

Community leadership practices in Edo State Nigeria: Justification for a Biomimetic-based alternative in community development

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Abstract: This article is the first of a two-part assessment of leadership practices in community development processes. In this first part, community leadership practices (CLPs) are established as everyday actions executed by community leaders in the administration of processes to achieve communal development. In which case, community development associations (CDAs) should be agents that facilitate community development. Therefore, the continued disbandment of CDAs by the government of Edo State Nigeria in the past 6 years is odd. Postulating that the prevailing anti-development leadership practices is the reason behind the disbandment, the authors assessed the state of CLPs in the study area to determine the justification or otherwise, for a Biomimetic leadership alternative. The assessment was by observation, news reports and document analysis. This article affirmed that dominant anti-development practices of CDA leaders are critical to lack of development and recommended drawing leadership lessons from resilient bio-communities for application in human communities.

Keywords: Bio-communities; Bio-entities; Community heads; Community leadership practices; Dominant leadership practices

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Citation: Adebola, H. E. & Abey-Fashae, G. C.. (2024). Community leadership practices in Edo State Nigeria: Justification for a Biomimetic-based alternative in community development. *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 5(1), 73 – 81.



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INTRODUCTION

In the recent past for example, there was several news reports on the disbandment of Community Development Associations (CDAs), evidently in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State, Nigeria due to the anti-development activities and practices of the CDAs leadership. Some of the news headlines included “Edo Police Wants Community Development Associations Banned” (Ibiwale, 2014); “Edo Assembly Outlaws Community Devt Associations” (Emenyonu, 2017); “6 Arraigned for Allegedly Constituting Disbanded CDA in Ayen Community” (Akodeja, 2017). The disbandment of the CDAs were occasioned largely due to the activities of the leaderships of the associations because, rather than fostering community development, the activities of the CDAs leadership promoted chaos and anarchy within communities. Prior to the ban on the activities of the CDAs, the leadership of the associations became armed groups/thugs involved in the sales of land, after forcefully taking over the running of their various communities from the *Edionweres* (elders) and *Enogies* (Dukes/palace representatives) who are traditionally saddled with the day-to-day responsibilities of running the communities, by the Oba [i.e. the paramount traditional ruler] of Benin Kingdom (Ebegbulem, 2018). Buttressing the reign of chaos due to the anti-development leadership practices by CDAs and usurping of authorities, a former Police Commissioner in Edo State – Mr. Haliru Gwandu stated;

We were always receiving cases of communal clashes, a situation where young chaps under the guise of CDAs will stockpile arms and they use those arms on the local administration and sack the local administration, they also sack the traditional administration and they constitute

themselves as Kings in those particular communities (Ewodage 2017, para, 5)

Similarly, an erstwhile Assistant Inspector General of Police, AIG Zone 5, Benin – Mr, Hashimu Salihu Argungu, implicitly reported that rather than complementing the state and local governments to foster development within communities, the leadership of the various CDAs usurp the powers of the state and local governments as regards the ownership of land which they most times sell in parcels to more than one person, thereby causing a breach of the peace (Ibiwale, 2014).

Given the foregoing reports, this article posited that leadership per se is not the reason for the retrogression in CD efforts within Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State, and the subsequent disbandment of the CDAs. Rather, it believes the causal factor is the prevailing type, style, or model of leadership practices. Relative to man and community, this article knitted motivation, dependability, enthusiasm, assertiveness, eagerness and selflessness to describe leadership. Therefore, leadership is herein described as a role depicted in a series of synchronised motivating actions that facilitate dependable followership towards enthusiastically, assertively, eagerly and selflessly pursuing and achieving predefined goals within environments where frontrunners equally have respect for the followers. The motivating words, actions, and the coordinating efforts resulting in synchronised followership towards achieving predefined goals are what the authors refers to as leadership practices.

In addition, the authors believes leadership practices have the ability to bring about positive changes in organisations and communities, or pose severe threat to successful community development, mobilisation, and citizens' participation in decision making in

community improvement purposes. In the aforementioned regard of posing severe threat, rather than fostering development within the communities, observations of happenings within communities in Edo State and the government response to CDAs indicate that dominant styles of leadership practice have been issues of concern constituting retrogression in CD efforts within Edo State. The said prevailing circumstance makes development within the communities unattainable, let alone sustainable.

CONTEXTUALIZING COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A community, in the context of this article, is a space for hominid groups, a space where their wills interact in various ways to achieve mutually holistic benefits with mutually symbiotic cooperation, shared encouragement, problem-sharing disposition, and mutual-ravishment of achievements. Given this, a community's beginnings are in the active reciprocal interactions of individuals who share a commonality, inside a common geographical area, and sporadically with other groups of people who are not members of the commune. Essentially, the members of such an entity are closely connected and woven together by an overwhelming degree of similarity, which inspires a sense of devotion to the objectives of the organization and to one another within the group. Apparently the idea of shared commonality, shared territory, and shared aspirations that a community represents raises the question of sustainable resource management, which in turn prompts the need for a CLP model.

The Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines "development" as the process of growth and advancement, however Gilchrist and Taylor (2016) saw it as a type of community transformation brought on by the introduction of new beliefs and methods of doing things in a

communal environment. The idea of community development is the outcome of community members' resolve and activities to improve their communities and their lives. In the views of Gilchrist and Taylor, community development is primarily the process of figuring out how to enhance a community's socio-economic and cultural circumstances in order to integrate the community and enable it to fully contribute to the success of the country. Continuing, Gilchrist and Taylor also posited that community development refers to the method through which the people in a certain community plan and work together to determine and meet their perceived requirements. In terms of a methodical approach to social and economic development, Odife, (2023) believed that community development process includes all coordinated actions and practices at the community level targeted at improving the community and community members. It is clear from the stated definition of community development that, despite the notion being described as both a field of study and a process, "improvement for the ultimate satisfaction of felt-needs" is a consistent thread. Community development therefore focuses on achieving an enhanced or better situation for a group of people within a certain geographic area.

Consequently, improving communities for the benefit and uplift of community members is the main goal of CD ideology, and it is only in places where such ideal community leadership practices are upheld that community upliftment are possible. The implication, in line with the submission of Odife, (2023) is that community development includes all strategies, interventions, or coordinated activities at the community level intended to promote social and economic development, is that to improve the community and community members, certain guidelines must be adopted and adhered to consistently at the community level. The principles of

community development represents these guidelines or fundamental ways that community leadership and community development processes should function. In other words, these are the fundamental rules or instructions that must be upheld, especially at the leadership level in order to accomplish the goal of effective and sustainable community development through a legitimate and trustworthy approach. This is because loyal and selfless followership is a product of effective leadership practices. It is evident from the preceding discourse (Akodeja, 2017; Ebegbulem, 2018; Emenyonu, 2017; Ewodage 2017; Ibiwale, 2014), that the said guidelines have not been adhered to, nor implemented in communities across Edo State. Thus, chaos within communities are occasioned by ineffective anti-progressive leadership practices by community development association leaders. This, in spite of the abundant observable leadership practices by Biological Entities in their Bio-communities, which has been sustained over several millions of years, and from which effective Biomimetic leadership lessons could be sourced.

CONTEXTUALIZING LEADERSHIP AND BIOMIMETIC LEADERSHIP

There are many definitions of leadership, all of which come from the theoretical perspectives of the relevant academics. This is due to the widespread belief that "theories guide research and inform practice" (Mango, 2018: 57). Mango specifically noted that more than 66 ideas serve as the foundation for leadership studies and compiled these theories into six categories: organizational practices, people practices, character, characteristics, context, and outcomes. However, Cherry (2019) asserted that eight leadership ideas stand out as being particularly important. The theories include relational, trait, situational, behavioural,

participatory, management, and contingency and great man theories. Each of the eight key theories of Cherry has a corresponding fit in the six areas of Mango's leadership theories. Several scholars show that Cherry had already in 2006 (Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube, 2015) and in 2012 (Uzohue et al., 2016; Jovanovica and Ciricb, 2016) established these 8 key leadership theories. Similarly, an examination of contributions by Uslu (2019) shows that Cherry's list is largely regarded as the most important theories of leadership. This is despite the fact that Uslu divided leadership theories into two primary categories namely universal theories and contingency theories. In fact, Uslu came to the conclusion that despite the articulation of several leadership theories, the majority of modern ideas are in some ways a duplication of earlier views. However, none of the theories of leadership, whether they were modern or historical, ever took into account the leadership behaviours exhibited by biological species over several million years. The results of these behaviours have been astounding, demonstrating the sustainability and effectiveness of the practices as well as the adaptability of the bio-species in the communities

According to the basic premise of the biomimetic theory (Biomimicry Institute, 2020), sustainable solutions to societal problems can be found by identifying specific traits in particular biological entities, closely examining how those biological entities naturally address specific problems in their ecosystems, and then applying those identified principles to influence human designs. This is where the biomimetic leadership theory comes from. The theory that mimicking is an essential adjustment to the human state is the core of the biomimetic philosophy (Taylor, 2015). According to Taylor, the theory is also connected to a practical reinterpretation of an original natural scenario that draws inspiration from bio-entities and the ecosystem, to

address man's problems using a theoretical design process that takes cues from nature. As a justification for proposing answers to problems with human leadership in the framework of community and community development methods, this article seeks to spark a discussion about the natural position of ants.

As a result of the sort of community leadership currently practiced in Edo State, Nigeria, and possibly in similar emerging communities throughout the world, as well as its regressive effects on community advancement, the need for alternative leadership paradigms becomes essential. Additionally, it becomes even more crucial to take lessons from robust biological organisms that have endured for a very long time in the ecosystem in order to achieve successful and sustainable community leadership practices. Thus, this research assesses a Biomimetic leadership-based paradigm for CLP as the best alternative to the prevalent anti-development leadership approaches in the majority of developing communities. The engagement of various entities within the colony in achieving collective goals for the development of their communities is further demonstrated through critical examination of ant communal customs.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FROM A BIOMIMETIC LENS VIEW

This article x-rayed effective leadership practice for application within CDAs, from the role of the 'lead' ant *per time*, and the roles of the other ants within the same colony or community. In the immediate regard, all ants - the queen and others exhibit certain leadership practices *per time* in their respective roles to ensure the development and sustenance of their community or colony (Moffett *et al.*, 2021). Whereas the "lead" ant which is

the queen in conjunction with the fertile male ants are responsible for procreativity in the colony, the other castes are responsible for the infrastructural development of the community, the well-being and protection of the entire colony or community. Little wonder in local understanding within the study area, if a colony of ants is to be riddled, the locals do not just level the ant hill, they dig and hunt for the queen, else in no time, the ant hill is up again. Seemingly, the scenario is typical of a survival and sustainability model that is deeply rooted in good leadership practices in Bio-communities where no one and nobody is identified as the sole permanent leader over a period of time. Yet, those communities have thrived sustainably over millions of years in spite of several natural predators and challenges.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE BASED ON THE LEADERSHIP PATTERN OF ANTS

It is a commonly known logic to describe sustainability as the ability to sustain; ability as skilful capacity; and to sustain as maintenance in a conservative manner for the purpose of perpetuation. Juxtaposing this common logic from the perspectives of community in line with the position of Ben-Eli (2018), sustainability is an ongoing balance in the relationships of the processes leading to community progress and the ability of the community environment to support such progressive process for the community to reach its capabilities with no adverse and irreversible impact on the subsequent carrying capacity of the environment. Put differently, sustainability is the capacity to skilfully maintain a thing or process in a conservative manner for the purpose of prolongation. Furthermore, from the stand point of community development, sustainability is the capacity of one generation of community members to

skilfully maintain the process of meeting their needs holistically in a conservative manner that is perpetuated such that the capacity of future generations of community members to meet theirs is not undermined in anyway.

Therefore, sustainable development in communities is the proficient and lasting improvement of the life, well-being, and ecological conditions of human groups who live in the same geographical region and effectively collaborate to collectively achieve all-inclusive benefits with collaborative support, transparency, problem-sharing attitude and mutually beneficial target attainments, with no endangerment of the potential for subsequent homid groups achieving their own developmental goals. A contrast of the above overview of sustainable community development with Newton's law of motion, shows that until ideal CLP (i.e., an external force) impacts all aspects of community development, there cannot be an improvement in the state of progress within any community (i.e., a change in the state of rest or motion) (Scheck, 2018). More conclusions drawn from Scheck's aversion show that the level of sustainable development that can be achieved within each community is closely correlated with the theoretical underpinnings of, and the kind of community leadership that is available to oversee the community development processes.

Ants and their colonies typically highlight the fundamental principles of community. The well-known proverb that "a single tree cannot make a forest" appears to be validated by the ants' cooperation and respect for shared duties in the performance of roles. Ant colonies are among the most well-known natural instances of exceptionally effective cooperative societies, according to Greenwald, Eckmann, and Feinerman (2019). The pattern of self-help and cooperation exemplified in ants' society differs from

those of humans as perceived by Ojobo and Damian (2021); Ibani (2019), only in leadership practices. Greenwald *et al.*, suggest that the leadership practices coupled with the pattern of cooperative societies and role coordination seen among the ants promotes the growth of communities.

Consequently, an ant colony is a commune which mostly acts as a single supper organisms where individuals of the community are tied together to achieve communal development goals rather than egotistical benefits.

Although it is commonly recognized that ants do not have a leader in conventional terms, the concept of a queen among ants inadvertently indicates leadership, which supports organized communality and sustainability of individual ants' communities. Without any centralized administration, ants are one of the most successful bio-entities on earth, approximately 10 million billion, equaling roughly the same global biomass as humans (Smart, 2013).

Notwithstanding the enormity of the above stated biomass, ants have effectively managed and organized their colonies for millions of years without man's type of leadership structuring. Indeed, the discovery of 100 million years old ant fossil (Moreau *et al.*, 2020), gives credence to how deeply establish the sustainability of leadership paradigm in ant colonies has been. It is astonishing how these bio-species have implemented leadership methods that have assisted in effectively managing their "communities" in a sustainable manner for such a long period of time despite not having leaders as humans do. This leadership paradigm must have helped these bio-entities persist for millions of years. Indeed, Moffett *et al.* (2021) proposed that the way ants operate in social groupings might teach people about leadership. The well-known shared respect for positions and responsibilities in ant communities, as well as their proclivity to always defer to

the "ideas and wisdom" of a lead-forager, demonstrate the historical relevance of their style of leadership practices.

CONTRASTING HUMAN AND ANTS COMMUNITIES

It is quite implausible, based on documented evidences highlighted in this article that whereas human communities especially Edo State, are plagued with several chaotic conditions occasioned by leadership practices that are counterproductive to community progress, colonies of ant have remained apparently organized and sustainable over several millions of years. The said implausibility is arises given that human activities buttresses the fact that they are more highly intelligent and developed than other species in the animal kingdom (Graf, 2022). This fact questions the seeming inability of man to proffer progressive and sustainable leadership practices in his community, though "less intelligent" ants have consistently sustained their species in cooperative and progressive communities in spite of also having their share of intra-colony conflicts (Sun *et al.*, 2020) just as does humans. Notwithstanding the outburst of occasional intra colony conflicts among ants, overall there is peaceful relationship devoid of obvious violence within individual colonies (Ivens, 2015; Martin & Sengupta, 2021; Wenseleers *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The hierarchy of the several Community Development Associations in Edo State have not been able to grasp the rudiment of effective leadership practices for sustainable community development. Consequently, community leaders have seemingly not been able to attain the drive of sustainable community development, which is the competent and long-term improvement

of the living standard, health, and environmental situations of community members' resident within the same area without affecting the ability for future generation to accomplish their own unique goals for growth. The situation has both resulted in continued chaos within the communities as well as deepened hindrances to sustainable community development.

However, since Biomimicry is a novel method of finding sustainable solutions for man's problems based on time-tested natural patterns and strategies of living organisms - ants in the context of this study, the chaotic situations in Edo State Communities due to the dominant style of community leadership practices is a clarion justification for a biomimetic-based alternative to designing community leadership practices for sustainable community development.

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