

WOMEN SELF HELP INITIATIVES: A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women self help initiatives, a paradigmatic shift in rural development in Central Senatorial District, Cross River State, Nigeria have been investigated. The study examined women self help in educational, agricultural and associational activities. Evidence was drawn from 540 randomly sampled respondents with the use of research instrument. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical analysis was carried out and results indicated existence of significant positive relationship between women self help projects and rural community development. Self help projects have assumed a significant place in the process of rural development. Women self help projects through educational, agricultural and associational activities have been proven to be significant predictors of rural community development. This study therefore suggests that women should be encouraged to initiate self help projects by government and non-governmental organizations.

Key words: Women, Rural Community Development, Self - help initiative

Introduction

The overall goal of rural community development has always been the improvement of life in the local area. Ering, Nwagbara and Ushie (2006) stress that rural community development seeks the satisfaction of basic needs such as food, shelter (housing), portable water, light, good health, basic education, clean environment as well as access to satisfactory cultural, spiritual, social and political life, increase in the utilization of the resource of the community and increase in the productive capacity of the population. Nkпойen (2008) asserts that rural community development has to do with increase in per capita income, improvement in standard of living, mobilization of people to ensure deep-rooted and self sustaining development.

Rural community development involves the conscious efforts of members of the community working individually or collectively to make the rural environment better for the people. Women as members of the community believe that they can also be involved in activities that can foster development of their rural areas. Women constitute one half of the

world's population and a visible majority of the poor. Women, either solely or collectively, support an increasing number of families in rural areas. Community projects that aim at improving the living conditions of the rural community cannot therefore be effective unless women participate maximally through initiating self help projects. One way in which women are redefining development is by undertaking their own projects. The 1991 General Assembly of Women and the Environment sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights an incredible diversity of such projects in rural communities.

Elaborating further, Oruwari (1996) states that women are involved in development process through self help projects. As evidence of the failure of current development strategies mount, it is becoming increasingly obvious that women's talents and capacities are under-utilized. If educated women were fully involved in decision making and policy making at every level, dividends of development would have been more visible in rural and urban areas. However, it is increasingly understood in rural development circles today that women self help projects have assumed an important place in rural community development. Through community-based women-oriented initiatives, they have been able to reduce poverty in rural communities, ensure equal opportunity for all, provide social services at affordable cost and raise the standard of living of rural dwellers.

It is common knowledge in development circles that rural communities have not been able to achieve meaningful development. Mobilizing and sensitizing rural communities for development purpose has not succeeded in transforming rural areas. In this direction, the Federal, State and Local governments have done a lot to foster development in rural areas through poverty alleviation programmes and other social welfare schemes or programmes to scale up activities that will enhance economic, social, cultural and political development. Regrettably, observations revealed that rural communities in Central Senatorial District, Cross River State lack sustainable development. Moreover, women either individually or collectively who could have contributed financially and mentally through self help projects to the development of rural Nigeria have always been excluded from participation in grassroot policy conception and implementation. This has attracted the attention of community development experts, rural sociologists, non-governmental organizations etc. These concerned groups have cried out about the absence of a strong and committed desire to enhance the quality of living standard by rural dwellers through the participation of rural women in the development process. These stakeholders understand the need for economic empowerment of women and their role in the socio-economic development of rural Nigeria.

Today, development experts believe that rural community development is promoted through conscious collaborative efforts of rural women. Since efforts made to improve rural community resources through intervention by external agents such as Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank Assisted Projects, Panama Projects etc have yielded little positive results. This research is carried out to examine the level of relationship between rural community development and the contributions of women through self help projects. The impact of self-help projects such as educational, agricultural and associational activities on rural development in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria was considered in this study.

Background of the Study Area

Situated in the southern part of Nigeria, Cross River State lies between latitude 5°32 and 4°27 and longitude 7°50 and 2°20 East. It is bordered in the North by Benue State, on the East by Cameroun Republic, on the west by Ebonyi and Abia States, on the South ó West by Akwa-Ibom State.

Occupying an area of 23,74.43 Square kilometres, Cross River State is one of the largest states in the Niger Delta Region. The people of Cross River State are of the Bantu Stock who migrated from Central Africa. The State is divided into three senatorial districts, viz the northern, central and southern. The State is further divided into eighteen local government areas, namely: Abi, Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Bekwarra, Biase, Boki, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Etung, Ikom, Obanliku, Obubra, Obudu, Odukpani, Ogoja, Yala and Yakurr. The Central Senatorial District where the study is carried consists of seven local government areas viz: Abi, Boki, Etung, Ikom, Obubra, Obudu, and Yakurr. It is bordered in the north by Ogoja Local Government, in the South by Biase Local Government Area, in the east by Republic of Cameroon and in the west by Ebonyi State. Apart from the local government headquarters in the District, other towns and villages are rural.

Chieftaincy in the state is classified into three main categories, viz: Village Head, Clan Head, and Paramount Ruler at the apex in each local government area. All the local government areas have paramount rulers except Calabar Municipality that has two paramount rulers ó Obong of Calabar and the Ndidem of the Quas. The people of the state are dominantly Christians, and traditional religion practioners.

Cross River people primarily engage in farming, trading and fishing. The state is endowed with natural resources like: granite, gmelina, lime stone, rubber, gravel, salt, forestry, river sand and laterite. The state is a home of most agro-industries. The state also houses United Cement Company, Crush Rock Industries in Akamkpa, Dangote Cement Company, Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Margaret Ekpo International Airport, Calabar Sea Port, University of Calabar, Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Federal College of Education Obudu, and a lot of commercial Banks.

Tourist attractions in Cross River State include: Kwa Waterfalls, located at Anigeje near the Oban Hills in Akamkpa Local Government Area, Agbokim Waterfalls, Ikom Monoliths, Agwagune Caves, Uruk Lake and Umon Island in Biase Local Government Area, and the Obudu Resort. The state also houses the Old Residency Museum and Mary Slessor Memorial Tomb both in Calabar Municipality. Calabar has important political status since the late 19th century when she became Headquarters of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885. In 1893, she became the Headquarters of Niger Coast Protectorate and in 1900, the Headquarters of Eastern Province; a title she lost after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. Hence, Cross River State is prominent in Nigerian politics.

Women Self Help Projects and Rural Community Development

Self help movement is not peculiar to Nigeria or Third World alone, they are found all over the world. In Africa, self help development efforts are represented for instance, by Harambee in Kenya and Uja oma in Tanzania. Self help has received government recognition, the allocation of societal resources tend to follow a line in which local initiatives are being made from the grassroot.

Self help is the only road to development worth taking. It has its roots in the people of a nation, touches their daily lives, rejects the notion of their inferiority and offers them a pride and a part in their development process they have never before experienced. It is a slow process and far from perfect one, but if the road to development does not begin with people, then I know at present no road at all (Eze, 2004: 6-7).

Bensman (1998) stresses that self help represents an alternative strategy for development. It offers the local people an opportunity to participate in shaping the lives of the people at the grassroots. Self help projects result to community development as manifested in the numerous social amenities provided to the local people at the grassroots through their efforts. Boothroyd (1991) in his study on women self help projects and community development drew evidence from 400 respondents in 10 communities. He concluded that it has filled the explanatory gaps created by modernization, reduced the sordid condition of rural communities and checked the problem of misplaced enthusiasm. Self help projects have addressed the problem of low positive impact of government projects, with its top bottom approach, which are never patronized.

Noel (1995) discovered from a study on influence of women self help projects on rural development that self help is today's engine of rural development. It enables the local women to exploit to their advantage the resources which would have remained dormant in the rural areas thereby transforming their communities. Self help is the prerequisite for sustainable rural development. Self help development associations have played a vital role in promoting peace and protecting their various communities as well as offering avenue for participating actively in the economic and social development of their communities. Self help associations have the ability to mobilize resources and regulate their use. Ottong (1999) concludes that, true development of rural communities today is tied to self help projects.

Women Initiative in Education and Rural Development

Education is an indispensable tool for the improvement of quality of life. Education is used to prepare man for social, civil and economic roles that go beyond the limit of rudimentary literacy training of community members. It helps to add value to the life of an individual, the community as well as the society (Ihejimaizu, 1999; Agba, Ushie & Agba, 2007). When education is inculcated into rural community development programmes, its aim is always to produce people who can choose for themselves what kind of development and self help actualization they want to pursue (Ihejimaizu, 1999).

In a survey on women self help projects in education and rural development in Ondo State, Nigeria Oril (1996) found out that active participation of women in community development cannot be achieved if women are not educated. He stated that one of the primary goals of women self project in education is to help sensitize the rural dwellers on the advantages of being educated. The assumption is that an educated rural dweller is bound to contribute positively to rural development. Duke's (1995) study revealed that women self help projects encourage non-literate community members to register in adult literacy classes. This helps them to embrace new vision, learn to respond to new initiatives, agree to existing institutions and help create new ones to serve economic, social and political ends. Nicholson's (1997) study showed that women carry out enlightenment campaigns as part of their

community self help projects. The aim of such campaigns is to help community members interact more meaningfully and sustainably with the environment.

Ngwuø (2003) study on the influence of women self help project in education on rural development discovered that women organize participatory adult education classes that involve productive activities. This helps to restructure the needs and goals of the people to foster development efforts. For instance, such participatory classes created opportunity for illiterate farmers to engage in sustainable farming practices. Iglitzin (1998) in his study on the relationship between women educational projects and rural community development discovered that women self help projects involve (a) fostering the need for young girls and women to play major roles in their community development through acquisition of necessary skills (b) providing scholarship and funds to deserving students in the community (c) equipping community schools with books and furniture (d) establishing and maintaining day care centers and nursery schools in order to assist working mothers (e) making donations in kinds such as desks, office furniture, books, pen etc to boost the interest of both pupils and staff in the schools. Iglitzin (1998) concluded that the overall impact of the women self help project in education is improved standard of living of community members. Oniø (1996) study indicated that women educational self help projects also involve organizing income-generating activities to enable them raise capital for schools in their communities.

Women Initiative in Agriculture and Rural Community Development

Ekwe (1993) asserted that from time unlimited women have been much involved in contributing their quota to the community especially in the area of agriculture. Women either individually or in groups are involved in several agricultural practices such as land clearing, land tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer or manure application, harvesting, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing. Bisong (2001) carried out an investigation on women agricultural practices and rural development using six communities in Cross River State. His findings indicated the existence of a positive relationship between women involvement in agriculture and rural community development. Women are producers of food, stock breeders, and suppliers of fuel wood, water and collectors of forest products. Thus, women contribution through agriculture has positively affected rural community life.

Mkpa (2006), Bender and Cain (2001) observed that in most countries of the world, women are involved in self help agricultural projects. Mivanyi (1993) posits that women self help project both in urban and rural areas contribute to agricultural as well as socio-economic development of their communities and the upkeep of their family.

NEST (1991) stated that there is a high dependency on agriculture for the production of food and cash crops. SPORE (1993) acknowledged women agricultural project as vital to rural development. Women contribute 70% of the labour force, produce 80% of food, contribute 100% of the food processors and undertake 60 ó 80% of marketing in the local communities (NEST, 1991). According to Bellamy (1995), women are custodians of knowledge and information. Most women know the medical properties of various plants, can identify trees that make good woods, recommend food crops that thrive well on particular soil and locate reliable water resources. He argued that by those constant activities, their interaction with the community is very frequent and this fosters rural development. Women self help projects in agriculture have assisted in community wealth creation. Through such projects new farming techniques are acquired.

Mkpa (2006) discovered from his study that the transformation of women's mentality in agriculture towards development in Southern Senatorial District started when Better Life for Rural Women was launched in Cross River State in 1987. This programme served as a rallying point for women empowerment crusades nationwide. Chinswan (1998) reported that agricultural self help projects which have boosted Nigeria's economy and development rest mostly on women. Agricultural productivity by women constitutes a significant aspect of rural economy.

Women Contribution through Associational Activities and Rural Development

Enabuele (1995) described women associations as those voluntary associations which function by means of democratic collective activity in pursuance of one or more specific interest of their members. Wijk-Sagbesma (2005) in a study on women association activities and rural community development discovered that women through their associations have assisted communities and households in improving their standard of living with their own resources. Dankelmar and Davidson (1998) using a sample of 650 women in their study on women association projects and community development found that women organize themselves in cooperative to initiate projects, create or increase income and generate employment; some exist for the benefit of the poor and helpless women in the community. Tondank's (1991) study found out that women associations promote self help projects in communities. Women associations enhance better quality of life, social justice, economic well-being and political liberation. He stressed that for women to strengthen their independence worldwide, forming community association is critical. Women association is the umbrella by which women carried out rural development activities.

Onah (2005) discovered from his study that women associations are committed not to achieving their selfish ends but towards the eradication of ignorance in the community, uplift the status of women, remove marginalization, liberate women and make them more conscious of their role in rural development. He stressed that associations provide forum for women to express themselves, educate women on relevant community issues etc. Hardly and Sahertwaite (2003) reported that due to the importance of women in community development, many associations have been formed to enable them contribute their quota to the best of their ability.

Theoretical Consideration

Identity Empowerment Theory

The proponent of this theory was Hall (1990). The theory explained and described critical and social processes that increase the probabilities and possibilities of women's well-being and optimal functioning. The theory assumed that empowered women make meaningful commitments and undertake effective goal oriented activities they choose for themselves. The theory posited that women's behaviour and quality of life and general society can be changed by increasing their awareness of the strength of social influences within the environment. The theory asserted that all women can make some constructive change to enhance and improve their situations and that of their communities. Based on this theory, women collective empowerment which results from their awareness and actions in relation to themselves and the community manifests in the form of self help projects. Again it implies that women involvement in self help projects leads to transformation in the lives of the members of the

community. The theory sees women contributions through self help projects as the ultimate goal of rural women empowerment. This empowerment manifests in rural development.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the survey design. The study was conducted in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State. Six local government areas were involved ó Abi, Boki, Etung, Ikom, Obubra and Yakurr. The population consists of all the women aged 20 and above. Three sampling procedures ó purposive, stratified and systematic - were adopted. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in studying one out of three senatorial districts in Cross River State. The six local government areas formed the seven strata of the study. To select the respondents for the study, systematic sampling procedure was adopted. The sample was made up of 240 respondents. Forty respondents were selected from each local government. The total numbers of respondents from the age of 20 and above were involved in the study.

Data were elicited from respondents using a four point Likert scale questionnaire. The questions were divided into two major sections. Section A, was the demographic variables of respondents. Section B accorded the study the needed topical data on the impact of women self help project on rural development in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Coding of Variables

RESPONSE OPTION	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
SA	4	1
A	3	2
D	2	3
SD	1	4

Where

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

Items in the four point Likert scale with positive response were ranked 4, 3, 2, 1, with 4 standing for strongly agree (SA), 3 for agree (A), 2 for disagree (D), 1 for strongly disagree (SD). On the other hand, items that show dislike were ranked from 1 to 4, with 4 standing for strongly disagree (SD), 3 for disagree (D) 2 for agree (A) and 1 for strongly agree (SA). See table 1. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to analyze elicited data.

Result

Hypothesis One:

Women contribution through educational initiative does not significantly relate to rural community development. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2**Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women contribution through educational initiatives and rural development (N = 540)**

Variables	\hat{U}_x \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_x^2 \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_{xy}	Rxy
Educational initiatives (x^1)	2480	16525	13075	0.824*
Rural development (y)	1599	9270		

*Significant at .05, critical r = .088, df = 538

The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.824 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance with 538 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted. Thus a positive relationship exists between women contribution through educational self help and rural development.

Hypothesis two:

There is no significant relationship between women agricultural initiative and rural community development. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3**Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women contribution through agricultural initiative and rural development (N = 540)**

Variables	\hat{U}_x \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_x^2 \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_{xy}	Rxy
Agricultural initiative (x^2)	2390	16430	11980	0.703*
Rural development (y)	1159	9270		

*Significant at .05, critical r = .088, df = 538

The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.703 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance with 538 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus a positive relationship exists between women contribution through agricultural initiative and rural development.

Hypothesis 3:

Women associational activities do not significantly relate to rural community development. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in table 4.

Table 4
Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between women contribution through Women associational activities and rural development (N = 540)

Variables	\hat{U}_x \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_x^2 \hat{U}_y^2	\hat{U}_{xy}	R _{xy}
Associational activities (x ³)	876	15131	10381	0.613*
Rural community (y)	1159	9270		

*Correlation Significant at .05, critical r = .088, df = 538

The result indicated that the calculated r ó value of 0.613 was found to be greater than the critical r ó value of .088 at 0.05 level of significance with 538 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that a significant relationship exists between women associational activities and rural community development.

Discussion

The finding of the first hypothesis supports Ihejiamaizu (1999) that education is an indispensable tool for the improvement of the quality of life. It helps in the improvement of the life of an individual and community. The findings support Oni (1996) who concluded that one of the primary goals of women self-help projects in education is to help sensitize the rural dwellers on the advantage of being educated. The findings agree with Nicholson (1997) that women contribute through self help projects in education by carrying out enlightenment campaigns. Emehø (1997) findings are also supported here. Emeh observed that women self help educational projects are designed to produce environmentally sound literate persons who will participate in production, consumption and policy formulation. It also supports Iglitzin (1998) that women contributions through educational activities help to upgrade standard of education and overall rural development.

The findings of the second hypothesis are supported by Ekwe (1993) who reported that women have been very much involved in contributing their quota to rural development. The findings agree with SPORE (1993) that women contribution via agricultural projects is vital to community development. Women contribute 70% of the labour force, and produce 80% of food. NEST (1991) is also supported by these findings. According to NEST, women involvement in agriculture is enormous; apart from their own share in food production, they also actively participate in other types of agricultural activities in the community at different levels contributing to self sufficiency in food production.

The result of the study also indicated that a positive relationship exists between women contributions through association activities and rural development. The findings support Wijk-Sagbesma (2005) who discovered that women associations and the projects that are usually embarked upon have great potentials for assisting communities and households in improving their standard of living. The findings are equally consistent with Dankelman and

Davidson (1998) who observed that women organize themselves in cooperatives to initiate projects, create or increase income and generate employment. The findings also agree with the study of Tondank (1991) who found out that women associations promote self help projects in various communities. Such associations contribute towards better quality of life, social justice, and economic wellbeing, political and cultural liberation. The findings also agree with Onah (2005) that women do not see associations as a means of achieving their own selfish aim but rather they are committed and dedicated to the eradication of ignorance in the community, the up-liftment of the status of women, removal of marginalization of women, uplift the status of women and mobilizing women to participate actively in rural economic development. The findings are consistent with Hardoy and Satterthwaite (2003) who posit that due to the importance of women in rural development, many associations have been formed to help women actualize and crystallize their dreams.

Conclusion

Women play significant role in rural community development. Their self help projects should be encouraged by both government and non-governmental organizations. This would foster participation of local people in self help development projects. The improvement of life in rural communities in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State is therefore a function of women contributions in the areas of educational, agricultural and association initiatives.

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