

COMMUNITY SELF –HELP AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

The study is developed in response to the concern on the possible cause of dearth of community self-help efforts in development of rural communities in Bayelsa State. Community self-help schemes initiated and implemented by local communities became vogue in the 1970s – 1980s and it played significant role in the provision of social infrastructure in rural communities. It's a bottom-top approach to rural development where the local people are involved from the initiation to the implementation development projects geared towards alleviating rural poverty and generating rural development, by jointly pooling their resources (monetary and labour) to execute badly needed social infrastructures in their communities. However, beginning from the early 1990s community self-help began to gradually loss momentum and finally died down due to myriads of variables. The dearth of community self-help efforts has in effect manifested in the increasing high rate of poverty the general decay in social infrastructure in rural communities, because community self-help was seen as the catalyst for the development of rural communities. The study identifies the factors that have contributed to the decline in self-help projects in rural communities in Bayelsa State with recommendations that are significant in reviving and sustaining self-help projects in the state.

Keywords: Infrastructure, Self-help, Community, Rural and Projects

Background to the study

Community self-help development is one of the emerging approaches to rural development. Aweto (2000) noted that the idea of self-help is one of several distinguishing features of community development theory, practice, and ideology. Self-help is based on the premise that people can, will, and should collaborate to solve community problems. In addition to the practical problem-solving utility of this perspective, self-help builds a stronger sense of community and a foundation for future collaboration. It embodies the notion that a community can achieve greater self-determination within constraints imposed by the larger political economy in which it is embedded. Without a commitment to self-help, a community may exist as a place, an organization, or an interest group but be lacking the capacity building strategy. It is a style of planning, decision making, and problem solving which is endemic to the very idea of community, especially that of the small, face-to-face community (Capfens, 1999).

Darah (2004) disclosed that self-help is emphasized not only as a goal to be achieved in and of itself, but also as a strategy for the accomplishment of broader development objectives. Helping communities achieve a capacity for self-help is fundamental to both the theory and practice of community

development. In Nigeria, as in other parts of African nations, self-help strategy for development has played significant role in rural development.

In the 1970s-1980s, community self-help effort became very popular and significant that prompted the Old Rivers State government to embrace it and made it as part of the State government policy by giving match grants and aids to rural communities that embark on self-help development projects meant to develop the rural communities. Most of the rural infrastructures that were built in the Old Rivers State (Bayelsa State) in 1970s-1980s were as a result of self-help efforts, where local communities mainly levied themselves to raise funds to provide the needed social amenities.

Self-help embodies two interrelated features: (1) it is expected to produce improvements of people's living conditions, facilities, and/or services" and (2) it emphasizes that the process by which these improvements are achieved is essential to development of the community. The "developed community" is both improved and empowered as a result. Of these two features, the self-help perspective emphasizes that the process is more important in the long run than the improvements, because the collaboration that derives from a strong sense of community can be the means to continuing improvement of community services and quality of life. By contrast; if community services, facilities, or improvements are contributed by an outside agency or organization with little or no community involvement, such "improvements" are likely to be transitory, to increase community dependency, to contribute little to a greater sense of community, and to diminish the community's future capacity to act on its own behalf. Thus a self-help approach not only emphasizes what a community achieves, but more importantly, how it achieves it (Darah, 2004).

In Nigeria, rural areas are noted for their backwardness in terms of infrastructural development in relation to urban setting. Therefore the need to focus on rural development through the self-help approach is potent and widely accepted. Chambers (1974) identifies four main reasons.

- i. Firstly, according to him the majorities of the population live and find their livelihoods in the rural areas.
- ii. Secondly, the drift to the towns (rural-urban migration) is a matter of concern, because of the increasing rate of urban unemployment, housing problems, increasing crime rates and other attendant social evils.
- iii. Thirdly, it is in the rural areas that most of the poorer and most disadvantaged people are to be found.
- iv. Fourthly, there is a cluster of orthodox economic arguments for giving priority to rural development.

The paper advances for the need to promote the self-help rural development approach as a potent development strategy in Nigeria. It examines community self-help efforts and dearth of self-help schemes in Bayelsa State and further identifies practical strategies to improve self-help schemes in State so as to improve upon the well being of the people.

Statement of the problem

Despite concerted efforts by the government to improve the welling of rural dwellers, there is persistence poverty in Nigerian rural communities (Akinleye (2003)). In fact, the present poor state of rural areas reflects cumulative policy neglect, poor planning and inadequate resources transfer Rural Development Sector Strategy. It becomes appropriate to promote community self-help project initiate as a participatory and integrated community development strategy to improve the social and economic well being of the people.

Objectives of the study

The study intends to address the following,

1. Identify forms of community self-help projects in Bayelsa State.
2. Examine factors responsible for the dearth of community self-help projects in the State.
3. Identify strategies for reviving sustaining community self-help projects in Bayelsa State.

Methodology and Source of Data

The study adopts a secondary source of data. Data were obtained from documentaries; government publications, literature from past research and personal observations. Internet research, documented profiles and field works have enriched the paper. It is situated in Bayelsa State. The state is in southern Nigeria in the core Niger Delta region, between Delta State and Rivers State. Its capital is Yenagoa. The state was formed in 1996 from part of Rivers State and is thus one of the newest states of the Nigerian federation.

Literature review

The literature will examine the concepts of development as they apply to this study; rural, community and self-help development.

The concept of development is ubiquitous. It means different things to different people, depending on intellectual and ideological belief of the society. According to Akinleye (2003) development varies as there are schools and scholars in the field of development study. The common theme that runs through the literature on development agrees that it is a man centered and multidimensional phenomenon that ultimately leads to qualitative improvement in man's standard of living. Thus, according to Okodudu (1998) development may be reflected in the economic, educational, social and aesthetic life of the society.

Development has different meanings, i.e. "increases in production, income, standards of living, quality and accessible education," the "development of the economic wealth of a nation for the benefit of the people;" or a set of "economic, social, political and government policies that seeks to improve the lives of the people." Whichever manner one choose to explain development; it seeks improvements in literacy rates, life expectancy, reduction in poverty, and the provision of adequate political goods and services. With that in mind, the main goal of development therefore is improvement in human well-being: high standard of living, expanding choices, guaranteeing people's freedom, increasing their economic security, and the provision of an enabling environment to allow people attain their private and public aspirations.

In addition, development can also be measured with indicators which includes advancement in infrastructural development, enhanced education, training and greater employment opportunities, affordable cost of living, a more efficient government system and reduction of wasteful economic and organizational practices such as embarking on unviable projects, corruption and graft, greater self-reliance especially in food production, development of technology, improved productivity, sustainable political stability, healthy population (Onuoha, 1999). Ibaba (2005) added absence of absolute poverty, low level of unemployment.

In addition, Laninuhun (2003) as cited in Amodu (2008) noted that development implies a change for better: the ordering of society and social and economic processes in such a way as to lead the eradication of gross poverty, ill-health, illiteracy, and to rising standards of living and material comforts for all. Therefore, development implies a process of transformation usually manifested in the occurrence of desirable changes in the various aspect of life of society (Tamuno, 2009). According to Akpakpan (1987), examples of such changes are:

1. Reduction in the level of unemployment
2. Reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities
3. Reduction in the level of absolute poverty
4. Rise in real output of goods and services and improvement in the techniques of production
5. Improvement in literacy, health services, housing conditions and government services
6. Improvement in the level of social and political consciousness of the people and
7. Greater ability to draw on local resources (human and material) to meet local need. i.e. becoming more independent.

On the other hand, the word 'rural' connotes a specific geographic location on the earth surface in relation to an urban location. Spatially, rural refers to the countryside, while urban refers to the city. Economically, rural areas are noted for the cultivation of primary products. Politically, rural areas constitute the politically marginalized group located at grass-root level, law and power flow not from the bottom (rural) but from the top (federal and state) and finally to local government areas. Socio-culturally, the rural people are seen as backward in every sense of the word. Social interaction and actions are based on primordial behaviour (Tamuno, 2009). Besides, the rural economy is generally characterized by high dependence on agricultural activities, farming, fishing, forestry, animal husbandry, poultry, food processing etc.

Ollawa (1977) cited in Tamuno, (2009) contributed that rural development is, the restructuring of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses and to promote individual and collective incentives to participate in the process of development. This involves a host of multi-sectoral activities, including the improvement of agriculture, the promotion of rural industry the creation of the requisite. Infrastructural development, social overheads and establishment of appropriate decentralized structures in order to allow participation are significant in enhancing rural development.

Contributing further, Todaro (1977) opined that rural development while dependent primarily on small farmers and agricultural progress, implies much more. It encompasses:

1. Improvement in levels of living, including income, employment, education, health, and nutrition, housing and variety of social services
2. Decrease inequality in the distribution of rural incomes and in urban-rural imbalances in incomes and economic opportunities and
3. The capacity of rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of development

According to the World Bank (2011), rural development is concerned with the modernization and monetization of rural society, and with its transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. In addition, Akpakpan view rural development as, the transformation of rural areas of the society i.e. the transformation of the economic, social and political structures, institutions, relationship and processes in the rural areas which have hindered productivity....must involve measures and actions that will bring about such transformation measures and actions that will generate economic opportunities (e.g. jobs and income) and improve literacy, health, housing, real output of goods and services, techniques of production and social and political & consciousness in the rural areas of the society.

The most widely cited definition of rural development by scholars and practitioners is that of Uma Lele (1979). He defines rural development as improving the living standards of the mass of the low income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining. The above definition has three main components:

1. Improving the living standards of the subsistence population entails the mobilization and allocation of scarce resources with a view to reaching a desirable balance overtime between the welfare and productive services available
2. Mass participation requires that resources be allocated to low-income regions and class and that the productive and social services actually reach them
3. Making the process self-sustaining requires development of appropriate skills and levels to ensure the effective use of existing resources.

Rural communities in Nigeria have been noted for their general state of backwardness as a result of deficiency in social infrastructure such as potable water, good roads, electricity, markets etc. The rural areas represent one of the extreme situations of underdevelopment- lacking virtually all the indices of development. Paradoxically, in Nigeria a vast majority of people, about 70% live in the rural areas (Idode, 1989). Eno (1988) aptly captures the features of rural areas, that the rural people and their areas are characterized by poverty, penury, hopelessness, unemployed youths roaming streets, widespread illiteracy and ignorance. Other features include absence of basic facilities such as well equipped medical centers, electricity, potable drinking water, good roads, etc. Rural development thus aims at eliminating these unfavorable conditions.

In literature on rural development, the term is used in different ways in divergent contexts. In our context, rural development connotes development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of rural people; this is occasioned by deficiency in social infrastructure. We can assert that rural development is a process that aims at improving the standard of living of the people living in rural areas, where a vast majority of Nigerians live through the provision of social infrastructure which is lacking in the areas.

Rural development strategies are programmes and policies designed and implemented by the government to improve the well being of rural lives. It is an integrated process which includes social, economic, political and physical development of poorer section of the society (Chambers, 2011). William (1978) sees rural development as enhancing rural well-being, which includes access to improved health facilities, potable water, and basic education among other necessities of life.

Corroborating on the above, Mabogunje's (1980) view rural development from the perspective of: Improvement of the living standards of the low income population living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis, through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. In essence, rural development implies broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their live and with changes consequent upon this. Therefore, in order to improve their standard of living, the rural dwellers initiated self-help projects in their communities, which they feel can bring about the needed development they have been yearning for. Because they realized that the state cannot government cannot single handedly provide these social amenities?

Scholars and policy makers have expressed diverse views on the concept of community development. Gary Craig's (1998) view is tied to the notion of promoting community participation as a means of enhancing the development process. He cites the Brundland Commission (WCED, 1997), which enlists effective citizen participation as one of the preconditions to sustainable development. The Human Development Report (UNDP, 1993) echoes the imperative of people participating in their own development, remarking that people's participation is becoming the central issue in the face of current challenges for development.

Community self-help is one of the variants of rural development widely practiced in Nigeria before the British colonial masters came to Nigeria. The main channel for execution of self-help projects were the Ages grades and village councils. It is a community based initiative. Community self-help schemes are bottom-top approach to the development of the rural communities, where the people mobilize, pool their resources, initiate projects according to their needs and execute such projects. It is the conscious efforts of the people to develop their communities aimed at reducing absolute poverty.

As one of the strategies for rural development, the self-help approach mainly concentrates on the provision of social amenities such as postal agencies, roads, electricity, classroom blocks, potable water, and health centre. Self-help effort was very useful in most rural communities in Nigeria for the provision of social amenities, because in the urban centres (such as Port-Harcourt, and local government

headquarters) the government provides the basic social amenities, while the rural communities were left to fend themselves through self-help. However, according to Tamuno (2009) self-help approach to rural development was formalized, gave more vigor and attention in 1971 after the civil war in the Old Rivers State. The need for increased attention can be explained in two ways.

- i. In the first place, given the consequences of civil war in terms of its massive destruction of social infrastructures, the DICTÉ-SPIFF regime in the State initiated a campaign for self-help development for rural communities. It was mainly aimed at mobilizing the people in the various rural communities to supplement government's effort in rebuilding, rehabilitating and reconstructing the war-torn physical, economic and social infrastructural facilities in the State.
- ii. The second reason adduced for renewed vigor given to self-help schemes in the State was the perceived neglect of rural tax payers and their areas by successive government located in the urban centers. This further aroused in the people a revival of spirit of self-help, which induced them to harness and mobilize their resources on their own towards the construction of socially-valuable projects which successive government failed to provide for them.

This concept of people's participation had been significant in the development of the Nigerian rural societies in the pre-colonial and early part of the post-colonial era (Anam, 2011). This paper advocates the need to establish and sustain the self-help approach to community development in the effort to improve the social and economic welling of rural dwellers in Nigeria.

Government participation in self-help projects

In Bayelsa State, in the early 1970s, up to the early part of the 80s, the government played significant participatory role in the promotion of self-help schemes in developing rural communities. There were levels of institutional participation. These were in form of,

1. Grant-in-Aid: This is the major area under which State government provides funding to self-help projects of communities. This can be categorized into three planks;
 - a. Category i- these were projects which would have been normally provided by the State government directly, but because no provision was made for such project in the budget, local communities were encouraged to provide them through communal efforts. Projects such as rural health centers, maternity homes, postal agencies, potable drinking water schemes fell into this category and attracted a grant of 25% to 50% of the estimated cost of the projects.
 - b. Category ii- these projects that contributes to the economic progress of the people, and include such projects as feeder roads, co-operative farming, markets, etc. these projects attracted a grant of 15% of the total cost.

- c. Category iii- this category provide for the socio-cultural improvement of the life of the people- libraries, youth centers, town halls etc. covered under this category are attracted a grant of 10% of total cost of the project.
2. Technical Aid- this was purely technical assistance to the communities, because it was clear that the communities did not have the technical know-how to initiate and execute certain projects. Thus, it entailed the offering of advice and the use of State government personnel and equipment in the planning and execution of self-help development projects.

Formulation of Self Projects and Sources of Funds

In Bayelsa State, there were agencies responsible for the formulation of self-help projects in the state. These were the Community Development Committees (CDC), enlightened members of the communities, Community heads, Youth associations and government rural development officers. The CDCs is the primary agent responsible for the initiation and formulation of self-help development projects. Self-help projects were financed from four main sources. We briefly outline them below.

- i. Development launching was one popular and acceptable means of raising fund for self-help projects. It is process by which funds were raised for a specific project. Citizen of the communities were invited and people make monetary pledges. Sometimes development launch for self-help projects became a sort of competition among the people sons and daughters from the community who lived in urban areas returned home to join their rural communities in the planning and execution of projects designed to improve life in the community. Huge sums of money were raised from development launch.
- ii. Individual donations for specific projects were another source of funding for development projects. However, we would like to point out that the amount of money raised from this source depends on the number of wealthy people in the community and their willingness to donate for specific development projects.
- iii. Another equally important source of financing self-help projects is the direct levy on all adult males and females for a specific project. This levy is compulsory, and in some rural communities, defaulters were arrested and detained until the levy was paid. In some communities in Bayelsa State, this was the major source funding for self-help projects.
- iv. Lastly, government matching –grants also contributes funding for self-project. This was an arrangement by which the State government provided funds to help rural communities in the execution of specific rural development projects. The funds were released when the State government was satisfied that an identified project was likely to be beneficial to the community in question.

For instance in Old Rivers State, between 1970 and 1975, a total of 839 projects were executed with 412 projects, in financial terms, total grants paid out by the state government towards various self-help scheme during the same period stood at #1,857,000 (Rural Development in Old Rivers State). Most of the social infrastructures that were built in 1970s and 1980s were executed through self-help, town halls, schools, markets; road, potable water etc. Self-help was the single most important variable in the development of the rural communities. In Bayelsa State, every community was involved; the CDCs of the communities were very active. With government's limited resources and communities took it upon themselves to provide the needed social amenities. At some point, it became competitive among neighboring communities, which one to first provide peculiar social amenities through self-help. They people felt the impact of their development effort.

However, all that suddenly changed beginning from the early 1990s. The tempo of self-help activities by rural communities began to decline. This can be evidence from the fact that in Bayelsa State, there is no provision for match grant for self-help projects in the successive annually budgets of the state government. Even in the rural communities, nobody is talking about self-help project any longer, as if it has become an outdated concept. But we argue that self-help is still one of the best strategies for community development, especially given the developmental challenges the people. Since the State government cannot simply provide all the needed social amenities for the rural communities.

The dearth of community self-help projects in the State

Several factors have been identified as factors responsible for the sudden decline in the self-help activities in rural communities in Bayelsa State. Some of them include,

1. **Corruption:** Corruption constitutes one of the greatest factor constraining self-help programs in rural areas of Bayelsa State. Corruption can be seen from two angles, the State government and the community leaders. We recalled that the Old Rivers State government made it a matter of State policy to encourage self-help efforts in rural communities by giving them match grants or aids. In today Bayelsa State, State officials in the Ministry of Local Government Affairs have turned the issue of match grants into private business by enriching themselves.
2. **Fictionalization in the communities:** The increased factions in rural communities over chieftaincy, stools, land, contracts, oil right, etc. has been isolated as partly responsible for the dead of self-help efforts in rural communities in Bayelsa State. When communities are factionalized, there is no unity, therefore they cannot come together to plan for the overall good of the community as a whole, there is no bound, no trust. Self-help effort can only thrive in a situation of absolute unity. Self-help efforts cannot flourish in a state of division and acrimony. People largely think of the faction they belong, not the community's overall interest. As a result the various factions cannot come together to promote their common interest and enhance their well being.

3. Conflicts-Communal conflicts are frequent in rural communities in Bayelsa State and this cannot foster self-help projects. When there are pervasive conflicts in communities, it leads to loss of lives and property. Community driven effort towards development cannot be fostered. These no doubt has led to the dead of self-help efforts in Bayelsa State.
4. Lack of Community Spirit-This is also argued as partly responsible for the decreased of self-help projects in rural communities in Bayelsa State. Gone were the days, people have deep seated interest in the development of their communities. Largely because of the hard economic situation in the rural communities, people think of their families, not the interest of larger communities. Lack of community spirit affects the development and sustenance of self-help projects.
5. Urban Migration-Most promising young men and women that would have been useful in mobilizing community support for self-help projects have migrated to Yenagoa the State capital, for greener pasture. This has affected the ability to the community to mobilize themselves, harness resources, plan and implement self-help programmes. Therefore, the migration of young men to cities is detrimental to self-help programmes of rural communities.
6. Poverty; Poverty has always been and still remains a delimiting factor in rural community development in Bayelsa State. Poverty appears both as a cause and effect of the problem for rural backwardness. As a cause, poverty precludes both the government and rural people from pooling huge funds to execute rural self-help projects. It is on record that, the level of poverty in rural areas is increasing in Bayelsa state compared to 1970s and 1980s, when self-help projects was in vogue and was embraced by every community. The poor rural dweller cannot levy themselves to fund projects that are of common interest to their communities. As an effect, the leaders tasked to manage the meager resources misappropriated and embezzled such funds. The CDC chairmen and members now see their appointment as a veritable opportunity to redress their poverty status.

Theoretical Framework

The participatory rural development approach is used in this study. Participatory approach is an alternative development theory which emerged in the late 1970's in response to the top down nature of previous approaches, marking a shift in the traditional focus from things to people (Anam, 2011). Promoting community's full involvement in their own development, the participatory approach envisages rural development as a process which values and promotes indigenous knowledge and skills while building upon their cultural and natural resources. Therefore, strategies used in participatory approaches aim at finding sustainable livelihoods solutions and opportunities by working with rather than for the community.

Community participation is the secret of the success of self-help projects. Participation is both in kind and in cash. There is usually enthusiasm from the community to participate in projects since the adoption of projects is arrived at through consensus and these projects must meet the aspirations of all

classes of the society. Wignaraja (1984) emphasizes the extent of people's participation by observing that the rural poor need to become increasingly aware of the socio-economic reality around them, of the forces that keep them in poverty, and of the possibility of bringing about change in their conditions through their own collective actions. This constitutes a process of self-transformation through which they grow and mature as human beings. In this sense participation is also a basic human need. This is manifested in the voluntary contributions either in cash or in kind from community members.

Participation and community development have been identified as key concepts in development with the emphasis on "the direct involvement of ordinary people in local affairs (Midgley et al 1986)." The stream of development thinking points to participation as a process of empowering those who were previously excluded from achieving power; that is, "power in terms of access to, and control of the resources necessary to protect livelihood (Oakley and Marsden 1984)." These concepts are in tandem with the efforts of communities to initiate and realise that their projects.

Promoting self-help projects encourages self-reliant among community dwellers in promoting their collective wellbeing. Self-reliant development provides basic community needs such as water, health facilities, roads, etc. while projects like electricity and telephone, which are not of primary importance, are not considered priority projects. This partly accounts for the enthusiastic participation of all strata of the society, particularly the poor, in self-reliant projects. The overriding principle is for rural communities to look inwards and search for solutions to urgent development problems through the mobilisation of local resources. Government organisations and other development partners should devise strategies to support these local initiatives and regional networks, which will go a long way in transforming most rural communities.

Conclusion

The study revealed that community self-help was a potent instrument at the disposal of rural dwellers in reducing abject poverty, thereby promoting the common good and well being of their communities. However, community self-help has lost its desired attention in rural communities in Bayelsa State. The study identified myriads of factors responsible for the dearth of self-help efforts in the development of rural communities in Bayelsa State. It submits that, given due attention base on the highlighted recommendations, self-help projects can be revive and promoted as a veritable tool for community development in the State.

Self-help projects are potent to sustainable rural community development. Development will be sustainable to the extent that it allows for community participation, contributes to increased local growth that rural people can see, and are able to access the resources to keep it going. Thus, sustainability implies effective participation to assure that the projects and activities undertaken respond to articulated priorities at the local level. A sustainable strategy will thus have to enhance the revenue base of local people over time (although initially the contribution will be small). It will, moreover, have to define a major role for local government in coordinating the participatory decision-making and in mobilizing available resources.

Recommendations/ strategies for reviving sustaining self-help projects in Bayelsa State

In view of the findings and the pivotal role played by community self-help schemes in the development of rural communities, the paper recommends that:

1. The State government should kick start the campaign to revive self-help programmes, by enlightening the people on the significance of the scheme and also appropriating certain amount of funds in the State government annual budget estimates as match-in-grants and aids to rural communities.
2. The State government should look into the issue of corruption that bedeviled the scheme in the past. It was noted that the increasing level of poverty is a militating factor against the success of community self-help and has been largely responsible for the dearth of the scheme in the past.
3. Therefore, the state government should revive the rural economy by establishing farm settlements in every local council area and building cottage industries to invigorate the local economy. Also the issue of conflict which has discouraged community self-help efforts should be given attention by the state government and the communities.
4. The state government should also step-up enlighten campaign to revive the spirit of community self-help in the mass media.

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