

## **Communiqué of the Second National Conference on Community Development in Nigeria held at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, June 14 – 18, 2009**

### **Preamble**

The Second National Conference on Community Development in Nigeria organized by the Community Life Project (CLP) and convened jointly with the CD division at the Federal level, was held at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja from June 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

The majority of participants were drawn from top level Federal, State and Local Government functionaries, Community Development Officials and Experts, Parastatals, Academia, International Development Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs).

The Conference was held on the theme “The Role of the Community in National Development: New Perspectives”. The theme was selected because in spite of efforts by development partners, NGOs, CBOs and FBOs to provide the public good to communities, the achievements recorded are like little drops in a mighty ocean.

Incidentally, huge resources committed by governmental organizations to enhance well-being at the grass-root have not led to any appreciable transformation of the physical and socio-economic conditions nor enhanced living standards at the community level. The communities have thus continued to live at the margin of existence without adequate access to electricity, health care, portable water, schools, roads and gainful employment.

After much agonizing on these issues, in 2007, CLP found ready support to organise a Biennial National Conference on Community Development, from a number of partners including ActionAid Nigeria, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Chevron Nigeria Limited, CD-Division Department of Public Health, Federal Ministry of Health, COWAN, ENHANSE-USAID, Federal Capital Territory, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Federal Ministry of Youth Development, Ford Foundation, Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Nigeria Association of Social Workers, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG), Office of the Special Assistant to the President on MDGs and Society for Family Health (SFH).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Conference was declared open by the Honourable Minister of Health, Professor Babatunde Osotimehin represented by the Director of Public Health, Dr. Jonathan Y. Jiya who also presented the welcome address. The keynote address was delivered by the West African Representative of Ford Foundation, Dr. Adhiambo Odaga.

Twenty seven technical papers were presented in six plenary and fifteen parallel sessions along three main thematic areas: Community Participation in Health and Education; Food Security, Poverty and Environmental Sustainability; and, Promoting Good Governance in Community Development. These papers were thoroughly discussed by participants. The papers presented highlighted the fact that at the community level, basic services - health care, electricity, schools, roads, employment, freedom to participate in governance, etc - necessary for a meaningful, healthy and productive life are lacking. These have led to massive poverty, unemployment and despondency that continue to negatively impact on the sustainability of the social and natural environment.

**PARTNERS:** ActionAid Nigeria, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Chevron Nigeria limited, CD-Division-Federal Ministry of Health, Community Life Project(CLP), ENHANSE-USAID, FCT, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development, Federal Ministry of Youth Development, Ford Foundation, LEEMP, NCDCN, National Poverty Eradication Programme(NAPEP), Niger Delta Development Commission(NDDC), Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC), Nigeria LNG Limited, Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs,, Society for Family Health(SFH)

The participants noted the efforts of government and development partners in the drive to provide the public good to the people at the community level. Such efforts include various poverty eradication schemes of government, The Fadama programmes, Agricultural Development Programmes, Primary Health Care Programmes, Local Economic Empowerment Programme (LEEMP) as well as several others. Though several such programmes have yielded positive results, they have been like small drops of water in a mighty ocean of poverty and hopelessness. Hence, the communities have continued to suffer intense deprivation, poverty, diseases and environmental degradation.

## **Observations**

Participants observed as follows:

- Policy makers and government agencies were conspicuously absent at the conference. This raises the fear of how whatever emanates from the conference will be communicated to those who could do something to promote grassroots development.
- Community Development Officers are not given due recognition in the country
- In spite of decisions reached in the past as to the appropriate domiciling of the Community Development Unit at the federal level, the unit is still at the Federal Ministry of Health
- While community development has been upgraded to full-fledged ministries in some States like Ogun and Rivers, it is not so in most of the others.
- In spite of shift in development paradigm to bottom-up approach, resources are still highly skewed in favour of the apex governing institutions at the expense of the communities. Nigeria continues to practice the top-down approach to resource allocation after nearly five decades of her existence without any development to show at the community level.
- Grassroots communities are wrongly perceived as illiterate, poor and wretched without capacity to contribute to personal and national development leading to the predominance of western models of intervention driven by people trained in western science and culture.
- The pervasive level of corruption is depriving communities and the poor of the vital resources required to provide the public good.
- Electoral fraud and political manipulation deprived citizens of the chance to choose their leaders resulting in marginalisation of the people from the governance process
- Theatre and drama sketches are potent tools for mobilizing communities

## **Resolutions of the 2nd National Conference on Community Development in Nigeria held at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, June 14 – 18, 2009**

- There is an urgent need to reposition community development as an engine of development in Nigeria. This should be done by clearly locating it in an identifiable location within the government structure at all levels. At the Federal level, participants suggested CD should either be reconstituted into a full- fledged ministry or a commission domiciled in the Presidency.
- The mandate of Community Development should be clearly specified at all levels from the local level through the LGA, States to the Federal level.
- The local level should be the prime driver of community development in the country, with the active participation of communities, while the Federal and State levels should focus on oversight and coordination,
- Community Development Organs at local levels should coordinate all community level activities of different Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Development Agencies and other stakeholders.
- Community media should be established and empowered to promote the information needs of communities.
- Traditional community organizing norms and values should be exploited in tackling corruption and resolving conflicts.
- There is the need to generate wealth through revival of infrastructures, industries etc in order to provide massive jobs rather than concentrating on poverty alleviation.
- There is the need to involve community members in policy formulation, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Government should involve community members in the management of schools and educational institutions to enhance quality and access especially for the poor.
- The Freedom of Information Bill (FOI) should be passed without further delay in order to guarantee access to information.
- The conference supports the provision of adolescent health education and services and increased access of young people and women to health facilities in communities in order to reduce the high incidence of infant and maternal mortality.