

Improving the Shrinking Circle of Societal Communication in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerians used to enjoy a very high rate of societal communication and well being through a vibrant living situation comprising of high business activities by individuals, massive transportation of people and goods across her land with much bustling and sights of people attending various occasions and association meetings until about half a decade ago. Nowadays, most of the activities that had other benefits but also enhanced much societal communication have witnessed an unprecedented decrease in occurrence and scope occasioned by insecurity in various forms and dimensions, bad governance and massive corruption with the looting of public funds resulting in a severe economic crisis, unemployment, massive relocation of Nigerians to other countries, poverty, killings, depression, suicide, stampede, and many more ills that have compelled majority of the citizens being affected to come up with several self-survival strategies including the reduction or total withdrawal of their membership of informal associations which before now they patronised a lot for their pleasure, fraternisation, to give back to society, for solace, moral or financial support, personal growth and a lot more benefits because subscribing to associations has now become unaffordable. The concern of this presentation, therefore, is to shade some light on the ugly development and to look into the ways by which associations, since government seems unperturbed, could revise particularly the rising poverty by engaging the description research design to obtain secondary data with personal discussion and observation. The conclusion here is that the associations to which people in society belong, being closer to them than government should step into the ailing situation with some measures against government's seeming unwillingness to alleviate the suffering and death of the poor masses while the recommendations put up include, the establishment of cooperative societies by associations in order to empower their members, training of their members to cultivate fruits, crops and vegetables at home, mobilising the unemployed among their members to acquire skills and urging members to patronise those with goods and services

Key words: Shrinking, Communication, Associations, Improving, Poverty

Introduction

Nigeria, a once vibrant robust and electric society bustling with different shades of gatherings for formal and informal purposes, religious fellowships and associations, tribal meetings, social club meetings, professional affiliations

as well as weddings, wedding anniversaries, retirement, survival, burial and burial anniversaries with countless other celebrations is getting quieter by the day seemingly courtesy of her shrinking or dwindling economy and other related situations of the country that are impeding on the quality of the communication needed for societal growth (Onjewu,2022).

A hitherto peaceful and economically vibrant country that was very appealing to foreigners and her nationals alike, is gradually becoming a ghost of itself being now not just a den of thieves, robbers, kidnappers cattle hustlers, bandits and Boko Haram insurgents alongside other forms of insurgency that have targeted people at gatherings like in churches, weddings and burial venues, or while on their way coupled with the fact the resources to host the gatherings are at the present rather too scarce and life is generally steadily becoming quieter and less eventful.

Such a development is devastating to majority of the Nigeria's populace who enjoy the fraternity accorded by the meetings of the associations that they belong to because although the country is naturally endowed with many resources to make everyone comfortable, such thought and reality have only been a mirage, since, the wealth of the nation has and continues to remain in the hands of a few citizens with collaboration with their foreign associates, so that majority of people have found solace in meetings and associations for survival and to come to the rescue of their family at the times of celebration or death. For instance, unlike in the western civilization, most Nigerians do not practise the culture of saving towards their burial which the family of most people cannot solely afford but for the contribution of tribal, religious and professional associations.

However, with the recent developments including hash economic policies and a gross lack of the protection of life and property by government that have resulted to both security and food crises at such high levels as never witnessed before as well as a seemingly bleak future, the average Nigerians who are in a dire need for basic survival are letting go many engagements, recreation and extracurricular activities of which their membership of associations seems the most affected as people openly discuss how they can no longer maintain their subscription of the associations due to financial constraints that makes it difficult to pay their dues and levies aside needing money to also transport themselves to attend the meetings, particularly.

Consequently and sadly, such Nigerians are being compelled by prevailing situations to retire to themselves with hopelessness, feeling dejected and with hardly other such sources of livelihood that everyone needs to live life to the fullest with the confidence that they have the means for survival in the case of eventualities with peace of mind, hope and happiness.

The scope of this article also includes a discussion of the crux of the matter being addressed here, formal and informal meetings, some evolving scenarios of informal associations in Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations.

The Crux of the Matter Here

From about half a decade ago, following the Covid 19 lock down era with the last and present dispensations in Nigeria, there has been heightened insecurity in the form of Boko Haram insurgence, Iswap invasion, unknown gun men attacks, headers versus farmers attacks, banditry, cattle rustling, ritual killing (Onjewu and Nwokolo, 2025), internet fraud and kidnapping leading to an unprecedented inflationary high living cost that is way beyond the average Nigerians, corruption at both high and low places as well as unemployment as government is not creating enough jobs while investors are being discouraged from coming to invest due to the insecurity situation (James, 2024) as a result, Nigerians are wallowing in poverty and hunger. According to Maclean and Auwal (2024) with also a World Bank (2025) publication, more than 87 million Nigerians live below the poverty line and Nigeria is the second poorest nation in the world. Therefore, as Nigeria is obviously experiencing her worst economic crisis ever, majority of her populace have no choice than to re-order their priorities with more attention being paid to basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and education against the back drop of other needs like joining new associations or regularly attending the ones they already belong to. In fact, many people are scaling down on the number of the associations that they previously belonged to because they no longer see the membership of association as priority but secondary need which calls for concern as it means that the people's source of recreation, financial, moral support and "insurance" is gradually being given up, unfortunately, not willingly but as one among the many survival strategies being imbibed, on the one hand while on the other hand many others have simply slumped and died from a supposed heart attack or have resorted to suicide as the means to just end it all because the present situation no doubt leads to much anxiety, emotional fatigue, depression and a feeling of hopelessness. Moreover, many more Nigerians have died from stampede during either free food sharing by churches and philanthropists or subsidised food buying from some organisations (Summers, 2024; Alli, 2024; Abamara & Ozongwu, 2024). The evolving situation consequently calls for attention in order to raise the necessary awareness for the right persons together with government intervention to reverse the ugly trend, otherwise, more deaths would be recorded in future from, hunger, poverty, disease, killing and stampede during free food sharing by churches or subsidised food buying and for how long more?

Formal and Informal Associations

In Nigeria, the working class is compelled to engage in certain kinds of associations within their work places, classified as formal which include the different levels of management or routine meetings with staff held as part of the day to day running of organisations that do not impose any dues or levies on

members. Formal associations also include bodies of various professionals that attract membership from both within and across different organisations that impose dues and levies on members. When such associations are domiciled within organisations, members often times agree that their dues are deducted from source, that is, from their salaries alongside other deductions including, payee, loan repayments and pension savings, which though might not be convenient but people just have to put up with such a practice in order not to default in their financial obligations to the associations. However, in the case of the associations across many organizations, members have to pay their obliged dues and levies via bank transfer or in cash physically during their gatherings which at times they may not have due to other compelling needs whereas their membership is rather compulsory for fulfilling their working requirements.

Meanwhile, formal meetings usually do not grant much financial support except occasional minimal moral support to members during good and bad times. On the whole, people join formal meetings by virtue of being staff of the places they work in order to satisfy the requirements to function well and progress on their jobs. For instance, in the Polytechnic sector of Nigeria, progression in terms of promotion from some ranks to the next requires the evidence of membership to professional bodies. Therefore, belonging to such meetings is not by choice but by compulsion.

Whereas informal associations which accommodate more persons approximated at 92% of the working age according to Maclean and Auwal (2024) are more diverse, ranging from church fellowships interdenominational fellowships, regional meetings at different levels, based on clans, dialects, tribes, Local Government Areas, states, geo-political levels and the like where the payment of monthly dues and levies are enforced with conditions that are stipulated in their constitutions or standing orders yet the people are quick to join them because the associations provide a great means of gathering together to socialise, sell their goods and services, share view on common interests, pursue some goals (Onjewu, 2000) and execute some personal or group projects as well as having access to financial and moral support during their happy and sad times which gives members some ease and "insurance" of some sort amidst the difficulties being experienced. Moreover, such meetings provide a great opportunity to strike some business deals or to secure appointments between members. Hence, informal meetings are a safe haven for members, for example, some of them give loans to members with less stringent conditions than the banks, mobilise the relocation of members when they retire and support their families to bury them at their passing, visit and give financial support during illness and child birth amongst several other benefits so long as the members concerned as well as other members are financially up to date in the payment of their dues and levies. The membership of informal meetings cuts across the educated or not, different professionals and artisan with very minimal qualification for membership such as being born within a geographical location or belonging to a faith family.

Emerging Characteristics of Informal Associations

Hitherto, informal meetings in Nigeria were very robust and popular. On mostly the second Sunday of every month, members could be seen crisscrossing from the nooks and crannies of most towns and villages, colourfully adorned in uniform attires whether literate or illiterate, professional or artisan and rich or poor using different transportation modes to arrive at the venues for congregation, to hold their meetings and share refreshments with the execution of projects in their immediate environments and their home towns. However, the sights and sounds of such sites have become less ostentatious these days, for some reasons attributable to the high cost of living that makes it difficult to afford basic needs talk less of belonging to and attending association meeting which consequently and presently experience the following trends among others:

Default in the payment of dues and levies by members

As a result of unemployment because many companies and government parastatals are scaling down their staff strength in order to fight the prevailing economic meltdown coupled with insecurity that has compelled many to stop farming as their main or additional source of income, many people are unable to afford the payment of the prescribed dues and levies demanded by their associations whereas no such association can survive without the financial support of their members for the hosting of their meetings as well as satisfying their obligations to members and communities. Meanwhile, every association has laid down rules for dealing with defaulters that emphasize on members financial obligation and stipulate the period of default that disqualifies them either from being members or from not getting some benefits. Such a situation is detrimental to such members because it defeats people's aim of joining the associations and discourages them apart from making them sad.

Dwindling membership

Also as a result of the inability to fund their financial obligations to associations, many members have been disqualified or left on their own while the many others who should have joined find it difficult to do so because for now because many people are barely surviving on meagre earnings that is hardly adequate for their family's basic needs which makes such people see the membership of associations as too much luxury for now. Recently, Maryam James, a food vendor in a personal discussion with me lamented over her reduced patronage by her customers with the difficulty she was experiencing to make ends meet and hence her decision to quit all the associations she had registered with until further notice.

Truancy

Some association members have resorted to playing truancy as a means to cope with the high transportation cost to the venues of their meeting which makes them to attend the meetings irregularly, for instance, only once in every three or four months. No doubt, doing so is detrimental to associations' growth

depending on the extent of involvement of such people in decision-making, the positions they hold in the association and their roles in the execution of projects. Also, for instance, if such people are given assignments which is pending until whenever they are able to attend meetings it might not enhance the progress of the association or if they are in possession of some useful information needed for decision making but are absent and unreachable on phone.

Inability of associations to meet their obligations to members

The inability of majority of members to fulfill their financial obligations to their associations directly impacts on the people themselves while also rendering such associations unable to fulfill their obligations at times even to non defaulting members which may lead to mistrust and bad blood between the affected members and executive committee members of associations which when not carefully managed could be detrimental to the progress and well being of such associations. In the same vein, such associations may also not be able to fulfil their obligations to affiliate associations and may be proscribed or forced to close down.

Charging unrealistic month dues and levies

Whereas, most of the Nigerian populace is living from hand to mouth, many association are raising the amount being paid as to them as dues and levies because of the claim that the existing amounts being charged are inadequate to meet up their obligations whereas the members' incomes are not being increased which is also now another reason for people opting out of associations that results to poor funding of such association.

Lack of accountability and corruption among association managements

Some executive committee members of associations are corrupt in the discharge of their duties which makes them not to be transparent with regards to their income and expenditures, rigging the elections to their positions and involving themselves in misappropriation of funds as well as misuse of their positions for privileges not due to them which causes displeasure among members coupled with a chain of reactions that could lead to black mailing or back biting with other dire consequences that are also detrimental to the survival and growth of associations.

Poor leadership styles of association managements and uncooperative attitudes of members

Some key persons in the managements of association at times are highhanded, unkind and uncooperative to the plight of majority of their members by engaging only in the decisions that they would personally benefit from. In such a case, if some members have a choice, they would transfer to a similar organisation or simple withdraw their membership or they may remain in the associations for as long as it takes only to make trouble while refusing to service their obligations.

Conclusion

The declining situation of the membership of informal associations in Nigeria needs redemption in order to reverse the trend because if more people have no access to the associations in order to have the benefits and to cushion the effects of the economic and food crises being experienced, individuals and the society would become more impoverished, continue to experience less growth and the development that happens more when people interact positively. As the retrogression of individual members experienced impacts on their communities and the Nigerian society at large because the more peoples' frustration levels would heighten and there could be more reported cases of death, depression and suicide among other worse consequences.

Recommendations

Hence, Alli (2024) cites Rafsanjani, in a statement issued following a series of stampedes in Nigeria where he stated that the government appeared unconcerned about the realities on ground which is a situation that has not changed. Hence, the onus to help the poor Nigerian populace falls on others including the Managements of associations who are obviously closer to their members and also understand their peculiarities better than government. Fortunately, there is much that they could do in order to alleviate the suffering and reduce the poverty level of their members, including the engaging following approaches:

Establishment of cooperative societies by leveraging on their membership strength and existing documents to qualify. By so doing, they could enable their members to get soft loans to establish their own businesses or boost their existing businesses while others could be employed to manage the cooperative society.

Some associations with indigent members have stacks of money left untouched in their bank accounts from which part could be used to buy food in bulk when in season to store and later when their prices have become exorbitant, sell to their members at subsidised rates.

Moreover, from time to time, managements of associations could buy commodities in bulk to sell to members also at subsidised rates. By so doing members would be enabled to save some money from their feeding that could be committed to other needs.

Another way to empower members by their associations is by organising talks or short seminars or workshops to be delivered to them during their meetings to teach them about measures to improve their well-being and wealth creation from the comforts of their homes. For instance, such talks could feature in-house cultivation of fruits, crops and vegetables, fish farming, poultry, soap making, food processing, drinks with snack making, and lots more, all of which could be for both sale and family consumption

Additionally, skills acquisition sensitisation programmes could be sponsored either fully or partly or organised by associations for their unemployed members or those wishing to acquire additional skills to empower them better in order to have sources of livelihood and invariable afford to pay their financial obligation to their association

Occasionally, free health checks could be organised for members leveraging on those of them in the medical profession for diagnosis and counselling purposes since, many members of the Nigerian population can no longer afford to go to hospitals for proper medical diagnosis and treatment.

Whenever, associations need to take far reaching decisions, their managements should endeavour to carry as much of their members as along as possible to enable everyone to understand the situation, feel a sense of belonging and to earn everyone's commitment towards the success of the decision taken, for instance, increasing subscription and levies should not done unilaterally but with the involvement of all members.

In view of the fact that people's remuneration are not being increased as much as the inflation rate, any increase in subscription and levies by associations should be reasonable and such that could easily be considered realistic by majority of their members.

Managements of associations should encourage the patronage of their members' goods and services in order to increase their patronage, enable them to make more profit and earn more money for their sustenance and payment of their obligation to their associations.

Whereby possible, associations could appeal to members with means of transportation to assist those without such by bringing them to their meetings while also ensuring that their meetings are held in places that are easily accessible to most members in order to enhance meeting attendance.

The choice of meeting venues must be carefully done bearing in mind the security of members and the meetings shouldn't last for too long until dark to enable members return home in good time.

Management of meetings must be transparent handling their funds and prudent in their expenses. From observation, many executive committees do not present the statement of account of their association as regularly as it is stated in their constitution or standing orders which promotes mistrust and suspicion among their members.

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