

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ANAOCHA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The manifest problems confronting local governance institutions in the attainment of community development goals and objectives in Nigeria necessitated the decision to embark on this discourse. Using, Anaocha local government area as a springboard for our analysis in this paper, we sought to find out the development problems faced by communities in Anaocha local government area and proffer useful recommendations on the way forward. Qualitative method of data generation was utilized in this paper. To this effect, data from secondary sources formed the basis of our analysis. The paper discovered that, inadequate use of grassroots institutions, economic inequality, inadequate financial resources, corruption and the general malaise called the Nigerian factor were among the problems that have hindered community development in Anaocha local government area. As part of its conclusion, the paper stated that, until these problems are solved, community development in Anaocha LGA will remain inconsistent and ultimately a hoax. The paper therefore, recommends that Traditional institutions should be incorporated into the development programs of the local government.

Keywords: Anaocha LGA, Community development, Local government, Economic inequality.

Introduction

Following allied viewpoints on the current debates, we align with the fact that, "Community development is not a new phenomenon in the political trajectory of Nigeria. In fact, it has permeated through the three major political epochs namely pre-colonial periods, colonial, and post-colonial periods with different nomenclature. In the pre-colonial epoch the practice of self-help development activities was concerned with mobilization of human and material

resources to achieve self-development across Nigeria. They employed communal efforts as mechanism for mobilizing community resource to provide physical improvement and financial facilities. Community self-help was employed in constructing homesteads, pathways, roads, bridge, market (Idode, 1989)."

However, in the colonial epoch, British policies turned community development effort to a compulsive and coercive form through introduction of warrant chief, arrangement taxes and compelling labour force from the people. The policies which disarticulated community development efforts that were in existence in the pre-colonial epoch were seen as anathema to the principle of collective self-help. The colossal gaps that these colonial policies created in community development which its effects can still be felt even in the post-independence time thus, the post-civil war saw the immerse role the government expected self – help activities to play in complementing their efforts (Anikeze, 2014). Other efforts by government to motivate development of the grass root led to the enactment of the 1976 local government reform to create new growth for future spatial speed of development. This reforms and the 1999 constitution have recognized local government as the third tier of government nearest to the rural populace and placed this third tier of government at the epic centre and prime actor in the scheme of community development there by relegating the role of age grade institution into background (Adekunle, n.d).

Then again, Akindiyo, Imoukhuede and Mohammed (2015) contend that, "Local Government in Nigeria is crisis-ridden. The debate over the performance of its statutory functions has undermined the existentialism of local government whose authority is derived from the constitution. Small wonder or no wonder the fate of local government in Nigeria has assumed a worrisome dimension since the democratic drive in 1999." In this dimension, "It is important to note that despite various local government reforms in local government administration in Nigeria, much has not been seen in terms of provision of essential services in the local governments that will translate to sustainable development at the grassroots level (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Nkah, 2014)." There are manifest problems confronting local governments vis-à-vis community development in Nigeria. Notably, Anaocha local government area is at the front burner of the avalanche of local council suffering the above ugly scenario. Based on this, this study is geared towards finding the problems faced by Anaocha local government area in community development and to proffer recommendation on the way forward.

Methodological Strategy

Qualitative method of data generation was used. To this effect, data from the secondary source were used in the analysis. Secondary data from relevant textbooks, newspapers, journals, internet sources and unpublished materials were systematically drawn and incorporated in the study.

Literature Review

At this point, the study points us to some extant literatures in the course of this review. On this note, we begin the conceptualization of relevant terms that is prevalent in the study below:

The meaning of Community Development

Development at the grassroots is development be it called, rural development or community development. It is a matter of semantics and choice of words of the author leading the intellectual debate. Community development is a movement and process with its specific goal centred on fostering better living for the whole community with the active participation of the masses in such community (Chioke, n.d). So, in this paper, the author will use the terms (rural development or community development) to drive home some points as regards the broad objectives of this paper. On this note, we agree that, "Rural development is one of the most talked concerns of local government. This is because local government is regarded as an instrument of rural development as it is created with the aim of bringing the rural dwellers closer to the government and to aid local participation and wide spread participation in politics before, during and after elections (Chioke, Umeokafor and Mbamalu, 2020)." Ekong, (1977) cited in Anikeze 2014, sees community development as any action in a locality by any agency with the primary intention of bringing some benefits to such locality. This implies that community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and on the initiative of the community. Ezeani, (2004) points out that, community development is an educational process; it is something of the spirit more than something material. It must reach into deep cultural pattern of people, examining them and testing them as principle of faith. It is not a temporary, physical construction. It is a building within the heart and mind of men not a recreation centre in the middle of a field.

World Bank (1975) rightly opined that, "It includes the whole range of development activities in the districts, whether these are under taken by the Government or unofficial bodies." Eze (1999) defined community development as efforts provided for advancement of communities, hesitated that the major emphasis of the concept was upon those activities which aim at prorating the improvement of the basic condition of the community's non material need. This implies that community development is aimed at community action where community action is used as a phenomenon that recommends that community members resolve their problems by directly participating in development activities (Adekunle, n.d). Accordingly, Anikeze(2010) is of the view that "community development as a process of social action in which people took action to meet those needs with maximum reliance on their own initiative and resources, supplemented with assistance in any government and non-governmental organization." In Nigeria, like in most developing countries, the governmental authority usually involved in community development is the local government because it is the closest level of government to the people. Perhaps, it is in respect of this that Odiong (2003) as cited in Abugu (2014) tells that, "The goals of community development should be to improve people's productivity and enable them to participate in their social, political and economic life into the future. Indeed, it is morally binding on the local government managers to do everything possible to achieve the goals.

Then what are the real objectives upon which community development stands in developing climes especially Nigeria? Viewed from the angle of Obodoechi (2006) perspective as cited in Anikeze, (2014), the objectives of community development in Nigeria are:

- i. To improve life at the local community level as much as our human and material resources can carry us.

- ii. To develop all aspects of community living equitably so as to avoid in balance or neglect of any area of living.
- iii. To achieve a self-generating breakthrough in productivity and to raise the production potentials by stimulating the human and physical process of change.
- iv. To minimize poverty and unemployment in the communities.
- v. To make families economically viable and to cross over the poverty line.
- vi. To provide governmental services to communities.
- vii. To explore and use technical assistance available from outside the community
- viii. To cooperate with and coordinate state and national development plans etc.

Therefore, it is well known that, "Usually, community development programmes aim at creating awareness of rural possibilities; providing information on resources, inputs and infrastructure; deploying technical assistance; skills acquisition and development; increasing literacy levels; improving productivity and productive systems; adapting appropriate technology in agriculture; sensitizing potential (Onodugo, Amujiri, Asogwa&Anyadike, 2015)."

What is Local government?

Local government has been variously defined. Based on this, we will examine some of the definitions that abound in the following direction. First, Agagu (1997) sees the term as a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar needs of the people. In this regard, Agagu (1997) was right to have conceived local government as a level of government which is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people of the grassroots. "Local government is defined as government, by popularly elected bodies, charged with the administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place (Appadorai, 1975)."

According to Abugu (2014), "Local government as a grass root government is designed to transmit the pulse of other arms of government to the vast majority of the rural populace, and to equally mobilize them for effective national development." The local government is essentially created as a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of all communities and for delivery of essential services to the citizens. The primary purpose of the local government and the basis for its existence is to create a mass development impetus to the grassroots transformation (Adeyemo, 1995). Conclusively, we note that, "Essentially, the local government is saddled with the responsibility of guaranteeing the political, social, and economic development of its area and its people (Enero, Oladoyin, &Elumilade, 2004)."

Problems of Community Development: Evidence from Anaocha LGA

There are several problems that confront community development in some local governments in Nigeria which have been identified as part of the problems with the local government under review.

Inadequate use of Grassroots Institutions – "Before the advent of Colonialism with its attendant social change, various Nigerian communities have through self-help effort used such Grassroots Institutions as the Age grade, the Umu-Adas, the Town Unions, the Masquerade group [usually an enforcement agent], the Religious groups, etc, to develop

themselves. Grassroots Institutions are in no doubt a great force to be reckoned with especially when harnessed well and channeled in the right direction in the realization of community development objectives. They possessed a quantum of both human, material and to an extent, financial resources which yearns to be tapped and in the right direction for optimum result. It therefore behooves on the practitioners to systematically integrates and utilize these grassroots institutions as a sway of attaining sustainable community development (Abugu, 2014)."

Economic Inequality Since the country is yet suffering the aftermaths of covid-19 pandemic, economic inequality has continued to trouble community development in developing countries of the world. "Economic inequality entails, unequal distribution or access to the common wealth and thus leading to the emergence of "the have and the have nots or the rich and poor. The above condition makes community development well-nigh difficult if not impossible. It is a common knowledge that-the gap between the rich and the poor affects their respective level of participation both in utterances and actions. There is usually low participation from the poor group due largely to their low financial strength and thus a constraint to effective community development (Abugu, 2014)."

Inadequate financial resources – In spite of the state – local government joint account, Anaocha local government area of Anambra state, Nigeria is not financially strong to effectively usher in community development programme within her jurisdiction. To show the matter, "The joint state-local government account has not helped matter as the latter is always at the caprice and whim of the former. There is glaring evidence of undue state interference in the financial resources of many local governments to the extent that the average local council finds it difficult to meet its recurrent expenditure not to talk more of executing capital projects (Abugu, 2014)."

Unskilled Workers – "Local government in Nigeria are faced with the problem of inadequate skilled workers such as engineers, accountants, medical Doctors, town planners, statisticians etc Reasons for this ugly development are that, there is a very low image of local government in the minds of these professionals. Again, there is lack of job satisfaction that can keep them in the local government. Most skilled and qualified personnel and professionals prepare to gamble their luck either in private organizations or establish their own firms rather than stay at the local government where there are no incentives and be wasted away. This have made local governments to be surviving on unskilled labour, some are diploma and certificate holders who cannot defend the certificates they hold. This situations is a great challenge to local government efficiency, people who don't know their left and right in what they does can hardly be productive and effective (Onodugo, et al, 2015)." With the high level of unskilled workers in the local government under study, community development remains unattainable.

Corruption and the Nigerian factor: According to Nwankwo et al (2021), "Corruption is a term used to describe acts that are considered immoral, such as fraud, graft, bribery, stealing, perjury, lying, dishonesty, indiscipline and debased act like sexual immorality or perversion." He also also said that corruption manifests in different forms such as private corruption, public corruption, political corruption, bureaucratic corruption. Anaocha local government area is not left out in this cankerworm that is destroying our

Nation called corruption. This manifests in local community levels through diversion of community funds and other resources meant for the well being of the people in the community. These funds are squandered and lavished for personal aggrandizement at the expense of community development. It is gradually becoming a norm if not an ideology of most local government officials and thus, not an open secret anymore. Local government in practice presently is nothing short of a venture where the triadic personality or in the words of Dialoke, "Triangular officers" of the Chairman who is the chief executive as well as the accounting officer of the local government, the Head of Personnel Management saddled with the responsibility of administration and the Treasurer who is in charge of the local government finance, all connive and divert the council's allocation to their personal purse. In fact, the monster has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation at large. there are also corruption challenges of reported cases of examination malpractice among the primary, post primary schools children and tertiary institutions while wide spread cases of certificates forgery rocks the so-called National Assembly (our legislators), these individuals are products from our different communities in Nigeria. Again, the concept of Nigerian factor which permits the continuous acceptance of anomalous administrative behavior such as taking short cuts or any means to achieve ones aim, bribery, mediocrity, inefficiency e.t.c. the implication is that anything goes under this condition and nothing works well. The guiding philosophy here in the words of Machiavelli is that "the end justifies the means". Therefore community development may remain a mirage to the hearts and minds of the people under the above condition (Abugu, 2014).

Conclusion

The paper concludes that there are diverse areas of disturbances such as, inadequate use of grassroots institutions, economic inequality, inadequate financial resources, and corruption and the Nigerian factor that constituted major hindrances to community development in Anaocha local government area. Until these problems are solved, community development in Anaocha LGA will remain very inconsistent and ultimately a hoax.

Recommendations

For the local government under review to thrive, the following recommendations are suggested as the way forward:

- Traditional institutions should be incorporated into the development programs of the local government.
- It is said that effective information and training contributes in goal attainment, as this will help the unskilled workers. Therefore, for community development to be ensured in Anaocha LGA, the local council should adopt effective information dissemination mechanism in intimating the need and benefits of community development efforts to the staff and rural dwellers in the local government for better synergy.
- Finally there is need for re-orientation of values from the grassroots on this endemic issue bedeviling community development that have cut across several entities in the globe today called corruption. To achieve this a well articulated policy/efforts directed towards detecting, preventing, prosecuting the culprits and reducing corruption to the barest minimum should be formulated.

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