

Appraisal Study of "Town Days" As a Strategy for Public Participation in Community Development

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ABSTRACT Since late 1970s, the use of "town days" or "community days" as rallying point for public participation in community development has become very rampant in South Western Nigeria. This study provides an empirical study of the extent to which this approach has been successful as a tool for community development in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The approach of the study is identifying the goals of the organizers of the "town days" identifying strategies mapped out to achieve the goals; reviewing the extent to which the goals have been accomplished; and identifying possible constraints to this approach. The study reveals huge success in the goals of emancipating people for development and of beautifying the city: a multi-million Naira City Hall has been built, modern park provided in front of the palace etc. The goal of generating industries and industrial employment opportunities are yet to be realized. Recommendations are provided to enhance the goal of utilizing "town days" for community development in the city.

INTRODUCTION

Development has been viewed from diverse perspectives and defined in various ways by social scientists. At present, convergence of opinions point to development implying change, and describing the process of economic, political and social transformation within countries. This process often follows a well-ordered sequence and exhibits common characteristics across countries.

One of the best attempt to-date at defining a concept of development is that by Goulet who distinguishes three basic components or core values, which he calls life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom (Quoted in Thirlwall, 1992).

Using Goulet's concept of development, therefore, we can say that development has occurred when there has been an improvement in basic needs, when economic progress has contributed to a greater sense of self-esteem for the country and individual within it, and when material advancement has expanded the range of choice for individuals. The fact that many of these ingredients of development are not measurable does not detract from their importance: the condition of being developed is as much a state of mind as a physical condition measurable by economic indices (Thirlwall, 1992).

Immediately after political independence,

newly independent countries, in the Third World, craving for rapid development to "catch up" with the colonialist, believed in concentrating decision-making and economic power at the centre. This, besides helping promote "development" from the centre, was also aimed at helping to create a bond between the diverse nationalities within each country. Development strategy adopted by most of these nations involved the government being responsible for provision of infrastructural facilities/amenities like roads, schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water, employment opportunities etc. with the local inhabitants, providing little or no input to either the planning, actual provision, or maintenance of facilities/amenities provided. This approach, termed "development from above" (Stohr, 1981) has been found by Bertrand (1972) to have the problems of not enjoying the support of the people; not being able to adequately identify the real needs of the people; and lacking adequate maintenance or continuity once the initial funds are finished or withdrawn.

As a solution to the problems of "development from above" or "Top-down" approach to development listed above, Bertrand (1972) proposed "self-help" approach to development. Here, emphasis shifts from members of communities folding their arms and expecting "development" to drop like biblical manna from

heaven. It involves efforts being geared to the support of the people themselves in the determination of the changes and goals envisaged (Bertrand, 1972). Ekong (1988) likens the approach to project and service approach to community development. The project approach is generally founded on the government's desire to improve the economic conditions in the rural areas. The establishment of an economic venture such as a government farm or rural based industry characterizes it. Investigations have shown that most of such establishments have failed mainly because of ill planning and lack of adequate identification of the local people with such projects.

The service approach requires the active participation, and often the initiative of the local people. This approach involves the provision of social amenities such as postal agencies, maternity homes, dispensaries, pipe-borne water, and electricity to local communities. Among the shortcomings of the approach are participants concentrating on short-range benefits at the expense of long-range goals, and possibility of encountering inexperience and lack of skills among the local participants (Bertrand, 1972).

Community participation is a concept, which describes the involvement of the people at the local level in making choices for the development of their communities. It is based on self-confidence and the possession of the capabilities to plan and take actions to solve their own problems with little or no assistance from the outside (Nigeria, 1997).

The basic assumption underlying community participation in development programmes are listed in training component module 1 of NPC and UNDP training manuals (1997: 54) as:

People both rural and urban are willing to cooperate and work with one another.

Such cooperation will not be prevented or exploited by local magnates or elites.

People organize best around problems or needs they consider most important.

There will be voluntary contribution of labour, time, materials and money towards implementing community programmes and projects by the people.

Local control over the amount, quality and especially the distribution of benefits from development activities is directly related to those benefits becoming self-sustaining.

Programmes in which local people have played a significant part both in the planning and implementation phases will be more effective and successful than centrally devised schemes.

Public participation in community development is not a recent phenomenon in South Western Nigeria. It dates back to pre-colonial era when communal efforts provided and maintained social facilities and amenities in the various communities. Contributions of communities to development since colonial era are well documented in literature. Various community-provided infrastructural facilities and amenities like schools, community buildings, markets, hospitals, roads etc. dot the landscape of the region. Since colonial era, communal efforts have also provided scholarship programmes for promising youths to improve the general level of education, and to provide sons and daughters that would later help the communities get their share of the 'national cake'.

Prosperous sons and daughters have always play prominent roles in attracting government's largesse to their "home town". This largesse from the government was a prominent way of "planning" and "executing" self-help projects till late 1970s when the nation experienced economic crisis. With the collapse of the nation's economy, a new strategy that would involve the participation and contribution of almost every member of the community had to be evolved. Hence, the emergent prominence of "town days" or "community days".

Since its prominence in early 1980s, various communities have embarked upon a lot of activities via the "town days". Treger (1993) among others provided a breakdown of activities on a typical town day. He also identified "town days" as a strategy for strengthening rural-urban interaction.

This paper aims at contributing to the existing literature on "town days" by investigating its effectiveness as a strategy for public participation in community development in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

The remaining part of this paper is divided into three parts. Immediately after this introduction is a review of community development efforts in Ile-Ife. This is followed by review of Ile-Ife day, from inception to date. In the last part, suggestions are provided to ameliorate problem identified in this approach.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN ILE-IFE

Community development efforts in Ile-Ife predates colonial era, and is reflected in historical monuments in form of relics of the city wall built for protection, pot-heads used in paving walkways, various communal buildings that dot the city etc. Youths were divided into age grades that were assigned specific roles like road maintenance, roof and building repairs etc.

Since colonial era, communal efforts at development have taken the form of constructing modern fence round the king's palace, prominent Ife sons and daughters using their influence to bring missionaries and schools to the city. Hospitals, post offices, police station, electricity, pipe borne water and the like have all been 'brought' to the city mainly through the influence of indigenes acting as conduits to direct development agencies to the city. Enterprising indigenes were also involved especially in establishing schools, hospitals, and commercial and small/medium scale industrial ventures. In 1962, prominent indigenes succeeded in persuading the government of the then Western Region of Nigeria to locate the then proposed regional university in the city. This has played a very prominent role in modernizing the psyche of the indigenes and broadening their horizons. With the university and its affiliated Teaching Hospitals Complex pumping more than N400 million (about US\$3.34 million) as salaries into the economy of the city every month, and with more than Twenty thousand students in the main campus of the university, the resultant impacts of the university on the economic and social development of Ife region is best imagined.

Since the king is the 'father' of the town and is the ultimate ruler, next only to gods, he was expected to guide the people in their quest for development and all agitations for development was usually laid at his door steps. The strategy of the king, perfected especially during the oil boom era of early 1970s, was to pick prominent Nigerians irrespective of their town or tribe of origin, and confer chieftaincy titles on them. These chiefs were then implored to help contribute to the development of the city. The strategy worked so perfectly that throughout the oil boom era; the indigenes were rarely called upon to contribute financially or materially towards community development of the city -

thanks to the honorary chiefs who ensured that the city did not lag behind in governments' patronage.

Review of Ile-Ife Day

With the collapse of the nation's economic might in late 1970s / early 1980s, it became clear that the government alone could not shoulder the responsibility of developing every community in the country. Emphasis was then on 'belt-tightening' and Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Ifes (as the natives are known) then realized that the government alone could not meet their quest for rapid socio-economic development of the city, in terms of adequate provision of social infrastructural facilities / amenities and industrialization. The king, in consultation with preeminent Ife elites and chiefs, decided to put Ifes' destiny in the people's hands. A planning committee comprising people from the various strata of the city was set up to map out strategies for accomplishing the dream.

The committee identified inadequate level of provision of modern social infrastructures and industrialization as the major problem of the city. The committee was also concerned that the city was not physically modern enough to befit its status as the 'Jerusalem' of the black race.

The committee perceived development as modernizing the city to "wear a modern and progressive look"; and establishing an industrial estate to provide employment opportunities for the people (Awoyode, 1993).

The committee proposed setting up two bodies – Ife Development Board to execute mapped out strategies, and Department of Ife Affairs to coordinate contributions of Ifes as individuals and groups for emancipation for development of the city.

The committee proposed the followings objectives to help achieve development as perceived above:

- i. To build a modern multi-million naira city hall.
- ii. To improve the well being of the people in the city by providing adequate modern social infrastructural facilities and industrialization.
- iii. To liaise with Ife chiefs, sons and daughters who have contacts outside the city to "bring development" to the city.
- iv. To help scout for gainful employment opportunities for teeming youths in the city.
- v. To liaise with existing traditional institutions

to obtain meaningful grassroots contributions to development (Ijiyode, 2001).

The committee proposed setting a day apart each year for development. The day, tagged "Ile-Ife Day" is for the people of the city to come together to mobilize for socio-economic development of the city. The consensus of the leaders of thought who conceived the idea of Ile-Ife Day is that it should not be another cultural jamboree but a rallying point for all and sundry to contribute towards the socio-economic emancipation of the city. (Awoyode, 1993).

The maiden Ile-Ife Day was held on the 21st of September 1991 and was attended by very important dignitaries from all over the country. Representatives of the nation's President, governors and ministers were present. Every 'compound' in the city and at least one hundred and twenty social clubs contributed to the day's celebration. A fifty-million naira (about US\$50 million) five years development plan was launched and about six million naira (about US\$6million) was realized. Governors and the representative of the president promised to contribute generously to the city's efforts at self-development. The president in particular promised to dualise Ife-Ibadan road to help reduce accidents on the existing road, and open up Ile-Ife to the outside world.

Since the maiden edition of Ile-Ife Day in 1991, at least five other "Days" have been marked and the spirit is getting higher. In 1992, the nation's president fulfilled his pledge of dualising Ife-Ibadan express road by awarding the contract for its construction and laying its 'foundation stone'. The road has since been commissioned, thus making Ile-Ife and its surrounding regions more accessible to Ibadan and other parts of Nigeria. On beautifying the city, a modern park has been constructed in front of the king's palace and the palace given a face-lift that easily makes it a source of pride to Ifes from all walks of life. All major streets in the city now enjoy streetlights - thanks to the executive chairman of Ife central local government area who allows himself to be guided by the dreams of Ife Development Board. More than three hundred youths have been linked up with employers via activities of Department of Ife Affairs. The king liased with the state government to obtain hundreds of hectares of government's forest reserves for Ife farmers to farm. More than three hundred and fifty families are at present gainfully engaged in

this venture. New markets have been created in the town to provide more spaces for trading and commercial activities. Efforts of prominent Ife chiefs, sons and daughters to lobby the government to "bring development" to the city have also yielded some positive results: Another express road linking Ibadan with the eastern and northern parts of Nigeria has also been newly commissioned. This road bye-passes the city of Ile-Ife, thus opening up another parts of Ife region for future development; the federal government has located a police college in the city; a transmission station of the state's radio broadcasting (O.S.B.C.) station operates within the city; a transmission station of the National Television Authority (NTA) is now operating in the city; a private university is planned to take off in the city in September 2004; and the city is now easily connected to the outside world via the mobile telecommunication system (The G.S.M.) Plans are also on to increase and digitize the existing telephone services in the city to boost the use of the Internet services. A Federal Advanced Teachers' College is proposed to take off in the adjoining town of Ipetumodu (located within Ife region).

The dream of industrializing the city was pursued with vigour right from the onset. The initial plan was to set up an industrial estate at Abata-Ege (on Ife-Ondo road) where small/medium scale industries would locate. An initial take-off grant of thirty-million naira (about U.S.\$30 million, representing as high as 60% of the anticipate revenue) was earmarked for this project out of the N50 million (US\$50 Million) five-year plan launched in 1991. By 1992, the site had been demarcated in situ and efforts were geared to encourage would-be entrepreneurs to occupy the site. As at today, (more than a decade after the launching), the site is yet to be occupied and industrialization via Abata-Ege industrial layout remains a dream.

Despite this short -coming, the general consensus in the city is that the approach to development has yielded bountiful dividends. Celebrating the "day" has its greatest point in changing the mental attitude of the people to personal and community development. The people have generally become more enterprising. Going through the city, one would hardly belief that the community is just recuperating from a very gruesome communal feud that was enough to cripple an average city. The feud was amicably

settled with 'no victor no vanquished', and the city keeps matching on. The success of Ife Day celebration is rated so high that it has now given birth to at least six additional community days within the city. The failure of the approach to adequately provide more productive undertakings in form of industrialization etc confirms Berry's (1985: 188-189) contention that "this approach focuses more on duplicating existing facilities or building political monuments".

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has shown that the use of town days as a strategy for community development has yielded some positive results in the study area. The failure of the approach to generate industrialization might be due to circumstances beyond the powers of the organizers of the "days". For instance, a gruesome communal feud engulfed the city since 1983 and reached a peak in 1997 to 1999. This did not provide a conducive environment for would-be investors. Another hindrance might be lack of adequate provision of enough encouragements in form of loans and assistance from the government for would-be entrepreneurs.

From all indications, the importance of developing the various communities for overall development of the nation cannot be over-emphasized. Since the government does not have the resources to be responsible fully for all development efforts in all the communities within the nation, concerted efforts should be made to encourage and coordinate diverse activities of

the various communities for development. The government could provide the general guideline for these "days". Since most of these "days" do not concern themselves with provision of infra-structural facilities and employment opportunities which they see as the responsibilities of 'the government', governments at the state and, especially, the local government level should give high priority to providing these within their domain.

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