



Community development values and social change in rural areas of Nigeria

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Abstract

Any nation that has weak and undeveloped rural communities finds it difficult to reach the height of its developmental strides. The success of any rural community development depends on the appropriate planning, implementation, utilization and sustenance of such values, to the individual and the community at large. Rural community social change encourages developmental programmes by making sure that it is carried out according to plans and the ways for improving the rural communities' conditions in accordance to community values. The paper highlights the concept of community, development, rural community, community development values, social change and rural community development. Based on these, the paper makes some recommendation that education should be the first priority for rural community development and the government should invest enough in funding education. The rural community should be involved in the planning and implementation of any project/ programme of the rural community. The element of participation should be fulfilled because it is the key concept upon which community development is built.

Keywords: rural community, social change, values, development

Introduction

The success of any rural community development depends on the appropriate planning, implementation, utilization and sustenance of such values to the individual and the community at large. In Nigeria, rural community development programme and policies revealed that several efforts have been made for rural development since the colonial time.

Ever since Nigeria gained her independence in 1960 from colonial masters, rural community development has been most priority by successive governments. Nigeria has been an agrarian society, their concern has been to transform this agrarian society to reach a common set of development goals towards the capacities and needs of the people. Ering cited in Ahed, Gbadebo, Iselobher *et al* (2021) ^[2] asserts that before colonization, Nigeria has been in rural community self-help schemes such as construction of village moat, shrines, village squares, markets, and a host of other activities. This means that Nigeria has been into developmental activities as part of her cultural heritage even before the discovery of crude oil. Shehu (2018) ^[13] asserts that all society desire growth and development especially the rural-based which are characterised by socio-economic backwardness. Aruma (2015) informs that the human society is usually guided by group dynamics in the society. That every human social action is guided by the way in which people in a group behave towards each other in a certain situation when they work together for a common purpose in the society. The rural development aims at finding ways of proffering solution to improving the rural lives with the participation of the rural people themselves to meet the needs of the rural populace. The participation of the rural community is paramount to their developmental needs because the outsider may not understand the settings, culture, language and other prevalent things in the rural area.

The need for active rural development policies has been very crucial in addressing developmental issues of the impoverished lives of the rural populace. Most of the western world are into shifting attention to rural development to reduce poverty level of the rural areas and the resultant of excessive population influxes in urban areas in search of greener pastures. Here in Nigeria, the opposite is the case; in the sense that the urban based process of development had marginalized and impoverished the rural areas which brought about mass rural migration to urban areas. A good number of the population of Nigeria lives in the rural areas. They are the primary source of food production, source of raw materials for domestic manufacturers, most of the mining that enrich the nation with foreign exchange are done in the rural communities, the exploration and exploitation of crude oil which is the major source of the country's economy is done within some part of these rural communities etc. In spite of all these, the rural areas of Nigeria are been characterized by low standard of living, have extremely limited access of infrastructure such as electricity, bad roads, poor health facilities, limited access to schools, poor and unsafe drinking water, illiteracy, malnutrition and spread of diseases and low life expectancy.

On this premise, the paper source to discuss the following: rural communities, community development, community development values and concept of social change and rural communities and social change.

Community Development Values

A community means the people with common interests living in a particular geographical area. Fankemberg in Onyeozu (2007) defines community as a territorially bounded social system within which people live, share common social, economic and cultural characteristics. Stein in Onyeozu (2007) sees community as population living within a legally established limit where the people have

same social and economic features in common which enables them to pursue common goals. Onyenemezu (2014) ^[10] defines community as a social system where people live, share common life, geographical location, common socio-economic, cultural and political characteristics, having a feeling of oneness and a sense of belonging which enables them to pursue common goals.

Development entails the occurrence of a whole range of positive changes; they could be social, economic, political, technological or even cultural. Palm in Onyeozu (2007) defines development as a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or group of persons. Development should be perceived as a multi-dimensional process which involves the reorganization and reorientation of entire social, economic and social system. It also includes the improvement in incomes, outputs, radical changes in institution, social and administrative structure attitude and even customs and beliefs. Masley cited in Ahmed, Gbadeb *et al* (2021) ^[2] sees development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. It is about reduction of poverty, increasing productivity, providing basic services such as health, education, drinking water, sanitation. Ahmed, Gbadebo *et al* citing Odiba (2001) include that rural development or social change physically transforms a backward community to stages represented by symbolic presence of structures such as modern buildings, town halls, schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, pipe borne water and electricity.

Community development promotes social inclusion. Smart (2019) ^[14] asserts that community development is a process where community members are supported by government and nongovernmental organizations to identify and take collective action on issues which are important to them. Community development empowers community members and create stronger and more connected communities. It is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, social justice, self-determination and collective action.

Community development is important because it provides the foundation in which a city built to improve the lives of its citizens. It creates strong, diverse communities that are able to attract and keep talents, start and grow businesses and overcome issues that arise. It's essential for poverty eradication since poverty is overwhelming in rural communities. Community development is fundamentally based on the value of human rights, social justice, equality and respect for diversity. The principles that guard this practice are self-determination where people and communities have the right to make their choices and decisions.

The concept of values reflects our sense of right or wrong. Values are in a sense the quality that human beings find in an object or activity which prompts them to wish to have the object or engage in the activity. Values can also be perceived as the object of one's interest or desire. What one wants or wishes to do or aspires to have must be something that is valuable, (Oyebamiji 2019) ^[9]. Values helps us to grow, develop and create the future we want. Community values are the non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community residents wish to maintain. They must be acknowledged, honoured and constantly defended to ensure that change and development occur in accordance with these. Community values help them gain self-respect

to be clear about what they want and be able to take decisions. Values keep the community motivated, focused and engaged to enjoy life.

Communities share values, shape local policies, interactions among individual's actions. Importantly, those shared values can change based on the collective choices of their members. In other words, it is individuals working together in community shared values.

Community development values see community knowledge, wisdom and community members as experts and programmes are led by community members at every stage from actions and evaluation. Ife cited in Smart (2019) ^[14] informs that through community development initiatives, community members can become empowered, such that they can increasingly recognize and challenge conditions and structures which are leading to their disempowerment or negatively impacting their wellbeing.

Community development values promotes social inclusions. It tackles the consequences of poverty, disadvantages and discrimination, promotes social justice and participation. A community development share values according to Johnson (2018) ^[7] appreciates at an individual level and shared by every member of the community. It is non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community residents wish to maintain. They must be acknowledged, honoured and defended to ensure that change and development occur in accordance with these community. Values guides the community vision, mission and strategic plan as well as its goals, objectives, activities, capital projects, budgets and services.

When support is being provided, to the activities of development of individual capacity and building the capacity of the community to generate social, economic and democratic activities and opportunities, achieving social inclusion is paramount to an active process of people participation. This is something that should be done by the community herself not people doing it for the community. It is a participative and dynamic process of learning, action and reflection.

Community development promotes strong communities such as full citizenship. Many community members are being disenfranchised by lack of opportunity to participate in decision making or by the failure of decision makers to recognize or respond to excluded voices. The idea of active citizenship is in cognizance in that the health of communities are enhanced when people are propelled and able to participate in meeting their needs. Citizenship activeness is not based on the idea of benevolence or philanthropy but ideas of mutuality and reciprocity which bind people together, which is the very idea of the community. The expression of shared responsibility evidenced in practical action is to be formed in all aspects of community life politics, sport and recreation care, art and culture, religion, the environment, health, economic and development.

Community led collective action, community development is an approach to social change that depends on building solidarity and support through emphasizing the common aspects of individual problems and the capacity of people to work together for their common interest. The community members supports the development of community leadership and encourages the building of a collective and accountable approach. Community collective action

includes small and large scale activities to meet the local needs as well as action for change.

Participative democracy; active participation in community affair is very important which brings a means to achieving best values and effective approach could lead to a better understanding of needs and issues. Other aspects of community development values are empowerments, problem focused learning, preventive action, collaboration and influence of community policy. (Community+Development+Values+(extract+fromABCD) (2)

Rural Communities

Rural communities are end products of nomadic ways of life based on hunting, gathering foods and transient agriculture to a more settled way of life. Jegede (2010) ^[6] citing FAO and UNESCO- HEP (2016) ^[16] asserts that rural areas comprises of human settlements with small populations, while rural space is dominated by farms, forests, waters, mountains, and deserts. Typically, rural communities have agriculture as their main occupation, transformation and marketing of land, forest products and services. Due to limited gainful employment, their labour is cheap and mostly self-employed. They commonly lack access to adequate basic social amenities because rural people do not have a political voice; they are usually poor and far away from the seat of government. Apart from this seat of government, non-sustainable policy action towards rural transformation that is responsible for the poor state of affairs among the rural dwellers in Nigeria. Kanu and Okonzi (2018) ^[8] observe that challenges facing rural sectors of Nigeria that are crucial to the socio-economic development of the nation are faced with the problem of retarded development. This has been attributed to top down policies of most Nigerian governments in approaches to rural development. He furthers that other possible reason could be attributed to non-continuity of rural development policies and projects by successive governments.

Ajadi in Kanu and Okonzi (2018) ^[8] assert that there is usually the absence of sustain comprehensive and conclusive implementation of rural development programmes. Most times, rural development polices or programmes are discontinued whenever there is change in government leadership. The new government may decide to abandon the project/ programme which would have been valued and appreciated. At times, some of these projects are haphazardly done and may not serve the purpose. Some of these might be deliberately caused by corruption in governance, no close supervision to projects/ programmes implementation. As a result, most of these projects/ programmes remain non- functional even from day one of its installation. At times, most of these projects and programmes are not sustaining, no follow up and as such within the shortest of time, nothing is heard or seen about such projects/ programme.

Egba (2014) ^[4] asserts that in Nigeria, over the years, the objectives and strategies of rural and community development have been pronounced by policy makers and those concerned with issues of development, there still exists enormous gap between policy formulation and implementation and the reality of the level of the development of the rural populace. Several approaches in terms of rural community development and execution have been adopted; some of which were creation of local

government areas, mobilization of people's local participation in planning and implementation of community development projects to reduce the influxes from rural to urban areas. Even in all these, there still exists a huge gap between policy formulation and implementation which is the crux of the matter.

Social Change and Rural Community Development

Social change is very vital aspect of any approach for meeting up with rural community challenges. Social change refers to changes that are significant, change which alter the underlying structure of an objective or situation over a period of time. Social change does not include all changes, but only changes which transforms things fundamentally, (Shagga 2019).

Social change in community development encompasses a commitment to individual and societal well-being and the opportunity for cities to determine their own and their societal needs to influence decisions that affect these. Social change incorporates public concerns in developing social policy and economic initiatives.

Rural change or transformation is a process of comprehensive societal change whereby rural communities diversify their economies and reduce their reliance on agriculture, become dependent in distance places to trade and to acquire goods, services and ideas. Sulhazan (2019) ^[15] asserts that social change however, involves alteration in the structure and functioning of those values, norms, social roles, habits, obligations of people or change in the lifestyle, life goals, chances, environment, or in the composition or organization of their society. When this is viewed within the rural setting, it is termed rural social change. It could be introduced from internal or external source to the society. Social change refers to the change in the system in which human social relationship remains organized, controlled and stable. It is community change and nature of change is influenced significantly by time factor. Social change are of various types, it could be growth, evolution, progress etc. Social change are evidenced by changes in economy, social and environmental factors, technological factors and political states of that nation, state and rural communities.

The Importance of Social Change in Rural Communities

Rural community social change is aimed at improving livelihoods by implementing comprehensive development for rural areas where a majority of people live in poverty.

Social change in rural development contributes to reduction of poverty in urban areas by reducing excessive population influxes from rural areas and transient agriculture to more settled form of life. It suggests ways of improving the rural conditions and encourages development of various plans for any rural development programmes. Social change lay stress on education for the solution of rural problems.

It helps change agents such as community development workers in knowing the felt needs of the rural communities and see the assistance they could render in satisfying such needs. Rural community social change encourages development programmes by making sure work is carried out according to plan. It also suggests ways for improving the rural community conditions.

Barriers to Rural Community Social Change

Sulhazan (2019) ^[15] identifies some barriers that could hinder rural community social change.

Culture; The values and attitudes of a culture as enshrined in its tradition determines how acceptable it is to change. Some culture view change with some mixed feelings, others with excitements.

Conservative and superstitious forces with the rural community can affect their conceptivity to change. Some culture may reject innovations because of their belief in their relative cultural superiority. In many rural communities, new programmes have failed because they did not synchronize with accepted and well defined role in the community. Sometimes, innovative programmes are grounded because relative values are not sufficiently taken into consideration. This occurs more on where the communities involved for that particular project/ programme are not adequately engaged. Another cultural barriers to change occurs when demand of innovation are contrary to established cultural norms and values. For instance, in some Nigerian rural communities, a pregnant woman is not expected to eat grasshopper for the belief that it prolongs labour during delivery. A pregnant woman is also expected not to eat snail because the baby when delivered will be pouring out saliva a lot or some religion like Seventh Day Adventist Church that do not eat crayfish. Whatever innovation towards the nutritive content of such food would not be accepted. In some Buddhist countries for instance, the religious sanction against the taking of life in any form interferes seriously with pest control programmes that rely on the use of insecticides.

Factions within the rural community may hinder innovation. The rural community may be divided into factions, genuinely useful innovation could now be defined in terms of the roles of leaders and members of the factions in the promotion of the package and the general acceptance of this project or programme by this rural community might be hindered by this factional divisions within the community.

Distributors and merchants may oppose the introduction of consumer's co-operatives, while money lenders may oppose low interest rate credit programmes, while herbalist may oppose modern health-care programmes.

There could still be problems emanating from the presence of rigid social classes. The rigid social class might decide to hinder the free flow of ideas and information across all strata of the community. This happens also where the distribution of political power is also along the class line.

Suggestions/ Conclusion

Based on the above discussions, the following are suggested;

The government should invest enough in funding education. Education is the first step to developing the rural areas. Education is an eye opener and when acquired, it changes the total being of the individual. It gets one out of vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, exploitation and illiteracy. Adult education is very vital to the development of rural communities. By so doing, the rural communities have the opportunity to build capacity and knowledge, helping them to make informed decisions about their farms, new innovations in agriculture, dissemination of information and new ideas about policies, procedures, rights and protection laws, giving them voice in their governance and in the government. Improved rural education is a possible opportunity for keeping young people in the rural areas. Quality education is an important tool for enhancing quality of life, increasing awareness, freedom and improving

overall holistic human development and by so doing, rural community will have a healthier and more sustaining future. Sajjad (2019) ^[12] asserts that education is considered as a vital element in the development of a society, a system and a country. Convincingly, a well-supported, easily accessed education system is an efficient means to making people economically conscious and actively participate in their economic prosperity and cultural development.

Government is a continuum and should work accordingly. Abandonment of project of the predecessor in rural communities should be put to stop. It is a colossal waste and should not be encouraged in its entity. A succeeding government should endeavour to complete whatever project her predecessor could not complete for progress and infrastructure to the use of the rural communities.

The rural community should be involved in planning and implementation of any project/ programme or any innovation meant for these rural community. Top bottom implementation of project is not encouraged; it leads to abandonment of such project, because it might not be part of the felt-needs of such community. The promotion of the development of human and physical resources in rural areas requires recognition of the fact that local people themselves are the main implementers of development project. The people have to be part and parcel of the decision-making in project planning and implementation. In other words, a project that the local people plan and implement is given priority as local materials and human resources are utilized effectively by the local people's initiative and responsibility. Local independence and sustainable development of project outcomes are enhanced by the effective use of local resources.

The government should work in synergy in terms of matching their words with actions so that the objectives and strategies of rural and community development as pronounced by policy makers and those concerned with issues of development of the rural populace. The use of qualified personnels and close supervision of projects for programmes are also of great importance.

Rural communities need to work in synergy, because community development is embedded in true democracy, that is, full participation of every individual member of the community. The division into factions and the presence of so called rigid social class that hinders some good innovation because of selfish interests should be conscientised for free flow of information and ideas.

The world through technological explosion has become a global village and there should not be any aspect of the nation deprived of this, government, nongovernmental organizations and good spirited capable individuals in the nation should help and provide to these rural communities regular electricity, internet services, infrastructure and industries to help and bring about balance to social amenities to the rural communities and control of the influxes of rural dwellers migrating to the cities.

For social change in rural community development to be effectively achieved, community development values need to be taken into consideration. Whatever social change is to be introduced to the community should be in consonance with the felt needs, self-help in plural form and participation. The community in question should be part and parcel of their development process. It should be a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, social justices, self-determination and collective

actions. Active participation in community affairs is very important which brings a means to achieving best values and effective approach which leads to better understanding of needs and issues.

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