PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND HUNGER IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract
Poverty and hunger have been seen as major problems in Enugu state despite the existence of numerous poverty alleviation programmes such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Women for Women International Programme, Visit Every Community (VEC) Project initiated by former governor Sullivan I Chime in 2013, Every Community 10 million naira project initiated by the immediate past governor Ifeanyi Lawrence Ugwuanyi, N-Power, etc. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it focuses on Nusska Local Government Area (LGA). The study is poised to ascertain the effect of public participation on the eradication of poverty and hunger in Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA). The study adopted participatory approach as its theoretical framework. The research applied a cross – sectional research design with an in-dept interview as an instrument of research data collection. Total of twenty eight respondents at the ratio of two respondents each from the fourteen towns that made up Nsukka LGA were purposively selected as the sample size. The collected data were later analysised thematically. And the study found out that poverty is ravaging Nsukka LGA because of non inclusion of the public on decision making. And that project providers usually carry out project of their choice in any community they wish without seeking to know the felt needs of the community. Also corruption, absent of effective legislation and lack of proper monitoring were discovered as cause of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA. The study further recommends that government and project providers should prioritise public participation in decision making, there should be effective legislation that will be checking mating the excesses of both project providers and the public. Finally, that project should be provided in line with the felt needs of the people.
Keywords: *Public participation, Poverty, Hunger, Democracy*

Introduction

Public participation is a democratic process that promotes the fundamental rights of the people. Mohamed & Kiruthu (2019) are also on the view that public participation plays an important role in the democratization of countries globally. Democracy without public deliberation and participation is ultimately an empty and meaningless concept (Pimbert & Wakeford, 2001) cited in Shantanu (2023). Public participation creates room for the inputs of the stakeholders and general public on the matters at hand. And for poverty and hunger to be eradicated in a society, engagement of the people is paramount.

Poverty is a state of being incapacitated to provide for the essential things that makes life easy. Aye, Oforka, Eze and Eseadi (2016), opined that poverty is a situation in which individuals are unable to meet the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, education, security and health. World Bank (2020) defines poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and unable to see a doctor, inability to go to school, illiteracy, joblessness, fear of the future, living one day at a time, lack of access to clean water, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

Hunger is living in a condition of no food and lacking substantial dietary that would keep one alive and healthy. According to Rodrigo and Andres (2008) hunger is associated with food and nutritional insecurity, which occurs when part of the population does not have assured physical, social and economic access to safe and nutritional food to satisfy people's dietary needs and preferences for a healthy and active lifestyle.. United Nation (UN) also defined hunger as the periods when people experience severe food insecurity.

Also according to Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), hunger is an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy.

Therefore, for eradication of poverty and hunger to be achieved, incorporation and engagement of all categories of people in the affected area where the development is taking place must be prioritized. When communities are involved in project initiation and implementation, there is the assurance of sustainability subject to some conditions unlike when they have no idea about the project or when it is imposed on them (Olukotun,2008). Ngunji (2020) , opined that Public involvement is vital in democratic governance because it allows citizens to participate in decision-making. According to Gitegi & Iravo (2016), public participation in governance is a concept that is highly embraced by most democracies in the world and it is seen as the epitome and measure of effective governance.

Public participation is needed for policy processes to be accountable and transparent and the public should have a say in decisions that affect them, particularly when taxes fund public policies that will affect the public for better or worse (Neil, Rachel & Clare,2023) .Public participation is a cornerstone of responsible democratic governance and a fundamental prerequisite to achieve sustainable development(Stella,2004). Stella (2004), further opined that democratic governance will be meaningless if government do not ensure an effective and fully informed public participation in decision making, in particular, in the impact assessment of trade. Blendi (2016), avers that the concept of democracy is connected to the idea of public participation because it allows government actions to become transparent and effective by avoiding corrupt behaviors. Public participation entrenches transparency, fairness, equity and sustainable service delivery. Government policies, programs and projects are sustained when the concerned people- such as community stakeholders, Civil Society Organization(CSO), clergies, women wings ,youths, security agencies ,etc are engaged in the program or project starting from the formation stage to completion stage because it is through the people's participation that their needs will be identified, addressed and sustained. Identifying the societal needs of the people is very paramount before embarking on any project if it must be sustainable.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of efforts have been put in place by government to eradicate poverty and hunger in Enugu state. Iloh (2020) also stated that Enugu State formulated an economic plan for Enugu State named Visision En:4: 2020. Poverty alleviation programmes and projects have previously and presently been introduced. And some of these programmes and projects includes: National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Women for Women International Programme, Visit Every Community (VEC) Project initiated by former governor Sullivan I Chime in 2013, Every Community 10 million naira project initiated by the immediate past governor Ifeanyi Lawrence Ugwuanyi, N-Power Programme, etc**.** But one shocking thing is that the more the programmes, the more poverty and hunger bite harder on the people of Nsukka LGA. It has been established that corruption, lack of public participation and legislation are the major impediments holding back on the efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA.

This work therefore, focuses to find out why poverty and hunger keep lingering in Nsukka LGA despite the numerous mentioned poverty alleviation programmes in Enugu state.

Participatory Approach

This study adopted participatory approach as its theoretical framework. The proponent of the theory was Paulo Freire in 1970s but was later introduced in the development field by Robert Chambers in 1980 and also lately advanced in one of the works of Fiorio and Bowles in 2001. Participatory approach advocates for the engagement of the supposed beneficiaries of the projects right from the initiation , implementation and so forth .When initiating developmental projects in any society, the people should be genuinely involved so that their felt needs will be identified, addressed and properly handled. Participatory theory kicks and antagonises the old top-down approach of development. Claridge (2004) participatory theory represents a move from the global,

spatial, and top-down strategies that dominated early development initiatives to more locally sensitive methodologies. Erring (2000) argued that the failure of the "top-down" approach to rural development necessitates "the participatory approach" to socio-economic development. The assumption is that participation of stakeholders will cause decision-making processes to be more inclusive and therefore, instigate ownership over development processes, which in turn, leads to more sustainable impacts (Chambers, 1983). Public participation is a key to eradicate poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA. Therefore, the government and other project providers should make provisions to engage the prospective beneficiaries of the projects from conception, designing and implementation stages so that their inputs will be considered and put into use.

Despite the importance of the participatory theory in the programme's implementation and poverty reduction, it has been criticized for placing unrealistic demands on people, with more pressing demands on their time. The theory has also been criticized for lack of better development impacts (Cooker, & Kothari, 2001). But in all, the benefit of participatory approach outweighs the negative aspect of it in the fight against poverty and hunger. Therefore, government and project providers should adhere to the rules of participatory theory if poverty and hunger must be eradicated in Nsukka LGA.

Materials & Method

The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. According to the (2022) National Population Commission of Nigeria (web) and National Bureau of Statistics (web) Nsukka population is projected to 444100 people with the majority of the population living in rural areas. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design with an in-dept interview as an instrument for data collection. The work also adopted purposive sampling method in the selection of 28 respondents constituting the sample size. Two respondents were selected from each of the 14 towns that made up Nsukka LGA. And the towns are: Nsukka, Okpuje, Obukpa, Eha Alumona, Opi, Okutu, Ede-Oballa, Lejja, Obimo, Edem, Ibagwa-Ani, Alor Uno, Okpanigbo and Anuka. The selected respondents were the representative of the Igwe in- Council, town union executives, youths, and women leaders in the various towns. The reason behind the choice of purposive sampling method was because of their positions in the selected towns. The interview with each of the selected respondents lasted for about 15 minutes. The age of the respondents rages from 18 years and above.

Findings and Results

Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nsukka LGA

Majority of the respondents stated that there are numerous poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LGA which includes: National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Women for Women International Programme, Visit Every Community (VEC) Project initiated by former governor Sullivan I Chime in 2013, Every Community 10 million naira project initiated by the immediate past governor Ifeanyi Lawrence Ugwuanyi, N-Power Programme, etc.

In fact one of the respondents from Okpuje Town, the Onowu of the community in the person of Chief Onowu Fredrick Ogbuanya said my son, I must tell you that government are trying their best in terms of provisions of poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka but that the problem is corruption, lack of continuity and non-involvement of the public in decision making. He further stated that many a times people wake up to see project been site in their town without knowing when the idea was initiated and who and who are involved in the project. He said a case of pipe bone water that was dung in Community Primary School Okpuje in 2012.

And a woman respondent from Opi had this to say also;
Government has provided many poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LGA but that the effects of

such programmes are not being felt by the masses. The woman leader said that during, Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi administration that he initiated each community 10 million naira project across all the 472 communities in Enugu State but that up till today that she does not know if Opi town received their own money because she had not seen any project that was built or carried with the allocated money.

Public participation in the poverty alleviation programme in Nsukka LGA

Majority of the respondents interviewed are of the opinion that many a times, the public are mostly unaware of projects going on in their locality talk more of engaging them in decision making.

One of the respondents from Obukpa town and a member of the town union executives emphatically stated; my brother, it may surprise you to hear this from a member of the town union executives. And he said, do you believe that a man of his age and a member of town union executive did not know when Nsukka LG built health center in his town? The respondent further stated that the same thing happened to majority of his people that it was few elites of the town that were merely informed. He then concludes, how would the project providers know the felt needs of the people when the opinion of the masses were not considered?

The experience was not different from other respondents interviewed in various towns. A youth leader from Edem in the person of Engr. Nnaemeka Mba also angrily said, my dear I can tell you that Edem people are not happy with government for non inclusion of the masses on decision making before embarking on project in their community. He said that what Edem people need mostly now is good road but government without consulting the public in Edem went on 2022 supplied up to 4 electric transformers to people of Edem when electricity was not their priority.

Effect of poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LGA

One of the respondents interviewed and also a woman leader from Anuka Mrs Loloanyi Okeze said my son that as far as she is concern that Anuka people have not in any way benefited from any poverty alleviation programmes of the government. She said that they Anuka people are the worst neglected in terms of provisions of poverty alleviation projects. She further said that even now , Anuka town have not seen electricity in their lives and in terms of bad road, poor health center, absent of pipe bone water, etc that Anuka community is ranking first in Nsukka LGA.

Also another respondent from Okpanigbo and also a community leader Chief Ikechukwu Odumegwu said that nobody should try to say that there are poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LG. He said with the best of his knowledge that poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LG has not achieved 20 percent of its objectives. The respondent said my friend that you can see by yourself that up till now that Okpanigbo does not have tarred road, electricity, pipe bone water, good health center, etc.

Effect of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA

All the respondents interviewed, none had a dissenting view on the negative effect of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA. They all aligned that poverty and hunger have done more harm than good on the people of Nsukka LGA.

One of the respondents and a woman from Owere Obukpa cried when she was entertaining the questions on the effect of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA. She said , that as a result of hardship none of her four children finished secondary school since she could not afford to train them since the demise of her husband in 2012. The respondent further said that many a times they hardly eat two square meals in a day.

Another male respondent, an octogenarian who hails from Okutu also gave a shocking experience of what poverty has caused him and his family. The old man stated that in 2018, he lost his dear wife in an illness that could have been cured if they had money to take her to a good hospital. He went on to say as that was not enough, in 2020, that his daughter in-law gave birth through caesarean delivery in a hospital in Nsukka town after much complications and the hospital bill was four hundred thousand naira(#400000) . The respondent said, they had no other option to raise the money than to sell their only one plot of land that his

was formerly reserving for his children to build house on.

A respondent from Obimo said that poverty has brought a lot of crimes in Nsukka LGA. He said that the number of young girls and boys that are into prostitution and other ill vises in Nsukka now is alarming simply because they want to put food on their tables.

Ways to eradicate poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA

Many of the respondents interviewed are of the opinion that if poverty alleviation programmes providers are to be sincere in their pursuit for the eradication of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA that public participation should not be jettisoned.

A respondent from Ibagwa Ani Hon.Steve Ezema pointed out that the easiest way to eradicate poverty in Nsukka LG will be to embrace public participation. He said that in 2022, a senator representing Enugu North Senatorial Zone in the person of Senator Chuka Utazi came to Ibagwa Ani and demanded that the community should discuss and tell him the project that he will do for them. And that after much deliberation the people of Ibagwa Ani unanimously sent to him that what they need most is pipe bone water and immediately the senator came and had the project done for them. And the respondent said that the project brought a lot of relief to Abagwa Ani people as source of clean water was a big problem before the senator intervention.

A respondent from Alor Uno who is one of the community youth leaders in the person of Comrade Godfirst Ezeugwu said that if government or any project provider(s) really wants to eradicate poverty and hunger in Nsukka LG that the first step towards fighting poverty and hunger should be to engage the stakeholders, youths, clergies, chiefs and every other groups or individuals who are the intending beneficiaries of the projects. He said, how can project providers be thinking of providing project to a community without first seeking to know their felt needs?

Another respondent from Ede Oballa and a woman leader acknowledged the important of public participation for eradication of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LG but also went further to say that public participation is not the only antidote to eradicate poverty and hunger. The respondent opined that if the project providers like let them have 100 percent record of public participation without providing means of monitoring the progress of the project(s) and curbing corrupt practices among the stakeholders that the situation will still be worst.

In Nsukka Town, a chief who was also interviewed vividly said that public participation signifies democracy and that an ideal democracy brings peace and progress. He summarized by saying that fighting poverty and hunger without public participation is just like budgeting without finance

Discussions

From the findings on the respondents interviewed, majority of them agreed that there are poverty alleviation programmes in Nsukka LG. But many of them said that the purpose of the programmes have not yielded any meaningful effect as people are many a times not being integrated/ consulted in the decision making. The respondents interviewed said that poverty and hunger keeps ravaging in Nsukka LG despite the presence of poverty alleviation programmes. There are clear indications judging from the respondents point of view that why poverty and hunger is increasing in Nsukka LG is because of lack of public participation.

Another respondent from Ede Oballa recognizes the significance of public participation in the fight against poverty and hunger but dwelled more on how to tackle corruption as she believes that corrupt practices are the major barrier to the fight against poverty and hunger in Nsukka LG.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the effect of public participation on the eradication of poverty and hunger in Nsukka LGA. It is clearly shown that public participation plays a major role in poverty and hunger reduction in any society but from the study it revived that project providers in Nsukka LG hardly engage the public in decision making thereby making poverty and hunger inevitable. Also the work unveiled that corruption is

one of the factors that hinders the fight against poverty and hunger in Nsukka LG.

Therefore, the study recommends that government and project providers should prioritise public participation in decision making, there should be effective legislation that will be checking the excesses of both project providers and the public .And projects should be provided in line with the felt needs of the people,

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