



The role of community-based organization in community development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Communities in Nigeria, often contend with various social, economic and environmental issues. These problems—insecurity, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, lack of opportunity for growth, pollution, poor health facility as well as other social issues, have significant impact on the development of communities in the country. Although, solutions to these issues, require the attention of government, however, the failure of government's top-down planning approach adopted long ago, have made it difficult for communities to achieve significant progress in addressing these challenges, hence, the reliance on local participation through community based organizations. The study explores literatures on the role of community-based organizations in community development in Nigeria. The study adopts content analysis with in-depth literature review as methodology. Reviews of related literatures indicate that churches, women associations, healthcare agencies, town unions, age groups and other community based organizations have been making significant contributions in the development of communities in Nigeria.

Keywords: community, development, community development, community-based-organization

Introduction

From prehistoric era to modern day civilization, humans have been living in groups in various settlements in the form of caves, hamlets, villages, towns as well as well cities, these human settlements, simply referred to as community in prehistoric period, were often narrowly conceptualized in terms of place. However, the term community, extends beyond this narrower perspective of place, and include relationships as well as collective political power (Gusfield cited in Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) ^[8]. In other words, community have commonalities as well as shared values, beliefs, norms and purpose that bind and maintain their existence. Given the relationship that exist among individuals or groups, community is formed through network of individuals with common interest, knowledge and understanding within a given sphere of life. Notably, the link in social interactions which gives it sense of community, to a considerable degree views networks as community (McMillian & Chavis, cited in Florin & Wandersman, 1990) ^[8]. The existence of these communities imply sheltering and defending members from human aggressions as well as other predators, protection of members' interest, improvement in skills and knowledge, provision of food for the survival of members as well as reserves in time of famine, division of labour wherein some specialize in creating goods for exchange while others facilitates the exchange processes in an open and protected manner, and a host of other relevant activities that preserve and maintains their existence.

Notably, humans as well as the ties that bind them are seen as the central focus in community and without which, community becomes a mere collection of physical objects such as lands, building as well as roads and street just to mention but a few. However, over time, humans experience changes in social interaction as well in the environment, these changes elicit the need for development in various sphere of life. As opined by Shaffer cited in Cavaye (2001) ^[7], development implies the creation of wealth. Christenson, Fendley and Robinson cited in Cavaye (2001) ^[7] view development as a continual social, environmental as well as economic improvement that preserve the environment, ensuring vital social system that promotes collaboration, equity and freedom; and a diversified, competitive as well as accessible vital economy. However, development triggered by improvement in technology, political awareness, socio-cultural aspirations as well as economic development, induce the desire for higher standard of living by members of the community as well as improvement in material and human resources. Development enhances the level and quality of life of the inhabitants of communities, create and expand local regional income as well as provide opportunities for skill/knowledge acquisition needed for employment generation, and as well instill and reinforced desired behavior, necessary for preserving and maintaining the resources of the environment.

Extending the views, Kenny (2007) ^[7], states that the principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective actions were the basis upon which community development was founded. Notably, social movements which is seen as the principle of collective action originated in the 1840s with the Sanitary Reform Movement as well as the housing reforms (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Although, these movements were christened “civil society” or “community regeneration” within the period and were carried out by both government and non-governmental organization, the term community development as opined by Phillips

and Pittman (2009), emanates within 1950s and 1960s, as a result of the need in alleviating the living condition of inhabitants residing within slums in rural areas as well as the need in rehabilitating declining urban areas. As a social movement (that is, civil rights as well as the anti-poverty movement), it acts as a catalyst in achieving social, political, economic as well as environment changes in communities.

Although, these movements began in Europe as well as in the United States, community development in Africa as well as Nigeria were attributed to the arrival of Europeans during the period of the colonial rule. As opined by Skinner (2010) ^[21], the need for mass education by the colonial administration in Nigeria, with a focus on adult literacy within the rural areas accounts for community development initiative. However, like other climes, the rural areas in Nigeria which housed most inhabitants of the country and serves as support for economic growth in the country, often contend with various forms of social malaise like high level of poverty, deprivation, lack of basic amenities, services and lack of opportunities for growth. For instance, there exist inadequate potable drinking water, lack of good road network, poor health facility, inadequate conducive learning environments within the rural communities, thus, rendering these areas underdeveloped. Extending the views above, Smyth (2004) ^[22], reports that communities in Nigeria contend with varieties of issues ranging from agriculture, health, to transportation as well as infrastructure and in a bid of tackling these issues bedeviling rural development, prompted community development.

According to Mayo (1994) ^[15], community development has been a major concern to various international agencies (United Nations and World Bank), regional, national government, non-governmental as well as community-based organization over the years. However, community-based organization is an organization that primarily provide social services within a locality. It is mainly characterized as a service oriented non-profit organization depending on voluntary contributions in enhancing the quality of life of residents within a locality. Notably, mistrust in the central authority precipitated by inadequate participation of locales in the bottom-up strategy as well as the disappointment of governments' top-down method calls for indigenous institutions like community based organizations (Abdulmalik, 2021) ^[1]. Although, it is a non-profit organization, community-based organizations do not exist in a vacuum, as it is absolutely necessary for these organizations to develop and maintain local relationship as well as partnership with state as well as federal agencies and support from public, private and non-profit sectors (Phillips & Pittman, 2009).

Indeed, the central focus of community based organizations anchors on the development of the community and economic well-beings of all indigenes within a given locality, however, diverse names in different places have been use in conceptualizing it. Biddle and Biddle cited in Owolabi (2018) views these to include "community development associations", "neighborhood councils" "united community" just to mentioned by a few. Also, in Nigeria, different community based organizations emerge in various locality taking different forms, like women's associations, credit groups, youth clubs, cooperatives, farmer associations, age grades, committee of friends among others. These organizations play vital roles in the development of communities, as they act as a veritable tool through which members discuss socio-economic issues as well as plans of actualizing desired changes. Against this background, the study tends to examine the role of community based organization in community development in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Concept of Community

The concept of community has gone through various definitions, although with similar perspective. For instance, Mattessich and Monsey cited in Phillips and Pittman (2009), view community as people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other as well as a place where they live. Similarly, community is seen as a location or a collection of individuals with a common interest or tie whether in close proximity or widely separated (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Substantiating on the views, Usman, Deepali and Kabiru (2018) conceptualize community as a people or group of people who share common interest or functions for instance, farming community, educational community, culture or religion just to mention but a few. Accordingly, this group may not include everyone within the geographical area or boundary, but only those individuals who have a particular interest or function in common. From the perspectives above, it is evident that the concept of community encompasses physical location, interest as well as other ties that span across wider range of communication like the web community, social media and the likes. However, over time, the inherent desire in humans in improving their standard of living, as well as humans' curiosity about their environment and how to protect their neighborhood, elicit the need for development in community.

Concept of Development

The concept of development is often use in describing as well as explaining economic and social changes around the globe. Although, it is often use in explaining economic change, it is not absolutely an economic fact rather it is a multi-dimensional process relating reorganization and reorientation of economic and social system. However, development raises humans' living standards, create situation suitable for the growth of individuals' self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems as well as institutions capable of promoting human dignity and respect. Also, it supports the values of freedom, equity, tolerance, solidarity, Respect for nature as well as collective responsibility. Notably, Green and Haines (2002), view development as a structural change and enhancement within community systems involving economic change as well as the running of institutions and organizations. In other words, development entails conscious action that brings about

desired structural change. Extending, Lawal (2011), views development as a fundament requirement to the growth and support of any vibrant nation.

Development affords humans the opportunity to live a healthy, creative and longer life, as well as access to resources required for quality of life. Notably, the process of development creates an atmosphere required by humans, either individually or in groups to enhance their full potentials in order to have a reasonable opportunity of leading productive and creative lives worthy of living. Although, priority for development is mostly focused at the national level, issues facilitating social progress such as education and training, health, housing and shelter, water and sanitation, social protection; and social justice as well as inclusion within the community is highly desirable for the wellbeing of individuals, hence, the concept of community development.

Concept of Community Development

Community development is a collaborative, collective action taken by local people to enhance the long term social, economic, and environmental conditions of their community. In other words, it is a process whereby people get together, communicate, identify important needs, plan and take action to resolve problems and achieve results which are desired by the community. Ismail cited in Usman, Deepali, and Kabiru, (2018) ^[24], view community development as a development approach embracing the inputs of persons, governmental and non-governmental organizations, collective ideas, action and contribution of each unit, identifying with different roles for increasing the economic and social well-being of the individuals for national growth. Notably, the essence of community development among other include enhancing the quality of life within the rural level, promote equitable communal life, reduce poverty and unemployment in the community as well as provide governmental services, explore and use technical assistance available outside the community, rural industrial development, sanitation, cooperation, recreational facilities, rural education planning (Obodoechi as cited in Usman et al., 2018).

Although, the term community development emerged within the 1950s in the Western world, the concept is not new in Africa, as there were traces of community development even before the wake of colonialism. Notably, communities in Africa long ago have been making several efforts through cooperative actions in ensuring the achievement of social and economic needs. For instance, in Nigeria, rural dweller had long ago learned to supply functional as well as physical facilities for the community through assemblage of resources. This, evident in the building of fortification, moats and tranches round their settlements, shrines, churches as well as mosques for religious gathering (Adegboyega cited in Adekola, 2012) ^[2]. Similarly, the existence of various gerontocratic type of government simply referred to as age grade system prior to the colonial era in Nigeria, depicts the existence of self-help in community in improving their standard of living. Although, it is the responsibility of government to protect and enhance the quality of life through provision of policies and various intervention plans, however, citizens have realized that government alone at all level cannot provide all their needs. This, compel the coming together of individuals to form associations capable of providing some of the social and economic needs within their locality, hence, the concept of community based organization.

Community-Based Organization

Historically, the foundation of community based organization is traceable to Elizabethan England during which Elizabethan poor law in England (1601) was established to provide services to the needy. Although the London Society of organizing charitable relief and repressing Mendicancy as well as the settlement house movement towards the end of the seventeenth century followed suit, notably, the modern community based organization is credited to the period of the American Civil War, in which charity groups were designed to offer assistance to those who were displaced, disabled, or impoverished by the war. However, as opined by Fisher cited in Lubari (2019), the period between 1980s and 1990s, marked the expansion of CBOs to a point wherein it is being referred to as a movement, and the process of community organizing expanded into many community organizations.

Generally, community based organizations are seen as a segment of civil society, in addition to non-governmental organizations, social movements and other related associations, whose aim is to operate within communities that receive less attention from government agencies as well as other relevant private sectors. It is a non-profit and non-governmental organization which is either private or public, representing communities and engage in activities capable of fulfilling the human, educational, environmental as well as security needs of inhabitants within the community. In other words, Community-Based organization characterizes an organization residing within the local community whose management often involves locals, and is aimed at identifying important issues affecting residents and as well, provide solutions in tackling the issues of concern through program design, implementation and evaluation. Buttressing, Caldwell, Reyes, Rowe, Weinert and Israel (2015), view community-based organization as a form of private or public non-profit organization representing a community or a particular area of a larger neighborhood whose aim is meeting a specific need in that community. Abegunde cited in Owolabi (2018), view CBO as a charitable, non-profit, non-governmental organization operating in as extremely confined location with the same equal participation whose main goal is the development of the community and economic well-being of all members in the community.

Despite being a localized institution, the activities as well as responsibilities of CBO's is not limited to minor issues within the communities but span across broader issues like crime and poverty existing outside the community that portend devastating effects on the community itself. This, CBO's achieve through the process of

closely monitoring how events unfold outside the community sphere of influence and how solutions are being provided in issues of concern, and also involves collaborating with other CBO's operating in other communities. Notably, as a non-profit and non-governmental organization, CBO's fulfill their responsibilities in their localities primarily through the contribution of members and not reliance on government. Abegunde (2009) views CBO's as a tool for grassroots' participation in indigenous programmes and projects in an attempt of satisfying local needs, and viewed the participation in the form of cash or kind, levied or free choice. Moreover, funds required in executing projects as well as programmes is generated from individual donations, fundraising efforts, grants via funding agencies, or directly from other nonprofits. However, the participation of CBOs in addressing communal needs is being undermined with problems of fund raising, mismanagement of resources, illiteracy, cultural beliefs, politics and corruption just to mention but few.

Notably, CBOs originate due to governments' poor attention toward issues confronting communities, as planning long ago assume - top down approach rather than - bottle-top planning system (World Economic Forum for Africa, 2014), thus reducing citizens' confidence in government, as beneficiaries in the community were denied participation in the planning phase of projects. Observably, CBO have been label different names in different places, these, as opined by Agboola cited in Owolabi (2018) include community development associations, neighborhood councils and united community. More so, community based organizations are categorized in the form of voluntary organization, professional services agencies as well as other informal groups, and organizations found in these categories include unions, women associations, age grades, credit groups, committee of friends, churches, health care agencies, social services groups, fraternities as well as clubs, just to mention but few. Corroborating, Awolabi (2018) categorized CBOs according to types which include – Users associations, micro-finance institutions, village development committees, common interest groups as well as networks of CBOs. More so, Akpehe (2006) categorized CBOs in the form of community development organization, charity organizations, self-help, producer organizations, youth development organizations, capacity building organizations, women organizations, service provision organizations, market/enterprise organizations and micro-credit organizations. Although, it exists in various forms and types, its roles cannot be underestimated as it serves as a medium through which the voice of the indigent in the community as well as other marginalized groups is made known.

Role of Community Based Organization in Community Development in Nigeria

In Africa, Nigeria is one country wherein community based organizations have been contributing immensely towards enhancing the long term social, economic, and environmental conditions of communities. Notably, Bamiwuye and Adisa (2015) ^[5] in their study, outlined roles expected from community based organizations and these include sponsoring training, project financing, liaison with government, promoting mutual understanding, raising fund for project execution, planning of programmes, provision of infrastructure, partnering with other organizations, protection of communities' image, security of community and government's projects, economic empowerment. Although, the performance of these roles is seen to have changed over time in reflecting current reality, evidence indicate the existence and performance of these roles long ago by community based organizations prior to the era of colonialism in Nigeria. For instance, in the south-east geopolitical region of the country, community development task like construction, re-reconstruction, and maintenance of inter/intra community roads, clearing of streams as well as water point, cleaning of village square and market places were initiated and undertaken by various age grades prior the colonial era (Iroh, 2019) ^[12].

Similarly, churches in Nigeria, is seen to have been playing crucial role in peace building, that is, they often get involve in resolving and transforming violent conflicts, with the intention of cultivating social capital and political institutions free from violence and intolerance. Buttressing, Haynes (2009), point that faith-based organizations mainly contribute toward peace building through the provision of emotional and spiritual supports to war-affected communities, they get involve in result oriented mobilization for peace mediation among parties in disagreement, and as well, act as channel in ensuring dialogue, reconciliation, disarmament, reintegration just to mention but a few. Notably, Hanachor and Echezue (2021) ^[11], in their study on the role of faith-based organizations (church) toward peace building for sustainable development in Rivers State, Nigeria, maintain that faith-based organization often give sermon on peace to their followers, they provide humanitarian aid to victims, mediate between warring factions, and as well, possibly provide early warning signals about disagreement to the state. Extending, Aniefiok, Udensi and Otu (2019) ^[4] in their study, reveal that members as well as rural communities benefit from churches, as they promote sustainable livelihood, guaranty social order, stimulate development, improves the social functioning of individuals, acts as agent of change, and bring about increased organized commitment and participation in community development activities, although the churches often encounter challenges like competition for members, land problems, memberships discriminations among others.

More so, in a report prepared by Whalen (2008) ^[25] on the engagement of community-based organizations in Tuberculosis/Human immunodeficiency virus collaborative activities in four selected states (Cross Rivers state, Kano State, Osun State and Oyo State) in Nigeria, it was revealed that CBOs plays crucial roles in addressing stigma as well as correcting popular misconceptions held about the diseases: that every TB patient also have HIV; TB is incurable and people living with HIV/AIDS among others. This, CBOs achieved through support groups for PLWHA and their community awareness and social mobilization programmes. They also provide training that tackled stigma among healthcare providers. Furthermore, the report indicates that practices which involve referral systems between clinical and community care, client-focused care, use of umbrella

organizations, cultural sensitive and gender-sensitive strategies among others, could be used to facilitates the scale-up of TB/HIV collaboration activities.

Also, town unions are seen to have been playing important roles in the development of communities in Nigeria. This, evident in the establishment of Shangev-Ya Community secondary school for facilitating capacity building and skill acquisition, health care centre for improvement of health status of the community members as well as the purchase of two milling machines, the rehabilitation of 23 kilometres road and some gutters by Shangev-Ya Development Association in Kwande Local government area in Benue State. Similarly, Ogunleye and Oladeinde (2013) in their study on the role of town unions in self-help project on the area of rural electrification in Kwara State, reveal that town unions have achieved up to 15 percent of rural electrification within their locality. Contrarily, Nwobashi and Itumo (2019) ^[16] in their study on town and provision of rural electrification in Ebonyi state, reveal that not much have been contributed by town unions in their area of rural electrification. The poor contributions of town unions in the area rural electrification in the selected communities in Ebonyi State, were occasioned by high rate of partisanship, lack of enlightenment, illiteracy, beneficiary interests, political differences and political intolerance, clientele patronage as well as poverty.

Furthermore, women associations have also been seen to have played significant roles in the development of communities in Nigeria. This, Robinson cited in Yidau, Tifida and Yusuf (2021) affirms that in recent years, women contributions to rural development have improved and continually grow in figure, due to their passionate nature, thus, placing them at an advantage position of executing developmental initiatives effectively in the community. However, Yidau et al., (2021) ^[26] in their studies maintain that women organizations immensely contribute toward community development through provision of infrastructures as well as innovation/equipping of rural schools, health centres, as well as participation in rural environmental services (Yidau et al., 2021). Also, they note that women organizations play significant role in rural development through the provision of funds for the establishment of women's business ventures, scholarship awards to children in communities, HIV/AIDS sensitization campaign, family health, child care programmes and generally other areas of health related issues.

In another study, conducted by Oparaojiaku and Ekumankama (2020) ^[18] on sustainable strategies adopted by Community-Based women organization for improved livelihood and rural development project in Imo state Nigeria, it was revealed that CBWOs supply services required by rural community and these includes supplies of farm implements, construction of rural toilet, houses for widows as well as flood control measures just to mention but a few. These were achieved through proper communication plan and outreach, participatory project selection, stakeholder conversation as well as design and implementation.

Conclusion

The need for grassroot participation in community development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized, as communities are seen to be contending with various degree of social, economic and environmental challenges threatening their survival as well as continuous existence. Notably, insecurity, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, lack of opportunity for growth, poor health facility as well as other social issues often limit economic and social development of communities in Nigeria. Although, it is the responsibility of the government to address these challenges, however, government alone cannot tackle these issues facing communities, as its top-down planning approach adopted long ago, seems to have been preventing it from making any significant progress in identifying and providing solutions to the numerous challenges confronting communities. However, identifying issues of common concern, as well as providing solutions to these issues requires the need for local participation through programs initiation, designs, implementation as well as evaluation.

Notably, self-help programmes and projects initiated, executed and been monitored through churches, age groups, town unions, health care agencies, women association and other community based organizations in Nigeria, seems to have consistently enhance the quality of life as well as the environmental conditions of people within their communities. Thus, the content of this study reveals that community based organizations play significant roles in the development of communities in Nigeria.

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