom-up perspective (Asnarulkhadi, 1996). The goals of development here is considered less important, emphasis is placed on building the

confidence and competence of people to fully partake in their own development initiatives without recourse to seeking assistance from outside the community.

Factors motivating beneficiaries' participation in development programs

As participation continues to remain a context-specific concept, so also the factors that motivate beneficiaries' participation varied from individuals, contexts and programs. The motivation to participate by and large depends on individual conceptions. Although, the reasons for beneficiaries' participation in development programs have not been consistent because the participatory literature is often vague as to what generally motivate people to participate (Cleaver, 1999), empirical evidences abound. For instance, whereas, Friedman (1992) places emphasis on economic rationality as the most influential factor motivating beneficiaries' participation, Cleaver (1999) on the other hand suggested the consideration of social factors. The social factors according to him are the intangible benefits such as the need for self-respect and recognition. Similarly, in a study of stakeholder's participation in rural development project in Northern Ghana, Boakye-Agyei (2009) found that one of the most important factors motivating people to participate in development projects is the desire to get tangible material benefits. Hildyard *et al.*, (2001) maintains that if stakeholders involved in development processes are really concerned with issue of sustainability and poverty reduction, it is imperative to prioritize the development of the oppressed and marginalized groups. This involves a careful examination of their training techniques and internal hierarchies, which are crucial for respect of other peoples' opinions. Friere (1972) observed that if authoritarianism and rigid conditions dominates development programs, exclusionism ultimately sets in – a situation in which participation of the targeted groups cannot be achieved. . Furthermore, in a study on peoples' participation in Mongolia, Berends (2009) found that the publicity given to the program and the cordial relationship that existed between beneficiaries and program officials have motivated beneficiaries participation.

Methodology

Being one of the participating village areas in IFAD/CBARDP, Guba community is situated 14.1km south-west of Baoimari along Gashua-Baoimari federal highway. Baiomari is 132 km north of Damaturu, capital of Yobe state, Nigeria. Lying within the semi-arid Sahel savannah zone with annual rainfall of less than 250mm (IFAD, 2001), the area experiences two main seasons – the rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season usually starts around July – November with the rest 7

months of the year experiencing dry season. The resultant effect of rainfall shortage according to the village head of Guba is low agricultural productivity and land degradation due to desertification. According to interview with the village head of Guba the cumulative effects of this contributed to widespread poverty in the area as majority are subsistent farmers. Guba community has an estimated population of 4,000 people out of which 70 percent are predominantly farmers.

The IFAD/CBARDP refers to a partnership program funded by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), Seven participating states (SPS) drawn from semi-arid zone of Northern Nigeria, participating local Governments and communities aimed at alleviating poverty particularly in rural areas where the majority poor and predominantly subsistent farmers live. The largest share of funding came from IFAD with 40-50 percent of the total program's costs. The Federal Government followed with 12-15 percent. The seven participating states and local government's share stood at 3-4 percent, while the remaining share is borne by participating local institutions, co-financing and beneficiaries (ADB, 2003).

Coming into operation in 2003, the program has a ten year gestation period. The main objective of the program is to empower rural communities through capacity building and provision of infrastructure to enable rural communities initiate and manage their own future developmental challenges. The program ensures the participation of beneficiaries in the development process in order to realize this objective. A total of 408 beneficiaries out of the 4,000 estimated populations are participating in the various intervention areas of the program as in table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of beneficiaries in IFAD/CBARDP

Type of intervention	Number of beneficiaries
Poultry development	96
Cattle upgrading	50
Fisheries development	70
Nurseries development	87
Fadama development	105
Total	408

Source: SSO (IFAD, Damaturu)

While employing qualitative approach in the exploration of beneficiaries' experiences of participation in IFAD/CBARDP, in-depth interview and focus group discussion based on semi-structured questions was used in collecting data for the study. Qualitative approach of inquiry was considered in this study because of its strengths in capturing expressive information about beliefs, values,

motivations and feelings underlying behavior which cannot be determined by quantitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The context specific nature of the concept under investigation-participation that requires understanding within particular setting not only informed the purposive selection of Guba community and the study informants with a focus on irrigation farmers being beneficiaries of the program as a single case study but more importantly, the distinctive need for case study [arises] out of the desire to understand the experiences of beneficiaries on participation which is a complex social phenomena (Yin, 2003).

Primary data for the study was collected through in-depth interviews and triangulated through focus group discussion with 8 purposely selected key informants. Sample size is one of the contested issues in qualitative studies. Contrary to selecting samples representative enough to make generalization of findings as is the case with quantitative studies, in qualitative studies the number is not important but rather emphasis is placed in selecting informants knowledgeable enough to provide answers to research inquiry. Thus, the criteria used in selecting informants for this study was guided by the following; informants must have participated in the program for at least 4 years based on the records of the farmers association in the community, must have been registered in the program and has participated in the activities of the program for at least 70 percent based on the records of the association, must have benefited as a result of his participation in the program e.g. ownership of fish pond, poultry or evidence of improved agricultural productivity as result of knowledge gained through workshops and seminars organized as part of the programs' activities. In addition, informants must be willing to volunteer as informants in the study

The focus group discussion was conducted in two (2) sessions consisting of 4 participants each with the researcher presiding throughout the sessions assisted by interview assistant. Interview guide prepared with questions bordering on how beneficiaries are participating and what motivates their participation in the programs was used in conducting interviews with informants. The use of interview guide significantly helped in maintaining consistency and accuracy during interviews and analysis. Apart from the 8 key informants that provided information to research questions, the village head of Guba was interviewed to obtain some basic information about the community. Other sources of information were the State Support Office (SSO) of IFAD in Damaturu, review of relevant documents from IFAD website and other related literature in the internet. Where to stop gathering data is one of the challenges being faced by qualitative researchers. Suggesting to possible

solution in this respect, Guba (1978) provided guidelines which included; lack of resources, repetition or emergence of regularities of data, and divergence within the confines of the research. In this study, data collection was called-off at the point of 'saturation' having interviewed eight (8) informants as indicated by the interview excerpts in findings section. This is the point when no new information was emerging from interviews. As an explorative study, findings are descriptive and interpretative based on the accounts of information gathered from the field.

Results and discussion

As the study used qualitative research approach, findings of the study are presented thematically while describing and narrating beneficiaries' experiences on their forms of participation and the factors that motivated their participation in the program. All informants that provided primary data for the study were males and their ages ranged from 45 to 70 years and had experiences of participation in the program for at least four (4) years.

While participation theoretically implies the active and full involvement of beneficiaries in all the program cycle - from design to evaluation, evidences from interviews with informants indicated that beneficiaries' participation in the program is only traceable at the lower levels and does not transcend beyond participating through labor contribution and by consultation. Several factors were mentioned by informants to have motivated them to participate, but the desire by to meet tangible material benefits in the program turns out as the most influential factor that motivated beneficiaries.

Forms of beneficiaries' participation in IFAD/ CBARDP

Participation through consultation

Consultation between beneficiaries and the development experts (IFAD) particularly during needs identification stages has been identified by informants as a form of their participation in IFAD/CBARDP. As beneficiaries understood their participation as that of consultation to gather information about the community for the purposes of designing interventions, implies that the responsibility of designing and management of the program lies with the officials of the development agency as observed by informants that; *When they (officials) come to the community, they ask questions about the community and they tell us about the activities of the program. We tell them what we want and in some cases, they do as we said (informant 3)*. Although, consultation has been mentioned as a form of beneficiary participation, it has been observed that the kind of consultation in

practice appears unidirectional or simply an information gathering exercise by development officials. Smith (1998) argued that for consultation to be regarded as participation, it must go beyond information gathering and has to be reciprocal and continuous, meaning that consultation between beneficiaries and development experts should occur in all the stages of the development process as opposed to the implementation stages being observed. Arguing further, he maintained that if information flow appears reciprocal between beneficiaries and development experts, it will not only be a source of power to the beneficiaries but will in the long run succeed in raising the level of consciousness of beneficiaries. This kind of participation resembled Pretty's (1995) participation as consultation in which beneficiaries ratify decisions already taken by development officials.

Participation through contribution

An Individual and community contribution towards the development program was another form in which beneficiaries viewed participation. This notion of participation was expressed by informants in terms of physical and monetary contributions being made to the program. While describing participation in this sense, most informants said; *When IFAD want to construct say a clinic, a community water tap or a community hall, I contribute money or fetch water (informant 2), I provide sand (informant 4), feeding the chicks in the poultry (informant 7) and watering the seedlings (informant 5)*. While another informant simply adds; *I don't have the money to contribute. My strength is the only thing that I can afford (informant 8)*

Smith (1998) observed that it is very common to find in rural development programs where beneficiaries' contributions in form of cash and labor are considered as a form of participation. International donor agencies and NGOs have been placing emphasis on the use of local resources as way of transforming communities to be self-reliant. However, this notion of resource contribution as a measure of transforming communities have been questioned particularly with regards to poverty endemic areas where the predominant issue is that of survival, communities and individuals may find it increasingly difficult to make such contributions towards the development process. Like the previous form of participation observed above, participation by contribution is also a lower form of participation that does not ensure sustained empowerment of beneficiaries.

Factors that motivated beneficiaries' participation in IFAD/CBARDP

Desire for tangible benefits

Farmers in Guba community have for long being faced by serious desertification problem and

coupled with inadequate rainfall led to devastating consequences on the income of farmers. This situation according to farmers have forced them in search of other alternative sources of income as explained during interview thus; *the situation in the community is getting worse every day. Agricultural activity had seriously declined and therefore, the need for other sources of income became imperative. IFAD has now come with the opportunity to us and we cannot afford to miss it (informant 5)*. All informants stated that they have realized the benefits to be derived from participation outweighed the cost and hence their conviction to participate in the program in order to meet tangible benefits associated with participation. This finding is consistent with Friedman's (1992) that the most important factor motivating beneficiaries' participation is economic rationality.

Group leadership style: It was also found that apart from leadership provided by group leaders as beneficiaries' representatives with the development agency, other extra-program activities such as attendance to informal adult education activities were encouraged as stated thus; *apart from program activities, group leaders usually organize education sessions to members, share important information that will improve our worth as farmers (informant 7)*. Furthermore, informants stated that the entrenchment of democratic procedures in the activities of community groups such as the opportunity given to group members to elect their own officials have provided the avenue where they elected responsible and committed officials that have the interest of the program. The exemplary leadership provided by these officials has significantly motivated community members not only to join but to remain with commitment as beneficiaries in the program as explained by informant in the following words; *Group leaders have always been fair to members. For example, they [leaders] adhere to rules of first come, first served in the disbursement of revolving loans (informant 1)*.

This is consistent with the findings of Boakye-Agyei (2009) that good and democratic leadership of community groups motivated beneficiaries' participation in rural development program in northern Ghana.

Workshops and seminars

As part of the activities of the program, workshops and seminars were organized by the development agency (IFAD) to sensitize and train beneficiaries in order to acquire skills necessary for the effective management of various intervention programs within the community. The conduct of the workshops and seminars according to informants has greatly endeared them towards the activities of the program as explained by informants thus; *the*

sessions were lively and speakers were so demonstrative in such a way that we understood what they were teaching us (informant 4) and another stated that; *the workshops were not only educative but also encouraging towards improving our capacities. The knowledge gained through the workshops had encouraged us towards participation (informant 7).* This finding concurred with Hildyard *et al.* (2001) who maintained that a careful consideration of beneficiaries' training techniques is imperative when it comes to issue of sustainability and poverty reduction.

Program's approach

As a community-based development program, community-driven development trainers were employed by the development agency to train various stakeholders in community-driven development strategies. Informants stated that the cooption of indigenous people as community-driven development trainers and the conscious efforts at consulting them on the types of intervention areas preferred most in the community had fostered a sense of belonging between the community and IFAD. An informant explained that *this is the first time when people in the community were consulted on the kind of project intervention that is most preferred by the people. We felt recognized and we accepted the program too (informant 5)* and another informant said; *we like how IFAD is using indigenous people as our trainers in the program. This has certainly attracted a lot of us to the program (informant 3)*

Officials/beneficiaries relationship

The cordial relationship between program officials and beneficiaries was also found to have motivated beneficiaries' participation. While describing these relationships informants stated that; *they are honest, helpful and accommodating. Apart from the program activities, they usually attend community functions such as wedding and naming ceremonies (informant 8)* and yet another informant said; *you can hardly differentiate them [officials] from beneficiaries unless being told because they have identified very well with beneficiaries, we go to the field together in their official car, at times they come*

with food from the cities and we eat together and in most occasions they eat the food that was prepared in the community (informant 7).

Publicity

It was found from interviews with informants that the publicity given to the program at the onset using information vans especially on market days, posters and jingles has attracted the attention of the farmers towards participation in the program as explained by informants that; *the logo of the program portraying a farmer gradually moving out of poverty was so appealing and convincing (informant 6), the publicity given to the program caught my attention to develop interest in the program (informant 3)* while another informant observed that; *the melodious jingles attracted me to join the program (informant 1).* Berends (2009) had also reported a similar finding in a study of peoples' participation in Mongolia.

Conclusion

The study illustrated beneficiaries' experiences of participation in IFAD/CBARDP focusing on how beneficiaries are participating in the program and the factors that motivated them to participate. Findings of the study revealed that beneficiaries' participation was only evident at the lower levels of participation in the forms of beneficiaries' contribution of labor and other resources and through consultations. Several factors have been mentioned by beneficiaries to have motivated their participation but the desire to get tangible material benefits was the prominent factor featured in the data collected. It is noteworthy to mention that being a case study; the findings are meant to highlight existing challenges and opportunities within the context of the study. However, the findings may be generalized to other areas sharing similar contexts. The study recommends the active and full involvement of beneficiaries while designing future developmental programs in order to achieve sustainable development programs capable of empowering beneficiaries to manage their own development.

Views and opinions expressed in this study are the views and opinions of the authors, Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.

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