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## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS IN KANO STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*A higher level of community participation has been for long advocated in social activities in Nigeria, especially among local communities who are not only unserved but in social disadvantage. This discussion provides not only a justification for community participation in ensuring social rights for the benefit of all citizens but also argues that only through this means can the quality of life for the average Nigerian, and residents of Kano State in particular, be improved. The paper also makes the case that Nigeria is a society where the human rights of the people are commonly infringed and strongly suggests that Governmental neglect of the needs of people is a risk that promise no leader any future good. Thus, community participation appears to be a 'double-edged sword' that is bound to increase if only to intensify the self-serving characteristic that Democracy endows upon the citizenry in the quest for a more satisfactory livelihood. The Nigerian Elite should therefore realize that True Democracy, which is evident in community participation, is but a mere illusion when pursued short of a massive involvement of the citizenry in all social affairs, including the elites' own access to power.*

### Introduction

Community participation is common to African life. It is replete in the Nigerian traditional life spectrum since time immemorial. It is also the life-line of the muslim 'Ummah', especially with reference to the Kano community today. The like of 'Aikin Gaiya' (collective collaboration), 'Taimakon Kai da Kai' (mutual aid and concern) 'Ajo' (collective financial security), etc, are conspicuous examples of this practice and

which have also become the mainstay of neighborliness in the contemporary atomistic modern towns and cities. Even by western standards, a community such as Kano in its consideration as " a population aggregate, inhabiting a contiguous area possessing a heritage of common experience having a set of basic service institutions conscious of its local unity and able to act as a whole in solving problems involving the public good" (Blackwell, cited in Ahmad & Ansari,1980:3) has justified its existence as a space of

common living in socio-cultural, economic, political and psychological terms, evident in the popular saying "Kano tumbin giwa". Relatively speaking therefore nowadays, indignation is only sometimes expressed in the direction of how development efforts have become increasingly disjointed nowadays rather than collaborative, trickle-down rather than participative and rationalist rather than communalist. Being a community where relations are more bound in a common faith rather than social unity (ibid., p.:173), community participation in the Kano community has to be sustained as traditionally given and also fashioned out according to the dictates of Islam. In particular, full cognizance has to be taken of the Shariah compliant nature of the affairs of State contemporarily.

### **Concept of Community Participation**

According to Garba (2006: 2) community participation means an open community involvement. Anyanwu (2002: 252) improves upon that understanding by adding to it that community participation "is the elicitation of the enthusiasm and wholehearted participation of the people in programmes to improve their welfare." In short, community participation is:

a) a social movement; a willful collective endeavour

- b) to attain certain foreseeable objectives;
- b) problem oriented; removing some obstacles to good living;
- c) voluntaristic; carried out or done with the compliance of actors, i.e. not enforced or compelled;
- d) progressive; attempting to induce a favourable change in life situations, and
- e) Useful or developmental; beneficial or capable of engendering social fulfillment

A few celebrated cases of community participation in modern Nigeria, and with particular reference to Kano State, are:

1. Community Policing; evident for long has been the relative operational incapacitation of the Nigerian Police in the 'War Against Crime' and for which co-operation between the Community and Police is a welcome idea (Abarshi, 2008);
2. Vigilante groups, this is the last resort in 'Social defense', a principle inherent in society on the basis of which it is expected that, where the authorities are incapable of protecting citizens' life and property, the people themselves would be

- compelled to protect themselves. This formation is locally known as 'Kato da Gora' in Kano State. This is what has been fine-tuned into Community Policing;
3. Protection of the Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN) installations by Neighborhood associations; This a variance of the collective responsibility movement directed at the power generation and use of electricity encouraged by the PHCN in the face of dramatic increase in the misappropriation or vandalism of its property, contemporarily. Most recently, the former Minister of State on Power, Hajiya Fatima Balarabe Ibrahim re-echoed the commitment of the PHCN to this strategy;
  4. Feminist Movements, e.g. the Women Farmers' Advancement Network (WOFAN), Women's Rights Advancement Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Women In Nigeria (WIN), Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), etc, who have continuously mobilized the efforts of all humanists against all forms of debasement of womanhood in Nigeria such as wife-battering, dehumanization of widows, women-trafficking, to mention but a few, and
  5. NGO development efforts, e.g. Community Participation for Action in the Social Sector (COMPASS), Literacy Enhancement Assistance Programme (LEAP), etc., who have emulated the programmes of Government to engineer grass-root development.

However, the major issue at stake here is by whose inspiration is the elicitation of involvement or enthusiastic participation of the community undertaken; is it entirely spontaneous or is it due to external propaganda? There is no gainsaying the fact that participation is most fruitful where it is self-determined than when induced. It is therefore evident that the former position would be more readily assured with a socially fulfilled citizenry. An impoverished, aggrieved, neglected, disconsolate, ignorant and hopeless citizenry cannot be expected to support let alone work alongside any Governmental authority on any programme, talk less on Human rights.

How can anyone expect people to get involved with their own enslavement? On the other

extreme, how could any one expect any Government devoid of people's active collaboration, support or even goodwill to rule in good taste and honourably too?

### **Human Rights Education.**

Human rights advocacy began with the fundamental respect for the right to life, after which a whole gamut of rights-clusters, e.g. right to freedom of speech, property, movement, security, etc., followed to encompass social fulfillment for citizens in general. It is universally acknowledged that one of the offshoots of the Human Rights issue, contemporarily, is the realization that a great number of people are ignorant of these provisions.. Today therefore, the need to ensure that people are educated or sufficiently informed about their social rights, especially individuals or groups at the grassroots, becomes a vital obligation. More importantly too, that the job of doing so rests on everyone as spelt out categorically in the declaration that every individual and every organ of society shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their

jurisdiction (Olanmi & Co., 2007: 5)

It goes to say, without any shadow of doubt, that rights and freedoms are infringed most fundamentally where and when their consciousness has not been imparted. In Nigeria today, cases of rights infringement abound evident from

1. The increasing social exploitation of subjects; poverty is taking a greater toll out of Nigerian lives. Massive fraudulent practices are disadvantaging a large section of our populace (the EFCC, ICPC, etc., are having a field day) (Edet, 2008:3, Col 1 )
2. Massive illiteracy and relapse into illiteracy; there is nothing to confirm the 52% literacy rate claimed by President Obasanjo while last in office. Poor Mass Education resources, evident to many, by no stretch of anyone's imagination seriously challenge this assertion
3. Political brutalization; Government's lack of stewardship in this country is so pronounced that, according to the Weekly Trust, only two States of the Federation, of recent, i.e. Kano and Niger, are

said to be blessed by Servant-Leaders. The relative lack of developmental expression, too, in our Local governments, nation-wide, is common knowledge (comparing this with the magnitude of the regular grants they receive).

4. Public and social insecurity; Our environment is not safe for anybody due to pollution, traffic mishaps, crimes, etc., and to make matters worse, no effective remedial measures are put in place to assuage the deleterious effects of these problems, viz. diseases, deformities, deprivation and even deaths
5. Large-scale morbidity; diseases such as poliomyelitis, malaria and typhoid fevers, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, etc., are reaching epidemic proportions
6. Great personal anxiety and stressful living; when we consider hyper-inflation against the revolution of rising frustration ordinary workers are facing. In family terms, for example, there are fears attendant with payments of school fees; etc., to mention but a few administration-related social problems of late.

### **Community participation and Human rights education**

To address the issues discussed above, community participation seen as a massive involvement in social welfare is implicated. The popular parlance that Government cannot toe the line of development alone means nothing other than that it requires some partnership with the larger community to make its presence felt; People should be able to have a more direct access to a responsible Government, to forestall parasitic middleman ship, the like of that eating into the commonwealth (i.e. the situation commonly tagged in Hausa "rijiyar ta bayar da ruwa, guga ya hana" ( literally, the pail refusing to give the water the well allowed). This moreover is testimony of the social distance between the people and well-meaning Government functionaries; one of the predicaments proponents of greater community participation in politics are at pains to overcome.

Everyone knows that in fighting for peoples rights collective action proves superior, reminiscent of the Aba 1929 Anti-colonial riots, Bakalori episode, People's Redemption Party days in Kano, etc., in wresting desserts and well-deserved privileges from reluctant and oppressive authorities. Conversely, good governments

strive on the collective support of subjects to ward against unnecessary, mischievously malicious criticisms or the outright spite of the unreasonable opposition.. For instance, a Government truly out to stamp out high-level corruption and fraud inevitably would need public vigilance and support against the adversarial vested interests of unpatriotic White –collar crime perpetrators In many ways like this therefore, community participation becomes the hallmark of good governance or administration to assist in addressing long-standing or stubborn social issues such as rural poverty, youth development crisis, political confusion, stunted technological growth, mass illiteracy, corruption and fraud as well as willful rights violation.

### **Prospects**

Community participation for human rights education has come to stay in this country. Democracy, which Nigeria is said to be married to, has citizenship participation, a component of community participation, as one of its hallmarks. So community participation ultimately implies a high level of citizenship participation, as this was intended in the original meaning of Democracy from the point of view of being “Government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Community participation

therefore cannot be achieved except under a people-friendly, well-meaning or just Government (including Sharia orientation in the North).

Since Democracy appears to have come to stay, people will continue to clamour for their rights, sooner or later, and it is therefore in the ultimate interest of Government, or, at least, those who govern to work together with their subjects. Those who govern should at least remember that after their tenure they will come back to the people, as much as they will come before Allah (‘Subhana wa Ta’ala’).

Those responsible for governance should also be fully aware of the part-whole theory in the sense that whatever state the generality of people are in, those responsible for it cannot exempt themselves from it since the consequences of such a state of living will reach them, sooner or later, e.g the vengeful visitation of armed robbers, public defamation, unpopularity coupled with Electoral reprisals and a host of other backlashes.; it has been aptly put by philosophers (wise men), since time immemorial that “no man is an island on his own” (Aristotle). On the issue of Human rights, in particular, community participation will facilitate the reporting of cases, identification of violators as well as speed up their prosecution.

### **Problems**

Although community participation in all forms of administration is extolled, it cannot be adequately engineered without overturning a number of existing predicaments of the generality of our people, as follows:

- 1) the increasing loss of the sharing attitude in our human relation that has previously been the core of our collective behaviour; we are becoming everyday Western in our attitude (exclusive living), at a time when even the Westerners themselves are striving to revisit mutual living and collective responsibility that Africans have for centuries been known for. This sharing attitude has to be fully demonstrated by Government;
- 2) There is general alienation among our grass—roots populations, this is a condition that critics have called the “One country, two nations” syndrome. The argument is that Nigeria is actually a conundrum of two nations the nation of the rich and that of the poor (Balarabe Musa) and there is every reason to believe this nowadays. I do not have to point out how inimical this state of affairs could be to

the desired community participation;

- 3) Leadership is the major factor that could bring about the desired community participation and at the level targeted also, but the politics is wrong. Selection of leaders in Nigeria, contemporarily, falls far below expectations. The sole criterion appears to be greed for money not stewardship. For long it has been observed that MONEY POLITICS has dominated the election scenario in Nigeria but no correction has been attempted to date. As a result therefore, we end up with self-seeking leadership;
- 4) Poverty alone constitutes a major factor offsetting community participation in this country and which is increasing daily due to the purported self-seeking leadership aforementioned. The prevalence of Poverty Alleviation schemes in the country alone bears out the fact of mass poverty in Nigeria. However, the spirit for the alleviation is not there;
- 5) Mass Illiteracy, a concomitant of Poverty is also a factor constraining participation. Granted that

participation could be influenced or improved by mobilization but experience show that literacy facilitates mobilization and by extension participation. The national literacy level does not do this country any credit.

These, and many other aligned problems, have to be squarely addressed and corrected for community participation to be a factor in our general management of our lives.

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