

# Re-Thinking Community Development for Effective Response to Effects of Climate Change on Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The world for long has recognized the importance of the environment and the need for man to live harmoniously with the environment. One of the contemporary global environmental challenges is climate change. Experts are on common ground that it is responsible for most serious environmental challenges confronting the Nigerian cities and rural communities. The nature of climate change challenges and its effects on local communities' environmental sustainability have shown that scientific and technical efforts are not enough in mitigating the effects of climate change on human livelihood and the physical structure of our communities. It then demands that if human contributions to carbon emissions and other greenhouse gasses that are responsible for climate change must be reduced a more people oriented approach like the community development must be adopted and make relevant and responsive to mitigating effects of climate change. This paper therefore focused on issues involved in rethinking community development to make it relevant and responsive to current trends in climate change challenges in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Re-thinking, Community development, Response, Climate change, Environmental sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

The world for long has recognized the importance of the environment and the need for man to live harmoniously with the environment. Significant efforts at ensuring adequate care for the environment began to manifest in the 1990s through international conferences dedicated to the environment. As observed by Adekola and Mbalisi (2015) reports from such international conferences culminated in the inclusion of environmental issues as one of the eight goals of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Reports on the final assessment of the performance of the MDGs revealed that not much expected targets were attained in Africa especially Nigeria where most of the communities, both rural and urban, still suffer from environmental challenges and the consequential effects. Thus, the further inclusion of environmental issues in the seventeen goals of the Sustainable Development (SDGs). Specifically, goals 6, 7, 9, 13, 14 and 15 of global declaration on sustainable development focused on issues concerning the environment and its sustainability. The aggregate of the focus of these goals is to integrate the principles of effective environmental management and sustainable development into countries policies, action plans and programmes aimed at reversing loss of environmental resources.

One of the contemporary global environmental challenges is climate change. Experts are on common ground that it is responsible most serious environmental challenges confronting the Nigerian cities and rural communities. Prominent environmental challenges in Nigeria, resulting from climate change, include unpredictable weather that has led to flooding, Ocean surge with its consequences of building collapse and

sub-merging communities in low land areas of Niger Delta State and Lagos, deforestation and desertification which has led to low crop yields, rural-urban migration, food shortage and most recently clashes between the farmers and the herders. In response to the effects of climate change, stakeholders in environmental management and development practitioners had proposed climate change adaptation which demands adjustment in communities' ecological, social and economic systems. Such adaptation process calls for changes in the structure, processes and practices of community development which is a major development option recognized, promoted and practiced by the Nigerian government and people as intervention strategy adopted for mitigating the effects of climate change and achieving planned development goals.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

'Alone we can do so little; together we can do and achieve so much'. This is the philosophy behind the practice of community development where ideas, efforts and contributions of the people in need lead the process of development. In community development, the principle is "work with the people" not "work for the people". It is based on this guiding philosophy and principle that community development at its evolving stage was described by the United Nation in Adekola (2023) "as a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress." In a more recent attempt the United Nations as cited in Aderinoye and Adeniji (2020) described community development as "a process where community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to common problems". Generally, anything dealing with people working together to make their community better can be put under community development whether those are social, economic and environmental needs. Implicit in community development are such elements as:

1. Full community participation
2. Bottom-up development approach
3. Addressing real needs of the people
4. Initiated by the community
5. Planned by the community
6. Executed and driving by the community
7. Accommodating local knowledge, culture, norms and values
8. Interaction with the capacity of the social environment; and
9. Timeously executed.

Community development today has gone beyond the traditional boundaries of developing the community and the physical, economic and social conditions of the people to include the psychological and emotional conditions of the people. On this premise Adekola and Oyebamiji in Adekola (2023) defined community development as a process by which the efforts of the members of a community are united with those of governmental and non-governmental bodies for a gradual and positive re-conditioning process with much reliance on local initiatives, resources and leadership for improvement in the physical and social structure of the community and general well-being of the inhabitants.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change also known as climate variation, climatic change or climate fluctuation refers to long-term shifts in the temperature and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural or human activities induced as a consequence of struggle to live and survive in the environment. Stephen (2024) described climate change as a periodic modification brought about as a result of changes in the atmosphere as well as interactions

between the atmosphere and other geological, chemical, biological and geographic factors within the earth system. This description focuses only on the natural causes whereas recent experiences have shown that human activities play more roles in climate variations.

Ezechinnah (2019) described climate change as a change in the state of the climate as identified by changes in the variables of the earth properties that persist for an extended period. Climate change is a change in the global climatic system as a result of interaction between the components of the earth system influenced by the solar energy.

Climate change is the defining phenomenon of this century. It has changed the magnitude and frequency of extreme weather as it is a key causative factor in increased heat waves, flooding, drought, intense tropical cyclone, rising sea levels and loss of bio-diversity. These environmental challenges resulting from climate variations have increased vulnerability to diseases and widespread human, material, economic and environmental losses.

In Nigeria, the effects of climate change include; unpredictable weather, reduced/increased rainfall combine with rising temperature, inhibits the country's hydro-power systems, hinder agriculture production and fishing thus reducing food security and negatively impacting on nutrition and human health.

First Bank of Nigeria (2024) reported that the changing Nigerian environment has resulted in increase in temperature, variable rainfall, rise in sea levels and flooding, drought and desertification, land degradation and many more frequent extreme weather conditions. The report further noted that the duration and intensities of rainfall have increased; producing large runoffs and flooding in many places. (For instance, long hours of rainfall in the first week of July, 2024 rendered the entire metropolis of Lagos State flooded with consequential building collapse and loss of lives and properties.) These changes are impacting agriculture and food security, depleting resources in every part of the country and posing serious food shortages, reduced livestock production, loss of income and growing desperation over food supply and escalating resource conflicts across Nigeria.

These heavy impacts of climate change on the environment and socio-economic system of Nigeria contribute significantly to the low ranking of the country in Global Human Development Index. For instance, the World Bank (2020) ranked Nigeria 150 of 157 in the 2020 Human Development Index. Knoema (2021) reported that 57% of the over 200million population of Nigeria live in the centres (resulting from rural-urban migration). Adekola (2023) reported that as at 2018, 40% of Nigerians were living below the poverty line while another 25% were vulnerable. Thus, the World Poverty Clock (2020) described Nigeria as "the Poverty Capital of the World". Adekola (2023) further reported that as April 2022, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that the rate of inflation has moved to 16.82%. Food inflation as at April 2024 has increased to 32.74%, 9.52% higher than the 23.22% recorded in April 2023. This is no doubt a consequence of low agriculture production and food insecurity resulting from climate change. Available data from NBS 2024 revealed that youth unemployment in Nigeria has risen to 8.6% while under-employment is 12.3%.

Nigeria since 1960 when it became independent, had been striving to attain a national development capable of up-scaling her beyond the third world nation/developing country class it belongs today. Successive government had initiated various national development plans and also key into the various global development agenda, yet the development level of Nigerian communities is still very low. Consistently, reports from various multi-national organisations have identified Nigeria as one of the countries that cannot meet global environmental, social and economic development targets. This has implications for development and environmental sustainability in Nigeria and other West African countries where Nigeria has lot of influence.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability literarily means ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level. It involves avoidance of depletion of national resources in order to maintain an ecological balance. Mollenkamp (2023) described sustainability as ability to maintain or support a process continuously overtime. It seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for the long-term.

Sustainability as a concept according to Adalakun (2021) was developed as a result of human activities in agricultural practices and the environment. It gains attention as a result of environmental problems caused by various human activities requiring attention for solutions. The concept finds its roots in the United Nations 1987 Brundtland Commission Report "Our Common Future". In the traditional era, people use-up resources without replenishing thus, making such resources unsustainable. The consequences of this unsustainable usage of resources bring hardship, poverty, stagnation and general underdevelopment. The culture of no replenishment snowballed into a situation where modern people are users and consumers of resources as if they will last forever. The emergence of climate change has worsen the results of this culture of unsustainable consumption thus, the idea of sustaining the environment became a necessity to fill the gaps created in natural physical resources due to human activities and usage of natural resources.

Environmental sustainability denotes the ability to maintain ecological balance in the planet earth natural environment and conserve natural resources to support the wellbeing of current and future generations. It is the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support its wellbeing now and in the future. Environmental sustainability encourages individuals to live in a way that creates minimal waste and even regenerates. Okorie (2016) observed that environmental sustainability can be attained when individuals are environmental literate and possess adequate environmental knowledge, environmental friendly attitude and sensitivity, problem solving skills and ability to take actions to improve the environment. A sustainable environmental conscious individual According to Nzeneri (2016) is one who possesses the following qualities and skill:

1. Does not waste financial resources
2. Does not exhaust natural resources or degrade environmental resources;
3. Values and protect nature;
4. Leverages local resources to satisfy community needs;
5. Values domestic work and recognizes gender needs and the different roles of men and women in the implementation of public policies;
6. Increases livelihood and income generating opportunities for everyone;
7. Seek to diversifies local economies;
8. Protects the health of its inhabitants placing emphasis on preventive medicine;
9. Protects universal access to housing and environmental sanitation services (water supply, sewage, drainage and vector control, refuse collection and disposal);
10. Guarantees universal access to public transportation;
11. Ensure food security and supply for the population;
12. Guarantees and improve, education, training and recreation opportunities;
13. Preserve historical patrimony and local culture; and
14. Guarantees community participation in decision making process.

### **Need for Re-Thinking Community Development for Effective Response to Effects of Climate Change on Environmental Sustainability**

Community development is a major grassroots and people centred development/intervention strategy that has gained general acceptability and usage as development initiative in responding to environmental

challenges thrown-up by climate change and other developmental issues. Since its formal mention in the 1948 Cambridge Summer Conference, countries of the world, both developed and developing, have adopted community development plans and initiatives towards improving qualities of the environment, managing environmental challenges and improvement in the general quality of life of the people and their communities. For community development to be sustainable and continue to be relevant as development initiative useful in the management of environmental challenges especially those contemporary one emanating from current environmental issues like climate change, government and all other relevant stakeholders need a re-think of community development as development option.

The general feeling today is that there is the need to focus more on the human front in the implementation of environmental protection programmes. Such focus should be on changing attitudes, values, perceptions, habits and inclination through community development programmes capable of inculcating in the people a sustained culture of environmental ethics and discipline towards engendering environmental friendliness through community engagement and practical peoples participation in community development initiatives meant to mitigate the effects of climate change on the people and the physical structure of the communities. The need to re-think community development is stirred by the belief that successful control of consequences of climate change depend to a great extent on the way people perceive their environment and the concomitant behavior and respect they attach to their immediate environment. This is because it is the human mind that masterminds human behavior. Since climate change problems are both nature and human induced, they require a radical change of attitude and complete transformation in the way people behave, use and manage the earth's resources. This is achievable in community development only when community development programmes accommodate sustainability principles in programmes planning and implementation. For community development responsive to sustainability principles to emerge stakeholders and change agents in community development and environmental management must adopt a modified perception and comprehensive change that promotes environmental consciousness among community development practitioners.

### **Focus Areas in Re-Thinking Community Development for Effective Response to the Effects of Climate Change on Environmental Sustainability.**

The trend of development issues have gone beyond mere physical development of the communities, economic and social conditions of the people.. For community to be responsive to the ever expanding environmental aspects of development, it should be structured to an intervention instrument that gives the community greater control over all the conditions that affect their lives. Community development should become such tool capable of equipping the people with confidence to tackle environmental challenges and function effectively in local actions directed at evolving positive change in their community. That is, "think globally; act locally".

Community development should operate at the level of local groups and organizations that make-up the community sectors. To this end, community development should be seen as a skilled process and part of its approach should believe that communities cannot be helped unless they themselves agree to the process of such help. Community development must not only look at how the community is working at the local level but also how responsive key institutions are to the larger national and global community needs.

For community development to be responsive to contemporary environmental challenges, like climate change, it is imperative that community development should;

1. Promote active and representative citizens participation so that community members can meaningfully influence decisions that affect their lives;
2. Engage community members in environmental problem diagnosis so that concern stakeholders can understand the implications of their actions and inactions on the environment and their general



wellbeing.;

3. Help community leaders understand their roles locally and as representatives of the people.
4. Assist community members to design, plan and implement agreed upon climate change mitigation initiatives by emphasizing shared leadership and active citizens participation.
5. Educate the environmentalists and community change agents in recognizing the need to disengage from efforts that adversely affect the disadvantaged segments of the community.
6. Concern itself with the issue of powerless and the disadvantaged, in this, it should involve all members of the community, promote power sharing and offer a practice that is part of the community social change process.
7. Consider the interests of neighboring communities that may be affected by solutions offer to cushion the effects of climate change in a particular community.
8. Rely heavily on local initiatives and resources with less emphasis on government on government support but not compromising government policies and bilateral agreements.
9. Revisit and improve base line assessment techniques, need identification and programmes implementation techniques.
10. Revisit curriculum of studies in relevant educational institutions to widen the knowledge scope to accommodate new trends in environmental issues, make knowledge acquired more relevant to change agent skill needs, and modern methodologies of programme planning and implementation
11. Adopt modern and pocket friendly means of communication, that will accommodate the limited literacy level of community members, in citizens mobilization for programme planning and implementation.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of climate change challenges and its effects on local communities environmental sustainability have shown that scientific and technical efforts are not enough in mitigating the effects of climate change on human livelihood and the physical structure of our communities. It then demands that if human contributions to carbon emissions and other greenhouse gasses that are responsible for climate change must be reduced a more people oriented approach like the community development must be adopted and make relevant and responsive to mitigating effects of climate change. This discourse therefore concludes that to make community development relevant and responsive in mitigating the effects of climate change; the need to rethink community development towards restructuring it to be useful in promoting climate change adaptation strategies, enhancing community resilience and peoples capability to prepare and handle initiatives that provides solutions to immediate and predictable climate related changes becomes very imperative. The authors further concluded that community development as people oriented local initiatives should come to the front burner wherever and whenever community actions and global partnership on climate variation and other environmental challenges are the agenda for discussion. More stakeholders focus and attention on community development are required for a more comprehensive national and global rethinking of community development principles and tenets towards making it a more useful instrument in climate change mitigation efforts.

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