

Strengthening the Family for Quality and Sustainable Livelihood

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Abstract

This paper explores the possibilities of strengthening the family for sustainable livelihood. The paper adopts the multidisciplinary approach to deal with the multi-headed and multifaceted problems of the modern family. Using documentary data, this paper argued that the modern family is faced with enormous challenges and these challenges must be counteracted if family members should live sustainably. Some of the strategies for counteracting the family challenges were highlighted. The paper also advances strategies to minimize extensive food importation in most African countries.

Keywords: Family, Sustainable, Livelihood, Multidisciplinary, Education

Introduction

The multifaceted challenges of family and sustainable livelihood have worsened as more families relapse into extreme poverty in the 21st century. It was estimated by UNDP in 2014 that about 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty and 870 million people go to bed every night hungry, 1.3 billion do not have access to electricity and 2.5 billion do not have access to improved sanitation (UNDP, 2014).

For Nigeria, the proportion of non-poor has been steadily decreasing since the 1980s. From 72.8 per cent in 1980, it fell to 57.3 per cent in 1992 (Omotola, 2008). Then it dropped significantly in 1996 to 34.4 per cent, and fell further in 2010 to 31 per cent. Furthermore, the poverty data

released by the National Bureau of Statistics for 2011 shows that 112 million Nigerians are poor going by the economic situation in the country. 100 million are in absolute poverty and 12 million are moderately poor (NBS, 2009 & 2012).

The rising trend of poverty in the country is a direct reflection of the unhealthy effect and failure of successive public policies in Nigeria – The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), of the Babangida regime, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) of Obasanjo's regime, the Seven Point Agenda of President Shehu Yaradua and the Transformation Agenda of current

President, Goodluck Jonathan (Aminu & Onimisi, 2014).

According to the World Bank estimate, Nigeria is the 15th poorest country in the world. At current rates, it is estimated that by 2015, Nigeria will have more poor people than India and China who have more than a billion people each. Unemployment is at the heart of Nigeria's poverty. There are few activities in the rural areas that create jobs apart from manual labour intensive seasonal agriculture. The poor have no access to low interest credits to enhance their production (World Bank, 2014).

In the past few years, the Nigerian government has spent colossal sum of money at Federal, State and Local Government levels in vain attempts to relieve poverty by initiating and executing several poverty alleviation programmes. This paper explores the possibilities of strengthening the family for sustainable livelihood.

The Family Explained

The state of the modern family in the West was first documented in England in the mid-1600s (Stone, 1977). The family is social system which must perform a number of functions in order to survive. Some of these functions include:

1. It has to be able to adapt to and transform its environment.
2. It has to be able to create and achieve goals.
3. It must integrate its various parts

4. It must be able to renew the patterns within the culture that motivate people.

As an economic and micro community unit, the family unit in our tradition, headed by the husband and the elders of his lineage, starts with one wife and adds more after accumulating the bride-wealth needed for each. The more wives and children, the larger and more affluent this unit can become because of the advantages of large number like more hands for manual labour. As individual families evolve, they and the community structures adapt to the physical and social conditions of production. Widespread agreement remains today that the modern nuclear family, with its two parents and two or three children, is the ideal end result of progress in the evolution of the family. The income of the man may not be enough to take care of the entire household. As a result the women are forced into the workplace to assist in the economic situation of the family (Shorter, 1975; Hareven, 1987 & Hossfeld, 1991)

Challenges of modern Family

It was seen that the challenges faced by the modern family created problems that made it difficult for them to perform these functions. Despite these, every family must strive to generate resources to be able to thrive - pay hospital bills, pay school fees, pay the cost of feeding, clothing and accommodation. It should also

contend with the problem of division of labour within it across gender lines – what should husbands and wives do regarding payment for rent, school fees or household feeding. Every family also needs to deal with the problems of decision making situation like- Choice of holidaying, number of children to have, etc (<http://uregina.ca>).

There is also need to acknowledge challenges as regards different religious norms and practices. These challenges in the modern family include atheism- that is, the philosophy that there is no God; relativism- the popular point of view which states that absolute truth does not exist; modernism which rejects the concept of authority in religion and states that religious beliefs must pass the test of reason and experience; hedonism- that is the philosophy which holds that man's chief and highest goal is pleasure; materialism which is an obsessive preoccupation with worldly possessions.

As we ponder over these, we should also recall that modern family life has been greatly influenced by technological advancement especially in the area of Information and Communication Technology (the media and social media). There is a powerful interplay between a society's technology, family structure, and social values. Yet technology is not a rigid cultural taskmaster. The same production technologies and ecological conditions accommodate

variations in family organization, management style, and emotional climate

(http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/07/1/quicktime/1_071_02.html).

Globalization has a lot of influence on the family. It has eroded strong family values and replaced it with commercialized relationships thereby inflicting a heavy blow on the marriage institution worldwide. Globalization has not only made the world smaller, it has also made it interdependent (Edgar, 2004). An investment decision made in London can spell unemployment for thousands in Nigerians, while a business decision taken in US can create thousands of new jobs for workers in Nsukka. The dislocation caused by these changes has affected the family economically, morally, socially and psychologically (Kumar, 2012).

Then there is the trend of media unification and fear of negative publicity. One of the implications of media unification is the rising incidence of rape. It is evident that most cases of child rape and/or rape in general are committed against victims by their close relatives or neighbours or those known to the victims. Sometimes, the perpetrators are larger family members. Consequently, these larger family members more often than not decide not to report these crimes to the police for prosecution because of relationship

ties. Thus the perpetrators are never given the punishments commensurate with their crimes. Victims of rape are more often than not afraid of reporting the rapists for fear of attacks by some of these rapists who sometimes are deadly and fiendish. Indecent dressing constitutes yet another factor that sometimes make the young girls victims of rape. Many a time, as a result of over-exposure to modern or western life styles and sometimes poor child upbringing, many of our teenagers dress in skimpy attires exposing their vital parts which ordinarily should be kept outside public views.

Strategies for balancing the family and business

It is also difficult to balance the family and business life. To maintain the stability of the family and sustain proper habits and practices of its members, the family also needs to take steps like having adequate sleep for body repairs; exercise to stimulate the heart and blood circulation; avoiding habits like drinking excessive alcohol and smoking and avoiding unnecessary stress

Education for sustainable development has been recommended to improve family income and livelihood. Inter/trans-disciplinarily and holistic learning as opposed to the traditional discipline-based approach is useful to alleviate poverty, promote economic development/transformation and good governance.

It is also useful in managing threats to health like HIV/AIDS and promoting gender equality policies and practices. More education means more progress in these regards. It promotes entrepreneurship and the rationale for entrepreneurship is to earn high profit and prosperity in most instances for the benefit of the family. Recall that an entrepreneur is a person while entrepreneurship is the process of its actual working. Entrepreneurship is a human activity which plays a major role in economic development. Its history is as old as human history. It is consistently equated with the establishment and management of small business enterprises. Innovating entrepreneurs are rarely found in developing countries due to lower propensity to save and mass unemployment. The role of small and medium scale industries has been emphasized. Less education restricts the growth and development of enterprises, the family included.

Food security is one of the important conditions that must be achieved for individuals in the family to be nutritionally secure and to maintain good health. The concept of adequate food is an important part of household food security. But food adequacy per se, is not enough. The supply should be stable and consistent. Stability of household food supplies refers to the ability of a household to procure, through income, production and/or transfers, adequate food supplies on a

continuing basis, even when the household is faced with situations of unpredictable stress, shocks or crises.

A number of mechanisms have been developed to reduce fluctuations in food supplies at the regional, national and household levels. Nigeria also has policies to facilitate physical access to food supplies through improved agricultural technology, food production and nutrition diversification programmes, improved market infrastructure, transportation and road extension and the provision of local storage and processing facilities in rural areas. Yet most Nigerians are hungry. The consumption pattern of households in Nigeria varies from region to region. Consumption patterns normally contribute greatly to the social and economic policy of the country. In Nigeria, the consumption pattern is skewed towards food i.e. food accounts for a higher proportion of the total expenditure, while in developed countries the opposite is the case. The more developed a society becomes, the less it spends on food and the more it spends on non-food items.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly explored some of the challenges of the family and sustainable livelihood using multi/trans disciplinary approach in the 21st century and beyond. It also advanced few strategies that help to counteract the decaying and declining family values and ethos in a typical

African society. This is because counteracting the family rot in the 21st century will also address the enormous socio-political and economic challenges of most developing countries such as unemployment, poverty and related crimes. It also advanced strategies to minimize if not end the extensive food importation in most African countries. No region or country can be said to be developing if the people cannot feed themselves.

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