

# The Role of Ministry of Rural Development in the Promotion of Community Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Community development issue has taken centre stage in the developmental needs of rural communities in the third world countries especially in Africa. The establishment of community development association has made it easier for people to participate in the development of their communities. In Nigeria, and Akwa Ibom State in particular this need is not new as it has existed as far back as 1928 with the formation of Ibibio union before it was formalized in 1948. However, it was observed that at a certain point, the issue of community development was relegated to the background as people focus was shifted from that of the good of the community to themselves, waiting for government to provide the needed social and economic infrastructure. In 1999, the government of Akwa Ibom State saw the need to rekindle the spirit of community participation in development via Community Development Associations thus established Ministry of Rural Development. The study therefore examined the role of the Ministry of Rural Development in promoting community development in the State. The study adopted a historical as well as descriptive approach in data collection. The study therefore revealed that, community development has contributed tremendously to the developmental stride in the state. Also, that the ministry serves as a clearing house to these associations thereby instilling confidence in their members. The study further revealed that the ministry has not only streamlined these associations, but has also repositioned them for effective performance. Based on these, the study recommended that any project embarked upon by these associations should impact positively on the entire community's, economic and social wellbeing. Also, community's development projects should be directed toward the development of individuals and groups of individuals for wealth creation and economic empowerment.

**Keywords:** Rural Development, community development, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

All over the world especially in the Third World Countries, community development provides a large proportion of the needed solution to the problem of the low level of participation of people in development programmes. The notion of community development owes a great deal to the effort of colonial administrators. After the 2nd world war, the British colonial office became concerned with community development whose aim was to develop basic education and social welfare in the United Kingdom colonies. For instance, a 1944 report, on mass education on the colonies, placed more emphasis on literacy training and advocated the promotion of agriculture, health and other social services through local self help (Mayo, 1975 and Midsley *et al.*, 1986).

In Nigeria, community development is not new. It has been carried out by villagers, voluntary associations and various government instrumentalities long before the idea became formalized and institutionalized in 1948. For example, communities have constructed and maintained markets, roads, and water reservoirs; cleared their farmlands and cooperated in the cultivation and harvesting of crops. To prove this, as far back as 1830, the people of Abeokuta in Western Nigeria built a civic centre and the centenary Hall through self-help effort. Also, the Ibibio communities in South-eastern Nigeria banded themselves for social development as far back as 1928. By 1938 they were offering scholarships for overseas education to their promising sons and daughters. In 1939, they established the Ibibio state college which was entirely supported by their pooled resources, (Ekong, 1994).

## 2. Study Location

The study location is Akwa Ibom State. It is one of the thirty-six (36) States in Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State was created on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1987. It is the tenth largest State in the country with 31 Local Government Areas. It is located between longitude 7° 30' and 8° 30' East of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 4° 30' and 8° 30' North of the Equator. The state is located in the south-south political zone of Nigeria and is bounded in

the North by Abia State, in the East by Cross River State, in the South by the Atlantic Ocean and in the West by Rivers State, (Ekop, 2002, Ibok and Daniel, 2013).

Akwa Ibom State is host to numerous oil fields and oil installations and by these benefits from the constitutional provision that allocate 13% of petroleum revenues to states where the resources is extracted. Despite this abundance; the people of Akwa Ibom State do not believe that government should do everything in terms of development. The worst is government policy of concentration of development in some designated urban centres to foster economic growth which has failed to yield any appreciable results coupled with weak government institutions and policy commitment especially towards rural communities. The people of Akwa Ibom therefore saw the need to come together by way of associations to satisfy their development needs especially in this era of development strategy called public-private partnership (Ibok and Akpan, 2013).

### **3. Conceptualizing Community Development**

The concept of community development is one of the oldest and most popularly acclaimed vehicles for the transformation of most societies all over the world. In developing countries like Nigeria and by extension Akwa Ibom State, community development denotes effort to provide for the advancement of communities. Emphasis here is on social justice at the core of activity with particular focus on individual, groups and network that want or need to cooperate in order to achieve change at local or community level. This approach also means ensuring that the issues and priorities are identified and agreed upon by the communities themselves, and that people are encouraged to work together towards a collective solution to a shared concern, (Gilchrist, 1995).

According to United Nations (1963), community development entails processes by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. This internationally accepted definition identified two important elements which are; participation by the people in efforts to improve their level of living with much reliance on their own initiatives; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. Ultimately, it is expressed in programmes designed to achieve a wide variety of specific improvements.

Franks and Smith (2012), observe that community development helps to build community capacity in order to address specific issues and take advantages of opportunities, find common ground and balance competing interests. To them, capacity building does not just happen. It requires both a conscious and a conscientious effort to do something or manage things to improve the community. In the same vein, Anyanwu (1981), sees community development as education in the fullest and best sense for the stimulation of the desire for better things and the odds to attain such better things. Explaining further, community strives to educate and motivate people for self-help with a view to developing responsible local leadership among them, as well as cultivating in them a sense of citizenship and a spirit of civic consciousness. The emphasis here is that, the people of the community already know what they want to do and readily organized themselves without external coercion.

A cursory analysis of the aforementioned conceptual meaning reveals that the main objectives of community effort is to provide better living conditions for the whole community either by the initiatives of the people themselves or through other agencies which may be government or voluntary.

### **4. Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is anchored on participatory development theory. This approach originated in the late 1970s in Chang Mai and Kohn Kean Universities in Thailand. It emerged as an alternative to the conventional “top-down” approach to rural/community development”. Since the 1970s, participatory development theory has increased in popularity especially, as its main concern was for meeting basic needs and reaching the poorest of the poor. The idea of this approach is the involvement of local population in the creation, content and conduct of a programme/project designed to change their lives. It is also driven by a belief in the importance of entrusting citizens with the responsibility to shape their future (Hartley, 1999).

According to Rahman (1981), the basic idea of participatory development is that a self-conscious people, those who are poor and oppressed will progressively transform their environment by their praxis. This means that the role of others such as government or NGOs is to act as a catalyst and play a supporting role but will not dominate. In this way, participatory model seeks to eliminate previous efforts at development of the rural communities which was characterised by a dominant/dominated relationship irrespective of whoever sponsored the development effort.

The flourishing of different development associations in African countries give evidence and support to the utility of the application of this model to the development needs of the rural communities such as the Organization of Rural Association (ORA) in Zimbabwe, The Bambe-Thialene in the eastern part of Senegal, the six movement in Burkina-Faso, the Inter-Group Organization, ITT, in Rwanda, the Animators at work in

Tanzania, the Women's Self-help Movement in Kenya and Ibibio State Union in Nigeria etc (Nyoni, 1981 and Rahman, 1981).

This theoretical approach is relevant to this study because through collective efforts (development association) rural people in Akwa Ibom have been able to identify their own problems, needs and opportunities and provide practical ways of meeting as well as solving them. It also strengthens the rural communities, associations and organizations to negotiate with institutions and agencies concerned with development and finally, it enhances the chances of making development objectives output relevant to the perceived needs of the Akwa Ibom people.

##### **5. Ministry of Rural Development and Community Development in Akwa Ibom State**

Rural/Community developments in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria have been the result of national, state and local government efforts. It is also worth mentioning that the development of rural communities in the state has not been limited to the efforts of the three tiers of government, rather, it is being complemented by international organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations Development Projects (UNDP), Non-governmental Organizations and Community-Based Organization (CBOs) which is the focus of this study.

The Akwa Ibom State Government was motivated by the acute underdevelopment, neglect and backwardness of the state's rural communities in taking action on community/rural development to establish an organized system of social self-reliant organizations able to participate fully in the development of their respective communities. Thus, the Ministry of Rural Development was established in 1999, (Ministry of Rural Development Background Documents, 1999 and Ministry of Rural Development Service Charter, 2005).

Community organization has been described as the "heart" of community development, the rallying point for the conception, planning and execution of community self-help projects. It is a social work method that ensures the grouping of people or communities with similar interest and developmental goals into developmental associations. In Akwa Ibom State today, communities are encouraged to form community development associations (CDAs), which are the starting points for initiating new ideas and development programmes. It is when people or communities are organised that meaningful community development programmes or projects can be conceived and implemented. In fact, community organization is fundamental to community development, (Community Development News, 2006).

As earlier observed, The Ministry's community development programme is aimed at mobilizing and empowering the rural populace to embark on self-help projects to improve their economic life. This is possible by encouraging the revitalisation of Community Development Associations. The government interest in encouraging community development is sequel to the fact that not long ago, community development associations (CDAs) played a significant role in bringing social amenities to our towns and cities. In fact CDAs were the catalysts in the development of the rural communities. For example, CDAs played a major role in the provision of health centres, primary and secondary schools, postal agencies as well as civic centres by awakening communal efforts among the people. So it is doubtful whether communities existed without development associations during the period which could be regarded as the golden age of our communal development (Ukpong, 2005).

The climax of these communal efforts was usually during the Christmas period where people from all walks of life would return home to celebrate the yuletide. It was so dignifying to be part of the effort in bringing development to the people at that level. This was largely done through festivities, which usually ended with a fund launch for a particular project lacking in that community. It should be noted that it was of no significance whether one was a tradesman or a wealthy man, everybody considered it a shared responsibility to be involved in community development.

Today, however, the scenario has changed dramatically and the CDAs have ceased to exist as it were. Community schools and recreational centres built over the years have become dilapidated yearning for repairs. Some of the structures that were not completed at the time have since been abandoned. Sadly, the efforts of our patriotic sons and daughters who made sacrifices for the development of their communities have become wasted so soon. Communal apathy had set in and weakened the bond that had hitherto existed. It is not that our communities have reached the peak of development or that there were no few facilities to be provided. It is because our priority has changed overnight. Our priority is no longer providing infrastructure in schools, and postal agencies, water etc, we just have to wait for government as it were. Again our pursuits have been wrongly shifted from that of the good of the community to ourselves, meaning that the CDAs began to fade away in our memories when not much attention was given to the collective well being of the communities.

Be that as it may, with the emergence of democratic governance in 1999 and the establishment of Ministry of Rural Development, the ministry program belief that now is the time for Akwa Ibom people to re-awaken our communal sensibilities and focus on the development of our society. Reason is that the opportunities offered in a democratic dispensation are golden and limitless. Waiting for government to provide all the needed facilities would certainly mean that some communities would have to forgo some facilities for

sometime. While one is not absolving government of its responsibilities in providing the people with the basic infrastructure, the participation of the CDAs will go a long way in quickening the pace of development. Though effort has been made in the past few years in the area of providing rural communities with social amenities, it is believed that rekindling the communal spirit among the people would without doubt bring much needed development of the rural communities in the state by partnering with the government through Ministry of Rural Development.

It is therefore worthy to note that the efforts of the past governments since 1999, in stimulating and revitalizing CDAs deserve commendation. The Ministry has encouraged the formation of associations, some of which have used the forum to obtained micro credit facilities within and outside the State. The Ministry coordinates the activities of these associations in conjunction with local governments through development officers of the Ministry which have their offices in the thirty-one (31) local government areas in the state. The impacts of these associations are felt in that as at now, there are over 400 registered CDAs initiating and executing various community development self-help projects in the state (Ministry of Rural Development, 2013).

Table 1 indicates different projects and their locations embarked upon by some registered CDAs under the supervision of the Ministry of Rural Development. These represent concerted effort on the part of CDAs towards socio-economic development of the state.

Table 1: Some selected registered CDAs/projects undertaken

S/N	Names of registered association	Project	Location
1	Mkpono Ndito Ibeno,	Skill acquisition centre, fish farm, civic centre, town hall, etc.	Ibeno Local Govt. Area
2	Afaha Itam development association	Palm processing mill, civic centre, etc.	Itu Local Government Area
3	Ikot Etefia Udim Development Association	Town hall, community farm, project, BMTC, integrated farm project – Ikwa Village	Ikot Abasi LGA
4	Ikot Development Association	Skill acquisition, semi-bridge project, community fish farm, town hall, village hall, civic centre, palm oil production mill, community hall, mini water, water project/electricity	Eastern Obolo LGA
5	The rural people's voice initiative association	Community farm, resource centre, civic centre, town hall, fish pond, water project, electricity project, community oil palm, processing mill etc.	Uyo LGA
6	Supreme Economic of Nsit Atai Youth	Skill acquisition centres	Nsit Atai LGA
7	Eti Ufan Youth Association	Oil processing mill, cassava processing mill, fish pond, market development project, community fish pond	Oron LGA
8	Nka Mmani Ekim Development Association	Community farm, craft centre project, town hall, palm fruit plantation, water project, town hall and village hall.	Udung Uko LGA
9	Ibiono Ibom Development Association	Water project, soap making project, market construction, village hall project, Ikot Edim rural road	Ibiono Ibom LGA
10	Ekom Iman Development Association	Town hall, community farm, town hall, water project, civic centre, poultry farm and electricity project	Etinan LGA
11	Afaha development association and Ukana Uwa West Development Association	Poultry farm, piggery farm, cassava processing mill, water project and electricity project	Essien Udim LGA

Source: Ministry of Rural Development Executive Summary, 2013.

The philosophy behind the Ministry's community development is that any community which strives to lift themselves up by their own effort will receive financial and managerial assistance whenever such projects are initiated. For rural electrification or water projects, matching grants in cash or in kind could be given by the state government to supplement local effort. The point here is that, there is a division of labour in that a community that is nominated to embark on rural electrification for instance; is expected to plant electric poles, wire, provide other accessories and do the stringing while the state government supplies the transformer, activate the

production and commissioned the project. This approach has created a competitive atmosphere for different communities. The government at time stipulates that the benefiting community should provide 25% of the cost, while government intervenes to pay the balanced of 75%, under the close supervision of the Ministry of Rural Development, (Eminue, 2005).

In the light of the above, it is obvious that the Ministry of Rural Development plays a vital role in not only encouraging, but also revitalizing the spirit of community development in the state. The Ministry serves as a clearing house to these associations. It also coordinates their activities through community development officer's attaché to all the local government areas in the state. These officers who are staff of the Ministry are responsible for overseeing and monitoring of any identified projects of these associations to avoid fraud and embezzlement of member's fund. These associations are expected to register with the Ministry and a certificate of registration issued and signed by the Director in-charge of the Department. Most importantly, the account of each of this organisation is audited and same presented to the Ministry to ensure probity and transparency. This supervisory role of the Ministry has instilled confidence in the people as against previous cases of few members absconding with association/community funds as this is no more a matter of concern now. For any executive member of any registered organization who involved in any fraudulent practice is likely to be sanctioned by the Ministry. This has helped to reposition these associations for effective performances. No wonder the state has witnessed more self-help projects which have contributed immensely to the developmental stride recorded in the state since 1999.

## 6. Recommendations

Akwa Ibom State government's effort in promoting community development via Community Development Associations (CDAs) is commendable. However, more still need to be done to ensure effective community development hence the following recommendations:

1. That any project or projects embarked upon by the CDAs should impact positively on the entire community's economic and social wellbeing.
2. That the Ministry of Rural Development should encourage the CDAs to redirect their attention to the development of individuals and groups of individuals to create wealth and economic empowerment.
3. That the Ministry should ensure that the accounts of the CDAs are audited from time to time to avoid embezzlement of people's fund.
4. That there should be an enlightenment programme on the need for people to band together for developmental need of their communities, since government may not be able to meet such demands at a full swoop.
5. That the Ministry of Rural Development should ensure that the executive members of the CDAs are men of proven integrity whose main interest is to serve.
6. That the state government through the ministry of Rural Development should institute an annual award for any of the CDAs that excel in physical infrastructure as well as capacity building programme.
7. That the Ministry along with the CDAs should ensure sustainability of any project(s) aimed at improving the living conditions of the people.

## 7. Conclusion

Community developing in Akwa Ibom State has certainly become the nucleus around which governmental rural/community development efforts are funded. This is true because of growing recognition that local community problems are not only social welfare problems but also include economic, physical and socio-structural ones. The establishment of Ministry of Rural Development was a conscious attempt to identify and codify communities and their associations for the purpose of development. This approach by the government has helped to expose some hidden and unrecognised potentials in local associations and also improved communication between the government and the governed. More importantly, the ministry has helped in re-awakening of community associations which were becoming moribund or maladjusted to new conditions thereby enhancing constructive community response to the general demands of social and economic development such as installation of traffic lights, provision of traffic stands, construction of playgrounds and parks, provision of bus stops, institution of scholarships, building of health centres, market stalls, water, electricity, road etc.



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