Domesticating Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach for the Attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the domestication of the ABCD Approach to community development for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The paper establish that Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a participatory approach to community development that focuses on harnessing the assets and potentials in the community and channeling them towards achieving set goals for the common good of all. These assets and potentials have been identified to include the talents and skills of individuals, organizational capacities, political connections, buildings and facilities as well as financial resources. The justification for the need to leverage on the gains of the ABCD Approach in facilitating the SDGs is premised on the fact that implementation of development goals of the past in Nigeria leaves little to be desired largely due to the traditional Directive method//Top-Bottom Approach that is commonly adopted. In the light of the ineffectiveness of such approach, the paper recommends that the ABCD Approach which has an antecedent of effectiveness in other climes like the United States and the Scandinavian Countries be domesticated in Nigeria to promote implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Keywords: Domesticating, Asset-Based Community Development, Attainment, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

In the world over, effective community development practice is key to achieving sustainable development in the society. This is so because community development goals and objectives centre

on promoting the well-being of the local people in a sustainable manner (Oyebamiji and Adekola, 2008). In this way, the adoption of the sustainable development goals which represent a 17 point development agenda in 2015, bordering on practically all aspects of the people's life would require effective community development practice and approach for effective implementation and goal attainment.

In retrospect, implementation of development goals in Nigeria with special reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not had much success largely due to reasons including poor implementation strategies (Agih and Wodi, 2016). The traditional approach to development programmes in Nigeria has been the *Directive Method* which allows for the government and relevant stake holders including development agents to sit in their offices and advance policies and programmes for the development of the people based on their perception of the needs of the people. Over the years, the lacuna with this Popular *Top-Bottom-Approach* has become obvious as there is usually lack of ownership of projects and programmes by the people as well as lack of commitment and shared responsibility towards sustainability of such projects and programmes by the people. Oyebamiji and Adekola, (2008) observed that the problem with this form of methods is that the psychological and moralistic feelings necessary for the sustainable management of the project by the community is not always available.

This situation has given development agents and stakeholders concern to explore new and more inclusive approaches to community development and in recent years, Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) developed by John L. McNight and John P. Kretzmann in USA in 1985 has caught the attention of numerous community development practitioners. As an alternative to the more commonly practiced needs-based approach, ABCD shifts the focus of community

development from "problem solving (need based)" to "asset building". ABCD takes a "grassroots" approach to community development, drawing upon the best of what a community has to offer.

Asset Based Community Development is one of a range of similar participative approaches. These include Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Ford Foundation's Asset Building and Community Development, Community Driven Development used regularly at the World Bank and Rights Based Approaches that use the securing of human rights as their driving force. There is also a growing body of knowledge that focuses on community strengths (O'Leary, 2017).

The ABCD approach involves identifying and tapping all of the potential assets in a community and channeling those potentials towards the common good. These potentials or assets may include the talents and skills of individuals, organizational capacities, political connections, buildings and facilities, and financial resources (Page-Adams and Sherraden, 1997). According to Mathie and Cunningham (2005), ABCD approach operates under the premise that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, thereby responding to and creating local opportunity for positive changes. Such unrealized assets include not only personal attributes and skills, but also the relationships among people that fuel local associations and informal networks. Mobilizing social assets can activate more formal institutional resources such as the government, formal community-based organizations, and private enterprise. In this way, the community development process is sustained and scaled up while it continues to recognize local associations as the driving force – the vehicles through which all the community's assets can be identified and then connected to one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness.

Accompanying the ABCD approach is a set of methods for mobilizing community members as provided by Mathie and Cunningham (2003). This include:

• Collecting stories of community successes and analyzing the reasons for success

• Mapping community assets

• Forming a core steering group

• Building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem solving within the community

• Convening a representative planning group

• Leveraging activities, resources, and investment from the outside community.

The process of mobilizing community members for mapping out community assets helps to galvanize the people in pooling their resources together. This method assumes the building of relationship among the people for the utilization of local resources for the benefit of all.

Conceptualizing Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a *strategy* for sustainable community driven development. Beyond the mobilization of a particular community, ABCD is concerned with how to link micro-assets to the macro-environment. The appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing, but often unrecognized assets, and thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity (Wilke, 2006).

ABCD builds on the assets that are already found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to build on their assets—not concentrate on their needs. An extensive period of time is spent in identifying the assets of individuals, associations, and then institutions before they are mobilized to work together to build on the identified assets of all involved. Then the identified assets from an individual are matched with people or groups who have an interest or need in that asset in order to maximize societal resources for efficient usage. The key is to begin to use what is already in the community for the common good of the people without depending on externalities.

ABCD draws out strengths and successes in a community's shared history as its starting point for change. Among all the assets that exist in the community, ABCD pays particular attention to the assets inherent in social relationships, as evident in formal and informal associations and networks (Wilke, 2006).

ABCD's community-driven approach is in keeping with the principles and practice of *participatory approaches development,* where active participation and empowerment (and the prevention of disempowerment) are the basis of practice. It is a strategy directed towards sustainable, economic development that is community-driven built on the productive potentials of the people.

Guiding Principles for ABCD

Most communities address social and economic problems with only a small amount of their total capacity. Much of the community capacity is not used and is needed. This is the challenge and opportunity of community engagement. Everyone in a community has something to offer. Everyone Has Gifts with rare exception; people can contribute if they are discovered and given the

opportunity to do so. The following guiding principle were provided by the Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation (n.d) for ABCD:

❖ Relationships build a community. An intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD and of all community building.

❖ It is essential to engage the wider community as actors (citizens) not just as recipients of services (clients).

❖ Leaders from the wider community of voluntary associations, congregations, neighborhoods, and local business, can engage others from their sector. This "following" is based on trust, influence, and relationship.

❖ People care about something; agencies and neighborhood groups often complain about apathy. Apathy is a sign of bad listening. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover what their motivation is.

❖ Motivation to act must be identified. People act on certain themes they feel strongly about, such as; concerns to address, dreams to realize, and personal talents to contribute. Every community is filled with invisible "motivation for action". This must be identified and encouraged in ABCD.

❖ One-on-one dialogue or small group conversations are ways of discovering motivation and invite participation. Forms, surveys and asset maps can be useful to guide intentional listening and relationship building.

❖ Asking and inviting are key community-building actions. "Join us. We need you." Should be the song of community development endeavors.

- ❖ Asking Questions Rather Than Giving Answers Invites Stronger Participation. People in communities are usually asked to follow outside expert's answers for their community problems. A more powerful way to engage people is to invite communities to address 'questions' and finding their own answer-- with agencies following up to help.

- ❖ A Citizen-Centered "Inside-Out" Organization is the Key to Community Engagement A "citizen-centered" organization is one where local people control the organization and set the organization's agenda.

- ❖ Institutions have reached their limits in problem-solving; all institutions such as government, non-profits, and businesses are stretched thin in their ability to solve community problems. They cannot be successful without engaging the rest of the community in solutions.

Five Key Assets in ABCD

Communities can no longer be thought of as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. Each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development. ABCD categorizes asset inventories into five groups:

- ❖ **Individuals**: At the center of ABCD are residents of the community that have gifts and skills. Everyone has assets and gifts. Individual gifts and assets need to be recognized and identified. In community development you cannot do anything with people's needs, only their assets. Deficits or needs are only useful to institutions.

❖ **Associations**: Small informal groups of people, such as clubs, age groups, cooperatives, etc. working with a common interest as volunteers are called associations in ABCD and are critical to community mobilization. They don't control anything; they are just coming together around a common interest by their individual choice.

❖ **Institutions**: Paid groups of people who generally are professionals who are structurally organized are called institutions. They include government agencies and private business, as well as schools, etc. They can all be valuable resources. The assets of these institutions help the community capture valuable resources and establish a sense of civic responsibility.

❖ **Physical Assets**: Physical assets such as land, buildings, space, and funds are other assets that can be used.

❖ **Connections**: There must be an exchange between people sharing their assets by bartering, etc. These connections are made by people who are connectors. It takes time to find out about individuals; this is normally done through building relationships with individual by individual.

At the core of ABCD is its focus on social relationships. Formal and informal associations, networks, and extended families are treated as assets and also as the means to mobilize other assets of the community. By treating relationships as assets, ABCD is a practical application of the concept of social capital.

The Emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Nigerian Engagement

Nigeria was among the 189 countries worldwide that endorsed the United Nations Millennium Declaration in New York in September 2000, which led to the adoption of the eight time-bound

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with several targets and indicators to be achieved by 2015. In 2005, Nigeria successfully negotiated debt relief from the Paris Club which enabled the country to increase and target public investments in pro-poor programmes and projects towards achieving the MDGs.

The Presidential Committee on the Assessment and Monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs were subsequently established to guide the use of the Debt Relief Gains (DRGs) in the execution of pro-poor programmes and projects and coordinate progress towards the MDGs. Despite these efforts, the MDGs did not record much successes in many key areas (Agih & Wodi, 2016). One can easily trace the dismal performance to the fact that Nigeria is always looking outside for help. Negotiating for relief alone could never solve the internal problems keen to development that Nigeria is facing.

In September 2015, world leaders converged at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to consider and adopt a new comprehensive, ambitious and transformational development agenda. The Outcome Document adopted during the summit outlines a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms and shifting the world onto a sustainable and resilient development pathway while ensuring that 'no one is left behind'. The SDGs seek to build on and complete the unfinished business of the MDGs; realize the human rights of all; achieve gender equality in all sectors and spheres of life; and importantly, strike a balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions of development (Orelope-Adefulire, 2017).

In this regard, the Document also calls on national governments to draw on the contributions of the UN system, parliaments, indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.

Delivering results on the SDGs across all of the goals requires pro-active planning and thinking. Strikingly, the jump from the MDGs to the SDGs is not simply a question of extending the timeline and the ambition of the goals. New goals have been added, entirely new sectors have been introduced and the number of indicators has more than doubled. The breadth and depth of the endeavour should now involve a substantial multiplication of activities and an expansion of partnerships and institutions. Moreover, a number of the SDGs do not simply specify outcome goals, but also the means by which these goals should be achieved. An emphasis on rights, justice, social inclusion, sustainability, access to technology and reducing inequality will place new constraints and demands on policy at all stages – in planning, implementation and monitoring. Preparing for these complex policy issues over a time horizon of fifteen years will depend on laying a solid foundation. Luckily, Nigeria does not need to start from scratch. The experience of the MDGs, if properly leveraged, should provide the foundation for achieving the SDGs.

Achieving the SDGs will depend on completing the unfinished business of the MDGs, broadening the focus of the MDGs to new activities and sectors, and deepening these successes to ensure that the achievement of the SDGs is truly universal and no-one is left behind (as described, for example, in Goal 1 to eradicate poverty). The phasing of these activities must reflect the need to achieve both breadth and depth. The timing of the transitional activities to be recommended in this strategy must be sufficiently comprehensive to ensure ownership, planning and a coherent framework for measuring and sustaining progress while leaving the maximum amount of time for actual implementation against the SDGs (Orelope-Adefulire, 2017).

Domesticating the SDGs Using 'ABCD' Approach in Nigeria

Why are people not participating more enthusiastically in the widespread implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals? How can we engage communities everywhere to make the United Nations' Global Goals *their* local goals? How can individuals and collectives contribute to achieving 'Agenda 2030'?

Among many activists, grassroots organizations and even some international NGOs the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been branded as the result of a top-down UN process. Failure to successfully implement previous agendas has damaged belief in the achievability of such multi-lateral agreements. Something needs to change if the SDGs are to be more successful than the Millennium Development Goals.

So far, implementation of the SDGs is still less encouraging even at four years into the take-off of the policy. The engagement with 'Agenda 2030' is currently too slow to catalyze the magnitude of change that is now urgently needed by African countries especially in Nigeria. Rapid climate change, increasing poverty rates, educationally disadvantaged status, resource wars, biodiversity loss and economic volatility to name but a few (Nigeria's Road to SDGs 2015) are indications of this need.

There is need to turn the Global Goals into *actively* shared objectives for all citizens, if we must create a more sustainable society by 2030. Manifesting the agenda will require active participation of people and communities around the country.

There is need for effective collaboration between the public and private sector and civil society at local, regional and national scale. We need to create processes that generate engagement with the SDGs at the level of communities and regions everywhere. Only if local people will take

responsibility for implementing the SDGs in their community and their region do we have a realistic chance of accomplishing the task set by Agenda 2030 (Nigeria's Road to SDGs 2015).

Conclusion

The ABCD approach provides an alternative to the more commonly practiced needs-based approach. Rather than focusing on what the community needs, ABCD uncovers what each community has to offer. ABCD creates an opportunity for the local people to not only take part in, but also lead the community development process. Given the potentials of the ABCD approach to drive the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is an imperative to localize the approach in the Nigerian society. There is an imperative for the government and relevant stake holders to review community development practices in the country and adapt these practices to the principles of the ABCD for effective implementation and attainment of the SDGs.

It is also needful for the government to provide relevant assistance to facilitate development efforts of communities while concentrating on harnessing community assets for development purposes as advocated by the ABCD approach. Such assistance can be in the form of skills development and training, where the local people can be trained on relevant skills that can enable the rural people to harness their local resources for community building that will enhance the wellbeing of the rural people in Nigeria.

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