

# TOWARDS EFFECTIVE URBAN COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ADOPTING THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH STRATEGY

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## **Abstract**

*One of the key functions of Government or leadership at every level is to foster progressive change and transformation of communities. This explains why successive leadership in Nigeria as in other parts of the world initiate developmental projects and programmes targeted at transforming communities to make life more enjoyable for residents. Most of these development efforts are focused on urban communities since that is where you have a large proportion of population and elites. However, government and other development partners often take the initiative of deciding what type of transformation is appropriate for these urban centres and go on to implement them without recourse to community input. This negates the principle of community development. The functional approach to community development emphasizes the needs for all relevant stakeholders including the residents to play their roles in improving the quality of life in these areas. This study, therefore, shed light on the operational process of the functional approach and the potential it has in accelerating urban transformation process. The paper further examined the challenges of transforming urban communities which include insecurity, corruption, over-population among others.*

**Keywords:** *Community development, Empowerment, Corruption, Functional approach, transformation*

## **Introduction**

A community is a group of individuals who share a common interest or a set of functions. It is viewed in terms of all the people or a group of people living within a specific geographical area (Anikeze, 2011). A community according to Frankenberg in Onyeozu (2007) is a

territorially bounded social system within which people live sharing common social, economic and cultural characteristics. The setting of a community could be urban or rural depending on the characteristics it possesses. Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) asserted that urban community

development/transformational programmes aim at creating awareness of urban possibilities; providing information on resources, inputs and infrastructure; deploying technical assistance; skills acquisition and development; increasing literacy levels; improving productivity and productive systems; adapting appropriate technology in agriculture; sensitizing potential volunteers and donors among other things. Ideally, most urban community development programmes in developing nations focus on peoples' felt needs and basic amenities such as the provision of good roads, electricity, health clinics, markets, school buildings, and mechanized farm settlements among others.

The aim of urban community transformation according to Hille (n.d.) is to bring about significant change in a distressed community that would be clearly measurable in terms of income, employment, educational attainment, human health, environmental quality, population retention, and business environment, access to capital, entrepreneurial activity, accountable governance and civic participation. According to Global Effect (2021), urban community transformation projects are specifically catered to a certain geographical area and designed to discover critical areas of need. From there specific activities and programmes, that are designed to create a relevant application of positive change to combat the concerns and identified needs of the urban community. This is accomplished through the following: Research and Discovery, Spiritual Growth, Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development, Meeting Social /

Educational Concerns, Fighting Oppression and Injustices, and Confronting Physical Needs.

“Community development is a process that leads to change in many aspects of community living which include social, economic, cultural as well as environmental. It is about continual improvement, first with the people themselves and later with the help of change agents to bring about change in their lives, which ultimately improve their quality of life. Thus, the focus of urban community development process is the people's involvement (hereafter the word 'community' will be used) whereby the community members come together to take action collectively to meet their shared goal(s) or to generate solutions overcoming their shared problems” (Sail & Abu-Samah, 2010). The goals of community development should be to improve people's productivity and enable them to participate in their social, political and economic life now and in the future. This would give them more confidence in managing their own affairs and help to protect their community. Indeed, it is morally binding on the local government managers to do everything possible to achieve the goals. (Odiog in Anikeze, 2014).

Obodoechi, in Anikeze, (2014) further spelt out the objectives of urban community development in Nigeria as to:

- i. improve life at the community level which involves human and material resources;
- ii. develop all aspects of community living equitably so as to avoid imbalance or neglect of any area of living;

- iii. achieve a self generating breakthrough in productivity and to raise the production potentials by stimulating the human and physical process of change;
- iv. minimize poverty and unemployment in the communities;
- v. make families economically viable and to cross over the poverty line;
- vi. provide governmental services to communities;
- vii. explore and use technical assistance available from in and outside the community; and
- viii. cooperate with and coordinate state and national development plans.

The potential steps for anurban community transformation project according to Hille (n.d.), are broken down into four phases include:

**Phase one:**

1. Identify community;
2. Do baseline research;
3. Identify existing resources and previous efforts; and
4. Identify core of local leaders and transformation process advocates.

**Phase two:**

1. Initiate training for local core group;
2. Conduct media campaign and public meetings led by core group to increase community awareness and involvement; and
3. Core group develops and conducts high-profile community development project to generate early significant success.

**Phase three:**

1. Core group identifies target sectors of the local community in which involvement and leadership needs to be increased;

2. Programmes and resources are accessed and/or developed to reach target sectors;

3. Leaders from target sector are added to core group.

**Phase four:**

1. Once the core group is large and diverse enough to be representative of the community, a community-wide visioning and planning process is conducted;

2. Local, state and federal resources are accessed to carry out the plan;

3. Data is collected over time to compare with baseline data; and

4. Human resource development and other activities continue, adjusted as needed to continue to meet new and ongoing needs.

However, in African countries, particularly Nigeria, it has been quite challenging and tedious to transform and develop communities. Most of the communities in this part of the world are still underdeveloped and lack to a great percentage the fundamental or basic needs of humans such as good health care system, adequate and quality foods, educational facilities and literacy programmes, housing schemes and others. According to Olanrewaju (2015), development crisis has become a reoccurring issue in Nigeria coupled with the series of contradiction inherent in every epoch of Nigerian society; the country has passed through different stages ranging from primitive to slave society, colonialism, decolonization and neo-colonialism. Presently, the crisis of development is the most serious problem facing Nigeria. This is because the continent remained largely under-

developed despite the huge mineral and human resources, several decades after the end of colonialism, most parts of Africa are still fighting with the problems such as basic infrastructure facilities, insecurity of life and property. (Alumona; 2009).

Various strategies and approaches have been developed over the years by authors and scholars to handle the issue of community transformation and development. Dokubo (2015) stated that there are three vital approaches to community development. These are transformation-operational approach, structural approach and functional approach. Functional approach entails involving all the relevant stakeholders in community development- government, members of the community and professionals or change agents to collectively and unanimously engage in the community transformation process as governmental authorities alone cannot bring about needed positive transformations in communities (Dokubo, 2015). The fast-pace of transformational change in our society and economy requires a deep level of collaboration between relevant stakeholders (Eziamo, 2016). Sustainable community development cannot take place through force or order, but is most likely to happen when all actors participate and share their ideas, visions and responsibilities equally and democratically in steering and implementing their community development projects (Ajayi and Otuya, 2006).

Functionalism or functional approach is a macro theory which posited that interrelated part of society (social institutions) work together to meet

the needs of individuals in that society (Hannan, n.d.). Functional approach looks at the ways that parts of society work together, thus it is important to consider when looking at a community faced with intersectional oppression. Functionalism helps us to consider the way multiple institutions like education, family, health care or religion interact to form an individual or community. Analyzing these relationships is necessary to identify power players and creating a plan of action around who or what institutions to target for change.

While adopting functional approach in community transformation, Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008), identified three parties or stakeholders:

- i. Members of the community who are in need of the development;
- ii. The government (Federal, State and Local); and
- iii. Professional or change agents e.g. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) i.e voluntary clubs, societies and associations or groups of people within the society or community that come together to achieve certain objectives. They may have similar identities and share some needs and aspirations. These organizations are non-profit or business oriented. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are organizations or societies that have little or no direct bearing with any of the three levels of government; in most cases they do not have permanent paid officials. Various community development clubs and associations also exist.

## Challenges Faced By Community Transformation Stakeholders

According to Mbachu (2015), the following are major obstacles affecting stakeholders in community transformation process:

- i. **Armed Conflicts and Communal Crisis:** there have been reports of increasing clashes and crisis of recent in African communities, Nigeria in particular, numerous community members have lost homes, jobs, farm products due to these violent uprisings. According to former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in Vanguard (2014), "Everybody wants development, but the fact remains that there can't be any development without peace..." Thus violence makes it practically impossible most times for stakeholders to execute their plans and missions.
- ii. **Corruption:** Due to the high level of corruption ravaging Nigeria communities, it makes it challenging and difficult for transformational activities to go on, as funds get embezzled by contractors, community chiefs and elders, government personnel and so on. There is lack of integrity, accountability and transparency on the part of these people who are supposed to implement the community transformation. Hence, by each stakeholder, there is a discord created due to the previous record of corrupt practices.
- iii. **Lack of Co-operation Between Community Stakeholders:** It is quite challenging most times to execute plans and proposals in communities as community members, leaders, government and other agents fail to

reach tangible agreements. Personal gains and interests are projected ahead of community interests.

According to Oyebamiji and Adekola in Dokubo (2015), the following are challenges faced in urban community transformation while adopting the functional approach:

- i. Refusal of project initiators to involve certain members of the community in some aspects of the project development process.
- ii. Poor leadership project directors.
- iii. Unsuccessful nature of previous community projects, which dampens the interest for involvement in subsequent projects.
- iv. Inadequate publicity given about proposed community projects by initiators.
- v. Wrong selection and execution of projects and programmes that do not meet the immediate needs of the people.

As opined by Modape (2009), illiteracy is also a huge hurdle to successful transformation of Nigerian communities, as most community members and leaders are not enlightened and knowledgeable, they cannot contribute adequately when discussions and negotiations are going on with government officials, NGOs and other change agents. Hence brilliant ideas and plans are usually opposed. Inadequate funding of projects and paucity of funds have contributed to underdevelopment of Nigeria communities (Oko, 2011).

Addressing the issue further, Legia (2011) enumerated the following as challenges affecting the key stakeholders in urban community transformation:

- i. Incessant youth restiveness and more recently, cultism.
- ii. Chieftaincy tussles and power rifts in communities.
- iii. Lack of community database.
- iv. Lack or shortage of professionals among urban dwellers.
- v. Imposition of projects on communities by the government.
- vi. Lack of comprehensive consultations by professional change agents on type and location of projects to be carried out in communities.
- vii. Traditional and cultural conservatism.
- viii. The role of dream killers among the external change agents.

The challenge of perception is also mentioned by Cavayein Dokubo (2015) as a major hurdle to community transformation. Cavaye further stated that ‘community development agencies need to interact with communities in a way that helps the people recognize their perceptions and beliefs. Attitudes towards the community and its future often determine action, rather than the reality of what is possible. There appears to be four components to the inertia that communities must overcome to take positive action. Communities struggle to change because they cannot change an issue in their sphere of influence, or because they do not have the resources or assistance to be effective. They do not want to change. They do not know how to change (lack of direction, organization or expertise) or they think they cannot change. It is this final component that is a crucial challenge. Most urban people simply believing that they cannot make positive steps to achieve developmental changes. These beliefs include views

about the current community situation, future prospects, and the image of a community development initiative itself.

This challenge of perception is important for three reasons. First, the current strong emotion in urban areas can easily reinforce perceptions of self-depreciation, victim mentality and negativity. Community members can “stall” in self-justification and denial (Gillard in Dokubo, 2015). Second, perceptions can easily limit or skew development options. For example, the perception that what is limiting community vitality is funding or assistance from “outside” clearly focuses development efforts on “acquisition” and possibly limits opportunities, such as redefining existing assets or fostering existing businesses. Third, perceptions can become institutionalized – culturally constructed and associated with local power arrangements. Community developers can subtly and unconsciously influence or reinforce perceptions in communities.

According to Mutiullah and Solomon, (2016), most of the local governments in Nigeria are not financially buoyant to effectively participate in community transformation. The joint state-local government account has not helped matter as the latter is always at the caprice and whim of the former. There is glaring evidence of undue state interference in the financial resources of many local governments to the extent that the average local council finds it difficult to meet its recurrent expenditure, not to talk more of executing capital projects.

## **Solutions to Challenges faced by Community Transformation Stakeholders**

To aid various stakeholders in urban community transformation using the functional approach, Dokubo (2012) enumerated the following:

- i. Prudent financial management: This is a tool for managing community transformational funds, and one of the most important practices that community transformational stakeholders are required to put in place.
- ii. Monitoring and evaluation of projects: Effective monitoring and evaluation of urban community transformation projects can improve management, accountability, participation, trust, and learning efficiency.
- iii. Improved and effective communication between all stakeholders.

Every community development initiative as a social development project requires effective communication among various groups of people who are involved in such development project in the participating communities. Communication is very vital for the success of community development in order to provide adequate information to project participants in the participating communities. In social environment, effective communication can be seen as a viable tool for a remarkable success in community transformation endeavours. It is imperative to keep communication channels open among all project participants and organizations involved in community development initiatives. Indeed, communication as the livewire of human culture as demonstrated in numerous human activities and

organizations beginning from individuals to family as the basic social organization, villages, towns, communities, societies, countries including corporate organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), institutions, religious organizations, notably churches among others. Communication, in the social setting in the contemporary global environment, can be likened to human heart which pumps blood in human body.

Fundamentally, a functional human heart pumps blood very well in the human body in order to keep it alive. Consequently, life is sustained when a functional human heart is at work in human body. However, if human heart fails to pump blood in the human body, the life of such an individual is not only in serious danger, but it will eventually cease to exist as a mortal. Therefore, communication is very important to stimulate effective service delivery in every human being and organization in social settings in the contemporary global environment. In every human culture, communication sustains the efficient functionalities of the various social organizations and their numerous activities (Aruma, 2018).

According to Noel (2008), security agencies should improve in their policing of Nigerian communities, especially, the urban communities and anti-corruption agencies should be strongly involved in community development projects. NGOs and private firms willing to play their part in the development of rural communities should be supported wholeheartedly by community leaders instead of being chased away by their hostile attitudes and responses (Ejim, 2011).

Furthermore, Dokubo (2015) mentioned the steps below as crucial to achieving community transformation through functional approach:

- i. Adult training and retraining to cultivate and sensitize consciousness of the people to participate in activities directly affecting them.
- ii. Dissemination of periodic and regular information about the project to be carried out or executed.
- iii. Awareness campaign among the people of the benefitting community.
- iv. The transformational projects should use voluntary groups or organizations within the community.

As opined by Cavaye (2001), partnership, as well as service delivery is very crucial in urban community transformation. Cavaye (2001), further stated that 'assessing needs and delivering services and infrastructure to meet perceived needs is a central role for government and community support agencies. Agencies need to adequately deliver high quality services and communities have every right to expect them.

### **Conclusion**

Urban communities in Nigeria have for ages suffered from underdevelopment; hence there is need for holistic transformation. Functional approach which this paper promotes entails involving the government at various levels, community members, professional/change agents coming together to champion the course of transforming the urban communities instead of leaving it to be handled solely by the government. It is crucial that all parties are involved in the process because

communities are deemed to have a better knowledge of the prevailing local conditions (such as who is non-literate and deserves to be helped, or the characteristics of the local micro-environment), and a better ability to enforce rules, monitor behaviour, and verify actions related to interventions. Lack of proper communication, corruption, violence and other factors pose as obstacles for these stakeholders to effectively work together and improve policing and enlightenment programmes. It is crucial then that there should be regular communication before, during and after project execution in benefitting communities.

### **Suggestions**

The following suggestions were made based on the reviewed literature:

1. Development agencies should foster adequate interactions by all stakeholders before and during the process of undertaking transformation projects, because it will go a long way in making the functional approach work in improving urban communities and the lives of the people.
2. Adequate funds should be budgeted by the government for urban community transformation and these funds should be well monitored to curtail issues of corruption.
3. Community chiefs and leaders should always be carried along in the decision-making processes by the government and professional agents and these leaders must always strive to be unselfish and realistic in their demands.

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