

PARTICIPATORY ACTION DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGY WITHIN A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO AQUATIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FOR NIGERIA INLAND WATERS

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ABSTRACT

The capacity of government to effectively regulate what goes on in widely scattered resource environments is distinctly limited. Devolution of major resource management and allocation decisions to the local level may thus be more effective than management efforts which distant, understaffed and underfunded government agencies can provide.

Community - based resource management approach (CBRMA), is a comprehensive strategy that seeks to address the multi-faceted issues affecting the resource environment through the active and meaningful participation of resource communities.

Active participation by the local communities, which is also the focus of CBRMA, is the central focus of Participatory Action Development (PAD) and has demonstrated itself to be an effective basis for empowerment. PAD is, therefore viewed as development for empowerment, which can be employed to achieve the objectives of CBRMA. It calls for the involvement of the local people in analyzing systematic inquiry and in mobilizing necessary action in order to solve an identified problem.

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, national governments have increased their role in the management of natural resources. The role of community level control, through management and custom, has correspondingly diminished. By appropriating this control over natural resources management, the government has often underestimated the capacities of the local management systems by which people have learned through often long and

difficult experience to manage natural resource systems to meet their needs.

Without denying that the traditional systems of natural resource management can often be inequitable and ineffective, state interventions that have chosen to ignore them have seldom fared better. National governments have, for the most part, failed to develop an adequate substitute for or complement to these traditional resource management systems.

The effective capacity of government to regulate what goes on in widely

scattered resource environments is distinctly limited. Devolution of major resource management and allocation of decisions to the local level may thus be more effective than management efforts which distant, understaffed and underfunded government agencies can provide.

There is a need for rapid and substantial evolution of existing aquatic resource management systems to support sustainable aquatic resource use. It is unlikely that local communities can accomplish this change entirely on their own. But neither can the national government accomplish it entirely through bureaucratic instruments. There must evolve a more dynamic partnership using the capacities and interests of the local community, complemented by the ability of the national government to provide enabling legislation and institutions and other assistance. This partnership can be called co-management of which Community-based resource management is a central element.

COMMUNITY - BASED AQUATIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Community - based resource management approach (CBRMA), is a comprehensive strategy that seeks to address the multi-faceted issues affecting the resource environment through the active and meaningful participation of resource communities.

Underlying the term, "community-based" is the principle that primary resource users should also be the rightful managers of their resources. Through its various processes, CBRMA hopes to restore the sense of "ownership" and responsibility to the primary users.

Participation means taking part in an activity. People "participate" in local

development everyday through their family life, livelihood activities and community responsibilities. The same holds true for initiatives that are initiated or involve "outsiders" such as conservation projects, development programs or advocacy campaigns.

The rationale for participation involves two themes. One suggests that participation is a necessary input to improve the chances of success of development initiatives. The other suggests that participation and the process of participation is a goal in itself and is not simply a means to improving development initiatives.

A number of purported benefits of using participatory methods for conservation and development has been enumerated. According to Cohen and Uphoff (1997), participation will result in:

- an increased sense of ownership of development initiatives by local communities;
- improved productivity and efficiency (i.e., greater benefits per unit of external assistance);
- increased coverage of impact;
- increased equity and self determination;
- an increased likelihood of project continuation, maintenance or sustainability after formal project support is withdrawn;
- increased cost sharing and effectiveness of development initiatives;
- increased appropriateness and relevance of development initiatives;
- greater emphasis in non-violent forms of social action and change, and

fulfillment of basic human needs and rights.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION DEVELOPMENT (PAD)

The acknowledgement of the benefits of participation has led to a growing advocacy for participatory development strategy. Active participation by the local communities, which is also the focus of CBRMA, is the central focus of PAD and has demonstrated itself to be an effective basis for empowerment. PAD is, therefore viewed as development for empowerment, which can be employed to achieve the objectives of CBRMA. It calls for the involvement of the local people in analyzing systematic inquiry and in mobilizing necessary action in order to solve an identified problem.

PAD is based on what Freire (1973) has termed "Praxis", that is the concurrent, dynamic process of action and reflection. Such an approach involves people in the problematization of their situation in its concrete objective reality so that being critically aware of it, they can also act critically on it (Freire, 1973).

Some Salient Features of PAD

The rural communities possess indigenous knowledge and organizations, which are powerful tool for their own development. PAD, therefore, seeks to combine the inherent potentials of development workers and the rural communities on bringing about development.

The following features are pertinent to PAD:

1. Collective systematic inquiry. This process involves the investigation of problems, needs and issues with active participation of the rural people in the whole process. The process often begins at

the problem-posing stage whereby rural people and the outsiders identify a problem, which they mutually want to solve. This also involves the analysis of the underlying causes of the problem.

2. Collective analysis and interpretation of phenomena. This is for the purpose of enabling both the outsiders and the rural people to better understand the problems, needs and issues at hand, including the underlying structural causes (socio - economic, political, cultural and physical).

3. Collective discussion, analysis and action. Often, there are different points of view on what the causes of the problems are and how best to take action to improve the situation. Therefore, this helps to make both the development workers and the rural people recognize that disagreement and conflicts are part of the process and they must be dealt with openly through dialoguc. This is necessary in order to further sharpen the analysis of the problem so as to reach a realistic short - term solution.

4. Collective learning and sharing. PAD is by its nature, a learning process for both development workers and rural people. The basic principle underlying PAD is that learning occurs as a result of activities engaged in by those who seek to learn. This process begins with people's concrete experiences and situations, and move to include both theoretical analysis and action aimed at creating and undergoing change.

5. Evolving homogeneity between development workers and the rural people. As interaction increases and common problems, issues and solutions are identified, the operational gap between development workers and rural people as

distinct social groups decreases. This inevitably narrows the development worker - local community dichotomy.

6. Progressive redundancy or self - liquidation of development workers. Genuine participation will increase the ability of the rural people to learn and undertake collective investigation, analysis, and action, particularly with regard to matters that directly contribute to their own development. In this way, the rural people are enabled to actively engage in activities that have traditionally been considered the domain of development workers alone. This leaves development workers with opportunity to delve into other complex and challenging tasks.

Projects based on PAD share common focus, which according to Barton et al., (1997) include three foci; local, action and process.

Local Focus

- An orientation towards the felt needs of the local people and institutions - PAD deals with issues directly experienced and explicitly acknowledged as problems by local people and institutions.
- A strong link with locally generated initiatives - PAD aims to generate information and support decision - making processes relevant to local aims and applicable to local initiatives.

Action Focus

- A minimal time gaps between data collection, analysis and feedback - The timeliness of analysis and rapidity of feedback are important, both to increase the cost-effectiveness of the support activities, and to promote the practical utility of the results.
- A direct feeding of the analysis results into planning and action - PAD incorporates methods for translating the knowledge gained directly into practical decisions and/or feasible causes of action.

Process Focus

- An equal concern for process and results - PAD aims at making all participants aware of the implications of the issue (problem, situation, possible solutions) being analyzed and supporting them in undertaking relevant action.
- A built-in communication strategy - final written reports are useful for institutional or training purposes of professionals; but meetings, posters, development theatre, workshops are more important means of providing feedback to local institutions and the community at large.

METHODS OF PAD

Some of the methods that have been used widely in PAD include: Group discussions (Miller, 1984); Public meetings (Beckhard, 1965); Surveys (Bergevin et al, 1963); Seminars (Aker, 1965) and popular theatre (Society for Participatory Research in Asia, 1982).

Applying PAD to Community-based Aquatic Resource Management in Nigerian Inland Waters

A thorough understanding of the social system of the local communities surrounding a water system will provide an easy entry point. Questions to be answered concerning local administration and/or leadership will include:

- What traditional system of administration exists?
- How are decisions made in the community?
- When decisions are made, how and by whom are they carried out?
- What interest groups are there in the community?

In different zones of Nigeria for instance, the social structure differs. Taking the three major ethnic groups as an example, the Ibos and the Efik-Ibibios of the East have no indigenous overall political authority around which their loyalty crystallized, their basic social unit is the family or kindred with the age groups transcending both (Meek, 1973). The Yorubas of the West have a large scale of political organization and a tradition of constitutional monarchy (Jones, 1953). They are also noted for their propensity to build large towns (McCall, 1955). The Hausas of the North, by virtue of their religion and theocratic government, they are a well-disciplined people, one of whose characteristic features is unquestioning obedience to constituted authorities. The other tribes fall in-between these major tribes.

An initial contact with agencies/institutions that have worked in the given area and literature search will help in

identifying the existing social boundaries and processes and give a baseline information for deciding the best point of entry. Before initiatives in community-based aquatic resource management is begun, the existing systems of management and indigenous knowledge of aquatic resources in the area should be understood. Documents, surveys, group discussions and key informants will do. An important component in CBRMA for ensuring success, is a sufficient incorporation of the perceptions and objectives of the primary users of the resources with regard to the resource development. Their perceptions may not always be clearly expressed, but the development workers have to gradually learn to understand the distinct problems of the local users as well as their preferred solutions.

Participatory Action Development strategy ensured the empowerment focus of community-based approach through the active participation of the primary users.

CONCLUSION

A closer look at the process of implementing the community-based communal manual clearing of water hyacinth on Lake Kainji would reveal some elements of Participatory Action Development (PAD). The PAD strategy aims ultimately at empowering the local communities by involving them in all aspects of decision making.

An understanding of the underlying features would lend it to practical applications with modifications to suit specific situations. A sustainable management of any given aquatic resource would require the involvement of the local users. Making use of their local traditional institutions ensures easy access to their cooperation,

while their indigenous knowledge when employed engenders a sense of belonging.

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