

COVID-19 AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PARADIGM SHIFT**Ikechukwu Maduka Okafor**

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Abstract

Community development is the process whereby citizens mobilise their members to map out a strategy for improving their status and wellbeing. It has been a long-standing African heritage geared toward helping one another and developing the rural community. The advent of COVID-19 has changed the equation and reshaped community engagement, participation and mobilisation. The paper highlighted the impact of the virus on education, healthcare, religious activities, and the

total neglect of communities by the present and past governments. Some innovations created by COVID-19 shifted the life pattern of the rural citizens by the protocols enumerated to curtail the spread and transmission of the pandemic. It recommends, among other things, the need for government to create synergy between community leaders and citizens, develop and provide a healthcare system, and stabilise E-learning and other social amenities to sustain community development.

Keywords: Community Development, COVID-19, Paradigm Shift.**Introduction**

Community, as the name implies, is made up of people living in one legal, geographical area, village, town or society and work for the common good of the entire members. It could also be seen or viewed as a group of people with diverse characters, attitudes, knowledge, ability and educational qualifications. It also includes those who are linked by common cultural and social activities, affected by common problems but engage in joint actions towards solving and uplifting members for better living. Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) define a community as a consciously identified population with a common physical space engaged in common activities and has some form of organisation that provides for differences in function, making it adaptive to its environment as a means of meeting common needs.

Amirize (2005) believes that development is any conscious effort made or designed by individuals, organisations or state authorities to facilitate the gradual growth, development and improvement of man and community. In this circumstance, development is not isolated from man as the emphasis of development should be on the people because they are thought to appreciate what constitutes change (Balogun, 2002).

Community is made up of man, and development could not be possible without the active involvement, engagement and participation of members. It is a pretence to believe that development could occur in a community without the active engagement of the people, particularly the large number of citizens who reside in the communities (Emeh et al., 2012). Therefore, community development could be a mirage without the collective involvement of community members in solving a felt need. Accordingly, Obetta and Charity (2012) opt that substantial participation and sustained interest could only be achieved through community development efforts of the people and in direct consonance with the people's social, cultural and religious values. This means that self-sustained development is important to the participating community's economic, education, health and social amenities. To enhance

participation in community development, a systematic policy of mobilisation of the community and people in the development outlook is imperative.

However, the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by a virus which causes a severe acute respiratory syndrome called coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). This virus was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11 2020. Callaway (2020) stated that COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, having met the epidemiological criteria of having infected 100,000 people in at least 100 countries.

According to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (2020), the index case of coronavirus was noticed in Nigeria on February 25 2020. The effect of COVID-19 created palpable fears and apprehensiveness within the government circle and the citizens. In Nigeria, for instance, most of the population lives in rural communities with little or no access to healthcare, pipe-borne water, electricity, and information, amongst others. The effect led to a shift in community gatherings, community ways of life and behaviours, social activities, religious programmes and handshaking, among others.

Concept of Community Development

Community

Many scholars in different fields have viewed the concept of community. A community could mean a group of people living in one geographical area, village, or town working for the common good of the community and its upliftment. It could also be seen as a group of people with diverse characters, knowledge, and ability linked by cultural affinity and social ties, share a common perspective and engage in joint action within geographical locations and settings (Ogili 2004). He stated further that a community is a territorially bounded social system within which people live in harmony, love, and intimacy and share common social, economic and cultural characteristics. The concept of community is about a population living within legally established city limits where the people have some social and economic features in common which enable them to pursue common goals' (Ogili, 2004).

Kalpana (2015) exerts that the traditional most held meaning of community refers to people living in a place who have face-to-face contact with each other. He believes that such communal living and isolation have the features of personal intimacy, cohesion, oneness and continuity among the members. This togetherness, cohesion and dependency on one another made COVID-19 a devastating pandemic in communities.

However, Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) defined a community as "a consciously identified population with common need and interest; it may occupy a common physical space, engaged in common activities and have some form of organisation within its population and the institution it forms to meet its needs. A community works together to uplift themselves from poverty and ignorance and has an organised institution which helps to ameliorate the effect of COVID-19 on members. In this circumstance, a community could be seen as a group of people who communicates and has an organised institution.

Development

The term development is seen from different angles by many professionals, such as adult education practitioners, economists, political scientists and other scholars. Many scholars are of the view that social scientists primarily use development. This is because they see development in terms of the per capital income of a person or the Gross National Product. However, development connotes a change and growth, a shift in the status quo, whether of physical development in a person, a plot of land, or the economic development of a community or nation.

Therefore, development becomes a conscious effort made or designed by individuals, organisations or state authorities to facilitate the gradual growth, advancement and improved wellbeing of man and society, Amirize (2005). He stated that development could be initiated by individuals, organisations or even state authorities but geared towards uplifting man and community. Therefore, development is of human advancement rather than infrastructure. This view was shared by Balogun (2002) that the emphasis of development should be on the people because they are thought to appreciate what constitutes change. The identification of change and shift brought about by COVID-19 to man through conscientisation, sensitisation and mobilisation using the formal and informal media included human development as "development is for man, by man and of man" (Ogwo and Oranu 2006). To create a shift during the COVID-19 pandemic, zoom meetings, distancing and regular washing of hands, amongst others, are introduced to limit the spread of the virus

Community Development

Community development has been a mutual understanding and cooperation within and among people of the same community or society. It is a practice that involves the identification of felt needs, community participation, engagement, and assemblage of both human and material resources towards solving the felt need for community welfare and upliftment. It is on this premise that Frank and Smith (2013) see it as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Chukwuezi (2000) noted that it is a process whereby the efforts of the community are combined with the efforts of the governmental authorities to improve the living condition of the people, thereby encouraging the development of various human potentials within the community.

Furthermore, Powell and Geoghegan (2000) described community development as an interactive process of knowledge and action designed to change conditions which marginalise communities and groups and are underpinned by a vision of self-help and community self-reliance. It is a means of community change toward the upliftment of citizens. Akintayo and Oghenekohwo (2004) see community development as a movement for better living with active participation and, if possible, the community's initiative by using techniques for arousing and stimulating it to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. This captures community development as a mechanism and a process which must arouse the interest of the community members to participate in community development.

Community development is one of the modern traditional heritages in Africa, Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) see it as a flourishing heritage of traditional African African

societies involving community citizen engagements. It is an indigenous mechanism and technique developed and employed by the people to identify their felt needs, choose what they want and take cooperative actions to satisfy their needs, Oyebamiji & Adekola (2008). Emeh et al. (2012) believe that community development relies on the interaction between people's joint actions rather than individual activities. This was one of the hindrances to community development during COVID-19, as Community members were banned from coming together and pooling their skills, knowledge and resources for the development of their community. This was to prevent large gatherings and community transmission of the virus.

Concept of COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was previously known as a 2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Ohia et al. (2020) noted that Nigeria experienced a direct effect of coronavirus in February 2020 when the country recorded her first index case with an increasing number of cases every day and the current case fatality ratio of 0.03 as of April 13 2020. World Health Organization (2020) stated that the symptoms exhibited by COVID-19 disease range from fever, cough, respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties.

Umerie and Nnamoko (2020) stated that COVID-19 emerged as a global health threat, and on January 30, 2020, it was declared a public health concern of international magnitude. It was so devastating that countries severed diplomatic meetings and social and economic interactions and, in most cases, total down of socio-economic activities. Due to the infectious nature of COVID-19, physical interactions among people and across communities and social distancing are among the measures put in place to curtail the spread of the virus.

According to Poonam & Rathi (2020), since the dreaded human enemy emergency, thousands of lives have been lost, and millions of confirmed positive cases have been recorded. The health sectors of most advanced countries were overwhelmed, exposing our healthcare systems' inadequacies. World Bank (2020) reported that COVID-19 would take a toll on emerging markets and developing economies with large informal sectors. And with the informal sectors in Nigeria employing over a 48million Nigerians, Yusuf (2014) said that the constant weak growth experienced in the Nigerian economy, the effect of the pandemic is expected to be staggering, debilitating and long-lasting.

However, the pandemic destabilised other sectors such as politics, economy, education, socialisation, tourism, hospitality, and even religious activities (Ozili & Arun, 2020). Umerie and Nnamoko (2020) believe that knowledge informs perception, and this perception will invariably militate against the government's actions. The perception of the citizens towards the government during the initial stages of the spread and the government's haphazard policy engagement with the populace helped to escalate the transmission of COVID-19. Furthermore, the uncoordinated programme of the government and the citizens could have watered down the efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

Consequently, Ozili and Arun (2020) noted that before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria had a weak and largely underdeveloped digital economy, with hardly any university or school that offered a full educational curriculum online from start to finish. Most companies, businesses, and even ministries operate using the traditional "come-to-the office-to-work" model instead of the "working-from-home" model. Compounded on socio-

cultural and attitudinal factors, digitalisation was still a mirage in Nigeria before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the scenario, analogue economic and administrative orientation, the mandatory digital switchover introduced a challenging operational environment for individuals both in the urban and most affected rural areas. It is on this premise that Sohrabia et al. (2020) asserted that the risk the outbreak posed was particularly troubling, foremost on their mind being the danger it posed to countries with vulnerable healthcare systems.

Effect of COVID-19 on Community Development

The community has been a place where people gather to practice their culture and pursue personal and group aspirations. Amongst others, suddenly banned from gathering at their community squares, wearing a mask, maintaining some distance from each other and even being advised to stay indoors—these new shifts from the old order affected community development projects and activities.

COVID-19 protocols, as enumerated by NCDC, include fewer gatherings, maintaining some distance, wearing a mask, sneezing on the elbow, etc were novel to the community. These protocols above hindered mobilisation, which is a kernel of community development. Accordingly, Umechukwu (2004) stated that mobilisation is all the efforts and means legitimately employed to encourage and get people ready to take action to achieve the goals and aspirations of individuals or society. Obi (2006) opined that mobilisation and sensitisation of the community enable the project's sponsors to have the opportunity to discuss dialogue and answer questions which, if not treated at the early stage, will later harm the project.

Community development is all-inclusive of the people and activates them in groups, and signifies a procedure whereby individuals are arranged mentally, rationally and attitudinally for change (Abiona, 2013). Due to the inclusive nature of community members toward community development, the pandemic has a far-reaching impact such as;

Poverty: Most Nigerians rely on daily income for sustenance and survival. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the ban on inter and intra-movements and social gatherings, among others, affected the citizens' daily earnings and impoverished the commoner. However, the government promised a cash transfer of Five Thousand Naira (₦5 000.00) to the poorest of the poor and other palliatives but lacked transparency and accountability. The idea of Cushioning the effect of COVID-19 became a mirage as it could not reach the poor community. With the high poverty level, many citizens do not believe that COVID-19 is real.

Poor Rural Healthcare: The most significant ingredient for development is health. It is one of the rural people's cardinal basic social needs. This is because health services are the driving force for community development. Osain (2011) noted that the infectious disease outbreak had affected the rural communities mostly in the areas of child mortality, death during birth, poor nutrition, patient education, and disease control, amongst others. Therefore, the government's inability to arrest the deplorable health services affecting individuals in the rural areas before the outbreak of COVID-19 not only prevented all the precautionary measures put in place by NCDC and hindered community development projects.

Disruptive Education: As the government closed all schools (primary, secondary and tertiary) to avert the spread of COVID-19, the effects were more in rural communities. Most rural communities lack electricity, access to data was poor, and therefore students did not benefit from the e-learning method introduced by some schools. This measure could be said to have been modelled for certain privileged groups in society at the expense of populated rural communities (Ladipo and Adoberi 2020).

Social Gathering: Before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, community members were known to gather in the community square for important decisions that affected the welfare of all citizens. The idea of selective or few representatives due to the ban on social gatherings is foreign to community members. This affected community development activities because decisions taken by a few individuals are not binding and could not be effective. It, therefore, deterred new projects and led to the abandonment of existing ones. It also created fear, panic and termination of all social life of the community like weddings, burial activities and meetings. The fear of being infected created panic in the rural community's minds, drastically affecting their development and social life (Maikomo et al. (2021).

Increase in Crime Rate: Nigeria is an import-dependent nation, and the closure of borders which led to an increase in the prices of foodstuff, led to a high rate of crime among the citizens. Hungry and unemployed youths were out in the street every night and day looking for a house to burgle and who to rob. The inability of the government to provide palliative and pay Five Thousand Naira (₦5, 000) as promised to the poor citizens enhanced the high rate of crimes and criminal activities in communities (Dauda et al. 2020)

High Level of Illiteracy: COVID-19 came with the government ban on all educational institutions in the country. The ban created a gap between the rich and poor in the country. This is a result of COVID-19 magnifying the educational inequality in Nigeria, as only those with access to digital learning resources could keep learning in the comfort of their homes. In contrast, those without access to digital learning resources (the majority of whom are rural dwellers) are left behind (Ladipo and Adoberi 2020). In the final analyses, therefore, the children of the rural communities became the most affected as they 'fail by the wayside'. The closure of schools led most of them into prostitution, crime and even death due to unnecessary risk-taking due to idleness. Education at that time became exclusively for the few who could afford e-resource learning. The shutdown of schools helped to increase the illiteracy level as many could not resume school even when schools were re-opened (Ladipo and Adoberi 2020).

Underdevelopment and Neglect of Rural Communities: Nigerian government (Federal, State and Local) have always paid lip service to the development of rural communities. World Bank (2020) estimated that about 98,156,651 million people in Nigeria (49.66% of the entire population) live in rural areas. Unfortunately, Nigerian rural communities are deprived of the necessities of life such as access to road, electricity, healthcare services and portable water supply, among other crucial basic social amenities. The neglect of rural communities by the Nigerian government manifested dangerously during the COVID-19 pandemic. The people could not observe the NCDC protocols because there was nothing on the ground to

show that the government was serious rather than the usual deceit syndrome. Therefore, any engagement carried out via the virtual world during the lockdown is at the detriment of rural dwellers (World Bank, 2020).

Poor Electricity Supply: Epileptic electricity supply in Nigeria portends grave consequences on the digital life of the rural community dwellers. The electricity supply was largely unstable and unreliable in the country. Most disturbing is the fact that substantial proportions of the population who live in rural areas have no access to electricity supply. The unreliable nature of the power supply helps compound the effect of COVID-19 and exposes the government's insensitivity to the public. The ever-increasing cost of fuel and other power sources do not help matters either (Maikomo et al., 2021).

The inadequate healthcare in the country and the low testing capacity of NCDC made COVID-19 a "white man" disease. Onyeaghala and Olajide (2020) assert that the low testing capacity in Nigeria was limiting the efforts targeted towards curtailing the spread of the virus, especially delays in identifying individuals who have the virus. They went further to state that the testing at the onset almost became an elitist affair because the distribution of the disease mainly affected returnees from abroad. Consequently, when evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 broke the class boundary, testing became insufficient to accommodate the generality of the populace (Amzat et al., 2020). The inadequate PPE has marred the effort to curb the spread of the disease, even for those at the frontlines.

The poor healthcare system in the country and poor response strategy undermines our capacity to deal with the outbreak, reduce public cooperation, and increase our mortality rates (Osain, 2011). With the country still recording zero access to safe water and sanitary means of disposal (Nwankwoala, 2021), poor housing conditions in the urban and rural communities increased the risk of getting sick from the tight living quarters, a major problem. The high poverty rate in the country contributed a lot to making Nigerian citizens more adversely affected than in other parts of the world and inadvertently creating a breeding ground for COVID-19 to thrive (Sowunm et al. 2012).

Despite all, it is noteworthy to highlight some of the strategic interventions the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) put in place amidst obvious limitations in resources to limit the negative effects of COVID-19 on the health and economy of the country. Adepoju (2020) stated that the interventions such as the distribution of information on personal hygiene and cough etiquette to the general populace using various channels, setting up of a network of state and public health emergency network centres within the country, and addition to training of skilled human resources on contact tracing and treatment, amongst others, (Adepoju 2020). He stated that these helped to curb the spread and local transmission of the disease amongst the populace.

The Paradigm Shift

COVID-19, through a pandemic, helps to move communities' hitherto mode of living and association to a new way of life. While the people are confronted with the government's inability to provide basic social amenities to the communities, COVID-19 shifted them away

from those cultural, religious and socio-economic activities that do not agree with its protocols.

Most COVID-19 preventive mechanisms are rather antisocial as they emphasise on maintenance of social and physical distancing within and among people to curb the spread of the virus. Community development involving human interactions, meetings and engagements was suspended from curbing the spread of the virus or reducing it minimally.

Due to the ban, community members imbibe the method of taking decisions through SMS, calls and few representations. Weddings, burials and other social activities that used to attract all the community members were reduced only to family members. Churches and other religious gatherings were held through radios and televisions, with few people maintaining the mandatory distance.

Education was worse hit due to the closure of all educational institutions. It created pandemonium in the initial stage, but citizens later learned that teaching and learning can still occur without the usual face-to-face teaching and learning. The E-learning method was introduced by some schools-public and private, and parents and students embraced the new order of learning. Though the gross infrastructural decay could not allow for the effective incorporation of inclusive digital teaching and learning in public and private schools, the idea that effective teaching and learning could go on is established.

Another noticeable shift is the wearing of a face mask. Before the virus, no "normal human beings" covered their mouth and moved in public. It was only medical doctors and nurses performing surgical operations that wore face-mask. However, face mask-wearing has come to stay as people wear it, especially in banks, government ministries and parastatals, among others. A good number of community people have embraced wearing face masks in meetings, weddings and burial activities.

As the world battles the novel virus, people are beginning to seek ways to adapt to the new normal. Community citizens are engaging in charitable activities to help vulnerable people survive the harsh realities of the pandemic and guidelines in place. This new order has reassured the rural community dwellers on the tenet of community cohesion, oneness and fraternity. COVID-19 has also reduced handshaking and created "elbow-shaking", a new order.

Notwithstanding that the pandemic and its precautionary guidelines may have affected community life, development and participation, it has equally introduced new ways of association, participation and development. However, with proper planning, the government could create new platforms that promote community development, cushion its impact and open up new vistas that aid cohesion.

Conclusion

The novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11 2020, took the world by surprise and affected the

world's global economy. In Nigeria, for instance, palliative measures were taken by the government to ameliorate the suffering of the citizens and to reduce the havoc the pandemic has caused on socio-economic development, religious activities, education and healthcare services. The pandemic brought into bear the high level of distrust toward the government, the poverty level of the citizens and the lack of transparency among the leaders. The virus, however, changed the poor hygiene living conditions of the community people to a better one, the overcrowding of social gatherings of people for weddings and burials to a manageable number and introduced teaching and learning through the digital method, unlike the usual face-to-face method. It also enlightened the rural dwellers on the need to take government policies seriously as, in most cases, it will be for their betterment.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion so far, the following are, at this moment, recommended:

- The government should, as a matter of necessity, create a synergy between community leaders and citizens to reduce distrust among the rural people;
- Adequate healthcare facilities should be made available to rural people as a necessity. This will help reduce unnecessary panic created during the early stage of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The government at all levels should, as a priority, develop rural communities. The development will help the rural citizens believe that government and its leaders are for them.
- There should be an improved mechanism for information.

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