

Continuing Education

AND DEVELOPMENT IN AN EMERGING DIGITALISED WORLD

A Festschrift for Professor Deborah Adetunbi Egunyomi



Edited by

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Chapter Three

Suburbia in Nigeria: A New Approach to Understanding Rural Community Transformation and Development

A. A. Omokhabi and B. A. Fajimi

Introduction

National development in Nigeria has always been driven by rural community development. Ugwukah (2021) stated that Nigerian precolonial societies organised themselves into sizeable and manageable socio-cultural fraternities. These societies engaged in collaborative efforts, developed their environment, and promoted good living conditions and communal welfare for survival and posterity. Notable among these societies were Benin, Epira, Efik, Hausa States (Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Gobir), Ibibio, Igala, Igboland and Delta City-states, Itsekiri, Jukun, Kanem-Borno, Nupe, Tiv, Sokoto (Fulani), and Yoruba alongside other ethnic minorities (Falola, Ajayi, Kirk-Greene & Udo, 2023). These were indigenous empires and kingdoms who evolved community-based systems where resources were pooled together to improve the environment and welfare of the people. They constituted the Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria Protectorates that were amalgamated in 1914 by the Lord Lugard's British Administration heralding the post-independence over 250 ethnic groups who are spread across the existing six-geopolitical zones of the country (Mustapha, 2005; Ngu, 2014; Uwaifo, 2016; Isiani & Obi-Ani, 2019; Quadri, 2022).

Scholars studied trends in rural community development in pre-independence Nigeria and found a common thread of development through the evolution of community-based systems, collaboration and self-help initiatives (Ugwukah, 2021). The Yoruba of the South West geopolitical zone are historically urbanised and cosmopolitan. They founded and built their communities through cooperative initiatives. The Yoruba developed social amenities for the common economic development of the people and promoted inter-relational commercial activities with other communities through the construction of roads, collective farming system, public utilities (such as the Oba's [traditional ruler] palace, market centres, and town halls), and communal labour for private housing facilities (Akinsorotan & Olujide, 2006). The Ibibio in the South-South established Union in 1948 and provided social and economic infrastructure for

people in present-day Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Ibok & Akpanim, 2014). There were different cultural governance and series of linkages and networks of cooperations for rural development in Igboland in South East geopolitical zone and other three geopolitical zones of North Central, North East, and North West in the Hausaland and among the various ethnic groups of the Niger area (Mohammed & Yarinchi, 2013; Nwachukwu, 2014).

However, the retrogression and decadence in contemporary Nigeria have given the community of practice in the field of community development and social welfare concerns. The pace of precolonial and pre-independence in rural community development has slowed down considerably. It would appear that there were no innovation in community development in the country. The bane of the paucity of innovation and decline in the practice of community development have been attributable to the foundation of colonial government whose priority to organise Nigeria was skewed in favour of its home government rather than building on the numerous home-grown models that should have consolidated on the gains of the different precolonial societies (Omitola, Akinrinde & Omitola, 2021).

Egbe (2014) and Adelabu (2019) argued that the colonial government introduced Western education to modernise Nigeria but focused on the development of the economy for British interest. This policy direction weakened established precolonial informal communal establishments for self-help and rural development. The white-collar industrial complex accompanied the colonial agricultural economy and accelerated physical and non-physical infrastructures in cities and major towns across the country. The rural areas lacked basic educational and social infrastructures. When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, there was a massive rural-urban migration and many young people left the rural communities to seek good life and enjoy social amenities in the cities (Adelabu, 2019). The oil boom of the 1970s generated another wave of massive rural-urban migration with consequent abandonment of the rural areas because of the neglect of agriculture and over-dependence on crude oil. This turn of events eroded successive government policies from Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in the 1970s to the Brown Revolution of the Buhari Administration in the 2020s (Onuba, 2021; Ubah, 2021) with an insignificant impact on rural development.

Rural development is the sine-qua-non for national development. A developing country like Nigeria is expected to prioritise rural community development as globalisation, liberalisation, and digitisation push the world toward the

attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs is a global community-shared blueprint for the betterment of people in their environment on planet earth across the different spectrums of life. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] (2022) said that SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The SDG 17 serves as a pivot that underscores the imperative of the mobilisation of resources (material and financial) through home-grown capacities and support from external (international) sources to actualise SDGs in 2030 (Eurostat, 2022; UNDESA, 2022).

Nigeria fell behind in the attainment of its Millennium Development Goal 2000-2015 (Fajimi, 2020). The United Nations has expressed concern that the country may not meet its SDG 2030 targets unless there is a community-based transformation and development with emphasis on inclusive and sustainable rural development efforts (Udejah, 2019; Nnaemeka-Okeke, Okeke, & Sam-Amobi, 2020; Terzungwe, 2022). The emergence of suburbia in Nigeria is a phenomenon in rural community development that requires the attention of scholars as a transformational and developmental paradigm. This paradigm is capable of restoring the country to the pre-colonial societies' collaborative trajectories and accelerate sustainable rural development and national transformation. This chapter explores the suburbia as an emerging concept in understanding rural community transformation and development towards achieving inclusive and sustainable rural community development in Nigeria. It discusses new thoughts in community development that make the concept of suburbia a compelling paradigm that bridges the developmental gaps between cities and rural communities and states the implications for community development practice in Nigeria.

Concept of Community Development

The definition of community development is contextual in nature (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2022). There are different schools of thought on the definition if the 5W1H model of inquiry is applied: Who needs community development? Why is it needed? What does it need to serve? When is it needed? Where is it needed? How is it served? All these are geared toward understanding the context in each circumstance, time, and space. A broad perspective of community development from the literature indicates a convergence. This convergence is a multifaceted concept of community development that entails a process, practice, professional discipline, and an academic field of study. Its objective is to promote collective social action, community participation, participative

democracy, diversity, equality, inclusion, sustainable growth, and social justice among communities in the society. The means of attaining the objective is through the capacity building of the people which can come through a planned programme or learning or an environmental force of necessity that induces innovation for survival and sustainability.

A streamlined overview of the definition from the prism of the community of practice, however, shows that the idea of community development is derived from two independent but inter-related social constructs that scholars put together to create a concept of sociocultural and economic change in the lives of people who coexist in time and space for a definite purpose. These are 'community' and 'development'. The community is a micro or macro collection of people sharing certain common features and living agreeably together under a mutual relationship within a geographical location or contextual space (Oni, 2013). On its part, development is a society's capacity to fulfill the citizens' felt-needs satisfactorily within its available resources (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001). Aliero (2008) succinctly captured Anyanwu (1981) understanding of community development and accentuated the linkages of the two interrelated concepts as the pursuit of felt needs, the need for social change, and the attainment of better conditions of living through collaborative efforts of the people. Cavaye (2004), Sapkota and Tharu (2015), and Akande (2016) said that community development combines the idea of community with development where people who share locale, socio-cultural bond, and belongingness empower themselves with skills forge a common agenda to change their locality.

Community development will mean communal efforts arising from social network interconnectivity to improve conditions of living in the environment. It is about the people and their choice to change their lives and improve their environment. Olaleye (2013) expanded the scope of community development beyond the achievement of beneficiary communal targets to include the enhancement of the people's capacity to organise themselves and solve problems that they have identified in their community through citizens' participation in self-help projects. Community development is, therefore, a complex concept consisting of two critical elements in development. Firstly, there is community participation where people rely on mutual cooperation to initiate self-help projects to improve their standard of living and transform the environment. Secondly, improvement in the living conditions of the people and changes in the community is facilitated by external support from government and social change agents such as international development agencies and private sector actors.

Simwa (2018) agreed that community development as construed by Olaleye (2013) has two sides like a coin but felt that it is quite contradictory to state that community development encourages local decision-making on one side and implementation of governmental policies on the other. Rather than conflict, the two sides are complementary as always as the two sides of a coin in the literal metaphorical sense. This hypothesis is supported by Olaleye (2013) and Gilchrist and Taylor (2022) who have articulated the principles and processes of community development respectively. This points to the existence of an intervening force that maintains the delicate balance between the two sides of the community participation and external support. Olaleye (2013) related seven principles of community development which are felt-needs, self-help, citizen participation, self-growth, self-reliance, self-direction, and communication. On their part, Gilchrist and Taylor (2022) identified 7Es comprising Enabling, Encouraging, Empowering, Engaging, Educating, Equalising, and Evaluating as the essential processes of community development. There is a common feature that runs through these principles and processes to keep the two sides of community participation and external support from falling off the orbit of the critical essence of collective social action and social justice in the community.

This intervening force of community participation and external support is capacity development. Community development cannot take place when people lack capacity. This capacity is the propellant of the basic principles that guide the theoretical framework of community development. Capacity development is the configuration of the ability of individuals, organisations, or society as a whole and their access to authority, resources, and opportunities to plan, adapt and execute pre-determined goals continuously for sustainable improvements (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001; Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010; United Nations Development Group, 2017). In contemporary times, the focus of community development has shifted to informal education, collective action, and organisation development which underline capacity development and are a prerequisite for the measure of successful implementation of the community development process.

People in the community need to operate within a structural framework with the requisite capacity to identify felt-needs, mobilise, organise, and work toward their desired objective for change. This is where the orientation of community development as a practice, professional discipline, and an academic field of study meets and shakes hand with its conception as a process to create a broad set of practices for the attainment of sustainable improvements (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2022).

Concept of Suburbia in Community Development

The basis for identifying and typifying suburbia as a community development phenomenon is the understanding of a community in terms of the land area such as a village, rural locality, town, city, or country with specific geographical boundaries. This is the traditional description of a community as a place circumscribed by territorial area and social interaction where residents bond together and relate with one another than with people outside the cluster (Akande, 2016). Although communities in Nigeria have always been divided along two paradigms of rural areas and urban centres, recent developments in national development and human capital migration along geographical borders between mostly urbanised centres and agricultural rural communities have created a set of smart communities sandwiched between these two territorial areas to create new frontiers of development which connects urban centres with rural areas (Tofowomo, 2008; Razak & Galadima, 2014). Typical examples are the developmental corridors in South West, Nigeria where communities that resemble American suburbia are emerging and connecting cities in Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos States. Similar developments are taking place across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja where new extensions and settlements are either springing up or sprawling out as frontiers to existing urban centres and closing up with rural communities or transforming these rural communities to entirely new development areas (Bloch, Fox, Monroy & Ojo, 2015).

These new smart frontiers are suburbia in Nigeria where people in the communities more than the government are practically responsible for the creation of their space, provision of basic amenities, and community development. Aside from being facilitated by the audacity of the people to create space and opportunities for themselves in a developing yet ailing and recessing economy, population growth and unchartered developmental needs for growth in housing and community-led rather than government-led initiatives for the creation of social amenities are fueling the realities of these new Nigerian communities. It should be mentioned that the typical Nigerian community has always been suburban areas that are largely cosmopolitan and built on the connectedness of cultural, economic, and political networks of adventurous city founders across the geopolitical precolonial city-states of Nigeria among the Yoruba, Benin, Igala, Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Kanem-Bornu societies. These societies were rural but not clannish in the sense that they are open societies where different ethnic groups came in to mingle and trade peacefully and felt at home as long as they did not outstep the hospitality of their hosts. This traditional practice subsists in the modern new frontiers of Nigerian suburbia today.

Suburbia in Nigeria exists on the fringe of towns and cities and is often untouched by government presence in the provision of infrastructure and social amenities to indicate modernity and enhance the quality of life of people living in these communities. Several unsuccessful policies and initiatives of government across the three levels of governance (at federal, state, and local government) have been formulated and implemented to integrate suburbia into mainstream national development. The paradigm has shifted to private participation in rural development and hence the evolution of community development associations and their involvement in rural development. The emergence of suburban communities is usually accidental and an outgrowth of the extension of urban and community development resulting from private actors' felt needs and activities. These communities are unmapped, unplanned, and largely inhabited by indigent people unlike the development of estates within cities and urban centres. Rural communities often grow out of necessity as homeowners are driven by socio-economic factors to build their properties and provide rental accommodation to indigent and rural dwellers. These homeowners form community development associations to cater to their mutual interests and welfare in their communities.

Public institutions are unable to meet the growing needs of urban communities in the provision of social amenities. Consequently, the urban communities have suffered gross neglect and do not have infrastructure and social amenities. The associations assume responsibility for the provision of basic social facilities such as electricity, security, road, water, and construction of communal areas (youth centre, market, police post, community school, and the chief's palace). They also pool their resources together to manage their leadership's administrative expenditures like transportation and logistics for participation in central community development associations and Police Community Relations Committee's meetings to mainstream the associations into national development plans. The basic social amenities are facilitated by associations in rural communities through self-help projects. The felt-needs, planning, programme design, and implementation of these self-help projects undergo processes and timelines that stretch the resources and capacities of the associations. The associations require innovation to raise funds within and outside the communities to actualise their self-help projects. Basic social amenities are capital-intensive and they will need to find creative ways to raise funds to finance their long-term projects.

Operational Approaches to Rural Community Transformation

Olaleye (2013) citing Anyanwu (1992) identified six operational approaches to community development but a punctilious review of these approaches shows a strong linkage between community participation and external support and situates capacity development at the fulcrum of rural community development. These six operational approaches are the matching grant approach, directive approach, non-directive approach, integrated approach, sectoral approach, and multiple approaches. These approaches recognised that most of the projects that the new rural (suburbia) embark upon are usually capital-intensive and members of the community may not have the financial capital and other non-cash resources to bear the cost of funding them. It calls for strategies for capacity development including but not limited to citizen education and fundraising (internally and externally) particularly to meet timeline for project execution.

In the matching grant approach, the community has identified a specific project they intend to execute through a self-help initiative, and have made contributions towards the initiative. The local or state government comes forward in response to a call for support from the community to provide technical and/or financial assistance to complement the efforts of the community (Blake, 2003). Literature (Suggenheim, Prasta, Wiranto & Wong, 2004; Bardhi, 2016; Spencer, 2017) demonstrated the usage of matching grant approach for funding different projects in Indonesia, and Albania with empirical evidence of their impact on rural development. The matching grant approach helps the community to navigate the government's bureaucratic excuses of insufficient funds and finance its project from inception to completion. However, the government must be persuaded that the project will significantly impact the community and promote its image as a responsive people-oriented administration. The ability of the community members to lobby the government is critical because of the government's lean resources and competing priorities.

Ovwigho (2007) studied rural community development projects in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria between 1994 and 2005, and drew a parallel between directive and non-directive approaches to community development. In directive approach, the government is solely responsible for initiating and implementing projects within the community whilst the community is a passive beneficiary of the gesture. The government identifies that executing such projects aligns with its development agenda for its

administration and uses it to promote its legacy, particularly in the area of education, health care, and security. It should, however, be stated that the community passivity is relative because unless there is pre-engagement and post-execution community participation, the project may turn out to become a white elephant project and go into a state of disrepair in the community. The non-directive approach is the opposite of the directive approach where the people do not wait for external support but proceed to initiate and implement projects within their environment. The community simply notifies the government of the completion of such projects. This type of approach is germane in the area of security, and infrastructural development such as road construction.

The integrated approach is the mobilisation of all the resources of the community toward a holistic development of the community ranging from infrastructure to the promotion of socio-cultural values of the residents. The community may want to tap into opportunities in tourism and design park-themed facilities to create awareness and earn revenue for its community. This approach enhances the commercial value of the community and is capable of increasing its competitiveness to attract external support for additional infrastructural development. The sectoral approach sees different government agencies, international development agencies, and professionals carry out development projects that are interrelated or independent of one another in the same community. The areas of focus of this approach revolve around education, healthcare, financial education, housing, agriculture, or recreation. Sometimes, all these agencies may work around the same time or on separate projects without a central coordinating framework.

Rural Community Development and Suburbia in Nigeria

Atkinson (2017) defined rural development as socio-economic efforts and programmes of retention, growth, and expansion in geographical areas outside cities to improve the quality of life of rural residents. This is innovative in the sense that it draws the attention to a new possibility about the rural area which contrasts with urban development and growth. Specifically, Atkinson (2017) described these areas as new rural where a blank canvas of homogeneity does not describe rural areas which are now distinctive and contemporary. This is because rural places have changed in recent times because of shifts in human capital migration, private sector initiatives in development plans, technology, digitisation, global democracy, and globalisation. The principal identity of a community as a shared territory with shared bonds of fellowship, set standards of behaviour, common culture, and common administration reinforces the new rural as an emerging Nigerian suburbia (Olaleye, 2013).

The abstraction of suburbia as the new rural in the context of Nigeria emphasises the fact that the country is changing and the approach to rural development should change. Undoubtedly, community development is a by-product of colonisation (Braden and Mayo, 1999; Sapkota and Tharu, 2015; Simwa, 2018; Kotinsky, 2022). However, literature has proven that the idea of giving financial assistance to the government of poor and developing countries like Nigeria has been counterproductive to development. This is because it creates a culture of reliance on foreign aid by the government and dependence on the part of the people who do not see the need to look inward and create solutions to problems in their communities. Aids and assistance from foreign countries may serve as a capacity enhancement tool but it cannot be a principal means of assistance for self-help projects to drive rural community development.

Consequently, scholars can no longer afford to think of rural areas as a relative concept to urban-rural dichotomy based on social, economic, and natural conditions where the residents are largely engaged in agricultural activities such as subsistence farming, forestry, fisheries, and livestock farming. Egbe (2014) suggested that a rural area may refer to a place with an agricultural orientation but added that an area with a population of 20,000 people and below can be classified as a rural area in Nigeria and does not essentially mean that it is an agricultural community because of the contemporary ideology of new rural propounded by Atkinson (2017). What is common to all rural areas, however, remains the absence of critical infrastructure and basic amenities such as roads, health facilities, electricity, potable water, and recreational facilities (Paul, Agba & Chukwurah, 2014).

Egbe (2014) posited that rural development is synonymous with community development. Rural development is closely related to community development and it involves multi-sectoral issues of infrastructure, education, environment, health care, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, empowerment, and wealth creation in the community. Although literature have doubted the adequacy of a conventional developmental approach to projects in rural development, there is no evidence to prove that the influence of external support from foreign countries has significantly contributed to community development in the new rural Nigerian suburbia. Scholars who expressed doubt about community participation in projects belong to the school of thought that developing countries need foreign assistance to develop.

Conclusion

The active participation of people in the development of their communities which forms the fulcrum of effective implementation of development initiatives is the most germane issue in community development. Community participation is the driver of the emerging suburbia and pivotal to rural community development in Nigeria. Members of the community subordinate their ambitions for the collective good of the community and willingly work together toward achieving set goals. Rural communities have self-developed frameworks for collective decision-making where all social fraternities mobilise themselves to solve their problems. The rudiments of community participation are the basis for the principle of participatory development which entails a bottom-up approach to the development strategy that is popular among international development agencies working in developing countries. The promotion of active community participation through capacity building in the area of citizen education and fundraising will go a long way to mainstream suburbia and bridge the existing widening gap between cities and rural communities in Nigeria.

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