

# Potentials of Community Self-Help Projects for Rural Development in Cross River State

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**Abstract - This study is carried out to ascertain the role of community self-help projects, in fostering infrastructural and economic development in rural communities in Cross River state of Nigeria. It focuses on their role in identifying relevant projects, project planning and execution, maintenance and revenue generation from such projects and the distribution of dividends from finished projects for community use. The study covered five (5) villages in Yala local Government of Cross River State: Echumofana, Ayi-ikachor, Oloko-Ogwope, Echiakpu and Akreha. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The findings of the study showed confirmation of the positive and overwhelming role of self-help projects in social and economic development in Yala Local Government area of Cross River State. It was recommended that The Community self-help approach be adopted by the Government in carrying out community-based projects, for greater accountability and sustainability.**

**Keywords:** Self-help projects, rural development, participation, rural communities.

## 1. Introduction

In developing countries and in Nigeria in particular, rural communities have become associated with low income, low productivity, and general poverty. It is a pervasive vicious cycle: low productivity, no surplus for investment, low investment, low income and so on. A stark reality is the lack of socio-economic structures such as good roads, bridges, distribution infrastructures, etc. which limit the market size and cause the local produce to remain valued at very low prices, because of the difficulty of transporting the goods to areas where the demand is high. Rural development has been defined by the [11] as “a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor”. Self-help approach is a paradigm in the field of rural development whose main goal is rural development. [7], In Nigeria in particular, most of the resources that serve as raw material or intermediate goods for further productive endeavors are likely to be situated in the rural areas. Most

rural areas are bedeviled by poor access roads, complete lack, or inadequate power supply and other such factors that make it either impossible or only possible with high attendant costs, to carryout productive activities. Particularly in the rainy season, several rural areas are cut off from contact with the outside world, except at great risk to life and property, due to floods and swollen rivers, with no bridges across the streams and drivers. As a result, a lot of produce is wasted, without reaching the final consumers; while an artificial scarcity is created, leading to high prices of the goods, since supply cannot be readily increased. Attention is increasingly being turned to this stagnant rural economic envelop that hinders growth and development in rural communities [8].

There have been several conscious efforts on the part of the government and other donor agencies to carryout infrastructural projects in rural communities in Nigeria. In many cases, corruption ensures that these projects never turn into viable solutions. They either remain unfinished, or so poorly executed that their life span is greatly reduced. There are also issues of vandalism. There seems to be a dearth of good maintenance culture and lack of stakeholder – mentality in the management of these government projects, [3]. Usually, when anyone of them suffers a breakdown, the project may never be revived again. This study seeks to ginger up local participation in the execution and maintenance of projects, and to get the people to share in the burden of the development process, through self-help projects.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

The study is focused on five rural communities in Yala local Government area of Cross River State. The communities are predominantly farming communities, with a little fishing also carried out. A life wire of economic activities in these communities is the Uruaba River which flows through them, bringing rich alluvial deposits, conducive for farming and fishing. Of great challenge is the fact that the river is subject to fluctuating conditions; overflowing its banks in the rainy season, and drying up completely in the dry season. This left the economic fortunes of the local people to be subject to the vagaries of the season and the weather. A dam was built

across the river in the 1970s, many decades ago, but it has since been washed away by poor maintenance and swollen river conditions, leaving the communities in their original state. Finally, after decades of limbo and epileptic farming, the community decided to revisit the dam project, with the attendant benefits of all year round irrigation for farming and fishing.

Until recently, the belief among most Nigerian communities was that it was the sole responsibility of the government and its agencies to provide the needs of their communities. Of course, the government cannot single handedly fulfill this aim of identifying, funding and executing, and even maintenance of these projects once completed. Consequently, most rural communities lack necessary social, infrastructural and physical amenities for community growth and development. There is a great need for the community members to come together and pool resources and efforts together and carry out projects of crucial importance of the community. The objective of this study is to investigate if there are greater impacts of community projects on socio-economic well-being of the community when the projects are identified and executed majorly by community self-help efforts, other than by the government.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to help attain this objective:

- 1) Do community self-help projects encourage greater participation from community members than government-executed projects?
- 2) Do community members have a greater stakeholder mentality towards public projects when projects are identified, funded (either partially or fully) and executed by the community?
- 3) Are projects more likely to last longer and run more efficiently when carried out by the community, than the ones carried out by the government?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Concept of rural development

Rural development involves improving the quality of life and economic well-being of People living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated. [10], emphasized that it encompasses a range of approaches and Activities that aim to provide the welfare and livelihoods of people living in rural areas.

As a branch of community development, these approaches pay attention to social Issues particularly

community organizing. The main objective of rural development according to [5] is improving the living standard of rural people by utilizing the easily available natural and human resources.

### 2.2 Concept of self-help projects

Self-help projects as emphasized by [9] are focused on local participation by the people who identify their needs, plan, take decisions and implement them to enhance their living standard. The essence is to activate the spirit of “give and take”, joint efforts, social cooperation and self-reliance [6]. Community self-help projects are an attempt to reduce poverty and satisfy basic needs by involving locals through communal work [8].

Community self-help projects are not new to African societies in general, and Nigerian societies, in particular [1]. Even before the advent of the colonial era, which was the beginning of the ‘government sector’ as we know it today, Nigerian communities had at different times in history, organized themselves into groups and combined resources to provide working facilities and bring about improvement in their localities. Community members build local roads and bridges, clear farmlands, or form neighborhood watch groups to defend against insecurity. Public utility buildings like town halls, market stalls, schools and churches have been constructed solely with community efforts.

The oil boom of the 1970s gave the Nigerian people the impression that the government should cater to all their needs. This impression helped in relegating their self-help spirit to the background [2] Community self-help projects have acted as catalysts for social development in the rural areas. Several infrastructural projects initiated upon by community efforts such as schools, market stalls, water supply and security, have been adopted and improved upon by the government. Needless to say, if those projects had not been initiated with community self-help efforts, they may never have seen the light of day. Government initiatives towards rural development have been bedeviled by lack of implementation and corruption. In an effort to make sure that development initiatives trickle down to the grassroots, Local Governments were created and given autonomy of operations, with the sole aim of mobilizing, coordinating, managing and utilizing of local resources so as to achieve socio-economic development. A report in 2011 by the Project Audit Commission (established by President Goodluck Jonathan) reveals that over the period 1962-2012, a total of 11,886 abandoned projects were spread across the country, worth 15 trillion naira [3] Nigeria borrows money to pay salaries and fund development projects. The debt profile of Nigeria in the first quarter of 2022 was 41.6 trillion naira.

The dismal news is that most of the borrowed money is embezzled.

The solution lies with the citizenry to monitor projects that have been budgeted and funded because the responsibility is a collective one – from the legislators to the man in the street, from the government in releasing procurement information to the contract or implementing the project in communities. The problem is that because government projects are usually funded from outside the communities, with community members not having any idea of how funds were raised, there is usually a lack of stakeholder mentality; even though the project is being carried out for the welfare of the community. Community members think it is the responsibility of the government from start to finish, to even supervise the successful implementation of the project. However, if funds are locally sourced, there is a greater proactive interest towards ensuring accountability, service delivery and maintenance of finished projects.

### 2.3 Empirical Framework

The findings from various literature stated that rural development processes will generate increase in the capacity of the rural people to control all aspects of rural life– social, political, economic and cultural-and it has some linkages with poverty alleviation [4], [8] in their work on the role of community self-help projects in fostering rural development in Kwara State of Nigeria found out that self-help projects have improved the standard of living of the people in the area, even though there was an unequal distribution.

In a research work on rural communities in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, found that the planning and implementation of self-help projects stimulated development of the rural communities, despite all odds. The study concluded that self-help philosophy will bridge the gap in economic and social development between urban and rural are as in Nigeria and consequently improve the economic and social conditions of the inhabitants. [9] found that self-help is a relevant strategy for rural development in Ohafia local government area. They also discovered that the engine of implementation on projects is the age grade system. The self-help movement in Ohafia rests on the age grade system and the communities have been undertaking self-help projects for some time. Only recently has the government come to partner with community efforts.

### 3. Methodology

Primary data was sourced with the help of the questionnaire designed for a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answer to elicit responses from the respondents. Random sampling technique was deployed to get thirty respondents each from the five

villages earmarked for the research thereby having a sample of one hundred. Data generated from the questionnaire was analyzed through the simple variance technique.

### 3.1 Area of Study

Yala is a local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria with head quarters in the town of Okpoma. Five communities were picked from the area for the study because of the peculiar challenge facing the communities and how they went about the solution. The communities were: Echumofana, Ayi-Ikachor, Oloko-Ogwope, Akreha and Echiakpu. These communities depended solely on farming and fishing. They are blessed with table and savanna-type vegetation and a small river that flows through all five communities. They make a comfortable income from vegetable gardening and fishing, all through the rainy season. But at the turn of the season, the River Uruaba dries up and this occupation is put on hold. They have to wait until the rains begin again before they can resume their livelihood. This implies that they switch from affluence to poverty as an annual cycle. Recently, an old dam which had collapsed many years back, and which efforts to get the government to revive it had proved abortive, was revisited again: but this time with solely community initiated efforts. The dam keeps the plains irrigated, and ensures that the River Uruaba does not dry up completely in the dry season. It is worthy of study to discover how community efforts revived this important aspect of their economic existence without government intervention, no misappropriation of funds and also complete accountability, contrary to what has become the norm in Nigeria.

Research Question 1: Do community self-help projects encourage greater participation from community members than government-executed projects?

**Table 1: Self-help projects and community participation**

S/N	Items	% Yes	% No	Variance
1.	Government projects are fraught with fraud.	65.33	34.67	30.66
2.	Self-support projects meets the community needs more than government projects.	80	20	60
3.	Government projects are easily abandoned once it develops any fault.	76.67	23.33	53.84
4.	Self-help projects are well monitored and maintained by the community.	90	10	80

Source: Author's computation

### 3.2 Discussion of findings

From table 1 above we present explanations showing that a total of 150 questionnaires representing 100% were administered to respondents to determine self- help projects and community participation. From the results 65.33% of respondents indicated “Yes” while 30.66% gave a “No” response to the first item of the questionnaire.

The second item of the questionnaire revealed an 80% acceptance while 20% of the respondents said “No”. The third item in the questionnaire investigated whether government projects are easily abandoned once they are faulty, 76.67% of respondents here indicated a “Yes” while 23.33% answered “No”. Results from the fourth item in the questionnaire revealed 90% respondents indicating a “Yes” while 10% responded “No”. The variance is calculated from the difference between the “Yes” and “No” responses; if the “No” response is greater than the “Yes” it indicates an unfavorable variance. If however, the “Yes” response is greater than “No” response, a favorable variance arises. The results above show that all the variances are in favour of the “Yes”, thus implying that community self-help projects encourage greater participation from community members than government-executed projects.

#### 4. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research questions asked at the beginning of the study and the responses to the questionnaires it was found out that Community self-help projects encourage greater participation from the citizenry than government executed projects. It was also discovered that people have a greater stakeholder mentality, when projects are identified by them, funded if not totally, at least partially by them, and finally, executed by the mat the community level. It could be concluded that community self-help projects area means of fast-tracking rural development and should be encouraged by government policy. The following recommendations are put forward:

- 1) Community participation should be statutorily included in all rural development initiatives of the government. That is, there should be some form of resource contribution from local communities, in order to attract government financing of any project, identified by the community. This would cause them to be more proactive in the maintenance of community projects.
- 2) Community work and pressure groups should be included as part of government rural development policy to help monitor accountability and efficiency of service delivery in carrying out development projects. This includes the age grades, the women groups and the youth groups, rather than appointing ingle persons as ward counselors.
- 3) Community self-help projects should be based on the felt needs of the people in order to elicit greater participation from them.
- 4) Government assistance can be converted to subsidizing costs of inputs, so that the resources pooled by the community can be adequate. Supervision of the work and the workers themselves can be locally sourced from the

communities, except where there is need for high level expertise, and it cannot be obtained locally.

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**Citation of this Article:**

Ogar Ohiana Ochagu, Augustine Ele Asor, Sam Chucks Eboh, "Potentials of Community Self-Help Projects for Rural Development in Cross River State" Published in *International Research Journal of Innovations in Engineering and Technology - IRJIET*, Volume 7, Issue 7, pp 74-78, July 2023. Article DOI <https://doi.org/10.47001/IRJIET/2023.707011>

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