

# **FOSTERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MENTORING AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper explains what mentoring represents and how mentorship programmes can effect development in communities found in Nigeria. It further explores the origin of mentoring as a concept; its types and fundamentals with stints on guidelines governing the mentor and the mentee as well as the benefit accruable to all including the community. The characteristics of potential mentors and ways to choose and approach a mentor are discussed. The paper explains that for Nigerian communities to foster 21<sup>st</sup> century compliant development, they must evolve and sponsor strategic mentorship plans aimed at developing standard skills needed within and outside the community and engender skill acquisition awareness by instituting meetings, conferences and workshops tailored towards career enlightenment. There is also need to involve successful entrepreneurs and role models in the mentoring plan of the community among other strategies highlighted. The paper concludes by imploring well meaning citizens of communities to assist in career development through mentorship activities that can trigger and drive sustainable involvements for community general enhancement for all citizens irrespective of the challenges.*

**Keywords:** Mentoring, Mentorship Programmes, Communities, Community Development, Mentees, Mentors

## **Introduction**

Societies and climes progressively developed as they advanced from normal day to day challenges of existentialism to more complex societies that intend to dominate all spheres of life. The intent to conquer and dominate as well as explore beyond what the horizon offers becomes the difference between the dominating societies and the dormant ones. In no time, certain lexicons were coined to differentiate between the active and exploring societies and the passive and stagnant ones. Such words as ‘Developed, Advanced, Industrialized, First World, White World, Technologically Advanced’ etc became more pronounced and formed a contrast to such derogatory words as ‘ Underdeveloped, Third World, Primitive Societies, Negro World’ etc. The difference is not farfetched but lies in the ability to instill discipline, invoke reasoning and thinking, and pass on the skill, knowledge and experience that can explode consciousness and cause self realization and aspirations that can lead to discoveries, products and development of communities and societies. This passing- on can only be achieved through what different climes have giving several names which connotes one meaning. To some, it is generalized as education. Others see it as apprenticeship, training, teaching, tutelage etc. However, most of the societies that have applied it seem to be comfortable with the name that we chose today- - - mentoring!

## **Concept of Mentoring**

Mentoring in a nut shell can be ascribed to influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor – more appropriately someone who inducts/impacts, teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and most times younger person. Mentoring is a relationship that involves or incorporates two or more individual(s) with more experience, advance knowledge and connections,

and are willing and able to pass along what they have learned to a more junior individual(s) within a certain field or profession. The more experienced (senior) individual in skill or knowledge becomes or is the **mentor**; and the less enhanced (junior) individual with little or less experience, knowledge and or skill is adjudged the **mentee**. In formal settings such as organizations (corporate or Non corporate), a mentor generally is expected to influence the personal and professional growth of a mentee. In its fundamental understanding, mentorships involve having senior employees mentor more junior employees, but mentors do not necessarily have to be more senior than the people they mentor. The paramount point to hold is that mentors have residing in them useful experience that are highly needed by other individuals for a perfect learning outcome that can foster development or ignite the occurrence of growth in certain spheres or in major ramifications (Hammond, 2021; Zachary, 2012).

Mentorship embedded in real love and passion of extending knowledge, skill and or experience by a mentor to a zealous mentee brings with it a lot of attraction and benefits. The reason is based on the ability of the Mentor to fashion, lead and or explore the horizon for the future generation based on their interest in area they care about and to ensure that best practices are passed along. In some instances, a willing Mentee receives guidance in areas or skill he/she had no interest or knowledge about; so long as such guidance can foster individual growth and development. The accruing benefits to the Mentee manifests as he/she proves that they are ready and capable to take this leap of faith and the challenges thereto in their chosen career in order to receive the extra help needed for such advancement.

The capacity of Mentors to make individuals advance in particular field of expertise which can transform and link such persons to opportunities is tremendous and actively recognized worldwide. People now gain access to opportunities that would have ordinarily eluded them. The act of sharing knowledge, assisting in the identification of opportunities found around the mentees environment or reach, and exploring potential untapped fortune in the course of time is the focus of every mentoring activity. It is not surprising therefore to hear people forged by mentors narrate their success stories. Imaginations and creativity can be unlocked through mentorship as it is tested implement for societal transformation. It is expected that Mentors where ever they may be found, guide and advise their mentees on ways to create successful career paths in either communities or excel in organization. Careers that are known to have been sustained and developed over the years or have been introduced into certain climes and have been instrumental to advances in such new climes, did not just happen. Certain footpaths are established which are linked to career guidance and invariably has a nexus to mentorship (MENTOR, 2006).

We can therefore assert that mentorship indeed deals with the act of mentoring which involves the process of informally transmitting relevant knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by those receiving it as relevant to work, career, or professional development. It involves informal communication sustained within certain periods of time where persons of greater relevant knowledge or wisdom (the mentor) agrees to impact it on others of less pedigree (the protégé or protégée). This relationship is necessary because such interaction with an expert potentially breeds proficiency in the handling of cultural tools and wield useful influence on the level of psychosocial support, career guidance, role modeling and communication that occurs in the mentoring activity (UCdavis, 2019).

## **History of Mentoring**

Historically, mentoring was found existing in the early European civilization of Ancient Greece as the name is coined from a character drawn by a famous classical writer – Homer. The legendary *Mentor* as was reported in this epic work was the son of Alcimus (as narrated in *Odyssey*). It is also seen in Fenelon's "The adventures of Telemachus, the son of Ulysses". With time, it has spread to other parts of the world especially the United States as it has been employed since the 1970s in the training procedures and other interns associated with historical movement aimed at advancing workplace equity for women and minorities. This innovativeness has been hailed in American learning and management System. Today, it is found applied in many fields of endeavour, especially the medical field (Ferrerres, 2018).

The Asians have always adopted mentorship in their traditional system of apprenticeship. The master – student relationship were used in many traditional training formulations to teach marshal art, self defense, weaving, dance, agricultural practices etc. At the time when industry and technology became the source of wealth creation; the Asians evolved the external mentoring process that was embedded in espionage directed by Asian state governments that instilled patriotism (love for fatherland) on the citizenry. Driven by the direction of international politics and the influence of the world wars, the Asians standardized mentoring and domesticated the products of the external mentorship to produce an Asian brand that gave rise to the Asian tigers of Japan, China, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea etc (Kumar & Budhwar, 2020). Today, these nations (especially China) with noble mentorship spirit and background have evolved to become one of the world's biggest economy and the controllers of better chunk of the world's political and economic influence.

In Africa, our traditional system has always been supported by apprenticeship or mentorship. From the homestead, the father traditionally acknowledges the responsibility of transmitting the family skills and values to the sons; and the mothers to their daughters. These skills and values are sources of pride to the kindred, village and the outer community. They include agricultural practices, carving, blacksmithing, weaving, traditional cousins', dance, music etc. These are handed down from generations to generation by a traditional mentoring process and they were the base for economic and socio-cultural development as at that time. Unfortunately, the system was not stepped up to accommodate changes in knowledge, experience, skill and time as the educational system ignored it. This lack of blending the old fashion with the new even in the school system (as the Asians tactfully remodeled) presented a lacuna that has seen most African nations (especially, the sub-Saharan) impoverished (Ddiba, 2013).

Many arguments have been raised in support of Walter Rodney's logic or facts on how Europe under developed Africa. But, let us not forget that the same practices and system of not enhancing the technical knowledge of the colonized by the colonialists were inflicted on the Asians. The lesson to be drawn in this historic navigation is that whatever bed you make for yourself as an individual or community, so shall you lie on it. The advancement of any nation or region has bearing on the strategic advancements of her communities which in turn is a product of strategic plans imbedded in its training system. This is the point where mentorship comes in. Mentorship Programme are sets of structured, strategic, well planned and organized learning activity intended to connect individuals or people as well as increase their knowledge of building skills that can bring out their potentials for future goals and achievements.

## Types of Mentoring Programme

Different types of mentoring programme exist that includes **Multiple mentoring** that exposed the learner to multiple mentors that have the capacity to expand the learner's knowledge being that different mentors may have different strengths. It's a new and trending form practiced in advance societies. There is the **Profession or trade mentoring** that exposes the mentee to someone already practicing in the trade or profession the learner is entering. These professionals are conversant with the trends, important changes, and new practices that newcomers should know to remain at the apex of their career. Such mentors must have the confidence of the learner as to allow the mentee discuss ideas with and also provides the learner the opportunity to engage with other individuals in the trade or profession.

On the other hand, the **Industry Mentoring** lays emphasis on the expert or professional and the profession only by delving into expanded insight on the industry as it concerns research, development and or key changes. **Organization mentoring** explains the importance of staff being knowledgeable in the values, strategies, and products that are within the organization, including factors that can make them change. An organization mentoring can expose and chart a course for developmental missions and strategies. There is also the **Work Process Mentoring** whose activity can help finish tasks quickly and efficiently by cutting through unnecessary work hurdles, explain the details of projects and day to day tasks, and eliminate unnecessary diversions in the learner's routine schedule. **Technology mentoring** on its own help with technical breakdowns; advices on systems that may work better than what the learner is currently using, and coach them in using new technology (Ferrerres, 2018). It is increasingly dominating the mentoring activities adopted within companies.

There also other types of mentoring. Mentoring programme may adopt the **Traditional One-on-one Mentoring** whose process involves matching of the mentee and mentor, either through a program or on their own plan. Mentee-mentor partners participate in a mentoring relationship with structure and timeframe of their making or as established by a formal mentoring program. It differs from the **Distance Mentoring** relationship where the two parties (or group) are in different locations (sometimes called "virtual" mentoring). There is also the **Group Mentoring** where the mentor is matched with a cohort of mentees. The programme delivers initial structure that allows mentor to direct progress, pace and activities.

## Fundamentals of Mentoring

Hammond (2021) outlines the fundamentals of acquiring relevant mentoring experience as embedded in what she called "the three A's" which comprise (a) active listening (b) availability, and (c) analysis. These she asserted must work in tandem as the mentee progresses with the mentor. However, the mentor must be a professional and well trained for the mentee to perceive this experience and gain value from it.

The development of **Active listening** skill is a rudiment and an acquired communication skill that is not common nor taught formally in learning systems. The mentor also applies active listening techniques to draw attention, allow for questions or queries and to respond to mentees probes which the mentor ignited. Conversations are guided to areas that may lead to new experiences and discovery by a renowned professional mentor to avoid close ended questions. The use of broad queries to suggest possible directions and outcomes for clients is an accepted modality. The intent of the professional mentor does not lie on offering solutions, but ability to

facilitate self discovery. The mentor reassures the Mentee by given him/her by showing he / she is being understood correctly. All these allows for quality feedback and close attention.

A mentor who has a professional outlook will always make himself/herself available to mentees in several ways. There has to be physical contacts with mentees (person-to person), high level of confidence by the mentee on the mentor (emotional availability). It is not out of place to use phones or electronic message systems to contact mentees or mentors in the cause of mentoring. However, this should not be abused. The body language and professional conduct of some mentors may disclose emotional availability. These can lead to interest and great success of a mentorship program.

**Analysis** depicts the capacity to make good and decisive judgment by both the mentor and the mentee. The ball falls on the mentee to be diplomatic but on point when dealing with issues. Formalities are dispensed with. While an effective and up to date experience on industry changes are needed by the mentor. This helps him /her make modifications on existing their philosophy and analysis based on changing data. There is also this perception of objectivity and fairness that is needed for a true analysis of mentor/mentee outcomes. No matter how disturbing a realization can be, a professional outcome leads to new ways or experiences in any project it is applied. Transforming business and projects in new ways is why mentor-mentee relationship are established (Hammond, 2021).

### **Benefits of Mentorship Programmes**

The benefits of mentorship programme is in many folds and multifaceted. The Mentees have an opportunity to gain practical knowledge and insight from seasoned professionals who have achieved a level of expertise they aspire to attain. Mentors have an opportunity to expand their repertoire of professional knowledge and skills through their instruction and facilitation of others especially in fields that are evolving new frontiers. The organization or community has the opportunity to further develop and disseminate the wealth of talent, skill and knowledge of its citizens or employees. It affords the learner the opportunity of observing successful and unsuccessful models, respond well to positive reinforcements and mastery experience of even difficult outcomes.

In fact, the benefits of mentorship as stated by the University of California (2019), has been modified and adapted to suit any community mentorship program. To the Mentee, he may receive guidance and support from any respected member of community and may have the opportunity of acquiring professional development opportunities. This has the capacity to increased confidence, reduce high rate of school drop outs in the community and increase achievement for unemployed graduates. It has the capacity to foster cohesion, greater awareness of other approaches to work, create a network of people with like minds and expanded knowledge to explore new frontiers. It can enhance the creation of spring board for ideas and challenges.

To the Mentor, the programme provides fulfillment and satisfaction of helping others and contributing to the development of fellow citizens in the community. It enhances collaboration of citizens and builds community supports and development of key competencies that can lead to growth. It enhances the evaluation of the existing conditions in the community and alternative possibilities that may engender growth. These in its entirety can encourage renewed ideas and perspectives on one's leadership role.

The community can harness these benefits as it can advance growth and encourage development of respected leaders and at the same time trigger visible commitment to the citizen's

development consistent learning. It can also help in transfer foreign values and maintain institutional/community knowledge. It can also foster an inclusive, diverse and collaborative environment for all citizens in the community etc.

To achieve the best outcome of the mentoring relationship, the mentor and mentee should establish not only their individual needs and goals, but identify the needs, goals and expectations of the mentoring partnership. An important step in the process of developing a good mentoring relationship is to **move from a problem orientation to a vision orientation**.

### **Characteristics of Potential Mentors**

The prospective mentor should be renowned in the community as an effective in leaders with character and value capacity to act and be seen or considered as role models. He/she must have the capacity to develop subordinates effectively and possess impeccable aligning community vision and mission stands. The ability to think- out and create strategic futuristic outlook.

He/she must showcase evidence of demonstrable links to positive relationships and diverse category of individuals with the will to freely share experiences and insight. The mentor should be able to recognize the strength and weakness of the community and build on it with zealousness and commitment to consistent enhancement that can tolerate new ideas and tactics.

### **How to Choose and Approach a Mentor**

Mentors are better sought for within the ranks of people you are already conversant with. Friends, schoolmates, relatives, village or community people, leaders in your field etc. Zacharay (2012) asserts that the potential mentee must understand that such requests are a favor that will require a potential mentor's time and energy. Therefore, a face-to-face meeting should be solicited. Request to your mentor via email should be the least option. Communication and choice of words that can convey your admiration of the persons and their work should be employed. his means your enthusiasm for progress, growth and your desire to learn from their skills and experiences should be convincingly presented. Communicate clear goals, objectives and expectations to your potential mentor. Explain that you are looking for guidance, not a tutor. You can also help by providing information about the mentoring process expected in the mentoring partnership.

### **Role of Mentorship in Community Development**

Understanding role of mentorship in community development requires clarifications of the meaning of community and community development. The word 'community' is derived from an old French word 'Comunete' which in turn comes from a Latin word 'Communis' (common) which describes people with common affinity or ancestry that shares common interest and living in the same area. It further depicts a group or groups of people living together in one locality with shared sense of identity. A community is a social group whose members have something in common, such as a shared government, geographic location, culture, or heritage. Although technology has helped to bring other type of communities such as virtual, national and international communities, there still lies the feature as important to their identity, practice, and roles in social institution such as family, home, work, government, society, or humanity at large A community is a familiar thread used to bring people together to advocate and support each other against certain threats. It is natural as humans that one of the needs recurring in existence is sense of belonging which connects us to the many relationships we develop.. Intentions, aspirations, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks etc are social factors that affect the identity of any human community. The gap can only be filled by

community cohesiveness and as Peck in 1991 asserted, building a sense of community is easy but maintaining this sense of community is difficult in the modern world (McMillan, 1986; Schutte, 2016)

The United Nations has always maintained or recognized two distinct communities in the world. The rural community with currently close to 3.4 billion people and is expected to rise slightly and decline to 3.1 billion in 2050; and the urban communities with over 50% of the population with expected 1.5 times increase to 6 billion in 2045 (World bank, 2022; Statistics Times, 2021). This brings to over 99 million people living in rural areas in Nigeria according to same World Bank report of April, 2022. While people living in urban centers of the world strive to increase per capita income, the rural dwellers wallow in abject poverty. In some Nigerian communities as Bonny, Warri, Lagos, Eket etc; certain industrial or exploration activities trigger the convergence of skilled labour and other learned commercial activities and apprenticeship. The awareness created by these endeavour stimulates the urge to create wealth through sustained channels of mentorship. While their counterparts in rural communities do not have the pull or stimulus that can connect them to skill acquisition and technical knowhow needed to break even. This gap breeds a lot of disadvantages to the rural people who cannot help themselves and lack necessary cohesion. To kick start the desired consciousness and the community response needed, McMillan and Chavis (1986) identified four elements that can induce "sense of community":in individuals found in any form of community. These include:

- i. membership: feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness,
- ii. influence: mattering, making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members
- iii. reinforcement: integration and fulfillment of needs,
- iv. shared emotional connection

This sense of community when harnessed fully leads to community development.

What then is community development? Community development is activities that are connected to community planning geared towards evolving progress in a community. There is this unwritten rule that compels groups and individual community members to give to community members and making them feel like they're better people for having been part of their community. These activities may involve stakeholders, foundations, governments and their agencies, or contracted entities including no-governmental organizations (NGOs). They lead to greater grassroots efforts of community organizing and building directed at empowering individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills usually help in building entrepreneurial, innovative, and political or other forms of empowerment through the formation of robust programmes directed at common agenda (Schutte, 2016). Having identified mentorship as one of the programs or community development tools, the need therefore arises for us to understand that some form of motivation is needed to trigger this sense of community and community building. The answer as asserted by Mcmillan and Chavis (1986) lies in a well formulated reward system for both community and participants (citizens). This is central to the Human Resource Management function.

### **Fostering Development in Communities through Mentorship**

Communities that understand the importance of human capital development must insist on creating avenues for individual and collective enhancement of its citizenry. The Nigerian communities, especially the rural dwellers are bereaved of assistance that can afford them the

opportunity to skillfully develop themselves along choice careers. Majority of the rural dwellers migrated to big cities without relevant skills. The rural – urban migration will increase in the coming years as individuals migrate for greener pastures. It would have been ideal if these citizens acquired the proper skills that will enable them create wealth for themselves before migrating. Mentorship avails communities the opportunity of connecting their people to experiences, knowledge and skills that can transform opportunities to wealth and creating more wealthy citizens that will in turn create developed and wealthy communities. The strategies to achieve this can be domesticated by adopting and embellishing some clues as pointed out by Mcmillan and Chavis (1986).

- **Development of Community Strategic Goals:** The need for Communities to develop tailored strategies forged for their needs becomes increasingly more pronounced. These should be 21<sup>st</sup> century dedicated skill acquisition and career path development plans with problem solving strategies embedded in the training tool kit etc. A survey of trending lucrative skills and certain environments and community skill deficiencies helps in the formation of a community training module. This also helps in the selection of mentorship programme and the kind of mentor to approach.
- **Organizing Career Awareness Meetings and Workshops:** Communities should engage in career awareness campaigns by hosting meetings, workshops, conferences and other events together with follow-up discussion on ways to engage in human capital development at the grassroots level. This is important as most community citizens are not conversant with modern career paths and the changing job environment generally. They are not aware of career and job mobility or certain drifts in opportunities found in urban environments. Awareness drives and campaigns prepares citizens towards the noble paths of wealth creation and tapping into opportunities.
- **Involving Established Entrepreneurs and Professionals:** Certain Communities are blessed with self made successful entrepreneurs and professionals who have excelled in their various fields of endeavour and are willing to assist their communities but do not know how to come in. Most times they share money, drill boreholes or engage in certain activities that do not create wealth or lead to career acquisition and progression. Others may not have the zeal to assist as they were not aided by the community. To attract such people, a coordinated attempt has to be made using strong public relation gimmicks to appeal to their ego. This includes but not limited to rewards as recognition through bestowing chieftaincy titles or composition of songs that eulogizes such people to invest positively on human and capital development in the community This in turn can draw their focus towards engaging citizens (especially the youth) on career guidance and mentorship programme that will in turn transform the community in the long run.
- **Role Model Identification and Community Reward System:** Discovering idols and create avenue for role model identification and creation has a way of appealing to the youth. This can be directed positively and harnessed in the communities to lure citizens to career paths that will in turn engender sustainable development. In the same vein, a strong community reward system attracts responses from well meaningful individuals in the community. This should be instituted and directed towards people who have made astonishing contributions to human capital development in the community. If well articulated, it can breed strong mentors and polish a mentoring process.



- **Cooperative Engagements:** When people work together, good will is generated, skills are improved and more techniques are developed. Community mentoring programme can enhance the mentor's role model skills and techniques for managing projects and handling challenges

### **Challenges of Mentorship Programme in the Community**

The most common challenges experienced in mentorship programmes which may apply to communities irrespective of its positive side are much expectations and possible over reliance and dependence of the mentees on the mentors and or the community supporting such programme. This has the tendency of over leaning or stretching scarce community resources to a level where rancor and bitterness may set in to abort the programme. Resentment can set in when mentors have streamlined their cause of dealing at the start, only to be burdened as the programme progresses. The Mentee taking up time beyond the agreed session or time commitment can evoke anger on the disgruntled mentor thereby presenting a clog on the wheel of the mentoring program's success.

In another development, poor matching of mentors to mentees may erupt discord and discontent which may affect the programme. While constant neglect to the rule of the programme can join to family problems to scuttle well initiated mentoring activity. When the mentee is a citizen of the community, over familiarity can produce disrespect. Thus, the right orientation may be withheld. There is need to have greater and sincere support from the community and her citizens on the programme as lack of consistent support can cause an abrupt end to it. An enhanced training and support will help deliver the necessary resource and knowledge required to confront impending hurdles they may face. These challenges and more have been attested to be universal and have been supported by 2005 survey in United States communities (MENTOR, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

This discuss have presented ample evidence that conscious development is needed in the communities and can only be activated through the spirit of mentorship. To instill this spirit in the members of the community needs a coordinated plan that will breed long term profit to both community and her members. Therefore, every community need to articulate their career and or job needs and reflect it in mentorship programme schedule that is pursued vigorously. To achieve the programme schedule, it is advised that community strategic goals be formulated by individual communities and adopted religiously. Career awareness need be stimulated through meetings and symposia and successful entrepreneurs in the community can be tactically appealed to help kick start a useful mentoring process etc. Let it be noted that a strong and encouraging reward system instituted by well structured communities that know their onus is a tremendous catalyst for a successful mentoring process. In not too long if whole heartedly applied, communities can boast of technical skills in industrial and oil sectors of the economy; or real time business venture management capabilities that can continuously engender more engagements. Though noticeable challenges can be felt along the process as over dependence on the mentor's goodwill or the community support, neglect to programme rules etc, there should be the will to tackle them headlong. Personalities in various communities should owe it as a duty to trigger and direct the course of action in citizenship skill mentoring to a positive direction. This re-awakening is needed in various communities in Nigeria.

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