

## COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN RENEWAL IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examined integration of communities in achieving sustainable renewal of urban communities for development of the individual and the social system. It was highlighted that communities integration seeks to ensure full participation of all people in community life such as school, careers, homes, relationships, leisure and other life styles in the community. This is to promote social capital development that is critical to urban renewal through physical development of shattered areas, improvement of local infrastructure, elimination of undesirable individuals or organisations and creation of development opportunities. It was concluded that menaces such as unmaintained infrastructural facilities, littered areas, non innovation of areas, etc in communities should be tackled effectively to achieve urban renewal. It was suggested that government and its urban renewal agencies should interface to integrate the lives of the individuals in communities through the utilisation of appropriate community renewal strategies as provided in this paper.*

**Keywords:** *Community, Integration, Sustainable, Urban, Renewal*

### **Introduction**

Communities seek to attain a high quality of life for their citizens. But few communities actually can claim that they are close to achieving this goal. It is a pity that many communities in various states of the nation are grappling with high rates of unemployment and poverty. Downtrodden urban communities in Nigeria are struggling to cope with a wide range of stresses that are related to complex social problems, such as tenuous accommodation, homelessness, drug abuse

and domestic violence. These social pressures have been exacerbated over the past decade by funding cuts in such areas as social housing, social services and welfare. According to Gandy (2006), there is a growing recognition, both within and outside government, that the economic, social and environmental challenges confronting urban communities are becoming increasingly complex. This complexity is rooted in many factors including the globalization of economies,

impact of rapidly changing technologies, the polarisation of wages and working time, social exclusion and dynamics of population changes.

Community integration implies unifying all communities, be it urban or rural. It is to form a block for the achievement of the expected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is essential as the first three Sustainable Development Goals (Poverty, Hunger and Health) fall within the basic needs of humans, and their provision will facilitate achievement in community renewal and development. These are factored in the concept of integrated community development, which implies that it is a composite and comprehensive programme for community people in which all relevant sectors such as education; housing, health and employment are conceived as interlinking elements in a system having horizontal and vertical linkage in operational and spatial terms (Enyi, 2014).

Urban community renewal has emerged as one of the effective means of combating the challenges of community lapses, infrastructure, housing deficits for reviving declining social and economic status of both urban and rural areas across the globe (World Bank, 2006). In developing countries, physical deterioration, infrastructure obsolescence, poor housing conditions and disaster vulnerabilities pose serious threats to public health and sustainable urban development (United Nations Population Fund, 2007). Urban community renewal has been suggested as a strategy for slowing down the rate at which these challenges are escalating in Nigeria (Dimuna & Omatsone, 2010). Thus, it is remarkable to highlight the roles of various professionals in decision-

making process, particularly the role of an architect towards an effective implementation of sustainable urban renewal plans in densely populated regions of Nigeria (Osuide, 2004).

Consequently, urban renewal has been described as a process for reversing or ending urban obsolescence, preventing urban deterioration, clearing blighted areas and upgrading deteriorated buildings, physical environment and infrastructure (Okeke, 2004). Besides, urban renewal has also been described as a strategy for eliminating undesirable individuals and creating additional job opportunities (Zielenbach & Levin, 2000), achieving sustainable provision of utilities, improving the quality of living environment, creating new and efficient economic activities (Kara, 2011), building sustainable communities and improving socio-economic integration in urban areas (Fadare & Oduwaye, 2009). This means that urban renewal schemes generally seek to eliminate undesirable physical, environmental, social and economic elements that negate community integration, sustainable urban growth and development. Therefore, the different urban renewal strategies should be seen as veritable planning tools for improving and sustaining the viability of urban neighbourhoods, and thus, promoting all around sustainable development for the betterment of the future generation. This has become a new thinking in community integration matrix.

### **Community Integration**

Community integration is a term encompassing the full participation of all people in community life. It refers to the unification of people (Racino, 2014). Community integration has been tied to

quality assurance in the community and improved quality of life. In tackling negative stresses, communities in Nigeria face diverse pressures. Therefore, various communities in Nigeria must address new demands arising from the need to attract investment and the best possible resources for development. In order to draw the resources they required to compete economically, communities must improve their 'quality of place' (Florida, 2000).

Integration is the process of making something to be in whole or entity, the process of fitting into a community or society (Hanachor & Olumati, 2018). Community integration is designed to help persons to optimize their personal, social, and vocational competency to live successfully in the community.

According to Torjman and Leviten-Reid (2003), community integration provides opportunities for the participation of the persons served. A person may participate in a variety of community life experiences or interactions that may include, but are not limited to: leisure or recreational, communication, spiritual, and cultural activities; vocational pursuits; volunteerism; educational and training activities; development of life skills; health and wellness promotion; orientation, mobility, and destination training; access and utilization of public transportation; interaction with volunteers from the community in programme activities; and community collaborations and social connections developed by the programmes (partnerships with community entities such as senior centers, arts councils, etc.). Such integration may be seen as from the following perspectives:

### ***Physical Integration***

As with all movements, conscious control is required in order to learn and then consolidate new experiences. Physical integration is about people having the capacity to actively engage in the learning process through stimulating increased connectivity between the brain and the body. This increased connectivity supports all learners at all stages to develop and improve key attributes like coordination, rhythm and timing etc. Examples include taxi stands outside bus terminals, walkways connecting stations directly to adjacent buildings, stations serving various bus and train lines, and bikeways along different routes. All these elements are situated to be integrated in order to achieve healthy development in a given community (Alba, 2012).

Physical integration fosters the progression of: body awareness and kinaesthetic awareness; spatial awareness and directionality; inhibition of unwanted movements; balance and postural control; alternating movements; rhythmical movements; stimulation and integration of moving and listening skills; eye control, and visual-motor integration; the ability to move and think simultaneously; and multi-processing and multi-tasking capabilities for the all round benefits of various communities.

### ***Social Integration***

This integration refers to the struggle for equality and quality of life. Social integration has different meanings to different people. For some, social integration is a positive process about encouraging harmonious interactions between diverse communities in society, and providing equal rights and opportunities for everyone. In the Western

world, integration is often associated with unification or engrafting of those with one form of disability or the other. Integration into the community is the greatest expectation and desire of rehabilitation workers and centres, for victim or people with disabilities in life (George, 2006). A critical analysis of social integration reveals its direct relationship with the element of the first three sustainable development goals of poverty, hunger and health. The pursuit of these elements through the integrated approach, enable the government and its agencies through programmes and policies, take concerted actions aimed at improving the quality of life of the people.

The actualisation of integration will result in self-sustaining improvement of communities and will manifest the re-organisation, re-orientation and mobilisation of the urban sector to emancipate them from the depression, exclusion and deprivation which characterise their existence, thus increasing their capacity and ability for a sustained livelihood and contribution to national economy.

### **Processes of Community Integration**

Community integration takes the forms of the following as processes of encouraging urban renewal:

*Civic Engagement:* Civic engagement refers to group activity addressing issues of public concern. Civic engagement includes communities working together or individuals working alone in both political and non-political actions to protect public values or make a change in a community (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). Furthermore, civic engagement includes strategies to organise individuals for collective action, as well as strategies to

make sure that all voices in a community are heard as part of inclusive decision-making. These strategies can help build various kinds of social capital for integration.

*Self-determination:* Self-determination can be defined as people having the degree of control they desire over those aspects of life that are important to them (Darke, 2000). Self-determination activities include activities that result in individuals with developmental disabilities, with appropriate assistance, having: the ability and opportunity to communicate and make personal decisions; the ability and opportunity to communicate choices and exercise control over types of service, supports and other assistance, the authority to control resources, to obtain needed services and supports; opportunities to participate in, and contribute to, their communities; and support, (including financial support) to advocate for themselves and others, to develop leadership skills through training and self advocacy; and to participate in the development in public policies that affect people with developmental challenges.

*Effective and Efficiency in mobilisation of resources for community development:*

There may be diverse approaches to gain access to resources to achieve integration of communities. This include but not limited to: accessing financial support from other organisations, like foundations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), local resources and support, etc.; Generating income by taking up income-generating activities; making use of resources available to generate funds and other kinds of support, like asking volunteers to raise funds, building and utilising network and goodwill to raise

funds. Effective mobilisation of resources reflects on the ‘face’ of community empowerment, by building on social capital, and reliance on community participation (Sanoff, 2000). Efficiency in mobilisation of resources used must be a relative measure, since the appropriate effort for a community endeavour relates to the prospective gains and how much the community can afford (or can get from others) and it will consequently vary over time. On the other side of the balance are potentially large process benefits in terms of intra-group trust, understanding and solidarity, as well as the tangibles (e.g., greater negotiating power) and intangibles (e.g., standing and influence) of interaction with the outside world (Allison, 2004).

*Social Capital Development:* Social capital has been described as the “glue” that develops between people in groups and societies by sharing experiences, ideas, beliefs and practices in order to achieve integration of communities. Thus, the distinguishing aspect of social capital is that, it relies on relationships between people who form the social structures. According to Levitte, (2004), social capital is dependent on the social structures that exist between people, which make it possible for those involved to take certain actions and to be able to get things done that they would not have been able to do on their own. Thus, the distinguishing aspect of social capital is that, it relies on relationships between people who form the social structures. It is worthwhile noting that the idea of “giving and receiving” is assumed and forms part of such relationships. That implies that social capital is established for a purpose and it will continue as long as people experience

results and benefits from it (Coleman, 2000).

*Funding of Community Integration Organisations:* There are organizations that provide community support activities and do not receive adequate funding. If there is no adequate money, these groups cannot offer the programmes and activities that are vital to successful community integration.

*Employment:* Community integration provides a road map to recovery by creating an environment that facilitates individual well-being for a better employment, job and wealth creation for the people.

*Vocational Training:* This focuses on developing technical skills for a specific job or trade among members of a community when there is a need for integration (Enyi, 2014). Community integration offers individuals practical and theoretical knowledge in communities to assist both young and old. It would be a problem when the people are not trained for effective community integration measures.

*Civic Participation in Social Space:* Civic participation involves many activities like voting, volunteering works, group participation, and gardening of communities. It enables community members to participate in the electoral process by registering and voting. Civic participation does not affect only the individuals, but the society as a whole. Communities with higher levels of civic participation have a greater sense of community lower levels of crime, and citizens who are healthier and happier (Kunkel, 2003). This brings about community integration but if there is dearth of civic participation, it could affect

the individuals as well as the community generally in attaining such integration for urban renewal purposes in development.

### **Urban Renewal**

Community renewal is the act of transforming communities by empowering and engaging individuals in community activity to improve their health, learning and employability (Kara, 2011). While urban renewal is a planned attempt to transform various urban communities through structured large-scale control of existing areas to enhance both the present and future operations of the populace (Osuide, 2004). Renewal in urban communities is set to receive special tax breaks designed to encourage economic growth by generating business investment and job opportunities.

Zielenbach and Levin (2000) described community renewal as the physical redevelopment of shattered areas, an improvement of local infrastructure, the elimination of undesirable individuals or private organisations and the creation of additional jobs. However, urban renewal projects have faced great challenges in most communities in many countries. This has been attributed to inadequate community renewal policies as well as poor action plans on urban regeneration projects. In addition, urban and rural settlers lack the willingness to accept community renewal projects in Nigeria as a result of poor communication amongst stakeholders and concerned residents (Chan, 2007). Considering the public perspective, the general concern is how to integrate into the government's urban renewal plans without imposing further poverty, particularly on those living in urban slums (Okeke, 2004).

Urban renewal may be made if cities or towns face one or more of the following challenges: a lack of economic development; crime and public safety concerns; a need for quality, environment, community existing infrastructure that do meet the community's needs; a shortage of recreational and wellness opportunities for urban residents. Local and state governments are catalysts in urban community renewal activities for the betterment of urban communities as well as integrating the standard of living of people in the area. They are required to participate by making their own commitments to taking actions, to reduce economic burdens on employers, employees and businesses in the area, as well as taking steps to encourage economic growth (Ebeling, 2013).

### **Urban Renewal through Community Integration in Nigeria**

In developing country like Nigeria, urban deterioration has become an issue of concern to governments, development agencies and the general public as it presently constitutes an obstacle to sustainable urban renewal. The best approach to achieving sustainable urban development and reversing the rate of urban decay is adequate care for existing cities through various community integration measures in Nigeria (Huang 2008). Fadare and Oduwaye (2009) made a case for comprehensive rebranding of various cities through community interaction. Interestingly, Olawepo, (2010) has shown that past and present governments in Nigeria have applied different urban renewal strategies ranging from slum clearance and redevelopment, road and city beautification to the rehabilitation of other physical

infrastructure to achieve sustainability with emphasis on community integration. Gbadegesin and Aluko (2010) identified the different urban renewal strategies to include rehabilitation, conservation and redevelopment. However, as is true for other urban development initiatives, the success of each of these strategies in urban renewal depends largely on the adequacy of funding arrangement for the scheme and integration process (George, 2006). Interestingly, the increasing need to reduce government budgetary constraints and improve the performance of public sector in service delivery has heightened the search for alternative to the traditional funding arrangement for urban renewal projects through different integration strategies in order to achieve sustainability. Towns and cities need to be integrated in terms of reconstruction of bad roads, reduction of criminal acts, provision of better infrastructural facilities, employment, and other necessities for the all round development and renewal of urban areas.

For urban communities to be renewed especially in Nigeria, there is need for joint effort of both individual, government, NGOs and other governmental authorities to utilise available resources such as funds, materials, etc, for the betterment of various communities and for the future generation. Essentially, any developmental or renewal plans set in place should be implemented and actualised to transform the lives of individuals in urban areas. Emphasis is currently on drawing from private finance through PPP arrangements (Jamali, 2004). This explains why there is increasing number of infrastructure and housing-led urban renewal schemes implemented using the Public Private

Partnership (PPP) finance option in the country (Olawepo, 2010). Although, there are different models of PPPs, it is observed that the build-operate and transfer (BOT) model of PPP has become popular in the rehabilitation and redevelopment of urban neighbourhoods and provision of infrastructural facilities in recent times for the all round development of urban areas through different integration programmes.

### **Economies of Scale of Urban Renewal**

The following are returns to investing in urban renewal:

- *Urban Transformation:* Some urban areas in Nigeria have successfully integrated physical urban renewal plans within their urban centres, and have achieved socio-economic and infrastructural transformation over the years.
- *Improved Environmental Air Quality:* Urban renewal plans are structured to improve the social welfare, health condition and environmental balance amongst the urban populace. An effective integration of such planning system particularly within the Nigerian urban built environment, will promote environmental air quality through an open air space management in the neighbourhoods.
- *Militate against Climate Change Impact:* One of the main goals of urban renewal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban development, is to achieve a sustainable built environment. This is achieved through sustainable physical planning, decision making process, integrated and area based approach. The implementation of urban renewal plan will militate against some future effects of climate change, particularly

in urban slums and low-lying coastline areas in the country (Wu, 2010).

- *Enhanced Socio-Economic Practice:* Urban renewal has been an economic driver in most developed nations. It involves a constant regeneration approach of the built environment to meet-up with the physical activities and environmental demand of the urban populace (Shuaeeb, 2012).
- *Promotion of Job Opportunities:* An effective implementation of sustainable urban renewal initiatives will create various kinds of job opportunities which include sustainable research work, sustainable architectural designs, green urban designs, green environmental technologies and other specialist job opportunities. It will further create opportunities for stakeholders to establish training institutes in regional centres across the country (Roberts, and Sykes, 2000).
- *Improve Professional Practice:* The regular practice on urban renewal systems in Nigeria will further enhance a wider knowledge of local building practitioners particularly the architects and urban planners towards sustainable urban development (Okeke, 2004).

### Conclusion

To enhance urban renewal, community integration is important both in principles and realities. To accept the renewal programmes is dependent on the integration of the community. Poverty, hunger, unemployment and other individual menaces affecting people in a given urban community can be addressed and be tackled effectively through community integration. Therefore, programmes of urban community renewal

and development should be vigorously pursued and achieved to save communities from total collapse through the integration of the individuals in the communities.

### Suggestions

The following suggestions are consistent with the paper as articulated.

- 1) Government and its agencies should interface with persons or target groups of any programme to integrate the lives of the individuals in the community through an appropriate community renewal strategy.
- 2) There should be monitoring mechanism to ensure that community integration programmes are effectively carried out to achieve its renewal plans for the betterment of urban communities.
- 3) Community integration is critical factor in community resilience for urban renewal activities.
- 4) Government should provide various cities or towns with the essential developmental activities for renewal such as standardized hospitals, rebranding of infrastructural facilities, reconstruction of good roads and other developmental plans for the urban populace to be renewed through community integration practices.

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