

Mobilizing Social Capital for Food Security and Poverty Reduction to overcome Religious and Ethnic Hostility: A Preliminary Community based Approach.

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Abstract

Ethnic or Religious intolerance in contemporary Nigeria is often a function of the effort to mobilize religion and ethnic rivalry to wrest limited resources that trickle down to the community level. In the absence of an effective policy to invest Nigerian petroleum resources, accountably, in infrastructures that provide employment and improved quality of life, members of diverse communities socially construct “insider” and “outsider” groups using religion and ethnicity to corner limited resources. This presentation shows how competing segments of a rural poor community were transformed into a corporate entity that protects the rights of all its constituents. It uses data collected from a multi-disciplinary micro-credit, small holder poultry grant. Poultry Specialists at the local Nigerian university, combined effort with an American nutritionist and an American anthropologist to bring practical up-to-date knowledge in micro-credit and poultry care to poor uneducated local community men and women of diverse religions. The presentation will show how this USAID funded Association Liaison Office grant strengthened the network of relationships in this community , thus assisting poor people to overcome ethnic and religious rivalry through improvement in economic resources and animal source food consumption in the community.

Need: The Existential Problem

Two existential changes noticeable in contemporary Nigerian societal behavior provided the impetus for this intervention in poverty reduction and food security through grant writing. The first noticeable change is the move from ethical considerations of good character built on the twin values of “honor” and “shame” to a cool calculation from the on-set of economic interaction that the “end justifies the means.” Good character was preferred to wealth accumulated through fraudulence in the old Nigeria before the civil war that ranged from 1967 to 1970. The second noticeable change was that communities that used to be tolerant and accepting of people of other ethnicities and religions have become outwardly intolerant and prone to violence as the economic hardship and endemic poverty bites harder in this otherwise wealthy country. Preliminary ethnographic studies confirm that doing business, even within family circles for the benefit of family members, hitherto the most sacred forum of ethical support and accountability (Ekeh: 1975) has now become problematic. A genre of internet-based schemes christened

“Nigerian Fraudulent schemes” has become so widespread in America that the name “Nigeria” is slowly becoming synonymous with fraudulent practices in the United States.

A group of African Faculty members who originated from or have done research in the 1975 to 1985 decade in Nigeria, mainly from Lincoln University, Pa. and the University of Delaware, at informal meetings, thought the new changes in behavior were most atypical of the Nigeria that they were familiar with. Some of them decided to conduct an intervention study to confirm empirically or disprove the claims. In addition, bringing together the strength of their various disciplines, they wrote a grant that would teach rural poor people, mainly women, strategies to generate money for self employment and food security in their rural environments. Since the Federal, State and Local Governments of Nigeria have not invested in infrastructures such as clean pipe borne water – the foundation of public health – or roads, schools, or hospitals or clinics, the only way the rural people without skills try to have a share of some resources was to move to the overcrowded cities with very little functioning sanitation infrastructure. They often came back from the cities sick. The micro-credit segment of the intervention grant would concentrate on keeping rural people self-employed in the villages. This effort specifically picked participants in the ratio of three women to one man because ethnography has revealed that women had better spending habits that positively affected their children for the better than men. Women would often spend their money on the welfare of their children first before dealing with their own needs..

Rostow’s Stages and the Nigerian Trajectory of ‘Development’

Without deifying W. W. Rostow’s theory of the five stages of economic development, the conditions were most suitable for Nigeria to modernize at its Independence in 1960. In the

Nineteenth Century, beginning with the annexation of Lagos in 1861, Pax Britannica put an end to wasted years of internecine warfare. It encouraged the transformation of the traditional Nigerian society from being statically dependent on peasant farming to embrace the cultivation of cash crops. It also provided the incentive for the extractive industries to mine various mineral resources as new sources of wealth creation. Manufacturing interests and markets in Europe and America helped to set the conditions for the second stage, Pre-conditions for Take-Off. The commercial exploitation of agriculture and extractive industry necessitated investment in infrastructures. The institutions of higher learning produced skilled man power who slowly transformed into a political elite conscious of their rights and responsibilities. This led to the foundations of the manufacturing sector, the third stage of Rostow's development trajectory. As the economy of Nigeria moved from reliance on the exploitation of agricultural cash crops such as cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts and the cultivation of food crops to a total dependence upon hard currency fetching petroleum resources, the drive to maturity - the fourth stage of development - seemed assured as manufacturing climbed inexorably to 10% of the Gross National Income. This stage would have been characterized by the consolidation of the elements of an open society characterized as the primacy of the rule of law to enforce contract, equality of all citizens, improved infrastructures and the freedom of speech, of assembly, of religion and the right to vote. As M. Gillis, M. Roemer, and D.R. Snodgrass who made a distinction between economic growth and economic development noted:

“Participation in the process of development implies participation in the enjoyment of the benefits of development as well as the production of these benefits. If growth only benefits a tiny, wealthy minority, whether domestic or foreign, it is not development” (1987:8)

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So, at the point that Nigerian economy was, according to the stages of Rostow's development process, ready to mature into a high mass consumption society, sufficiently developed to take advantage of the comparative advantages in global trade, the military overthrow the democratically elected leaders thus turning Nigeria into a closed society. Decrees replaced the meticulous and tedious but necessary discourse of the democratic process. Corruption and the failure of the rule of law to enforce contract replaced the hitherto effective checks and balances needed for accountability. As Rose-Ackerman succinctly noted

“Even when corruption and economic growth coexist, payoffs introduce costs and distortions. Corrupt high-level officials support too much unproductive public investment and under-maintain past investments. Corruption reduces total investment and limits FDI... A country is poorer over-all if corruption levels are high. It may be caught in a corruption cycle where corruption breeds more corruption and discourages legitimate business investment. (1999:3).

Both in internal planning and external relations, resources that were supposed to lay foundation for efficient development were put into projects that in the long run were not in the best interest of Nigeria. As J. Owoeye a noted Nigerian International Relations expert reiterated succinctly

“Indeed the value of international trade is that it provides access to those domestic requirements (goods and services) which the nation cannot fulfill independently. The surplus accruing from favorable trade balance can be re-invested to replenish the internal economy. The resulting Gross National Product (GNP) may not only produce a high standard of living but also support a high profile political clout internationally. The point to be stressed here is that it is more prudent for a nation

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to assume a high profile in international politics only as a reward for its economic achievements. However, some nations- Nigeria included - would appear to put politics before economics, thereby assuming the expensive political roles in their regions or globally, even-though the domestic economic structures are not strong enough to support such political missions abroad.” (1991: 138)

The refusal of Nigeria to invest money accountably in infrastructures, improved health delivery, effective means of mass transit, efficient transportation systems and the information super highway has lead to limited and diminishing chances of employment. This renewed poverty in the face of plenty has led to noticeable changes in the behavior of most contemporary Nigerians.

As economic conditions worsen in Nigeria, normally tolerant ethnically and religiously diverse communities exhibit atypical traits of violence and intolerance. It was also noticed that the rural areas which used to be more tolerant and welcoming of people of diverse beliefs and ethnicities were showing traits of violent bigotry. Secondly, contrary to the traditional insistence on the twin importance of attitudes such as deferred gratification and moral behavior as the measuring parameter of good character, anchored on the rigid sense of “honor” and “shame”, behavior in contemporary Nigeria is, in the main, predicated on the nascent twin attitudes of (a) immediate gratification and (b) so long as one is not caught, the end justifies the means. In the old traditional culture honor and shame were factored into the approval or disgrace that one’s actions brought to one’s family and ancestors before one engages in any behavior.

In the contemporary American society, much of the news, in audio-visual and print media, about Nigeria is seldom positive. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa (one in

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every six Africans is a Nigerian) is synonymous with all sorts of fraudulent schemes aimed at making people part with their hard earned money. Although the high rate of success of these schemes say something about the victims, the fact that they are performed at all, has worsened the affection for most people linked to Nigeria in America. To do something positive, no matter how little, for those mainly Nigerians who go about their daily business with integrity in their poverty mainly in the neglected rural Nigerian environment, a group of faculty from Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, and the University of Delaware at Newark, got together to write a grant from a multi-disciplinary perspective incorporating relevant principles in anthropology, nutrition, animal science and micro-economics.

The pre-proposal study of the situation in Nigeria necessitated that a few givens or rules of avoidance had to be adhered. They are;

1. If and when possible, avoid dealings that will involve the transfer of money through the government agencies.
2. When possible, dealings with institutions at the center, that is, in the case of Nigeria, Lagos, the former capital or Abuja, the current capital should be avoided.
3. Make Nigerian counterparts to the grant accountable by working through those few institutions still regarded as credible for purposes of accountability such as the institutions of the Catholic Church and secondly, the first and second generations of Nigeria Universities (Ibadan 1948; Lagos, 1962, Ahmadu Bello, 1962, Nsukka 1962 and Jos, 1962) where the transfer of money was to be involved.
4. The fourth rule was to utilize a strength learnt from the pragmatism of American higher education to commit university education to solving the existential problems of daily

Social Capital

Contrary to the initial assumption that asserted that aspects of traditional culture impede transformation to modernization, recent Social Science research has encouraged the mobilization of strengths inherent in traditional cultures in the development effort. The rise of the Asian Authoritarian Paternalistic Democratic model to employ Confucian values in the dogged pursuit of technological innovation, while retaining its cultural identity has given credence to the primacy of traditional aspects of culture in modernization. With particular reference to strengths inherent in cultures, Francis Fukuyama(1995a, 1995b) Lee Teng-hui (1995) and Robert Putnam(1993b, 1995a, 1996, 1998a) in America have drawn attention to the usefulness of employing the concept of social capital to strengthen societies for development. The Scholarly edited work of Stephen Baron, John Field and Tom Schuller, *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 has drawn attention to the utility of the concept in rejuvenating community life in the United Kingdom. It has also provided the pedigree of scholars such as Jane Jacobs (1961) Pierre Bourdieu (1983), James Coleman(1988) and Robert Putnam(1993, 2000) who have over the years and in their different ways sensitized Social Scientists to the importance of social capital in strengthening communities for development (2000:2-23).

Social Capital is the network of trust and reciprocal relations existing in the community for its self development. Although it is not the only type of capital that exists in the society for its use, it is the most unique. The other types of capital include physical capital, human capital and fiscal capital. Physical capital is made of the tools, objects and property that exist in the society. Human capital constitutes the personal attributes, talents and training in the society. Fiscal capital consists of the financial resources in a society for its use. What differentiates the three other capitals from social capital is that usage depletes each of the first three. Social capital, on the other hand, improves with usage as it mobilizes community trust to improve its productivity.

The tremendous efforts of the works of these scholars and the contribution of Francis Fukuyama has led the World Bank to see the usefulness of embracing the strategy of mobilizing social capital for development. To improve the effectiveness of this intervention strategy, the World Bank has transformed this essentially qualitative data into a quantitative empirically measurable instrument. Survey instrument, built around six vectors of social capital include, (1) Groups and Networks, (2) Trust and Solidarity, (3) Collective Action and Cooperation, (4) Information and Communication, (5). Social Cohesion and Inclusion and (6) Empowerment and Political Action.

Multi-Disciplinary Methodology for Social Engineering

Anthropology, Nutrition and Animal Science provided the multi-disciplinary foundations for the funded intervention project. With particular reference to Anthropology, the two major influences were two seminal articles. The first was Jack Goody's work, "The Classification of Double Descent Systems in Current Anthropology", vol. 2, no.1. (1961, 3-25). The major contribution

of that work was to show that when Unilineal Descent Groups (UDGs) have rights in material objects such as inherited properties, they are transformed from small units that fission and fusion into corporate groups who not only identify themselves by their inherited rights but also protect those rights, and utilize them for the benefit of the group(1961. 4-7). The major implication of this as a powerful tool of social engineering is that units distinguishable in the group by ethnicity, religion or even gender and who employ these distinctions in subtle ways to discriminate by creating artificial inclusive and exclusive groups in the larger group, can and will transcend these subtle distinctions if they have common rights in properties, skills and new resource-generating knowledge elements.

The second work was by Shirley Ardener, “Money-Go Rounds; the Importance of Rotating, Savings and Credit Associations for Women” in *MAN*, 94, 2, (1964, 202-228). This article brought the attention of the academic world to traditional patterns of vibrant economic interaction in the micro-credit rotating enterprise to create wealth for self employment in Africa. More particularly, since most societies were male-oriented, it showed the foundations of gender empowerment and how females negotiate the world of men on their own terms through financial freedom.

The nutritionist whose Doctoral program was on “How Traditional Beliefs and Practices Affected Meat distribution in the Yoruba Household” found that in West Africa, meat and eggs needed for adequate animal source nutrition for infant balanced growth were both scarce and therefore surrounded with taboos. These taboos were based on a consideration of what Yoruba culture considered prior and essential to a successful life. The Yoruba regarded the measurement of a successful life to be accomplishments which required personal discipline embodied in a frugal life. Both values required that one’s appetites be controlled in order to save money to buy

many cocoa farms, build houses, and marry many wives whose children went on to high achievements in modern educational system. The Yoruba thought that for one to be able to achieve these feats in adulthood, one ought to bring one's children not on expensive diets such as eggs and big portions of meat, which once one got used to, would drain one's resources. So the consumption of eggs and meat were so restricted to children, that the portions that they got did not meet the adequate nutrition standards of this vulnerable group at the most crucial periods in their life, from birth to the age of twelve.

To reverse this axiological trend, working on the strength of Yoruba culture which measured a mother's worth to the community in terms of the number of surviving children a woman has, the nutritionist mobilized the concept of positive deviance to educate rural women that if they wanted to achieve the societal objective of having children who do not die in infancy, they ought to feed them with eggs and meat since the children and not the adult men who really need the large portions of meat for survival and thriving. Since theory alone would not help the children to survive, small holder family poultry which produce eggs and chicks for meat constituted one of the import elements of this social engineering effort. Learning from the experience of similar types of food security and poverty reduction intervention projects in Nicaragua and Bangladesh, a micro-credit segment was included to create alternative source of wealth for the participants in the study. In the Nicaragua and Bangladesh, similar projects failed because when participants were faced with harsh economic choices such as paying for the treatment of their sick children in clinics or buying books for their school age children, they tended to sell their eggs and chicks and thus cripple their chance of generating wealth.

Project Goals, and Activities

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The first goal of the project was to provide for very poor rural village women, mainly, an opportunity for a diversified income earning, wealth creation and employment opportunities through micro-credit. The second goal was to use nutritional education informed by the notion of success and other sensitivities of the recipient Yoruba culture to mobilize the mothers in positive deviance to ensure that their children thrive. Women are in charge of food distribution in the household. They are the ones who give more portions of protein-dense foods to adult men who do not need it to thrive while depriving infants who need it. A process of re-education of women to move beyond moral gender considerations that work against them. Since the male-oriented Yoruba culture measured the worth of women by the number of their surviving children, convincing them to give more meat and eggs to their children, in the privacy of their homes, was not difficult. The third goal was to train these mainly rural women in basic poultry technology that included vaccination, care and protection of chicks and eggs from predators such as snakes and hawks. The final goal was to lay a corporate ownership foundation for all units of the villages irrespective of ethnicity, gender or religion in Araromi, Matale villages of the Imeko-Afon Local Government Area of Ogun State of Nigeria. This foundation of corporateness in wealth generation, poultry care, micro-credit processing and basic health care delivery know-how would assist all in the group to take collective ownership of the new factors of production in their community, thus overcoming hostilities built on religion, gender or ethnic sensitivities.

The pre-study interactions revealed that women in the Araromi and Matale villages reared local chicks, wide range, as hobbies for ritual taboo purposes. For instance, the ownership of wide range local poultry was a necessary prophylactic. A traditional Yoruba belief is that owners of free range poultry stand the chance of deflecting tragedies such as sudden death or terrible afflictions from themselves to their poultry. The understanding is that, instead of sudden

death striking members of the family, it would strike poultry of the owner dead. So it was wise, ritually, that most mothers kept chicken on a wide range basis since they did not have to care for them on a daily basis.

The activities included the training of villagers on family and nutritional health and on semi-intensive poultry production. This also involved chicken egg distribution and family managed semi-intensive cockerel production. The immediate practical application was school egg consumption project for the local school pupils in the quantity of three boiled eggs per pupil per week.

Implications for Policy Formulation

1. The study confirmed that women are very central to development since they are mainly in charge of nutrition, the foundation for health and wellness, the distribution of food in the community.
2. The study as found out that in Emerging Economies where development is lopsided in favor of over-crowded, disease-ridden cities, channeling wealth creation and self-employment projects through experts (both foreign and local) to rural women in their environment prevents the spread of diseases from the cities to the villages by keeping the villagers self-employed in their villages.
3. Since the pattern of women's spending habits, is first, to think about the welfare and thriving of their children and their aged parents, teaching women skills in wealth creation and self employment have more positive distributive effect upon the entire community.
4. Mobilizing rural women by using the strengths and negative sensitivities inherent in their culture allows women to identify with the intervention strategies as natural to

- them. An example is the use of positive deviance to provide adequate nutrition through the giving of eggs and larger quantities of meat to children who need it for development. Although local taboos prohibit this exercise, such knowledge transfer works well for children and their mothers. It prevents women from participating in their own oppression. Since male-oriented Yoruba culture measured women's worth by the number of surviving children that mothers have, when women provide adequate nutrition for their children by given them eggs and meat forbidden by taboos, more of their children will survive and women's worth will be more readily realized.
5. Empowering women to become aware of what is inimical to their best interest in the traditional culture through creative use of paradigms that break down false consciousness can produce enthusiastic support necessary for the success of the program of empowerment.
 6. The study also found empirically validated data to support a theory that underpines this effort that units of a community who fission internally among themselves over limited resources, often fuse and work together among themselves when extraneous wealth injected into their community turns them into corporate owners with rights in common property.

Conclusion:

This effort to apply multi-disciplinary intervention strategy, albeit in a preliminary stage, to deal with food security and poverty reduction has provided a few interesting results. It has confirmed that in situations of scarcity, competing units of a community construct notions of group

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alignments as one of the coping mechanisms for dealing with the issue. This reconstructed group re-alignments serve the purpose of excluding some in the group from access to resources. Bickering over religious and ethnic differences as well as the contention that “women are taking over our roles” can be overcome. Community ownership in properties provides the corporate foundation for uniting to police common interest in the community. Thus, as globalization creates cores and peripheries, the most abject peripheries reconfigure their world to have greater access to the diminishing resources that trickle down to the communities in terms of “insider” groups that belong and “outsider” groups that do not belong. Since these peripheries lack those factors of globalization such as information super-highway, improved infrastructures that allow not only for wealth creation but rapid transfer of capital and the means with which to internationalize their labor, their responses can have either local or extra-local international dimensions.

At the local level, a trenchant tendency to inclusion surfaces by excluding those “outsider” groups that they used to welcome. This allows for confinement of scarce resources to members of their own “in-group”. At the extra-local level, the hopelessness of their situation is brought home to their peripheries by the new gadgets of globalization, cell phone, portable televisions and other accoutrements of modernization that they have no resources to own. The first response in such situations is for these rural unskilled poor to move to the over-congested and disease ridden cities to earn some money doing menial jobs to own some of the gadgets. In so doing, these unskilled rural migrants to the cities, often end up by bringing the problems of the city to the village.

At the extra-local level, since most citizens of nation states subscribe to one religion or another, they are by the fact of their faith, global citizens who are transnational in the messages

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they receive and process for their religious and physical well-being. Those contemporary religions which do not embrace the taming of technology, leave their adherents far behind. As these groups are confronted with their own powerlessness in the scheme of things, they rush to fill the gaping space left by lack of technological development by new messianic messages of self-immolation. Ideas of eternal salvation are then woven around dramatic efforts to get even with the rest of the World through confrontation.

The policy implications of this phenomenon is that the willing poor who are only too prone to be recruited to turn their bodies into lethal weapons at the peripheries of the periphery are assisted directly in their rural locations to generate wealth that allow for self-employment for the improvement of their quality of life as they participate in the basic activities of the global age in their own environment. The first policy implication is that women are crucial to community health and wellness as they often are responsible for the care of food which is the foundation of development. Their spending habit reveals a pattern to take care of the children and the elderly as well as the men in their lives. Channeling resources to them at the periphery creates a distributive network that reaches every point in the community grassroots. To ensure that these efforts are not sabotaged by men who see their control over women slipping away since they are no-longer the main source of resources for their families, a ratio of one man to many women in an interactive context based on voting to confirm decisions ought to be encouraged as the method of doing business. Nutrition education that emphasizes particularly to women that they must overcome traditional taboos about serving protein rich foods to their children if they want them to survive will lead to a cognitive development. Since the measure of women's success and worth is in the number of children that survive, a resort to positive deviance as a coping strategy will enlist women in the modernization process. It is important that this nutrition

education be supported by information to the women that for their children to develop to enjoy a quality of life, resources sufficient to raise two children are not adequate for raising three. When birth rate reduces to meet with adequate resources, and investment which generates gainful employment improves the quality of life for all, division of the society into violently competing units will diminish.

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