

Impacts Of Nigeria's Declining Economy On Societal Communication Via Social Gatherings

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Abstract

In Nigeria, societal gatherings contribute immensely in enhancing human communication which is imperative for society to thrive. Nigerians generally love to gather under many forms of parties and associations' meetings which attract people from all strata, nooks and crannies of society enabling much communication to take place for the growth of society. However, these days as a result of the economic downturn being experienced in the country, the frequency and capacity of the gatherings are highly reduced which portends a great decrease in the available fora for communication to an extent that seems detrimental to societal growth and communication. This article engages a descriptive research design with the aim to discuss the issues affecting societal gatherings using observation which allows a systematic description of a subject matter through the eyes of a researcher. Beginning by examining how social gatherings enhance communication and invariably the growth of society, some impacts of Nigerian's present declining economy were discussed leading to the conclusion that the economic situation resulting from the factors discussed is threatening the meaningful continuous existence of such gatherings as already many of them are going extinct, which should be halted through efforts of both government and individual Nigerians including reviewing the removal of fuel subsidy as well as eradicating the insecurity in the country to allow improvement in agriculture and other businesses with being frugal in managing available resources and keeping the expenditures for hosting social gatherings within moderate levels respectively.

Key words: Impacts, Declining, Economy, Societal Communication, Social Gatherings

Introduction

Human communication is what society relies upon to thrive. Society comprises human beings, animals and things. Human beings, having been placed over all other creatures of God need to communicate internally within themselves and externally between themselves in order to coordinate or mobilise fellow humans, other creatures, or things to facilitate and enhance their own existence,

besides being social being. Without communication, nothing else maybe achieved in any organisation or society because it is only through it that the purposes of man's existence are achievable (Lasswell, 2007). Communications as a subject matter is divisible into formal, informal and Semi formal types. However, no single one of them alone is capable of aiding man to achieve all the purposes necessary for communication as much as engaging a blend of all three types of communication can accomplish. Even in organizations where communication is supposed to be formal there is the belief that without semi-formal and informal communication running in the background, the formal communication alone may not succeed as desired (Onjewu, 2020).

There is no doubt that Nigerians love to gather semi formally to socialise under very many forms including wedding ceremony, monthly meetings of tribes or clans, alumni meetings of educational institutions, birthday anniversary party, retirement party, burial ceremonies, child 'naming' ceremonies, thanksgiving party for surviving sickness or an automobile accident, graduation party from school, house warming party and countless others during which a significant part of societal communication takes place which could range from the striking of contract or job deal, establishment of relationships and settlement of squabbles and a many other achievements. Besides, generally, humans rely on social interactions which relies on communication to feel connected to others as well as to make sense of their place in the world (Humber, 2023).

Hence, such gatherings are good for the enhancement of societal communication aside playing the role of providing avenues for people to unwind and socialise. Typically, such gatherings have become the norm in society such that there are now, for instance, certain birthday anniversaries and landmark achievements in life that people feel obliged to celebrate for their children or themselves like first and tenth year birthday anniversaries, then every decade from 50th as well as at the age of retirement from work, when given an award, moving into a new house, graduating from school, completing a course, having been promoted, during burial and in some climes to mark particular years post burial of their parents, to mention but a few.

However, a fundamental development is threatening the continuous existence of such gatherings namely the declining economy of Nigeria because the rate at which the prices of goods and services are soaring higher by each day along side a sustained rising rate of unemployment (Asaju, Arome & Anyio, 2014) has obviously been detrimental to the continuous hosting of majority of such gatherings. This development is the matter of concern being addressed in this article supported by the view of (Warne, 2022) that the ability to connect with others and establish real relationships are very relevant aspects of being human.

Benefits of Social Gatherings for enhancing Communication in Nigeria

The different types of gatherings of the people of Nigeria are diverse in their arrangements and features but they all have very far reaching advantages for

supporting societal communication among which just a few are discussed here as follows:

Providing people easy access to one another: Incidentally in Nigeria some people in positions of authority claim to no longer have the time to see close friends and family who might have assisted them to climb up the ladder of success to those very positions and who in turn maybe needing some form of assistance themselves from them but had not had the access to the so called "big" people either at home or at their offices. However, when any of such gatherings comes around, the "big" people are often in attendance genuinely or to in order to show off at times, politicise or simply to unwind as well as have fun which thereby creates the opportunity of easy access to them as well.

Providing a relaxed atmosphere for people to mingle or socialise: Nigerians love to gather and interact with family, friends, colleagues of same profession, same Alma mata, tribe, clan, religious and social affinities as a result of which there has the existence of very many gatherings or associations' meetings formed from the membership of the aforementioned sources to meet regularly as on monthly basis for example and usually the membership of such associations cut cross people from all social classes and caliber of society including the haves and the have not, people who own comfortable homes and offices but yet are happy to go to some other places even if sub standard to their personal choice in order to just share cherished moments and common interests with the other members of their association's meeting because the whole idea is just to eat perhaps, have some drinks and discuss whatever project or plan they may be doing or having with the other members.

Strengthening of communal ties: Many of the gatherings of Nigerians are based on tribal affinity by birth or marriage as the qualification for membership and going by the names of some of such gatherings it is easy to tell that part of their objectives is the furtherance of a particular cause or causes, for instance, "Idoma Community Development Association" with headquarters at her state but having branches in other towns or cities within the country or abroad where members may always have the execution of one project or the other in their hometown while such a meeting holds in a far away city. Hence such people from the particular community have the opportunity of coming together regularly which strengthens the communal ties between the people abroad or at the city with those at home with whom they liaise to execute such projects and form other relations.

Being sources of development: The gatherings of the various associations also serve as a source of personal empowerment and development for people in society in many ways, for instance, people in the same profession have the opportunity to aquire more experience from one another as they do things together for their professional growth while some other associations teach their members entrepreneurship or skill acquisition which leads to the overall

growth or development of their association as well as of the individual members.

Bridging the gap between the different strata of society people: In Nigeria today the situation is such that every rich person also has poor people in their family and vice versa so that during some of such gatherings like those with tribal affiliations both the rich and the poor come together to mingle which at times enables some kind of developments that initiate the taking of certain decisions that could enhance the growth of those of them at the bottom of the ladder through the granting of opportunities like scholarships to the indigent children of members, jobs, awarding of soft loans to the others willing to learn a trade, the provision of some other welfare packages which enhance better living for some members are among many other interventions achievable by such gatherings.

Strengthening of national cohesion: Sometimes when the people in society gather it is to conduct the marriage ceremony between a Nigeria from the North and another from the south or the child of a politician from one party political with the other or the child of a very popular professional in one field with that of another popular professional in another field and sometimes particularly when the people involved are wealthy, such wedding ceremonies may last for a couple of days over which the people in attendance interact together long enough to possibly hatch new political plans of cohesion aside the making of new friendships, reconciliation of old squabbles, matchmaking of their other children or the establishment of several other kinds of other relationships or alliances.

Impacts of Nigeria's Declining Economy on Social Gatherings

A kin observer of the daily happenings in Nigeria would notice a huge reduction in the occurrence as well as the quality of services offered at most of the gatherings held these days due to the astronomical rising costs of food and drinks, increased charges by masters of ceremonies, disk jockey (DJ), ushers and caterers with all the other artisans or professionals whose services are usually engaged for the actualisation of gatherings, some of which are discussed in here as follows:

Total absence or reduction in the refreshments served: One of the new trends at gatherings is the non-provision of refreshment in form of cooked food popularly referred to by Nigerians as 'heavy entertainment' but the serving of snacks or 'light refreshment' being more affordable due to no other reason than the prevailing high cost involved in the purchase of foodstuff and drinks. Also, in some cases, instead of bottled drinks, homemade ones are served along with snacks only and at times if it must be cooked food only the likes of steamed bean cake popularly called "moi moi" is opted for because of being more affordable than rice menus, for instance, cooked personally rather engaging caterers (Alagbe & Dumo, 2016).

In the same vein, some wedding ceremonies these days are held without any after party or "reception" ceremony as the tradition had been. Rather, after the church ceremony for the joining of couple, guests simply return to their homes except a few very close relatives and friends who accompany them home to mingle a bit and for entertainment. At times the other guests who leave from the church are offered a few snacks already packed and handed out to them as they depart the church premises. This development has implications for the rising rate of the unemployment of caterers, decorators and low sales by traders of souvenirs items, photographers and the others (Alagbe & Dumo, 2016) whose services are only required at wedding "receptions".

Poor attendance by family and other invitees: In the past when a family member got married themselves, gave out a child in marriage or had another form of celebration that necessitated people to gather, more friends and family attended from far and near in order to grace the occasion and catch up with family and friends, however, these days many family members and friends prefer to send a part of the cost of their transportation for such a journey to the celebrant rather than being in attendance. In the alternative, some persons hosting parties and not wanting to spend more money than they can afford make provision for family and friends to hook up online through Facebook, What'sApp video call, Zoom and the like even though the attendance through such media is a far cry from physical attendance because of their obvious limitations only that it leaves them with a more manageable number of persons physically present to entertain.

Increasing Attendance of uninvitees: The prevailing situation of Nigeria's declining economy also has implication for many people being unable to put food on their tables and so on Fridays and Saturdays when the now fewer social gatherings of society hold, many of such people roam about in search of the ones without entry restrictions where they may be lucky to either get a served plate of food or some of the left overs by some of the guests. Apart from legitimately looking for the food to eat some of such uninvited guests are with the mission to also steal from unsuspecting guests by targeting items like phones purses and bags with other valuables which when they succeed to steal are sold at giveaway prices perhaps only for this sake of purchasing the next meal. Another set of uninvited guests at such gatherings are beggars who line up along the passage to the entrance of the venue of the gathering to beg or solicit for alms with yet another set of uninvited guests being the praise singers whom as guests either arrive or leave go after them drumming and singing their supposed praise in order to be given some money even though they do not even know the celebrant. Similarly, at weddings for instance, some women make small rosettes which they sell to guests as their personal source of income to make a living as well as freelance photographers who pretend at first to be one of official photographers of celebrants but whom in the end impose the photographs taken of guests on them for payment with the claim that they have

to earn a living. Interestingly, such women and photographer are usually not even known to the celebrants but they make money off them and at times partake in the entertainment served.

Postponing of gatherings: Some associations' meeting membership is based on being colleagues at work, same profession, former school, or same tribe that are solely funded through the payment of dues and levies by their members. To hold an end of year party for instance, members are levied sums of money to pay other than their regular monthly and other dues of which many members these days find difficult to afford, so, whenever it is not possible to raise enough money to host the event, usually being capital intensive in terms of the cost of food, drinks, venue and lots more, the party ends up being postponed which denies the people of the opportunity of the particular gathering.

Restricting the number of Invitees: Another strategy which celebrants of parties engage in order to have only the size of guests they are ready to gather for entertainment during an event is the restriction of the number of guests. Although this practise is alien to us with many Nigerians frowning at it and taking it take personal, it is a legitimate option. To succeed, a celebrant gives cards to the people invited which they must take along to the party venue for admission or entry into it while the people without such are denied entry. Since, typically, because Nigerians are used to inviting friends and family to accompany them when invited to parties, they are usually not happy and easily condemn the practice but could such people be justified considering the escalating prices of food items? A recent article on the inflation rate of food stuff between December 2022 and December, 2023 showed an increase rate of thirty three point ninety three percent (33.93%) contained in a Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics report(Izuaka, 2024) with the rate continuing to rise to forty percent (40%) in March 2024 (Kolawole, Nnorom, & Adegbesan, 2024).

Reducing one's membership of the associations' meetings: Being a member of any association has financial implications and without the payment of which one is referred to as a non-financial member which is not advisable because such a person is not entitled to all the benefits enjoyed by financial members. So, as part of the survival strategies in the ongoing economic down turn some Nigerians have withdrawn their membership of some associations to just the compulsory or basic ones with of course some obvious limitation to gather with the others.

Conclusion

Nigerians are generally a happy people with the zeal to fraternize with family, friends, colleagues, and other associates at various social gatherings like birthday anniversaries and wedding ceremonies as one of the sources of our strength as a nation aside providing us the additional avenue for the enhancement of societal communication regardless of being divided along

ethnic, political and religious lines. During such gatherings like football matches we all come together to wine and dine peaceably.

However, as such gatherings are gradually going extinct as a result of the declining economic situation in Nigeria there is urgent need to reverse the trend otherwise very soon Nigerians would no longer have anything else other than football to unite us as a people.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that the state of the economy is inflicting untold hardships on majority of Nigerians who have been losing hope on successive governments for some time now. Government at all levels alongside some individual Nigerians know what to do but for reasons best known to them would not do so. However, if willing, government could engage many strategies including:

- Reviewing the removal of fuel subsidy
- Eradicating the insecurity in the country to enable citizens go about their legitimate businesses freely and safely
- Reviewing the current tax reform laws to be more favourable
- Supporting entrepreneurs and small-scale business
- Increasing budgetary allocation to the key sectors of the economy like education, health and agriculture
- Eradicating corruption at all levels of governance with zero tolerance

Individuals at their levels could devise cost saving measures by reviewing some of their expenditures with regards to:

- Living more frugally by opting for more affordable means of clothing, transportation, electricity power generation, accommodation as well as engaging in in-house gardening with other sources of revenue creation at home like poultry, fishery and animal husbandry, joining cooperatives, teaming up with others to source for food from the grass roots where they are cheaper, engaging bulk purchase of some foodstuff while in season and avoiding involvement in any project or event that is not a priority.
- They should if they must host social gatherings keep them at a moderate budget level rather than wanting to outshine the performance of the others who have done same in the past; people should avoid spending money in competition with others, for example.

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