



## EXPLORING APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract:**

Community development practitioners had evolved various approaches to achieve the desired level of development and improvement in human lives. In Nigeria, governmental and non-governmental organizations have adopted various approaches in the process of national development. However, many development efforts had failed to achieve desired goals due to the usage of wrong approaches. This paper, therefore, discussed various approaches to community development towards national development. In doing this the authors identified two major approaches relevant to national development in Nigeria. Based on the available knowledge from the use of the approaches and the methods, this paper concluded that community development and its approaches possess the potential for the effective achievement of national development goals.

**Keywords:** approaches, community development, national development, Nigeria

### **1. Introduction**

The human community started with the creation of the first man (Adam) and the first woman (Eve) and their off-springs when God (after the scenario in the Garden of Eden) instructed them to migrate to the earth's surface to live. The early man began to survive in the earth's environment by struggling with nature. He attempts to influence the environment and turn it to meet his needs to make a comfortable living. As man increases in the population through procreation, further attempts to influence the environment to meet their needs and live a good live continue, thus the beginning of human community and the development of the community for the betterment of the life of the inhabitants of the human community on the earth surface, which we today, refer to as 'community development'.

According to Buye (2022), community development is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-

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determination, and collective actions. Community development approaches involve different methods and techniques of operation and functioning with community for conventional programmes and organization. Some of these approaches are traditional while others are conventional and participatory.

Community development practitioners had evolved various approaches to achieve the desired level of development and improvement in human lives. In Nigeria, governmental and non-governmental organisations have adopted various approaches in the process of national development. However, many development efforts had failed to achieve desired goals due to the usage of wrong approaches. This is in line with the findings of Adekola and Okogbule (2013) that many community development projects in Nigeria failed to succeed due to the adoption of the wrong approach. In national development, the usage of effective approaches to community development possesses the potential to empower persons and groups within the community to have the capacity to improve their lives and the community structure. It is based on the significance of effective approaches to community and national development that this paper explores various approaches to community and national development in Nigeria.

### **1.1 Community**

The term *community* is difficult to define with precision. This is because it is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted concept that means different things to different people. This is despite the fact that it has enjoyed long existence and usage among scholars in social work, education, sociology, community development, environmental education, and other related disciplines. Based on the long existence and constant romance with the concept of community, scholars have attempted to define it from different perspectives. The term community has been described in terms of place, interest, or the virtual community that sees the entire humanity as a global village. The emphasis in this paper is on the community of place. In this perspective, for instance, Anyanwu (1981) defined a community as “*a social group occupying a more or less defined geographical area and based on the feeling that people have for one another.*” Upadhyaya (2006) described the community as a natural grouping based on ties of shared blood, language, history, territory, and above all culture. He further described it as “*a group of people who have something in common*”.

Boothroy in Virginie, Lynn, and Rawad (2016) described the community as a human system of more than two people in which the members interact personally overtime, in which behavior and activities are guided by collectively evolved norms or collective decisions and from which members may freely secede. According to Virginie, Lynn, and Rawad (2016) community mean a collection of people who have become aware of some problems or some broad goals, who have gone through a process of learning about themselves and about their environments, and who have formulated group objectives. A more recent definition of the concept of community given by Kathleen, Elanor, David, and Susan (2022) sees community as a group of people with diverse characteristics, who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives and engage in joint action in a geographical location or setting.

Considering the various definitions and descriptions of the concept of community by scholars, what is clear is that for a place or group of people to qualify as a community, the following elements must be present:

- 1) A group of people;
- 2) Shared territory that has a geographical delimitation;
- 3) Common goals or interests;
- 4) Common ways of life.

Based on these elements, Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) described a community as a localized population that interrelates, develops, and nurtures specialized institutions that provide on a day-to-day basis, a full range of goods and services necessary to meet the common goals and perpetuate its existence on the surface of the earth.

Scholars in various disciplines and professions concerned with the concept and nature of community have classified community mostly into two types. For instance, Osuji (1991) classified community as *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. He describes a *Gemeinschaft* community as a group of people associated together as a result of unity, rootedness, intimacy, and kinship. *Gesellschaft* on the other hand, he described as a community of association or friendship. It is characterized by formal and specific bonds dictated by self-interest. The community has also been classified as Mechanical and Organic. A mechanical community defining features include common conscience, beliefs, and sentiments while the organic community is characterized by interactions and interdependence. Classifying community as *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*, mechanical or organic notwithstanding, scholars are unanimous in classifying community broadly as Urban or Rural. This classification satisfies the yearnings of scholars and professionals since all other classifications can conveniently fit into either urban or rural without tampering with their structure or functions.

## 2. Development

In defining the term development, many words with similar meanings often come to mind. Such words include change, growth, evolution, advancement, and modernization. As noted by Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) the word development belongs to the group of words regarded as 'systematically ambiguous'. They stated that a word is systematically ambiguous when it is elastic in usage or is capable of multiple meanings and when it persists in its ambiguity in whatever context it is found. The ambiguous nature of the concept of development gives the opportunity to scholars to view and described it from different perspectives especially as it suits their discipline or profession. For instance, while an economist sees development in terms of an increase in the Gross National Product (GNP) Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and per capital income of individuals in a system. Political scientists will see development as an improvement in the political consciousness of the people and improved governance. The environmentalists will see development as improvement and welfare of the totality of the physical and natural environment. To psychologists, development implies the physical

and mental growth of an individual. To adult educators, development is viewed in terms of improvement in life and living standards of the people and their community.

To this end, development is described as a natural progression from the previous simpler or embryonic stage to a later, more complex or adult stage ([www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com)). Onyeozu (2007) observed that development is a multi-dimensional process involving the organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. Nishan (2020) perceived development as a process of improving the quality of all aspects of human lives with three equally important aspects vis: raising peoples living levels, creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political, and economic system and institutions which promotes human dignity and respect; increasing people's freedom of choice by enlarging the range of their choice variables.

Development presupposes a change in the status quo. With the exception of social change, all other forms of change imply a change in a specific direction which is regarded by beneficiaries as positive or highly valued. Development in typology could be economic, social, political, or physical. However, a paradigm shift in development that cut across all types of development and sphere of life is sustainable development. It is the most recent and currently the most discussed in development discourse.

Sustainable development was first mentioned in 1987 in one of the reports of the World Commission on Environment and Development titled "Our Common Future". The term was described by The World Resource Institute (1992) as "*development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need using the same resource*". By 2015 The United Nations adopted some specific goals meant to achieve development and sustainability among nations of the world. These goals were tagged Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Global Goals or Agenda 2030. The goals are seventeen in all. The United Nations (2016) summarized the goals as:

- 1) No poverty,
- 2) Zero hunger,
- 3) Good health and well-being,
- 4) Quality education,
- 5) Gender equality,
- 6) Clean water and sanitation,
- 7) Affordable and clean energy,
- 8) Decent work and economic growth,
- 9) Industry, innovation and infrastructure,
- 10) Reduced inequality,
- 11) Sustainable cities and communities,
- 12) Responsible consumption and production,
- 13) Climate action,
- 14) Life below water,
- 15) Life on land,

- 16) Peace, justice and strong institution,
- 17) Partnership for the goals.

The seventeen goals are aimed at achieving three main objectives:

- 1) Establishment of long-term strategies to maintain development efforts in the community,
- 2) Clear identification of policy design and implementation of developmental programmes and projects that will not compromise the needs and welfare of future generation,
- 3) Balancing societies' economic, social and environmental needs.

Therefore, the focal areas of development to achieve the SDGs are economic growth, social inclusion, environmental protection, human dignity, planet management, and lastly people's prosperity.

Whatever the type or form development adopts, it often presupposes a cumulative, sequential and definite direction change in the status quo; though not all changes that occur in the community can be regarded as development and not all development activities qualify as community development.

### 3. Community Development

As it was in the beginning, a man had always sought to improve his lot; 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 (1997) when he observed that community development has always been a part and parcel of African culture. In the 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: 20) 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 the construction of fortifications, moats, and tranches 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 a development practice in the western world, as it was just mentioned as recently as 1948.

According to Anyanwu (2002), the concept of community development lacks a precise definition that caters to its ever-expanding field. While no generally accepted definition is available, some important elements appear again and again in the most available description of the concept. Such elements include:

- Community as a unit of action;
- Community initiatives and leadership as resources;
- Use of both internal and external resources;
- Inclusive participation;
- An organized and comprehensive approach that attempts to involve the entire community; and
- Democratic and rational task accomplishment.

Based on the re-occurrence of the above-listed elements, Ojokheta and Oladeji (2004) observed that there is little or no divergence in how scholars describe the term community development. The National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (2014) described community development as *“a practice-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 Consult (2021) describes community development as a process whereby community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to common problems. The concept of community development was further described as *“anything dealing with people working together to make the community better can be put under community development whether those are social or economic needs.”*

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 the community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable the contribute fully to national progress.

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) defined 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. This lecture is anchored on this definition.

In discussing the meaning of community development, two schools of thought emerged. The first school of thought according to Anyanwu (1981) is 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 by improving 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 meeting the needs of the people using available local human and material resources with little or no external intervention.

#### **4. National Development**

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 of the conditions of living of citizens and foreigners that reside in the country. 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. Lawal and Abe (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.

The scope of national development includes 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 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.

According to 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 general public, lack of good governance, high-level corruption, and indiscipline among the populace. All these challenges as observed by Nwapi (2018) had resulted in rural stagnation, urban population problems, unemployment, and growing inequalities. Community development and its approaches possess the potential to effectively address the challenges of national development and its consequences in Nigeria; thus, the essence of this discourse.

## 5. Approaches to Community Development for National Development

There are various approaches to the practice of community development. However; all approaches to community development emphasis progress in such a way that the community can cope with the impact of change as well as induce desirable national development. According to Anyanwu (1992), three distinct approaches to community development can be identified. Two of the approaches are discussed in this paper due to their relevance to the Nigeria situation. These are the functional approach and the operational approach.

### 5.1 The Functional Approach

The functional approach sees community development as a process by which local and national development efforts can be mutually sustained. In the functional approach to community development, three main groups of people are involved. These are the participants who are members of the local population who need community development for the improvement of themselves and their community. The second group is the government. This is represented by bodies outside the community. Such bodies include the various levels of government, voluntary associations, and philanthropic bodies. The third groups are the professionals or change agents who give on-the-spot direction and guidance for the achievement of the goals of the community development programme. In this approach, it is believed that government alone cannot meet all the needs of every community. To fill the gap, therefore, the community people have to assist themselves with the will and determination to do something to meet their lacks and improve their condition. Contemporary community development methods under this approach, as listed by Pawar (2020) include:

- Community-Driven Method,
- Right-Based Method,
- Asset-Based Community Development Method,
- Local Level Development Method,
- Sustainable Livelihood Method,
- Community Engagement Method,
- Community Capacity Building Method,
- Direct Action Method,
- Community-Driven Development Method.

In operational practice, all these methods adopt the bottom-up strategy. That is, all development actions start from and end with the people in need/project identification and project implementation. Where a wrong approach or method (most of which are top-down or provider-dictate) is adopted the goals of national development through community development can hardly be achieved.



## **5.2 Operational Approach**

The operational approach to community development is a people-oriented approach that emphasizes the people, their needs, resources, ability, and cooperation level. This approach believes that communities can develop social, economic, and political power, knowledge, and skills which in turn build capacity for national development. It adopts self-help and local resource use as a community development strategy. The operational approach to community development is based on six different methods. These methods according to Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) are:

- a. Matching grant method
- b. Directive method
- c. Non-directive method
- d. Sectoral method
- e. Integrated method; and
- f. Multiple method.

### **a. Matching Grant Method**

This method takes the form of self-help projects undertaken by the local community under the supervision of the local authorities with the state government providing technical, financial, and managerial assistance. In the matching grant method, the people initiate the project and supply the materials needed for the actual implementation of the project. Such materials may be money, materials, equipment and/or labour. The government or its agency involved in the programme provide matching grants which may come in the form of money, materials, and/or expert advice to complement the local efforts.

### **b. Directive Method**

The main thrust of this method is total control by an outside agency. The government or the outside agency determines what is good for the people i.e., the needs of the people and how to meet such needs. The outside agency plays a major role in the planning and implementation of the community development project. The agency not only provides the materials needed; it also plays an active role in project supervision. The main problem with this method is that beneficiaries' involvement in the planning and implementation of the community development project is very minimal. This problem may be worsened when the outside agency provides all the staff, materials, and equipment required for project implementation. Another danger in this method is that the body sponsoring the project/programme may assume an authoritarian position. i.e., having the final say on what is good for the people. The implication of this is that the psychological and moralistic feelings necessary for the sustainable management of the project by the community are always not available.

### **c. Non-Directive Method**

This method emphasises the people. In this method, the community people decide for themselves the extent of their needs, the degree of their willingness to do something to

meet their needs, and how best they can organize, plan and carry their project through. This method is based on two assumptions vis:

- that the people must be dissatisfied with their present condition.
- that they possess confidence in their own ability to change the condition for the better.

In this method, the role of the outside agency is not that of a controller but that of a motivator who only motivates the people at crucial stages in the development process.

#### **d. Sectoral Method**

This method is a compartmentalised style of community development. Specifically, the method involves different agencies or government bodies undertaking different community development programmes within the same community at the same time. In this method, community development programmes are undertaken within the community without any co-ordination or linkage among the various government agencies. This Community Development approach focuses on specific sectors such as education, agriculture, health, housing, economic and the welfare of the people in a community. It is believed that the development of a specific sector could accelerate the development of other sectors. For instance, the agricultural sector could boost rural development. All sectors do not have the same level of importance; one sector may be given less priority than the others

All the agencies operating in the community do so independently without interference, advice or monitoring from other agencies involved in the community development programmes in the community. The problem with this method is that it is expensive in terms of labour, finance, and equipment. It may also lead to conflict among the agencies involved in the development of the community. However, the method encourages and promotes the rapid development of a community.

#### **e. Integrated Method**

This method sees community development going beyond the physical development of the community. It emphasises a comprehensive programme of development, which apart from physical development projects also emphasises the socio-economic, political, and cultural development of the community. This method emphasises effective co-ordination of human and material resources available in a community for its overall development.

*Multiple Method:* This method is focused on experts dealing with community problems and providing varieties of services such as education, medical, recreation, etc., to achieve community development. The method is based on the experience and functions of experts and professionals. This method believes that for successful community development to take place, relevant experts and professionals must be involved at every stage of the community development process. The weakness of this method is that it is expensive to maintain in terms of time and finance. However, the method guarantees quality in the community development project embarked upon.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed various approaches to community development towards national development. In doing this the author identified two major approaches relevant to national development in Nigeria. The community development methods on which the approaches operate are also stated. Based on the available knowledge from the use of the approaches and the methods, this paper concluded that community development and its approaches possess the potential for the effective achievement of national development goals. It further concluded that many previous development plans in Nigeria failed as a result of the usage of wrong approaches in the management of the development plans for community and national development.

The authors, therefore, recommend that government at all levels in Nigeria should adopt and integrate community development approaches in the implementation of development plans for national development. They further recommend that community development experts should be involved in the development of national development plans so that their expertise and experience count right from the onset of the national development plans and programmes.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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