

Press Release

Why Citizen Engagement is a game changer for national development and very critical for maintaining national security?

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Today, in an increasingly interconnected world, citizen engagement can have a great impact on development outcomes. However, it's not a technical process that can be replicated independently of its socio-political, cultural and even geographical context. Around the world, we have seen that when citizens are engaged, when they participate, they can improve policymaking and service delivery by government, of-course, when government has a sound economic policy.

History has shown that engaging citizens has led to more sustainable, open and just governance. Whether formally integrated in documents such as the Magna Carta and the Code Napoleon, or informally presented at local levels, the concept of citizen engagement is widely global. Going back in history, the first Islamic State has based its "Medina compact" on a social contract whereby it clearly explains the nature of collaboration and accord between the citizens and the state, shaping the relationship governing them. World Bank also draws on a long history of advancing governance reforms, on multi-stakeholder engagement, citizen participation, social accountability, and government transparency. An important development was the establishment in 2012 of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), to enable civil society organizations to work together with their governments to solve difficult governance problems using citizen engagement and social accountability mechanisms. The 2017 World Bank World Development Report, on Governance and the Law, also highlights the importance of creating the space for citizens to affect government policies. The Report focuses on the determinants of policy effectiveness, exploring how policies for security, growth and equity can more effectively achieve their goals by taking the underlying drivers that influence governance into account. Given the complex landscape of citizen

feedback with so many experiments underway around the world, the time is ripe now for Nigerian Government to look at citizen engagement holistically as a game changer for national development and very critical for maintaining national security.

History and definition of Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement agenda opens the door for investing in those processes that will empower people. Like mentioned earlier, the concept of citizen engagement is thoroughly global. Kin-based societies from East Africa to the Amazonian rainforest have traditionally made decisions by consensus and persuasion rather than by top-down diktat. Some 2,500 years ago the city-state of ancient Athens rose to unprecedented political and economic power by giving its citizens direct voice and an active role in civic governance. The city's uniquely participatory system of democracy helped unleash the creativity of the Athenian people and channel it in ways that produced the greatest good for the society as a whole. Importantly, the system grew organically from Athenians own needs, beliefs and actions - it was as much a spirit of governance as a set of rules or laws.

Countries that are not democracies, such as China, have also sought out forms of citizen engagement. Government officials can be subjected to informal rules and norms created by community solidarity groups that have earned high moral standards in the community. These solidarity groups establish and enforce public obligations that everyone in the community, officials as well as citizens, are expected to follow. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa also have their own forms of citizen engagement, which vary greatly from one society to another. The Medina Compact social contract mentioned earlier is a common feature of many Muslims today - particularly Arab societies, throughout, which is refer to as the 'shura' often translated as "consultative assembly."

All in all, there is no one blue print or template for citizen engagement. However, it is indeed basic to all nations today because the "raison d'être" of any democratic government is "people." By this, governments derive their authority and power from the people. Governments hence have an obligation, and not just the discretion, to respond to their needs. In a democracy such as ours, citizens have both the right and the responsibility to be law abiding and to demand accountability and to ensure that government acts in the best interests of the people, with the form of integrity, fairness, justice and equal opportunities for all.

The responsiveness of government to citizen voice is a key for any positive change to occur. While citizen engagement includes consultation, cooperation, participation and empowerment, these are all a “one-way interaction.” As such, there must be clear and efficient mechanisms by government to answer citizens’ voice. At the end, the objective of civic engagement is to enhance the accountability of the government and service providers, thus closing the “feedback loop.” Thus, citizen engagement is to be understood as the right of people to define the public good, determine policies by which they seek the good, and reform or replace institutions that do not serve that good. And therefore, drawing on the World Bank and others’ recent work, we will define citizen engagement as the two-way interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector that give citizens a stake in decision-making, with the objective of improving development outcomes.

Citizen engagement can take place at multiple levels, at the community level, at a local government level, at the sector, state or national level. It is highly embedded in the nature of the political and governance context and in existing power relations, or the local context. It needs to be understood as a core component of any governance system. It requires active participation of both citizens and decision makers, and is an integral part of governance processes, above and beyond individual projects or one-off feedback. Though, it is not a panacea; certain conditions need to be in place for citizen engagement to have a development impact, like what tools and approaches are available, the crucial role of context, and a wide range of other factors to measuring its success, including the utilization of information and communication technology (ICT). Technology can greatly increase the scalability and reach of Citizen Engagement programs, as well as increase efficiency and reducing participation costs.

Citizen Engagement can reduce poverty and improve well-being of marginalized communities?

Citizen engagement is not the state against citizens or citizens against the state. Many citizen engagement approaches focus on building supportive pro-accountability networks across “state” and “society”. The approaches need to be tailor-made, designed to fully utilize the inherent economic challenges and opportunities, increase economic viability and address the problem of low-incomes in order to bring prosperity to the people and create wealth.

Discussions of Citizen Engagement sometimes lead enthusiasts to claim that it is a magic bullet for promoting good governance, while skeptics conclude that it is just hype. Realistic expectations are in order. Citizen Engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach that can solve huge problems all by itself, but it can bolster good governance, especially if it is combined with other efforts to strengthen government responsiveness and the rule of law.

Here's the argument we are suggesting: If one unpacks the impact evaluation evidence, it actually tests two very different approaches under the broad Citizen Engagement umbrella: *tactical and strategic*.

- **Tactical citizen engagement initiatives** are those that are short-term, address a particular issue with just one tool, and are limited to the very local level, while
- **Strategic citizen engagement initiatives** refer to long-term campaigns that combine multiple tactics, and are scaled up beyond the local level - so they are both broader and deeper at both state and national level.

Citizen engagement is important because it helps to create citizens. What does that mean? Citizens don't just wake up in the morning and say "okay today I'm a citizen, I have rights, I know how to make a difference". People have to learn about those rights, people have to learn their skills to make a difference. And how do they learn that? One learns that by starting with engagement. So engagement is a process that when it is working well, strengthens citizen's voices and power to increase their voice and power. Secondly citizen engagement makes a difference because it helps strengthen the capacity of groups to work together. Change doesn't happen just by individuals expressing voice; change happens when they build their own forms of collective action. And again, collective organizations, strong networks, aren't created out of nowhere. They are created through practice, are created through engagement. And those two conditions - strong capacity of citizens and strong ability of citizens' organizations and networks are the basic building blocks, incredibly important for making a difference on development issues such as service delivery, water, education, healthcare, security, all those other sectoral things like helping institutions to be accountable to the people they're meant to serve.

So how does citizen engagement help reduce poverty and improve the well-being of marginalized communities? Poverty is a multidimensional process, so engagement isn't just about dealing with economic poverty, or income poverty, or material poverty, which is very important, but it's also about overcoming social exclusion, it's about overcoming what we know as voice poverty, it's about overcoming inequities in who has power and who doesn't. And how can you deal with those multiple aspects of poverty unless people themselves are involved, using their own voices, using their own knowledge with support from government with sound economic policy. To shift to real export-led growth economic policy that would create higher income from exports through supply value chain, increasing foreign exchange earnings that will trickle down leading to wealth creation.

Reducing poverty is all about strengthening people's own assets. We can look at communities and look at what they don't have or an individual to evaluate his/her capacity and skills and determine what is required to upgrade the skills or access; or we can look at communities and ask "where are the assets which they can begin to mobilize to improve their own well-being?" And that approach gives us a different set of answers. Rather than asking what we can do to help the poor, we can ask the question: how do poor people strengthen their own lives starting with their own assets, starting with what they have, in order to get what they don't have to get what they need. And that is the process of mobilizing one's own assets to build the power from within one's communities in order to have the power to act, to make a difference in the long term of one's life, to create wealth and become self-reliant.

So what are the barriers that impede this process? Often times, citizens don't have the core capacities, they don't have the knowledge in order to engage and those that do have may not have the access or the opportunities. This is where the government engagement will not only provide equal access for example to education, skill development/capacity building, healthcare, security, access to finance for SMEs (like Trademoni) and other needed infrastructure but also opportunities to every citizen to pursue and develop his/her God given talent to maximize his/her capacity as a citizen. The government response should always be apt in what we refer to: Social Accountability Support, building multi-stakeholder coalitions, partnerships and collaboration and not have bureaucratic inertia. In light of the need to build coalitions, maintain strong relationships across government and outside of it and help solve collective problems, we find it is important to clearly enshrine the commitment to adaptive and flexible programming approaches in this area.

This requires reviewing existing reporting and program management tools and frameworks to ensure, for instance, log frames and other reporting frameworks do not commit to a linear, prescribed process of change and rather allow for considerable adaptation of activities against some clearly defined goals. Recognizing these multiple pathways for change, and multiple ways of working to deliver score card approaches, could be a crucial first step to effective citizens' engagement.

In today's globalized world, it's the combination of citizens coming together with those in power and with strategic allies, building from below and across all levels, which ultimately will make the difference. Mutual collaboration and partnership are definitely critical to help build governance institutions that are more inclusive and responsive to people's needs and thus able to reach the development needed. In this regard, governments and citizens should work together not against each other for the welfare of all. And although one's benefits may not be greater than the costs, that shouldn't impede participation and thus change. So, in addition to working at each of our levels, learn how to build links and relationships and trust amongst those people that are working across the levels, because again in a global world where local problems are also linked to global issues, it's how we solve the problems together at every level through a linked citizen engagement that will really make a difference.

There is also a significant co-relation between citizen engagements and how infrastructure development contributes to economic growth and to improved quality of life for citizens. In the case of Nigeria, there is the urgent need for the newly elected PMB Presidency to continue to address these infrastructure deficits (like power, water, road, rail networks, education, health, education, ICT etc.) in concerted manner and approach, which are very important and cannot wait for the dwindling public resources to finance them all. The objective, therefore, is to induce the private-sector to come in; to take the initiation and finance these infrastructure development projects, both in short and long-term, creating enabling environment for businesses to grow; thus a multiplier-effect on return on investments and a boost to the general economic output, which ultimately leads to positive change, to sustainable economic growth, improved security and people's development. Citizen Engagement is indeed a game changer for national development and very critical for maintaining national security, as well as the upliftment of the socio-economic pillars of all regions in Nigeria, especially Arewa.

Nigeria and indeed the northern region needs to harness the potential of its burgeoning youth population in order to boost economic development, reduce widespread poverty, and channel large numbers of unemployed youth into productive activities and away from various crisis and ethnic violence: <http://www.arewaonline-ng.com/citizen-engagement.htm>

Given the emergence of new regional dynamics in development policy and practice, Nigerian regions MUST fine-tune current regional development perspectives and to develop new ones that are not only more in sync with the present and future global context but with the governance systems being currently adopted that are becoming more and more decentralized and grassroots oriented. States Governors within each region must come together to create and adopt Regional Economic Development Plan with emphasis on a balanced approach to development and opportunity for all, irrespective of one's tribe, social class, religious belief and even political affiliation; and establish targets for economic growth of the entire region, in line with national policy on development. The economic plan should be built on current regional opportunities, collaboration and partnership linking States and National macroeconomic models with regional development and economic plan termed: Regional Econometric Model, geared toward support of government policy and constructive engagement.

What are the roles of citizens in maintaining national security in Nigeria?

Today, in an increasingly interconnected world, citizen engagement is critical for improving development outcomes and maintaining national security. These security issues include among others: corruption, crime and terrorism, specifically Boko-Haram terrorism, clashes between Fulani herdsmen, farmers and the communities, rampant kidnappings, with the States seemingly powerless to stop this unconventional warfare, unemployment, education, the environment, infrastructure, gender issue, tribalism, etc.

I quite agree with the fact that security is the responsibility of each and every citizen and that Nigerian security agencies seem to respond to alerts very poorly. I also believe that these national security threats in Nigeria require greater engagement with the citizens – citizen engagement & public awareness and reporting system: Human Intelligence, as part of the national security infrastructure. While engagement is often led by government, engagement may also be led by the

community with government support. To be effective, the citizens must be equipped with the knowledge of where and why specific actions, locations and activities may be a terrorist target or lead to clashes, what is being done to protect those targets, and how they can help through intelligence gathering and sharing between the citizens and Nigerian security agencies as well as the deployment of drone technologies to monitor and deter in a proactive manner.

Instead of fueling the fear, government must do more to sensitize and educate the general public on what each of us can do to reduce the vulnerabilities we share as a nation. It has been demonstrated that a well-informed, educated public is a vital part of developing their ability to withstand any kind of brainwash, sentiment, fake social media news, terror attack or other catastrophic event.

Like, on one hand, the police are not properly equipped financially and morally due to corruption and on the other hand, the citizens are not vigilant enough to report suspicious activities, and whether or not the reporting centers are active and prompt-enough to act; thus the need for community policing. You know that, Nigerians have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, and neighbours, and that compared to fifty years ago, we only care about money, how to get rich quick without moral values and respect for elders; behaviours that were not part of our communities before. Today, we don't know our neighbours, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with our families less often. Many of these trends are a result of changes in social behaviours: greed, envy, selfishness, drug abuse, lack of trust and opportunities, urban life, television, internet & fake social media news, women's roles, family structure, intolerance of tribes, religion, culture and even political affiliation compounded with despair and hopelessness. Consequently, Government has the responsibility to build social networks that transcends tribal communities; that strengthen public resilience, trust, hope and opportunities for all irrespective of one's tribe, social class, religion and even political affiliation. The most effective way to diminish citizen suffering and the massive economic costs of conflicts and their aftermath is to prevent conflicts and terrorist activities in the first place. This prevention must include engaging citizens to participate in intelligence gathering and sharing between them and Nigerian security agencies. Most of the understanding of participation follows what academics call a "rational choice approach", which can be simplified in the following manner: citizens will participate only when the benefits of participating are greater than the costs of doing so.

So, very simplistically, according to the rational choice theory, we can expect citizens to participate in intelligence gathering and sharing when the benefits of participating are greater than the costs incurred by participating. Findings have shown that the benefits include safety, peaceful co-existence and economic growth while the costs include lost of lives, lost of economic activities and lack of peace. These findings tell us two things about the perceived benefits of participation. On the one hand, people are more likely to participate if they see that their participation makes a difference. On the other hand, results show that knowing their participation makes a difference is not the only factor determining whether people participate or not, the other factors could include opportunities to find jobs and or get government support toward education or business activities or for an incentive like Tradermoni. But ultimately, in order to maintain national security, policy makers and service providers need to ask for feedback from citizens, and give them feedback and respond accordingly. A key element of democracy is active citizenship, and together with that is a responsive, accountable, fair and corrupt-free government. It is important for us to listen to the citizens and make sure that their concerns, their problems are actually attended to, not by government on our own, but in a process where they are engaged in an empowering problem solving process.

First is the recognition that Citizen Engagement, when done well, is a very powerful vehicle to create meaningful change and can improve development outcomes, bring sustainable economic growth, maintain national security and create peaceful co-existence. Not only can Citizen Engagement make government policy and services more transparent and accountable, it can also make them more inclusive and efficient, ultimately leading to more efficient policies that can reduce poverty, provide secure environment and promote shared prosperity. It can surely help improve the relationship between governments and citizens and significantly increase the roles of citizens in maintaining national security.

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