

Community Development and National Development: The Perspectives of a Change Agent**By****Omage, Adesuwa Sarah****And****Ganiyu Adekola****Abstract**

This paper discussed community development and its people-oriented development strategies as a major tool in national development plan and programme implementation. The paper established that for Nigeria to achieve the goals of her national development plan and attain targets of global development agenda which she has signatory to Nigeria needs to revisit and rethink her approach to national development to accommodate community development as a development strategy. As change agents, the authors emphasized that ideas and practices of national development in Nigeria, must adopt participatory bottom-up approach that moves beyond rhetoric to real participatory development strategy that sees local communities as the alpha and omega of national development where generation of development ideas, planning and budgeting for development are resource based and implementation is people oriented, inclusive and participatory.

Key Words: Community development; National development; Perspectives; Change Agent

Introduction

Every nation of the world seeks to improve the structure and position of the country among the comity of nations. This pursuit is always measured in terms of betterment in the conditions of living of citizens and aliens that reside in the country. Attainment of high level of national development is often the general focus of national government, especially in Africa where all the countries still struggle with elements of underdevelopment. National development is a process that depends on progressive social change that creates growth in citizens and national status. According to Bujus (2023) elements of national development include development of rural areas, increase in agricultural outputs, enlargement of economic knowledge, handling of urban growth and eradication of poverty.

The current Nigeria national development plan released in 2022 by the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning was designed to run for five years 2021-2025. The main philosophies of the plan are:

- 1 to unlock all constraints to ensure that economic growth is enhanced, inclusive and sustainable over the plan period and beyond;
- 2 to generate employment and reduce poverty;
- 3 to promote qualitative participation in vital sectors of the economy that will open opportunities for the private sector to be a major engine of growth;
- 4 to work with all stakeholders within and outside the country for the structural transformation of the economy to guarantee continuous improvement in the welfare and standard of living of all citizens.

The associated broad objectives of the plan are to:

- 5 Establish a strong foundation for a diversified economy with robust MSME growth, and more-resilient business environment.
- 6 Invest in critical physical, financial, digital and innovation infrastructure.
- 7 Build a solid framework and enhance capacity to strengthen security and ensure good governance.
- 8 Enable vibrant, educated and healthy population.
- 9 Invest in the social infrastructure and services required to alleviate poverty.
- 10 Promote development opportunities across states to minimize regional economic and social disparities.

Nigeria since 1960, when it became independent, had been striving to attain national development that up-scale her beyond the Third world nation/developing country class it belongs today. Successive governments had initiated four national development plans from 1962 to 1985, Vision 2010, Vision 2020, and the current one being 2021-2025 national development plan, as well as keyed into the various Global Development Agenda such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet, the development level of Nigeria is still very low as a result of the insignificant success recorded by the various national development agenda.

The unsuccessful nature of the development plans had always been a consequence of various factors among which is adoption of wrong approaches to development programmes. Nigeria has always adopted the 'Top-Down' approach that see the grass root people as consumer of development projects rather than co-participants/stakeholders in the development programmes.

Thus, community development as an approach to national development has not gained national recognition beyond rhetoric. This is despite the fact that many countries like South Korea, India, Bangladesh, Brazil and a host of other countries have adopted specific need-based community development models to attain national development. For instance, South Korea adopted Samuel Undong, India uses Panchayati Ray, while Bangladesh after the liberation war of 1971 adopted the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) for rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is against this background that this paper examined the correlation between community development and national development and how the adoption of community development as a development strategy can fasten national development.

National Development

National development can simply be described as a process of reconstruction and development in the various dimensions of a nation and the development of individuals. Benjamin (2017) described national development as the overall development of the collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. Bawa in Ogbonnaya (2020) noted that national development includes all aspects of the life of an individual and the nation. It is an all-round and balanced development of different aspects and facets of a nation; i.e. political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, and materials. UN academy (2024) observed that national development encapsulates a broad range of parameters including growth of human resources, harnessing of industrial production, application of science and technology in health, industry, textile and agricultural sectors, provision of mass education and facilities for the disadvantaged and the poor; and development through a planned and well phrased economy. To achieve an overall and well balanced national development in a nation like Nigeria, there is the need to look into all facets that make up the nation.

The scope of national development covers full growth and expansion of industries, agriculture, education, social, religious, and cultural institutions (Ajay; 2019). National development is focused on the capacity of a nation to enhance its citizens' standard of living. The general objectives of national development are to build a society free of exploitation and poverty; ensure equality and good governance, protect human rights and provide a friendly environment for all. All over the world, national development is built on the concern for good health, education,

environmental quality and recreation, social and cultural amenities, and access to information and transportation.

As observed by Lawal and Abe (2017), all the previous national development plans in Nigeria failed to achieve set goals due to reasons such as; weak executive capacity, little or no consultations with the grassroots communities, lack of good governance, high-level corruption, and indiscipline among the populace. All these challenges Nwapi (2018) observed had resulted in rural stagnation, urban population problems, unemployment, and growing inequalities. Community development and its approaches according to Adekola and Uzoagu (2022) possess the potentials to effectively address the challenges of national development and its consequences on individuals and the nation.

Community Development

From the beginning of life, man had always sought to improve his lot by taking communal efforts to improve on individual existence and the environment where they live. Community development is just a modern terminology of these actions of man towards the improvement of self and his environment. This assertion was shared by Adekola (2009) when he observed that community development has always been a part and parcel of African culture. In African traditional society, community development implies working together as members of a particular community to achieve common goals that are meant to benefit each and every member of the community. Thinking along this line, Adegboyega in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) asserted that:

One of the enduring and flourishing heritages of the traditional societies in Africa is their involvement in community development, it has been the indigenous mechanism and technique developed and employed by the people to identify their felt needs, choose what they want and take cooperative action to satisfy the needs. Long before the introduction of science of development planning and studies, many rural communities in Nigeria had learnt to pool their resources and provide both functional and physical facilities for themselves. It was in this way that they involved themselves in construction of fortifications, moats, and trenches round their settlements, shrines, churches and mosques for religious worships and lately educational institution.

The above position shows that the practice of community development is not a new thing in the continent of Africa. However, it is a relatively new discipline in the Social Sciences and as a development practice in the western world as it was just mentioned as recent as 1948.

According to Anyanwu (2002), (the first professor of community development in Africa), the concept of community development lacks a precise definition that caters to its ever-expanding field. This lack of consensus is a consequence of the following:

- i. wide variation in scholars' national orientation and perception;
- ii. differences in the roles community development play in different societies and at different times;
- iii. variation in community and national expectations,
- iv. level of development of scholars host nations,
- v. professional background
- vi. global challenges and development trends.

While no generally accepted definition is available, some important elements appear again and again in most available descriptions of the concept of community development. Such elements include: community as unit of action, community initiatives and leadership as resources, use of both internal and external resources, inclusive participation, an organized and comprehensive approach that attempt to involve the entire community; and a democratic and rational task accomplishment process.

Based on the re-occurrence of the above listed elements in most of the available definitions, Ojokheta and Oladeji (2004) observed that there is little or no divergence in how scholars describe the term community development. While attempt is made to give samples of definitions given by scholars and organizations, it is important to avoid the repetition of the 1948 and 1954 definitions of community development by the Cambridge and the Ashridge conference respectively, which it is assumed community development practitioners and experts are very conversant with, although, they serve as the basis for other more recent attempts at defining the concept of community development. For instance, the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (2014) described community development as a practiced-based profession and academic discipline that promotes participatory democracy, sustainable development, human right, equality, economic opportunity and social justice through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities whether these be of locality, identity or interest in urban and rural settings.

Similarly, Straza (2021) describes community development as a process whereby community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to common problems. He claimed further that anything dealing with people working together to make the community better can be put under community development whether those are social or economic needs. Community development is an organized effort to improve the condition of community life. As noted by Ali in Adekola (2023), it is one of the methods for involving people in the process of socio-economic development and improvement of their own conditions by supplementing government efforts in this regards. In the view of Edwards and Jones (1976), community development is a process in which the people of a community attempt a collaborative effort to promote what they consider to be the well-being of their community.

In search of a consensus definition for the concept of community development, the United Nations in 1963 presented a definition that today enjoys wider acceptability among scholars and practitioners when it defines community development as a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress. In a more recent attempt, the United Nations as stated in Aderinoye and Adeniji (2020) observed that community development is a process where community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to common problems. Community development is a process of change from the traditional way of living to progressive way of living. Community development has also been described as a method by which people can be assisted to develop themselves on their own capacity and resources; as a programme for accomplishing certain welfare activities for locales; and as a movement for progress with certain ideological content.

Community development today has gone beyond the traditional boundaries of developing the community and the physical, economic and social conditions of the people to include the psychological and emotional conditions of the people. On this premise, Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) described community development as a process by which the efforts of members of a community are united with those of governmental and non-governmental bodies for a gradual and positive re-conditioning process with much reliance on local initiatives, resources and leadership for improvement in the physical and social structure of the community and general well-being of the inhabitants.

Implicit in community development are the elements of:

- 1 Full community participation
- 2 Bottom-up development approach
- 3 Addressing the real needs of the people
- 4 Initiated by the community
- 5 Planned by the community
- 6 Executed and driven by the community
- 7 Accommodating local knowledge, cultures, norms and values
- 8 Interaction with the capacity of the social environment
- 9 Timeously executed.

In discussing the focus of community development, two schools of thought emerged. The first school of thought according to Anyanwu in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) comprised those who emphasize the achievement of physical targets. This school believes that the goals of community development should focus on the material improvement of the community and the achievement of physical development indices such as schools, potable water, roads, hospitals etc. The second school of thought emphasized that community development goals are not supposed to attach importance to physical structures but should focus on activities that would build the community through empowering the individuals and making them the builders of their community and architect of their own well-being. No matter which school of thought one may belong, the concern of community development should be focused on solving local problems or meet the needs of the people using available local human and material resources with little or no external intervention.

In this direction, the goals of community development among others are to:

1. Organise the people for sustainable development.
2. Establish mass movement for awareness creation.
3. Improve the living standards of the people.
4. Empower and build the peoples' capacity to effect change in their community.
5. Develop linkage with other communities and organisations for development.
6. Promote the notion of community ownership.

In practice, community development aims to:

- 1 promote, sustain, support and maintain community actions;

- 2 achieve participatory democracy, sustainable development, economic opportunities, equality and social justice;
- 3 develop and accommodate new reforms;
- 4 recreate community orientation and change pattern and style of community thinking;
- 5 promote social justice.

Specifically, community development aims to:

- i. Gather up-to-date information about needs, problems, sources and resources of the community.
- ii. Mobilise community resources in the best possible way for better handling of community needs and problems.
- iii. Implement programmes required to effectively meet the needs of the community.
- iv. Arouse interest among the people in the welfare of community as a whole.
- v. Motivate people to participate in the planning as well as implementation of programmes meant for general upliftment of the community.
- vi. Develop democratic leadership among the people through their participation in community programmes.
- vii. Bring about co-ordination between various individuals, groups and organizations associated with development programmes in the community.
- viii. Create awareness among the people on various issues and problems confronting their community.
- ix. Introduce necessary reforms to eradicate various preventable social vices deeply rooted in the social fabric of the community.

Community Development and National Development

The fact that community development process and programmes have become major ingredients of national development is no longer in doubt. This manifests in the qualitative shift in national policies of developing nations towards indigenous entrepreneurship and innovations. This is with the intent to provide a more conducive participatory environment for mobilizing national resources and maximize national output to achieve national development.

The agenda of development paradigm have moved from the desire to simply improve the citizens and their communities to a greater concern for harnessing community development

programmes and processes to achieve specific national economic and social objectives. Suffice it to say that the absence of a coherent national development policy on community development process has no doubt adversely affected the positive transformation of most communities, especially the rural communities, in Nigeria. This is because genuine development is deeply rooted in the qualitative transformation of material and human resources. Development essentially refers to the capacity and creative capability of the people to effectively transform the natural resources in their environment into goods and services through the application of their skills and labour power. The citizens thus constitute the active agents in the national development process. Therefore, it is clear that any nation that fails to develop her communities through the skills and productive talents of her people, to effectively mobilize and utilize such skills for positive transformation of the national economy, would distant itself from growth and development. In this direction Kushan (2022) observed that community development is an integral part of nation building capable of contributing to human development since it ensures that communities can develop social, economic and political power and improves skills and knowledge which in turn helps build nations capacities. Community development builds nations capacities by serving as:

- foundation for economic development;
- empowers people to exercise their rights and responsibilities;
- improve access to resources;
- strengthen the capacity of local institutions and;
- gives everyone the chance to contribute to a better society.

While community development programmes are centered on self-reliance of individuals and the betterment of the local communities, the question arises, what contributions do they make to the development of the nation as a whole? It might be possible to identify the impact of community development in terms of direct or indirect individual empowerment, but the central question remains, how can the process of community development programmes be mobilised to harness national resources to actively contribute to the achievement of the objectives of national development?

Regarding the posers stated, the significance of community development as a major instrument of national development agenda cannot be over-stressed. Through community development the citizens acquire necessary skills that empower them to participate productively

in the national economic development and thereby helping to reduce poverty levels. In line with this, Osuji (2001) asserted that:

The theme of people-centered development is increasingly occupying a prominent position in most of the discourse and debates on national development especially in contexts where a sense of individual and collective commitment and responsibility is required for the attainment of societal goals.

Much of political advocacy for community development programmes in recent times have been characterized by emphasis on contributions of community development programmes to the economic development of individuals and the nation. Given this paradigm of community development perceptions, it can then be seen as a participatory training programme for the generality of the citizens, most especially the rural people. When viewed from this angle community development process, as noted by Acharya and Verma (1996) contains basic values which are centered on poor people's participation in rebuilding their own future. Community development programmes are thus based on a value premise which believes in empowerment of the poor, sustainability, ecological soundness and social justice.

The important point to note therefore, is to integrate community development into national development agenda as an intervention strategy whereby the people are consciously mobilized to start thinking about their situation on facilitating critical learning which according to Acharya and Verm (1996)

believes in enabling the poor to gain control over their lives in a more active manner, break the culture of silence, give the people the confidence to express their individual and collective interests and help them to understand the social dynamic and identify solution.

In his contributions to discussion on national development, Osuji (2001) observed that:

a significant proportion of opinion contends that the people are the foundation of national development while government can facilitate, energise and create conducive policy and programme environment for nation building and development. The people are the real foundation, builders and transformers of the society. With their creative energy and labour, the people constitute the real engine for the social, economic, political and cultural development in a nation.

It therefore becomes pertinent to state categorically that the integration of community development process into national development agenda would stress people's involvement and promotes their economic and social conditions. Furthermore, such integration should be designed

to achieve a stable, responsive and self-reliant citizenry capable of mobilizing national resources for the attainment of socio-economic development of the country.

The above buttressed Anyanwu (1981) as he asserted that the involvement of the masses in development programmes helps to give the people a sense of identity with the government, which they come to see as their government rather than the government of the person at the head of the executive. Development practitioners are unanimous on the fact that any planned programme for national development must concern itself with all aspects of people-oriented programmes. Leaving out some aspects from such central plan would amount to a great mistake with significant impact on the overall success of such plan. Emphasizing the role of the people, especially the grass root people in national development, Okigbo (1992) suggested that for growth and development to be sustained, there must be much emphasis on the liberalization of the energies of the people. Osuji (2001) thus concluded that this is why the commonly accepted and prescribed approach to people oriented development is peoples' participation. The strength of this approach is in its ability to provide public enlightenment machineries through the use of local institutions, such as Co-operative Societies, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to mobilize citizens' interests and support for development programmes initiated. Anyanwu (1981) believed that through community development, the people can involve themselves in the control of change and live a more meaningful life.

Synergising community development into national development in a developing country like Nigeria would bring to the fore the importance of the civil society in the process of economic integration, social development, poverty alleviation and governance. To this, Kester, Akinwande and Ojokheta (2004), stated that many development initiatives in Nigeria failed to succeed because the development processes are largely undertaken by the elites in power. It is therefore very clear that, it is not for lack of programmes and policies that the underdevelopment of Nigeria persists but rather, the non-inclusion of the local people.

To solve the problem of non-inclusion of the local people in the planning and implementation of national development programmes, Anyanwu (1992) recommended community development. He argued that being a people centered process; community development offers important point of take-off for programmes designed to achieve better living for the people. This is because, programmes operated in line with community development processes are usually geared towards the attainment of people's needs and the general welfare of

the community. Apart from this, the in-built organizational model of making use of the existing local organizations and institutions makes community development process an effective vehicle for national development.

In this direction, Ojokheta (2022) identified ten emerging areas where community development approaches become very imperative in attaining national development in the 21st century Nigeria. These areas are:

- 1 Climate change
- 2 Environmental degradation
- 3 Emerging health emergencies (such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Lassa Fever and Covid-19)
- 4 Rising cases of insurgency
- 5 Religious intolerance
- 6 Phenomenon of fake news
- 7 Declining positive virtues of humanity
- 8 Rising cases of domestic violence
- 9 Rising cases of election related violence
- 10 Rising cases of hunger, poverty and food insecurity.

These are in addition to basic infrastructural development needs of the communities. To promptly respond to the ten thematic areas identified by Ojokheta (2022); planners of national development programmes must shift from need-based development plans to resource-based development plans. This would promote national development in that each community will not only develop at its own pace but will focus and emphasis on its areas of strength where the community has comparative advantage. Positive transformation of the communities at the grassroots level will definitely impact on national development since it is the aggregation of the local communities that makes a nation.

Conclusion

Nigeria today faces a lot of development challenges to the extent that its existence as a united entity is under serious threat. The world had moved from dictatorship governance style to democracy. The democratic principles dictate the guidelines for national development plan and its programmes implementation. Benefits or otherwise of the national development plan are felt most at the grassroots level. These therefore brought to the fore community development with its

integrated democratic tendencies and people-oriented development strategies as a major tool in national development plan and programme implementation.

For Nigeria to achieve the goals of her 2021-2025 development plan and attain the targets of global development agenda which she is signatory to, Nigeria needs to revisit and rethink her approach to national development to accommodate community development as a grassroots development strategy towards addressing those challenges that retard success rate in her national development plan. The paper further concludes that ideas and practices of national development in Nigeria, must adopt participatory bottom-up approach that moves beyond rhetoric to real participatory development strategy that sees the local communities as the alpha and omega of national development where generation of development ideas, planning and budgeting for development are resource-based and implementation is people oriented, inclusive and participatory.

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