

UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

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Abstract

The increasing pressure on both natural system and social resources are often culminating in environmental and social epidemics with heavy burden of diseases, shortage of food, potable water and lack of meaningful livelihood among the vulnerable communities in developing countries. While these communities are always left to cope on their own and create subsistence from their marginal agricultural or pastoral lands, the intervention of numerous establishments or institutions that share close proximity with these communities through social responsibility could aid their sustenance. The study employed the theory of ethical social responsibility and responses from 16 in-depth interviews with purposively selected community leaders in two communities of Ogun State, Nigeria. The state has, among others, highest number of higher institutions in Nigeria (15 universities, 11 Polytechnics, and 5 Colleges, excluding other vocational studies), higher concentration of industrial estates in Nigeria but the poverty incidence is as high as 26.4% compared to other states in the same region. The data from the interview were analysed using systematic content analysis with thematic organisations of the summaries and typologies of the responses of the participants. The result shows the major coping strategies adopted by these communities as personal contributions and communal labour. The primary themes and sub-themes on participants' experience on successful initiatives were mapped as University-Community Development Initiative Model (UCDIM). The model suggests that the university may help their host communities and the society in physical development by enhancing the maintenance of balance between the academic and alleviating the socio-ecological challenges faced by their host communities.

Keywords: Community development, coping strategies, university, initiative, framework, sustainable development, social responsibility model

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing growth of human population in developing countries places ever-increasing pressure of both natural system and social resources with environmental and social epidemics including the shortage of food, potable water, increasing poverty, disease, and violence (Al-Dahir & Bisley, 2009; UN, 1995). Worldwide, this development procures adverse effects but with greater significance upon developing countries considering the level of their poor or low institutional and infrastructural capacities that could effectively deal with complex and dynamic situations (Al-Dahir & Bisley, 2009; UN, 1995). Within these nations, the rural communities suffer abysmal neglect in the distribution of resources and bear heavily such burden of underdevelopment like diseases, lack of access to portable water, and meaningful means of livelihood. Thus, individual communities are left to cope on their own and create subsistence from marginal agricultural or pastoral lands (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014; UN 1995; Al-Dahir & Bisley, 2009). However, the emerging of numerous higher institutions such as universities with close proximity to these communities (especially due to the availability of land) could be a burden or gain for these communities depending on the corresponding level of social responsibility from these institutions. Organisation social responsibility is crucial for the development of community hosting them (Akanni, Oke & Omotilewa, 2014; Worlu, Atayero, Owoeye & Amodu, 2014). The primary focus of this study is therefore to assess how universities in developing countries could aid socio-ecological sustainability in rural communities and especially among their host communities.

The theory utilized suggests that an entity (and the university organisation, in this case), has obligations to act for the benefit of society especially through the maintenance of balance between the economy and the socio-ecological challenges they are facing (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams & Ganapathi, 2007) considering their conspicuous lack of capacity to meet these needs on their own. However, the initiatives to enhance the living conditions of host community by the organisations or industries within their community are not conspicuous and the specific patterns or models to follow are relatively scanty in the literature and especially as it related to university-community relationship in Nigeria.

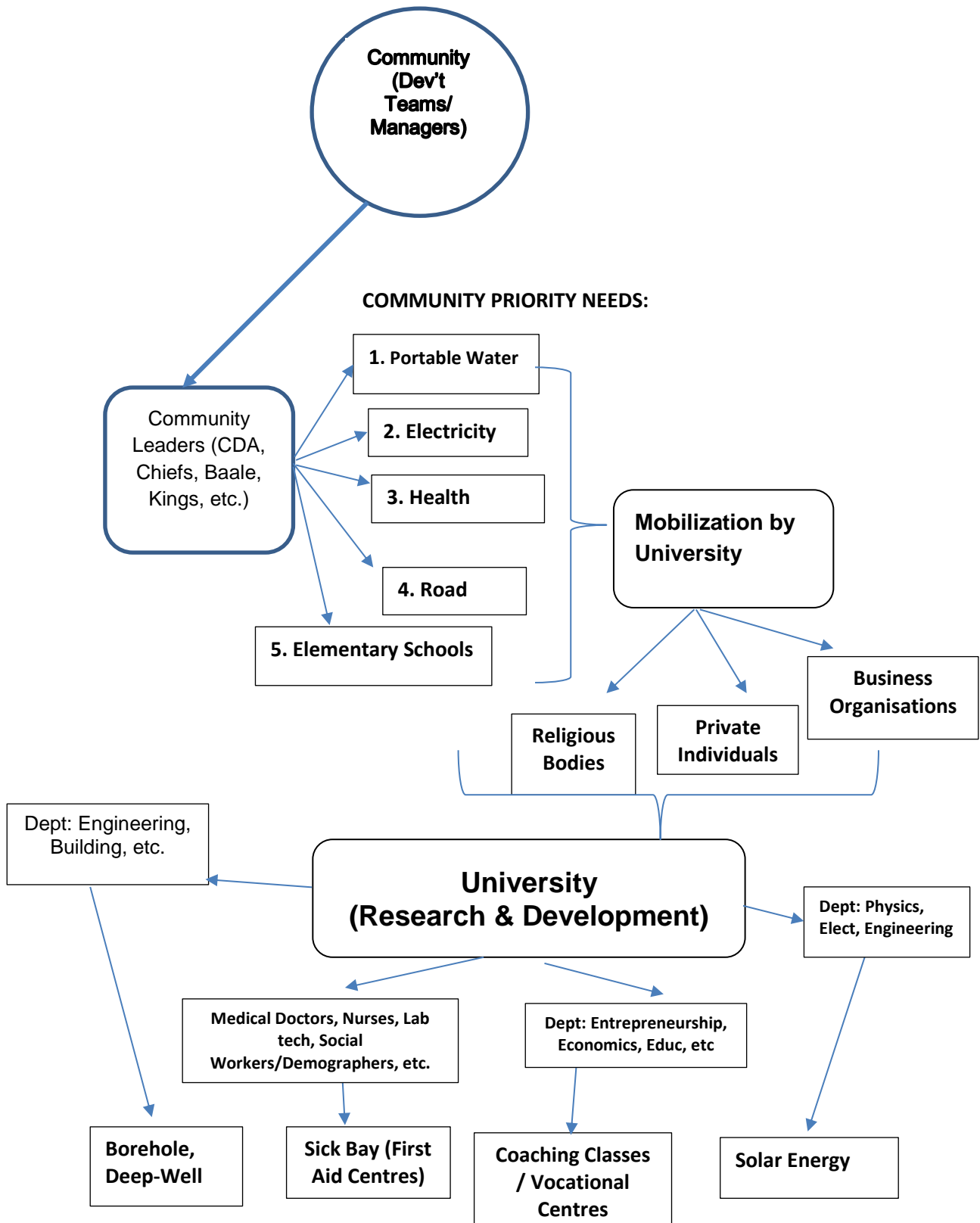
Specifically, till date, a typology of incorporation of community efforts into planning and development of the community is also not popular in Nigeria context, notwithstanding that these communities bear the brunt of negative government planning or environmental decisions. These could come inform of air pollution, encroachment of arable farm land, and advent of practices that may seemingly contradictory to community traditions and values. A roadmap to synergise companies and industries, schools, religious houses together for a common goal of making live conducive for the community dwellers is expedient, especially in areas where government presence or impact is relatively not available. The study therefore attempts to model an organisational-community inter relationship for sustainable development.

2. COVENANT UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The university was established in 2002 as a mission university poised for raising the new generation of leaders. Among her tripod focus is research development and community development. The university specifically designated a special centre (called Community Development Impact Initiative committee (CDIIC)) focusing on several community development services geared towards impacting positively on people lives especially in her host community, Ota including other environs. The services of the centre range from health promotions, road rehabilitation, educational promotional activities, care for aged and orphans, construction of amusement parks, environment beautification, entrepreneurial skills acquisition, among others. The programmes are parts of deliberate efforts by the university management to instill leadership spirit and responsible-citizenship skills in our students and faculty through community service platform. The centre initiates and collaborates other organisations in commemorating most of the world event days, especially as it relates to health, population and development, examples of which are World Malaria Day, World Health Day, Cancer Day, to mention but few. Severally, the centre respond to the demand from the host communities on a number of environmental challenges including social amenities such as electricity transformer, rehabilitation of roads, challenge of portable water, educational assistance and health issues.

The members consist of voluntary students and faculty of the institution and the centre is directly under the supervision of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Office. Requests from the communities are often screened, intelligence investigation conducted to ascertain the genuineness of the claim and the cost implications. The request and the proposal that are developed are examined by the forensic department as well as the ethical and research board of the university. Partnership is sought with all financial obligations and responsibilities coordinated by the finance department of the university as approved by the university management while the committee (CDIIC) execute the activities or request the appropriate organ within or outside the university to carry out the project.

Fig 1. University-Community Development Initiative Model (UCDIM)



3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study employed the theory of ethical social responsibility (Garriga & Melé, 2004) and responses from 16 in-depth interviews with community leaders in two communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The state has highest number of higher institutions in Nigeria, hosting up to 31 tertiary institutions (15 universities, 11 Polytechnics, and 5 Colleges, excluding other vocational studies studies). The state has comparative advantage to strategically becoming a model knowledge hub and the community stands to benefit more from the socio-economic development impact that the students, faculty, and other university workers bring to the state, especially those communities where these institutions are situated. The state also has higher concentration of industrial estates in Nigeria but the poverty incidence is as high as 26.4% compared to other states in the same region (South West) with small number of higher institutions such as Osun (10.9%), Ekiti (12.9%) and Lagos (8.5%) (Poverty Human Development Initiative, 2017).

The participants for the in-depth interview were purposively selected from their various communities (i.e. town and villages). The data from the interview were firstly transcribed and then analysed using systematic content analysis with thematic organisations of the summaries and typologies of the responses of the participants.

4. RESULTS

The major coping strategies adopted by the host communities have been personal contributions and communal labour. However, the primary themes and sub-themes on participants' experience on successful initiatives were mapped as University-Community Development Initiative Model (UCDIM). The framework that represents a step-by-step approach to community development initiatives especially between the universities and host communities. The model suggests that the university may benefit their host communities and the society in physical development by enhancing the maintenance of balance between the academic and the socio-ecological challenges their host communities are facing considering their conspicuous lack of capacity to meet these needs on their own.

5. ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

All research instruments were reviewed by the Covenant University Ethics Committees (Processing to commence). Permissions necessary were secured from leaders in the communities selected, informed consent letters were also obtained from the participants and they were informed of their freedom to withdraw at any stage of the discussion. The participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their responses and anonymous reporting of our research findings.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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