

Analysis of the influence of community based organizations on community development in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study focused on analysis of political influence of community based organizations on community development in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data was collected with the aid of structured questionnaire from 960 randomly selected respondents in the study area and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that the activities of community based organizations in Rivers State include building of market stalls, provision and servicing of boreholes, building and renovation of town halls, maintenance of community roads, provision of furniture and equipment to schools. The study also concludes that the activities of community based organizations influence respondents both physically and politically which are good development. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: increased awareness at the community level on the formation of community based organizations. Such awareness campaigns should be carried out by the opinion leaders in the communities and the campaign should highlight the benefits open to individuals and members of associations and the communities both locally and internationally. Community Based Organizations should seek for ways of partnering with all the tiers of government for development projects in rural communities. Government should encourage community based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by subvention.

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1. Introduction

Self help projects undertaken through voluntary efforts and the active participation of individuals and corporate groups in communities constitutes an important nucleus in grassroots development. This process involves organizing community members for identification of their needs, plan; and for action to meet these needs with maximum reliance on their initiative and resources, with or without the assistance of government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to Dike (1979) the growth and development of a town is mainly a reflection of the population growth, location of industries, specialization and organization of the inhabitants of the community. In Nigeria most people believe that it is the responsibility of the government and its functionaries to provide for the needs of the communities. It was maintained that government could, and should develop communities, provide basic infrastructure, social and physical amenities.

Though the government is seen by some as a greater provider with unlimited resources, Sociologists and development experts see collective efforts and self help as inevitable tool in community development. From the primitive stage of man's existence to the time of civilization, development has always stemmed from the coming together of people

or groups for the common interest of members. Grouping for mutual help and improvement of lives of community members has been accepted as a strategy of community development. Ekpeyong (1993) affirms that affiliation creates passion, shapes behavior and induces action. We make effort to live but we need the support of others to improve. As infants born into the world cannot survive without the support and assistance of adults, in the same vein, some communities cannot improve on their living conditions without the effort and assistance of other people and corporate groups in the communities. Okodudu (1998) argues that the failure of government in their traditional role of developing rural communities to enjoy developmental facilities gave rise to social institution and organization aimed at mobilizing local resources for the provision of the amenities with the cooperation of other agencies like the non governmental agencies (NGOs). The collection of these social institution and organization is what is referred to as community-based organizations (CBOs). In Nigeria, community-based organizations include town unions, women associations, age grades, social clubs, credit groups committee of friends etc. Community-based organizations are those organizations within the communities which come together for attainment of desired objectives in the interest of the group.

Adamu, Sodiya, Adeogun and Ogunbameru (2005) community based organizations provide mechanisms by which people relate with their environment. They also serve as forum where people come together to discuss their socio-economic problems and decide on strategies for bringing about desired changes.

Community development is now recognized as an educational process in which groups of people, through the initiative and prompting of an internal or external leadership cadre, organize themselves, identify their development priorities and determine their strategies for meeting the needs identified. Whether internally or externally induced, the role of leadership is central to the overall success of the process. The manner in which the peoples' needs are identified and their priorities determined, all depend to a large extent on the types of leadership which their community has (Anyanwu, 1982)

It is worthy of note that if the accomplishment of objectives requires collective efforts, human beings try to form associations designed to coordinate the activities of many individuals backed up by incentives, so that the objectives for which the associations are formed are achieved. As a matter of fact, society will cease to exist if members do not interact. This means that they must come together to give meaning to certain social phenomenon, establish a "commonness" with one another and develop a strong spirit or feeling of "we together" which implies a transfer of meaning and some level of mutual understanding. The feeling that the programme or project is "our work" adds advantage to the success of community-based organizations in community development.

Before the advent of the colonial administration in Nigeria, many communities had employed communal and self-help efforts as mechanism for mobilizing community resources for the provision of physical facilities in these areas through community based organization. In Rivers State, various clubs, unions, age grades, association and organization differ according to size and financial ability. The truth remains that no matter how small a self-help project is, it has the capacity of provoking further development. It triggers group competitions within communities and among the stakeholders in community development. In various part of Rivers state, women association, youth organizations, clubs and age grades have directly or indirectly influenced development activities in their area of operation. They have not only encouraged development activities, but have also embarked on development projects such as building of bus stop stands in places where people

stay in the sun or rain waiting for vehicles; market stalls, traffic control booths, classroom blocks and furniture for people in primary and secondary schools and so on. For instance in Aluu, a community in Ikwerre local government area of Rivers State, an association of women known as 'Alice' built a five-room apartment with toilet and bathroom for midwives and pregnant women in the area. At Rumueche, another community in Emohua local government area of Rivers State, an age group embarked on the renovation of the hall in the village wrestling (play) ground. Though the activities of community-based organizations may not be very elaborate is size, their impact on the development of communities has far reaching effect. It challenges wealthy men and even other non-governmental agencies to embark on similar development projects. According to Okodudu (1998), social clubs, cultural organization and cooperative societies (community-based organizations) are major actors in the community development scene. In most cases the work we do help others regardless of whether the work is paid for or not. Those who develop this selfless attitude to fellow men and to the nation do so under voluntary associations which the community-based organization share characteristics with. They are sometimes described as humanitarians or help agents; they render help to communities without seeking any rewards.

It has been empirically established that multinational companies and local governments contribute to grassroots development, but the contribution of community-based organization seem not to have attracted much scholarly attention. This neglect if continued will make the communities lose contribution of community based organization in grassroots development. In satisfying community needs, community based organization play prominent role in initiating programmes and project, mobilizing resources and educating the grass root populace. The influence of local indigenous actors in community development cannot be neglected. Local initiative stemming from the felt needs of the people remains very important in grass root development. This study therefore concerns itself with the influence of the activities of community based organization have on grassroots development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Specifically the objectives of this study are to examine the activities of community based organization in grass root development in River state; determine the level of political influence of community based organizations on community members.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

The research design employed in the study was descriptive survey design. This method is considered adequate in line with Cohen and March (1986) in Ofo (2001) who noted that this is a method of gathering data at a particular time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions; identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared; determine relationship that exist between specific events.

2.2 Population and sample of Study

The study focused on all members of registered community based organizations in Rivers State as at February 2007. There were 650 women associations, 830 social clubs, 560 youth organizations, and 350 age grades, giving a total of 2,400 registered community based organizations with a membership of 20,000 as obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare.

Using simple random sampling technique, 1,000 respondents were selected across the 9 local government areas involved in the study. However, 960 questionnaires were usable for the study. A four-point Likert Type rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree was used to elicit information. Based on the data collected a midpoint of 2.50 was established and decision was reached thus: any mean score less than 2.50 suggest disagreement with the item, while any mean score equal to or greater than 2.50 suggest agreement with the item. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 1 presents the analysis of the perception of the community members on the contribution of community based organizations. From the table, 93.85% of the respondents agreed that community based organizations in the area embark on building market. The building of market stalls in the area has helped inhabitants to keep their wares and reduce damage from flood and other weather conditions that hitherto affected them adversely. Also, 100% of the respondents agreed that CBOs in the area provided and helped to service boreholes. In many of the rural areas since there is no pipeborne water, they survive of water from borehole. All (100%) the respondents agreed that community based organizations in their communities build and renovate town halls. These halls were mostly used for town meetings and for vital ceremonies such as weddings, thanksgiving and so on. It was also found from the study that 47% of the respondents agreed that community based organizations maintain community roads. This, no doubt is a commendable feat from such

CBOs. The study further revealed that 72.4% of the respondents agreed that CBOs in their area provide furniture and equipment to schools. The efforts identified in table 1 can be referred to as Social development efforts which Onyeozu (2007) explained to be contribution by an individual or individuals in any form to collective output of services from which they will in turn receive services that enrich them materially, psychologically or otherwise. Similarly, Ihejirika (2007) emphasized that development projects requires the support based of grassroots organization such as the community based organizations.

Table 2 shows that the knowledge and experience gained in the governing of associations help members in community leadership and politics (mean =3.90). The implication of this is that social interactions as a result of participation in the endeavours of community based organizations create interest in community leadership and politics. This is obviously because responsibilities accrued from the organizations help them to handle higher responsibilities in the village political arena.

The findings of the study showed that respondents generally agreed that members of your club, organization or association had been good leaders in the community and outside. The mean score of 3.80 confirms this assertion which suggests that members observe their leaders and thereafter emulate the positive ingredients of leadership they observe. According to Adesope (2007) the five ingredients of leadership include initiative, intelligence, industry, influence and integrity. There is no doubt that the respondents have been influenced by the integrity of their leaders hence want to be like them. Also, findings from the study revealed that respondents' activities in club and association made them to be interested in leadership and politics. This clearly supports the meaning participation in group work. Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) had observed that participation emphasizes total control by community members. It was noted that one of the merits of participation is that the involvement of people in development activities taking place in their communities is likely to result in better decisions.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of contributions of CBOs as perceived by the community members

Table 1: contribution of (CBOs) as perceived by community members (n=960)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Building market stalls	600 62.5%	300 31.35%	60 6.25%	0	3.6
Provision and searching of bore holes	290 30.2%	670 69.8%	0	0	3.3
Build and renovation of town halls	700	260 27.1%	0	0	3.7
Maintenance of community roads	30 3.1%	430 44.1%	500 52.1%	0	3.5
Provision of furniture and equipment to schools	200 20.3%	650 52.1%	110 11.5	0	3.1

3.1 Political influence of community based organizations

Table 2: Political influence of CBOs

S/N	Items	Mean score
1	The knowledge and experience gained in the governing of associations help members in community leadership and politics	3.90
2	Members of your club, organization or association had been good leaders in the community and outside	3.80
3	Your activities in your club and association made you be interested in leadership and politics	2.90

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the activities of community based organizations in Rivers State include building of market stalls, provision and servicing of boreholes, building and renovation of town halls, maintenance of community roads, provision of furniture and equipment to schools. The study also concludes that the activities of community based organizations influence respondents physically and politically which are good indices for development. Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Increased awareness at the community level on the formation of community based organizations. Such awareness campaigns should be carried out by the opinion leaders in the communities and the campaign should highlight the benefits open to individuals and members of associations and the communities both locally and internationally.
2. Community Based Organizations should seek for ways of partnering with all the tiers of government for development projects in rural communities.

3. Government should encourage community based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by subvention.

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