

The Role of Community Development in Addressing the Challenges encountered in access to Electricity in Ashaiman Slums

By:

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Introduction

- The lack of legal access to electricity is a common problem in many slum communities, which are mostly occupied by poor folks.
- According to Baruah (2010), about 40% of urban poor people do not have access to electricity legally.
- This has implication on both the social and economic development of urban poor people (Cohen, 2006).
- This problem has necessitated the adoption of community development to engender electrification efforts in urban slums across the globe (Baruah, 2010).
- Community development is a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems (Nunavut Arctic College, 2010).

Introduction continued

- Community development has been adopted as a response to energy needs in Ashaiman slums.
- Although community development has been used to aid electrification efforts in Ashaiman slums, there is not much known on how the practice has fared in these communities, hence the conduct of this study.

Objectives

This study sought to:

- Examine the challenges encountered in electrification efforts in Ashaiman slums.
- Ascertain the contributions that community development has made in relation to electricity provision in Ashaiman slums.

Literature Review

Challenges faced in electricity provision in urban slums:

- Society for Promoting International Research and Innovation (SPIRI)(2012):
The urban slums are even excluded in the planning of energy access by city authorities.
- Scott, Dunn and Sugden (2003): High electricity bills and insufficiency of electric power.
- Singh, Wang, Mendoza and Ackom (2015): Lack of ownership of land and poor demarcation of slums

Literature Review

Contributions of community development in electrification efforts.

- Baruah (2010): 100,000 households in Ahmedabad in India were electrified through community development efforts.
- Singh et al.(2015): Community engagement with electricity company in Brazil and India has improved the relationship between the people and the company, and this resulted in electrification efforts in some slums.
- Banks (2008): Community development efforts in Dhaka (Bangladesh) with support from Basti Basheer Odhikar Surakha Committee (BOSC) facilitated electrification efforts in poor settlements in the city.

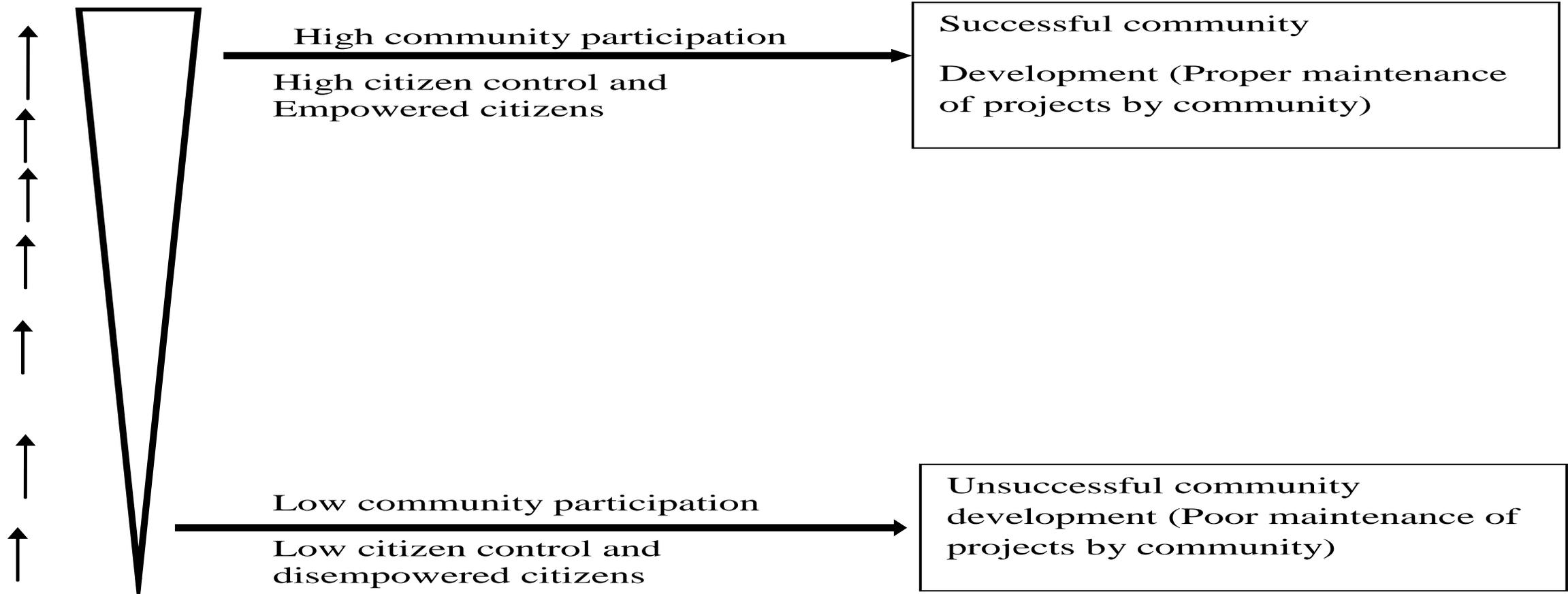
Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Community Participation

- Key contributors to this theory are Sherry Arnstein (1969) and John Abbott (1995).
- Community participation in development projects is in the form of a continuum or ladder ranging from the bottom where there is low participation to the top where there is high participation (Arnstein, 1969).
- The theory asserts that community participation is high in the implementation of projects in which the community members are involved in identifying problems and designing the projects.
- Community participation is low in projects that the inhabitants are not involved from the beginning and as such do not understand the processes and the essence of those projects.
- Community participation in development projects empowers the inhabitants to be able to utilise local resources to initiate, undertake and sustain self-help projects in their community (Abbott, 1995).

Figure 1: Theory of community participation

Community participation
continuum or ladder



Research Methodology

- Qualitative research strategy was adopted for the study (Merriam, 2009).
- The study was conducted in Ashaiman, a municipality in the Greater Accra region.
- Ashaiman is 5km north of Tema and 30km away from Accra central.
- The population of Ashaiman is 190,972 comprising of people from over 50 different ethnic groups (GSS, 2012).
- Specific slums selected for the study were **Tulaku**, **Taboo Line** and **Valco Flat**
- A sample of 30 participants were purposively sampled based on the knowledge of participants on the issues being discussed (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003)
- The sample consisted of 3 officials from the Department of Community Development (DCD), 3 chiefs, 3 assemblymen, 3 workers of Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), 9 slum dwellers and 9 staff of three NGO community development agencies that worked in Tulaku, Taboo line and Valco flat, all of which are slums in Ashaiman.

- Primary data used for the study were collected through interviews which were conducted at the homes and offices of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
- A voice recorder was used to collect the data after permission had been participants.
- Obtained data were transcribed and analysed using Braune and Clarke's (2006) framework of data analysis.
 - i. Data familiarisation
 - ii. Generation of initial codes
 - iii. Searching for themes
 - iv. Review of codes
 - v. Defining and naming themes
 - vi. Presentation of findings
- Some ethical issues that were considered include informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality and plagiarism.

Findings

Challenges faced in electrification efforts in slums

• Theft of materials

Some electrification efforts have suffered direly as a result of the theft of some materials which were meant for the projects.

“One problem that I think has led to many houses in this area not having electricity is theft. For some reason, some people who I believe live among us have been stealing some of the materials we use for electrification. It is a big challenge because it has denied some households electricity. The Dumsor (power cuts) too has not helped matters because some thieves too have stolen cables from already electrified areas when the light is off” (Mr Afede, slum dweller).

- **Sabotage by inhabitants**

Some community members have sabotaged some efforts that have been made to provide electricity. This sabotage has usually been in the form of non-attendance to meetings, refusal to make contributions decided by the communities, and resistance to change in the community.

“Sometimes, the attitudes of some community members is very demoralizing even to us, no matter the level of enthusiasm you have as a community developer...The resistance has caused delays in some of community development projects, and that affects our schedules and resource base badly” (Miss Quartey, community developer).

• Lack or inadequacy of resources

Many electrification efforts in the slums have been stifled by the lack of resources, mostly on the part of the slum dwellers.

“... It is one of the problems that has caused many people to be unable to pay for electrical connection. A lot of meetings and other efforts had to be made for ECG to extend electricity to this area. Unfortunately, many households in the area down there (points to the place) still don't have access to electricity because they cannot afford the connection fee. If you cannot pay for it, then ultimately paying electricity bills will also be a challenge for the people” (Hon. Adama, Assemblyman).

- **Ethnic and tribal differences**

The differences among ethnic and tribal descent of the Ashaiman slum dwellers has impeded some development efforts geared towards providing electricity in the communities.

“Tribal differences among the people also worry us. Sometimes some people from particular tribes feel they are being sidelined in some projects, because their leaders are not actively involved. They want to see their local leaders at the helm of affairs. If they do not see that, then some of become aggrieved ... With such thinking, they will not come for meetings and participate in that project” (Baba Yakubu, Chief).

• Lack of land ownership

Some electrification processes in the slums have been stalled by the insecure land tenure on the part of many slum dwellers in Ashaiman. Many slum dwellers in Ashaiman are squatters in people's properties or temporary occupying lands of which they are not the legal owners, and this has discouraged them from expending their resources on the development of such plots of land.

“Some slum dwellers stay on other people's land. Considering the fact that many of these people are barely surviving, it is somehow understandable that they will not use their little money to pay for electricity to be provided on the lands and properties which are not theirs. They could be evicted anytime and this has actually happened before here” (Hon. Kanazoe, Assemblyman).

- **Poor demarcation of settlements and housing structures**

The lack of ownership of land on the part of the slum dwellers is further aggravated by the poor demarcation of land in the urban slums and the dilapidated housing structures in the some slums. The poor demarcation of land in the communities has also stifled some electrification efforts .

“The settlement pattern in the slums is very haphazard and this alone is a challenge we have to contend with whenever we try to create a map for electrification efforts... This poor demarcation also creates the problem where people feud over small portions of land. If the communities we well demarcated, then we could conveniently identify the portions allocated for street and then plan the positioning of the poles along the street” (Kofi Aboagye, ECG worker).

Contributions made by community in electrification efforts

- **Improved sense of community ownership by slum dwellers**

Through community development efforts, the inhabitants have become committed to the improvement of the conditions in the slums, including electrification efforts. Now, many of the slum dwellers are willing to expend their resources on processes geared towards electrification of the households.

“Through our development projects in the community, apathy among the people has reduced ...the people are now able to work with us and other agencies on efforts that are geared towards getting them other amenities” (Madam Agyeiwaa, official of DCD).

- **Enhanced dialogue and relationship between some slums and ECG**

The series of meeting and processes between the slum dwellers and the officials of ECG has created a positive dialogue and healthy relationship between them. As a result of the frequent dialogue, these communities have gained the recognition of ECG.

“We have been in contact with the officials of ECG for a while now and it has been very fruitful.... Now they (ECG officials) recognize the slums as communities who also need electricity like other citizens of Ghana. As you have seen for yourself, electricity has been provided in some households and we are still trying to provide electricity for many other households. This will go a long way to reduce illegal connections in the community” (Hon. Tiekou, Assemblyman).

- **Campaigns on safe electricity use**

As a result of some community development efforts which were aimed at educating slum dwellers on the safe use of electricity, the rate of fire as a result of electrical faults has reduced in the slums. This has served as a leverage for the slum dwellers to ask for electricity provision in the parts of their communities where the inhabitants do not have legal access to electricity.

“We have embarked on some campaigns in which we have educated the people on safety precautionary measures that will help them avoid fire outbreaks... because the people are always ready to work together, such campaigns have been fairly successful, and I believe it has helped them a lot” (Aunite Kate, DCD official).

- **Improvement in housing conditions**

As a result of community development efforts embarked upon by both the inhabitants and some agencies, the housing situation in the slums has improved. As result of the improved housing, there has been increased efforts to provide electricity in the slums.

“You can see that there are some new houses in the neighbourhood... some old ones have been renovated so that they would get to a standard where ECG would not have a problem with providing electricity for them. The community has seen some development in terms of housing and electricity provision over the last two years” (Hon. Tiekku, Assembly member).

Discussion

- The finding on theft as an impediment to electrification efforts in Ashaiman is consistent with Scott, Dunn and Sugden's (2003) assertion the theft of materials which created shortage of resources compromised electrification efforts.
- Sabotage of projects which was found as a challenge has also been reported by Dukeshire and Thurlow (2002) on rural community development in Canada.
- Resource constraints as a challenge to electrification efforts has constricted electrification efforts in Latin American slums according to Kessides (2002).
- The finding on lack of land ownership as a challenge is consistent with findings of Singh et al. (2015) that lack of land ownership has impeded community development efforts in many urban communities.

Discussion continued

- Through the participation of the inhabitants in community development and electrification efforts, they have gained some expertise and this has been useful in maintaining improved situations in the slums. This supports Abbott's (1995) and Arnstein's (1969) arguments on the theory of community participation.
- Findings on the improved relationship and trust between the slum dwellers and ECG supports Singh et al.'s (2015) position that the meetings and dialogue between slum dwellers and electricity operators in Brazil and India has led to the establishment of trust, and this has galvanized the electrification efforts.

Conclusion

- Lack of electricity in urban slums is a key developmental problem that has stifled the development of Ashaiman slums.
- As a result of the legal lack of electricity, some slum dwellers have improvised to provide electricity through illegal means, leading to increased cost of electricity production in the country.
- This makes it imperative for some efforts to be made to legally provide electricity for the slums.
- Although slum electrification efforts has been stifled by many challenges such as theft, lack of land ownership, resource constraint and sabotage of efforts, the adoption of community development has helped some urban slum dwellers to gain access to electricity through legal means.

Recommendations

In order to promote slum dwellers' access to electricity, it is important to adopt measures to overcome the challenges encountered in the process. The following recommendations have been made from this study:

- Electrification efforts should be well coordinated and supervised in order resolve the theft of materials.
- The chiefs, ASHMA and police should institute patrol programmes so that theft and other crimes that have impeded community development and electrification efforts in Ashaiman slums can be resolved.
- Resource acquisition should be engendered by the stakeholders of electrification efforts.
- The government and the chiefs of the tribes in Ashaiman should expedite the demarcation of land and also grant many slum dwellers ownership of land in the slums.

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