LEADERSHIP QUESTION AND THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
It is disheartening that despite efforts and resources put in transforming the rural communities in Nigeria, they have continued to remain underdeveloped. Several approaches, among which is community development, have been adopted to improve the lives of the people, all to no avail. This paper on leadership question and the challenges of community development in Nigeria examines why these communities have continued to remain poor. The methodology adopted is analytical discussion of library materials. The paper examines what community development entails, and the leadership challenges that have undermined its effective roles in rural transformation and community development in Nigeria. It observes that leadership is fraught with many challenges that have impinged on its efforts at transforming the rural communities despite their abundant human and material resources. It looks at those factors that have blurred the visions of leadership in community development. The development of the resources could leap frog the communities as foundations for development of national economies and integration to global markets. Having examined the exigencies of genuine and critical knowledge leadership, the paper recommends among others, that leadership for community development be development-oriented, shun corruption, be transparent and accountable; development assistance agencies and government to re-examine the internal and external factors militating against rural transformation; and the structural policies of development to be re-evaluated to examine why they have not achieved targets.

Introduction and the Problem

Rural communities remain strategic in the socio-economic development of any nation. A lot of resources abound in the area to the extent that if they are harnessed, they will not only be a foundation but a springboard for the structural transformation for economic growth and development of the people and the nation at large. However, despite approaches adopted to tap the wealth in these rural communities, especially in the developing economies, it appears that not much has been done to harness the endowed resources of the rural areas. Community development is reputed to be an indispensible component among the approaches adopted world-wide for the socio-economic transformation of any nation, especially developing nations like Nigeria (Anyanwu, 1992). The rural communities are acknowledged to be endowed with abundant human and material resources that will accelerate the pace of development of any country. It is argued that in Nigeria for instance, majority of the population dwells in the rural communities. Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) opine that about 80% of Nigeria's population resides in the rural communities. Olatunbosun (1975) cited in Ugwuanyi and Chukwuemeka (2013), aver that the rural communities are the major sources of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufactures. For Abah (2010), rural communities basically engage in primary economic activities (e.g. farming) that form the foundation of the country's economic development. Within the rural areas, informal economic activities that form the bedrock of structural economic transformation of any emerging economy thrive without being accounted for neither in Gross Domestic Product nor given prominence.

However, given the importance of the rural communities in the development prospect of a developing economy, especially Nigeria, it could be observed that the communities have continued to suffer neglect. They are grossly underdeveloped and poverty has remained pervasive. While resources abound, development has eluded most communities due to lack of "the mastery of the practical wisdom (leadership) and technology to mobilize them for our overall benefit" (Ozor and Nwankwo, 2008:63). This is to say that the lack of purposeful and knowledge leadership, the catalyst to integrate and drive the wheel of development is the bane of community development in Nigeria.

The purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate the appalling situation of our rural communities and the need for their development through the coordinating efforts of resourceful individuals endowed with critical knowledge, wisdom and persuasion (leadership) required for such community development. While a critique of community development as an approach is not the main scope of this paper, a major challenging problem of this thesis is to examine why rural communities have continued to remain

poor and underdeveloped despite approaches used to develop them, especially through the adoption of community development strategy. Could it be that the approach is structurally faulty or that the leadership catalyst employed to drive it is inefficient, incapacitated, inept and non-creative? The primary focus of the paper includes: the exploration of the leadership question in community development, the identification of the functions and roles of a leader in community development, identification of what community development entails, the interaction and synergy between leadership question and community development with a focus on Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations. This paper has been written on the basis of analysis of secondary data sourced from library and internet researches. However, the observation and experiences of the authors helped in enriching this paper. We will however, start the excursion with identifying the concept of leadership, the leadership question and the functional pre-requisites of a leader.

Leadership and the Leadership Question

Leadership is currently one issue that has become a regular topic of discussion. According to Bolden (2004), it is hard to turn on the television, open a newspaper or attend a conference without coming across numerous references to leaders, leadership and leading. The concept of leadership has been a topic of interest for a plethora of individuals from the early Greek philosophers to modern day leadership gurus. It has been argued to occupy a strategic position in the search for development in the socio-political, economic and religious sphere and life of any nation, developed or under-developed (Oruonye, 2013; Ugochukwu, 2002). It is therefore a catalyst.

Leadership has been identified as an important function towards achieving the aims and objectives of a group (organization or society). Omolayo (2005) cited in Lawal and Owolabi (2012:5) describes leadership as an "essential oil that keeps the wheel of government working without any difficulty." It involves giving direction to citizens who are critical assets of the nation. Northouse (2004) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. These definitions embody six elementary attributes of leadership as:

I. A process
II. An act
III. An involvement of influence
IV. A group context
V. An involvement of goal attainment; and
VI. A quintessential pathfinder in directing

Bolden (2004) opines that leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on many other important organizational, social and personal

processes. It depends on a process of influence, whereby people are inspired towards group goals, not through coercion but through personal motivation. In our own context and interest, there are some other characteristics of leadership that need to be added to include wisdom, knowledgeability, charisma, comportment, competence, tolerance, focus and accommodating. If an individual entrusted with leadership does not have the above characteristics, it will be difficult for him to lead, to give direction, and for him and his followers to achieve set goals.

In theorizing about leadership, McGregor (1960) opined that certain assumptions determine how a leader performs his functions. He identified two theoretical types of people-leaders, theory X and theory Y. A theory X leader believes that an individual has an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if possible. Here, the leader believes that coercion is necessary to enforce obedience. On the other hand, a theory Y manager/leader believes that people see work as natural as play and thus, will not avoid work but seek for more responsibilities and perform their tasks under minimal control. Thus, this type of people-leader combines the qualities of leadership and management. Leaders holding these views about their followers will hold different assumptions and adopt different approaches to leadership. Among these approaches are:

      a. Situational leadership,
      b. Transformational leadership,
      c. Charismatic leadership, and
      d. Servant leadership.

In summary, leadership is both an act and a process involving a structural situation in which an individual influences a group of individuals through requisite skills for the purpose of achieving set goals.

The leadership question has emerged as a result of the dearth of credible leadership to steer growth, development and productivity. The underdevelopment level of Nigeria's economy, the stark poverty syndrome in the country especially in the rural communities/areas, the spate of ethnic, religious and tribal violence, insecurity in the land, level of criminality, educational and infrastructural decays, level of unemployment especially among youths and graduates, political instability and electoral violence, etc indicate the obvious reality that there is a serious leadership problem in the country. The underdevelopment situation in the rural communities especially necessitated this exploration on leadership question.

The Leader and His Functional Roles

Having discussed what leadership is, a pertinent question that follows is who is a leader? What does a leader do? These questions shall form the thrust of this section of the discourse. A leader is someone who can influence

other people to perform beyond their formal authority. A leader is someone who possesses the authority to influence or cause obedience from other people in pursuit of the attainment of the group's goals and objectives. The above implies that a leader should have the following:

I.   Authority: this is the basis or platform upon which a leader is to carry out his duties. Authority includes that which will enable him/her to enforce/command obedience among his followers. Authority can be derived from charisma, law, religious belief and culture.

II.   Vision: a leader must have a focus of what he/she intends to achieve for and on behalf of the group. A leader without vision has nothing to offer and will achieve nothing.

III.   Knowledge: the leader must be knowledgeable, apart from having authority and vision. It is the knowledge and skills he has that drive and energize him to identify his responsibilities and be focused to use his authority creditably to the benefits of all.

IV.   Firm: the leader must, in certain circumstances, remain firm, resolute, persistent and refuse to be distracted, especially by detractors. While being focused, he should avoid seeing oppositions as disgruntled elements, but see their criticisms as pivots to achieve more. He should rather see them as his strength. That is why in Igbo land, southeast Nigeria context, leaders are seen as *Ndi Ndu* (leaders) not *Ndi Ochichi* (rulers).

Stogdill, (1974) identified the following traits of a leader:

I.   Strong drive for responsibility,
II.   Focus on completing the task,
III.   Vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals,
IV.   Ingenuity and originality in problem-solving,
V.   Drive to exercise initiative in social settings,
VI.   Self-confidence,
VII.   Sense of personal identity,
VIII. Willingness to accept consequences of decisions and actions,
IX.   Readiness to absorb interpersonal stress,
X.   Willingness to tolerate frustration and delay,
XI.   Ability to influence the behaviour of others,
XII.   Capacity to structure social systems to the purpose in hand.

A leader with the above traits needs to be creative and innovative. He must always see his followers' condition as not adequate and must strive always to improve or better their condition through a cautious craze for change. He must not be complacent. In other words, the leader must be purposefully change-oriented. A leader is saddled with the responsibility of accomplishing set out goals for the group he/she is leading. To achieve this, there are certain functions expected of such a leader. These functions are:

Creating an Agenda

This relates to establishing vision and direction for the future, and developing strategies for change to achieve goals. The leader must always be at the forefront for any meaningful project and be ready to mobilize followers and the people for actions needed for results.

Developing People

This involves ensuring the improvement of the quality of people and teams, who will contribute towards achieving the set goals and objectives. This entails capacity building and creating opportunities for leadership succession bid by encouraging followership. He is never gender biased. The leader involves himself in mentoring people. This is why people literally say that a successful man is one who is able to mentor successors.

Motivating and Inspiring

This involves energizing and motivating people to overcome obstacles and challenges to satisfy human needs. This also includes inspirational management and communal healthy relationship that begets love, harmony and development. The motivation and inspiration are geared towards change to better the living standard of the people in particular and the community at large.

Ensuring Outcomes

This entails producing positive and sometimes dramatic changes. He does not just wish for change for the sake of it, but for its sake where it is sufficiently necessary for transformation. This ensures a movement forward, a quantum leap from the status quo to advancement upwards from the social condition, thereby enlisting the cumulative social wellbeing of the people and the community at large.

Adopting Participatory Leadership and Management Style

The leader ensures that he encourages his followers and all around him to contribute to problem solving always. He must not see himself as the repertoire of knowledge that must always proffer solutions to problems even when his followers look up to him for solutions. He is always the envy of all as a result of the accommodating nature of his participatory leadership style that involves inclusiveness, motivation and inspiration. He has no phobia for opposition.

Community Development

The process of community development is often referred to by several terminologies. The most common is rural development. Thus, the

concepts of 'community development' and 'rural development' are often interchangeably used to describe the actions and processes of transforming and improving the living conditions of the rural people. Aslam (1981) defined the concept as a process aimed at developing the rural poor, their economy and institutions from a state of stagnation or low productivity equilibrium into dynamic process leading to higher levels of living and better quality of life. Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. However, a more comprehensive and acceptable description of community development is that of the United Nations. According to the United Nations (1965) as cited in Adedayo (1985:26), community development is:

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

In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of National Planning (1980) identified that the cardinal objective of community development includes the geographical spread of physical development throughout the country, and thus help to reverse the strong trend towards rural out-migration. According to Adebayo (1985), the task of community development has been identified as a complex one that may be the intervention and involvement of government, the self-help projects by the community, or by both as partners in transforming the socio-economic life of a community. In order words, there needs be a synergy between the community development partners.

The task of community development involves taking action to explore the internal (and external) causes of underdevelopment of the rural communities and by extension, rural poverty; taking actions through critical public policies and articulated programmes and expenditures to reduce poverty in the rural communities in the provision of infrastructures such as electricity, housing, etc; construction of projects such as roads, bridges, rural water supply, etc in rural communities in preference to urban areas; investments in primary education and health services to transform the lives of the rural people and to curtail both infant and maternal mortality and diseases; creation of environment for wealth and job creation to stem the tide of rural-urban migration; designing and implementing strategies for the reduction of poverty and which must be guided by the needs of the poor as identified by the poor themselves; ensuring that since poverty is an

environmental issue, it does not degenerate into degradation and counter effect of further impoverishment; etc. Community development involves macroeconomic policies from government at both federal, state, and local levels and donor agencies for the achievement of stabilization in the provision of incentives for employment-creating and wealth-generating production to encourage both domestic and export markets, especially in this age of market and economic integration and globalization. In all these however, there should be a link to facilitate the requisite partnership for the transformation of the life of the rural community dwellers to come to fruition.

To the above effects, rural and community development involves strategic rural infrastructure, pro-poor public expenditure patterns and critical policies that encourage entrepreneurship and which do not share discriminatory attitude towards labour, whether manufacturing or service oriented, since a greater majority of the poor are dwelling in the rural communities. Agricultural research and extension services and programmes, with their focus on new technology and services, should always be the target of development in rural communities since agriculture still employs a good percentage of rural dwellers in order to make rural economy supportive of the urban. Through research and extension services, agriculture should be made attractive to the teaming migrating youths. This is where the issue of leadership question at all levels becomes germane.

Synergizing the Challenges of Community Development and the Leadership Question

Since political independence in 1960, various governments in Nigeria have adopted various strategies and methods aimed at developing the rural areas of the country. Notable among the plethora of policies, schemes and programmes aimed at community and rural development are:

a. Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP)
b. Primary Health Programmes
c. Rural/Community Banking Schemes
d. Low Cost Housing Schemes
e. Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER)
f. The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).
g. Better Life for Rural Women, etc.

However, Ikotun (2002) noted that in spite of colossal amount of money that have gone into implementing the various rural development programmes and the proliferation of rural development agencies one after the other, not much impact has been made.

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One of the major factors that have contributed to the failure of rural development agencies to achieve their noble goal of poverty eradication in Nigeria today is the problem of purposeful, critical and knowledgeable leadership. As Achebe (1983) aptly observed, the trouble with Nigeria, is simply a failure of leadership. Leadership failure has become pervasive, permeating every facet of our national life.

According to a research carried out by Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), local leaders are expected to perform the following roles and duties:

1. Identifying, articulating and making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach

2. Acting as liaison and bridge builder between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance

3. Monitoring and evaluating projects for proper execution

4. Sourcing and raising funds through levies, donations/philanthropy, launchings, etc to finance community development projects in the community

5. Developing a strategy and plan of work for the community projects

6. Legitimizing development projects in the community through participatory approach

7. Diffusing and educating rural people on government/non-government intentions and development interventions for the community

8. Ensuring that all forms of assistance from government/non-government agencies reach the targeted people in the community

9. Coordinating all rural development projects in the community to ensure that results are achieved and to the satisfaction of all

10. Identifying and ensuring that all factors such as land tenure, communication problems, etc, that may impede development processes are surmounted

11. Ensuring that there exists cordial relationship among the rural people for effective and efficient participation in community development programmes

12. Ensuring that there is maintenance of peace and harmony between communities that bound own community

13. Collectively identifying and determining feasible community development programmes based on the felt needs, priorities and available resources in the area

14. Attracting the presence of extension officers and providing information to rural people on where and how to obtain farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, credits, improved seedlings, etc

15. Providing informal technical advice to rural people on how to utilize farm inputs, and where necessary, invite technical officers for their expert advice

16. Enforcing government laws such as tax and rate payments through dialogue, persuasion, and more especially through enlightenment programmes

17. Awakening the political and developmental consciousness in the community

18. Collectively identifying and developing proposals for funding by the community, governmental or non-governmental bodies.

It is the onerous duty of the leadership to ensure peace in the community, always enlist the people's participation and mobilize them for the development of their community, identifying critical areas of the people's life that need transformation, identifying and ensuring that the endowed natural resources and budding human capacities are harnessed and developed, and ensuring that the developed critical human and natural resources are not kept dormant but mobilized for socio-economic transformation of the people at large. Leadership must always be the link between the community and the government. It is the human factor that mobilizes the other factors of production. The leader must be altruistic, always there for his people and must abhor any thing that will bring rancor, acrimony, hatred, conflict etc. He must not fan the embers of dis-unity for selfish motives and ends. He must not be crazy about sycophancy, surrounding himself with praise singers.

However, certain factors and issues have been identified to have caused leadership failure and particularly, challenge in community development, especially in Nigeria (Roxborough, 1981; Ugochukwu, 2002; Oruonye, 2013). These include:
1. Lack of rule of law and non adherence to constitutionality;
2. Absence of development oriented leadership;
3. Absence of accountability and transparency;
4. Corruption challenges;
5. Electoral malpractices challenges; and
6. Craze for riches, wealth, power, selfish interest, etc.

The above and many more have mitigated the efforts of leadership in ensuring the development of Nigeria generally and the transformation of the rural communities in particular. They are factors that have blurred the visions of leadership on exposing the internal and external causes and continued underdevelopment of rural communities and the efficacies of community development as an approach to rural development; decentralizing government and development agencies' decision-making in areas such as public expenditures, promotion of participatory management in

the identification, design and implementation of pro-poor projects, infrastructural development, etc for poverty reduction; and identifying and improving the capacities of the rural manpower and resources for entrepreneurship and socio-economic development. The lack of requisite leadership is fingered for the inability of community development efforts at ensuring the integration of rural capacities, endowments and resources for domestic growth and export markets; attracting agricultural research and extension services to promote agriculture in the communities and making it attractive to the youths to stem the tide of rural-urban migration; ensuring that government's macroeconomic policies and agencies' development efforts at providing incentives for employment, job creation, wealth generation and rural economic production are meaningfully achieved; etc.

Conclusion

Community development has been identified as an important effort aimed at improving the lot of local people. In Nigeria, various governments (both military and civilian) have done a lot in ensuring sustainable community and rural development. Despite these efforts, development has continued to elude majority of rural areas. These communities have suffered neglect, they are poverty stricken and they lack the basic rural infrastructure such as good water supply, road and electricity. There is no accessibility to credit and banking facilities. These problems are believed to be compounded by leadership challenges.

Most local leaders are not development oriented, have no respect for rule of law and are corrupt. These negative attributes impede on their ability to ensure an effective and sustainable community development. However, our leaders, particularly the local leaders, should begin to recognize that they have a significant role to play towards sustainable community development. A dynamic leadership enlists a dynamic community, portraying a quantum leap upwards from the status quo. This dynamism enlists advancement upwards for the social wellbeing of the people and the community at large.

Recommendations

The leadership in community development can achieve the aims of being catalyst for rural transformation by becoming development oriented, shunning corruption, becoming more transparent and accountable and having greater respect for the rule of law. On the other hand, the local people should become more empowered through education and be involved in the development process of their communities.

It is the avowed opinion of this treatise that if the identified lapses and challenges in our local leadership are addressed, and the roles of leadership applied appropriately for transformational and sustainable

community development, then our rural communities will be a haven to be graced by every angel here on earth. It is recommended that if the leadership selflessly applies their capacities on genuine community development, the rural communities will be strategically re-positioned to play their roles as bedrocks and foundation for socio-economic development, a springboard for both domestic and export markets and a pathway for integration of rural economies with international and global economies.

The governments at all levels and development assistance agencies should endeavour to explore the internal and external factors that have challenged community development and are still weighing down transformation in the lives of the rural people. This call is germane taking into consideration the amount of efforts and resources that have gone into rural and community development by all and sundry, yet sustainable rural community development has remained a mirage.

There is need to re-examine the structural policies of government, the efforts of the development assistance agencies and the self help programmes of the rural people themselves to discover why they have not achieved their targets. Either the policies are structurally faulty or the leadership that should act as catalysts and facilitators have not played their roles or both.

Leadership, especially in rural community development, should avoid being selfish, corrupt, inept, and visionless who always hear that which they want to hear about themselves from praise singers. Leadership should be creative, knowledgeable and be able to carry the followers along in the identification, designing and implementation of projects and programmes meant for poverty reduction and their socio-economic transformation and development. Leaders should realize that they are there for the people who must see the projects as their own and therefore ensure their participation and motivation. If discrepancies exist in the programmes and visions of development partners in community development, there should be alignment and understanding towards ensuring a sustainable community development.

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