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# Effective collaborative partnership for sustainable local development in Ghana

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## Abstract

Traditionally, development has been the obligation of the government but NGOs have over the years complemented the efforts of the public sector. The paper seeks to explain reasons for success or failure of NGO development projects. The paper also seeks to explore the importance of collaboration for the sustainability of projects. The study involved forty respondents from four development project locations in Ghana. Focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews, phone interviews and questionnaire administration were the data collection methods with qualitative data analysis using some simple statistical tools. The main finding of the project is that community involvement is very essential for the success of the project but projects initiated by the community are more sustainable. It was also noted that project location, quality of products and services among other things are necessary for project sustainability. Another interesting finding is that local government involvement is necessary but not a prerequisite for successful project implementation and sustainability.

**Keywords:** Local government, Sustainability, Rural development, Community involvement, Nongovernmental organizations

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## 1. Introduction

Development has been a major issue of concern to all nations of the world evident in the application of all efforts to achieve it even though its precise definition has been very difficult. Despite its urgency to all nations, definition of the concept has been quite as copious as its indicators of measurements as well as the authors and institutions who have written about it. However, development can simply be categorized into international, national and local with local receiving much attention in recent times. Like the parent concept, local development has also been difficult to define with many asking the question 'what is local in local development?' Many authors unanimously agree that local development involves local actors, use of local resources and is within a certain location classified as local.

Development, whether national or local, has over the years been the responsibility of the public sector but with complements from the private and voluntary sectors. The latter represented by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have however received much attention in recent times due to some advantages they possess over the former as shown by Clark (1993) and Behera (2002). NGOs have become major players in the development of countries especially in Africa where much of the continent is under their domain. Despite the loud applause given to NGOs, they are not without challenges and one of which has been the ability of NGOs to sustain development projects. Ullah et al. (2006), Meniates (1992) and Makuwira (2004) realizing the shortcomings of the various sectors of development call for effective collaboration between them to counterbalance weaknesses, make use of comparative advantages and sustain development projects.

The paper sets out to highlight the contributions of NGOs to local development and assess the contribution of local government to the sustainability of NGO development projects. The paper also brings to the fore issues which affect the sustainability of local development projects. The paper examines four local development projects and finds out the reasons for their successes or failures.

The paper begins with an introduction and follows with a brief literature review. The methodology used in the paper is explained followed by the results and findings. The paper wraps up with conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Actors in local development

In past times when states and kingdoms were ruled by kings and emperors, they were responsible for the development of their subjects and territories. With the formation of modern politically constituted governments, development became the obligation of governments responsible for the area. It has become evident that with the passing years central governments have lost their central coordinating role which has necessitated the influx of other actors of development according to Helmsing (2001). The influx of these other development actors in addition to the government has overtime proven to be very essential for development. Many authors like Lukas et al (2005), Swinburn et al. (2006), Plantier-Royon (2009), the

UNCDF (2006) and the UNDP (2007) have emphasized the importance of these actors and most especially the ability of the various actors to work together to generate the desired outcomes. Prominent actors which have been identified by most authors in local development include local government, NGOs and local communities.

### *2.1.1. Local government*

The importance of the local government in local development cannot be overemphasized. Helmsing (2001) believes local governments are responsible for the creation of place prosperity and the coordination of all the efforts by the various actors of development. The UNDP (2007) have also posited that concerted efforts of the various local development stakeholders will prove essential when local actors are empowered and capacitated to develop their conditions through the local government. As a further support, Swinburn et al (2006) have also noticed the importance of the local government in the capacity as creating favourable environment for the success of local development. Generally, local governments have been described as the fertile grounds on which the other development actors thrive and operate to gain the desired results but the question is whether local governments are politically driven entities or real development driven entities.

### *2.1.2. NGOs*

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (1996) has noted that about 15% of all aid to developing countries which is over \$6 billion is channeled by or through NGOs. INBAS and L&R Institute of Social Research (2005) have also posited that NGOs have become magic bullets that find their targets irrespective of the directions they are fired. Despite the extensive literature on the importance of NGOs to development, some other authors have given some contrasting views. Swinburn et al. (2006) for instance consider NGOs as just one of the implementation agents of local development policies while Zaidi (1997) quashes the comparative advantages of the NGOs and regard them as myths and advocates for a return to the state as the actor responsible for local development.

### *2.1.3. Local beneficiary communities*

Local communities have over the years grown from being recipients of any form of programmes and projects to a level where they have become actors of development as evidenced by many authors such as Swinburn et al. (2006), Bjaras et al (1991), Rifkin and Kangere (2001), and Dukeshire and Thurlow (2002). Al-Mazroal and Al-Shammari (1991) and other proponents of the rights based approach hold the assertion that local communities have the right and responsibility to be involved in development programmes which affect them. This is supported by Reid (2000) who has classified community participation as the heart that pumps blood into the development of the community but do the communities have enough resources to be an effective actor of local development? The copious literature is also silent on the level of involvement of the community members.

### **3. Methodology**

The paper included four projects namely the Fotobi primary school and Obregyemah clinic; and the Kwahu Besease Oil palm processor and Kwahu Oda soap and cosmetics project located in the Akuapem South and Kwahu West Municipals respectively. Both primary and secondary sources were used with the later from relevant books, project reports, policy papers, governmental and nongovernmental organizations' websites. The former was collected through interviews, observations, focus group discussions, experiences and questionnaire administration. In all, the sample size was forty (40) comprising six (6) project officers of NGOs, five (5) local government officials, twenty eight (28) community members and one (1) other stakeholder. Data analysis was basically qualitative with simple statistical tools.

### **4. Results and findings**

The paper found that Fotobi primary school and Kwahu Besease Oil Palm processor were more successful and sustainable than Obregyemah clinic and Kwahu Oda Soap and cosmetics project. This was because Fotobi primary school being 8 years old is still vibrant and has increased enrolment consistently with quality education while the Oil Palm processor was also very active generating revenue for the community and with market for their products extended to bigger towns nearby including the municipal capital. The two successful projects were also well maintained since they received periodic maintenance. The other two projects, Obregyemah clinic and Kwahu Oda Soap and cosmetics project, were found to be unsustainable and had failed because the clinic was in a deplorable state and earmarked for demolition with most of the community members seeking health care in other towns. The soap and cosmetics project was also stuck in a bush and production was no longer in process.

The paper found out some factors which accounted for the success or failure hence the sustainability of the projects and key among which was location. It was noticed that the two failed projects have become unsustainable because there were problems with their locations. Obregyemah clinic for instance had been affected by the construction of a highway and had been earmarked for demolition while a dusty road near the soap and cosmetics project made the powdered soap dried on the sun dirty and as such reduced the quality of the products. It was revealed by the Municipal Health Directorate of Obregyemah clinic that there was no consultation with the directorate, which could have offered some advice, before the construction of the clinic. The successful projects were however constructed on designated community project lands and therefore had no location challenges.

The quality of products and services produced by the projects was also very essential in determining the success or failure despite the fact that there was general agreement that the projects were very beneficial to the community. The paper gathered that the two failed projects had issues with the quality of products and services they produced. For instance, the clinic had only three health attendants with one being resident in the community and therefore the ability to provide services was limited. Also, only 5 out of the 17 rooms in the clinic were used for operations which meant that services intended such as wards were not functioning.

Due to these, most of the community members preferred seeking medical attention in another town. For the soap and cosmetics project, the dusty road that changed the colour of the product coupled with poor packaging compelled community members to purchase similar products. The quality of products and services of the primary school was high judging from the increase in enrolment from 22 in 2003 to over 650 in 2011 and consistent performance in the final exams. The product from the Oil Palm processor was initially patronized by community members but markets of the municipal capital and other towns have been captured due to the high quality of products from the processor.

Another key issue which determined the success or otherwise of the projects studied was the level of involvement of the beneficiary communities. It was recorded that there was massive community contribution and involvement in the successful projects while the failed had a lesser level of involvement. The two successful projects as well as one of the failed project, the Kwahu Oda soap and cosmetics project, enjoyed community contributions in the form of communal labour, finance, building materials, land and other forms of support while the clinic did not have any community support in terms of building materials, finance and land. One distinct phenomenon which emerged was that the two successful projects were commenced entirely by the community members while the clinic was commenced and completed entirely by the NGO. The level of community involvement is facilitated by the role of community leaders and opinion leaders in the communities. The role of opinion leaders in ensuring the success of the projects included to a high extent community mobilization, advisory, and supervision; and to a lesser extent finance since only the primary school had some financial contribution from the community and opinion leaders.

Generally, the projects did not enjoy much local government involvement since only the primary school had some support in terms of a project supervisory from the local government. There were no contributions in terms of logistics from the local government to the projects. However, the involvement and contributions of local government cannot be written off even though the paper posits that they do not influence greatly the success or failure hence the sustainability of the projects.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

The results and findings gave some essential conclusions which include the fact that the location of a project is very essential in determining the success or otherwise hence the sustainability of a project. The location of projects affects accessibility and utilization as well as the quality of products and services produced from the project. It is therefore important that location is considered seriously when implementing a development project. Consultations with various stakeholders such as government agencies concerned and the community especially are necessary before choosing a project location. Effective consultations will not only reveal the appropriate location but also the kind of project which will be of maximum benefit to the community, the kind of assistance and support the community can provide to the project as well as other essential information on the project.

The paper also shows that a project can be very beneficial to the community but the success and sustainability of the project can be affected by the quality of products and services the project provides. The

quality of products and services affect the market, the utilization of the project, the lifespan of the project and the performance of the project. Poor quality of products and services could be as a result of bad location as well as inadequate and unskilled workers. The quality of products and services are essential in ensuring the sustainability of projects since the quality determines the continuous operation of the project. Adequate supervision, availability of logistics, adequate skilled workers among other things are some of issues which might be considered in ensuring high quality products and services.

One very key position entrenched by the paper is the importance of community involvement and participation in ensuring the sustainability of development projects. Community involvement and participation are essential during the implementation of projects through the provision of local materials like sand, stones, wood, water, and communal labour. After the completion of the project, community members are also effective in the utilization of the project as well as the maintenance of the project thereby contributing to the sustainability of the project. A proper consultation and sensitization of the community members on the intended project is necessary to ensure good community involvement and participation. An imperative issue emerging from community involvement is the supervisory, advisory and mobilization roles of the leaders of the community. Since community members are driven by their community and opinion leaders, it is very important that the capacities of the leaders are well built to ensure adequate support during and after the implementation of the project. Another emerging issue is the ability of the community members to initiate intended project and later acquire support for completion. Projects can either be initiated by the community out of necessity as in the case of the primary school or with encouragement by the implementing NGOs as in the case of the Oil palm processor, and the soap and cosmetics project. With three out of the four projects including the two successful projects initiated by the community, it is vital to stress that projects initiated by the community are more sustainable and therefore NGOs should encourage communities to initiate projects. The sense of ownership of the project is greater with project initiation and this leads to greater sustainability of the project. It is also stressed that the focus on community involvement should shift from being just contributors to projects to initiators of projects to ensure greater sustainability.

The local government is an important driver on the local level since they represent the central government. However, the paper portrayed that there was not much involvement from the local government in either the successful or failed projects. The only form of local government support was recorded in the implementation of the primary school project where the local government performed some project supervisory roles. Despite the fact that the paper posits that local government involvement is not a prerequisite for the sustainability of development projects, they can be in a way very important and if involved in projects could be essential in the successful implementation and sustainability of projects. A key issue worth considering however is whether local governments deliberately refuse to get involved in development projects or are not invited by the NGOs and the communities.

Finally, it can be stressed that all stakeholders of a project are essential and should be involved in the implementation of projects. However, there should be much emphasis on the community since they are the custodians and beneficiaries of the project. They should be encouraged to initiate projects and then supported to complete. Other issues such as location, quality of products and services among other things also come into play in determining the success and sustainability of implemented projects.



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