

**Community participation approach to local communities' development in Ogun State,  
Nigeria: Implications for legal enablement**

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**Abstract**

The paper assumes that the non-provision of basic amenities required for community development (CD) is a major basis for violence, agitation, and desperation to partake in the “sharing of national cake” in Nigeria. Therefore, it focuses on how community self-help can be institutionalized through the Community Participatory Approach (CPA,) to provide basic amenities and services that can facilitate grassroots development in Nigeria. The study adopts survey method for the investigation, the population of study is the Chairpersons of 232 functional Community Development Associations (CDA) within Olambe/Matogun zonal Community Development Committee (CDC), in Ifo Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria, and the sample consists of 210 respondents. While the sampling technique adopted is convenient sampling, the research instrument is open-ended questionnaire and the medium is the WhatsApp social media used to elicit responses among the samples on; projects executed within the last three years in line with the Sanders (1958) basic program activities for CD; the factors inducing constraints; and suggestions for effectiveness. The findings indicate that the basic elements for CD are provided through self-help and not the government in the study areas. It further reveals inadequate legal enablement as the factor responsible for the challenges. Therefore, to address the identified policy implications for legal empowerment, the recommendations include: constitutional amendment, reform of revenue allocation formula in favour of the community organisations, and decentralization of government structure and services.

**Keywords:** Community Development, Community Participation, Legal Enablement, Self-help

## 1. Introduction

The Conflict school of thought emphasises that inequality is inevitable in any society because of the competing interests and values between individuals and groups, most especially, access to the limited resources (Bell, 2013). According to the Karl Marx's perspective, society will always be in a state of perpetual conflict due to the competition for access to available inadequate resources. Hence, individuals and groups will always attempt to maximize their assets through various means (Hayes, 2022).

Conflict is inevitable in any society or country, where development is not evenly spread. Development interventions are meant to advance societies to a better position. The concept is multi-dimensional and encapsulates many issues; macro issues (national), meso problems (specific projects), and micro problems (local community development) (Barbanti, 2004).

Suberu (2001) submitted that the Nigerian federal structure has inflamed more conflicts despite going through different changes since independence, and has been unable to effectively harness the enormous developmental potentials. Many conflicts in Nigeria today can be attributed to the uneven national development and inability of government at various levels to provide basic amenities for human development, most especially, in the grassroots areas. Development infrastructures will generate employment, social bond, and security. Nigeria is presently witnessing youth violent agitation and militancy in the South-East and South-South regions, banditry and kidnapping in the Northern region, and cyber-crimes in the South-West region as a consequence of government neglect. As a way-out, different local communities are now embracing self-help initiatives as alternative grassroots development strategy in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing the term, Community Development (CD), can be difficult due to the ambiguous nature of the two words that make up the term. Each has multiple interpretations and can easily mislead and possibly, lead to loss of vital components. Community development, like many political concepts, has divergent perspective in different context.

Some social scientists regard CD as a process. Thus, it can be described as an organized process, by which the people work together to achieve community goals. It is a comprehensive process for managing community change, by involving citizens in dialogue on programmes, sharing their vision of the future, and implementation activities (Vincent, 2006). It should however, be

understood that Community Development as a process is not a single process. CD as a process transmutes in stages or from one stage to the next. It involves a progression of changes in line with specified criteria. Furthermore, it is a complex process comprising several processes. The sub-processes include: the processes, by which the efforts of the people in local communities are united with those of government authorities to improve the socio-economic conditions of the communities, and in contributing fully to the national process; the continuing process of social action, through which the people of a community organise themselves for democratic planning and action, to define and solve their common needs and problems with available community resources; the process of involvement, which is of vital concern to all communities' actions and programmes, because it plays a significant role in each element of the community's action process of initiation, legitimization, and execution; and the process of innovation, which is also critically important in community development, because its central function is the creation of change (Paul, 1962).

Another perspective is that CD is an outcome. For those that are action-oriented, rather than research-oriented, CD is an action at the local level involving two major actors; the Action Group and the Community Workers. The Action Group consists of a group of ordinary people involved in the community, such as schools, clubs, associations, churches, villages, and CDAs. The Community Worker is a person, who might not be a professional, usually assigned by an authority or agency or invited by villagers to partner with the people to facilitate and implement projects (Chhay, n.d). This perspective of CD places more emphasis on accomplishments rather than on sequences. Thus, Community Development includes establishing a city park, improving infrastructure, and creating an industrial park.

As an approach of Social Work, CD is a method or means to work with communities, who are disenfranchised, marginalized, and faced with broad social issues resulting from unjust policies and planning at global, national, state and local level (Goel, 2014). Thus, the core of the community development approach is to institute those interactive processes that can help communities to take autonomous decisions in meeting their needs, and addressing issues that mostly affect their life. It promotes collective action rather than an individualised approach, and focusing on the individual well-being (Goel, 2014).

Therefore, CD refers to a “bottom-up” approach and a range of practices dedicated to: increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life to build social capital; improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, to overcome social exclusion; and enabling people to participate in public decision-making, to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances (Chay, n.d.)

However, there are various strategies and approaches to CD and appropriateness of choices to address the peculiarities would determine the programme outcomes. One of such is the Community Participatory Approach (CPA), which is also known as Community-Based Approach. It argues that the people targeted for humanitarian assistance have the right to participate in making decisions that can affect their lives, because it will strengthen their capacity to identify and develop sustainable solutions, and facilitate the right to information and transparency from those providing assistance (UN Women, 2013). A participatory approach connotes that all stakeholders are involved, either in person or by representation. Hence, the staff of the administering institutions, members of the target population, the community officials, interested citizens, the network agencies and other institutions are part of the decision making process (Rabinowitz, 2022).

Community Participation (CP) is usually interchanged with Public Participation as a reference to the approach, which involves the people in the community activities for the maximum benefit of the whole society. It entails the integrating of the citizens in the decision-making process on the community activities by the city planners and public authority such as local councils, state or government agencies (Planning Tank, 2020). This process engenders the bottom-up approach to participatory governance and community development.

Community Participation takes different forms (Pretty, 1994 and Cornwall, 1996). One form is participation by information giving. This category of people participates by proffering answers to questions posted by extractive researchers through questionnaires or other media. However, they do not have the opportunity to influence the proceedings (Planning Tank, 2020). Passive participation (Compliance) mode represents the communities that participate by being informed of what has been decided unilaterally by an administration or project management without regard to people's responses. Another form is participation by consultation, in which the communities participate by being consulted or by answering questions. In this form, the external agents define

problems and information gathering processes, and controls analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to consider the people's views. Participation can equally be in form of material incentives. The communities participate by contributing resources such as labour, in return for material incentives (e.g. food, cash). It is very common to see the people referring to this practice as participation, yet there is no committed participation without the incentives.

In another form, it is referred to as functional participation (cooperation), the Community participation is explored by the external agencies as a means of achieving the project goals. People participate by forming groups to meet the predetermined project objectives and may be involved in decision-making, after the major decisions have already been made by external agents. In case of the interactive participation (co-Learning) model, the people participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives, and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. The groups have a stake in maintaining structures or practices, because they are in control of local decisions and determine how available resources are used. The last form is self-mobilization (collective action), in which the people participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change the systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilization can spread, if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power. From observations, most CDAs operate at this level in Nigeria, but it will be more beneficial, if other models are explored.

Sanders (1958) espoused four elements to frame the approaches and conceptualization of the community development, which are; process, method, program, and movement. However, the focus of this paper is the programme activities, which is the basis for creating CDAs in the study areas. He classifies the programme activities into three, namely; physical improvements like drainage, roads, and sanitation. Functional activities concern education, health, recreation, and protections. The last is social activities like self and communal reliance, and cooperation. The extent to which the communities embrace CPA as a strategy for community upliftment and the

number of activities engaged by the community indicates the level of the government involvement in CD or the level of neglect.

Therefore, the objectives of the paper are: to identify the extent to which self-help is explored as strategy to provide basic development amenities by the CDAs of the sample; to identify the main issue propelling the challenges in the process; and to determine the way out to strengthen the strategy. The rest of the paper will look at the theoretical framework, challenges of the grassroots development in Nigeria, methodology, discussion of findings, policy implications, and recommendations.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework for this paper is social capital theory. The last few decades have witnessed the application of the social capital theory as a tool to assess and understand the relationship between social networks and collective action. Social capital theory is based on the notion that networks of relationships constitute an important resource for the conduct of social affairs (Balijepally et al, 2004). The theory argues that these social relationship and networks can provide invaluable resources to the participants for general development (Bartecchi, 2021).

Social Capital is a multi-dimensional construct used in social sciences. However, it was first conceptualized by the Sociologist; Pierre Bourdieu, and further developed by Coleman and Putnam, who perceived it as a 'set of social relations' that can provide access to the resources. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as various features of any social organization that can facilitate mutual benefit through coordination and cooperation, such as networks, norms and social trusts. The presence of social capital in a society glues the societal institutions, while maintaining the coherence of the society (Claridge, 2021).

Also central to the social capital theory is trust; be it generalized or special trust (Bartecchi, 2021). The fundamental assumption of the theory is that individuals are integrated in a network of social relations that influences decisions and actions (Coleman, 1990). It acknowledges the interaction between individuals and social structures, and ensures that the decisions and actions of individuals are motivated by normative values. Hence, the presence of trust is imperative to

reciprocate the cooperative behaviour of one person or group, without taking advantage of the others. It will bond the normative environment of groups with the social capital (Paldam, 2000).

Social capital facilitates the effective execution of the CD projects and programmes. It enhances the working together by the people to enjoy the benefits of social relationships and facilitates the cooperation and collaboration of different groups and organisations. Consequently, it leads to a wide range of benefits such as reduced crime and corruption, and increased mutual assistance and cooperation (Claridge, 2021).

Therefore, Social capital can be used as a tool to facilitate the community development programme. For it to play such a role, it has to be disaggregated into micro, meso, and macro level dimensions to obtain a realistic measure of the stock of community social capital (Tirmizi, 2005). At the micro-level, the higher levels of social capital (trust, communication, shared norms), shared within and between the communities will have positive impacts on the performance of macro-level structures (i.e. national and sub-national governance). Also, low levels of social capital at the local level will lead to inefficient performance and less accountability at the macro-level (Bartecchi, 2021). The effectiveness and quality of ties within and beyond community has a bearing on the outcome of development efforts. Therefore, communities with more effective network beyond the community (stronger macro level social capital) are more likely to be successful than others (Tirmizi, 2005).

However, despite its numerous benefits to various fields of the social sciences, and community development in particular, the social capital theory is not without its own criticisms. Its theoretical ambiguity and variability, constrains its generalised application, though scholars usually embrace it for purpose of analysis and application (Claridge, 2018).

### **3. Challenges of Grassroots Development in Nigeria**

As a federal structure, the responsibilities for local and community development in Nigeria rest on the local governments. Despite the vantage position, in which the constitution placed the local government for effective and efficient service delivery at the local level, it failed in performing to expectation in grassroots development across the country. The challenges that have constrained the effective performance of the local government in grassroots development in

Nigeria include: corruption, lack of strong revenue base, lack of autonomy, misplacement of priorities and lack of community participation in the development Process.

Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. At the local level, corruption has deprived many local governments the much-needed resources for development. Both elected and appointed officials of the local governments often divert resources budgeted for the development projects. Also, contracts for projects are often inflated, and only awarded to contractors, who may abandon, or not execute the projects properly after paying the contractor huge percentage of the contract sum as mobilization fee (Odo, 2014).

In addition, local governments are unable to carry out developmental projects in the localities due to the undue interference of the state governments in the affairs of the local governments' administration, and unhindered access to the funds of the local governments (lgs) (Ananti et al, 2021). Section 7(1) of the Constitution, empowers the state governments to interfere arbitrarily in the affairs of the LGs, thereby relegating local governments to mere extension of the state, without the power to function independently (Oikhala & Tobi 2021).

Local government is regarded as the most effective agent for grassroots development, because of closeness to the people and intimate knowledge of their needs, aspirations and preferences. Yet, many development projects executed by some local governments do not reflect the basic needs of the people. Lack of driven-within approach to many development interventions has resulted in the failure to address critical areas of rural development such as construction and maintenance of rural feeder-roads, provision of portable water, electricity, primary healthcare services, basic education, and agricultural extension service. Instead, they engage in many projects with huge capital costs, but low impact on the basic needs of the rural populace such as secretariat complex, dam construction for tourist site and taxing local governments to fund tertiary education (Odo, 2014).

Funding is very germane to community development. The bulk of local government's revenue comes from its monthly allocations from the Federation Account. The over-reliance on monthly allocations impedes the development of the grassroots, because the State-Local Government Joint Account is controlled by the State government. Studies have further proven over the years that it worsens, especially during the post-1999 civilian rule. (Yau & Abubakar, 2021).



Furthermore, community participation in the development process is fundamental in self-help approach to grassroots improvement. If development is to be meaningful, it ought to embrace a bottom-up approach, and not a top-down approach, hence, the people must be its active agent and not just passive beneficiaries. Most grassroots development programmes are not sustainable because, the local communities are usually not integrated in its conception, design and implementation. Since Nigeria's total population comprises 70% rural dwellers, any development strategy that neglects this sector, will have negative consequences on the larger national development (Osisioma, 2004).

#### **4. Method**

This research adopts survey design. The population of study is the Chairpersons (head) of the executive committee of various Community Development Associations (CDAs) within Olambe/Matogun Community Development Committee (CDC). Olambe and Matogun are neighbouring suburb towns of Ifo Local Government and border to Ifako Ijaiye/Ojokoro Local Government of Lagos state. The sample of the study is 210 respondents among the CDA Chairpersons of functional CDAs. They are the appropriate respondents that can provide information required. A CDA comprises few adjoining streets within the same community, while combination of many CDAs forms CDC. Thus, a functional CDA is the one that meets regularly, executes projects and participates in the CDC activities. They are selected through purposive and convenience sampling, because not all are literate and some cannot operate android phone. The research instrument is open-ended questionnaire, and the medium is WhatsApp social media. Three questions were sent to the WhatsApp numbers of the respondents provided by the CDCs and their responses routed through the same channel. The responses are expected to be in line with the Sanders (1958) conception of basic program activities of the community development. Question 1 requires enumerating development activities executed within the last three years, to determine the extent of exploring self-help strategy and government neglects. Question 2 requires enumerating the challenges encountered, to determine the most prominent challenges to address. Question 3 requires enumerating considered suggestion on way forward, to determine policy implications. The research analysis and discussion rely on primary data and relevant secondary data that can aid the analysis. The data analysis adopts descriptive statistical analysis method, involving the use of percentage to determine the frequency of the CDAs adoption of

CPA as alternative strategy to the reliance on government in providing essentials of CD, and bar chart for the purpose of illustration.

## 5. Findings

The results and findings are stated in tables and charts below:

### 5.1 Tables

**Table 1: CDA Activities (2020-2022)**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Security	196	93%
2	Road/Drainage	187	89%
3	Electricity	135	64%
4	Social/Welfare	96	46%
5	Education	91	43%
6	Healthcare	88	42%

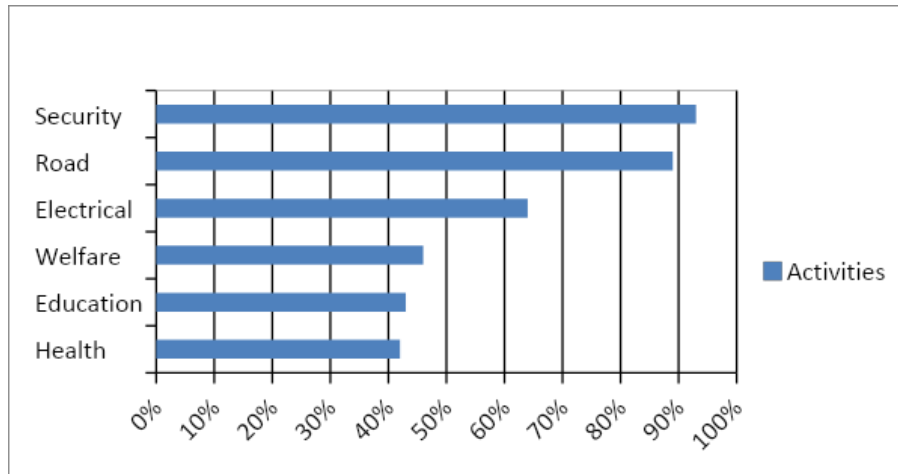
**Table 2: Identified Challenges**

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of Enforcement	182	87%
2	Inadequate Finance	168	80%
3	Lack of Government Support	156	74%
4	Lack of Commitment	102	49%

**Table 3: Identified Solutions**

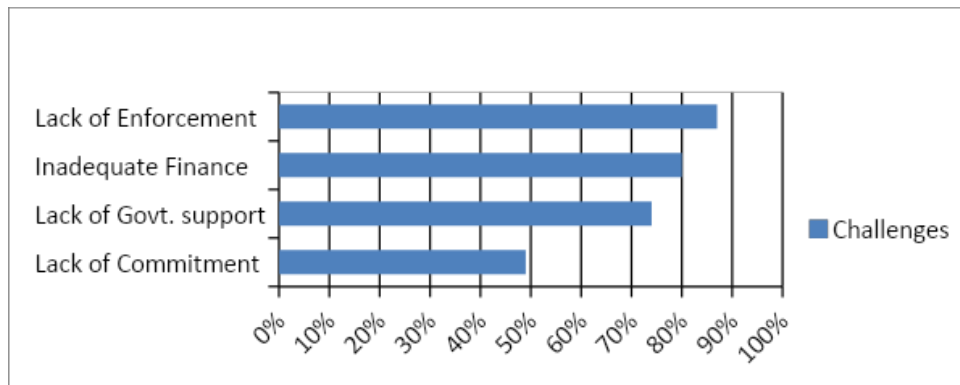
S/N	Suggested solution	Frequency	Percentage
1	Enabling law	168	80%
2	Government support	146	70%
3	Voluntary donations	116	55%

## 5.2 Charts



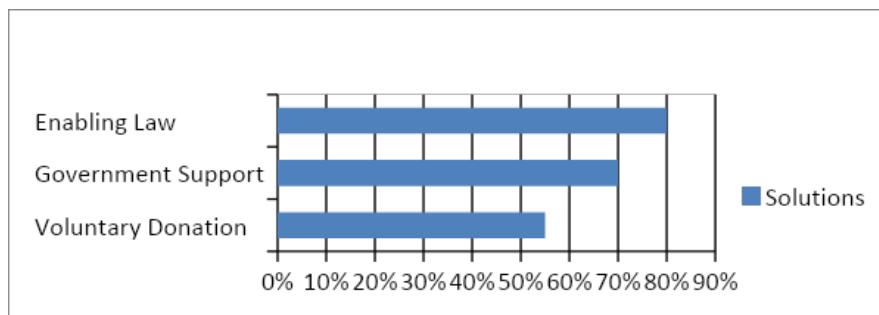
Frequency (tens)

**Fig: 1 Activity**



Frequency (%)

**Fig: 2 Challenges**



Frequency (%)

**Fig: 3 Solutions**

## 6.0 Discussion

Findings from the responses to the research questions reveal government neglect of the studied communities and the constraints to the capacity of the communities to initiate self-help. The finding from the question 1 indicates that 93% of the CDAs embarked on security related activities, followed by road/drainage, electricity, social/welfare, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, the finding from question 2 reveals that the lack of capacity for enforcement has the highest percentage of 87% of the CDAs, having been identified as the most challenging by the respondents, followed by inadequate finance, and lack of government support, while the least is the lack of commitment with 49%. However, the finding from the Question 3 shows that the enactment of enablement laws has the highest percentage among the suggested solutions with 80% of the CDAs, followed by government support, and voluntary donations.

The higher frequency of the identified activities undertaken by the CDAs through CPA, point to the pattern of neglect of infrastructure and amenities in most suburban communities in Nigeria. It also exposes lack of government responses to the basic needs of the citizens and the reason why citizens opt for self-help development strategies.

The failure of government community development initiatives can be seen in the level of pervasive poverty and illiteracy, lack of useful information, economic hardship, social exclusion and other cultural impediments in the country (Ovwasu & Onimisi, 2021). The evaluation of the activities of Community Based Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA), particularly on poverty reduction in the rural communities of Ebonyi State, indicates little impact despite government effort, due to poor background studies on the demographic characteristics of the rural communities, distorted distribution approach and elite sabotage (Udu & Onwe, 2016). Similarly, an examination of the challenges of community development in part of Anambra state, of Nigeria, reveals non engagement of grassroots institutions, economic disparity and corruption as hindrances to the community development (Mbamalu & Ewuim, 2021). Also, there is no provision for community leadership development scheme, and measurable comprehensive and implementable community development policies and programmes (Ramsey-Soroghaye, 2021). However, ineffective and inefficient government initiatives create vacuum being addressed by self-help community participation. The activities listed by respondents above are basic needs for community development, but which are being provided through the community participatory approach. Self-help initiatives are tools gradually being adopted by the rural communities to

intervene on their neglect and underdevelopment. Community self-help programmes on employment, education, and health care have significant impact on rural development (Udo-Imeh & Mahammad, 2015). Community self-help projects have positive implications for a sustainable development and advancement in the quality of life of rural dwellers. Study reveals that the adoption of community self-help scheme as an alternative rural development strategy has significantly improves the socio-economic indicators of development (Tamuno & Iroh, 2012).

The community self-help projects are an avenue for public participation, initiating self-help and the strengthening of the community sustainability. Also, it accelerates the pace of development in the affected community and enables the people to assert economically, socially, and culturally (Tyagi et al, 2020). Evidences from communities in Bekwarra Local Government of Cross River State, Nigeria, indicate that the community members embark on projects on the basis of their felt needs. The rural cooperatives and savings scheme, the repayable agricultural loans, skill acquisition programs, and youth internship programs, contribute significantly to the socio-economic activities, poverty reduction, employment, and reducing the rural- urban drift (Acha, 2020).

To strengthen the Community Development, the participatory approach is gradually being adopted as development strategy and gaining popularity among governments, practitioners, and funders. Community-Based Development (CBD) is an approach to implementing local development projects through community participation in decision-making and management, with a goal of using local knowledge and resources to execute more projects effectively (Baldwin et al, 2016).

It is an important approach for people-oriented development. The approach arose to address the inadequacies of the top-down approach to development where the government formulates and implements policies without the active involvement of citizens. Thus, the people are relegated to beneficiaries, and not actors, thereby leaving unsolved the deep-rooted problems of poverty and disparities between urban and rural dwellers. It emphasizes the quality of participation in local societies because; the active participation of the locals and other relevant stakeholders enhances both the quality and relevance of interventions (JICA).

The participatory approach is an effective approach for achieving a self-reliant, sustainable development and social justice. It involves taking the needs and opinions of local residents into

account as much as possible in the formulation and implementation of development policies. This would in turn enable the local people to acquire the necessary skills needed to implement and manage the development projects themselves, thereby ensuring its sustainability (JICA).

Participatory approach creates a feeling of ownership in the participants and thereby ensuring the continuous operation of the projects. Participation can serve as a learning opportunity, which would empower both the stakeholders and right holders through the co-generation of knowledge with researchers, and increasing the capacity and ability of participants to use this knowledge (Okali et al, 1994). Through participation, local communities are able to build an adaptive capacity by gaining the relevant skills and knowledge, which are needed for tasks such as planning, problem-solving and decision-making (Onyango, 2018). Active community members are best sources of information on what has failed in the past, and how it can be resolved (Community Tool Box).

Despite the strength of this initiative, it is not without operational challenges. The findings above indicate that the identified challenges by the respondents point to the inadequate peculiar legal enablement for effective operation of the associations. Their modus operandi is to collectively identify their pressing felt-need, determine the cost and share it among all the members. However, there is no legal empowerment either to sanction or enforce their decision. Government's support is discretionary and unenforceable in the court of law, notwithstanding the provisions of Section 2 of 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, which contains government's responsibilities that can facilitate effective and good governance. The provisions on fundamental human rights also hinder enforcement. Chapter 4 Section 33 to Section 46 is explicit on the rights of the citizens, but some of the provisions are at variance with enforcement under voluntary association like CDA. The most popular instrument of enforcement of the CDAs is disconnection of access to the utilities (electricity) by members, which in most cases by the law establishing those agencies, is illegal. The control of certain utilities by law are exclusively preserved for the government, for instance, roads are divided into trunk A; under the control of federal government, trunk B; under state government, and trunk C; under the local government without provision for the individuals and organisations. Adesina, (2018) submits that the legal regime for economic development in Nigeria is challenging. Notable among the controversial issues are, archaic laws, the multiplicity of laws and regulations, conflicting and overlapping

administrative and institutional structures, the inadequate legislation for the critical areas and a weak enforcement mechanism. Anyaechie (2009) argues further that both stable and orderly society, which are the two favourable conditions for effective enterprise and national development are being downplayed due to the overbearing influence and manipulation of the law by the political leaders. In the same vein, Ibe-Ojiludu (2018) concludes that the poor contextualizing of development by the development scholars and the mismatch between the structure of Nigeria's legal arrangement and some key extant theoretical frameworks in law and development, partially responsible for the Nigeria's underdevelopment. The inefficient legal framework for customary law also militates against the effective developmental roles of customary court system in Nigeria. Thus, many post-independence laws failed to transform old institutions, for developmental purposes.

## **7. Policy Implication**

The following are policy implications for effective legal enablement:

- i. Community group participation is yet to be legally accommodated into the grassroots development structure in Nigeria. Therefore, there is the urgent need for intervening constitutional amendment.
- ii. Self-help initiatives that rely on contribution and donation need legal empowerment to enforce the collective decisions for effectiveness. Hence, appropriate law enacting authorities need to assess the gap and enact enabling laws.
- iii. Over centralization of government power and responsibilities is a major governance issue in Nigeria. Hence, there must be decentralization of not only the structure of government, but also the provision of infrastructure for development.
- iv. There has been agitation for amendment to Nigeria's revenue allocation formula. The process needs to be accelerated and community participation groups must be factored into the new formula.

## **8. Conclusion**

The rise in agitations, youth restiveness and insecurity in Nigeria point to lack of basic amenities and infrastructure necessary to facilitate grassroots development that can reduce unemployment and create wealth. Different communities are gradually embracing a community participatory approach to grassroots development as a way out of this neglect. The approach encourages identification of peculiar felt-needs, and the implementation of projects and programmes that can provide succor through community self-help. Although, the approach is a positive direction, various challenges reduce the expected benefits. Most of the constraints relate to legal enablement. Therefore, the implementation of the following recommendations will strengthen the operations of the groups to maximize the benefits of the community participation approach to development.

## **9. Recommendations**

The following are suggestions to strengthen the legal empowerment of the community participation approach for grassroots development in Nigeria:

- i. Formation of community development groups must be mandatory in Nigeria to accelerate the development in various communities.
- ii. Functions and responsibilities of development groups must be properly identified and enunciated in the constitution.
- iii. There must be enabling laws to empower enforcement of community decisions on developmental activities or projects among the members.



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