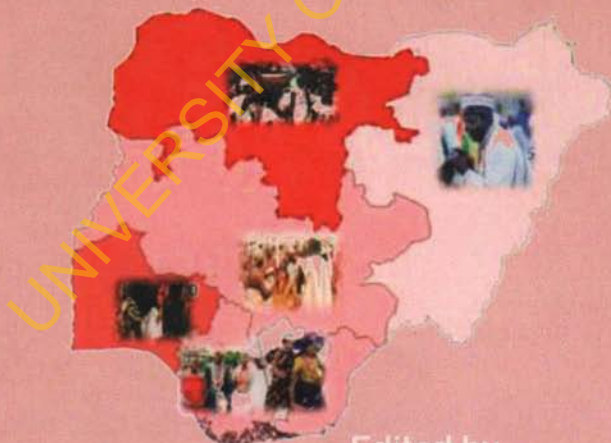


Citizens' Participation and Governance in Nigeria

Essays in Memory
of
Professor Emmanuel Ejiogu Osuji



Edited by
M. A. Oyebamiji
O. E. Olajide
C. O. Omoregie
N. A. Adedokun

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Social Capital and Community Participation in Nigeria

Chris Olusola Omoregie Ph.D.

Department of Adult Education University of Ibadan
comoregie@gmail.com, +2348033685734

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Introduction

This paper starts from the position that social capital promotes community participation. If the level of social capital is becoming low in African countries due to individualistic living, unabated materialistic lifestyle and government neglect of common good, then community participation would be impeded. Instead of finding ways of improving social capital, government and development societies keep initiating developmental programmes whereas the foundation of development is neglected. This paper analysis the argument for putting social capital first and suggests ways of using it to promote community participation in Nigeria.

The Concept of Social Capital

The concept of social capital was most popularised by Robert Putnam and his colleagues when they were explaining the success of local government reform in Northern Italy. Putnam (1993) refers to the levels of social capital of the region as due to a sense of community when citizens perceived rules and obligations as something, they have imposed on themselves, and are keen to comply with. The Northern Italy was contrasted with another community which was referred to as a non-civic community' (a community with low social capital) where the element of self-government is lacking, and laws were perceived as imposed from the top and are more likely to be disobeyed.

Putnam and his colleagues believed that interactions between citizens which are fair and follow the principles of civic morality, set high standards for the government to follow. Therefore they identified civic morality resulting from high levels of social capital as the element of the mechanism behind the link between social capital and institutional performance (Letki,2004).

Social capital has been defined by authors like Coleman (1988, 1990, and1993), Putnam(1993a,1993b,1995,1996) and Fukuyama (1997) as:

- A variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether personal or corporate actors-within that structure (Coleman,1988).
- Features of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits (Putnam,1993).
- An instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. Not just any set of instantiated norms constitutes social capital: they must lead to cooperation in groups and therefore are related to traditional virtues like honesty, the keeping of commitments, reliable performance of duties, reciprocity and the like (Fukuyama,1997).

The main thrust of these definitions is the element of cooperation that social capital promotes among people as against individual and selfish aspirations. From this point of convergence, social capital performs some functions in the organisation and conduct of programmes that promotes adulthood as well as practices that involve citizens' development in various aspects of local communities. Since adulthood is about freedom, maturity and citizenship, adults grapple with the problems and opportunities in their personal lives, they are simultaneously challenged to contribute to the development of their communities and society. Adult education (lifelong learning) becomes imperative, not only for the effective functioning of individuals at the workplace and in their own communities, but also for the renewal of society itself (Nnazor,2005).

There is need to re-conceptualise social capital and highlight its relevance to adult education and community development within the social economic and political contexts of Nigeria. This paper therefore describes social capital in its historical and conceptual contexts, discusses the relevance of social capital to all areas of disciplines and policy

formulation, and earmarked adult education and community development as areas of particular application.

Social capital is a collective asset. It nurtures active citizenship and democracy within communities. Without social capital societies become dysfunctional. Since poverty is often closely associated with weak democracies (Oyen, 2002), adult education has an important role in nurturing social capital. Social capital is a complex and contested concept in relation to education. Its core features include network of relationships involving trust, communication, and collective identities. Communities with strong social capital are seen as able to respond to participatory learning opportunities that increase their collective empowerment (Alladin, 1997). Participatory liberating education seeks to increase equality in the access to knowledge and to continue the transformation of the society where the minorities can liberate themselves through the learning process. Once the minority is liberated they can play a more active role in the development of the society as a whole.

Despite the benefits enunciated by Falk and Kilpatrick, the social environments where social capital is defined and measured should be taken into consideration. Field recalled the previous qualitative research suggesting the pattern of high social capital was associated with relatively low levels of participation in formal adult education and training (Field and Spence, 2000). The most reasonable explanation seemed to be that high social capital and low adult learning were partly caused by the existence of dense networks of close ties (including strong linking ties within families, reinforced by close bonds among the main ethno-religious groupings) (Field and Spence, 2000).

Conversely, McClenagan reported evidence from evaluative research into the aspirations and motivations of almost 300 adult students in community development education at the University of Ulster. There was an apparent differential impact of social capital on the educational outcomes of children and the participation rates of adults in formal learning, often,

though not always; in evidence within the context of a single community (educational outcomes among children and adult education participation rates in Northern Ireland vary by district) (McClenagan 2003).

There was a high level of social capital in the African traditional system. Sofola (1973) listed some values as typically African: an emphasis on wholesome human relations; a respect for elders; community follow feelings as reflected in communal life; altruism and hospitality. When does the fellow-feeling and brotherhood which are positive social capital become negative influences that can lead to tribalism and nepotism affecting the large society? Little was found in the way people's networks affect their access to learning in the traditional society. How do social networks create opportunities for adult to have new knowledge, skills and attitudes that would engender community development? Would more social capital promote adult education than less social capital in Nigeria? Is adult education or community development affected by the types of network that people have?

Human capital and social capital are the two educational models that claim to address social exclusion, social justice and widening participation. Human capital is interpreted as skills, knowledge and work attitudes that are competitive. In poor countries, human capital as the primary model for education is premised on individualism, competitiveness in the labour market, and personal gain. This model creates a society that encourages survival of the fittest in a market economy. As a universalist approach, it does not challenge the societal and political structures that have created inequalities in the first place. Yet, education can do more than this. It can empower and create momentum for change Bacchus, (1997). Hence, social capital provides the basis for human capital, so that education can induce desirable change in the society.

Controverting Social capital

The definitions of social capital and its theoretical foundations of community development education have witnessed intense debate from the writings of McClenaghan (2000) on one side and the trio of Kilpatrick, Field and Falk (Kilpatrick, Field and Falk (2003) on the other. Their arguments border on using social capital as a theoretical foundation and an analytical tool in adult learning as well as community development. McClenaghan suggested that the links between social capital and community development are less obvious in specific and empirically grounded communities rather than an abstract homogenous social structure. Kilpatrick and others argued in turn that McClenaghan definition explicitly restricts the meaning of community development and posited that the value of social capital for community development is threefold: it represents both an existing set of resources within the community on which intervention may be based, a public good in its own right, and also a resource that can contribute towards sustained autonomous development after the intervention is deemed complete.

Social capital has been discussed by Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) in two kinds that can be used as an analytical tool in the fields of adult education or community development. They are: a knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done, called knowledge resources and identity resources, that is, being able and willing (committed) to act for the benefit of the community and its members. Identity resources include self-confidence, norms such as reciprocity and values, and visions that are shared between the parties to the interaction. Knowledge and identity resources allow community members to combine their skills and knowledge (human capital) with the knowledge and skills of others.

Social Capital and Community participation

Social capital has been shown by Matteessich, Mousey, and Roy (1997) to be related to community development. He identified the factors on which community task depends as sweeping economic and social trends (economic recession, increase in the aging population); broad-based political forces (increased centralisation or decentralisation in government); environmental forces (war, earthquakes); as well as the social capacity of a community. Community social capital constitutes a strong resource that affords community agents the potential to develop. Committee for Economic Development used social capital as 'attitudinal, behavioural, communal glue that holds society together through relationships among individuals, families and organisations. Without social capital efforts to address specific problems of individuals, families, and neighbourhood will make little progresses' (Committee for Economic Development, 1995).

A community with high social capital has an increased likelihood of improving its quality of life. Apart from social capital, the external forces of the economy, environment, and socio-political institutions are very evident in all community development efforts in Nigeria. Hence, community development can be studied with reference to political and economic activities and policies in Nigeria during the pre-colonial, colonial, independence, post-independence eras in Nigeria. The post-independence witnessed a lot of changes in government and economic policies that influenced community development. To all intents and purposes, what takes place at community development in Nigeria is usually determined at the national level through policies. Instead of bottom-up participatory strategy, the governments at the three levels of the national, state and local councils pay lip service to rural development. Why is it that in connection with rural development, the government always argues that it alone cannot meet the needs of every community especially as its recourses for providing these needs are limited? (Osuji, 1975).

The belief that community development is a practical activity was popularised by the partnership theory of community development. Partnership theory claims that local efforts must be united with that of the central agency in order to achieve the national goals. If politics is a struggle for power, then the ways local efforts are channeled to the national government is a political process. Politics should be interested in people's future, their security, better opportunities, greater prosperity, excellence and better education for children (Uke, 1990).

Much of what is usually considered as community development in Nigeria involves projects that improve community well-being such as building a borehole, road construction, and provision of electricity. Kincaid and Knop perceived that community development apart from tangible goods and citizen learning experiences should include attention to building a sense of community, opening up local participation, and encouraging a realistic optimistic view of the community's future among a broad range of citizens (Kincaid and Knop 1992).

The higher the existing levels of social cohesion (that is, the strength of interrelationships among community residents) the more likely that a community building effort will be successful. Communities that have stable population, where people are not continually moving in and out, tend to have more success in building community. High social cohesion is related to a common spirit of problem solving, good communication, and a larger number of associational groups (civic, recreational, business, and so forth) in the community. They tend to have structure that enhances the attributes identified by the literature as necessary for success (for example, trust and communication). It is easier to increase the level of social capacity of these communities than it is to increase the level of social capacity of a community that has few pre-existing ties (Matteessich, Mousey, and Roy, 1997). Hibbard (1986) described the lack of the spirit of cooperation in Oregon, USA after seven years of assistance, research, planning and discussions without any changes. The reasons for lack of

cooperation are: "first, the people in the community had been socialised not to disagree publicly, so it was hard to have a meaningful discussion. Second, in the past, any suggestions of change had been met with strong private criticism, so people were hesitant to bring creative ideas to the table. Finally, there was such a strong tradition of individualism in the community that members could not openly discuss problems, because they did not believe in collective effort as a way to solve problems".

Critique of Social Capital

Social capital is not without its weaknesses, but its potential as heuristic devices, as well as a growing body of persuasive empirical evidence around the concept has helped make it one of the most influential in the social sciences in recent years (Field, 2005). Social capital consists of social networks, the reciprocities that arise from them, and the value of these for achieving mutual goals (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000). It can nurture criminal gangs (Preston, 2003). It can also exclude certain social groups and resist change. Baron (2000), Fukuyama (1999) condemned Coleman (1988) who argued that social capital was a public good and therefore would be under produced by private agents interacting in markets. This is clearly wrong since cooperation is necessary to virtually all individuals as a means of achieving their selfish ends; it stands to reason that they will produce it as a private good. Fukuyama quoted Dasgupta (2000) that social capital is a private good that is nonetheless pervaded by externalities, both positive and negative. The positive externality could be a religious injunction to treat all people morally while negative externalities refer to when groups achieve internal cohesion at the expense of treating outsiders with suspicion, hospitality, or outright hatred. Both the Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia achieve cooperation on the basis of shared norms, and therefore have social capital, but they also produce abundant negative externalities for their larger society in which they are embedded (Fukuyama, 1999).

Critics of social capital argued that it differs from other forms of capital because it can lead to bad results like hatred and intolerance in the community. Physical and human capitals also have negative externalities. When rifles are used to assault others and human capital is used to devise ways of torturing people, they have negative effects on the community. Since societies have laws that prevent the negative externalities of any form of capital; the onus is on the government to ensure the positive part of any capital. Nevertheless, social capital has more tendency than other two forms of capital to produce and promote negative externalities. Group solidarity in human communities is often bought at the price of hostility towards out-group members. This appears to be a natural human proclivity for dividing the world into friends and enemies as the basis of all politics (Fukuyama, 1995). Despite the tendency of social capital to develop into cliques, sects and cults that produce negative influence on the society, one cannot rule out the large 'radius of trust' (Harrison, 1985) that national and international organisations are promoting. Hence, a modern society can be described as a network of trust where all groups have to fit in so as to achieve the common goal. For example, all the countries and races are signatories to United Nations charter of 1948 that seeks to promote peace and harmony in the world.

Notwithstanding, social capital is often presented as the missing link for bottom-up models of self-help and development, which are now regarded as the way forward for communities to move out of poverty (Hamilton, 1992). Social capital encourages critical, reflexive thinking and participation in social life. It promotes participation and the opportunity to access learning that would facilitate the development of the community though physical, social, mental and environmental well-being.

Functions of Social Capital in Adult Education and Community Development

Social capital performs both economic and political functions in adult education and community development. Social capital reduces the transaction cost associated with adult education and community development programmes. It is of course possible to achieve coordinated action among a group of people possessing no social capital, but this would presumably entail additional transaction costs of monitoring, negotiating, litigating and enforcing formal agreements. Adult educational and community development programmes can be very costly to monitor especially in areas where little or no social capital exists.

Social capital also performs a political function. The vice of modern economy is that it promotes excessive individualism, that is, a pre-occupation with one's private life and family, an unwillingness to engage in public affairs. Americans combated this tendency by their propensity for voluntary association which led them to form groups both trivial and important for all aspects of their lives (Fukuyama, 2005). The need for social capital is presumably what produces a dense civil society and non-governmental organisations that have promoted adult education and community development in African societies where civil societies and NGOs serve to balance the duties of state and provide for individuals and groups where the state fails. In the absence of civil society and NGOs in African countries one could imagine how the government would have done what NGOs are doing to better the life of the people. For example, in the April 2007 polls in Nigeria, there were both national and international civil societies who educated the electorates and observed the election. Some of the foreign observers noted that the election was massively rigged and did not meet the standards of fairness. The government media downplayed the comments of the foreign observers and gave credence to the intention of the incumbent government to perpetuate its party in power. This scenario can be taken as a negation of the statement that social capital provides

political function for adult education and community development, but then, the civil societies have stated their position and continue to garner enough mobilisations for social actions.

One of the success stories of civil society's intervention in Nigeria's political history is the pro-democracy efforts of NADECO (National Democratic Coalition) in the realisation of June 12 annulment of 1993 and subsequent enthronement of civilian administration in Nigeria. As part of political function, social capital provides a learning conversation in communities by sustaining certain social connections, networks and relationships that act as a resource to help participants be future leaders and advocates for their area of interest (Baker, 2006). Social capital is built extensively through engagement or active citizenship. Putnam perceived active citizenship as an important source of social capital because it is the main way in which people- particularly those who are strangers to one another experience reciprocity through their pursuit of shared objectives (Putnam, 2000). This in turn helps to create a dense web of networks underpinned by shared values and producing high levels of social capital.

Like human capital is highly needed in developing countries, social capital should be rediscovered in communities so that the productive life of the people can be harnessed for the present generation and accumulated for the future. Social capital as a resource based and embedded in relationships among people has been known to facilitate reciprocity and cooperation that could result in networks and norms been used for mutual or collective benefit(Baker,2006).The greatest problem of social capital is its measurement and not its possibility to make people form cliques that could work against the general interest. As much as fellow feeling is a value in Africa, no one will be in doubt when it turns to nepotism or tribalism. The measurement of social capital fizzles out into insignificance when judging from the perspective of observable evidences of peace, cooperation and trust that can be felt in every organisation or community where it is in surplus. No one needs any measurement, even the casual

observer of the Nigerian polity, knows that social capital needs to be learnt again in the society. It should not be out of place from the analysis of this submission to suggest that adult education and community education provide the most potent and veritable tool for the much-needed change in the social lives of Nigerians.

One of the ways scholars have tried to understand the Nigerian state is through the nature of the society. Dudley attempted to explain the political behaviour and institutional pattern given the differentiation of values in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria where the prevalence and ambivalence of corruption in Nigeria politics is such that: 'insecurity is guarded against not just by safeguarding the present but also by insuring against future which, in practice, means the use of one's office to enrich one's self...in so far as a successful individual is seen to contribute to the welfare of his community, he is not seen as corrupt (Duddley,1982).The evidence of low social capital in the Nigerian policy can be perceived from the extent to which political office holders have looted the treasury of the people without much resistance from the governed who are waiting for their own opportunities to loot the nation as well. When the public office holders are called to account for their stewardship, it is seen as a selective punishment of the opposition to the government of the day. Another opposition to social capital one might think but then cliques would submit to the collective will someday.

Conclusion

Development programmes succeeds when there is high social capital. If development programmes are not succeeding we should be bothered about the factors causing social capital deficit in the country. One of the causes could be lack of commitment to truth telling. We have got used to lies at homes, schools, communities and government agencies to the extent that falsehood is becoming our second nature.

In response to Cain's question in Genesis 4:9 when asked where Abel is 'I know not: am I my brother's keeper? The communitarian answer is absolute yes. The underlying relationship of the three concepts of citizenship, participation and governance is that the community functions better when regardless of birth privileges, location opportunities and religious preferences, every member benefit under the principles of justice, fairness and equity. When these values are at the basis of development, then the future of the society can be guaranteed.

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