

EDUCATION FUNCTIONALISM AND COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT: EFFECT OF THE NEXUS AND MISSING LINK IN RUMUEKINI COMMUNITY.

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Abstract

This paper, as a succinct but modest academic discourse, makes an attempt on a fair operationalization of the key concepts under the spotlight- education and community development. Accordingly, the paper zeroes-in on the perspective of the core use of education, which is functionalism. The discourse, to a great extent also, attempts to x-ray the nexus between education and community development; as it critically reflects on how the use or otherwise of educated elements can either impact or scuttle community development; hinging the analysis on interviews and observations that span through a period of time and experiences in Rumuekini Community. The findings show that, with the influence of some educated persons, the community recorded many developmental feats, as against when some uneducated folks took over the helm of affairs in the community. The paper therefore concludes that modern community development can only thrive with the influence and use of educated persons.

Keywords: Education functionalism, development, nexus, missing-link, community.

Introduction

No man is a hermit; rather men live together in such a way that they share essential conditions of life in a group. Such a group is what scholars in social sciences and social works have come to term a community. The community in itself performs certain fundamental functions for the group of people within it. Such functions are usually aimed at developing either the people and/or their community. Expectedly, it is the individuals in the community that are saddled with the elemental functions that could lead to the development of the people or their community. In view of this, the requisite knowledge, values and skills of the individuals become of utmost importance if they must be instrumental in the development of their community. Conventionally, values and skills are transmitted via the process of education.

Thus, the covert or overt linkage between education and community development appears incontrovertible.

Oral tradition has it that Rumuekini community evolved out of a descendant of Akpor Kingdom, known as Ekini. Ekini was known and dreaded as a warrior, who was deliberately deployed to co-terminus axis of the Akpor Kingdom so as to co curb external aggression against the kingdom. Ekini had eight children who eventually metamorphosed into the eight compounds that at first formed a community of rural dwellers (Nyewusira & Nmecha, Not Dated). The initial land mass of the community was made of thick forests and vast arable farmlands, hence the community is also fondly called Ekini-Ishishiohia; meaning a land of forests. Presently, Rumuekini has transformed into semi-urban community in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. It has expanded from the original nucleus towards the East-West road. In the four cardinal points, it is bounded by Rumuosi, Aluu, Rukpokwu and Elakahia communities. The population of the community, according to the 2002 census data of Rivers State, was Rumuekini 6, 943. However, it was projected to be 10, 502 by 2016 (Visigah & Ewin, 2018). The gradual urbanization of Rumuekini in this 21st century should have been an added advantage to the development strides of the community, but that has not happen. Whether there is a link between this and the educational disposition of the people is an inquiry that only a discourse of this nature can establish.

Conceptual Clarification on Education

The concepts or ideas about a subject matter like education are not only many and varied, but seldom lend themselves to any single definition. Education is a very wide and all embracing concept, hence the necessity to situate it appropriately in any discourse. Fafunwa (2004) defines education as the process by which a young child or an adult develops the ability and other behavioural forms which are of positive or acceptable value to the society in which he lives.

According to Thight (1996), UNESCO describes education as an organized and sustained valuable instruction to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life. To adumbrate Nyewusira (2007), education is the training of the mind to gain knowledge, acquire skills, attitudes and values for the development of the nation. Hence, education is necessary for both human and societal development. Indeed, the purpose of education is bound to be defeated if it cannot be deployed to serve personal and collective societal interests.

Historically, the African primordial educational system or the traditional/indigenous education was primarily aimed at serving the needs of the society. Indeed, the utility of indigenous education was self-evident in many African societies. Sarumi (2001) succinctly enumerates the key features of indigenous education as containing the following:

- (i) Suitable content to meet the needs of communities
- (ii) Provision of life-long education as it takes care of education of community members from cradle to the grave
- (iii) Functional and moral orientation that was pragmatic and took care of the moral ethics of society.

The foregoing is an attestation that primeval or informal education was functionally used for the advancement of the good of society.

On the other hand, contemporary or formal education, particularly in most industrialized societies has been seen as a tool for the development of society. Most nations therefore give priority to education and thus embark on massive investment in the education of its populace, with the intention that society will in turn recoup from the resources and potentials of the major end-product of education which is the educated man or woman. Interestingly, Nigeria in a theoretic attempt to join the committee of nations in the use of education for human and national development has, through the National Policy on Education (2014:14) stated, *inter alia*, that the goals of education are:

- total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigeria society and the world;
- development of the appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competences to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

What can simply be deduced from the above is that education, whether traditional or conventional, is only germane to the extent that it can be beneficial or helpful in advancing the course of any community or the larger society.

The concept of Community Development

Community development falls within the bracket of disciplines that also enjoy a plethora of definitions. Scholars conceive the subject from a number of perspectives, but then lack of agreement on a specific definition for it has brought about various but similar erudite explanations and characterizations of the term. As such, while no widely accepted definition is available, few important elements of community development appear again and again in scholarly literatures. These elements together provide a generally acceptable description of the subject matter. Such elements as noted by Osuji (1991) include:

- Community as the unit of action;
- Community initiative and leadership as resource;
- Use of both internal and external resources;
- Inclusive participation;
- An organized and comprehensive approach that attempts to involve the entire community; and
- Democratic and rational task accomplishment.

The Cambridge Summer Conference in 1948 defined community development as “a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community” (Anyanwu 1981:36). According to Onyeozu (2007), community development, whether it is defined as a movement, a process or a method generally has its ultimate central concern, the development of man as a member of the community. He further opines that the expressed felt-need of the people of a community must be the basis for community development activities. However, it is also generally accepted that community development is a process by which the efforts of the people are united to improve

the economic, social and cultural conditions of the community where they reside (Adekola, Not Dated). Based on the above scholarly submissions, Anyanwu (1981:165) has summarized the objectives of community development as follows:

1. To educate and motivate the people for self-help.
2. To develop responsible local leadership.
3. To inculcate among the members of a community a sense of citizenship and spirit of civic consciousness.
4. To introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass root level, through the creation and revitalization of institutions designed to serve as instruments for local participation.
5. To initiate a self-generative and self sustaining and enduring process of growth.
6. To enable people to establish and maintain co-operative and harmonious relationships
7. To bring about gradual and self-chosen changes in the life of a community with a minimum stress and disruption.

Historically, community development is a relatively new phenomenon in the social sciences and is equally somewhat a new art of practice in the western world. This is because the concept was only introduced at the aforesaid 1948 Cambridge Summer Conference. In Africa however, Anyanwu (1981) observes that community development is nothing new, noting that from the earliest periods of human history in Africa men have sought to improve their lot, and that community development was one channel for doing that. Likewise, Adekola (2011) admits that community development has always been a part and parcel of African culture. He based his stance on the views of Fafunwa (2004:8) who identified the objectives of African Traditional Education to include:

- (i) the development of a sense of belonging and the encouragement of active participation in family and community affairs.
- (ii) to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large

Generally, before the incursion of imperialism, Africans had learnt to meet their social and economic needs in their communities. In most African settlements, Age Groups were usually engaged in community work. They helped other members of the group in clearing, planting or harvesting or helping the community at large in constructing and maintaining track-farm roads or feeder roads, community halls, etc. Much more in aforesaid times, many rustic African communities had learnt how to pool their resources and provide both functional and physical facilities for the collective benefit of all and sundry within the community. It was also in these ways that they provided trenches round their settlements, erected public buffers, centres of religious worship and of course facilitated the foundation laying and gradual placement of educational infrastructure (Adekola, 2011).

In recent times, communities have collaborated with Government Agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, etc to construct maternity homes, pipe-borne waters and other self-help community projects. Therefore, it is not in doubt that part of the notable and inherent practices that is historically evident in most African societies is their attachment to community development. As such, community development has been the aboriginal method or technique which is developed and used by locals to identify their

immediate needs and taking collective action toward addressing those needs. It was one sure way of using a self-help approach towards meeting the common goals of all community dwellers.

The above epistemic and historical clarifications evidently reveal that community development is not novel in the African society and that in the African society; community development means working together as individuals of a particular community to achieve common goals that are targeted at benefiting the larger part, if not the entire community. Thus, the foregoing has presented a concise understanding of the elementary features of community development.

Education Functionalism for Community Development

The concept of the educated man may vary from one civilization or culture to another and from one generation to another, but the fact remains that an educated person is the model of knowledge that in his epochs or cultures is easily relied upon to proffer well-informed solutions to the challenges in his society. The idea of functionalism in education presupposes that the educated person is deemed to have imbibed all the rudiments through which civility, freedom, innovation, progress, development etc can be realized. Hence, Okoli (2011) surmises that education has always been patterned with functionalism in view, that is where education is seen as a means to an end and not an end itself. Functionalism in education consequently entails that education should be an instrument for induction and for utility society.

Nduka (1998) is also axiomatic that functional education is valuable to the society, noting that the educational system ensures that the population is reproduced culturally and socially by ensuring that the individuals learn the skills and values that will enable them function adequately as responsible members of the society. Education therefore does equip an individual with the capacity to acquire essential knowledge which enables him to engage in activities necessary for effective functioning in group or community. To this end, Adekola (Not Dated) observes that the overall focus of education in any given society is the development of values and skills that make the individual a responsible citizen capable of impacting on community and national development.

Suffice it to say that with the growing field of knowledge and the age of sophistication, in virtually every domain of human endeavour, community development has now become an area where education and the educated are increasingly required, not only to be significantly involved but are indeed expected to be in the driving seat. In fact, community development today has gone beyond its traditional boundaries of developing the community in terms of the physical, economic and social conditions of the people to include emotional and psychological development of the people. It now transcends the material improvement of communities through developmental indices such as schools, water boreholes, hospitals, roads, etc, to include such non-material ones like tackling attitudinal change, reinforcement of political consciousness and participation. Other education-driven community-based activities include: sensitization programmes against illiteracy, violence, disease, harmful or obsolete customs and practices.

Community Development has also graduated into a process where members of a community rely on extraordinary local initiative, clever leadership and adroit human resources to liaise with governmental and non-governmental bodies to better the lot of the community

(Anyanwu, 1981). It then follows that the leadership quality of community members who intend to champion these courses, in modern community scenery, should reflect the potentials of the best and the brightest of minds. It is moreover instructive that the crop of leaders and citizens that are required for this type of assignment can only be packaged by the ivory towers or cognate institutions (Okoli, Uche and Nyewusira, 2010).

Education is quite important for the development of one's personal life as well as to build up a good and healthy society. It is necessary for community leaders to learn new things if they must be creative and innovative. Creativity and innovations are the offshoots of fresh knowledge and ideas. Sustainable community development depends on the rate of new knowledge and skills applied towards the activities in it. It is an indisputable fact that knowledge is power, and power in this instance is the ability to create or make innovations in the community.

Education makes a man not only to think in the right direction but to be dynamic in his thoughts. Thus, education plays a crucial role in the building of the dynamic leadership that is needed for community development. Leadership at all levels requires competence and competence, which according to Ogbini (1998) is not a commodity that can be bought but the sum of knowledge, experience and the ability that can be acquired.

Education is a key for establishing and spreading knowledge for individuals and their communities because through it one gets to comprehend the history, values and ideals of the community. It is also helpful in understanding the social dynamics of any given community. Knowledge is thus supportive in synthesizing the sundry interests of members of the community.

Any fundamental change in any society has to be preceded by educational revolution (FRN, 2014). Education provides the platform for transformations in a community through the impartation of requisite intellectual empowerment and endowment necessary for desirable changes in the community. As such, any community where the greater proportion of the members grope in intellectual darkness can hardly experience meaningful changes because no community can truly rise above the level of its educated members.

Modern community development cannot take place in isolation from systems of information. This is so because modern community development involves information gathering, information dissemination, information management and professional utilization of information for the advantage of the people of the community. Such rigours are beyond the capacity of the stack or even the functional illiterate.

People reasonably exposed to the theories and practices of community development are better equipped with the right policy thrusts and development ideas necessary for the onerous task of community development. For example, no one can dispute the fact that the knowledge and inspirations gained through community service courses while in the university are not useful to the paradigms of community self-help projects. So, we can say that education is an indispensable factor to any individual who wants to significantly contribute to the development in his community. Good and quality education is imperative for the breed of

men and women who desire to venture into leadership in community service and development.

The foregoing indicates that the value of education in community building cannot be belaboured. In a nutshell therefore, the importance of education in engendering community development can't be ignored by community leadership because nowadays community development, like most socio-political activities, is predominantly knowledge-based. If the significance of education is ignored, it is only at the peril of members of the community in particular and community development in general.

Effect of education on the development pattern in Rumuekini Community

The trajectory of self-help developmental activities in the community as recorded in interviews started with the collaboration, by the earliest set of beneficiaries of formal education with missionary agencies, to build the first primary school for Rumuekini/Rumuosi communities, in 1957. In 1980, the community formed a "Light Committee" which single-handedly facilitated the provision of electricity in the community from the national grid. The Light Committee members were mostly made-up of the first-generation primary and secondary school leavers from the community.

A village town hall (now transformed to a civic centre) was initiated in 1955. The construction of semi-modern market along the east-west road and its commissioning in 1978 by the then military Governor of River State, Zamani Lekwot, was largely coordinated by the elites and chiefs of the community. After a cholera outbreak in 1982, Sir Christian Chinwo liaised with some of this same crop of persons to move for the establishment of a health centre in the community.

In order of succession between 1982 and 2010, the following persons headed the leadership of Rumuekini Community Development Community (CDC). They are: Late Hon. M.O.C. Amadi, Mr Theophilus Worlu, Late Mr Francis Echeonwu, Mr Mathias Chuckwu, Mr Promise Akani, Mr Felix Amadi and Mr Ordu Chukwu. Of these men, only Messrs Promise Akani and Felix Amadi have been so privileged to head the CDC in two separate tenures. These crops of men were ostensibly given the opportunity to serve the community because of the modest level of their enlightenment.

However, it is noteworthy to observe that the high points in the development of Rumuekini took place under the auspices of Ekin Development Association (EDA). EDA, which came into existence in 1994. EDA was largely the idea of the intelligentsia and the crème de la crème in the community. The First Executive Members of the Association was ably headed by Sir Christian Chinwo. Suffice to say at this point that Sir Chinwo is a Biochemistry graduate of University of Ibadan and an erstwhile top-notch manager with Agip Oil Company. The second Executive Council was led by Chief N.B.C. Akani, a graduate of Transport studies, Cardiff University and former General Manager, Western Operations, Nigerian Ports Authority. These two were not just thorough breeds, who distinguished themselves in their chosen careers, but were also considered as higher academic pacesetters in the community. Their rich credentials and profiles reflected in the quality of leadership they offered in the Association. In addition to these two leaders, Dr G.C. Job, Barrister Ichella Chuku and Dr. B.N. Nyewusira, at some point in the Association, acted as Scribes.

Under the superintendence of EDA, the community indubitably witnessed landmark progress in the collective aspirations of the community. The Association strengthened host-community relations with the University of Port Harcourt, and this provided some admission opportunities for sons and daughters of the community who sought for admission into UNIPORT. EDA also revamped internal security measures for the protection of life and property by ensuring that members and non-members, irrespective of their lofty social status, were personally involved in rotational night watch over the community. The body also liaised with some relevant organs of government and their representatives to ensure that the community was not denied political attention in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Council. Members of the Association were subjected to subscriptions and levies that were used to fix water pumps, electric transformers and to carry out sensitization on the federal government programmes such as the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), National Population Census, etc.

The lone Community Secondary School in Rumuekini began with the construction of eight-classroom block by Nmwere Bu Nzi Social Club, a community-based women group, in 1996. The construction of another eight-classroom block for a proposed Community Primary School (now occupied by Grandeur Schools) was the exclusive initiative of another women group, Ogbotu Social Club, in that same year. However, it is important to note that these two historic educational projects happened with the encouragement and support from the leadership of EDA. Was the leadership of EDA all that sublime in its activities? The answer is No, but considering what followed thereafter it became clear that any shortcomings associated with this body is nothing to be compared to what happened when some uninformed persons took over the helm of affairs in the community.

For some inexplicable reason that snowballed into leadership vacuum, EDA effectively became moribund by 2006, and that plunged the community into a rudderless path. Again, with the demise of the paramount ruler of the community, Chief Amadi Wosu, who worked closely with the leadership of the Association, nothing was further mentioned of the Association. Much as it is posited that the eclipse on the Association was indeed a sad commentary in the chronicles of the community, it would have been expected that the extinction of the forum should have prompted another generation of informed persons to come together and kick-start a new phase of a process to raise the bar for the community's development, but regrettably rather than this expectation the direct opposite happened.

The end of EDA coincided with the rise of indigenous land speculators, grabbers and vendors in the community, most of whom were barely literate. It also threw up the emergence of a hedonistic and poorly informed youth groups whose primary lifestyle and economic mainstay largely revolved around land sales and adjudications on land matters. It was also at this point that the educated elites literarily went into hiding, and deliberately abdicated any form of responsibility in the community for fear of the prowling group of land merchants who did everything unprintable to avoid any form of checkmate on their activities in the community.

Within this period also, community leaderships, and by extension all other forms of community activities were not only relinquished to the hands of the ill-informed and total

ignoramuses, but to all sorts of dogsbodies. All sheds of undesirable elements become interested in hijacking the process of community services and control, of course just because of their self-serving interests; ranging from pecuniary interests to other forms of self-centred and self-seeking ambitions. Community development at this point translated into the common metaphor of the macro Nigerian society where the call to public service has lamentably been misconstrued as an invitation to “come and chop”, to use the exact words of Sunday Afolabi, one time Minister of Internal Affairs. The bunch of uncouth leaders that the season threw up at Rumuekini enriched themselves out of communal proceeds and patrimonies that ought to have been ploughed back for the overall development of the community.

In 2013, a segment of the aforesaid group from Rumuodo compound approached the management of only Community Secondary School demanding that some portion of the land, which was freely donated for establishment of the school be relinquished back to community. Their grouse was that the land was hitherto given in excess. But for the perimeter fencing around the school and resistance from the school authorities, they were poised to make encroachment into the school premises with the main aim of grabbing and selling the supposed portion of the school land that was in excess. These same hordes of individuals dealt a blow to the community when the eight classrooms originally constructed by Ogbotu Social Club, for the establishment of a primary school, was brazenly sold to a private school proprietor without due consultation and any form of accountability to the community.

In contemporary times and in most neighbouring urban communities, the process for determining the leadership of CDC or the community youth leaders is not only democratised but the minimum of a first degree is very well considered as a prerequisite for applying for such positions. This is not the case with Rumuekini. This brings to fore the assertion of Adedokun, (2011) that community leadership without cerebral and democratic contents can only be short-sighted if not completely blinkered. This reflected in Rumuekini for the period of time when some uncultured folks reigned.

In effect therefore, the noticeable gaps in Rumuekini’s development were mostly so because the educated and proficient persons in the communities deliberately refused to be engaged in community affairs. They did not just choose to abdicate responsibilities associated with community services; they consciously preferred to look the other way in order not to clash with the unscrupulous elements in the community. What the educated did not realize by acting in this manner is that, in the memorable words of Pius Okigbo, “they surrendered themselves to the superior wisdom of the ignorant” (Nduka, 1998:40). The firm supposition therefore is that the aberration and anomaly the community witnessed after the demise of EDA would have not happened if the educated class had continued to be the community’s gatekeepers.

Conclusion

The prongs of analyses in this succinct discourse clearly suggest that the nexus between education and community development establishes an incontestable fact that community development can’t thrive in the absence of the intrinsic and extrinsic inputs of educated persons. The implication of this is that the community is in dire need of educated men and

women who will take up community services for the purpose of repositioning the community for sustainable development.

Recommendations

That we live in an era where easy money-making, especially by land speculators and vendors, has become the order of the day should not imply that education is now immaterial. Material things, including money and wealth, are pertinent in achieving development only to the extent that they do not discourage educated fellows from participating in such development. The Nigerian nation, and indeed the community on spotlight, is in need of the brain banks and wealth of the knowledge that can transform society. Rumuekini, and indeed other Ikwerre communities, must leverage on education and educated persons who have the promising ability to intellectually redefine and refocus the roadmap to development in their communities, particularly in the face of a highly competitive Nigerian socio-political environment.

Suffice it to say that the reason a part of the Yoruba nation, Ekiti precisely, is referred to as “the fountain of knowledge” is because Chief Obafemi Awolowo, right from 1955 when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in the Western Region, insisted through his policy statement and drive, that education would not only be treated as a foremost priority but an emergency that would revolve the wheel of progress and development for his people. Since then, historians and events have proved him right. Awolowo’s vision should be shared by any farsighted man or woman in Rumuekini.

But very much appealing is the memorable counsel of the erstwhile Nye-we-ali Akpor, Late Eze Badumerum Oriebe, that: “it is better to have education when you don’t need it, than when you need it but don’t have it” (Nyewusira, 2010:9). Such a counsel, as the Holy Writ states, is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance (1Tim1:15). Indeed, the reminisces of Late Eze Badumerum Oriebe bring to fore an example of a highly educated man who did not only redefine and refocus community leadership in Akpor clan, but brought dignity and respect to his stool and the people of the clan. The search for men and women of his character must continue until they are found and engaged in the community service.

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