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ROLE OF YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS IN INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN KHANA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study investigated the Role of Youth Associations in Infrastructural Development in Khana Local Government Area of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. With the aid of a structured and validated questionnaire, data were obtained from a random sample size of 80 respondents selected from 20 youth associations randomly selected from the 32 registered youth associations in the study area. Data analysis was by the use of frequency, percentage and mean scores. Results showed that majority of the respondents are males (62.5%); falls within the age of 26 and 30 years; 50.0% of them are married; while 38.8% are civil servants. The infrastructural development activities youth associations participate in the study area include: road maintenance (mean = 2.92), construction and maintenance of market square (mean = 2.59), building/mounting of sign posts (mean = 3.21), and construction of drainages (mean = 2.70). The study also revealed that youth associations play active roles in project planning (mean = 2.81), project implementation (2.91), deciding and selecting appropriate projects (mean = 3.21), mobilize community members for project support (mean = 3.27), organize project fund raising forum (mean = 3.80), provide security at community project sites (mean = 3.36), among others. It was recommended that youth associations should liaise with donor agencies and non-governmental organizations in project planning and implementation to reduce the burdens of embarking on some of these projects alone. Youth associations should be encouraged to cooperate with donor agencies and play other critical roles other than finance, such as providing labour and security at project sites.

Keywords: Youth Associations, Infrastructural Facilities.

INTRODUCTION
In Nigeria, infrastructural facilities have been identified as precursor to sustainable rural and agricultural development. Consequently, efforts have been made by the three tiers of government in Nigeria in conjunction with international agencies, non-governmental agencies, local groups and individuals towards the provision of infrastructural facilities in many Nigerian rural communities in recent times. According to Ighor (2000), infrastructural facilities are the basic physical and organizational structures needed for an economy to function. These physical structures includes boreholes, health centres, power supply facilities, a functional telecommunication facilities, market centres, recreational centres, motorable road network, town halls, civic centres, cottage and agro-industries and so on.

The importance of infrastructures to development in any society cannot be overemphasized. This is because infrastructural facilities in view of Bennell (2005) are the vehicle to rural transformation, a bridge to community peace, a symbol of rapid economic growth and indeed national development. Infrastructures provide services that support economic growth by increasing productivity of labour and capital thereby reducing the cost of production and raising profitability, production, income and employment in rural communities. In view of the above mentioned benefits, successive government in Nigeria has over the years called for the

participation of various segments of the society in infrastructural development. In response to this call, men, women and the youths in rural communities have constituted themselves into community-based organizations to address their felt-needs in areas of infrastructural development. Onibokan and Faniran (1995) identified youth associations among such community-based organizations involved in infrastructural development activities in rural communities in Nigeria.

Youth associations are organized group of young people who consciously and creatively employ their knowledge, skills and resources to bring about increased and effective changes in their economic, physical, psychological, social and political wellbeing (Maunder, 1972). Memberships of these associations are usually composed of individuals between the ages of 15 – 40 years as indicated in some studies (United Nations, 1990; Soeze, 2006). Youths constitute a formidable force in community and national development in any nation. In Nigeria, about 45,400,000 of the estimated 150 million populations are youths. Onyeoziri (2002) revealed that about 61 per cent of the estimated population of Nigerian youth lives in rural areas while about 39 per cent are in the urban centres. General expectation is that youth use their massive population and strength to their advantage in contributing meaningfully in the life of their community. However, the major challenge is that Nigerian youth face various degrees of handicaps in their quest for relevance in the mainstream of national development. Oftentimes, youth have been associated with various social vices such as restiveness and crimes that their actual contribution and roles in national development are lost. The above background raises the need to identify the roles of youth associations in infrastructural development in khana local government area of the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Khana Local Government Area of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of 800 members of the 32 registered youth associations in the study area. A 2-stage random sampling technique was used to select 20 youth associations out of the 32 registered youth associations in the study area and 4 members from each of the selected associations. This exercise gave a sample size of 80 respondents. Data were collected with the aid of an interview schedule which was structured and validated by the researchers. The responses on infrastructural development activities in which youths participate in and the roles played by the youth associations in infrastructural development in the study area were weighted on a 4-point likert-type summated rating scale of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). The values of the scale (4, 3, 2 and1) were summed up to obtain 10. The mean value of the sum gave 2.50, which served as the cut-off mean. This became the benchmark for accepting any item as either an infrastructural development activity of youths or the role played by the youth associations in infrastructural development in the study area. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive tools namely: frequency, percentage and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics of members.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The result in Table 1 shows that majority (about 62.5 percent) of the respondents are males. This implies that more males than females constitute the membership of youth associations in the study area.

On the age categories of the respondents, the Table also indicates that about 2.5 percent of the respondents fall between the age bracket of 16 and 20 years; about 12.5 percent of them falls

between 21 and 25 years majority (about 48.8 percent) of members of youth associations fall between 26 and 30 years. This appears to be the most proactive stage in the life of individuals in various societies. This phase of life is characterized by enthusiasm, energy, vibrancy and readiness to face tasks and challenges with vigor. The finding is in line with the view of Onyeziri (2002) that youth are group of young people in a society who have a lot of energy, new ideas and new ways of life and face problems. The result on Table 1 further showed that 43.8 per cent of the respondents are single while the majority (about 50 per cent) married, about 2.5 per cent are divorced and about 3.8 percent are separated. This result implies that people with family responsibilities are more involved in the infrastructural development of the community. This might be because of the expected positive effects such development efforts have on their wellbeing and that of their respective families.

As also indicated in Table 1, the result showed that only about 1.2 per cent of the respondents have no formal education while about 98.8 per cent have formal education. Of this percentage, about 6.2 per cent are of primary education level; about 50 per cent are of secondary education level and about 42.6 per cent attained tertiary education level. The result indicate that the youths in the study area are benefiting from various government policies and programmes on education and youth development. Such programmes may likely have the potential to promote their awareness, contribution and participation in social networks such as youth association and the likes.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	50	62.5
Female	30	37.5
Total	**80**	**100.0**
Age Categories		
16-20 years	2	2.5
21-25 years	10	12.5
26-30 years	38	48.8
31years and above	29	36.2
Total	**80**	**100.0**
Marital Status		
Single	35	43.7
Married	40	50.0
Divorced	2	2.5
Separated	3	3.8
Total	**80**	**100.0**
Educational Level		
No Formal Education	1	1.2
Primary Education	5	6.2
Secondary Education	40	50.0
Tertiary Education	34	42.6

Total	**80**	**100.0**
Occupation		
Civil Service	27	33.8
Trading	25	31.2
Farming	12	15.0
Contractor	16	20.0
Total	**80**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data 2011.

The Infrastructural Development Activities in which Youths Participate in.

Entries in Table 2 showed the infrastructural development activities in which youths participate in. The result indicate that the respondents participate more in the area of road maintenance (mean = 2.92). Youths in the study area may have considered this as essential since feeder roads eases off movement of persons, goods and services within the community. It also increases linkages between the rural and urban centers. The finding showed that youths participate in the maintenance of market square (mean = 3.34). This development activity is within the reach of rural youths since maintenance activity generally may not require huge sum of money but labour which the youths can provide through cooperative effort. From the findings, youths also participate in building of sign posts (mean = 3.21). Sign posts are essential to guide the movement of persons especially visitors to the community. It further provides timely information on monumental sites, imminent danger and locations in the community for both indigenes and guests. The result further revealed that youth participate in the construction of drainages in the community (mean = 2.70). The findings confirms the view of Nitzberg (2005) that youth associations are group of youths who come together for common interests to improve themselves and their environment.

Table 2: Respondents' Rating of Infrastructural Development Activities Youth Participate in.

Variables	Mean	Remark
Road Maintenance.	2.92	Accept
Provision of Community Borehole.	2.11	Reject
Building of Health Centers.	1.91	Reject
Building of Community Town Halls.	2.35	Reject
Construction of Community Markets.	2.59	Accept
Provision of Agricultural Processing Machines in the Community.	1.59	Reject
Building of Community Recreational Centers.	2.01	Reject
Maintenance of Community Market Square.	3.34	Accept

Building of Community Sign Posts.	3.21	Accept
Renovation of School Buildings in the Community.	2.26	Reject
Construction of Drainages in the Community.	2.70	Accept
Establishment of Cottage Industries (Palm processing and Gari processing mills, Soap factories and the like) in the Community.	1.98	Reject

Source: Field Data2011.

Note: Items with mean score ≥ 2.50 and above are accepted as the infrastructural development activities while items with mean score < 2.50 are rejected.

Roles Played by Youth Associations in Infrastructural Development.

The results on the roles played by youth associations in infrastructural development in the study area are presented in Table 3. It was found that the youth associations play an active role in the area of serving as members of project planning committee (mean = 2.81). This finding validates because the youth of any community have great ideas and suggestions which when involved in development planning could be very essential and beneficial. The result further indicates that youth associations participate more in the area of serving as members of project implementation committee (mean = 2.91). This role is highly demanding in terms of physical strength to which the youths likely fits in to because of their greater physical ability. The youths do this through offering services at project sites. Also, the result revealed that youth associations in the study area play active role in deciding and selecting appropriate development projects (mean = 3.21). Infrastructural requirement in any community is expected to be need driven. Most youths in various communities have travelled widely to know the kind of projects that are supposed to impact positively on the standard of living of community members in the modern world order. Consequently, the versatility and exposure of youths gives them an advantage in playing the role of selecting relevant projects in the community as found in the study area. As indicated in Table 3, youth associations play an advisory roles in the infrastructural development in the study area (mean = 3.14). Such advisory roles may likely enhance the knowledge of community members on the potential changes such infrastructural facilities may bring to their communities. Such roles may also help to garner needed support for the success of development projects at the implementation level.

The result also show that youth associations in the study area play active role in mobilizing community members for project support (mean = 3.27). This finding is feasible since youths constitute the hub of any community, capable of generating great influence from the home to the larger community. There is no doubt that such youth associations found in rural communities do mobilize the community towards successful development project. The result further shows that youth associations organize project fund raising forum for infrastructural development in the study area (mean = 3.80). Such fund raising activities may likely include launchings for needed development projects, sports competitions, and community debating activities, workshops, holiday job, ragging, appeal funds, harnessing of community resources

(waste to wealth) and the likes. It was also indicated that youth associations donate fund for project implementation (mean = 3.24). Such funds may be raised through group efforts since mobilization of resources in most communities is a collective action. As revealed in the study, the result show that youth associations monitor project implementation (Mean = 3.31). This appears to be an essential role in infrastructural development. Because project monitoring ensure that the project embarked upon are carried out to completion.

Table 3: Respondents' Ratings of the Roles Played by Youth Associations in Infrastructural Development.

Variables	Mean	Remark
Serves as members of project planning committee.	2.81	Accept
Serves members of project implementation committee.	2.91	Accept
Deciding and selecting appropriate project.	3.21	Accept
Advisory roles.	3.14	Accept
Mobilizes community members for project support.	3.27	Accept
Organize fund raising forum.	3.80	Accept
Donate funds for project implementation.	3.24	Accept
Monitor project implementation.	3.31	Accept
Provide security at community project sites.	3.36	Accept
Provide labour for project execution.	2.59	Accept
Organize skill training, enlightenment and workshop for community members.	2.59	Accept

Source: Field Data 2011.

Note: Items with mean score ≥ 2.50 and above are accepted as the roles while items with mean score < 2.50 are rejected.

Furthermore, the result indicate that youth associations provide security at community project sites (mean = 3.36) The findings in Table 3 also show that youth associations play active role in providing labour for project execution (mean = 2.59). Most projects require physical exertions which the youths in their peculiar nature provides in most project sites. As shown in the result, youth associations also organize skill training, enlightenment and workshop for community members (mean = 2.59). This may likely be necessary to encourage community involvement in infrastructural development programming.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it is concluded that youth associations in the study area play active role in infrastructural development activities in their communities. Furthermore, youth associations participate in infrastructural development activities that do not involve huge financial burdens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Youth associations should liaise with donor agencies and non-governmental organizations in project planning, implementation and execution as to reduce the burdens of embarking on some of these projects alone since the findings indicate that members youth associations serve in various committees on community project planning, implementation, selection and advisory.
- Government should through appropriate community development policies and regulations encouraged youth associations to cooperate with donor agencies in playing other important roles other than finance.
- Youth associations should be encouraged on skills acquisitions that are agriculturally based as this will boost agricultural productions which are at the centre of rural economy and as tool for national progress and development.

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