

PEACE AND SECURITY AS IMPERATIVES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Just as humans need peace of mind to be able to achieve success in their daily endeavors, so do communities require peace and security for sustainable community development. Though conflicts are part and parcel of human existence, the role of community leaders in ensuring peace and safety in communities cannot be overlooked. This is because they are the closest to the people and due to their positions in the community, are well respected. They are able to wield a lot of influence over the people in their various communities. This paper, therefore, examined the concept of peace, security, leadership and community leadership as well as the importance of peace and security in community development. It also identified the roles of community leaders in advancing peace and security in the community. In conclusion, the paper pointed out that there is need for serious collaboration between government, non-government agencies and community leaders if the desire for peace and security in communities will be achieved. It also recommended that capacity building programmes be organized for community leaders to make them more effective in their role of ensuring peace and security in the community.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Community Development, Community Leadership

Introduction

All over the world, peace and security have become topical issues in modern times and have been acknowledged as basic requirements for sustainable community development. This explains why

nations of the world make frantic efforts to ensure peace and security within their borders. In the words of Achumba (2013), there is a consensus among scholars that there is a linkage between failure in

governance, national development, sustainable development, insecurity and conflict.

The abundant human and natural resources with which Nigeria has been blessed makes it inevitable for the country to thrive and compete with other developed countries in the globe. However, the continuous unrest and conflicts within communities in various parts of Nigeria makes it almost impossible for such communities and indeed the country to move at the expected pace of development.

Similarly, the high level of corruption among government or political office holders, violation of human rights, injustice within communities prevalent in the country have created room for aggressive tendencies, violence, conflicts, crime and general insecurity in the nation. These among others, have resulted to a nose dive in the state of economy. Aghalino (2004) observed that the feeling of estrangement of Nigerians in their home land is a source of worry to all patriotic Nigerians. If it is not the problem of Niger Delta, it is that of North-South dichotomy, or that of the minority group with the majority group. The situation, therefore, demands that everyone, especially, community leaders, should make visible efforts to calm the voice of violence and restore peace.

Community leaders are very vital in the quest for peace, security and national development. Though they operate at the grass root levels, their impact can also be felt at higher levels since without grass root development, there would be no real development in any country (Ojogwu and Diwe, 2016). The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to reiterate the relevance of community leaders in brokering peace and securing lives and properties of those within

communities and also to remind leaders at the grass root of the need for wake up to their responsibilities in this regard, while bringing to the fore the importance of government/community partnership in the achievement of peace, security and subsequent community and national development.

Concept Clarification

The various concepts which are the focus of this paper include community development, Peace, Security, Leadership and community leadership.

Understanding the Concept of Community Development

Community Development is predicated on the ability of people to work together towards influencing and having significant control over social, economic and political issues which affect them. In other words, community development focuses on relationship between people and a range of institutions and decision makers that govern their everyday experiences. This implies that the development of a community does not rest on the community leaders alone neither is it dependent exclusively on the people. Rather, it can only be achieved when both community leaders and people come together to understand their peculiarities and work out ways towards solving them.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2001), community development occurs when people strengthen the bonds within their neighbourhoods, build social networks, and form their own organisations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving. Members of communities who possess the capacity to influence and enhance the quality of life in their community are portrayed as having the ability to think, to decide, to plan and to take action in determining their lives. To this extent, any community development

effort towards sustainability must give critical and balanced attention to both economics and individuals.

Community development is change which improves the lives of community members. It is a process by which the community come together to identify their problems or needs with a resolve to proffering solution to them and implementing the decision critically. Sustainable community development characteristically entails effective and transparent communication system, all people affected by change should be involved in the process, local knowledge and talent must be identified and respected, community projects should be based on the felt needs of the people and should be identified by them, building of local capacity. The scope of community development process can vary from a simple community initiative within a small group to a complex or larger initiatives that involve a bigger number of community members. Rahim and Asnarulkhadi (2010) opined that regardless of the number of participants in an initiative, the fundamental characteristics of a community development is community organizing themselves. People have to organise themselves before an action can be taken. Community organization is about developing a democratic instrument within which community members can decide or make some influence that affect their lives. The group can be an informal or formal with or without a formal structure of leadership (Rahim and Asnarulkhadi 2010).

The community development process must be planned in order to achieve effective results. This implies that effort must be made towards proper planning and execution. The effort can come from community members as well as from change agents. In this sense,

community development process requires, not only to develop the community's capacity, but also the capacity of change agents as well to address issues and problems, to find avenues and opportunities, to meet the needs and improve certain situations or services.

Concept of Peace

The concept of peace has gathered various opinions at various times. However, a seemingly very popular opinion of peace is that it is the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence (Igbuzor, 2010). This perception has been criticized for not being able to create a critical understanding for the meaning and nature of peace. Considering this deficiency, Galtung (2011) attempted to provide a clear definition of the concept and in the process, he distinguished three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace. These are:- issues of direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence.

Direct violence is manifested by physical, emotional and psychological violence, structural violence on the other hand is in the form of deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death and harm while cultural violence involves cultural norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice and human suffering. Galtung also outlined two dimensions of peace. The first is what he called "negative peace" which he described as the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels and the positive peace, which he referred to as the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace at individual levels. This definition implies that the concept of peace goes beyond the absence of war, fear,

anxiety, suffering and violence as was initially conceived.

In like manner, Ibeanu (2006) approached the concept of peace from the angle of development. He maintains that peace refers to activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and the wider international community. This definition introduces philosophical, sociological and political dimensions of peace and implies that peace is not necessarily a state but a process that involves all steps and machinery that is directed at developing both the human person and the community in which he lives. Politically, however, Ibeanu (2006) explained that peace entails political order. That is, the institutionalization of political structures in a way that makes justice possible. Thus, he argued that it would be wrong to classify a country experiencing pervasive structural violence as peaceful.

This holistic approach to the concept of peace indicates that it is possible for a nation not to be at war and yet not be in peace. In other words, though war may not be going on in a country, the presence of pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of ordinary citizens by those in power, oppression of women or monopolization of resources and power by some social cleavages in the society or nation, still sends a strong notion that there is no peace in such a nation. Therefore, for any nation to talk about peace, the primary process of creating structures that will ensure justice and welfare of the citizenry must be put in place. Peace is seen as an original, God-given state of human existence for men and women. It refers to a state of harmony among people of

various standings in which there are no social antagonisms.

What Security Entails

The issue of security has always been on the front burner of national discourse and has remained so for decades. All these while, attempts have been made by security experts and scholars to provide a broad definition of the issue. Security is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially the survival of individuals, groups or objects in the near future. Adebakin (2012) defined security as activities that ensure protection of a country, persons, and properties of the community against threats, danger, mishaps and all other forms of perils. This means that security constitutes steps and process which are taken to remove any thing that constitutes threat or a potential threat to the safety of the people.

Security of lives and properties of the citizenry is the key to national development. It encourages people to venture into places, areas and business activities with confidence and fearlessness. In other words, no meaningful development can take place in any nation where the people or citizenry are not sure of their safety. This makes it clear that national security is very pertinent in the quest for development.

A critical and broad view of national security must essentially entail economic, political, religious, social and environmental dimensions. This makes the state or government the key actor or stakeholder in the process of seeking active peace, security and national development. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2006), human security refers to freedom from fear and freedom from want and safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions of daily life

in homes, work place or in communities. This means that national security refers to the deliberate obliteration and absence of all forms of social, religious, economic and political vices. In other words, it entails deliberate efforts to ensure adequacy of essential characteristics that make life worth living. It also includes provision of conducive political, religious atmosphere for dwelling.

National security is limited to military defence alone. The concept of national security must be located where it rightly belongs by attaching to it a broader meaning that emphasises not only development in the military or defence sense; but also political, economic and social development of the society. This means that national security encompasses other vital areas such as environmental protection, social and food security and, more especially, the prevalence of internal peace. Ogwari (2015) stressed that without adequate security of lives and property, the system will be rife with lawlessness, chaos and eventual disintegration. The people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution cum socio-economic injustices (Gubak and Bulus 2018). Security is, therefore, a very necessary ingredient for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development and should be handled with all forms of seriousness. This explains why developed countries appropriate large portion of their budget for security.

Community Leadership

The concept of leadership has continued to attract several meanings, based on discipline, experience, location, religion

amongst others. It has emerged from the view of leadership as innate ability of the leader, to it being conceived from the perspective of relationships of influence, and most recently as “a multidimensional social process that contains a range of complex relationships, involving the integration of social systems and individual skills”. These various views of leadership have largely been influenced by our social structures, from hierarchical command and control structures with leadership at the top, to more horizontal shared leadership structures and finally to more flexible organic open systems of leadership.

Leadership is often seen as one of the most important and effective responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by the global context. There are many approaches and definitions of leadership. It is an influence of relationship among leaders and collaborators who intended to bring significant changes that reflect their mutual purposes. This implies that leadership does not exist for the mere sake of possession of authority but pursue predetermined objectives. In other words, the primary purpose of leadership is to influence others towards the achievement of a group objective.

Community leadership refers to the ability of individual to influence, mobilise and cooperate with the members of his community to effect tangible changes within the community. It is essential to a vibrant and sustainable community development effort. One seemingly general agreement by scholars on the concept is that community leadership is community specific. Community leadership is not about an individual wielding power but about setting motions in place to better the living conditions of people in the community. It

involves the process of galvanizing the people towards setting, pursuing and achieving development goals in the community.

According to Sullivan (2007), community leadership, takes a more clear form with local government in shaping action by others in conjunction with its own activities. This same idea finds strong implication in the core elements of the community leadership role. This includes focusing attention on key community priorities that require local authorities to demonstrate the capacity to set a shared strategic direction and to represent community priorities beyond the locality; and involving citizens in the process of priority identification and delivery.

Uhl-Bien (2007) identified three types of leadership as administrative leadership which is hierarchical and controlling; enabling leadership which encourages creative problem solving, learning and adaptability; and adaptive leadership which is a dynamic that empowers change. He noted that adaptive leadership emerges from interactive changes and can be used especially for dealing with problems which require learning, new behaviours and innovation, all of which are also relevant processes to the development of grassroots innovations (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Summarily, effective community leadership and leadership structures, though lacking in various communities, especially in Nigeria, is of paramount importance in the quest for sustainable development.

The Place of Peace and Security in Community Development

There is a strong relationship between peace, security and development of any community, state or country. According

to McNamara, (2008), as development progresses, security progresses, and when the people of a nation-state have organised their own human and natural resources to provide themselves with what they use and expect out of life, and have learnt to compromise peacefully among competing demands in the larger national interest, then their resistance to disorder and violence will enormously increase. To this extent, it can be said that no country can be regarded as secure except it has been able to meet with the demands of its citizenry such as employment, sufficient food, quality education and reduction in the level of poverty.

Peace and security are very paramount in the journey towards community development. In other words, it is practically impossible for any nation to boast of development when it is experiencing strife and rancor within its borders. Hence, all hands must be on deck to ensure sustainable peace and security or safety within communities. Peace and security permeates virtually all sectors of the economy thus Omeriyang, Nnadi and Chukwuto (2015) advocated that the relevance of peace and security entails development of stable economy, encouragement of unity as well as attraction of foreign investors. Development of stable economy has to do with assurance of economic growth. Attraction of foreign investors will bring about establishment of industries and consequently lead to job creations.

Similarly, the presence of peace and security in any community encourages students to continue their education. In other words, crises and conflicts affects the schooling system at all levels because students and their parents would not want to

leave their homes for fear of losing their lives. Where this is not controlled, it goes on to affect the psychology of such students who may ultimately drop out of school. The implication of this is that the nation loses out on such potentials.

In addition, peace and security enhance the quality and quantity of the production of food and other material needs of the citizenry. They also encourage the development of infrastructure within the country such as roads, electricity, water, school, hospital among others to ensure a change in the standard of living of the citizenry. Another important role of peace and security is the social aspect. This refers to a situation where community members can be in unity. It is a common saying that unity is strength, however, it would be impossible for unity to exist among community people when there is no assurance of safety and peace.

Furthermore, a very notable aspect of community development is the active participation of community members in their own affairs. This implies that members of a community should come together to share thoughts and ideas on issues regarding the community and how to better their lots. As long as people are not sure of peace and security in their area, it would be extremely difficult to enlist active participation from them.

The Role of Community Leadership in Advancing Peace and Security

Communities in Nigeria have various leaders such as paramount leaders, chiefs, council members, women leaders, youth leaders, religious leaders amongst others. They also hold the key to the success or failure in security administration in Nigeria because they operate at the grassroots of the society and interact closely with people in

their daily activities consequent upon which they are highly respected. Community leaders are bound by rules and regulations of the community which they govern. In most cases, these rules are enshrined with vision of development in mind. The implication, therefore, is that community leaders must first and foremost endeavour to adhere strictly to the laws of the community as a principal step towards maintaining peace and tranquillity.

According to Mahady (2015), community administration functions as a system of checks and balances, an entity comprised of a specific group of people living in a particular geographical area, established to support governance at local, state and federal levels based on the rule of law. At the heart of the efficacy of this system is the respect and honour given to community leaders as well as a centuries-old hierarchical system of leadership. This shows that such community leaders are expected to take practical steps to ensure peace and at the same time watch out for suspected threats to security within the community boundaries.

Traditional leaders command respect from their subject. This made it convenient for them to settle dispute, to mediate between warring factions, to maintain orderliness and absolute peace in their various domains and so in most cases, government do saddle them with the responsibility of curtailing their subject in order to restore calmness and peace. One of the causes of community conflict is injustice. On this note, it is the primary function of community leaders to ensure that justice is served at all times. Justice in this case refers to fairness. Each community member should be given his due. Earning members should be punished as deterrent to would-be offenders

while honesty and patriotism should be rewarded as a way of encouraging other community members to work for the good of the community.

Conflict has been accepted as part of human existence and when they occur, community leaders are expected to play a significant role to restore peace and sanity. According to Ganiyu, Ojewale and Oyewole (2016), right from the pre-colonial era, traditional leaders served as the major body that settles disputes between and among families, groups and communities. They succeed in this by virtue of being in existence for long and their being on the throne indefinitely which has given their subjects confidence, assurance, reliability and continuity. One very prominent area where the presence of community leaders is felt is land dispute. They are acknowledged to have good historical facts and experience with which land dispute can be addressed. This makes them assets that must be valued and cherished if peace and security must be sustained in communities.

Similarly, where neighbouring communities have conflicts, leaders can facilitate communication and act as mediators in peace processes whether at clan level or national level. This is done by bringing together members of such in a round table discussion in order to understand the details leading to the conflict and to restore peace and security in their area of jurisdiction. In such cases, the leaders are expected to be good peacemakers, well respected, impartial, honest, good decision makers and communicators.

In the same vein, Besteman cited in Ganiyu, Ojewale and Oyewole (2016) argued that traditional elders have the experience and authority to mobilize human and other resources for communal security.

In this regard, it is expected that they should be consulted, and their cooperation sought before taking any action on security issues that would affect their people. The threats to peace include banditry, militia roadblocks, kidnapping of foreigners, the rebellion of a clan against the government, and disarmament.

Community leaders can also introduce and encourage ideas that will help empower women and youths in the community, thereby discouraging violence and acts capable of disrupting peace and security in their territory through seminars on peaceful coexistence, like skill acquisition and capacity building programme among others.

Community leaders like the kings also maintain a great deal of cohesion by ensuring that people of different tribes living within the community other than the natural inhabitants have their tribal heads who protect the interest of their people and also serve as a link between the traditional ruler and the people. Ganiyu, Ojewale and Oyewole (2016) observed that nearly every major town in Yoruba land has Sabo Market dominated by the Hausas while shopping complex dominated by Igbo traders in Ibadan, Lagos, Oyo, Ogbomosho and the likes. Also, there are title holders like Serikin Shasha at Ibadan who is recognized and respected by Olubadan and the Alaafin of Oyo. There are also recognized Igbo leaders both in Ibadan and Oyo town. These gestures are, no doubt, designed and geared towards ensuring peace and welfare of the people in such areas.

Challenges of Community Leaders in the Maintenance of Peace and Security

Community leadership has always remained a crucial factor in the issue of community peace and security. Community leaders have

huge role to play for improving peace and security and subsequent development of their communities. However, there are certain issues that could pose as challenges towards achieving desired communal objectives. These challenges, according to Ojogwu & Diwe (2016), include poor conflict management skills, poor communication strategy, distrust for community leaders, non-inclusion of the community leaders in the planning process, women discrimination in leadership position, lack of fund and corruption.

Poor Conflict Management Skills: Most community leaders lack conflict management skills which is a basic requirement in maintaining peace and security, especially, in these times when insecurity has taken new dimensions.

Poor communication strategy: No matter how good an idea is, if it is not properly communicated, it can be misunderstood. Sometimes security officers tend to misunderstand the assistance of community leaders and perceive it as usurping their authority.

Distrust for Community Leaders: When community members, for whatever reasons, lose confidence in the leadership of the community, it becomes extremely difficult to enlist their support and cooperation on any issue. This can sabotage the peace and security strategy of the community leaders.

Non-inclusion of the community leaders in the planning process: Security agencies in various communities tend to plan without the active participation of community leaders. They merely come to inform the community leaders after they have concluded their plans. This in itself limits the ability of community leaders to proffer solutions.

Women discrimination in leadership position: The role of women in brokering

peace within the community is undisputable. However, discrimination against women, especially, concerning leadership positions seem to be preventing women from playing their roles in ensuring community peace.

Lack of fund: Very many communities have beautiful plans on how to maintain peace and security but lack the financial capacity to execute these plans. This is added to the fact that security in itself is very expensive to maintain. This situation tends to limit the operations of community leaders.

Corruption: This is one aspect that is capable of destroying community stability. Corruption among community leaders can make them become selfish with community goods and so neglect the people and their needs.

Conclusion

Peace and security are very vital to the development of every community, state and country. This explains why many countries of the world, especially, the developed ones try to ensure that the citizens are free from fear and safe from attack. These efforts are seen, not only in the provision adequate security structures and personnel but also in the provision of basic human needs such adequate food and water, quality education, employment and other welfare programmes that improve the standard of living.

Community leaders have been acknowledged as prominent instruments in ensuring sustainable peace and security within the grass roots. This is because they are closer to the people than even the local governments and enjoy massive respect and cooperation. In recognition of the vital responsibilities that community leaders can fulfill with regard to peace-building and reconciliation in communities, there is need for government at all levels to continuously

collaborate with them in order to sustain safety of lives and properties in the community and the country at large. To this end, regular capacity building programmes for peace and conflict resolution should be

organized for the community leaders by both government and non-governmental agencies so as to enable them become more effective in their duties.

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