

RURAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF SECURITY THREATS IN NIGERIA: SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The paper discussed resiliency as the ability of individuals, communities and organizations or countries exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects. Resilient communities are characterized by possessing a roadmap of action that can be adopted in managing an emergency crisis situation. The necessity for making communities resilient arises from the need to empower rural communities with capacities and resources that can be utilized in mitigating adversities and crises that might occur in the areas, components of community resilience and ways of engaging rural dwellers with a view to making rural settlements of Nigeria more resilient. Planning and implementing community-level public awareness programmes, identification and integration of community competencies into crisis management committees and setting-up effective communication tools for the community, among others, were discussed as methods of promoting resilience among rural settlements in Nigeria. The paper finally drew security implications which include that building community resilience is a collective task for all and by all members of the community, hence, community development practitioners should learn to engage rural dwellers and their resources in establishing structures and institutions needed to manage and resolve crisis and wax stronger thereafter; and the key tasks for promoting community resilience in rural settlements involves the mobilization and utilization of community structures and institutions which can be galvanized in mitigating the difficulties so that the communities might emerge stronger from their upheavals, among others.

Keywords: *Community development, Resilience, Rural Settlements, Rural dwellers.*

Introduction

Nigeria, like its contemporary developing countries of the world, is faced with the prevalence of a myriad of crises and disadvantages in its social, economic and political structures and systems. Apparently, these crises and disadvantages, which were hitherto simple distresses that were ignored by individuals, families and communities are now persisting and becoming serious security challenges and crises confronting the generality of the people. Such crises, upheavals, disasters and conflicts necessitating the promotion of resilience in our communities might include the Boko Haram uprisings, banditry, kidnappings, flooding and other environmental disasters, collapse of old houses, fire incidences and so on. In the rural areas, development interventions have mostly focused on the provision of infrastructural facilities and social amenities meant to moderate the consequences of age-long neglect and consequences of under-development. Thus, empowering rural communities with infrastructure, skills and attitude to develop resilience to crises, disadvantages, vulnerabilities and disasters should equally be given special attention, through engaging community members to learn to manage disasters and crises using community-based structures and institutions. Community development practitioners and administrators should now consider this as an important challenge facing them; the challenge of building resilience among communities, so as to strengthen them to withstand shocks and adversities with minimum disruption of their future. There is the need to positively adapt to social changes which should impact on the socio-economic system of the communities.

This paper is, therefore, an advocacy on the significance of community resilience and ways to enhance it in rural communities of Nigeria through engaging community members. It reviewed the concept of community resilience, characteristics of resilient communities, necessity for making rural communities resilient, components of community resiliency, promoting resiliency among rural communities of Nigeria and security implications.

Concept of Community Resilience

Community resilience constitutes a modern strategy for empowering communities to survive crises, challenges, disadvantaged conditions or disasters by responding to vulnerabilities and sustaining their systems and structures, following the crises, challenges, disorders or disasters. It has a wider application in health, environmental and ecological, financial, agricultural as well as security circles. Community resilience is defined as the ability of individuals, communities and organizations or countries exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, redress the impact of, cope with and recover from, the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects (IFRC, 2014). Community resilience, as seen from this perspective, is the process of empowering individuals who are vulnerable to overcome vulnerabilities through remedying their conditions, coping with as well as recovering from the effects and shocks arising from their conditions without losing their identity. It also entails the capability in families and communities, to emerge stronger from crisis situations and recover. Countries and organizations also need to be resilient by evolving strategies and programmes that can help them in managing the impact of crises, the shocks

arising from sudden changes, and learning how to transform through adapting actions without compromising their identities.

Furthermore, community resilience has been defined as the transformation from adverse environments to those that support and facilitate family health and wellness without losing the community's unique identify and essential characteristics (Lerch, 2015). In this definition, 'community resilience' means the art of empowering communities to transform from the vulnerable conditions they are facing, or they have faced, and facilitating their transformation through family healthcare development, without sacrificing their features and unique characteristics. Here, community resilience begins from an individual to the family, community, and country levels and, in any case, connotes the preparedness of an individual or a people to cope with disasters and vulnerable conditions, with the minimum disruption of their status and characteristics. Alphine (2017), also, defined community resilience as the strength and prosperity of any community, no matter how big or small, which are enhanced by the capability of its individuals and communities. 'Resilience' here is the capability of individuals, family, community or the entire country to anticipate crisis and engage it without losing their identity. This means that it is the process of building capacity and resources around the community so that it can absorb its risks and vulnerabilities and become better able to prepare, plan and respond to crises situations as a result of which it recovers quickly. 'Building capacity' here means empowering individuals and their neighborhood to learn how to support each other voluntarily.

Community resilience is further defined as the capacity of a social system, community

or society potentially vulnerable to hazards, to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the extent to which the social system is capable of organizing itself by increasing its potentials for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures (Daly, Becker, Parkers, Johnston, and Paton, 2009). In this definition, community resilience is seen as the sustained ability of communities to withstand and recover from adversities. A resilient community here implies healthy, educated and skilled individuals and families who have access to healthcare, knowledge and resources to function effectively under stressful conditions as well as recover easily. In another definition, Pfefferbaum (2005) saw community resilience as the ability of community members to take meaningful, deliberate, collective action to remedy the impact of a problem, including the ability to interpret the environment, intervene and move on. This definition considers community resilience as the power of community members to organize and take up action, in a participatory manner, which is intended to remedy, mitigate and transform their environment after a shock. Yet, community resilience, according to Bruneau (2003), is the ability of a social unit to mitigate hazards and contain the effects of disasters when they occur and carry out recovery activities in ways that minimize social disruption and mitigate the effects of future disasters.

In all these definitions, community resilience is seen to be the capability of a community (social units) to anticipate vulnerabilities and risk, work towards reducing their consequences and be able to spring up with minimum disruption of its identity, features

and objectives. Therefore, community development is aimed at instigating community social action through forming networks, partnership and educating stakeholders to facilitate the process of change in our communities. Thus, community development is invariably a process of empowering community building capabilities and competencies aimed at making communities resilient, enhancing community vitality and sustaining development. In this context, therefore, community resilience can be seen as an embodiment of community development activities because Community Development Associations are working tirelessly towards building partnerships, building capacity and developing resources among community members with the aim of promoting and enhancing social, economic and political capabilities among the people.

Characteristics of Resilient Communities

The goal of community development is to foster the spirit of self-help among community members so as to promote the strengthening of the socio-cultural, economic and political systems in order to endure changes and transformation arising from shocks, crises and challenges. When a community is able to withstand and recover from such shocks through survival, adaptability, evolution and growth in the face of turbulent changes, which are acquired by the community through community development, one can safely conclude that such a community has become resilient. Resilience is, therefore, an attribute with adaptability as its core value.

a) Possessing Internally Self-Sustaining Capacities

One of the important characteristics of resilient communities is the possession of internally self-sustaining capacities that

can be found in the community system of values. For instance, a resilient community is often characterized as possessing a well-rehearsed emergency plan. Here, a well-rehearsed emergency plan of the community is a proposed course of action designed to manage an emergency situation encountered by a community. Resilient communities are, therefore, such communities that possess a roadmap of action to be adopted in managing an emergency crisis situation.

b) Social Connectedness

This is another feature of resilient communities is that they are socially connected with one another as a result of which they have the capability to marshal and harness their resources to their collective advantage. They, also, have the capacity to effectively communicate with residents of the community, mobilize resources and plan for infrastructural and human recovery after a crisis or upheavals (Noris, 2008).

c) Network of Partnerships

Resilient communities are, also, characterized by processing a well-established network of partnerships existing among its different stakeholders and segments. With such partners, these communities are capable of collaborating with one another, deciding and taking action to recover from crises or adversities.

d) Prevalence of a High-Level and Well-Integrated Volunteer System

Another important feature of resilient communities is the prevalence of a high-level and well-integrated volunteer system. 'Volunteerism' refers to a civic action or work that is carried out freely without coercion, where profit making is not the main motivating principle and where there are other beneficiaries beyond the

volunteer (Tahir, 2004). In this perspective, resilient communities possess a large pool of educated, public-spirited and patriotic men and women who are willing to engage in civic duties and works required by the communities, during or after disaster. Such duties may not fall within conventional routine duties of government but can be offered through voluntary special services such as rescue and rehabilitation.

e) Possession of Social, Economic and Political Controls

Resilient communities are characterized by the possession of social, economic and political controls that are suitable for responding speedily to local hazards and emergencies. 'Social, economic and political controls' here refer to the extent of power and influence a people has over their socio-cultural, occupational as well as leadership systems, with which they respond decisively to their predicaments. When a people have no social control over their affairs, for example, the social system does not impact on them in such case. When the social, economic and political institutions exert maximum positive impact towards ameliorating their hardships, one can safely conclude that they have social control which is an indicator of resilient communities.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC (2014) summarized the indicators of community resiliency to be communities that are knowledgeable; healthy; that can meet their basic needs, become socially cohesive; possess a well-maintained and accessible infrastructure and services with which it can manage its natural assets, and, that is well-connected.

The Necessity for Making Rural Communities Resilient

Rural communities are those communities usually living around the countryside and engaged in primary production. Lifestyles of people living in rural communities are different from those in urban centres mainly because of the limited services that are available. Thus, governmental services such as law enforcement agencies, schools, fire departments and libraries may be distant, limited in scope or entirely unavailable. Moreover, utilities such as water, sewage and refuse disposal systems, street-lighting may also not be present. This shows that most rural areas are vulnerable to crises situations such as dangers, upheavals, and disadvantages.

The necessity for making rural areas resilient arises from the need to empower rural communities with capacities and resources that can be utilized in mitigating adversities and crises that might occur in the areas. Community resilience is built upon the relationships between planning, preparedness, response and recovery. Rural communities are more exposed to crises and natural calamities, such as flood, fire outbreaks, diseases, and other crises. In addition, the areas require adequate planning as a means of fostering preparedness for response to enable crises-communities to recover from such calamities, since a community without such a structure is not prepared to respond, manage and recover from disasters.

Furthermore, there exists the justification for building resilience in rural communities of Nigeria because while the Federal, State and Local governments are working towards planning and preparing to increase resilience through measures that can lessen the negative impact of natural disasters. Rural

community members could be engaged and empowered to learn to develop their local capacities (that is, human, social, institutional and structural) so as to partner with the government and form a coalition of resilient partners which can provide timely response and manage effective recovery processes.

There is also the need to make rural communities resilient so as to reduce the dependency of the communities on governmental support in crisis periods. Right now, community members need to understand that resilience builds upon, rather than replaces, existing strengths and arrangements. Thus, building resilience is a shared responsibility among members of the community.

Components of Community Resiliency

Community resilience, generally, is composed of wide-ranging capabilities available within communities with which the communities can sustain themselves, withstand and recover from adversities. But because communities differ in terms of their strength, assets, availability of resources, environmental features and so on, the components of community resilience will always vary according to the size, location and the strength of the community. In the rural areas of Nigeria, coupled with the attendant problems and shortcomings arising from prolonged neglect, community resilience components are rarely available and, where they are, they are inadequate. Components of community resiliency include the following:

a) Social Connectedness

The first important component of community resilience is social connectedness, for resource exchange,

cohesion, response and recovery. This social variable refers to the social capital available in communities and with which resources available can be shared and exchanged, cohesion among members can be nurtured, response to disasters can be initiated, and the rehabilitation and recovery processes can be initiated and executed. In a resilient community, social linkages must be made available and with which resources and capabilities must be shared across different segments and sectors to promote cohesion, response and fast recovery.

b) Effective Communication System and Structure

Another important component of community resilience is an effective communication system and structure, available for at-risk populations and vulnerable groups. The office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, ASPR, (2017) suggested that if an effective communications system is available, communities at-risk and vulnerable can engage their counterparts and other stakeholders in sharing information and actions regarding the resolution and recovery processes.

c) Integration and Involvement of both Governmental and Non-Governmental Institutions in Planning Response and Recovery Schemes

Furthermore, the existence, integration and involvement of both governmental and non-governmental institutions in planning response and recovery schemes are another core component of community resilience. As governmental

and non-governmental institutions exist, their structures, work and resources must be incorporated into the planning programmes for response to disasters and into the recovery process.

d) The Physical and Psychological Wellbeing of Community Members

The physical and psychological wellbeing of the community members are yet another component of community resilience. Physical health refers to physiological health of the communities in terms of town planning, security, occupational health, street lights and so on. Psychological health, on the other hand, refers to behaviours, norms and values among community members and which qualifies the community with the credentials to respond to emergencies. It also refers to the availability of human resource capitals, social capitals in the communities.

e) Prevalence of Social and Economic Infrastructure

The social and economic well-being infrastructures of the communities themselves are also components of community resilience. Social wellbeing refers to the prevalence of social structures and institutions that promote the healthy survival and sustenance of life of the people, while economic wellbeing can be considered as the occupations, income sources, production and consumption activities that promote the survival of the individual in the community. These are all components of community resilience in a community and which must be found in a community that is resilient.

Promoting Resiliency among Rural Communities in Nigeria

Determining how resilient a community is could be a difficult task, before an adversity or calamity strikes. However, making a community resilient as well as establishing its resilience status can only happen after an adversity. Therefore, planning, developing and enhancing resources for mitigating disasters and ensuring that the structures, institutions and systems of the community work are the best ways of promoting resilience among rural communities. To enhance or promote resilience among rural communities, community development agents should engage community members in activities and tasks that can foster community health and vitality. Some of these activities and tasks include the following:

i) Planning and implementing community-level public awareness programmes

Public awareness programmes, planned and implemented at the community level, can be an important way of promoting community resilience. Public awareness programmes, when organized, can empower individuals, families and households to prepare adequately for accidents and emergencies. Sensitization, campaigns, mobilization activities, group work, youth work, volunteer task programmes and so on, can, also be good public engagement activities through which individuals, groups and households can be encouraged to form partnerships and collaborate with one another in establishing and managing links for better flow of information about risks as well as for identifying at-risk individuals and locations (Morris, 2008).

Most rural areas are known to be detached settlements requiring networks and information sharing programmes, not only during emergencies but on a routine basis. They need awareness, enlightenment and education about community-buildings skills, community partnerships as well as preparation for health incidents and other risks. Public enlightenment about possible health, environmental, social or political crises should always be provided and given prominence in the promotion of resilience.

ii) Identification and integration of community competencies into crisis management committees

This is yet another strategy that can effectively be utilized in the promotion of resilience in rural communities. There exist enormous resources seemingly lying idle in many rural communities. These include the human, economic and social capital; the various structures and institutions available in the community as well as those outside the community which can be accessed and utilized by the community in the process of its development. Community development agents should adopt or adapt a good strategy of identifying these resources and competencies through collaborating with active community members and integrating them into workable plans evolved by crisis management committees. Partnerships should always be formed with the various stakeholders leading to the emergence of crisis management committees. Their community resources could be judiciously used in crisis management and protection as a way of making the communities resilient.

iii) Setting-up effective communication tools for the community

This is another important strategy of promoting resilience of rural communities. One of the key issues leading to the vulnerability of such communities and, their people is the inability to effectively communicate with or between one another during crises. Community development agents should develop and establish good and sustainable communication networks between one community and another and among the people as well as among themselves through engagements, so that immediately crisis erupts, contacts can be made between individuals and groups in and out of the neighbourhoods. Setting effective communication tools can lead to the promotion of active linkages between community members, institutions and structures, so as to collaborate with one another in the event of an emergency situation. The community development agents can establish communications links through creating an inventory of community actors and promoters or a community resources inventory. Such an inventory can always be referred to, for the purpose of harnessing and mobilizing actors, volunteers and victims for mediation and rehabilitation and performance of some other necessary tasks.

iv) Strengthening social and cultural networks before disaster eruption

This is another means of promoting community resilience. It is the basis of community engagement. Community development agents should work towards collaborating with wide ranging stakeholders in the communities and

outside, so as to strategise for disaster preparedness activities and strategies. Such collaborations can lead to the development of plans for mitigating vulnerabilities; reduce negative health and environmental consequences, thereby, restoring community functions which will also promote social re-engagement activities. Such stakeholders can include groups like non-governmental, social support organization, faith-based organizations, family and child advocacy organizations, drug and alcohol abuse agencies, volunteer corps and youth organizations with which partnerships can be formed. Engaging and strengthening these groups can assist in preparing them to understand the task of investigating crises and disasters in the neighborhood.

v) Fostering adaptive coping responses during adversities

Rural community development workers should learn to work towards fostering strategies through which community members can adapt and cope with adversities. Many members do not possess the capacity to cope with adversities and calamities and that is why they panic and became disadvantaged during disasters. To avoid such situation and promote the resiliency of our rural communities, development workers should initiate measures that people can adapt in coping with difficult distresses. These coping strategies range from financial stability promotion services, housing plans, and infrastructural support projects.

Conclusion and Security Implications

This paper analyzed the concept of community resilience, the characteristics of resilient communities, the necessity for making rural communities resilient and the components of resilience. The paper discussed some ways through which rural communities can be made more resilient which includes identification and integration of community capacities and resources; setting up of effective communication tools; planning and implementing community-level awareness programmes; strengthening social and cultural networks as well as initiating coping strategies for members during emergency situations.

The following security implications can be drawn from the paper:

- i) Many security concerns prevailing in our communities were hitherto simple distresses that can be resolved through strengthening community structures and institutions. They persist and became overwhelming, thereby calling for community engagement in the security architecture;
- ii) Building community resilience is a collective task for all and by all members of the community, hence, community development practitioners should learn to engage rural dwellers and their resources in establishing structures and institutions needed to manage and resolve crisis and wax stronger thereafter; and
- iii) The key tasks for promoting community resilience in rural settlements involve the mobilization and utilization of community structures and institutions which can be galvanized in mitigating the difficulties so that the communities might emerge stronger from their upheavals.

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