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## Rural development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: The developmental strategies in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The development of communities and villages in Nigeria depends on the strategies and methods of development put in place by the leaders. Community development is part of the national development. The development strategies and actions of government at all levels have not really helped to enhance rural communities. Rural communities suffer in many things including the following: urban migration, lack of social amenities, poor social infrastructures, diseases, health care systems etc. These made the economic gaps that exist between rural and urban communities very large. The improvement of community development in Nigeria demands that, attention should be given to the rural areas for development. The purpose and aim of this paper is to ensure that rural development is achieved as part of national agenda

for development. The data for this study are secondary data from the works of scholars and journal of government services etc. The study deals with the approaches, strategies and the challenges faced by the rural communities in Nigeria. The paper highlighted that, in keeping a sustainable rural community development in Nigeria, awareness of the citizenry must be created; empowerment programs must be made available, the increment in the level of participants by the rural dwellers in the development processes must be taken into account, Education of the members of the community by awarding scholarships must also be taken cognizance of and not just allowing the youths to participate, they should also be trained and employed thereafter. With this, a sustainable community development can be achieved.

**Keywords:** Rural communities, development, strategies, participatory approach

### Introduction

A community is a physical location that has precise boundaries that are known and accepted by all. It means so many things to several people in term of its application of the word. A community could be a city, town, village where we reside. It is a cultural heritage, language and belief or shared interests amongst people living together in a location. These social units of people share common values, and they live in a place sharing common historical heritage, living near each other, speaking the same languages. Development is assumed to mean change that brings about positive expansion and growth leading to transformation. It is no longer news that development is vital to the economic growth of a nation, as it improves the social lives of the people. It is expedient to note that, economy of a nation cannot also grow without the improvement in the social and economic lives of the people within. Development implies change nothing more and nothing less because it involves the transformation from one level to another level that enhances good living standards from what was previously experienced.

Community development therefore, is multidimensional process that involves, productivity, health, income, welfare, education and social amenities such as, electricity and infrastructure to stimulate growth and better standards of living amongst a giving society and the people within that society.

In community development activities, such efforts in political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors are considered in the process of changing or transforming the communities to benefit the less-privileged ones and even the privilege once. (Penarands, 1994) stated that, Community development is therefore the active movement of the citizen in the affairs that concerns and affect their standards of living. For the community to develop, there are structures that should be in place that would help to control the activities that affect them. These structures enable people to participate and do things in the best ways as it would benefit them and the society. Their visions, ideas, capabilities to confront any emerging situation are vital hence, their involvement to use their experiences to solve the challenges of underdevelopment facing them is critical to development. The assistance and helps from outsiders complement their own actions, research and efforts to change the community for the better. Several strategies are adopted in the process of bringing community development. It should be noted that, community and rural development strategies are the same, because community development is a strategy for rural development. The problem addressed on rural development, is the organizing of both humans and natural resource to provide solution to the issues that

Bothers on poverty, lack of social amenities, and improved standard of living of rural areas caused by the approaches from the government and non-governmental agencies and the people.

Community development involves the designing of an improved economic and social life process for the whole community and initiatives. Rural development is holistic in nature involving governmental initiatives while community development is an inclusive process where they identify their objectives, vision, needs and take action to develop and actualize the objectives through collective efforts and practices in the community.

The integrated rural development approach that operates under the agriculture development programme ADPs came under the third nature development plan in Nigeria sponsored by the World Bank that brought about some of the programmes that changes the life of the rural communities. Rural development made it possible for rural women, men, and children, to have access to life's standard requirements (Chambers, 2005) <sup>[8]</sup>.

The focus on community development is on the people, their social life and environments. Their participation in the political, social and economic matters helps in effecting the needed change through community development efforts. In this regard, the main reason and feature for the introduction of integrated rural development program is for the poor in the rural area having such objectives on agricultural productive income and employments. These efforts and approaches identify local initiatives, ideas utilization and mobilization of the available resources and self-radiance that is vital to both materials and rural development strategies.

### Statement of the problem

Nigeria is a country that most of her rural communities are not cared for and due to the bad states; there exists mass movement to the urban cities. According to Anyanwu (1994) <sup>[3]</sup>, he opined that, majority of Nigerians that live in the rural communities are characterized by illiteracy, disease, neglect, exploration and equality are been oppressed by the communities that they belong. While according to Adelemo (2003) <sup>[1]</sup>, most of our rural areas suffered from inadequate provision and lack of employment opportunities, disease, malnutrition, death rate etc. Rural communities in Rivers State, Nigeria are fraught with underdevelopment crises despite the accrual of wealth from oil and gas (Osaghae, 1995) <sup>[9]</sup>. This shows the gap or problem between the rural and urban communities economically in the country.

It is prevalent that, citizens cannot afford good medical services, social amenities and infrastructures to develop their living standards. The problem caused creates the difficulty in social and economic development that heavily makes the poor not to acquire the basic needs of life. The rate of illiteracy, lack of scholarship and funds for better education, social political revelation in the resistance to accept change also affect the community development process.

In the work of Dike (2009) <sup>[10]</sup>, he attributed these setbacks to the poor leadership styles that affect our coming together. He continues by saying how well the community grows economically, political, and socially depends on the level of responses of the political leadership in handling issues of basic social, economic and environmental challenges faced by these rural communities. The challenges are one factor that hinders the transformation of the rural communities looking at the various strategies put in place.

According to Fergusson and Dickson (1999), the predominant harsh faced by the rural dwellers due to lack of social economic facilities led to the mass movement to the urban cities that causes crises, and other violence crimes, such as political instability, unemployment, and crime rates. It is with this regards that one may say that, there is the urgent need of addressing the problem of community development with renewal of strategies to curb the incessant constraints experiences that hinders developments. Considering the time lapse of papers addressing the crisis on community development, the need to study and bridge the gaps becomes more glaring.

### Methodology

The method used in this paper is the secondary data collection method from the relevant sources of research, scholarly works, articles and government sources. These data were intensively reviewed to gather the needed information that will help to identified and proffer solutions to the problem facing community development process in Nigeria.

### Community Development

The concept community development has to do with the process whereby community members come together to take actions that affect them collectively, and determine the way forward to solve the problems faced by them. The need for their economic, cultural and social environmental wellbeing emanates from these actions. It evolves from a group of leaders to the very large community, a grass root movement that enable collective interest for healthy lifestyle and reduction of poverty. Such actions and efforts create jobs, and improved the economic and social wellbeing of the citizens. The process promotes local and commercial participation of everyone to implement strategies which will improve their lifestyles.

Akponuvie (2010) states that, community development includes, coordinated activities, all strategies and intervention activities at the community level that is aimed at bringing in economic and social development. In his work he cited Idorbe (1989) for the classification of three major approaches to community development in Nigeria and they are; Extension approach, project approach and the service approach. He further said that the extension approach involves directly teaching the rural people to improve their methods and techniques of farming, how to read, write and their health care system. The project approach is motivated by the government to improve the social and economic conditions of the rural dwellers. For example, government farming estates and industry. Service approach to community development deals with the active participation of the local people, which is a strategy for community development as applied in Nigeria. The service approach involves the provision of social amenities like health and maternity centers, water, dispensaries, postal services, electricity, etc. According to Anyanwu, (1994) <sup>[3]</sup> the united nations (1978) as quoted, explain or considered community development as a process by which the efforts of the people are united with those of the government agencies to improve the social, economic and cultural lives of communities to integrate these communities into the mainstream of the national life and contribute their quota to national development. This implies the total involvement of the local people into the process of their environmental life improvement and development. In the same vein, the economic commission of Africa as cited

by Hanachor (2008) defined community development as the outcome of a series of quantitative changes occurring among rural population.

A process where certain measures are put in place for implementation with and for the inhabitants of the rural areas with the main aim of improving their social economic condition.

Community development implies change for the betterment of the rural areas. The concept suggests that people are not whatever circumstances detect for them. These people have the creative capacity to improve their environment if supported with good policies and commitment are created. Nzeneri (1995) in his definition attribute it to hard work that community development is “self-help and hard work freely undertaken by the adult and youths through the inspired visions for better standard of living for the country as a group”. While in the work of Barikor (1984) who gave an all-embracing contemporary definition of community development as “an amalgam of many dynamic and complementary factors involving education, economic, socio-political, cultural efforts to emancipate the community from retrogressive tradition, poverty and disease and ignorance.

The essence of community development is to engage members of the different rural or urban communities with meaningful engagement or business that will better their standard of living. This will enable them stand, depend and be able to proffer solution to their problems before seeking the support, and intervention of the government.

### **Community Development Strategy and Approaches**

In the proposition or agitations for community development, there are certain approaches and strategies that can be apply or are applied to ensure that the essence of development is achieved. As cited in the work of Bassey and Antai (2014) <sup>[5]</sup> community development theories provide a guide to what should be done in a given situation. They represent intellectual attempts and explanatory accounts by scholars of various disciplines to explain the presence or otherwise of development in the different rural communities. Below are some of these theories that explain the theoretical application of the concept community development;

#### **1. Community Development Functional Approach**

This is one approach that explains how the society works and are stable. It originates from anthropology and can also be called structural functionalism. Functionalism was a concept that explains or interprets the parts of the society or community on their contributions and how these contributions help in stabilizing the society. Each community with its distinct part forms part of the society. They are organized and structured to perform certain function that contributes to solving the society’s problem which may or may not have consequences, thus shaping the society. The functional approach works with parts of the society, as it related with system theory which contains interdependent or interconnected parts that works together for the betterment of the society.

#### **2. Community Development System Approach**

System theory involves a process of working towards practical prescriptions for behavior that support community improvement, though it is not an easy task. Bertalanffy, (1968) as cited in Bassey *et al.*, (2014) <sup>[5]</sup> community are parts

of the large society, hence each community should be structured and should work for the sustenance and development of the community and the society at large. They interact with the outside world (environment) where they equally get their support and later transmit the outcome or service or raw materials into the society. So the collective efforts of the entire communities in both the rural and urban areas work together, interact and gain from each other. None can survive without the input of the other.

#### **3. Community Development Integrated Approach**

This approach is designed to explain how the various parts with different activities are put together based on their functions. All the community development projects, activities are organized and designed to improve the standard of living of the people. According to Anyanwu, (2004), as cited in Bassey *et al* (2014) <sup>[5]</sup> the main emphasis is on rational development and coordination of all the principal factors required for community development. Integrated approach therefore, has a distinct and comprehensive approach to the situation, where proper planning process and proper allocation of resources of the population are set out to be implemented by certain institutions mandated to do so for the benefit of the society. It creates confidence in the people themselves, getting involves in what will benefit them harnessing their potentials both human and capital resources for the purpose of promoting the development of their community.

#### **4. Community Development Holistic Approach**

This approach involves the total involvement of all and the processes needed to achieve it aim. According to Ogilvy (1979) <sup>[15]</sup>, holistic approach as a concept involves rational thought. That is the need for thinking about a particular approach or method is not need rather all should be thought about for effective administration of the project. This strategy came as a result of the failures experienced from other sector or sectors. Prior to this time, community development has been only premised on the natural activity of man through agriculture. But in the present world, other sectors aided agriculture to thrive and such other sectors need to be incorporated into the community development system. The need for machineries to process the products, capital, manpower, storage, modern technologies, etc.

This theory suggests that there is one piece of the system by which everything depends. There are cases when thought was given only to technology designed to increase production with the result that on it introduction the cultural system will be destroyed and another thought emerged. Modern technologies have been introduced only to have the cultural system prevent them from reaching the anticipated level of increased production. It is imperative that the holistic system approach guard against improvement in only one section that at the long-run will bring bad consequences in the other sectors, which the adverse effect will be unbearable than the intended benefits.

#### **5. Community development involvement or participatory approach**

According to Spiegel (1968) citizen participation is the process that can meaningfully knit program to people. The participation of the individuals to the development of the community is a welcome development that need not to be over-emphasized. Their involvement in the projects that will

benefit them is the hallmark of why community involvement plays a role in the development of a nation and has been defined as actions of community playing a main role in the discourse of rural development specialists and policy makers (Speer & Vasquez, 2013; Torgerson & Edwards, 2012) <sup>[20, 21]</sup>. Their involvement in the projects that will benefit them is a grass-root approach.

Citizens are allowed to participate in the decision making for the projects, and this tie them to making sure that such projects are not abandoned as its involves them on how the implementation was decided. Through participation people learn. It makes for justice in decision making as people have a say and influence on the collective decisions. Community participation concerned the issues on the social development and the creation of opportunities for the involvement of people in the political, economic and social life of a state, nation at large. Direct involvement in local affairs and administration. Community participation is the creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development, United Nations document (1981) as cited by (Smith 2006) <sup>[17]</sup>. In making community development to work, the underpinning factor is that, since everyone member of the community will not participate or be made to participate, in the community development projects or programme, there is the need for a good representation of all segment of the community, men, woman, and youths irrespective of their economic status, political affiliation, religion or level of education should be involve in the planning, and implementation of the programme as designed for the improvement of their community.

#### **6. Community development Self- help approach**

In the work of Ugwu (2009) self-help is emphasized not only as a goal to be achieved, but a strategy for the accomplishment of broader development objectives. Self-help is tie to the premise that people can collaborate to solve community problems themselves.

The zeal in them and the desire to better their community pushed well-meaning abled bodied men and women to think of helping to develop their community through their means without being coerced into doing so. Therefore, looking at it all, self-help approach did not only emphasize on what the community will achieved or benefit but on how collectively these fits one achieved through the contribution and collaboration of all.

#### **Problems and challenges of community development in Nigeria**

Considering the facts that several approaches and strategies have been adopted that make community development an asset, there are so many other challenges that hindered the activities of community development in Nigeria.

#### **1. Culture and Tradition**

According to Hannachor (2005) culture is a way of life of a people, the totality of their values, custom, norms, and traditions. The belief that people have about their traditions sometimes make it difficult for community development to take place, as these customs would make addicted citizens to always go against any modern project that will improved and change their pattern of life. For example, bringing light to a community that have so much believe in witchcraft would be

very difficult because, from contemplating on the planned project of bringing light to that community for development, there will be intense resistance from the members of that community.

#### **2. Finance and Affluence**

Most communities that do not have rich men cannot undertake certain projects and even though, contributions are made through mobilizing and sensitizing people, the funds realized would not be enough to undertake a project. So, finance is one key challenge to community development. From the federal allocation, states and local governments are giving enough funds, that if a certain percentage is set out for community development, most of the drift and migration to the urban areas would have ended because development of communities would have improved. All we have today is that, most of the local communities are still in impoverished states due to the fact that, Local Governments tend to share the funds amongst themselves and at most times concentrates on their own community leaving others in the dark.

#### **3. Mobilization of Community Members**

Community mobilization is a process through which action is stimulated by a community itself, or by others, that is planned, carried out, and evaluated by a community's individuals, groups, and organizations on a participatory and sustained basis to improve the health, hygiene and education levels so as to enhance the overall standard of living in the community (Delgado-Gaitán & Concha, 2001) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Community development experts faced the problem of mobilizing the members of the communities. This is because of the perception and actions toward changes and modern innovations. In the past this has been a serious problem to deal with and which has also affected the growth of development in most rural area in Rivers State. According to Community Mobilization and AIDS", A group of people have transcended their differences to meet on equal terms in order to facilitate a participatory decision-making process. In other words, it can be viewed as a process which begins a dialogue among members of the community to determine who, what, and how issues are decided, and also to provide an avenue for everyone to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

#### **4. Adaptation for Change**

The term development encompasses change, is a truism. For those that traveled out, interacts with other communities' members, certain good perception about development and change are welcomed and accepted. But in every community, it is not every person that can be successfully convinced to accept changes. Hence, adaptation for change becomes a bigger problem for practitioners as though even if the government decides to establish certain projects in communities, the adaptation to this change is always difficult. Adapting to change is a critical problem that most development initiatives face.

#### **5. Crisis and Conflict**

In most cases, whenever there is a new project programme in a community there is always conflict of ideas amongst the citizens and this usually led to crises and once this happen, such project is abandoned in totality. These problems may start from the allocation of the site where you would see personal and selfish demands youths and the chiefs. Imagine

asking the government to pay matching ground fee before bringing development to your community. The question would be who is trying to favour who? To the best of our knowledge the government is trying to favour the community yet the selfish interest of the youths and chiefs won't allow for just achievements.

### **Strategies to address community development challenges:**

From the problems highlighted above, the strategies that can both sorts out for the peaceful execution of community development projects and programmes are;

#### **1. Increasing the level of community member's participation**

The people from these communities should be given the opportunity to be involved in this programme that will benefit them. And assuming, the required manpower to support the projects from the community are not available, there is the need for training as this will attract more participants. Spiegel (1968) rightly said that, citizen participation is the process that can meaningfully knit program to people. When these people are allowed to participate in the decision-making process of the development within these areas, it gives them a sense of belongingness which will in turn affect their commitment level to the need to bringing such development to the community.

They will be obligatory to the goals and objectives towards bringing change. However, if they are not being allowed to participate, they will feel resentful and a resentful person is a dangerous person. They will not share the philosophy behind bringing such development to the community. Again, there is need to consult them at all level, let them feel a sense of "I am part of this change" as such they would strive to uphold it.

#### **2. Creating more Awareness**

Creating community awareness and the need for participation; the degree to which this awareness is done, determined the level of acceptance and participation of community members in the project. It is a truism that resistance to change is a human condition that have affect the growth of development in many sectors not just development of rural areas in question. However, creating awareness on the need for communities to embrace development is a key element to fighting their resistance. There is need to let these people know the possible benefit and they should allow for such development within the area as it will really change their long held boxed mentality about development. Creating awareness is a necessary element for development. Those in charge should call the council heads, chiefs and even the youths to create a mutual understanding why there is need for development within a given community.

#### **3. Promoting Empowerment**

Promoting empowerment for the economic growth of the community through projects or programmes. Once these members are empowered through training, orientation, the level of their resistance to change will be reduced or totally eliminated, as those trained and empowered will see the need for participating in the project development. The implication is that, community development revolves around people and these people are those that will participate and work for the increase of these projects or programme in the communities. After you must have trained them, there is a need to also

empower them with tools, equipment and certain financial aid that will give them a smooth start of their own businesses, which will also allow them focus on their own path to greatness. This means, training members of these communities is not enough but also empowering them will go a long way revamping the system.

#### **4. Training and Employment**

This is also another key strategy to be identified with. The members of the communities should be trained by these companies to carry out the development programs and not just about allowing them participate, they should also be employed as or absorbed into the system as this would also send a clear signal that the development is not just to beautify the communities but also human intensive. Human investment is capital intensive, this means, when the members of the communities are trained, they in turn give back to the communities in varieties of ways. Also, there is need to employ and train the youths and elders of the community for the sustenance of the development initiatives. Studies have shown that most organizations carrying out these development programs tend to come with their workers without the need to employ people within these communities but this goes a long way to creating conflict amongst these communities which becomes a barrier to development.

#### **5. Education**

It should be noted that, community development comes with a lot of things and not just the infrastructural aspect of it. While we most times look at the infrastructural aspect development, we should not also forget the need to educate these youths and elders by awarding scholarships to study to any level because whether you like it or not, education is the tool that put a smile on the face of development. If these people are not educated, these facilities cannot be maintaining well, there will be destruction and stealing of these facilities not minding the benefits it provides for the community. So, educating the youth not by training alone, but also giving them opportunities to school to any level by this, the people in the community would have the sense of value to the development.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper unravels the needs for community development to rise and the communities themselves to fully participate for the success of developing the rural societies in the country. Resistance to change is a human condition, but once the members of the communities are involved in the decision, planning and implementation of such community development projects and also trained and employed thereafter, the resistance and challenges faced in the implementation of community development projects will be reduced if not eliminated. The study concludes that, there is a strong relationship between the strategies of these study and community development in rural areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

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