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Alternative Livelihood Support for Reducing Poverty: Snail Project for Kwaprow Community in Cape Coast

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Abstract

The critical importance of employment for sustained poverty reduction and curbing rural-urban migration necessitated this action research. It was embarked to introduce snail farming as alternative livelihood support for reducing poverty in the Kwaprow community at the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast. The participatory action research design was adopted. Ten perceived poor people were selected from the community with the assistance of the key informants and other participatory rural appraisal techniques. The results were compared and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns. From the research that was conducted, it could be realized that the nature of poverty in the Kwaprow community exists in terms of material deprivation, lack of voice and influence, low human and health development and vulnerability to shocks and disaster. The extent of poverty in the area could be said to be relatively high with indicators of poor housing facilities, poor drainage facilities, low employment, high household dependency ratio, poor road network, environmental pollution and low access to potable water. The causes of poverty were found to gender inequity, lack of access to financial capital for business and low access to land for farming activities.

Keywords: Alternative, Ghana, Livelihood, Poverty, Snail.

Introduction

Growing concerns about poverty have been a developmental concern for all governments, especially, African governments (Imoro, Nti, 2009). Between 1990 and 2001 the headcount ratio of poverty for all Least Developed Countries (LDCs) fell from 27.9 % to 21.1 %, but the ratio for Africa actually increased from 44.6 % to 46.4 %, leading analyst to doubt if Africa will achieve its target by 2015 (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2000). In the specific case of Ghana, the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) in 1991 gave the poverty level as 51.7 % but there was a reduction in 1999 to 39.5 %. This dropped further to 28.5 % in 2005. Of these percentages, a large number of women have been seen to be more prone to poverty (Asamoah, 2009).

There are various views on the causes of rural poverty all over the world. According to Chambers (1983), poverty is deprivation; it is deprivation for the many and affluence for the few. Physical factors such as soils, environment, and population are used to satisfy the wants of the few while the many do not have even their basic needs. Also, Chambers (1983) holds the view that, in the political economy cluster, rural poverty is a consequence of processes that concentrate wealth and power. Poor rural people are usually tough, hard-working ingenious and resilient. They struggle against five inter-locking disadvantages which trap them in deprivation: poverty itself;

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physical weakness; isolation; vulnerability and powerlessness. According to Kunfaa (1999), poverty is much more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas. Demographic characteristics are also indicative of the extent of poverty in a community. For instance, the increase in household size is likely to place an extra burden on the household's resource base and this is positively related to the extent of poverty. Increased dependency ratios, the number of children and the presence of a third generation in a household are other demographic factors associated with poverty (Odozi, 2018).

The evidence of poverty in rural communities in Ghana cannot be ignored. According to Imoro and Nti (2009), the number of people living on less than US\$1 a day, defined as the poverty line, tells only half of the story. There are many who could be classified as chronically poor. Despite the presence of numerous poverty alleviation programmes, the poverty situation seems to be worsening in bounds and leaps. This is seen in the worsening degree of vulnerability, social exclusion, falling standards of living, limited employment opportunities, low income, failure of several kinds of basic capabilities, lack of power to command or exchange entitlements like goods and services, shelter, food, and other basic needs of life (Sen, 1999). The situation in Ghana does not deviate from this. The high rate of unemployment among the youth in Ghana has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. It has compounded the problem of rural-urban migration (Cleveland, 1991).

Consequently, development must concentrate on improving the living standards of rural people. According to Norton et al. (2010), development implies more than economic growth. It also looks beyond the use of measures such as the Gross National Product (GNP) to measure the wellbeing of nations. In the wider context, it concerns itself with the quality of life; educational attainment, nutritional status, access to basic freedoms and spiritual welfare. A key emphasis is placed on sustainability which looks at making these developmental achievements last well into the future. In view of the critical importance of employment for sustained poverty reduction and curbing rural-urban migration, much attention has been placed on capacity building and human resource development in recent times (International Labour Organization, 2004). The researchers embarked on action research to introduce snail farming as alternative livelihood support for reducing poverty or tackling a developmental challenge in the Kwaprow community at the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast. The purpose of this research was to study the community to find ways by which to help a household to generate income to supplement their livelihood.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to be able to undertake a comprehensive study on poverty in the Kwaprow community, the participatory action research design was adopted. Similarly, Anderson (1998) agreed that studying and interpreting human experiences in authentic settings cannot be best represented quantitatively and stated that qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them. Considering these ideas, the most appropriate method for conducting a study on poverty-related issues is to use qualitative methodology. Using this design helped provide a means to understand the essence of the action research experience. Understanding the experience of action research helped to document the experience more precisely. The phenomena were interpreted and explained through both the participants' lens and through the theoretical framework of action research.

Context of the Research

Kwaprow is a community approximately 3 km from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension. The community shares boundary with the University of Cape Coast on its eastern side. It has students of the University residing there and commuting daily for campus activities. It has an estimated population of about 3,000. The predominant occupation in the community is farming. Other notable activities include petty trading, artisanry, transport services, and charcoal burning. The case of poverty pervades in the community in various forms; vulnerability to shocks and disaster, low level of education, material deprivation, powerlessness, isolation, physical weakness, low financial status, susceptibility to violence, and lack of access to clean water and sanitation.

Community Entry

In order to ensure that there was no breach of cultural and traditional norms in the community of study, community entry techniques were employed by the research team. This was done to understand the administrative structure of the community. Contacts were made with some traditional elders of the community and they were informed about the upcoming activities of the research team in the community. Permission was duly granted to commence the research activities in the community.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The convenience sampling method was used to gather information from the community members. This was conducted bearing in view the willingness of the community members to participate. In total, about nine (9) males and six (6) females were engaged in the data collection process.

Sources of Data

The sources of data that were used for this action research were mainly primary data which was collected from the community members. Secondary data were also employed in this research. This was done through a comprehensive review of existing literature on poverty. An interview schedule was prepared and used during the interview sessions.

Data Collection Procedure

Key informant interviews were conducted among the participants selected for the research. This involved the use of one-on-one interaction with the participants. It was conducted to understand the nature of poverty in the community, the extent of poverty, the causes of poverty and the measures by which poverty could be reduced in the area. The participants included young people, school children, adults, and some aged community members. Seidman (1998) states that an interview provides a necessary and sufficient avenue to understand the meaning people involved in the community make of their experience.

In addition to the one-on-one discussion, the researchers conducted a transect walk through the Kwaprow community to understand and have a fair view of how the community looks like. All the structures, facilities and institutions in the community were noted. Other participatory methods such as the Problem Tree Analysis and Venn Diagram were used. Observations were conducted to gather supporting evidence for the research. Artifacts were used as evidence of common themes from field notes, observations and interviews. The field and observation notes helped the researcher to collect noted artifacts. Also, artifacts were collected in a spontaneous manner.

Data Analysis

The data collected from this action research were analyzed on an ongoing basis using the constant comparative method. This non-mathematical data analysis process was used to guide the researcher through identifying themes and patterns within the issues (Glaser, Strauss, 1967). In preparation for using Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative method, results from the participant interviews, observations, transect walk, problem tree analysis, artifacts were organized separately for each case. The data collected were organized and assembled by date, data collection method, study question, interview question. This helped the researcher to identify change and growth. These results were compared and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns.

The Intervention

On the basis of sustainability, the research group settled on ten households. The purpose of this was to be able to monitor the progress of livelihood alternatives even after the end of the semester. Secondly, previous intervention reports given by some of the community members indicate that students always come there to introduce an intervention but they are not able to sustain it. The project normally begins with a large group of people and in the end, only one person is found holding up the project. Thirdly, the availability of resources in terms of time availability of financial power also influenced the selection of the ten households. The research group believes that with ten households effective training could be done, effective monitoring and evaluation of the project could be conducted over a long period of time and effective follow-ups on the household could be done at an affordable cost. The expectation is that as the households benefit from this project, it can be used as a way to attract others unto the project and then it expands.

In all, four (4) meetings were held with the households to explain the project modalities and other important details. The eldest children (youth) were chosen as the leader of the teams. This

was a key measure to ensure the sustainability of the project. The parents (adults) were involved in the project as a way of monitoring their children to constantly work in order to supplement household income. The meetings were all organised in their houses. One of the research group members served as the resource personnel on the training of the household in snail production. Arrangements were made with COCOBOD (Agona Nyarkrom District) in acquiring initial breeding stock.

Findings and Discussions

Theme 1: Nature of Poverty in Kwaprow

Sub-theme 1: Material Deprivation

From the data that was collected, it was realised that there are lots of people in the community who hardly know of their next meal for a day. Hunger is a common phenomenon among most of the community members. One of the school children who was interviewed indicated, “When I leave for school early in the mornings, I don’t have any breakfast or lunch and in the evening I get a little supper and that is not enough” – a 9-year-old school child. For poor households, meeting their most basic needs in terms of provision of food, water, clothing, and shelter is a daily struggle in the community.

For those without access to land or the ability to grow their own food on other people’s land, access to dependable wage labour emerged as a major factor defining the nature of poverty in the community. Furthermore, it is rare for people to find a permanent source of employment. Most of the youth in the community engage in informal and casual labour to fend for themselves and their immediate households. The results of this research agree with a study in Cameroon where the poor were distinguished as people who had fewer meals a day. Poverty also includes areas such as malnutrition, inadequate living standards and lack of income (Alkire, Sumner, 2013).

Sub-theme 2: Low Human and Health Development

The nature of poverty in the Kwaprow community is such that it has led to a high rate of school dropouts. This has resulted in a low level of literacy rate among the community members. This has led to a high increase in unemployment among the youth in the community. They lack the needed employable skills that are acquired only through education. It is often difficult for families in the community to invest in their ward’s education. The sacrifices they make sometimes include, skipping meals to reduce household expenses so that children in the household can be able to attend school.

Community members dread serious illnesses. This is because they deprive people of contributing to the wage-labour of the household. In the course of interviews with key informants, it was observed that disease when followed by premature death, as the cause of extreme poverty. It is a devastating drain on the resources of the household. This probably explains why the community members mentioned poor health as a nature of poverty (Sayeed, Fernando, 2018). Poverty also includes areas such as ramshackle schools, poor health and lack of education (Alkire, Sumner, 2013).

Sub-theme 3: Vulnerability

The arable lands that are available for farming have lost their fertility. This has led hugely to low yields. This can be attributable to the indiscriminate bush burning activities and poor practices they use in managing their lands. The rampant construction of student hostels is rapidly reducing the spaces that could be available for farming activities. This situation has consequential effects on the livelihood security of the people as there is insufficient land for other development activities in the community.

The Kwaprow community was through observation found to be a flood-prone area. Whenever it rains, the roads are impassable. One-woman farmer the research group interviewed indicated that she does not have any savings to show for her hard work in farming. In another study, it was noted that during the rainy season villagers find themselves completely isolated from the more developed areas. The result is that the members of the unconnected villages remain effectively marginalized from virtually all educational institutions above the primary level, from adequate health care facilities and from important governmental and non-governmental institutions (Langmore, 2000). When the participants in the research were asked to identify their most vulnerable members in the community, they identified “children, orphans, single mothers,

unemployed youth, adolescent mothers, disabled, casual workers, the sick, men with large families” as the most vulnerable. They are always dependent on the aid that is provided by others.

Theme 2: Lack of Voice

The precarious situation that was also observed among the community members was that most of them lacked the voice to make meaningful influence or impact in the community. Their voices are not heard. Three of the adults the research group interacted with indicated that the poor people in the community often express a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. A poor elderly man the research group interview said, “The forces behind poverty are so powerful today. So we now feel somewhat powerless. We cannot talk in society”. For those who are able to engage in subsistence farming, the rich people take advantage of their powerlessness by offering them low producer prices which they have no option than to accept. While they sometimes feel that there are corrupt people in authority in the community, they are unable to talk about it openly for fear of being victimized. They also have little influence over their political representatives such as the assemblyman or unit committee members. In rural areas, poverty is equated with the inability to adhere to local customs and norms. Such people do not make their voices heard in communal and political activities (Imoro, Nti, 2009).

Theme 3: Extent of Poverty in Kwaprow

According to a study by Kunfaa (1999), poverty is much more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas. This was indicative of the situation found in the Kwaprow community. The extent of poverty that exists in the area could be said to be very high. The location of the community (sharing boundary with the University of Cape Coast) could be a source of motivation to reduce poverty in the area but that was not the situation.

Housing facilities in the community are of poor nature. The designs are archaic and of poor quality. The settlements seem unplanned and scattered in the community. Most of the houses are closely built on crowded compounds. There are no clear cut roads or lanes demarcated for such a purpose. One could just bump into another’s house when walking on a perceived road. The houses erected by the indigenes are of low elevation. The status of the community is only improved by the presence of immigrants who have settled there and constructing various housing facilities such as student hostels.

Children are mostly found in scanty clothes and shabbily dressed. Most of the time, they are found playing in the sand. The young people are found gathered under trees and shades making conversations. The adults are mostly at home, either petty trading or resting. Household sizes are relatively large; ranging between 5 and 8 on average. According to OECD (2012), increased dependency ratios, the number of children and the presence of a third generation in a household are demographic factors associated with poverty. They further asserted that this is likely to place an extra burden on the household’s resource base and thereby increasing their level of poverty.

The roads are untarred. On a sunny day, it is very dusty while on a rainy day, it gets flooded and muddy, making vehicular movement quite a hectic task. The drainage system in Kwaprow is quite poor. By observation, the research group noted that the gutters are choked with refuse. There is no notable refuse dump community. This could mean that sanitation is very poor. Environmental pollution is not a rare phenomenon in the community. The air in certain sections of the community is heavily polluted with pendant odour from faecal waste and decomposed garbage. There were very limited public places of convenience. Only a few homes had their own toilet facilities but the majority did not. There is only one public toilet facility located in one extreme end of the community. Nearby bushes were mostly used as a ‘make shift’ toilet facility, a situation research participants indicated was a major cause of communicable diseases in the community. The outskirts of the community are heavily littered with non-degradable materials such as mineral water sachets and other plastic waste. There were also cases of human excreta being littered in some areas the research group visited.

Some of the community members were said to be working with the University but these were either security personnel or casual labourers. Some of them found other self-employable activities, worked for the students in order to get something to eat. Others are hawkers on the University premises selling fruits, plantain chips, mineral water, etc. Access to potable water in the community is a problem. The majority of them fetch water from the Kakum River that flows through the community. Subsistence farming is practiced by most of the people who claimed to be farmers. Their animals are reared on a free-range basis. It is easy to find goats, sheep and poultry

birds roaming carelessly in the community. The demographics as found in Kwaprow are indicative of the extent of poverty in a community

Theme 4: Causes of Poverty in Kwaprow

The causes of poverty as found in the community could be accounted for by many factors. The first is gender inequity. The gender bias found in the community is ingrained in the fabric of society. Women are really allowed to engage in active local politics although some of them manage to do. In the household, most of them were only good for the kitchen. Many decisions about access to, control over and the distribution of resources are made mostly by the men in the family. According to Langmore (2000), these disparities have serious consequences, not only for women themselves but also for their families and for society at large. The source of financial capital for business activities is rare. The available informal and formal sources of credit are also too costly for the poor who need it as a matter of urgency. This is a cause of poverty that is noted in the research. Because of this, they are not able to afford education above the basic school level, making their level of poverty very deep.

The inadequate access to financial capital, low saving rate, low domestic investment does not generate large enough increases in employment opportunities for the poor. The poor are denied access to credit to finance their small-scale enterprises and farming activities that generate employment and income and enhance household food security. Access to adequate land for farming activities was also found to be a major cause of poverty in the community. According to Perez-Bustillo (2003), indicators to determine if people lack access to productive land resources are lack of purchasing ability, distance to services, quality of services, etc. Some potential contributing factors for lack of access or unequal access are geographic marginalization, ethnicity and access, structural adjustment and debt, trade liberalization and globalization.

Conclusion

From the research that was conducted, it could be realized that the nature of poverty in the Kwaprow community exists in terms of material deprivation, lack of voice and influence, low human and health development and vulnerability to shocks and disaster. The extent of poverty in the area could be said to be relatively high with indicators of poor housing facilities, poor drainage facilities, low employment, high household dependency ratio, poor road network, environmental pollution and low access to potable water. The causes of poverty were found to gender inequity, lack of access to financial capital for business and low access to land for farming activities.

Recommendations: Implications for Agricultural Extension and Community Development

There is clearly the need to build new opportunities for social interaction that will generate trust and reciprocity among the people of Kwaprow. Voluntary organisations that provide effective leadership in addressing the challenges of young people will be more effective than they have been in the past.

Sustainable community development strategies need to identify strategies for overcoming isolation and segregation that arises because of the vulnerability of the people. Strong ties must be built which can alert development organizations and their agents about the availability and interest of such vulnerable people.

Development strategies that will ensure the community members against shocks such as bad health, inclement weather or government cutbacks and to pool their resources, such as food, credit or childcare will be helpful. In addition to enabling poor people to start up small enterprises by the provision of affordable loans, they could be aided to build informal relationships that will help their day-to-day survival.

Policies for sustainable livelihoods among the people of Kwaprow must cut across the conventional divides of government/political bureaucracy and professional specialisation. There must be a conscious effort to create and sustain livelihoods in the community. The promotion of agriculture and off-farm income generation activities will pay off highly.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare the work has no conflicts of interest.

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