

## **EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AS MEANS FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract:** *Leadership role is critical in promoting community development. When the leadership is effective, he will win the confidence of the followers that is the community members. He will function well as an organizer and visualize projects that are need-based. This paper therefore conceptualizes what constitute effective leadership and how such leadership can foster sustainable community development*

**Keywords:** Community leadership and sustainable community development

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Community leadership has been seen as being very crucial if the people or community followers would embrace community development with enthusiasm. Leadership in the community when it is effective enhances community participation and generates confidence which is a crucial factor in completing community projects. In carrying out community development projects, change agents have depended on effective leaders who would champion programmes for sustainable community development. Also, when effective leaders are chosen they will mobilize community member for execution of community projects. Even then, the effective leader would ensure that from initiation to execution through evaluation the community members would be carried along. This will reduce the incidence of abandonment of projects. So from the above perspective it is necessary to espouse the key concepts implicit in this paper.

### **Leadership**

Leadership has been seen from many perspectives which espouse the meaning of leadership. Hornby (2000); sees leadership from three perspectives, firstly, as the state or position of being a leader; secondly, the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have; thirdly, a group of leaders of a particular organization etc. Barikor (2005) described leadership as the person who creates the most effective change in group performance and as a process of influencing, directing and coordinating the activities of other people in an organization towards the advancement of the goals of the organisation. On their own part Kobani and Alozie (2015) citing Wikipedia (2014) indicated that leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. So Kobani et.al. concluded that the leader is simply somebody whom people follow or somebody who guides or directs others. Further explaining the way leadership may be viewed Kobani & Alozie indicated by reference to Anijah-Obi (2001) that:

1. A leader is one who is the focus of group behaviour and as such receives most communication than any other around and is the centre of attention and action.
2. A leader is one who initiates changes to accomplish the goals of an organization
3. A leader is one who is able to lead a group toward group goals, motivates members towards such goals and manages available resources so that such goals can be achieved.
4. A leader is one who is named by a group as a leader. This is based on group acceptability. It involves socio-metric affiliation of group choice and attaches themselves to the individual.
5. A leaders is one who demonstrably influences group personality and measureable performance of a group.
6. A leader is the one who engages in leadership behaviour and such a person specifies group goals, provides policies and programmes that can lead to group goals and is excellent in socio-emotional aspects for the job of the group.

### **Characteristics of Good Community Leaders**

Ume (2000) quoted Wilson as asserting that a fundamental problem in a democratic organization is that of recruiting, retaining, developing and finding a functioning leader at all levels, from the smallest local government to the entire country or central government. To solve the problem of leadership therefore he proffered certain characteristics which may serve as parameters in identifying good leaders. These include:

1. Acceptance of the group
2. A good leader must have the spirit and desire to lead
3. A good leader must make certain sacrifices
4. Personality suited to do the job
5. Must have expert knowledge
6. A good leader must be skilled in working with others

Nwakaire (2013) included some other parameters such as:

7. Openness to constructive criticism
8. Fear of God
9. Modesty and humility
10. Non-tribalistic approach to matters (Detribalized) and
11. Visionary

He tried to justify the inclusion of the five additional parameters by stating that few leaders in Africa and indeed the whole world would accept constructive criticism. For these leaders they are perfectionists who do not falter. It is a truism that when a leader listens to constructive criticism he will progressively improve his leadership skills. He regretted that because African leaders consider constructive criticism as an affront they have continued to commit the mistakes of the past. A brief exposition of the characteristics of a good leader is appropriate for the purpose of clarity and the effectiveness desired in the leadership that would ensure sustainability in community development. These are:

1. Acceptance by the group. For a leader to be accepted by the group is vital to success in the community. In fact, the group should be yearning to have such leader appointed from the beginning. They would indicate such acceptance by collectively enlisting their support for the

leader by the majority in the group. This will give the leader once appointed the ganner support for projects that must be executed.

2. A good leader must have the spirit and desire to lead. This leadership quality would exclude a laizzer faire attitude once appointment. The spirit and desire to lead will generate enthusiasm for work and would ensure that followers are accordingly motivated.

3. A good leader must make certain sacrifices. A good leader must be willing to sacrifice his time, talents, financial resources, conveniences to ensure that the community is led. This unselfish approach will reflect well on the community who will likely follow his example.

4. Personality suited to do the job. An effective leader must have the skills of oratory, bravery, courage, humility, kindness and ability to convey his thought aright. He has to speak with conviction and persuasiveness. These characteristics associated with personality suited to do the job will enable a leader carry the followers along in executing community projects.

5. An effective leader must be quite knowledgeable. His knowledge expertise will enable him preside over community meetings and ensure that projects are selected in a need-based format.

6. A good leader must be skilled in working with others. He must not be an extremist but reckon that others have a lot to contribute. Though he will moderate discussion of the community; he is sensitive to the contribution of others in a democratic manner. He is able to discern when matters are veering off the knowledge path and the redirect matters positively.

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Few leaders in Africa and indeed the whole world accept constructive criticism. For these leaders, they are perfectionists and do not falter. It is a truism that when a leader listens to constructive criticism he will progressively improve his leadership. African leaders consider constructive criticism as an affront, they have continued to commit the mistakes of the past. That a leader has assumed the mantle of leadership does not mean that he is the most intelligent, so an effective leader must listen to opinions of the followers no matter how crudely they are put (Nwakaire, 2013).

Fear of God; leaders usually swear by saying, so help me God and by virtue of the leader saying so help me God in consummation of his oath of office he has acknowledged, his accountability before the Universal Sovereign. In his subsidiary, infinitesimal role as a leader he must render an account to the Universal Sovereign who allowed him to function in his area of governance.

As for modesty and humility a leader is bound to listen to the cries of the poor. the leader must recognise his limitations as a human (modesty). He does not favour anybody above others as one who is not tribalistic in his approach to matters. With the multiplicity of tribal groups a leaders must be careful not to be tribalistic.

The leader as a visionary, a leader must be able to create a mental image of the ideal state he wants his community to attain. Once the vision is created the leader vigorously pursues it, putting into place every appropriate machinery for its attainment, monitoring all agencies and infrastructures for the attainment of the vision. a good leader channels all the resources available to attain it. These resources are both material and human. There is a need to understand what community development is in order to determine how an effective leader can promote sustainable community development.

**Community Development**

Kobani and Alozie (2015) saw community development as a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forth-coming spontaneously by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. They also saw 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 condition of community to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and enable then contribute fully to national progress.

Onyeozu (2007) defined community development as an educational method in which the efforts of the people, themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities. According to Community Development Exchange (2013) community development is a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grassroots and deepening democracy. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and imposition of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which if used in creative ways can be channeled into collective action to achieve the community desired goals. Frank and Smith (2013) view community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. This means that commonly development ranges from small initiatives with a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community. Given the perspectives that development in positive change that takes place within a community in the reasons of economic, social as well as cultural and political lives of members of the community an effective leader is expected to champion development in these areas.

**Sustainable Community Development**

Sustainable development according to World Commission on Environment and Development Brundtland, Report (1987) is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of needs is in particular the essential needs of the worlds poor to which overriding priority should be given and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment ability to meet present and future needs.

According to Barbier as quoted by Nwakaire (2016) the concept of sustainable economic development as applied to the third world is directly concerned with increasing the material standard of living of the poor at the grassroots level, which can be quantitatively measured in terms of increased food, real income, education services, health care, sanitation and water supply, emergency stocks and cash, which are only directly concerned with economic growth at the aggregate national level. In general terms the primary objectives is reducing the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods, that minimize resources depletion environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social instability. There is no overstressing the fact that there is no sustainability in Nigeria given the operational terms above.

### **Existing State of Community Development in Nigeria**

Communities in Nigeria are bedeviled by many problems which hinder sustainable community development. These problems are numerous and include those identified by Nwakaire & Ume (2006) as: poverty, crime, illiteracy, women disempowerment, examination malpractice, depletion of the environment in the Niger Delta region, conflicts, land disputes, youth restiveness, religious/ethnic conflicts and poor nutrition. Many lack the basic necessities that will lift them off the guagmire of poverty such as self-esteem, shelter, freedom from servitude and health. Many are still homeless as well as unable to obtain good health care.

It is surprising that after years of identifying the essential ingredients of development, most communities in Nigeria are still bedeviled by underdevelopment. For example Goulet (1971) identified three basic components or core values of development which included life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude. For Ume (1987) the expansion of these three components indicated that: life-sustenance needs included food, shelter, health and protection, where as self-esteem would mean self-worth and self-respect and not being used as a tool by others for their own ends. Nigeria lacks this self-esteem. Their freedom from servitude would mean freedom or emancipation from alienating material conditioning of life and freedom from the social servitudes of men and women to nature, ignorance, misery, institution and democratic beliefs.

Two major areas for democratic values to promote sustainable community development have been explored and include forming partnerships and participation with the communities. This will exclude the top down approach which imposes on communities projects which they neither suggested nor representing their felt needs. They should participate in determining which projects should be embarked upon-from initiation through execution to evaluation. This is the core of human centered development. It is the core of democracy premised on recognizing democratic values. They are the values to be promoted for there to be sustainable community development

### **Leadership Role in Promotion of Sustainable Community Development in Nigeria**

An effective Community leader must possess the characteristics already mentioned above He is to guide his people and himself be guided by the understanding that community development has the principal purpose of bringing about desirable changes for better living among the people. He must endeavour to lead his people to identify the problem inhibiting their progress as community and should lead them to be prepared to solve them. He must endeavour to lead his people to appreciate the fact that sustainable community development can be achieved where they willingly cooperate to achieve set goals. He must therefore ensure that the citizens themselves are involved in the planning, execution and evaluation of any project designed to improve their welfare (Kobani and Alozie (2013).

The effective community leader should lead his people to the understanding that their reliance on the resources of the community will lead to appreciation and management of any external resources coming into the community. The characteristics mentioned above indicate that a community leader must endure he accepts constructive criticism which will lead to improvement in his leadership and ensure that as the head in his relay race, he has to hand over the baton of leadership to a

successor who will continue his achievement sustainably with fear of God. He can always look in retrospect satisfied that nothing will bother his conscience.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has taken a critical consideration of the role of effective community leader in promotion of sustainable community development in Nigeria. Poverty has bedevilled many communities resulting to underdevelopment as may be seen from the exposition of the existing state of development in the country. Sustainable development therefore will mean that the leadership should take the bull by the horn and tackle many of the teething problems which have engendered unsustainability. Once he is trusted by the community members, he would be able to lead them successfully to sustainable community development. As a matter of urgency Nigeria should take a critical reappraisal of the quality of leaders to ensure that the regressive, unsustainable conditions prevailing in the entire country will be reversed.

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