Contents :

Community Development in Akwa Ibom State: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

Edet J. Tom Ph.D, Amadu J. Attai Ph.D
Department of Political Science and Public Administration University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.
Department of Political Science and Public Administration University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

Abstract: *Community development has always been a matter of serious concern to both the government and people of Akwa Ibom State. In this regard government and people of Akwa Ibom State have at one time or the other made several attempts in bringing development to some rural communities of the state. Such attempts in developing both urban and rural communities have achieved very little success. This paper identifies and discusses major impediments against community development in Akwa Ibom State. It is of the view that significant stride in community development in Akwa Ibom State will be achieved if community dwellers are actively involved in development programmes and recommended that people must become both carriers and patrons of development. The work is descriptive in methodology.*
Key words: *community, development, human, needs.*

I. Introduction

Community development over the years has had the intrinsic expectation of transforming and modernizing the rural areas and has been one of the major concerns of the Akwa Ibom State since its creation. As early as 1989, the State Government used Matching-Grant which is based on state subsidy to self-help projects, already initiated by the people or communities themselves to propel community development. Through this system of administration, the State government hopes, among others, to utilize local resources to improve or establish social facilities like schools, welfare institutions, health services etc. in the various communities as well as stimulate economic activities at community level so as to reduce the socio-economic imbalance between the rural communities and the urban centres and curtail the drift of population to the cities. Although these programmes testify to the priority attention community development has received in Nigeria, experience so far demonstrates that what have been achieved does not commensurate with the expectation. In contrary over 80 percent of the rural population who reside in the rural communities are victims of neglect, deprivation and exploitation. In other words, community development programmes failed to translate the dividends of Nigeria's economic reforms into measurable benefits for ordinary citizens in communities.

A coherent strategy that could have extricated both the urban and rural communities of Akwa Ibom State and Nigerian as a whole from underdevelopment and set the communities on the path of sustainable livelihoods has been lacking.

This work identifies the factors that impede the success of community development in Akwa Ibom State and proposed that community development will show remarkable improvement only when the development of the human person, as the most important atomic component of the community, becomes the pivot of development programme.

II. Conceptual and theoretical Issues

Malinoswki (1944) and Radcliff-Brown (1952) conceived community as conjugal social units, comprising of families, kin-groups, local settlements, villages or hamlets, including tribal or ethnic groups or social aggregates etc. In contemporary times it can, however, be extended to include urbanized settlements of people in town or cities, a state, even a nation at large. Community as Durkheim (1933) opined has high degree of solidarity in terms of sameness, intimate relationship, morality, high integration, closeness, commonly shared norms and values. In a strict sense community is thus primarily a social group occupying a defined geographical area based on common feelings of belonging to and sharing the responsibility of the welfare of their members. It is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence or a collectivity of which the members share a common territorial area as their base of operation for daily activities and domicile.

The other concept, development, implies progress, an observable or noticeable improvement in the socio-economic and cultural lives of the people towards their well-being, welfare or emancipation. It is the act or process of unfolding or bringing out what is latent or potential to a more advanced or highly organized state which enables, in this case, community to function at its best. It is a total process that involved all aspects of human endeavour (Palmer, 1985). Essentially, development leads to better performance, better quality, and

quantitative increase or change. It is growth, and also connotes improvement of or upon existing facilities or provision of somewhere non-existed before.

Community development is therefore a process by which efforts of the people, individuals, agencies or governments are designed toward enabling a community to realize their potential, build self confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment evidenced in improved quality of life and standard of living. It leads to higher levels of civilization((Ake, 1996:); control over productive forces (Anikpo, 1984); reduction in the rates of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Seer, 1970); access to basic social amenities (electricity, potable water, etc) institutionalization of democracy (the South Commission Report, 1993), advanced infrastructural development, enhanced education and improved productivity (Onuoha, 1999).

So conceived, community development is divided generically into two groups namely organic and mechanistic types of development (Strauss, 1953). Organic development is innate, self-propelled, and natural.

The inference from the organic theory is that community development is a natural process. Accordingly, it is nothing new to the people. Long before governments of Nigeria became interested in community development in a formal sense, as Umoh (1985) observed, both rural and urban communities had been engaging in the development of their communities. What is observed, even today, as positive qualitative change in many communities throughout the state is, for the most part, of the organic nature. The communities provide themselves with better homes and modern facilities like water and electricity. Many rural communities still provide themselves with roads, bridges, town halls, markets, etc without reference to the government. All their attempts to improve their conditions through communal sponsorship and execution of development projects are expressions of organic development.

Mechanistic kind of community development programme as Wheeler (1936) opined, on the other hand, depends on the principle of organic development which assumes that the people have ideas about their needs and wants. They need, therefore, only to be given opportunity, guidance, and motivation to cause them to develop themselves (Peet and Watts, 1996). In other words, mechanistic kind of community development is founded on the Promethean theory that the ability to shape a good life for himself is innate to man and that, with knowledge, he is capable of providing himself with comfort and good life.

Unlike organic development, mechanistic type of community development according to Fanolumi (2002), Chino (2004), and World Bank (2004) is stirred up or generated from outside by a factor or an agent that is external to the community or, if it is within the community, an urge or a motivation which is particular to the sponsor or agent and, strictly speaking, non-communal.

Again, there are about two variations of this type of development – public and private. The public mechanistic type of community development is the one sponsored by the government through its authorized agencies and ministries. The project is planned, funded, and executed as well as managed by the government or the agencies. In the case of the private typology, Century and Taff (1971) contend that sponsorship comes from individuals, social clubs or unions, and corporate bodies urged by profit motives or humanitarianism or hedonistic feeling of philanthropy. Many of the schools, hospitals, industries, agricultural estates, etc in a number of communities in Akwa Ibom State are examples of mechanistic type of community development.

III. Community Development in Akwa Ibom State: The Issues

In Akwa Ibom State as it is elsewhere in Nigeria, community development programmes are conceived within the framework of the modernization perspective. Accordingly, community or government effort toward community development attempts to replicate urban infrastructure in the affected communities. Governments in Nigeria have assumed that community development means the wholesome transfer of various urban amenities to the countryside (Anikpo, 1984). This has become the ideology that guides development planning for communities.

This conception guides the agencies that sponsor mechanistic type of development in Akwa Ibom State, particularly the government, which conceive of community development as a conscious programme for the physical development and improvement of the rural environment and quality of life of the inhabitants through provision of infrastructures. The organic agencies, on the other hand, see their efforts less as a programme or development than an attempt to solve pressing problems or provide certain conveniences for themselves. To achieve their envisioned objectives, Umoh (1985) observes that , both, however, adopt similar attitudes and strategies. It is here that one could observe the conceptual error about community development.

To them, community development means, as Makinwa (1978) put it ,

provision and improvement of infrastructures such as good roads, schools medical facilities, electricity and clean pipe-borne water supply with the aim of increasing general welfare and quality of the people diversifying and increasing employment opportunities labour so that workers enjoy increasing incomes.

While Erring et al (2006) agreed with Makinwa that communities are developed through the projects that are undertaken and these can be varied and many, there is, however, unanimous agreement in the literature (Littrel, 1990, 1977; Milson, 1978; Biddle and Biddle, 1995), that community development involves more than

satisfy the basic needs of the people. They maintain that development goals at various stages of community development should involve:

(1) Encouraging the spirit of communal self-help and initiative in the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the communities.
(2) Assisting the communities in organizing themselves to undertake self-help projects.
(3) Educating members of the community on the need to co-operate and to participate actively in community affairs.
(4) Enhancing self awareness and promoting the spirit of confidence.
(5) Educating and stimulating individual and groups to accept change for the improvement of their living standards.
(6) Encouraging the cooperation between communities, government and the private sector in the improvement of the living conditions of communities.
(7) Enhancing community integration and encouraging the spirit of patriotism.
(8) Encouraging inter-communal interaction that will promote exchange of ideas for social development.
(9) Establishing an organized system of social service in order to make people self-reliant and enable them to participate fully in the development of the nation.
(10) Encouraging communities to be fully integrated into the life of the nation through special community development programmes.
(11) A careful scrutiny of various community development programmes in the state revealed that these supposed objectives of community development programme are lacking. In other words man should be pivot of development.

In other words, community development involves creating conditions which is conducive to the growth of people's self esteem and institutions, which promote human dignity and respect with overall goal of improving lives in the community. Generally, community development should imply whatever is done to ensure social progress locally, the steps taken and the methods used to do with human welfare and humans cooperating with each other, helping each other, assimilating new ideas, adopting new ways of living and habits of doing things. It has to do with raising funds, acquiring new technology and techniques from outside experiences for the social and economic improvement of the whole community. In other words, development should evolve from and revolve around human.

IV.   Community Development in Akwa Ibom State: The Challenges

Community development programmes should lead to reduction of poverty, unemployment and income inequalities. This is, however, not true in Akwa Ibom State where community development is facing some man-made challenges as enumerated below.

All mechanistic community development programmes in Akwa Ibom State, for instance, adopt top-down approach to development. As Musa (1995) and Adefila (1995) pointed out, the 'top-down' approach is not only donor-driven, sector-specific and restrictive in scope; it is also based on the belief that rural communities or poor people are ignorant, fatalistic, improvident, lazy and sometimes stupid and incapable of solving their problems without assistance. It is presumed that educated outsiders know more about the needs of the poor and rural people than the rural poor themselves. And, since project beneficiaries are hardly involved either at the policy design or at the implementation stage, they become more or less onlookers rather than participants and stakeholders in such projects or programmes. Vandalization and abandonment of projects, installations, etc., provided by the government for the use of communities, have also been attributed to the lack of commitment and disinterestedness on the part of the beneficiary communities, which the "top-down" approach produces among people who hardly understand what the programmes hold in store for them.

The loss of control over development process which follows from the fact that the intended beneficiaries of the development projects are enable to utilize it is colossus. Once built, and the attendant fees and kickbacks paid to contractor and politicians, the only group with an interest in seeing the project function, the community, has no decision making power over its operation. The projects fail to be incorporated into community productive forces, which should include all means necessary for the production and reproduction of material life.

Most organic type of community development projects are initiated and implemented without adequate planning. Equipped with only the natural drive to try to improve their own lot, many communities pick on and launched projects related to their most pressing needs without proper ideas of the ways and means of meeting the cost and any structural designs or plans nor are they based on accurate cost estimates. The promoters as Umoh (1985) lamented lack a true understanding of the socio-environmental consequences or implications of the projects that they initiate. Because of this, many of the projects hardly go beyond the first or the second launching. Records show that less than one-third of the development projects launched between 1989 and 2009 by communities in Akwa Ibom State had been completed.

The hypothetical community member who is the thermometer through which one determines the impact of community development in the words of Chinsman (1997) continues to give negative readings as he is seen to be ravaged by an excruciating poverty, ignorance and disease. A lot of rigours, bottlenecks and unnecessary bureaucracy are often attached to initiation and implementation of pubic sponsored community development project. This is evident in the history of most of the mechanistic community development programmes which are often saddled with disappointments.

Generally low income of the people makes collection of levies to sponsor organic development projects difficult. Some communities lose morale and give up when they discover that the cost is prohibitive. Leadership crises, misappropriation of funds and inability of leaders to give accurate accounts of levies already collected generate opposition that halts further progress of projects.

There is another problem. Because of lack of maintenance or service expertise, completed organic community development projects frequently grind to a halt. In many communities wells that were functional have become dry pits and boreholes are idle because the pumps went bad. Their resuscitation constitutes new projects for which such communities can no longer organize. Resources invested in such projects just waste away.

Some colossal effects follow from all of this. One is that the project, together with all the attendant envisioned objectives is grudgingly abandoned. Next, the resources already invested become a painful waste. Lastly, memory of failure which the project represents lingers and retards or discourages further development efforts in that community.

Implementation of the development programme itself is shrouded in politics. Political considerations influence the citing of projects or public support to organically sponsored schemes. Within the Akwa Ibom State for example, records of public support to locally initiated community projects between 1999 and 2013 show marked disparity between communities in a way that tends to indicated patronage where ruling party was supported.

Completed projects are not without problems. Corruption flickers away funds needed for their effective up-keep and operation. Nepotism and favoritism in staff employment and service to the clients as well as victimization of vocal staff and inter-institutional conflict impair internal management and achievement of objectives. This explains why community development efforts still leave very much to be desired (Umoh, 1985).

The community development direction and terrain is crowded with inconsistencies and distortions. Little wonder community development experience in Nigeria is compared to that of an AIDS patient who because of intrinsic pathological abnormality in the body system finds it difficult to respond to all medical entreaties. After many decades of effort towards community development programmes, many communities still lack structural foundation which development can be sustained.

The issue of proliferation of publicly sponsored type of community development programmes is a matter of serious concern. Some are so superficially implemented that the average targeted population in the community doubt the sincerity of the initiators. Such proliferation is easily noticed from the many numbers of such projects that died with successive governments that initiated them. There is also a glaring problem of implementation. Obot (1989) justified this claim when he writes that the development policies geared towards the improvement of the rural communities remained almost a house-hold word without corresponding success especially at the implementation stage. To this end, some of them are haphazardly implemented as a result of poor supervision. Perhaps, this is why water taps abound in so many communities but without water since their installation.

The problem of armed conflicts ranging from ethnic, communal, and religious to location issues which do not provide enabling environment for the implementation of sustainable development in such community could not be ignored. Situations where philanthropists, contractors, and government workers are target of kidnappers demanding ransom scared them and stifled development.

V.   A New Direction is needed

For community development to record greater success than it has been doing so far, however, the concept of community development has not only to be restructured, but it must also be given a new and proper focus. Community development has to become homocentric and be conceived, therefore, as the improvement of man himself and his pattern of behaviour or habit in order to enable him to strive always to live at greater ease, comfort, and with security.

It is well established in the government literature that when the local population participates in the conception and implementation of projects affecting their lives, the success and sustainability is assured. This explains the recent emphasis on the promotion of participation in the implementation of grassroots-based projects by many development agencies. In Akwa Ibom State a recent study by Nkpoyen (1988) indicated that over 65 per cent of community population did not take part in any activity connected with the conception and implementation of the projects in their community.

In view of their pivotal position in the scheme of community development, therefore, the people must become both carriers and patrons of development, both organic and mechanistic, to the extent that development programmes and development efforts not only minister to them, but they also become part of the leading administrators, devisors , initiators, in short, efficient causes of their community development. Man should be regarded as the sole dynamic of nature. He is the generator of all causative and innovative impulse aim at taming, harnessing, and directing the force of nature and the natural tendencies of man, for the total progress and happiness of his species.

Popular participation should be promoted by the government through collaboration with the communities right from the earliest stages of planning, through decision making (choice and site selection for the project) implementation, utilization, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation.

Community education which involves a holistic approach to the betterment of communities should be promoted by the government rather than concentrate on only rehabilitation of physical structures in the formal school system. This will enhance the welfare of the communities through mass education and general enlightenment in the area of agriculture, local industrial development, health, adult education, farm productivity environmental education, cooperative and enterprise development. This will lead to skill acquisition, growth in people's capabilities and increase productivity.

Government should help to promote a dynamic communication process through building of excellent communication linkages between itself and rural communities. To achieve this, community level institutional structures vis-à-vis social organizations such as town and village unions, youth groups, women groups, cooperative groups and community based organizations (CBOs) should be strengthened and made viable. This will serve as veritable platform for linkages effective and timely dissemination of information concerning community projects involving the community and external agent like NDDC. This will help to build a functional chain of awareness – understanding – motivation – participation and subsequent sustainability of development initiatives.

Sustainable approaches to community development such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which employs a bottom-up strategy that ensures the full involvement of the community in problem identification, solution, planning and implementation should be employed by the agents of community development in identifying communities' problems and appropriate intervention to address them.

New inconveniences should not be the communities' trade-off new projects. To give water or telephone to a community, road are cut up and left for months unmended or poorly mended to the great inconvenience of the road users. Green Revolution, at one time, and the River Basin Authority, at another, were meant to the rural communities, for example but in some areas they were also a source of woes because they deprived the people of their useful land. These happened in areas where the projects were sited at the usual farm lands of the communities. Such communities could have benefited more and the projects could have constituted an increase in economic opportunities if they were sited at the jungles which, for lack of tools, know-how, and finance, the people had left virgin and unexploited.

Moreover, one of the goals of the Akwa Ibom State's Development Plan is full employment and fair income distribution. Community development is one avenue that leads to the achievement of this objective. Each project carries in its wake new and increased job opportunities and legitimate avenue for earning money. Accordingly, each project should make effective use of the manpower of the community within its personnel structure. There is no better way of bringing out or unfolding the latent or potential power of the people to earn good living and improve their behaviour, habit, and character than this. This will also minimize the drift of population from the rural community to the urban areas.

At this stage of technological development, moreover, there is sufficient foreknowledge about socially or environmentally undesirable by-products of projects. Scheme to safeguard the community against them should be concomitant with the general plan for the project. Disposal arrangement for example, should be part of the planning for industries that produce waste while others that issue unpleasant fumes should equip themselves with deodorizing facilities to remove the nuisance from the air and save members of the entire community in its eco-environmental sense from breathing unpleasant air. Projects should not wait until the known possible accident occurs before thinking starts. Prevention and remedy should precede the incident. The traditional occupation of the people not likely to benefit from employment in the project should not be jeopardized as a result of the scheme but rather protected to afford them their usual means of survival.

As a process, community development is a well articulated programme and should therefore include an effort to assist individuals to acquire attitudes, skills and concepts required for their democratic participation in an effort toward solving their own problems in order of priority and as determined by their increasing level of competence.

Community education which involves a holistic approach to the betterment of communities should be promoted by the sponsors of the community development rather than concentrate on only rehabilitation of physical structures. Enhancement of the welfare of the communities through mass education and general

enlightenment in the area of agriculture, local industrial development, health, adult education, farm productivity, environmental education, cooperative and enterprise development must be made part of the community development. This will lead to growth in people's capabilities and sustainability.

Sustainable approaches to community development such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which employs a bottom-up strategy that ensures the full involvement of the community in problem identification, solution; planning and implementation should be employed in identifying communities' problems and appropriate intervention to address them.

VI. Conclusion

The work maintains that human beings are the centre of community development. Accordingly, all planning should be guided by an ever-present awareness that the focus of community development is the human population but not the infrastructures qua infrastructures. The people who live in the rural community are the interests to be developed. They are also the media that manifest or express development. As Huntington (1968) rightly proposed, community development cannot succeed without the active participation of the community. The people are the measure of success or failure of development efforts.

References

[1]. Adefila, Funsho (1995). "Accountability and Transparency". Report of Policy-Level Seminar on Accountability and Transparency organised by the National Planning Commission and the UNDP at Imo Concorde Hotel, Owerri, 20-21 November.
[2]. Akanji, O., Oyeredan, T., Thomas, B. & Dan, F. (1999). Infrastructure expenditure policy and private sector output in Nigeria 1970 – 1978. Lagos: Central Bank of Nigeria.
[3]. Ake, C. (1996). Democracy and development in Africa. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
[4]. Anikpo, M. (1984). The peasantry and the dilemma of Nigerian underdevelopment. Pan African Social Science Review (PASSR), 1, October.
[5]. B. E. Umoh (1985). Community Development in the Cross River State: Problems and Prospects in Proceedings of the Nigerian Rural Sociological Association. Uyo, April 1-5
[6]. Biddel, W. W. & Biddel, C. J. (1995) The community development process, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
[7]. Chino, T (2004). Oil for nothing: Multinational corporations, environmental destruction, death and impunity in the Niger Delta: United State of America non-governmental delegation trip report, September 6-12.
[8]. Deuts ch, K. W. (1957). Mechanism, organism, and society: Some models in natural and social science. Philosophy of Science, 18 July, 16-28.
[9]. Durkheim E. (1933). The Division of Labour in Society. New York: The Free Press.
[10]. Dwright, C. & Taff, C. (1976). Elements of business enterprise (3rd ed.). New York: The Roland Press.
[11]. Erring, S. O., Nwagbar, E. N. & Ushie, E. M. (2006). Sustainable rural development in Nigeria: Issues of methodology and policy. Journal of development and policy, 1 (1) 81 – 109.
[12]. Familoni, K. A. (2004). The role of economic and social infrastructure in economic development: A global view. Proceedings of the 11th annual conference of zonal research unit, Lagos, May 7.
[13]. Ibaba, S. I. (2008). State intervention in the Niger Delta: A critical appraisal of the ideology of development commissions. Port Harcourt: Harey Publication.
[14]. Ilori, B. (2002). The role of government in the development of basic infrastructure: Infrastructural development and economic growth in Nigeria. Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference of Zonal Research units, June 3 – 7.
[15]. Littrel, B. W. (1990). The theory practice of community development. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
[16]. Makinwa, P. K. (1978). Population dynamic and rural development. Nigerian Behavioural Science Journal, 11 (6), 179 – 194.
[17]. Malinowski B. (1944). A Scientific Theory of Culture and other Essays. Chapel Hill University of North Carolina, Press.
[18]. Milson, F. (198). An introduction to community work. London: Routledge and Keyan Paul.
[19]. Musa, Danladi (1995). "Community Participation in Rural Development". (Paper presented at Facilitators' National Training Workshop on Participatory Approach in Agriculture and Rural Development at the National Centre for Development Co-operation, Shedda, Abuja).
[20]. Nkpoyen, F. (2008). Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Initiatives and Rural Community Development: A Case Study of NDDC Assisted Projects in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria.
[21]. Nwankwo, J. (1994). Advance in Africa- a study of rural environment and rural needs. Benin City: University of Benin Press.
[22]. Obinozie, R. O. (1999). Rural development in Nigeria: Strategies and challenges. In O. O. Okereke (Ed.), Development administration in Nigeria: Issues and strategies. Owerri: Concave Publishers, 175 – 193.
[23]. Onuoha, B. C. (1999). The third world nations and underdevelopment: The role of some personality. Port Harcourt: Education Books and Investments.
[24]. Peet, R. & Watts, M. (1996). Liberation ecology: Development, sustainability, and environment in an age of market triumphalism. In R. Peet and M. Watts (Eds.), Liberation ecologies: Environment, development and social movements. London: Routledge, 1-45.
[25]. Radcliff-Brown A. R. (1893). The Principles of Sociology, Vol. 11 No. 3, New York, London. Appleton & Company. Ltd. U.K
[26]. Seer, D. (1970). The meaning of development. New York: Agricultural Development Council.
[27]. Strauss L. (1953). Natural right and history. Chicago: university of Chicago Press.
[28]. Tile, W. S. (2007). Approaches to Community Development and Poverty Alleviation Among the TIV People of Central Nigeria in International Journal of African Culture, Politics and Development. Vol. 2 No. 1 April.
[29]. Umoh, B.E. (1985). Community Development in Cross River State; Problems and Prospects, Proceeding of the Nigerian Sociological Association second Annual Conference, Uyo April 1-5.

[30]. Wheeler, R. H. (1936). Gestalt psychology. In P. L. Harriman (Ed.), The encyclopedia of psychology. New York: Psychological Library, 612-628.
[31]. World Bank (2002). Making infrastructure work for the poor. Washington D.C.: World Bank.