

Towards a Genuinely Participatory Approach to Poverty Alleviation in Uyo Lga, Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

Research evidence shows that commercial banks are not keenly interested in financing agriculture. The commercial banks on the other hand argue that the farmers and governments have not provided a default risk-reducing environment to enhance lending. In the light of the foregoing, the participatory rural appraisal technique [PRA] is being proposed as a remedy for rapid transformation of the agricultural sector/poverty reduction. There is the need therefore for a thorough insight into the different dimension of default risk as a means of suggesting some ways by which it could be reduced. It is for this reason that PRA was employed in this survey to identify potential beneficiaries before evolving the loan scheme. It is crucial as we can now maintain close contact with the borrowers through regular visit to keep the obligation constantly before him.

Introduction

Economic development studies in recent times clearly indicate the following; decline in the number of our youths involved in the productive sector of the economy, be it formal or informal, lack of interest by commercial banks in financing agriculture [Lee and Baker, 1984, Okorie, 1988]; high default risk and consequently very high mortality rate of Agro-SMEs [Kohl, 1989].

There is the need therefore for a thorough insight into the different dimension of default risk as a means of suggesting some ways by which it could be reduced. It is for this reason that this survey was carried out to identify potential beneficiaries before evolving the loan scheme. It is crucial as we can now maintain close contact with the borrowers through regular visit to keep the obligation constantly before him.

Arising from the foregoing, a survey was conducted using PRA technique. This paper therefore, examines the issues of economic rights, poverty reduction and proposes a micro finance scheme for human development in Uyo area of Akwa Ibom State

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to employ the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach [PRA] in documenting the status of small scale agricultural activities in the LGA with a view to achieving the following specific objectives; identify individual farmers in the various clans in the LGA; assess the asset portfolio of each of the selected farmers; assess the sources of funds for small/medium scale farming, related economic activities; identify the causes of high rates of loans default in the state; employ the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach; in evolving a Sustainable Micro-Finance scheme in the Local Government Area

Study Methodology

The methods employed include [a] in depth interviews [b] focus group discussions [FGD] [c] field observation and [d] questionnaire interviews. A total of one hundred questionnaires were administered to both individual farmers and co-operative societies located in various communities. Video recording of the FGD, IDI and visits to the project sites/farms was also undertaken. A digital camera was used in taking pictures of all the selected farmers and co-operative societies sampled. Simple statistics were employed in data analysis.

Study Area

Uyo Local Government Area is bordered to the north by Itu, Ikono and Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area, to the south by Etinan, Nsit Ibom and Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area, to the east by Uruan LGA. It is located between Latitudes 4°53' and 5°04' north of the equator and longitudes 7°48' and 8°02' E. east of the Greenwich meridian. The total estimated population based on 1991 census was 234,615 with a density of 824 persons per square km. In a recent population census, Uyo emerged as the most populous LGA. The entire Local Government Area is underlain by sedimentary rocks commonly referred to as the Benin formation a.k.a. the Coastal Plains sands.

The highest elevation in Uyo Local Government Area is less than 70 metres above sea level. The loose, friable and unconsolidated ferrallitic soils of the Coastal plains sands are highly deficient in weatherable mineral reserves. The mean annual rainfall at Uyo is 2,500mm. Temperatures are equally high throughout the year and vary very little from a mean monthly temperature of 27°C. The climax vegetation type in Uyo LGA is the lowland rain forest. Annual bush burning, shorting of the fallow periods, urbanization and other types of agriculture/urban land-use have completely transformed the vegetation. The entire area is now dominated by oil palm bush with few isolated stands of forest species, grasses and farmlands.

Conceptual Framework

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

PRA grew out of a range of methodologies including Agro-Ecosystems Analysis and Rapid Rural Appraisal in the 1970s and 80s, in which the emphasis was on finding ways to express the diversity of local knowledge through facilitation by outsiders. It evolved from two distinct traditions: planners seeking to overcome the limitations of externally-dominated blueprint planning, and empowerment-oriented activists seeking to make their social transformation ideals more pragmatic. PRA is increasingly being used autonomously by communities but is now so diverse in application that it is hard to speak of a single methodology. The term is somewhat misleading because the combination of techniques are equally applicable in urban settings and are not limited to appraisal – they are linked to planning processes and are being adapted for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is an approach to the analysis of local problems and the formulation of tentative solutions with local stakeholders. It makes use of a wide range of visualization methods for group-based analysis to deal with

spatial and temporal aspects of social and environmental problems. It mainly deals with a community-level scale of analysis but is increasingly being used to help deal with higher level, system problems. PRA can be described as a family of approaches, methods and behaviours that enable people to express and analyze the realities of their lives and conditions, to plan themselves what action to take, and to monitor and evaluate the results. Its methods have evolved from Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). The difference is that PRA emphasizes processes which empower local people, whereas RRA is mainly seen as a means for outsiders to gather information.

The terminology is confusing and there is much debate about what constitutes “real” PRA. The key elements of PRA are the methods used, and – most importantly – the behaviour and attitudes of those who facilitate it. PRA provides a structure and many practical ideas to help stimulate local participation in the creation and sharing of new insights. The emphasis on ensuring community feedback broadens the group of people involved. It is increasingly linked to participatory planning processes (e.g. using adapted forms of logical framework analysis). Although PRA was not intended to collect statistically significant information, it is increasingly used in combination with other methodologies to fulfill scientific information needs and is easily made complementary.

There is no single way to ‘do’ PRA, although there are core principles and over 30 methods available to guide teamwork, do sampling, structure discussions and visualize analysis. The combination and sequence of methods will emerge from the context. Optimal ignorance and triangulation of findings guide the fieldwork in recognition of the need to know enough without knowing it all and to ensure that the qualitative insights are cross-checked by different sources using different methods.

The core principles are: Sustained learning process: enhancing cumulative learning for action by participants is the focus and has three outputs: identifying strategies for improvement, motivating people to undertake these strategies, and enhancing their capacity for solving problems. Different perspectives in group-based analysis: PRA explicitly seeks insights from and an understanding of the needs of different individuals and groups, which may be conflicting but will better show the complexity of local situations. Key role for facilitators: to include different perspectives often means challenging local traditions of communication, which requires sensitive facilitation (often someone from outside the area but also increasingly a role taken on by someone with a local stake in the process). Systemic and methodological basis: creating a structured process that explores problems within the wider context and not just focusing on a narrow slice or reality – from description to analysis and action. Context-specific; unique social/physical conditions means building a process of discussion, communication and conflict resolution – which by necessity evolves out of the specific of the local context.

PRA employs a wide range of methods to enable people to express and share information, and to stimulate discussion and analysis. Many are visually based, involving local people in creating, for example: Maps showing who lives where and the location of important local features and resources such as water, forests, schools and other services. Flow diagrams to indicate linkages, sequences, causes, effects,

problems and solutions. Seasonal calendars showing how food availability, workloads, family health, prices, wages and other factors vary during the year. Matrices or grids, scored with seeds, pebbles or other counters, to compare things – such as the merits of different crop varieties or tree species, or how conditions have changed over time.

PRA activities usually take place in groups, working on the ground or on paper. The ground is more participatory, and helps empower those who are not literate. Visual techniques provide scope for creativity and encourage a frank exchange of views. They also allow crosschecking. Using a combination of PRA methods a very detailed picture can be built up, one that expresses the complexity and diversity of local people's realities far better than conventional survey techniques such as questionnaires.

Behaviour and attitudes

PRA depends on facilitators acting as conveyors and catalysts, but without dominating the process. Many find this difficult. They must take time, show respect, be open and self-critical, and learn not to interrupt. They need to have confidence that local people, whether they are literate or not, women or men, rich or poor, are capable of carrying out their own analysis.

The use and abuse of PRA

Unfortunately, there has been much abuse of PRA by outsiders keen only to extract information quickly, and use it for their own purposes. Such practice is unethical because local people are brought into a process in which expectations are raised, and then frustrated, if no action or follow-up results. To avoid this, those wishing to use PRA methods in a purely extractive way need to be transparent about their intentions, and refrain from calling what they do PRA.

In PRA, Facilitators act as a catalyst, but it is up to local people to decide what to do with the information and analysis they generate. Outsiders may choose to use PRA findings – for example, to influence policy or for research purposes. In all cases, however, there must be a commitment on the part of the facilitating organization to do its best to support, it request to do so, the actions that local people have decided on.

Practical applications

Since the early 1990s, PRA approaches and methods have evolved and spread with astonishing speed. Originating mainly among non-government organizations (NGOs) in East Africa and South Asia, they have since been adopted by government departments, training institutes, and universities all over the world. They are now being used in at least 100 countries, with PRA networks existing in over 30. PRA has been applied in almost every domain of development and community action, both urban and rural examples include: natural resources management, establishing land rights of indigenous people, slum development HIV/AIDS awareness and action, anti-poverty programmes, disaster management, negotiation and conflict resolution adult literacy etc.

Discussion

As noted earlier, the PRA technique was employed to document small/medium scale agro-based activities in Uyo area of Akwa Ibom State. It was evident during the interactive sessions that the so called farmers co-operative societies were not properly managed. Hence, the questionnaires retrieved from them were not considered in the study. However, the sampled population from each of the wards in Uyo is shown below. It is obvious that farming is not a profitable venture in the wards around the city –centre.

Table 1 Number of Respondents/Ward

Wards	Frequency	Percentage
2	3	13.6
9	2	9.1
10	3	13.6
7	5	22.7
1	2	9.1
5	7	31.8

Source ; Fieldwork, 2007

A large proportion of the farmers in Offot clan are mainly poultry farmers. Extensive commercial arable farming is concentrated in communities in Etoi clan due to availability of land and surface water bodies- streams. This also explains why large scale fish ponds are found in the clan. The graph above confirms a large number of farmers [both arable and poultry farmers]

Table 2 Types Of Small Scale Economic Activities

Economic. Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	18	81.8
Piggery	1	4.5
Bakery	1	4.5
Carpentry	1	4.5
Others	1	4.5

Source ;Fieldwork, 2007

Table 3 Age Distribution Of Respondents

Range In Age	Frequency	Percentage
25-35	5	22.7
36-50	13	59
50 yrs & Above	4	18.3

Source ; Fieldwork ;2007

It is quite evident from the illustration in table 3 that youths [within the age bracket of 25 -35 years] are few in farming activities. It constitutes only 22.7 percent. Majority of the farmers are adults,-59 percent of the respondents, some of which are retired civil servants. Hence, there is the need to encourage the youths already engaged in farming. This will weep up sentiments among the youths in urban centres to ‘return’ to farming. This can only be achieved when the earnings of those engaged in farming improves significantly. The graph on marital status of farmers corroborates the claim that youths are not many in farming

An attempt was made to estimate the number of years of practical experience of

the selected farmers. The results are displayed in the figure below, only 13.6% have put in more than sixteen years. In sharp contrast, 36.4% took o farming barely five years ago.

Table 4 shows the total asset portfolio of the farmers in the study area. About 54.5% of the farmers had investments worth more than one million naira each, 9.1% have between N500,000 and one million naira; 22.7% - N250,000 – N500,000 and finally 13.6% invested less than N250,000 each.

Table 4 Total Asset Portfolio Of Farmers

Amount	Frequency	Percentage
<N250,000	3	13.6
N250,000-N500,000	5	22.7
N500,000-N1m	2	9.1
>N1m	12	54.5

Source ; Field work, 2007 2007

It is rather pathetic that farmers in Uyo do not have access to the numerous loans schemes in the state as illustrated in the figure below. Some of them claimed there was no need applying as loans disbursement was based on political consideration. The total number of labour employed by each farmer is shown in the figure. A large number of the farmers interviewed engaged less than six people in their farm [63.6%]. The reasons advanced for loans default in the area include the following : Diversion of fund by beneficiaries; Mismanagement by farmers; Existence of portfolio farmers[fake beneficiaries]; Lack of farming/management skills by beneficiaries and Type of farming/risk and uncertainty in farming

The farmers may supplement their income by engaging in other forms of economic activities as shown in the figure below. The the following participatory rural appraisal method was employed in identifying the problems faced by the farmers in Uyo LGA: a, lack of capital for expansion; lack of funds to rehabilitate broken down machine/ Agro-SMEs; lack of farm implements/inputs to maximize profit; insufficient labour in farmlands; inadequacy of processing mills –palm oil and cassava; no access road to farms; no storage facilities; no pest control; no drugs/vaccines; no farmland for expansion and epileptic nature of electricity/water supply

Summary/Conclusion

Micro financing is strongly recommended as a strategy for sustainable poverty reduction in the area. This will significantly improve the agricultural outputs of the farmers selected for the pilot study. The specific areas of micro financing identified are Agro- SMEs – cassava mills [3] ; Poultry and piggery farm; Acquisition of fertilizers directly from Ministry of agriculture; Agro- SMEs – oil palm mills ;Juice processing plant [2] ; Rehabilitation of broken down processing mills [3]; Oven for bakery [one; Equipments for fish ponds/procurement of fingerlings ; Sinking of boreholes [2] ; Purchase of improved seedlings

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