

## **Community Governance and Socio-Economic Development Realities in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the nexus between community governance and the realities of socio-economic development at the local level. This work relies on secondary data. The paper reveals that institutional frameworks at community level have potentialities in the realisation of socio-economic development in Nigeria. The paper recommends that extensive national value re-orientation and spirit of communalism are the needed mechanisms that would inspire patriotic citizenship/leadership and active civil society which is able to drive the process of utilising both local human and natural resources for the actualisation of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Community, Governance, Community Governance, and Socio-economic Development.

### **Introduction**

There is a renewed interests by national and international organisations in the potential contribution of community institutions to the social and economic development of third world countries. Olowu, Ayo and Akande

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(1991) explained that the rationale behind these renewed interests, was occasioned by the economic and fiscal crisis which had been confronting most developing nations since the 1970s. This poses a serious question to the prevailing paradigms of the roles of the state in economic and social management.

Having identified this milieu, more than two-third of African countries implemented the structural adjustment programmes. This can be traced in part to the fact that the governmental structures inherited from colonial governments in Africa declined sharply in quality and quantity, leading to a situation in which the public institutions could not find their all-inclusive bearings on policy issues and social service delivery.

Meanwhile, there are clear governance alternatives that could be sourced from either the private sector or community based organisations. However, it has been argued that private groups are more business-oriented and are not given to the high anticipated social input in governance at the grassroots level (Olayiwola & Okorie, 2010). This makes community institutions the more preferred alternative because of the increasing advocacy that local people are more likely to be rational while at the same time possessing the right capabilities to sustain an indigenous-based development strategy (Ake, 1990; Olowu & Erero, 1997; Asiyanbola, 2007; Olayiwola & Okorie, 2010).

In addition, the renewed interest is based partly on the fact that they are more effectively institutionalised; and could be better relied upon by African people to render some local services. It is also expected that the little community services would, in a way, complement the few socio-economic roles of the existing governance structure. To this end, the failure of state-based institutions makes the governance at the community level an important agendum in the quest for socio-economic development. Hence, this paper attempts to address community governance and its impactful evidences on socio-economic development within the political landscape of the Nigerian state.

### **Methodology**

This paper is designed to provide a vivid expression of activities relating to these variables; showcasing the significance of one variable to another; as

well as their intended effects. Variables, in this regard, are the elements of the two concepts that informed this study which, at the same time, are the samples to be studied. The qualitative nature of this study makes it to draw literatures largely from secondary sources of data collection. Typology of this paper is basically descriptive. Data came primarily from secondary sources such as articles, textbooks, lecture notes, journals, newspapers and academic research projects. The contents of numerous data gathered were appropriately analysed. The method of analysis adopts an explanatory scheme which provides a discursive outline of the effective impact of community governance traits on the operationalised views of socio-economic development.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

In this section, this paper reviews the following related concepts: Community, Community Institutions, Governance, Community Governance, and Socio-Economic Development.

#### ***Community***

The term community may be defined as a territorially bounded social system within which people live in harmony, love, intimacy and share common social, economic and cultural characteristics (Bola & Bello, 2003). It is also defined as a population living within legally established city limits where the people have some social and economic features in common which enable them to pursue common goals (Ajayi & Otuya, 2006). Dunham, as cited in Agbalajobi (2010) inscribed that the term community refers to “a group of nations with a common history or common economic or political traits, by focusing on long-term change through the organising of community. This is often accomplished through inclusion, cooperation, participation, popular education, and direct democracy”

The community, according to Okegbola (2010), is made up of individuals and families, and must fulfil four purposes: survival, self-fulfilment, and love and tolerance. The fourth is the enhancement of human culture. This means that the knowledge, wisdom and ideas of our fore-fathers are useful and must be preserved and transmitted to younger ones through the process of socialisation. Community must be a friendly place where social illnesses,

physical disability and the deterioration that comes with old age can be coped with successfully. However, for community to serve these purposes, it must be more than just an economic community. It is, though, an important factor but not enough. The community needs to have development impetus; and serves as a place for the promotion of conducive living patterns and high level of well-being.

### ***Community Institution***

Community institution can be classified in two ways: it could either be formal or informal. As clarified by Olowu, *et. al* (1991) and Albert (2007), institutions created by government at one level or the other are the formal or official ones. While organisations which are operated by the people themselves and which do not involve government intervention are tagged informal or non-official. Community institutions, as described by Ellis (2000), represent mechanisms of formal and informal dynamism in the societies and culture continuity; they are mediums through which people adapt to changes (driven by any factors), while simultaneously maintaining some degree of social coherence and continuity.

Irrespective of their classifications, Olowu & Erero, (1997), Adebayo (2006) and Albert (2007) concomitantly eulogised that community institutions exist for the governance of clans and villages in all sampled communities. However, these institutions which exist in various forms are either traditional (i.e existing-from pre-colonial times) or relatively recent indigenous responses to the limitations of the post-colonial state institutions. These include political/administrative institutions, centred around newly created ‘chiefs’, trade and professional guilds, age grade associations, town/village unions, community development associations, women’s groups as well as religious and social organisations.

In this paper, community institution is used in the broadest sense, to encompass both formal organisations, such as councils and associations, and informal organisations, such as kinship and commercial networks, as well as semi-formal organisations, such as community bodies, religious associations and social groups, and their regularised social practices, such as customary tenure or gendered divisions of labour.

### ***Governance***

The social contract theory, as postulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, describes government as the agency by which men sought self-preservation from the warlike state of nature (Ijere, 2014). Contemporary scholars are yet to refute the fact that the protection and preservation of life and properties are not only the motivation for the establishment of government, but the primary end of government once established.

The World Bank (1989) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. For the World Bank, governance has three dimensions; the nature of political regimes; the exercise of authority in the management of social and economic resources and, the capacity of government to formulate and implement policy and to discharge its functions.

Moore's definition of governance has been one of the mostly quoted by other scholars due to its explicit nature. This definition sees governance as the process through which citizens and state agents interact to express their preferences, exercise their rights and obligations, reconcile their differences and cooperate to produce public goods and services (Adebayo, 2006; Enuke, 2008; Ijere, 2014; Adeyeye, 2016). It is the means of making the society a better place for producing the collective goods and services which people cannot provide individually. Governance therefore is the various actions of the state through its institutional framework within which collective goods and services are pursued.

### ***Community Governance***

The purpose of governance is to bring about orderly development of society and realisation of the objectives and aspirations of members of the community (Hunt & Smith, 2005; & Duke, 2010). The underpinning philosophy of community governance is therefore that good governance of local communities is a critical requirement for achieving self-determination and socio-economic development.

Community governance describes the formal and informal structures used in organising and running a community (Abiola & Laogun, 1981; & Okegbola, 2010). It is identified by the governance processes and structures

used by local indigenous communities. According to Hunt and Smith (2005), Community governance is a number of ways:

How members of the group are identified and [how they] organise themselves to represent their interests and negotiate their rights within the wider environment of competing communities; how they manage their affairs; how they conduct themselves and negotiate with outsiders; and, how they make their leaders accountable. Community governance is determined or affected by, and it affects, the culture, values, ethos, beliefs, attitude and other institutions of the people (p. 35).

Governance at the community level interrelates with other institutions in its internal and external environments in an almost interdependent way. It interconnects with governments at the local, state and the national levels and their agencies. It also relates with private sector organisations, indigenous community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, etc. According to Duke (2010):

Community governance has inter-cultural dimensions operating across all these layers, and as such, it serves as: a field of inter-connected (and disconnected) players; a network of relationships, rights and interests; layered institutions where decision-making, differential power, governing functions and economic activities are dispersed among diverse entities; institutional spheres (state, market and customary) which have an intimate presence in communities; and, is marked by different languages of governance and competing expectations (p. 21).

Community governance could therefore be noted as the formulation and execution of collective action by formal and informal groups at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organisations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services.

#### ***Socio-Economic Development***

This is the process of social and economic development in a society. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less tangible

factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic development are basically changes in technology and in laws which is one of responsibilities of the state in the process of governance.

Scholars like Edame (2001), Agi (2003) and Coker (2008) opined that development as an idea embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material wellbeing of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not imperil the future.

Carrington, DeBuse & Lee (2008) viewed socio-economic development as a process of societal advancement, where improvements in the wellbeing of people are generated through strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. Hence, socio-economic development is the combination of social and economic development. In this case, socio-economic development includes the advancement or improvement in the standard of living and the change in economic life and conditions of the people.

### *Nigerian State*

According to Nwabueze (1982), the origin of the Nigerian state can be traced to the 1861 treaty between King Dosunmu and the agents of her majesty, the Queen of England in what is popularly known as the annexation of Lagos. The single entity called Nigeria became very clear after the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates under the leadership of Lord Frederick Lugard. Lugard and other subsequent colonial administrators were able to administer Nigeria through the 1914 Nigerian Council, the 1922 Clifford Constitution, 1946 Richard Constitution, 1951 Macpherson Constitution and the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution.

It is important to note that the instruments of colonial governance were not only exclusivist in context and approach; but granted the Governor-Generals irresponsible veto that gave them the leverage to conduct national affairs at their whims and caprices. The challenge the Nigerian state continuously suffers today. The excesses of colonial leadership propelled series of agitations for an independent Nigerian state including the 1957

motion for independence. On October 1st, 1960, Britain granted formal independence to Nigeria.

Given these early manifestations, it could be averred that Nigeria's founding fathers did not share a common ideal on the Nigerian project. Sectional and ethnic domination rather than socio-economic development of the Nigerian state became more important. Balewa himself as Prime Minister referred to Nigeria as the mistake of 1914. For Chief Awolowo, Nigeria is a mere geographical expression. Azikiwe, recognising the danger of this division, advised succinctly that the leaders should de-emphasise their areas of differences and conflicts in their vision of Nigeria. All these are proving of the visionary distortions and political disagreement of Nigeria's nationalists who were in control of the machinery of government. This ethno-tribal disposition or competitive communalism has prevailed and is manifesting in contemporary Nigeria's politics and governance with instances during the first republic and orchestrated a large number of military coup d'état.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory underpinning this paper is community development theory as explained by (York, 1984). It is noteworthy that the concept of community governance is viewed as a process towards achieving a desired end, among which improvement of socio-economic well-being of the citizens is inviolable. Community development theory is presented in this paper as a framework capable of establishing the nexus between community governance and socio-economic development. The tenets of this theory have implications for the ways local community institutions engage in the provision of their community needs; as well as, the ways they can seek to make large-scale changes within the community.

A number of authors offer such tenets. York (1984) summarised the foci of community development theory as the organisation of community agencies, the development of local competences, and political action for change. Paiva (1997) called the theory's tenets structural change, socio-economic integration, institutional development, and renewal. Pandey (1981) referred to the strategies of community development as distributive, participative, and human development. Schiele (2005) summarised the work



of community development as collective problem solving, self-help, and empowerment. Payne (1997) referred to developing social capital, social inclusion and exclusion, and capacity building. Each of these authors may offer their own perspective and language in the description of community development theory; however, the general truths are common in all of their work and descriptions of the theory's tenets. This theory focuses on the centrality of oppressed people in the process of overcoming externally imposed social problems.

This theory therefore becomes relevant to this study because it emphasises shifting the skills, ideas, expertise and wisdom of local community institutions in achieving self-sufficiency in priority areas, such as: health, education, agriculture and rural development. A community development framework places the traditional office-holders firmly in the role of facilitator, not expert. Often, the action of community development seeks for the provision of change to be managed within the community (Alinsky, 1971).

Perhaps, the most compelling criticism of community development theory and its relevance to contemporary and future local practice is the lack of evidence of its long-lasting effectiveness. In addition, issues on governmental accountability, limited funding resources, and continued emphasis on evidence-based practice are likely to pose challenges to services operating from a pure community development framework (Mullaly, 2002; & Allison, 2009).

### **Community Governance and Socio-Economic Development in Nigerian State**

It has become an axiom that development is best enhanced through the bottom-up approach. This places socio-economic activities at the community level as a forerunning developmental exercise. These activities however are predicated upon by the institutions in place in the local communities. To understand the state of socio-economic development as they actually exist, it is important to factor in the role of the community institutions vis-a-vis their actions and inactions. Community governance plays a crucial role in the development of any society. Socio-economic development indices are largely influenced by governance at all levels, but the solutions to many intermittent socio-economic problems are at best proffered through the

indigenous channels (Agi, 2003; Asiyabola, 2007; Albert, 2007; & World Bank, 2010). This allusion places community institutions as veritable tools for development policy implementations across the nook and cranny of the Nigerian nation-state.

It is truism that government policies in key development sectors of the economy appears to be suffering at the execution stage. The rationale behind its infringement at this stage is of two-fold: result of poor enforcement of policies and lack of public acceptance and legitimacy of the dictates of the policies. It has however been argued that community institutions have the framework to correct these two infringing factors to put public policies in good perspectives of the people. Evident examples are on the immunisation policies, Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) programmes, vigilantism, issues of voters' registration and colonial tax collection system, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), N-Power Volunteerism amidst other social investment programmes.

In Nigeria, after the return of civil rule in 1999, laying the foundation for political and economic liberalisation and engendering a framework for social and economic development became, and still is, a critical responsibility of government. Agreeing with empirical evidence that good governance is a key determinant of sustained socio-economic development. The stride towards socio-economic development, democratic ethos and accountability has been at the lowest level and national institutions have remained weak, while the domiciling strengths in community governance institutions are being under-utilised.

One of the problems with the Nigerian state is that the system lacks institutional checks and balances (or mechanism) to control the monocratic tendencies in policy space and to hold political actors accountable. However, community groups/institutions have, in most cases, provided checks to the governance styles and patterns in Nigeria through various agitations and counter-statements to the government of the day. For instance, the impact of community institutions have gone a long way in the quest for construction of socio-economic facilities in Niger-Delta. More so, the incessant

recognitions of Niger-Delta region by successive governments are consequent upon the clarion calls of their respective community institutions. This shows the very high extent to which community governance institutions could play impactful roles in realisation of socio-economic development in the country.

Amidst other challenges, lack of ethical politics and values, and responsiveness in the governance coupled with massive corruption have hampered socio-economic development in Nigeria. Meanwhile, there are numerous unreported cases in which the expected development-oriented community institutions would be mobilising support for indigenous political office-holders that have been charged for corrupt, unethical and anti-governance exercises, thereby preventing the state from putting its abundant human and mineral resources into productive use. This is to affirm that the community institutions sometimes have their impacts soiled in ethno-religious politics, unethical value system and anti-development movement.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper has demonstrated that community institutions have a remedial impetus to correct socio-economic development inadequacies in the Nigerian state. Community governance remains a veritable platform for engineering socio-economic development in Nigeria. It is also important to note that achieving sustained socio-economic development would, on a broad note, demand solving some of Nigeria's political problems (like federalism, state police etc). In the same vein, community governance must be guided by high levels of morality and integrity and should transcend zoning and ethno-religious thinking. To make sustained progress, community governance must be wedded with transparency and accountability, vis-a-vis improved economic management as well as investments in education, health and critical infrastructure. This paper therefore recommends that extensive national value re-orientation and spirit of communism are the needed mechanisms that would inspire patriotic citizenship/leadership and active civil society so as to drive the process of utilising both human and natural resources for the actualisation of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

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