

Community Development as the Bastion of Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The oft quoted slogan of sustainable development, it has been argued; cannot become achievable without a conscientious effort at ensuring an integrated and practical approach towards that goal from the grass root level. The grass roots is the countryside where it has been argued that most of those who eagerly respond to activities and schemes for primary industrialization are found; and from where the workforce and resources for heavy industries and operations come from. The locality participation model of the community development theory expounds the methods and processes of articulating the consciousness of the need for development among the citizenry at the community level, so that when this is achieved, the collectivity of such efforts in developmental programme by the various communities would form a solid foundation for all round national development. This paper submits that this approach if used to mobilise the people will achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: community, development, initiative, needs, and self-help.

Introduction

Community development is everyone's responsibility. It can be further stated that community development is a responsibility which begins from the bottom (that is, the grassroots and not from the top (which is the government). It can therefore be said that for effective community development to be achieved, the local inhabitants must know what it is all about, what it entails, and what it will result to. Akanimo (2000) holds the view that before community development will be achieved; there must be mass mobilization of the local populace to the consciousness of the need for development and how that development can be achieved. Essentially, community development has long been identified as a sine qua non for the general development of the larger society and the country in general. Ewa (1978) submits that it is this need for community development that gave rise to the balkanization of the country into smaller units right from the colonial era, starting from Sir Authur Richards. In this views, Sir Arthur Richards as the Governor of Nigeria had argued that dividing the country into units with the mandate and responsibility for the development of the smaller units vested in the people of such units will hasten the development of such regions, hence he went ahead and divided the country into three regions of North, East and West in 1946, with the explanation that the exercise is to allow each regions and their people to develop at their own pace (Orjiako 1981). Since then the balkanization exercise has been continuously and consistently carried out at both the national level and at the level of the local units themselves. This exercise resulted in Nigeria growing from three regions in 1946 to become four in 1963; and 12 in 1967; 19 in 1976; 21 in 1985; 30 in 1991 and 36 in 1995.

Conceptual Definition of Terms

Some terms in this work need special attention at explanation so that the intention and direction of using them will become clearer. These include:

1. Community

Sociologically, community is defined as a group of people who live in a geographically defined territory and share common socio-cultural attributes with similar socio-cultural institutions-political, economic, cultural and social. These may be common businesses, common methods of education, common world-view, common religious beliefs and practices etc. from the foregoing definition there are different types of communities depending on the size, origin, make-up and activities of each communities. To this end, two major types of communities are easily identifiable. These are (1) Traditional (primary) community, and (2) Secondary (Adopted) community. A traditional community (Gemeinschaft) is one which is usually small and the inhabitants can easily trace their origin to a common ancestor or community. The people of traditional communities are usually emotional and sentimental, which may be as a result of their common origin with everyone looking and perceiving one another as brothers and sisters, no matter the size of their community. Such communities usually have a common world view with common aspirations. The people from such communities are relatively equal in terms of achievements and progress in life. Secondary or adopted communities (Gessellschaft) are usually communities with people of diverse background-different ancestors, different cultures, different world view etc. the people are usually outgoing, less sensitive and less emotional. They aspire differently and engage in what fancies anyone's attention. They are very progressive and achievement minded. This type of community is usually associated with urban areas or large areas where it is usually difficult to establish the identity of those who make up; live and work in such communities. There is no common culture in such secondary communities.

Both types of traditional and adopted communities can be either open or closed. According to Obikeze (2006), an open community or society is one in which the inhabitants are free in all the ramifications of freedom-freedom of movement to wherever they desire to go; freedom to engage in whatever activity they choose; freedom to live their lives the way they choose. Closed societies or communities are the ones in which the opposite of the life in open societies obtain. The people have their lives, regulated by the government or other overseeing agencies. In some cases, the people choice of work to do, their lifestyle and their world-view is dictated by the government as was the case in the former communist bloc of the defunct Soviet Union and their allies. By the reason of folklore, and in some cases, actual history, most communities in Nigeria belong to the primary or traditional type. (Aliyu 1982).

2. Development

Desai (2008) submits that development is a generic term. This means that it has many uses and variants; which variety is clarified in the context of the definition of the usage. For the purpose of this work; development is defined as a permanent condition of positive growth, resulting in a higher level or condition, which is better than the previous stage or position. (Iheanacho 2000). In the views of Long John (1998), development is induced. It has to be worked to be attained. This is more apt for community development which is desired for the transformation of such places to become better and more conducive and more hospitable than they previously were. As a desired stage, the

attainment of any stage in community development has to be planned, programmed, and the process towards development implemented, evaluated, reviewed and ascertained.

3. Needs

Obikeze defines need as "the pressing problems which are important to be addressed in order to achieve development". Community development is about addressing identified needs of any community in order to transform them. Obikeze identifies the most pressing of the problems of a community as "felt needs" that is, the needs which the community feels most. The first step towards the attainment of development is to identify their "felt needs"; analyze them and map out strategies for addressing them; formulate the policies for such strategies, and implement such policies effectively. Awa (1986) explains that felt needs can be classified as;

- (1) Demonstrated felt needs that is, where the communities have proceeded with action to demonstrate their commitment to grapple with their most pressing need.
- (2) **Solicited felt need:** This type of need is one developed out of desire to be like others e.g. if the Government builds a hospital in a community, and another community Solicits for such a hospital to be built for it.
- (3) **Ascertained needs:** This is determined out of consultation and interaction with the people by the government or its officials.
- (4) **Generated felt need:** This defines need established through the mobilization of the people to sensitize them towards a particular need which exists but which their consciousness or awareness does not establish as a felt need.

4. Self help

According to Elekwa (1999), this is a programme of action actuated into a project proposal to be executed by the people themselves for their community; or with assistance that comes through the government or other developmental agencies during the conventionalization or during the implementation of such projects. Self help projects are evidence of effective and successful mobilization of the people which goes beyond creating awareness in the people to energizing them into action. Self help projects are resorted to as a result of the insensitivity of the government to the plight and need of the people or as a result of non or inadequate representation at the level of decision making in governance; compelling the people to take their own developmental destiny into their own hands.

5. Initiative

Initiative general means volition, resolution, expression of commitment, or pursuit. In this study, initiative goes beyond this general assertion to mean a determination and procedural engagement with a cause. Ejiofor (1978) says that it means:

- i. all the processes and decisions involved in conceptualizing community development,
- ii. deciding on the activities to bring about the desired developmental goal,
- iii. formulating workable and achievable policies;
- iv. commitment to pursuing the implementation of such blueprints relentlessly until the achievement of set goals;
- v. evaluating the process followed;

- vi. fashioning out a permanent action guideline for repetition of the execution of similar or other developmental projects;
- vii. outlining a maintenance scheme that will transform into a culture for the upkeep and retention of achieved developmental milestones.

Okafor (2008) submits that this developmental initiative makes developmental endeavours to become a culture among a people or a community. It becomes eventually an annual engagement during which either a developmental stock-taking is made, or developmental landmarks are reviewed, renewed, or new ones are initiated and carried out; this being the case with the August-break meeting syndrome among the communities of the Ibo nation.

Theoretical Framework

This work is predicated on the Principle of co-operation model of the locality participation theory of community development. Etuwor (1995) explains that the locality participation theory of community development has many variants namely:

1. Principle of co-operation model
2. Historio-cultural model
3. Social awareness model and
4. Mass mobilization model.

He says that the principle of co-operation model works through the dictum of "unity is strength" as the slogan to engender the spirit of co-operation among the people to unite for the developmental needs of their communities to be met. He concludes that the rallying call and basis of the success of this approach is co-operation for development which compels the people to look beyond every distraction or divisive tendencies and focus on the developmental objective decided upon.

Historio-cultural model, according to Etuwor is the community developmental approach which relies on the found memories of the developmental zeal of the people's pasts; and the cultural characteristics of "need to develop" inherent in some groups psyche, whose tendency is always to engage in one developmental agenda or the other. Examples of this approach in some areas where markets, roads, health centres, schools, churches of various designs and magnitude constructed on the past ages litter the landscape; and the present generation engage in more grandiose and gigantic projects such as the building of secondary school, construction of bridges, and other more expansive and expensive projects.

Social awareness model explains community development embarked upon as a result of the awareness and realization of the need for such developmental engagement by the people of such communities. Such awareness may come as a result of witnessing and observing what is going on in the communities or the realization of the need for such projects. Examples include the need to embark upon building a postal agency or post office upon realizing the importance of the dearth of medium of external communication by the community with the outside world; or the building of a market to attract outsiders to the economy of a community.

Mass mobilization model refers to a situation where community development is engendered through the propaganda, motivation, compulsion of the government or other developmental agencies. Such mobilization can be carried out through developmental campaigns, advertisements, visit of mobilization officers, radio and television jingles, television and radio discussions, promotions and directives (Ogbuagu 1999).

In all of these, the principle of co-operation model appears to be the most preferable model, hence it is recommended here. The reason for the recommendation includes:

1. It is a learning process which promotes co-operation and unity that ensures peace that cannot easily be forgotten but can be, and is easily transferred from generation to generation.
2. As a learning process, it is scientific and can be repeated and replicated from community to community promoting the inter-community co-operation of the operators.
3. It is cost effective because as a joint effect it eliminates unnecessary and extraneous expenses and the estimate is determinable and the cost predictable.
4. Its cost-benefit-analysis is positive because it involves felt need project chosen by all and which must be a necessity to the community and the benefit cannot be over-emphasized.
5. It is recommended for peace education.

Akwe (2008) is of the view that policies and programmes which involve the co-operation of all state holders in a particular community and which extends to other communities, are vehicles for inter-community integration which can bring about the needed stability that would create a conducive environment for good governance and afford the government to save the resources which would have been spent on security matters, and divert them into beneficial developmental goals.

Community development can only be achieved through the co-operation and involvement of all and sundry, especially by all those who have a stake in the community whether within it or outside of it. It therefore becomes necessary to take measures for explain developmental proposals to the proper understanding of all in such a manner that everyone knows their roles and express their willingness and ability to fulfill those roles and play their parts so that the developmental objectives will be achieved to the attraction and interest of others in other communities. Such other communities would be attracted in such a way that they will commission their own projects such that their own projects would complement the projects in the other communities. In this way, integrated community development would have been achieved in a way that a network of inter-community dependence and relationship would be established thus promoting peaceful co-existence, unity and co-operation.

Conclusion

Community development is evidently an instrument of peace, unity and co-operation, and a platform for building solidity part and legitimacy for the government. The principle of co-operation model of the locality participation theory of community development makes community development an enterprise that would highlight and priorities development projects from community to community in a manner that would ensure the effective integration of the communities and create a network of mutual dependence, advantageous benefits and peace; bringing about stability that would promote good governance and the conducive environment for greater dividends of bigger and higher development projects to such communities by the government.

Recommendations

1. The issue of community development should be taken more serious by the government and her official as well as the agencies and organizations engaged in development issues.
2. Grants, aids, support, logistics should be used as incentives to attract communities to engage in development projects.
3. Trained personal and officials should train and equip local people for community development in the communities

4. Government should commend communities by augmenting their developmental efforts with more projects that would attract other communities to engage in development in order to get their own projects from the government.
5. Community development should be made courses of study in post-primary and tertiary institutions and such programme adequately funded and professionalized.
6. Prizes, certificates, awards should be given to outstanding communities and such projects taken over by the government for running and management.

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