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The Effect of Self Help projects in the Development of Communities in Isuikwato L.G.A. Abia State

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Abstract

The increasing rate of rural neglect by the government in Nigeria has necessitated the embrace of self-help projects as a complementary development strategy for community development. The major aim of this study was to determine the impact of self-help projects on community development in Isuikwato Local Government Area of Abia State. This study which was survey in nature made use of sample size of 450 respondents drawn from the six communities randomly selected for the study. Data was collected through questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Z test statistical tool was used to analyze the two hypotheses developed for this study. The analysis of the hypotheses revealed that calculated Z value at 14.2 was more than the table value at 1.96 and in the second hypothesis the calculated Z value at 13.7 was more than the table value at 1.96. The findings revealed that execution of self-help projects enhanced community development and that effective leadership facilitated the success of self-help projects in Isuikwato Local Government Area. Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations; that community leaders entrusted with self-help projects should be individuals with integrity and transparency, the community leaders entrusted with self-help projects should seek for collaboration with development experts like NGOs on how best to form synergy in community development, and the government should complement the efforts of self-help groups by providing them with soft loans and technical expertise.

Key Words: Self-help, Community development, Leadership, Strategy

Introduction

The need to develop the rural area in the face of government neglect has been one major impetus to evolution of self-help projects in Africa. From the earlier epoch of human history and evolution, communities have sought to improve their socio-economic and cultural conditions through self-help efforts. Due to the secular character of most developing countries specific programmes and strategies are usually designed to address the problem of underdevelopment and poverty. One of the enduring and flourishing heritage of traditional African society is their involvement in self-help development projects. The concept of self-help development gained a lot of attention in developing countries especially in Africa during the increasing poverty and economic downturn in 1980s and early 1990s (Gonerantine and Mbilinyi, 1992). The idea of self-help was therefore a strategy aimed at complementing governmental development effort with the effort of people themselves.

For King and Slessor (1987) self-help approach entails the use of local initiative to embark on local development of the community. This means that the community has the right and ability to set their own goals and then realizing them as much as possible through their own efforts using their own factors. These factors include land, finance, knowledge and skill among other factors. Similarly, self-help embodies the notion that a community can achieve greater self-determination within constraints imposed by the larger economy in which it is embedded. In essence, without a commitment to self-help, a community may exist as a place, an organization, or an interest group but lacking the capacity building strategy. It is this idea of intervention to produce a greater capacity for self-help among communities that is the cornerstone of the community development profession.

The successful mobilizing of a broad community participation and execution of self-help project is predicated upon by the knowledge and leadership of the people. The ability to mobilize and effectively coordinate the affair of the community towards self-help projects requires quality leadership and in-depth knowledge of the project. Kuponiyi, Ayanwuyi, and Olarinde (2007) noted that the success of any community action hugely rests on the quality of leadership. For them Igboja Community Health Centre project in Ondo State of Nigeria, illustrated clear situation where quality leadership played crucial role in actualizing the community based project.

However, some studies have related self-help projects to community development. Akpomovie (2010) in an empirical study on the "impact of self-help projects on community development" carried out between 2006-2007 in Ethiopie East and West Local Government Areas of Delta State; with data collected from 280 respondents through questionnaire and interview method; discovered that the community based self-help projects greatly enhanced the quality of live in the community and bridged the gap between the rural area and the urban.

Osimebi (2011) discovered the relevance of self-help project in community development. In the study conducted in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria, on community self-help projects and rural development; Osimebi (2011) study revealed that self-help projects have tremendous impact on the development of the rural area. In the same vain Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) in their study on "The role of community self help projects in rural development of Kwara state, Nigeria", discovered that self-help projects normally influence the development of the rural communities thereby increasing their standard of living through the provision affordable and accessible healthcare, pipe-borne water, electricity etc.

The Felt-Need theory offered a theoretical explanation the use of self-help projects. The theory hinges on an idea that change is considered necessary to correct community problems. For Sheriff (2014) a proponent of this theory, felt-need theory implies that in community development, the perception of the problem or what the people really need generates a feeling of worry and this worry becomes the driving force and propel the people to move towards solving the problem. For Onyenemezu (2013), felt-need theory advocates the emotional feeling for need for change to better the lives of the people. This ultimately makes them team together and form a driving force in that change process, which they see as essential.

So in Nigeria, self-help efforts have been adopted as a veritable strategy for achieving community development in the face of gross government neglect of the rural communities. Respective governments in Nigeria have concentrated socio-economic development in the cities while the rural areas remain underdeveloped and poor. Most rural communities are characterized by illiteracy, neglect, inadequate provision of social services and infrastructure, high birth rate and death rate, low life expectancy and malnutrition.

A critical look at Nigeria since independence in 1960 till date will reveal that vast rural communities of the country are in deplorable state. In fact, the development gap between the urban and rural areas in Nigeria is very noticeable (IFAD, 2012). With about 70 percent of Nigeria's total population residing in rural communities (Akpabio, 2005), the incidence of poverty and underdevelopment is evident in lack of social service and infrastructure, unemployment, disease, high infant and maternal mortality, low income, underdeveloped agrarian economy among others have become their lots.

Programmes on self help projects in Nigeria are basically an attempt to reduce poverty and satisfying basic needs. Thus, successful self help projects in rural development in Nigeria implies the acceleration of the pace of developing the rural areas, through the provision of basic needs and necessary amenities like water supply, electricity, job opportunities, development of settlement schemes and feeder roads. The total acceptance of self helps as a strategy for community development is evidenced in the number of projects initiated in the country by

the rural communities in Nigeria. Based on the fact that survival is an innate attribute in human beings, the Isuikwuato communities have sought for complementary development strategy since the government could not adequately provide for them. They organized themselves into groups for self-help activities such as the construction and building of health centres, schools, rural roads, village halls, market stalls etc.

Although the relevance of self-help activities in fostering community development is overwhelming, there are some visible constraints that have beset the process. The quality of leadership appears to be crucial at determining whether self-help efforts will succeed or not. The leader is guide to his group members and as such, sees to their need and planning for finding means to achieve group goals. Ekong (1995) attributes the effectiveness of group to leadership, submitting that when good leadership exists there is every tendency for the success of group action. As political entity, community development projects are always influenced a great deal by politics of who should be the leader. Hence, the personal integrity of leaders entrusted with self-help projects always bear to mind. Leaders perceived to be of questionable character hardly earn the support of the community members on self-help projects. This invariably may affect the realization of self-help projects negatively.

As a corollary to the issue of leadership, is the question whether the projects initiated in communities, meet the immediate needs of the people or not. Community self-help projects are expected to add value to the lives of the rural dwellers. Development programmes imposed on the people by their community leaders scarcely get completed. This could be one of the reasons for abandoned self-help projects in Isuikwuato communities. So not fully involving the people in the project identification, initiation, implementation, and evaluation may have consequently limited the mobilization of people and resources towards effective people's participation in self-help efforts. This may be a major constraint to effective community participation and mobilization to self-help projects. The above constraints seem to cast aspersion on the viability of self-help projects in achieving community development in Isuikwato L.G.A. of Abia State. As a result, the major objective of this study is to examine the impact of self-help project on community development in Isuikwuato. While the specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify self-help projects of the people of Isuikwuato.
- To determine whether self-help projects aid community development.
- To find out whether leadership helps in the success of self-help projects.

Study Area

Isuikwuato is a local government area in Abia State in Southeastern Nigeria. The name Isu-Ikwu-Ato translates from Igbo as 'three Isu families or lineage' and refers to the three lineages descended from the Isu people, in what is now a local government area. The three brothers are Imenyi which was considered the eldest, Oguduaasa the second eldest and their younger sibling Isuamawo, these three major clans which also harbours some various communities in each of them makes up the present day Isuikwuato. Isuikwuato is a Local Government Area came into existence as a separate administrative entity in 1989 with its headquarters at Mbalano. Isuikuato is bounded in the North by Umunneochi Local Government, in the south by Bende Local Government all in Abia State, and in the West by Okigwe Local Government in Imo State and in the East by Ivo Local Government in Ebonyi State. It has the land mass of 144 square kilometer and population of 115,794 (NPC,2015).

The Local Government Area has natural resources such as iron ore and kaolin. The people are mostly farmers and major cash crops are palm oil and cassava the major agricultural products are cassava, yam and palm oil. Isuikwuato is also home to Abia State University Uturu. And the people are predominantly Christians. Catholic, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists dominate other denominations, but denominations such as Assemblies of God have increased in number.

Materials and Methods

A survey research design was employed for this study. The data for the study was gathered through Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion. And “sample size calculator” was used to get the sample for the study from the six autonomous communities (Ahaba, Ovim, Ngodo, Achara, Amibo, and Aro) chosen from the study area, Isuikwuato Local Government Area. These communities have a total population of 33340 (NPC, 2015), using the software sample size calculator, a sample of 590.

The study made use of simple random sampling, a proportionate stratified random sampling to assign each community based on its population strength; and systematic random sampling to choose households for the study. So out of the 590 questionnaire distributed, a total of 450 copies were returned which constitute the actual sample size for this study. The data was then analysed using Z-test.

Results and Discussion

This table 1 shows that the number of persons aged 31-40 years has the highest response rate of 35.6%. The implication of this is that the community is made up young and vibrant men who are eager to move the community forward. Many people in this age bracket are more industrious and gainfully employed and have the ability to mobile the resources required for self-help projects in the community.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent

Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	110	24.4
31-40	160	35.6
41-50	99	22.0
51-60	40.5	9.0
61-above	40.5	9.0
Total	450	100

Table 2 shows the numerous self-help projects embarked upon by the people of Isuikwuato community. The table reveals that of all the self-help projects undertaken by the people, the health/maternity centre is the predominant self-help projects embarked on by the people. The implication of this is that at the time of the study the members of the community were very much concerned with health status of the people. This is connected to the health challenges faced by the rural people. This table also shows that the community has been able to execute numerous self-help projects.

Table 2: Major self-help Projects embarked by the people.

Major self-help projects	Frequency	Percentage
Road construction	65	14.4
Rural Electrification	63	14.0
Health/Maternity centre	96	21.3
Civic centre	28	6.2
Construction of motor parks	21	4.7
Skills acquisition	67	14.9
Construction of market stalls	80	17.8
Borehole	18	4.0
Others	12	2.7
Total	450	100

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed that the execution of self-help projects has enhanced community development in their communities. The percentage of positive response (SA+A) of 83.3% is greater

than the percentage of negative response (DA+SDA) of 16%. From the foregoing, execution of self-help projects helps in engendering community development. There was also an overwhelming agreement from the FGD that self-help projects are necessary for developing rural communities in the face of neglect by the government.

Table 3: Execution of self-help projects and community development

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
SA	190	42.2
A	185	41.1
DA	35	7.8
SDA	40	8.9
Total	450	100

The table shows that transparency and proper management of fund (35.8%) is the outstanding criteria for measuring effective leadership in the success of self-help projects, 34.2 % maintained that ability to duly consult the community members before embarking on projects shows effective leadership, 21.3% saw acquisition of technical knowhow as a criteria while 8.7% agreed that non-politicization of projects determines the quality of leadership. Data above illustrated the fact that transparency and prudence management of funds is a necessary leadership quality for the success of self-help projects.

Table 4: Effective leadership criteria for successful self-help projects

Effective leadership criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Ability to duly consult the community members before embarking on projects	154	34.2
Transparency and proper management of fund	161	35.8
Non-politicization of projects	39	8.7
Acquisition of technical knowhow	96	21.3
Total	450	100

From table 5, the percentage positive responses (SA + A) of 82.3% is greater than the percentage negative responses of 17.7%. Therefore the study discovered that effective leadership is crucial for the success of self-help projects in Isuikwuato communities.

Table 5: Effective leadership and success of self-help projects

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
SA	201	44.7
A	196	37.6
DA	61	13.6
SDA	19	4.2
Total	450	100

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₁: There is a positive relationship between the execution of self-help projects and community development.

H₀: There is no positive relationship between the execution of self-help projects and community development.

The hypothesis was tested with table 3 proposition; the execution of self-help projects has enhanced community development in the community.

Z - Calculated = 14.2

Z - Table value = 0.4500, traced to the table of normal distribution

Z Table = 1.65

Decision rule: since the calculated Z value at 14.2 is more than the table value at 1.96, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a positive relationship between the execution of self-help projects and community development is accepted.

Hypothesis 2

H₁: There is a positive relationship between effective leadership and the success of self-help projects.

H₀: There is no positive relationship between effective leadership and the success of self-help projects.

This was tested with table 5 proposition; effective leadership is crucial for the success of self-help projects.

Z = Calculated = 13.7

Z = Table value = 0.4500, traced to the table of normal distribution

Z Table = 1.65

Decision rule: since the calculated Z value at 13.7 is more than the table value at 1.96, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a positive relationship between effective leadership and success of self-help projects is accepted.

Discussion of Results

The findings of this study reveal that Isuikwuato Community has vibrant and youthful population (35.6%) that the financial resources and capability to initiate and embark on self-help projects. Most of the people within the age group (31-40) are involved in meaningful businesses, farming, politics, trading, etc that enable them mobilize resources towards self-help projects. In terms of the project executed through self-help, the study shows that the construction of health/maternity centre is predominant (21.3%) among other projects. The reason for this was that the community like any other rural community in Nigeria is faced with health challenges that require drastic measures to address the situation.

Furthermore the findings from this study reveal that there is a positive relationship between the execution of self-help projects and community development in Isuikwuato Local Government Area. There was evident from the FGD that self-help projects are necessary for developing rural communities in the face of neglect by the government. Majority of the people agreed that the self-help projects have enhanced the quality of life in the rural area and narrow the gap between the urban and rural communities. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents as shown in table 3 agreed that the execution of self-help projects have enhanced community development in the communities.

This further study reveals that there is a positive relationship between effective leadership and the success of self-help projects. This hypothesis was supported by the finding from table 4 which revealed crucial effective leadership criteria, for successful self-help projects. Prominent among them are the leader's transparency, proper management of funds and ability to duly consult the community members before embarking on projects. Empirical findings from Kuponiyi, Ayanwuyi, and Olarinde (2007) supported that the success of any community action hugely rests on the quality of leadership. This is in line with the finding of Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) that

the execution and completion of any self help projects and rural development cannot materialized unless somebody perceives, conceive and put the initiative forward before people can embark on it. The FGD supported this position; the people expressed the fact that they will never support any member of the community that who is discovered not be honest and has bad antecedence. The implication of this is that leaders found out by the community members as corrupt or with questionable character may hardly mobilize community's support for self-help projects.

Recommendations

The study made the following suggestions:

- Since the quality of leadership is essential in providing direction towards self-help projects in the community, individuals with integrity and transparency should be selected. There should be a check on the background of such leaders before entrusting them with such positions.
- The government should identify with the communities that have embarked on self-help projects, and encourage them through the provision of some expert and technical knowledge and finances. This will go a long way to encourage other communities on self-help projects and facilitate more development.

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