Public Participation in Urban Governance: An Effective Measure in the Repositioning of Nigeria Economy

[1]Baadom, Livinus E., [2]Yiinu Needam and [3]Peter, Tomonidie O.

[1]Department of Urban and Regional Planning
[2]Department of Surveying and Geo-Informatics
[3]Department of Estate Management

[1,2&3]School of Environmental Technology, Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic, Bori, Rivers State |
E-mail: livybas@yahoo.com or livybas459@gmail.com | 08034983226

Abstract: *In most cities of developing countries, the challenges of urban slum, urbanization, lack of urban facilities and services and population growth portray unmistakable opportunity for urban governments to fundamentally rethink how they intend to develop and function effectively toward repositioning of the economy. However, public participation which encourages individuals, and organizations to contribute in decisions, implementations and management of policies which affect them has been identified as critical to sustainable and democratic planning processes especially in urban governance. This article aims to assess how public participation in urban governance will be able to repositioning Nigeria economy. It is observed that the traditional approach of top-down management of cities failed in most city governance leading to urban violence and environmental crisis. Literatures were collected from different sources and analyzed. It is found that management of urban services should be determined and left under control of the public. The paper recommends that urban governance remains effective measure toward repositioning of the economy which can be achieved through public participation.*

Keywords: *Public participation, economic repositioning, governance, urban development*.

1.0 Introduction

In most cities of the world, especially in developing nations, the challenges of increasing population growth, rural urban migration and rapid urbanization have resulted in urban slums, lack of basic facilities and services, poor and inadequate housing, incremental insecurity and violence, as well as economic depression and environmental degradation. Thus, most city governments have fundamentally re-think how they function and how they intend to develop their localities. A "business as usual" approach is a recipe for disaster in the medium to long term and will cause a collapse in the functioning of the core systems of cities (Pieterse, 2000).

It has become pertinent that decision making and planning of urban governance should be dynamic in approach rather than the old system. Thus Lalehpour (2007) reveals that mending the traditional approach of top-down and adopting the modern governance approach of bottom-top which gives prominence to the participation of the people in the management of urban affairs.

The top-down approach deals with the imposition of decision and the provision of services on the people. It is a sharp deviation from people oriented planning. However, down-top is an involvement of the general public in affairs which affect them and tend to provide quick solution to the problems of urbanization especially in developing countries. According to Ghadarjani, Gheitarani and Khanain (2013), effective and lasting solutions to the myriad urban problems can only be found in the city government reinventing their institutions towards a more networked mode of inclusive governance involving collaboration and discussions between various urban stakeholders. In line with this assertion, Lane (2005) observes that the new political culture in most countries no longer places much faith in solutions imposed from above, increasingly relying instead on a network of decision making relationship that link government and civil societies across many scales. This accordingly, marked the beginning of the shift away from the blueprint nature by planning to a democratic planning in which local involvement is now considered important in the planning process since they have a wealth of local knowledge that they can offer as well as a natural understanding of their needs, requirements, local conditions and relationships that are vital in planning development.

Public participation in urban governance has been supported by the normative ideals and the pragmatic benefits of participation arguments (Nabatchi, 2012). The normative ideals argument believes that participation is intrinsically good and it is the right thing to do regardless of other outcomes. The merits of participation are numerous and collectively act to reposition an economy. Participation is an important part of democratization. It fosters legitimacy, transparency, accountability and other democratic values. Nabatchi (2012) asserts that globally, administrative agencies make numerous decisions that affect the lives of people, especially within their jurisdiction; therefore, it is pertinent and morally just for citizens of such environment to have a voice in the decisions that will invariably give meaning and direction to their livelihoods and well-being. According to Leighninger (2012), public participation offers many instrumental benefits to citizens, communities and government to collectively determine the ideal developmental trajectory suitable for their environment. It creates and fosters better citizen because it promotes education about government and policy and it improves basic civic skills and dispositions. Also, public participation in urban governance has the potential of securing multiple benefits for the city and the nation since cities account for the bulk of gross national product in most countries.

In terms of social solutions, it strengthens social cohesion and inclusivity which is an essential precondition to address growing social problems such as urban violence, youth bulge, street children and police brutality. According to Pieterse (2000), it can lead to the establishment of a balanced and sustainable development path for the city. It can stimulate greater efficiency and innovations as departments are compelled to become more responsive to citizen needs and seek solutions in partnership with communities and private sector. Politically, public participation enhances stability and confidence in the municipal government as the legitimacy of the municipality grows from joint decision-making mechanisms and greater transparency. Public participation also helps in stimulating greater community ownership, non-monetary contributions to development processes and direct involvement in maintaining infrastructural investments.

Sequel to the numerous roles of public participation in governance, it becomes necessary that any developing country especially planners should engage the public in policy and decision making processes. Thus, Davidoff (1965) asserts that it is impossible for the planner to have an

overview of the entire needs of the citizens and that a method for greater diversity of opinions is essential for planning process. Also, Brabham (2009) maintains that inclusion of non-expert knowledge could be beneficial to the planning process in general, since the perspective of individual outside the professional sphere of urban planning can (re) discover creative solutions that could work in a specific local context. Public participation helps planning discipline to approach all aspects of human lives. Thus Corbum (2003) asserts that local knowledge should never be ignored by planners seeking to improve the lives of communities experiencing the greatest risk, as it could add the perspective of the future user of a design space and the insights about environment and place that planning discipline might never have approached or might have already forgotten.

This paper focuses on public participation in urban governance. It is structured into different sections. It starts with introduction in section one and then considers the conceptual and theoretical background of the basic issues. It also examines good governance, models of good governance, and responsibilities for effective good governance, levels of public participation, and public participation and economic repositioning, as well as relevance of public participation in urban governance to urban planning and other professions within the built environment.

2.0 Conceptual and Theoretical Background

To enhance effective understanding of the theme, it becomes necessary that the following terms be properly defined public participation, governance and urban governance. In a simplest term, participation is said to occur when everyone who has a stake in intervention has a voice either in person or by representation. Therefore, participation implies not just that the opinion of others are sought but rather that each participant becomes an important contributor to the planning process and has some role to play in decision making (Sonja, 2001). However, public which is synonymous to citizen is simply put as someone who lives in a particular town, country or state and has rights and responsibilities there (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2008). Thus, citizen or public is an individual who has both right and duty towards the urban rulers. According to Pieterse (2000), citizenship implies a set of individual rights and a set of social and civic responsibilities.

In line with the above concept, public participation is viewed as the tendency of the generality of the people to be involved in public concerns, needs and values. It gives the opportunity of the people to determine and influence decision and projects within their neighbourhood, community state and region. Lisk (1985) quoted by Chikerema (2014) defines public participation as the involvement of the broad masses of population in the choice, execution and evaluation of programmes and projects that are designed to bring out significant upward movement in the living standards of the people. The World Bank Learning Group on public participation considers public participation as the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiative and decisions and resources which affect them (World Bank, 1995). Also, public participation is viewed as a process in which members of the public take part in any of the processes of formation, passage and implementation of public policies (Stoker, 1997). Thus, participation provides the public with necessary information and allowing their voices to be heard, the quality of the plans is expected to improve with the citizens' ideas, opinions and knowledge. It gives the power holders chance to assist them in understanding the problem, the alternatives and possible opportunities. According to UN-Habitat (2009) public participation provides education in democratic practice, fosters a sense of belonging, leads to

acceptance of collective decision, encourages bureaucratic responsiveness and accountability, and brings collective knowledge and new ideas to bear on decision making.

One of the outstanding theories on public participation is the work of Arnstein (1969). This creates an overview of the different ways the public can be involved in decision making. It conceives the degree of public participation as a ladder of eight rungs broadly divided into three segments of Non-participation, Tokenism and citizen power. According to Dewar (1997) the segments symbolize the degree to which individuals and groups are involved in the transformation of their environments. Arnstein (1969) views the bottom rungs of the ladders as Manipulation and Therapy which portray non participation. This accordingly is to enable power holders to educate the participants. However, rungs 3 and 4 advance to tokenism which provide for the have-nots to hear and have a voice through informing and consultation which live on 3 and 4 respectively. At this level, the public may hear and be heard, though lack the power to ensure that their opinions are heeded to. Placation which is rung 5 allows the public to advice but lack decisions. This graduates into the higher level which is Public Power. The public at this degree can enter into partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with power holders. Delegated Power and Public Control occupy top most rungs of 7 and 8. At this level, the public obtain the majority of decision making and participate in absolute managerial power.
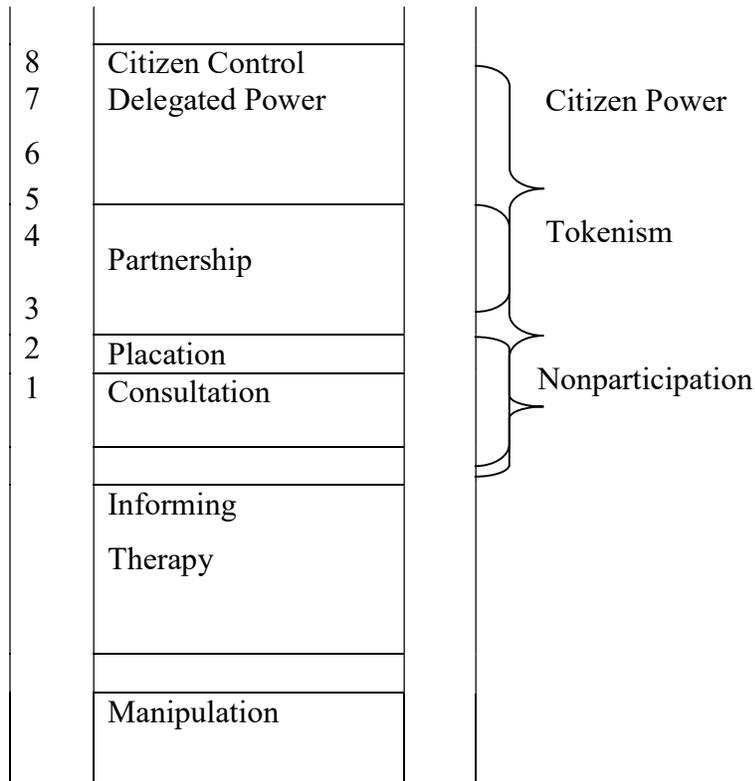

Fig.1: The ladder and public participation adopted from Arnstein 1969

The above figure by Arnstern 1969 portrays the differential relationships which exist between the governed and those who govern. It maintains that governance can only be effective and functional when people participate in all ramifications.

The concept of governance came into the limelight in the 1990s. It attempts to provide functional means of government to carry out its responsibility. Thus, UN Habitat (2002) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. However, the concept of urban governance was developed by a group of U.S. political scientists. The group noted that governance is broadened by integrating ideas of alternative power concentrations instead of traditional government (McCarney, 2003). Also, Stoker (1998) contends that the concept of governance points to the creation of a structure or an order which cannot be externally imposed but is the result of interactions of multiplicity of governing and other influencing actors. Others view governance as the state of orderliness to address violence. Governance is the means by which order is accomplished in a society where potential conflict threatens to undo or upset opportunities to realize mutual gains (Williamson, 1998).

There are basically two types of urban governance. The good urban governance and the weak urban governance. While there is serious campaign for good urban governance, UN-Habitat (2002) argues that there is an emerging consensus that good governance is the since qua non for sustainable human and settlements development. Good urban governance imbibes the principles of sustainability, subsidiary, equity, efficiency, and Transparency/accountability, Civil engagement and Citizenship as well as Security.

Although the principles that characterize good urban governance tend to be interdependent, they are also mutually reinforcing (UN-Hbitat, 2002). Some basic concepts that are still considered to have close association include democratization; decentralization; participation; inclusiveness; environment; poverty; women; conflict, corruption and planning.

3.0 Models of Urban Governance

There is no single model of governance for an urban area (OECD, 2001). However, a contemporary model for the explanation of urban governance has been adopted. According to United Nations Habitat (2008), the two major criteria for explaining governance system are the level and degree of centralization or control over urban functions and the degree of formality in the relationship among the various units in the urban area. Accordingly, the major models include (1) Fragmented Model (2) Mixed Model (3) Centralized Model and (4) Comprehensive Model.

Irrespective of the model adopted by any nation, especially administrators of cities in developing countries, certain challenges are inherent in developing effective urban governance. These challenges are;

(1) Jurisdictional Coordination (2) Strain on the financial/fiscal ability of local authorities in urban areas (3) Lack of transparency and accountability. However, the UN-Habitat (2008) proffers the following options for developing nations to overcome the challenges inherent in urban governance. (1) Effective leadership (2) Efficient financing and (3) Effective citizen participation.

4.0 Responsibilities for Effective Public Participation in Urban Governance

According to Ashland (2000), achieving effective citizen participation in urban governance requires tripartite responsibilities which are strongly related. These responsibilities required systematic and collective performance by the city staff, the elected officials and the citizens (Nabatchi, 2012). Thus, Pieterse (2000) argues that the citizen staff roles involve; effective recognition of the benefits of citizen involvement and serve as advocate for its use; work programmes, ensure that resources are adequate; training and engagement with the public as partners in the design and execution of the public involvement strategy. However, the elected officials' responsibilities including recognition of the importance of citizen inclusion, provision of resources and support staff of the city, as well as definition of decision making process (Ashland, 2000). It also includes; definition and identification of public good, respect opposing viewpoints and recognition of functional solutions. The public participation roles include; respect, listening contributions fair and understanding opposing viewpoints, consideration of public good and reaching compromise that will ensure collective information on the subject matter.

5.0 Level of Public Participation

According to Albers (1998), public participation in urban governance can be carried at different levels. These include the neighbourhood, community and Region.

The nieghbourhood provides close identification and linkages. It acts as key point in policy making. Therefore, Pieterse (2000) argues that public participation at the neighbourhood level is to encourage participatory assessment of problems, create opportunities and priorities in the area, ensure representative coordination structures to interface with the municipal council and possibly outside actors; decide on and use monitoring indicators to facilitate greater accountability around concrete plans. It engages budgeting, social consultation and inclusivity through short, medium and long terms.

The community which may be collection of many neighbourhoods forms groups which engage with the municipal managers. The community has the opportunity to engage with the municipality to agree on the type of project and how they will be implemented in line with the available budgetary provision of the municipality.

However, at the city/municipal level, effective consultations are carried out. The city consultation starts with the preparation of city profile which gives a thorough analysis of all the information relevant to the programme at the regional level, the delegates from the neighbourhoods, communities and cities engage each other and provide higher order priorities. This level may take a lot of time. However, delegates are expected to provide feedbacks to associations and interest groups from the various lower levels.

6.0 Public Participation and Economic Re-positioning

Public participation as a new concept has been viewed as the latest paradigm in urban governance with its gross tendency of repositioning depressing economy. Onibokun (2006) reveals that the effectiveness of urban economy is rooted in public participation. It acts in the reduction or elimination of wasteful projects through proper involvement of the public in decision making, project selection and monitoring of implementation. Public participation in

development initiatives is not new especially toward economic development and enhancement. According to Mabogunje (2011), the city consultation process applied for poverty reduction in many states of Nigeria constituting in directing governance toward economic growth.

Public participation has been argued and practiced in many regions and states. Mabogunje maintains that by 2009, the enterprise initiative in the catfish farming, an aspect of the poverty reduction initiatives, worth over ₦280 million with annual production of 450 tons that worth over ₦180 million at the Eriwe fish farm village. The sustainable city programme in Ibadan sensitized all the stakeholders and through the process of consultation forged an alliance among them in problem identification, priority setting, resource mobilization and project implementation. At various times and areas in Rivers State, groups in conjunction with government have embarked on medical care, borehole projects, construction of bridges, educational training and development and skill acquisitions which have better the lives of the people. These projects, due to direct involvement of the people of been found to be lasting, through effective maintenance by the peoples which reduces costs, time and enhances good governance. The presence and effectiveness of these projects and their direct positive impacts cut across different local government areas and communities within Rivers State.

It is curtained that continuous presence of such projects with the strategy of public participation as tool of process will improve the lives of the peoples, develop communities, and improve regions and repositioning of the economy. Thus, employment creation, poverty reduction, improvement of industries as well as physical development of the area.

7.0 Relevance of Public Participation in Urban Governance to the Built Environment

The importance of public participation in the Urban and Regional Planning Profession and other professions within the built environment has earlier been stated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Thus, the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law (Cap. N 138 LFN. 2004), formerly Decree 88 of 1992, establishes the framework for a broad-based participation in the planning process in the country (FGN, 1992). Accordingly, section 13 of 1992 Law states the procedure for the participation in National Physical Development Plan. It maintains that the commission to handle the preparation should call for submission from all relevant government organizations (NGO) and interested members of the public and their contributions are to serve as part of the input towards the preparation of the draft plan. It makes provision for any member of the public, professional bodies, NGOs and government agencies to submit written statement of their objections to anything appearing in the draft plan during the period of objections, stating the nature and reason for the objections and suggesting alternations and amendments. Also, to ensure multidisciplinary approach to planning, the agencies to handle plan preparation at various levels of federal state and local is expected to comprise chairman, who shall be a town planner and one representative of each of the following professions; who shall be a registered member of the relevant professional bodies: Town Planning, Architecture, Civil Engineering, Land Surveying, Law and Estate Surveying. To ensure effective public participation, the law advocates in addition for one representative of each of the following who shall be members: Ministry of Works and Housing, Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development and Steel, Transport and Communication. Other agencies to be involved as provided by the law include; National Electric Power Authority, Nigerian Telecommunication PLC, one Representative of Nigerian Chamber of commerce and Industries, Mines and Agriculture etc. Also, section 7 of Nigeria Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree No. 86 of 1992 states that the Federal

Environmental Protection Agency shall give opportunities to government agencies, members of the public, relevant disciplines and interest groups to make comments on an EIA of the activity. These steps are taken to ensure effective public participation in Urban and Regional Planning process.

Conclusion

This article on public participation in urban governance: an effective measure in the repositioning of Nigeria economy has grossly examined the basic concepts of public participation and good governance. The paper reveals that sustainable public participation which is instrumental to effective governance can only exist in a democratically decentralized urban system. This accordingly enhances public initiated projects, where the public participate in the decision – making in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring and cost sharing. Effective participation reduces poverty, eliminates elephant projects and bursts the economic base of the city. Its unending roles will in no little way help in the repositioning of the economy.

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