



Encouraging community welfare through social work for community sustainability in Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, the poor, elderly, disabled, students, orphans, vulnerable children, as well as other categories of disadvantaged and underprivileged persons constitute a major segment of communities. These individuals need some form of support through social welfare in enabling them handle or cope with socio-economic problem and living condition. Indeed, supporting disadvantaged and less privileged people in the community in transforming and enhancing their well-being becomes of utmost importance, as they are capable of making significant contribution to the economic, social-cultural as well as environment sustainability of communities. However, identifying as well as addressing socio-economic and environmental issues as well as the needs of individuals (especially, the less privileged), requires social work practice. Thus, the study examines community welfare through social work for community sustainability in Nigeria. Notably, welfare programmes through social work is pivotal to the sustainability of communities in Nigeria, as communities and their social systems supports in shaping the lives of individuals who inhabits it. However, it was revealed that welfare services are not fully carried out with the support of skilled as well as knowledgeable social workers in communities in Nigeria. Therefore, the need for encouraging community welfare through social work for community sustainability in Nigeria.

Keywords: welfare, community, social work, sustainability

Introduction

Globally, communities contend with diverse set of environmental, economic and social challenges. These challenges span across health, safety, diversity, inequality, human rights, population, education, pollution, unemployment, portable water, energy, hunger, homelessness, crime, poverty, deforestation and climate change just to mention but few, and to a very great extent threaten the environmental, economic and socio-cultural existence as well as survival of man inhabiting communities. For instance, human continuous disturbance to the habitat through deforestation and pollution, often leads to changes in the stratosphere as it leads to climate change, unsafe drinkable water and poor air quality which becomes a threat to life. Buttressing, Turner cited in Shende, Janbandhu and Patil (2015) ^[20] inform that humans' operations in the past two centuries have drastically changed the earth's surface, ocean as well as the stratosphere in ways that, generation in the 21st century need to be wary about Malthusian claim of the finite nature of the earth and the unrestrained population growth and its effects on limited natural resources.

As observed, humans' quest for economic development in relation to continuous resource exploitation causes more changes to the ecosystem in recent years, with devastating effects on ecosystem as well as biodiversity. This, reported in decline in aquatic lives resulting from ocean acidification as well as global warming, which increase in the rates of extinction of aquatic species between 100-1000 time (Gurria, 2019). More so, emission from coal as well as gas, portend danger to humans' health as they result in air and land pollution in cities and communities around the globe. These necessitate the need for sustainable living. Boyer, Peterson, Arora and Caldwell (2016) view social issues as the key aspect of sustainability discourse, as all other aspects hinge on the connection between social and the

natural, as humans are one of the core inhabitants of the environment.

Notably, human society involve diverse sets of individuals differentiated on the basis of social class, occupation, age, income, sex, tribes as well as ethnic, race, religion and so on. These conditions inherently found in humans often results in unequal treatment, as individuals are often discriminated on the basis of social condition and such, leads to inequalities with devastating consequences in communities around the world. As stated, inequality results in millions of lives lose occasioned by insufficient health care provision, while also within 15 to 20 percent of children in developed countries, grow up into poverty (WHO; UNICEF in Hoffer, Laiberte & Gross, 2013) ^[6]. Poverty, hunger, gender, education, gender inequalities are issues of concern limiting humans' ability in achieving sustainable community development. According to Fosu cited in Hoffer *et al.* (2013) ^[6], high initial levels of inequality limit the effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty while growing inequality increases poverty directly for a given level of growth. This to a very large extent hinders economic growth and environmental sustainability of communities.

Observably, effort aimed at tackling the human cost associated with economic pursuit anchors on improvement in living condition, health, safety, fair labour practice, wellness, human rights, diversity, equity, empowerment, community engagement, philanthropy, volunteerism etc.

Unarguably, the poor, elderly, disabled, students, unpaid workers like mothers and other caregivers, as well as other category of disadvantaged and underprivileged people constitute a major segment of the communities and all have unmet need. These individuals need some form of support through social welfare in order to enable them handle or cope with social problem or living condition. Although, countries of the world all encounter social and economic

issues like poverty, health, inequalities and so on, however, the number of people living with less than an equivalent of a dollar in Africa become alarming, as report indicates that 42 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, surprisingly accommodates 25 percent of those living in extreme poverty around the world (UNDP, 2004) ^[22]. With this, it is likely that the next generation of sub-Saharan Africans cannot meet their basic needs. Thus, futuristic thinking and acting in relation to the well-being of future generations as well as designing a society, economy and community that caters for all are basis upon which sustainable living can be developed for the next generation. United Nation Sustainable Development Goals 1-4 and 10, specifically aimed at zero hunger and poverty, as well as good health and well-being, quality education and reduced inequalities (United Nation Development Programme, 2015) ^[23]. Indeed, supporting disadvantaged and less privileged in the community in transforming and enhancing their well-being becomes of utmost importance in achieving sustainable community.

Observably, communities in Nigeria had long ago practice the customs and traditions of rendering help to the poor, sick, elderly and disable individuals. This shown in the traditions of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa ethnic nationalities, although, social welfare was pioneered by the Salvation Army, as far back as 1925 (Irele, 2011) ^[8], in a bid of addressing the prevailing social challenges.

In Nigeria, reports indicate that about 54 percent of the nation's population live in poverty, out of this number, 22 percent is considered "extremely poor" in spite of steady economic growth (Holmes, Akinrimisi, Morgan & Buck, 2012) ^[7]. Occasioned by poverty, income inequality is on the increase in Nigeria. As stated in United Nation Development Programme, 65 percent of the investment in the country is owned by less than 22 percent of the nation's population. Observably, inequality in income and asset distribution, unequal access to basic infrastructure and services and social-cultural norms are major contributors to poverty, vulnerability and inequality in the country (UNDP, 2009) ^[23]. Notably, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), children under the age of five, disabled, the elderly, just to mention but few, are among the most vulnerable in the country, thus, the need for social support in achieving its development's plan of the nation.

Although, social protection has been a major concern in Nigerian, as government often develops policies and programmes in education, health, infrastructure and microcredits for empowerment in a bid of eradicating poverty as well as inequality, however, NGOs and community based organization become part of promoting "welfarism", as they make efforts in enhancing the social wellbeing of less privilege and disadvantage group in remote communities in Nigeria. For instance, Young Women Christian Association, Lion's club as well as Rotary clubs just to mention but few, render philanthropic services to the poor, elderly, disabled individuals, homeless children, children and other categories of disadvantage and less privilege people, through programmes aimed at reducing poverty, illiteracy as well as employment (Oduaran cited in Irele, 2011) ^[8]. Indeed, building or establishing an inclusive environment wherein those in need as well as the less privileged feel integrated and get empowered, require knowledge and expertise, as such experience and knowledge will easily solve social issues and bring lasting change in the

community. This experiences and education is mainly acquired through engagement in social work.

Social work, identifies and addresses the needs of the elderly, poor, destitute as well as other category of less privileged people, congregate communal members in forming social movement wherein social issues like poverty and inequalities is tackled, it develops community awareness, identifies and develops leaders, provide adult education, as well as enhances communities' capacity, through the development, analysis as well as implementation of policies and programmes. As noted, the practice of social work has been in existence around the world, though, its practice in Nigeria on a wider scale is traceable to the period of the Nigeria civil war (Alamu, 2022). Noting, the promulgation of decree 12 in 1974, which established charitable practice as an aspect of social development directorate, supports its existence (Mbah cited in Alamu, 2022).

Notably, studies exist on community welfare, social work as well as community sustainability in Nigeria, however, none in particular is found in examining the relationship existing among community welfare, social work and community sustainability in Nigeria. Against, this background, the study examines community welfare and social work for community sustainability in Nigeria.

Community Welfare

Differing views exist in explaining the concept of community across discipline, though, some are similar, others have little differ. Notably, community from sociological perspective, refers to a social group within a society that share similar culture, norms, values as well as status, and may participate in organizing social life within a given location, or may be bound by a sense of belonging sustained over time and space (Zuleyka, 2016). Communities provide people with rich social personal lives. They shape the way we think and act. Community surround us with values and norms of behaviour, explicit law and unwritten rules of conduct.

As observed, Theodore (2005) ^[21] categorized community using two labels in the form of "territory-based" and "territory-free". The territory-free community is simply referred to as social groupings or networks, for instance, the internet community, academic community as well as business community just to mention but few. Although, different scholars view the concept of community according to their discipline, a common characteristic found among all, is the interaction taken place among inhabitants. Humans through interaction, generate ideas, information, suggestions to problems affecting their well-being as well as living condition in the community. Observably, humans' relationship and interactions with friends, colleagues, family as well as other persons in the community have significant influence in their overall well-being, as such interaction often exposes challenges and dangers beyond one's control, thus, resulting to assistance in form of social support for improvement in individuals' wellbeing (welfare).

Hayes (2022) ^[5] views welfare as diverse programs carried out by the government aimed at giving financial or other support to persons or group of individuals unable to assist themselves during difficult periods of their lives. Observably, governments in most nations, especially in Europe and the U.S funds welfare through collection of taxes, as beneficiaries are handed food stamps, vouchers, or

direct payment either on every fortnight or on monthly basis, though qualification for receipt differs on several factors like income level as well as family size (Haye, 2022)^[5]. It is a conscious and organized effort of either government or non-governmental organization or individuals (philanthropists) aimed towards the well-being of the members of a community. Although, government do engage on welfare programmes to a large extent, individuals as well as NGOs had being long ago rendering charitable contributions to the poor in the community.

Helping one another in the society becomes a special attributes possessed by man and such, distinguishes humans from other animals. This often regarded as social welfare. Community welfare also known as social welfare is seen as an arrays of well-coordinated activities carried out by voluntary and governmental agencies, aimed towards preventing, alleviating or contributing solutions to social issues, or improving the welfare of individuals, groups as well as communities (National Association of Social Workers, cited in Ogbonna, 2017)^[15]. Irele (2011)^[8] views community welfare as an organized community response aimed at supporting the social wellbeing of its members in the form of caring for their physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and economic problems. This, seen through the provision of homes to the motherless as well as the aged, timely payment of pensions to the aged, provision of portable drinkable water, provision of employment opportunities, establishment of skills acquisition centres as well as provision of quality education to indigent members, disabled, mentally deranged, children, adult women of the community.

Welfare services in the community spans through major areas of concerns, as it focuses on family welfare, child welfare, youth welfare, welfare of the elderly, group welfare, sick and disabled welfare, mentally ill welfare. Observably, family goes through a lot of marital and economic issues capable of causing disunity if left unaddressed, thus the need for family welfare, in addressing the issues facing family peaceful existence. This, achieved through the provision of marriage counselling, maternal as well as prenatal and infant care programmes, family planning program, family life education and so on. The aim is to enhances family ties as well as improvement in home economics, as there exist children born out of wedlocks, broken families and the likes, which eventually results in abuse and neglect instead of love and nurture. Buttressing, Travis, Lizano and Barak cited in Nwokolu-Nte and Onyge (2020)^[13] observed that divorce renders the family weak in terms of inability to protect children. Similarly, provision of financial assistance to disadvantaged children probably ensures basic security of the family structure. In addition, child health care programmes obtained through welfare becomes of absolute importance to community, as it addresses rampant disease as well as high rate of infant and maternal mortality, which eventually leads to sustainable community.

Notably, welfare services to the elderly is culturally rooted and highly revered in Nigerian communities, although as observed, the family is seen as the most vital support for the elderly, as elderly individuals mostly rely on the family for economic and emotional assistance (Anda & Marcus, 2016). In addition, emphasis on the welfare of older individuals in regards to health has been prioritize by international organizations. Accordingly, World Health Organization in

its policy, on “healthy aging”, emphasizes the need for action across multiple sectors, in enabling older people remain a resource to their families, communities and economies (World Health Organization, 2018)^[26], and is attainable by promoting physical activities. However, assistance and support to the less privilege as well as the disadvantaged in the community requires the help of professionals in social work practice.

Social Work

Social work is seen as an organized profession aimed at giving or assisting individuals, group and community in achieving better standard of living, as well as assist them sustain themselves through diverse professional strategies (Dhavaleshwar, 2016)^[2]. In other words, it is a professional activity aimed at assisting individuals, groups as well as communities improve or restore their capability for social operations, and develop conditions necessary in attaining the said goal. More so, International Federation of Social Workers (2014), view social work as a practice oriented profession as well as an academic discipline aimed at promoting social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment as well as freedom of people. Accordingly, the core of social work hinges on the principle of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity. Notably, Boehm cited in Kuruvilla and Sathyamurthy (2015)^[9] viewed restoration of impaired capacity, provision of resources and prevention of social malfunctioning, as the main activities or functions of social work.

As opined by Payne (2005)^[18], social work transformed disadvantaged and down-trodden individuals in communities, as it empowers them actively engaged in the process of mutual co-operation and learning; it as well, maintains social order by a way of meeting individual needs in time of hardships, thereby making individual recover and become stable. In addition, Dominelli (2009), viewed the roles of social work with regards to maintenance, therapeutic and emancipatory roles. As stated, the maintenance role of social work aims at enhancing humans’ functioning as well as how they adapt to situation based on support on the basis of well stated criteria, the therapeutic role dwells on individual’s capability in enhancing his/her condition through the assistance of targeted professional while the emancipatory role deals with radical social work and challenges the present balance of power in society as well as share of resources, of which the essence is to support individuals and as well, realize structuring change. These roles are executed by professional often regarded as social workers.

Social workers are professionals who often execute or carry out different roles at different time through their practice and the roles played by the professionals as stated by Dhavaleshwar (2016)^[2] often make them act in the capacity of - caseworker, group worker, community organizer, need analyser, project manager, facilitator, middle manager and counsellor. For instance, in terms of community development, the social practitioner starts by organizing community on various social challenges, the essence of which is to ensure a fit between available resources and societal issues or objectives for the purpose of actualizing the need. Also, social workers facilitate in the distribution of aids provided by government, NGOs and other relevant donors and ensure that none of the beneficiaries, most

especially the less privileged are left out from benefitting. Noting, social group work entails internal and external mobilization of resources for effective functioning of the group (Kuruville & Sathyamurthy, 2015) ^[9]. Social workers employ a range of intervention skills at each level in order to alleviate large and complex problems face by communities. Intervention can range from the protection of an individual community member to safeguarding the economic and environmental wellbeing and safety of residents, rebuilding the community spirit and livelihoods of residents and employing strategies for mitigating any order present or future occurrence. Research has shown that the down trodden or the poor within the society are the worst heat in any disaster because their socio-economic situation is generally unreliable. Base on this, issues of social and economic justice should be the central to service delivery during the disaster and post disaster. In order that services should get to all. In other words, in certain cases the opinions of the community becomes of utmost importance, as they ensure easy identification as well as mobilization of communal resources. This create the need for participation between members of the community as well as the professional social workers. (Kuruville & Sathyamurthy, 2015) ^[9].

Koyenikan and Ikharea (2014) describe participation as a contribution to predetermined programmes and project, thereby enabling people to develop skills and abilities to make decisions and actions essential to their development. Participation according to Samuel (2014) implies voluntary joint activities of people in economic and social activities which affects their lives. Participation is one of the three elements of community development. Participation is the real core of community development in that any group activity which does not include an aspect of human participation by member of the group in its programme cannot be regarded legitimately as community development. (Onyeozu 2007) ^[17] It is through participation that beneficiary of any development programme have input into the priority setting, planning, implementation and evaluation of such development programmes designed to improve their standard of living. Incorporating the less privilege as well as the disadvantage or beneficiaries in participating on social welfare programmes, ensures easy identification of needs as well as enhances welfare plans, implementation as well as evaluation for ensuring community sustainability, as social sustainability according to World Bank (Nd) promotes social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable through empowerment, cohesiveness, resilience, and as well, making institutions accessible and accountable to the members of the community.

Community sustainability

Globally, attention has been drawn to the concept of sustainability, as scholars, environmentalists, as well as researchers often presents it in conferences, research articles, books as well as academic discourse. Sustainability implies meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation in meeting their needs. this linked to the increasing demands of the current communities, in addition to those of the future, in order to sustain quality welfare and conserve the basic key systems in the future.

Sachs cited in Maynar, Vidigal, Farage, Zandonad, Nakano and Botelho (2020) views it as an integration of actions

towards environmental, social, and economic concern. Notably, environmental sustainability emphasizes on how communities can share vital organic need like habitation, food, clean energy, access to water as well as open space in a manner that considers life support systems, cycles of nature, biodiversity as well as ecosystem. Thus, emphasis on the preservation of ecosystem, biodiversity and natural resources from depleting as well as misuse (Najja, 2022) ^[12]. As stated, environmental sustainability deals on the physical as well as social conditions around humans and can either be objective or subjective and involves water bodies and the life there in, land mass, forests, grasslands, deserts, animals and man himself and all the interactions that take place (Gana & Toba, 2015) ^[4]. Thus, is the responsibility of humans to protect and preserve these resources for future generations.

Similarly, economic community sustainability implies practices aims at supporting future economic growth of communities without compromising or negatively effecting the social, environmental as well as cultural aspects of communities. Buttressing, Najja (2022) ^[12] views economic sustainability in terms of prosperity, commerce, ecological technologies, innovative environmental norms and regulations of green trade and industry. In other words, economic sustainability of communities emphasizes on producing goods or rendering services that will help consumers live a sustainable zero-waste lifestyle, as well as minimizes ecological damage or disruptions for future generations. While economic and environmental sustainability are seen as the goals for sustainable development and instruments to its achievement, social sustainability is viewed as the finality of development (Assefa & Frostell, 2007). Social sustainability centres around the idea of equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation, sharing, cultural identity, and institutional stability.

Chu (2003) view social sustainability on the basis of humans' centred interpretation and is seen as activities aimed at enhancing humans' wellbeing and equitable distribution of resources while limiting social exclusion as well as devastating conflict. Although, emphasis on human's wellbeing and equitable distribution is key to social sustainability, however, humans' activities and operations while pursuing economic development are often restrained in order to be at par with the physical limit of the planet carrying capacity through changes in social structure, values as well as norms in communities. This, Chu (2003) views as the environmental oriented approach of social sustainability. Corroborating, Najji (2022) ^[12] extends the social aspect of sustainability and include Cultural-historical dimension. As opines, culture denotes communal identity while history is seen as the lens through which community reads its stories, customs, traditions, events, festivals, feasts, marks and symbols. The cultural-historical dimension aims at understanding and sustaining communities' culture and history, in order to preserve them as much as possible while also community's modernization (Najja, 2022) ^[12].

Sustainable communities are communities seen to be environmentally friendly in terms of efficiency in resource usage and preservation; inclusion of various category or group of people (including the marginalize and less privilege member) into developmental plan as well as service, aimed at eliminating extreme poverty as well as ensuring prosperity for all locally, regionally and

internationally as enshrined in the sustainable development goal of 2030. As observed, sustainable communities are communities who do well in maintaining a balance between overlapping values of environmental quality, economic viability as well as social viability.

Community Welfare, Social work and community sustainability in Nigeria

Sustainability community is achievable when all members of the community is integrated into the economic as well as social viability and environmental quality of sustainable plan. However, integrating all and sundry implies involving the elderly, sick, refugee (internally displaced people), disable, mentally deranged, children, care-givers as well as other disadvantaged and less privileged members of the community as they are considered an integral part in achieving sustainable community. For instance, the experience of the elderly is considered of absolute importance when proffering solutions to communal issues and challenges, as their experience will result in the achievement of lasting peace and communal security which will further foster sustainable development of communities. Hence, the need for community welfare through social work for community sustainability.

Notably, welfare programmes through social work is pivotal to the sustainability of communities in Nigeria, as communities and their social systems supports in shaping the lives of individuals who inhabits it. Thus, the need for social workers to be actively engaged in happenings in communities. For instance, most communities in Nigeria experienced air and water pollution, oil spillage, toxic waste disposal, indiscriminate garbage disposal, terrorism and community violence as well as other category of naturally occurring events like flood, and hurricane, landslide and so on. These events either caused by humans or natural occurrence have significant impact on the biological and psychological health of inhabitants of affected communities in Nigeria. Provision of humanitarian aid requires the roles and skills of social workers in collaboration with residents of affected communities, the aim of which is to ensure environmental as well as social sustainability. However, studies have shown that welfare service are not fully carried out with the support of skilled as well as knowledgeable social workers in communities in Nigeria. As observed, the involvement of professional social workers in social work intervention in solving problems of the Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria is almost non-existent (Aliche, 2018) ^[1]. Although, churches, communities, non-governmental organizations as well as special centres provide relief items to victims of insurgency in IDP camps, in addition, distribute food items and provide health services and other humanitarian services with the help of the government, it has been observed that, in most cases, there are handful of experienced and skilled workers in the field while majority of the workers engaged, are inexperienced and lack the basic skills and knowledge required to perform on the field. Thus, the need to encourage community welfare programme through the support of professionally trained social workers in performing humanitarian service in IDP camps in communities in Nigeria. This will identify the problems, needs as well as provide empowerment for those affected environmental, social and economic sustainability of communities in Nigeria.

In addition, as observed, the elderly through their wealth of experience contributes meaningfully to the peaceful coexistence of most communities in Nigeria, however, as observed, care for the elderly in communities in Nigeria are hardly seen or inadequately available unless for small percentage of elderly persons that work and retire in public establishment who depend on their pension for survival. This negates what is obtainable in other climes around the world. For instance, report shows that different kinds of community-based day care for the elderly in the form of "care that provides rehabilitation" aimed at enhancing the physical ability of the elderly through an individual programme worked out by professionals (occupational therapist) exist in Sweden (Tolle 'n, Frederiksson & Kamwendo cited in Okoye, 2013) ^[16]. Similarly, in Britain, many paid "volunteers" (often women) perform many helping functions for the elderly at very low wages with reimbursement by the local social services department. This can be replicated in Nigeria with the help of trained social workers in order to utilize the knowledge and experience of the elderly for community sustenance.

More so, as observed, people with disabilities in Nigeria struggle to make a living despite the fact that they have illness and loss of income as a result of inadequate measures provided by government as well as other NGOs in catering for their needs (World Health Organization, 2010) ^[26]. As opined by Lang and Upah (2008) ^[10], inaccessible public building, inaccessible transportation system, inadequate access to micro finance as well as banking services hinders the social inclusion of people living with disability in Nigeria. In addition, rehabilitating people with disability for effective contribution to community sustainability as well as national development requires effective education and related services in an atmosphere of inclusiveness which guarantees equal access to programme and services. However, factors such as absence of support services, relevant materials as well as support personnel becomes a major barrier in the execution of effective inclusiveness of students living with disability (Eleweke, 2016) ^[3]

Sustainable community development through social welfare must not only rely on the expertise and knowledge of trained social workers but must incorporate the contribution of communities' input in the administrative and policy making process. This brings about community empowerment as well as the development of community structures, resources, and skills, and employment of community organizing strategies for the purpose of creating awareness, realization, and the analysis of people in relation to their realities and situations, thereby giving them the opportunity to swing into action in providing solutions to the situations (Rinkel & Power, 2017). Hence, participation becomes the key aspect of sustainable community in Nigeria, as community members will be better abreast with their social-economic and environmental realities, in order to make meaning contributions in addressing such issues.

Notably, in Nigeria, it has been observed that elderly women participate in community welfare activity through constant interaction with children from the day of birth for the purpose of inculcating sound cultural values, as well as institutional wisdom. The essence of this hierarchical transmission of knowledge is to stabilize the future of the younger generation as well as preservation of cultural identity. This ensures cultural-historical sustainability of communities.

Conclusion

The environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability of communities in Nigeria, depends on the contribution of all members (including the strong, weak, rich, poor, elderly, disable, intelligent, children, mentally ill and other categories of less privileged and disadvantaged) in the community. However, the less privileged and indigent members of the community cannot make meaningful contribution to sustainable community development due to their psycho-physical imbalance, hence the need for community welfare. Community welfare helps the social wellbeing of individuals in the community by a way of caring for their physical, emotional, mental, spiritual as well as economics challenges, most especially the less privilege as well as disadvantage members of the community. This achieved through social work practice and active participation members of the community. Thus, the study examines community welfare and social work for community sustainability in Nigeria. Although, several community welfare service exist in Nigeria in ensuring sustainability, however, finding from studies indicates that the programmes are fully implemented with the support of professionally trained social workers. Hence, encouraging community welfare through social work for environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability of communities in Nigeria.

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