Title

Community development in Nigeria: history, current strategies and its future as a social work method

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Abstract

Development is a vital necessity to the growth and development of any vibrant nation. Community development is as old as man. Before colonization, Nigerians have actively engaged in community development programmes. Different governments have made efforts in establishing welfare programmes of her citizens. Communal living and collective actions aided in promoting what we knew to be community development. There were the age grade systems that was used to check-mate behaviour of youths and active festivals that were some form of leisure and recreation activities for community members. Youths and members of the community voluntarily participated in developmental activities of the community. The elderly were taken care of by family members and younger women. Evidently, the post-colonial origin of community development in Nigeria emerged during Britain's administration of its African colonies from the 1920s to the 1950s. However, over the years, the efforts by government and missionaries in terms community development are evident in the continuous growth and development of communities. This paper will add to the scarce body of work on Nigeria's history of community development from a social workers perspective as social workers are actively involved in community development practices. The paper concludes that the extensive type of problems faced by a community should be considered so as to enable social workers, community development workers, government and all a sundry provide appreciable help.

Key words

history, community development, social work, Nigeria

Key dates

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Introduction

Community development in Nigeria is as old as humankind and there are vital proofs that at one point or the other people have craved for and engaged in one form of development or the other to enable them to function more easily and effectively in the society. Basically, community development entails the advancement of community involving a common sense of identity, values, belief, capability and rationale. People at all levels should have access to goods, services, opportunities, decision-making processes and information. Most often members of the community would choose to voluntarily carry-out development activities even without been paid just to see to the smooth running of the community. Community development emphasizes empowerment, equality, social justice, participation and representation. Professionally, community development or organization is one of the three methods of social work practice. Social workers who are change agents and catalysts work with and in communities to ensure that their problems are solved. No man is an island we all belong to a community directly or indirectly hence there is need to actively engage in community development practices to improve what is already on the ground. This article will examine the history of community development in Nigeria, strategies and its role in social work.

Meaning of community development

Community development is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community development processes and practices entails the inclusion and participation of different interest groups, stakeholders and actors including the people whose livelihood projects are geared at improving, government and non-governmental bodies, funding organizations, project experts and executors (Akande, 2010; Nseabasi, 2012).

Over the years the struggle to eradicate poverty and maintain a satisfying standard of living has been the plan of every government. This is because every government craves for a developed nation (Bonye, Aasoglenang & Owusu-Sekyere, 2013; Amakye, 2017). Community development is a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives (Anam, 2014). Again, Eleberi et al. (2014) stated that community development is a legitimate process to foresee community advancement, improvement, and instructive strategy to tackle social activity and development. Community development seeks to improve the quality of life a group of people. It helps the community strengthen itself in order to improve people's lives and address issues that have been identified by the community and it builds upon existing skills and strengths within the community (Inkoom 2011). Significantly, over the years there have been improved changes in what was known as community development a hundred years ago and what it is today. Political shifts, population growth and changes in cultural dynamics have often times played a vital role in how community development manifests. Some of the classic concerns of community development found expression in the early 1990s in the notion of capacity building. There was an interest in developing the ability of local groups and networks to function and to contribute to social and economic development.

History community development in Nigeria

Community development before colonization

Community development before Nigeria's colonization existed in a different form from what we have today. For instance, communal living and collective actions were engaged by members of the community for sustenance. Also, age grade systems were used to check-mate and regulate behaviour of youths. The youths also participated in festivals that were some form of leisure and recreation activities for community members. These activities improved the mental health of individuals, families and the community. Youths and members of the community voluntarily participated in developmental activities of the community such as bush clearing, cleaning of their surroundings and the community and building armature houses and relaxation centres. The elderly were also taken care of by family members and younger women. Community self-help was employed in constructing homesteads, pathways, roads, bridge, market (Idode, 1989). This was carried out by relevant institution like age grade, and village council.

Furthermore, communal living improved the economy. Community members had communal farmlands, barns, trees, streams and markets. The communal ownership and relationships guarantee the prosperity of the community which, in African sense, concomitantly guarantees the prosperity of the individual. Also socially, communal squares, masquerades and festivals

were other strategies employed in community development. During festive periods, for instance, various segments of the town were given the opportunity to showcase their dancing or athletic prowess. This creates a healthy competition whereby the youths not only engage in activities exercising to their bodies, but also improves ingenious capacity. Again, in traditional Nigerian societies, community development went purely on the voluntary efforts of the people. There were no non-governmental bodies also. Age grades played a significant part in many Nigerian communities. They saw that local institutions were not abused and that the habit of self-help was developed (Ijere 1987).

Colonial community development in Nigeria

Colonial community development in Nigeria can be traced as far back as the 1900s when colonists arrived. Lugard, who was the colonial governor conquered the area through indirect rule. He disposed real chiefs and created warrant chiefs at the village level that represented the government (Nseabasi, 2012). British colonial interest in rural Nigeria was characterized by two-prong exploitation. In the first place, the rural areas were available only as primary resource areas for export of raw materials. The second level of exploitation saw the rural areas as food productive centers for the few urban centers which eventually were to serve the basic food needs of the colonial inhabitants (Nseabasi, 2012). Furthermore, Nigeria at pre-independence was dominantly rural which depended on agricultural practices for subsistence and exchanges. Church authorities and missionaries set out missionary schools and hospitals to attend to the basic needs of the people but this also contributed to the colonial objectives of keeping people under control by giving them incentives in the form of food, education and hospitals. The colonial government Township Ordinance Act promulgated in 1917 dictated the developmental course of the rural areas when it classified settlements into first, second and third class for the purpose of infrastructural provision (Nseabasi, 2012). The first-class settlements were mostly foreignized by the white Europeans and their workers. Consequently, such settlements were the focus of heavy infrastructural concentration, and Lagos represented the classic example of such discriminatory infrastructural concentration. On the other hand, the second and the third-class settlements were not given adequate policy attention in infrastructural provision (Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005).

Colonial community development was initially called 'mass education' by the Colonial Officers and they focused on adult literacy classes in rural areas (Skinner, 2010). After 1948 it became known as 'fundamental education' or 'community development' and it started to address a wider range of issues such as agriculture, health, transport, and even infrastructure (Smyth, 2004). In effect, it became what would now be called an 'integrated rural development strategy' and from the outset ideas of 'self-help'. The concern of community development was in response to the growth of nationalism and an outcome of a desire to increase the rate of industrial/economic development (Smith, 2013). These concerns were: with social and economic development, the fostering and capacity of local co-operation and self-help and the use of expertise and methods drawn from the local community. Community development entails the processes by which community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to a common identified problem (Ifeanyi, 2006). Mayo (1994) mentioned that community development has gained widespread emphasis, from very varied quarters, including international agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank, as well as from national and regional governments and from non-governmental and community-based organisations (NGOs and CBOs). The World Bank, for instance, sees community development as a means of ensuring that the Third World development projects reached the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, whilst the range of structural adjustment and anti-poverty projects imposed on national governments actually involved the poorest in making ever greater contributions to financing those programmes, for example in terms of fees for housing, health and education (Craig, 2014).

Missionaries and community development

Community development is a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community. Missionaries in the colonial era were the frontiers for community development. They engaged in various educational, health and empowerment activities as their means to effective community development. They literally forced people into various manual works such as gardening, marketing, cooking, and tending horses and on plantation work, agricultural field and coffee gardens (Raghumani, 2012). They set up mission schools for children and adult classes. Although their aim was to spread colonial beliefs and foreign religions such as Christianity, they contributed to the growth and development of

education in inaccessible area (Raghumani, 2012). One of such missionary work is presented in the Report of Secretary of Jeypore who revealed that the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church which was established by missionaries, established a weaving Training School and subsequently a Co-operative society called Koraput Weavers Co-operative Society' to help impart training to the weavers. Besides weaving, they also gave trainings on making baskets, weaving mats, carpentry, blacksmith work, bamboo work, weaving and pottery. All these were targeted at developing individuals in the community (Raghumani, 2012). Unfortunately, the missionaries worked with the other settlers to dispossess people and provide Nigerians with an education that focused on manual skills and restricted political consciousness. They also used Christianity and community development as a tool to ensure submission and advance the colonial agenda.

Community Development in Nigeria from Independence in 1960 to 2020

Agreeably, in 1960 Nigeria gained her independence from British colonialists and since then community development has been prioritized by the various military and civilian governments that have led the country at one point in time. Akhimien, Adamolekun and Isiwele (2017) observed that rural communities face an array of challenges such as the impacts of commodity prices, technological changes, land value dynamics, and other market influences. Some communities are also experiencing unemployment, poverty and population loss. Over 70% of Nigerians live in rural areas and Nigerian government and its leaders have not only recognized the fact of the important roles which the rural sector plays in the generation of national wealth but also that leaders of the developing countries in Africa have also come to accept the development of rural areas as a sine qua non for national development. In Nigeria, over the years the stated objectives and strategies of rural and community development have been pronounced by policy makers and those concerned with the issue of development.

Again, self-help efforts in Nigeria were another effort utilized in community development and related activities such as the construction of footpaths or roads, dredging of rivers and streams, clearing of public land and marketplaces we community development practices (Idode, 1989). The scope of operation included the

building of schools and market stalls. Projects such as pipe-borne water, road tarring, dispensaries, and cottage hospitals and so on, were not usually attempted. Furthermore, equipment used was simple; hoes, cutlasses, diggers and shovels were generally utilized. The construction of walls did not follow any standard measurements as the people used their imagination to plan and construct such projects. At this stage, there was little or no government involvement as the planning and execution of these self-help projects was the sole responsibility of the people. Where the government was involved at all, was for the purposes of taking over completed projects for operation or maintenance. However, Emeh, Eluwa and Ukah (2012) observed that the period between 1960 till date marked a watershed in rural development efforts in Nigeria. The period witnessed deliberate government efforts at mobilizing the people for rural development.

Over the past five decades, Nigeria has never been short of programmes and reforms aimed at alleviating the failing rural economy, livelihood, insecurity and other specific policies associated with poverty alleviation and rural community sustainable development (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2010:618). Majority of the programmes formulated on community development programmes and policies encountered complications. Since Nigeria gained her political independence in 1960, there has been a great impetus attached to the rural community development as a factor that advances the overall developmental process. These include the rural electrification schemes, rural banking schemes, urban and rural water supply schemes, credit schemes to small scale holders through various specialized institutions, transport schemes, health schemes, Universal Primary Education scheme, low cost housing scheme, National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), River-Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), The Green Revolution (GR), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life for Rural Dwellers, National Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Primary Health Care Programmes (PHCP), National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF), Rural Banking Scheme (RBS), Family Support Programme (FSP), Universal Basic Education (UBE), Expanded Programme on Immunization, The Nomadic Education Programme, Rural

Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Ferry Transport Schemes (in Riverine Areas and Lagos), Low-cost Housing Estate Schemes, Federal Environmental Protection Agency, Flood and Soil Erosion Control Programme, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI), Rural Electrification Schemes; Credit Schemes to small holders through various specialized institutions such as People's Bank, Agricultural and Cooperative Development Bank, Community Banks, NERFUND, SME Credit Schemes, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Universal Primary Education Schemes and Low Cost Housing Schemes, Health Scheme as the Primary Health Care Programme and Family Support Programme (FSP). More recent programmes include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the YOUWIN program as well as the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Schemes (SMIEIS).

These policies show the zeal of different governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which has led to the proliferation of development agencies. Nigerians have since independence experienced numerous rural community development programmes initiated by successive civilian and military governments beginning with the National Development plans which have not yielded desired results (Akhimien, Adamolekun & Isiwele, 2017). Additionally, Johnson and Ifeoma (2018) observed that there is an absence of sustained, comprehensive and conclusive implementation of community development policies and programmes. A typical example is the abandonment of the Better Life for Rural Women programme of former First Lady Mariam Bagangida for the Family Support Programme by the succeeding regime of General Sani Abacha. Some are not well implemented, and the targeted population (rural dwellers) hardly benefit as government officials are corrupt and pocket some of the funds released for such programmes (Johnson and Ifeoma, 2018). Convincingly, systemic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability have been major sources of development failure (NEEDS, 2004: 100).

Community development: a global perspective

In other parts of the world, the concept of community development can be traced from about two hundred years ago and since then numerous organizations and movements have devoted their time to improving rural life which emerged in the post-civil war era (Phifer, 1990). The democratic political revolution of France and Britain as well as the Second World War played vital roles in the existing of community development (Farooq, 2012). These events were the major reasons for the emergence of community development. After the heavy destruction in these occasions, the community filed with social problems for which rehabilitation and construction was felt. From that point, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers and technocrats were activated to develop a programme named community development programme for the assistance and cooperation of the community people. The development of the community is not possible without the participation of the people. Community development is essential for national as well as international development for his purpose various countries launched community development program in the multi sector of underdeveloped countries (Farooq, 2012). Later on the notion of community development became associated with and labeled as social action (Smith, 2012). According to Thomas (2012), five main strands or approaches characterized community work in the early 1980s. They are:

- Community action: Community action was seen as focusing on the organisation of those adversely affected by the decisions, or non-decisions, of public and private bodies and by more general structural characteristics of society. The strategy aims to promote collective action to challenge existing socio-political and economic structures and processes, to explore and explain the power realities of people's situations and, through this twin pronged approach; develop both critical perspectives of the status quo and alternative bases of power and action.
- Community organisation: Community organization involves the collaboration of separate community or welfare agencies with or without the additional participation of statutory authorities, in the promotion of joint initiatives.
- Community development: Community development was seen as emphasizing self-help, mutual support, the building up of neighbourhood integration, the development of neighbourhood capacities for problem-solving and self-representation, and the promotion of collective action to bring a community's

preferences to the attention of political decision-makers.

- Social planning: This orientation/approach was presented as being concerned with the assessment of community needs and problems and the systematic planning of strategies for meeting them. Social planning comprises the analysis of social conditions, social policies and agency services; the setting of goals and priorities; the design of service programmes and the mobilisation of appropriate resources; and the implementation and evaluation of services and programmes.

- Service extension: This is a strategy that seeks to extend agency operations and services by making them more relevant and accessible. This includes extending services into the community, giving these services and the staff who are responsible for them a physical presence in a neighbourhood. (Thomas 2012).

International bodies and their indices for community development

In the World Bank's classification system, 206 economies are ranked by their levels of Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. By the 2003 classification, 59 nations or 28.6% (including Nigeria) are low-income countries (LICs) with GNI of $765 or less; 57 nations (27.7%) are low middle-income countries (LMCs) with GNI of between $766 and $3,035; thirty-five nations (17.0%) are upper middle-income countries (UMCs) with GNI of between $3,036 and $9,385; thirty-five nations (17.0) are Other high-income countries with GNI of $9,386 or more and 24 nations (11.7%) constitute the High-income OECD countries. Accordingly, nations are broadly divided into 2 groups: the developing countries formed by LICs, LMCs and UMCs and the other high-income countries and the developed countries (High-income OECD countries) (Todaro and Smith, 2002; African Development Bank, 2007; Onyenekenwa, 2011). Also, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) classifies countries according to their level of human development, including health and education attainments. By 2007/8 UNDP human development rating, Nigeria was the 158th out of 175 United Nations member countries (Todaro and Smith, 2002; UNDP, 2007; Onyenekenwa, 2011).

Models of community organizing

Rothman (1974) identified three models of community development and for this paper relevant example of how these models are useful to community development. It is important to note that no particular model is the best. However, a particular model may be more useful at a particular time than another.

Locality development model

Basically, in order to effect change, a reasonable number of members of the community should be involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of developmental programmes. Key themes include the use of democratic procedures, voluntary cooperation, self-help, the development of local leadership, and educational objectives. So, for instance, if a community project like building a library comes up, members of the community should also be used in planning and evaluating the plan. Their skills such as land/bush clearing, fetching of water, molding blocks and any other identified skill should be incorporated to promote local participation.

Social planning model

A rational, deliberately planned, technical process of problem-solving with regard to substantive social problems, characterizes this model. The degree of community participation may vary. However, building community capacity or fostering radical or fundamental social change is not a major goal of this model of community practice. As social workers and community development workers, this model helps us not to carry-out just any project rather the felt-needs which is the exact desired project of the community. For example, it would be effort in futility to build a school for a community who already has numerous schools but lack a hospital or primary health care centre.

Social action model

The model in its own assumptions holds that there is in every community a disadvantaged segment of the population that needs to be organized, perhaps in alliance with others to make an adequate demand to the larger community for increased resources or for treatment or more in accordance with social justice. This model seeks the redistribution of powers, resources and decisions making in the community. The models seek change in the basic policies in the big organization it tries to affect legal reforms relying on political agitation as a way of coping with powerful trends and

developments. It is committed to the reduction of inequality, changing social conditions as pre-condition for individual change. Key themes in this model are social justice, democracy, and the redistribution of power, resources, and decision making.

Social work and community development in Nigeria

Social workers are often faced with numerous challenges, yet it is a rewarding career. The importance of social workers cannot be separated from the lives of individuals, families and groups of people most especially the disadvantaged, disabled, the elderly and those who are in need of the services social workers render (Onyekwere, 2016). The mission of social work has always included a people-focused development approach that is proactive and preventative in its move towards addressing present and anticipated social problems. Social work and social welfare programmes in Nigeria were initiated by missionary groups such as the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Churches, Methodist churches etcetera. The spread of social workers in Nigeria started in Lagos and the then social welfare programmes and social work activities were domiciled in the Social Development Division of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, although, the ministry was manned by untrained social workers (Onyekwere, 2016).Social work is at the heart of individuals and community structural strategies to enhance individuals and community sense of belonging in participating in activities that will strengthen individuals and community peace (Onyekwere, 2016). Harnessing social workers into community development practices in Nigeria will promote growth and sustainability.

Justification for the continuity of community development

- Man exists and through this existence various interactions leads to problems that yields to community development. If these problems exist, then actions to tackle them must always be considered.
- Governments and those that they govern especially democratic societies would always need community development workers.
- Community development emphasizes empowerment, equality, social justice, participation and representation.
- Social workers exist to ensure that individuals enjoy the life they live, thus,

they will always be available to help communities solve their problem

Conclusion

Community development is an important tool aimed at improving the lives of people. Since community development aims at getting individuals involved in measures through which they can solve their problems, it is apparent that extensive study on the type of problems they are faced with is carried out by social workers, government and all a sundry to ensure that people enjoy and appreciate the kind of help they receive. Apparently, in the next few years other studies will go a long way in evaluating the state of Nigeria community development practice.

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