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Educational Predictors of Social Capital Development and Sustainable Community Engagement in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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Abstract:
This paper focuses on educational predictors of social capital development and sustainable community engagement in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. It is recalled that inclusive in the four core variables of education are empowerment, engagement, experience and evidence. However, contemporary changing dynamics in educational provision are concerned with building of trust, consensus, cooperation, cohesion mentorship and network of partnership for civic engagement in community development actions. This is with the goals of ensuring a stable, dynamic, inter-dependent, strategic alliance and engagement that are capable of accelerating mediation, conciliation and resolution of issues that threaten community interaction and likely global peace and stability. Presently, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has experienced relative peace after era of sustained agitation and struggles for resource control attended with violence. It is the view of these authors however that, there has being a seemingly neglect of social capital development in the provision of education with its attendant results of distrust, exclusion, self-serving interest, disintegration of values and norms among leaders and the led. Recommendations were made on how education can be used to revert the deficits in social capital particularly in areas of deliberative community civic engagement, cooperation and network for sustainable development and integration in the Niger Delta Region.

Keywords: Education, social capital, community engagement, participation, influence

1. Introduction

One attribute of communal life is trust and consensus building in most social and economic engagement. This constitutes the benchmark for measuring traditional form of adult education in the pre-western era of formal education. The values of trust and consensus building accelerate community cohesion, mentorship, networking, partnership and relationship that bear positive influence on social, economic, religion and political engagement of the traditional African society. Education then was an instrument of building trust, integrity, cooperation, unity, integration, engagement and participation within the framework of collective good of all citizens. It is within the aggregate of these attributes that communal efforts are germane to self-help and self-reliance development in traditional community development process which is a platform for learning and sharing of ideas and knowledge in the community over space and time.

Therefore, communality is the basis on which social capital finds meaning, application and relevance because, Alexis de Tocqueville in the first half of the 19th century noted that, the level of social participation in American society was directly linked to the equality of conditions (Ferraigina, 2010). Hence, where there is equality, there exist greater tendency to participate and engage in meaningful discourse and reciprocal interaction.

1.1. Education, Social Capital and Development

Education is a process of transmission of knowledge, ideas, wisdom and know-how from one generation to another. It is an activity that is based on trust, ideals, cooperation and sharing of information. Critical elements of education are engagement, empowerment, experience, and evidence. These elements are consistent with the values enshrined in "social capital" which is systematically ambiguous in meaning. For example, Sander (2015) defines social capital as the collective value of all social networks and the inclination that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity).

Systematically, social capital at various times is used to explain superior managerial performance (Moran, 2015), the growth of entrepreneurial firm (Stan et al, 2014), improved performance of functionally diverse group (Evan and Carson, 2005), the value derived from strategic alliance (Koka and Prescott, 2002) and enhanced supply chain relations (McGrath and Sparks, 2005). Integrating these diverse meanings, we note social capital as resource and the values

associated with these resources, tangible and intangibles as well as the impact these resources bear on each other as critical elements in its application.

In this respect, social capital must be situated for public good or for the benefits of individuals within the context of reciprocity norms. As a resource, social capital would, in the view of Putman (1993) facilitate co-operation and mutually supportive relations in communities and nations, and thus, be a valuable means of combating many forms of social disaggregate or disorder that constitute structural causes of dysfunctional entities a major challenge of modern societies. However, social capital is mostly influenced through education that is characterized by engagement, empowerment, experience and evidence. It is formed, according to Fukuyama (1995) cited by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) by repeated interactions (engagements) over time, and it is critical for development purpose but difficult to generate through public policy. So, social capital cannot be generated through public policy rather, it is a product of sustained interaction, engagement, communication and mutuality as contrived in the aggregate of educational provision.

1.2. Basic Assumptions and Hypotheses on Social Capital

Key assumptions about social capital in the development space have been advanced for sustainable community engagement based on these assumptions.

First, predictors of high level of social capital include education (Smith, Bealieu and Seraphire, 1995; Teachman, Paasch and Carver, 1996), health (smith, 1997), confidence in political institutions (Brehm and Rahn, 1997), and satisfaction with government and political engagement (Putman, 1993).

Second, mentoring, job networking and mutual support associated with high level of social capital is a partial cause of success in education (Loury, 1997; Coleman, 1988). Such mutual support is also associated with self-reliant economic development without need for public intervention (Putman, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995).

Third, the level of social capital has been declining in a retrogressive order since independence in Nigeria in 1960 due to exploitation, suppression, exclusion and poor governance associated with distrust, inequality and suspicion among citizens

Four, the decline in social capital in Nigeria is centrally enhanced by globalization factors characterized by social media, which is seen as having a profound individualistic impact which undermines it in any society.

Fifth, the spread of information and communication technology (ICT) creates networking infrastructure which promotes the formation of social capital (Calabrese and Borchert, 1996). Conversely, ICT according to Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire, (1991), Loeh and Ganger, (1996) can have an anonymizing deindividuating impact which relaxes social norms and erodes social capital.

Hypothesizing from the above assumptions, Garson (2006), postulated as follows:
- The greater the level of participation, the greater the social capital;
- The more networking/integration/cooperation, the greater the social capital;
- The more the mentoring and mutual support in a system, the greater its social capital
- The greater the prevalence of passive media the less the social capital
- The greater the social capital, the more prevalent the norm of reciprocity (bargaining, compromise, pluralism).
- The greater the social capital, the higher the priority of the norm of equality.
- The greater the social capital, the greater the confidence in government institutions
- The greater the social capital, the higher the percentage of problem-solving outside the government sector (public space).
- The less the social capital, the greater the need to rely on authoritative controls.

These hypotheses situate the current settings in community engagement for development as the emphasis on social capital does not have its premise within individualistic context, but in social networks, social grouping, cooperation, mentoring, mutual support and collaboration which is presently in deficit.

1.3. Social Capital and Community Civic Engagement

In the context of sustainable community engagement, social capital focuses on educational issues as measures of consensus building and integration. As a product of educational process, social capital's relationship with community deliberative civic engagement constitute a process of intentions, and conscious attempt to change an existing narrative that tend to undermine community cohesion and stability. The Niger delta communities are so polarized because of the divisive tendency of foreign interest in collaboration with certain local beneficiaries. Consequently, critical instruments that ordinarily should be accessible to enhance development are inadequate and in extreme cases lacking to the detriment of communities. Without education, there cannot be meaningful engagement, integration and development. Civic engagement is meant to address issues of public concern.

Thus, Delli (2006) noted that individual and collective actions are to be designed to identify and addressed such issues of public concern. Such concerns are insecurity, vote buying, nepotism, bad governance and other anti-democratic values that plague the Niger Delta political space. Community civic engagement means that citizens working together to make a change or difference in the community. This synergy includes citizens working together in both political and non-political actions. This can only be experienced in an atmosphere of mutual trust aided by reasoned and unbiased relations.

The educational influence of social capital on civic engagement is underlined by the argument that a fundamental step in creating functioning society begins with the civic education of children within the community. This is what informed the view of Kelly (2008) that "when our young children serve their communities through volunteerism, political participation or through vocal activism, they are likely to emerge…voting and serving all aspects of society" (p. 55).

Meanwhile civic education is an adult learning component of education which situates in lifelong process, even for those who make decisions on behalf of the people they serve.

Therefore, education is key not just to the development of social capital but also in the process of civic engagement which is to advance social capital for community integration in the region. In a research Prentice and Robinson (2010) reported that, students who participated in service learning even one time appear to have made gains in knowledge of and commitment to civic engagement when compared to non-service learners. Besides, Fogelman (2002) noted that, civic engagement is largely shaped by schools. This is the context of the educational influence which underscores the fact that educational institutions are the only entity that have requisite technical-know-how to engender civic competence, critical thinking, and public spirit, that can capacitate citizens to become deliberately engaged. So, it was reasoned among many public interests moulders that, within the public space, civic engagement that is deliberative ought to be parts of the contents of learning and that higher education institutions should provide opportunities to become engaged through internships, service learning and community-based activities. In this process learning institutions are expected to ensure that there are learning outlets where students can have open discourse over matters of community concerns (such as insecurity, unemployment, poverty, out-of-school children) and other controversial subject of community interest.

In this regard, in order to ensure sustainable community engagement, such engagement must be deliberative, social capital based and educationally influenced for such engagement to be impactful on communities.

1.4. Benefits and Factors in Deliberative Civic Engagement

Recall that better governance at all level is a predictor for the success or attainment of the new set of targets for future international development. Every community has its target goals for development, but, it is vital to ensure that such goals are collectively determined and pursued over time. Such mutual effort is enhanced through cooperation and integration that are derived from civic engagement. Before highlighting the engagement factors in deliberative civic engagement, it is now clear that, civic engagement can engender community participation, integration and government involvement. Essentially, communities benefit from deliberative civic engagement in terms of

- Achieving greater buy-in to decision with fewer backlashes such as litigation, recalls and resistance;
- Engendering trust between citizens and government, which improves public reaction at public meetings;
- Developing better and more creative ideas and solutions;
- Implementing programmes, ideas and policies faster and efficiently;
- Creating involved citizens instead of demanding clients
- Building synergy for further cooperation, networking and other elements of social capital
- Building community within a city.

Deliberative civic engagement according to Nabatch (2014) refers to a wide variety of process through which members of the public, often in concert with policy-makers and stakeholders, come together to engage in constructive, informed and decisive dialogue about important public issues. It has become imperative that, there is a growing debate on the re-emergence of interest in deliberative civic engagement among scholars, community development practitioners, politician, civic reformers and other opinion moulders. This is perhaps based on the fact that it is a process that is internally predictive of community integration, security and well-being. (Nabatch, 2014)

In the Niger Delta Region, it is less obvious to engage deliberatively on civic matters. This perhaps is based on the submission that, despite growing interest in and use of deliberative civic engagement, such processes are typically one-off experiment that occur within the confines of a single issue over a short period of time (Leihninger, 2012). The process of deliberative civic engagement is grossly undermined in Niger Delta communities because, several factors contribute to its episodic reference on public issues. Inclusive of such factors are weak or inadequate legal infrastructure that prompt public officials to seek compliance with the explicit minimal standards for citizens participation; the challenge of reaching scale and creating processes appropriate to the size of the political body; the need to overcome elements of the political system and political culture that are resistant to public engagement; and the lack of "civic assets" that connect citizens to one another; and to their public institutions (Nabatch and Amsler, 2014).

Sustainable community engagement in the Niger Delta region must therefore be in response to seven key development indicators as derived from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While leveraging on the educational demand for such engagement to thrive, these seven engagement factors are essential for the preparation of citizens to actively engage in social capital development. These are:

- Growth aided by good health and nutrition among citizens
- Development of engagement vocabulary for ease of communication, interaction and sharing of ideas through dialogue, debate and social actions.

Effort and energy is also required for civic engagement. As a deliberate, well-thought out process, it requires patriotic efforts, determination and investment in energy and other resources. Mindset of the citizens is crucial to civic engagement. Mindset is a critical internal attitude when it comes to civic engagement. A positive attitude held towards a process is a predictor of success and vice-versa. In every process in civic engagement, citizens must be prompted by positive mindset as an internal dynamics of behaviour manifestation.

Cognitive capacity is most significantly complex. Socioeconomic condition of people is significantly correlated with a number of measures of cognitive skills and ability. To be able to promote civic engagement, citizens must have high Intelligent Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Social Quotient (SQ). These are those capacities defined by the cognitive and effective domains. They help to promote, when present, higher capacity for civic engagement in social capital

development among communities.

Relationship is also essential as a factor of civic engagement. An individual who relates positively with peers, adults and neighbours is likely to fit into the mix of engagement equation. Strong and secure home relationship help support and stabilize citizens behaviour even right from early childhood. Individuals who grow up with positive relationship learn healthy and appropriate emotional response to everyday situations. The level of stress is critical to engagement process. Stress is expressed as the body's response to loss of control, resulting from an adverse situation, or person can be healthy and acute or chronic. Light stress levels are healthy as such can help build and sustain resilience, while acute or chronic stress can lead to devastating imprint on people. These seven factors must be balance at will among citizens in a process that promotes civic engagement.

2. Conclusion and Recommendations

We shall draw our conclusion from of a review Nabatchi (2014) perspective that, communities must build the civic infrastructure needed for citizens to engage effectively in governance at every level. Such civic infrastructure must include the creation of viable public space where citizens can meaningfully discuss issues; the cultivation of civic assets; and the building of a national roster of conveners, facilitators, and other experts who can organise and support ongoing debate or dialogue.

In addition, Nabatch (2014) noted that, there is the need to ensure that our civic infrastructure educates citizens about important issues; connects citizens to civic leaders; government officials, and other decision makers; address the full government cycle; from policy making to implementation to evaluation, and makes room not just for deliberation and decision making, but also for consistent, expedient, rational and purposeful action. Building such civic infrastructure could be difficult in Niger Delta communities given the nature of leaders who are not open, never tolerant and completely insincere to their people. However, with robust network of groups and organisations who are dedicated to deliberative civic engagement, coupled with trained facilitators and rich body of few who are knowledgeable about what works where, when and how, investing in education and civic infrastructure will enhance the culture of civic engagement for community integration in the Niger Delta region.

Consequently, education must address those factors that predict or negate deliberative civic engagement. Secondly, civic infrastructure should be re-awakened in every community in the region. Thirdly, civic engagement is needed as a process to address insecurity in communities in Niger Delta Region. Lastly, civic engagement as a form of social capital development that can institute a culture of participation, cohesion and integration for sustainable community engagement in development activities.

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