Original Research Article

Rural Community Participation in Self-help Projects in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study analyzed rural community participation in self-help projects in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The sample size of the study was 150 respondents which were made up of 75 males and females each. The random sampling method was used in the distribution of the interview schedule which was used in gathering data from the respondents. Data were analyzed with percentages and means, while the tests of the hypotheses of the study were done with the linear regression analysis and the t-test. Results of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents indicated a pooled mean of 42.64 years of age and 7.70 years of schooling. The major self-help projects identified in the area were pipe-borne water (22%), public toilet construction with 12.69% and markets with 10.67%. The least self-help project in the area was scholarship programme with 1.33%. The highest rate of gender participation in self-help responsibilities for men was on decision on project type and location with 24%, while for women this activity was the second with 21.33% rate of participation. The major effects of self-help projects in rural development in the area were improved community action (87.33%) and improved communication (70.67%) among the people. The least effect was on the appreciation of the roles of women in development with 24.67%. Result of the test of relationship between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and rate of participation indicated an R^2 of 0.9541 with marital status, educational level, occupation and gross income, exhibiting significant relationships with the rate of participation. The t-test analysis indicated a non-significant difference between men and women in the rate of participation in self-help project responsibilities. The study recommends improvement in self-help project on scholarship programme and the appreciation of the role of women in rural development in the area.

Keywords: Rural, Community, Participation, Self-help projects, Southern Ijaw

Introduction

The rural community is a geographical local environment which cannot be described as being semi-urban or urban in nature. The globe has recognized two opposite sites for human habitation.

One is the rurality and the other is the city. Those who inhabit the rurality are said to dwell in the rural communities, while those who inhabit the cities are said to dwell in urban communities. Rural communities in Nigeria represent the countryside where life is simple and very close to nature as opposed to urban communities which are more organized in comparison. A community therefore is explained to mean a group of people inhabiting a given geographical location with a common background, having the same culture and working towards the achievement of common interests (Deckor and Nnodim, 2005), for the benefit of themselves and the wider society in general. The achievement of these common interests is fostered through the process of participation.

Participation in the other hand is a process through which stake-holders take decisions, influence and share control over development initiatives and the resources which affect them. The main focus of participation in development is to actively involve people and communities in the identification of problems, formulation of plans and implementation of decisions over their own life. Community participation is a concept which is well associated with self-help projects.

A self-help project is that which entails the development of resources of the community by the efforts of members of that community alone, instead of relying on outside initiatives or assistants (Udoye, 2000). A self-help project is an inward-looking approach to self or group improvement which relies solely on own efforts and largely for own benefits in the process of project development. Self-help in the content of rural development is the carrying out of development and capital projects in rural areas through the process of community participation (Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde, 2013).

In the self-help process to community development, the understanding is that the individual or the community effort determines the extent to which their development is achieved. Self-help projects therefore are focused on local participation by the people who identify their needs, plan, take decisions and implement the project to enhance their own standard of living.

The benefits of community participation in self-help projects as identified by Abatena (1995) includes fostering local inputs in problem assessment and need identification, enhanced sound feasible decision–making, expediting proper programme-planning and implementation, facilitation of the development of community capabilities, gathering of first hand and appropriate data about local conditions and expression of felt needs and realistic assessment of community needs and problems.

The effects of self-help projects to rural community members cannot be over emphasized and include employment generation, income generation and infrastructural provision (Tamuno and Iroh, 2012). Other effects of self-help projects are improvement in: education, human resources, transportation, communication, community action, environmental sanitation, productivity, human interaction and gender roles in development.

In Nigeria, the common development approach which is used by the political leaders is the urban development method. In this method, most development projects by the government are cited in the urban areas, with the expectation that the effects of the project will trickle down to stimulate development in rural communities. The effects of the projects conceived through the urban development method have not been able to satisfy the needs of the city dwellers not to talk of their effects tricking down to stimulate development in rural communities. This scenario has left the rural communities with a consistent insufficiency in rural infrastructure and an unending demand for basic social amenities from the various tiers of government. The inability of government to

fully satisfy the infrastructural needs of rural communities has created a gap which needs to be addressed with community participation self-help projects.

The research problem of this study was predicated on the fact that since the government is currently unable to satisfy the infrastructural needs of rural communities, the complementary efforts of community self-help projects have, consequently, become needful. The research questions of the study were: what

i) are the socio-economic characteristics of rural community members of the study area?
ii) are the existing community self-help projects in the area?
iii) is the gender participation rate in community self-help projects?
iv) are the effects of self-help projects on community development?

In order to tackle the research questions, the objectives of the study described the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identified the existing community self-help projects in the area, determined the gender participation rate in self-help project responsibilities and analyzed the effects of self-help projects on rural development in the area.

The null hypotheses of the study were: (i) there is no significant relationship between the respondent's socio-economic characteristics and rate of participation in community self-help projects, and (ii) there is no significant difference between men and women in the rate of participation in community self-help projects in the study area.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Southern Ijaw Local Government of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Bayelsa State was created on October 1, 1996 out of the old Rivers State. The name *Bayelsa* is an acronym from three former local government areas of Brass, Yenagoa and Sagbama in the then Rivers State. The then Brass Local Government Area is what makes up the present Nembe, Brass and Ogbia Local Governments. The then Yenagoa Local Government Area now consist of the present Yenagoa, Kolokuma/Opokuma and Southern Ijaw Local Government Areas, and the then Sagbama Local Government Area is what makes up the Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Areas.

South Ijaw Local Government Area has its headquarters at Oporoma. It has a land area of about 2,682km^2, and a population of 319, 413 people in the 2006 national population census. It is made up of two districts namely, Oporoma and Kula-Ama. The population of the study was made up of rural men and women who are members from the two districts of the study area. Random sampling technique was used in selecting five communities from each of the two districts to have a total of 10 communities. The random sampling technique was also used in selecting 15 persons from each of the communities, to have a total sample size of 150 respondents. The sample size was made up of equal (75) men and women. Interview schedules were used in the elicitation of data from the respondents by one of the researchers. Both the descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analyses. The descriptive statistics used in the analyses of the study objectives were frequency, percentage and mean. The inferential statistics used for the test of hypotheses were the linear regression analysis and the t-test. Gender participation rate for each respondent was obtained by dividing the number of activities participated in by the respondents, by the total number of activities under consideration and multiplying by 100%. The model of the linear regression analysis used for the test of the hypothesis on the relationship between the respondents' socio-

economic characteristics and participation rate is explicitly presented as used by Nlerum and Okorie (2012) as:

$$Y = a+b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5^- + ei \quad \text{.................................. (1)}$$

Where : Y = Participation rate (Dependent variable, measured as described in materials and methods)

a = Intercept

X_1 = Age (in years)

X_2 = Marital status (dummy variable; married = 1, single = 0)

X_3 = Educational Level (years of schooling)

X_4 = Occupation (dummy variable; farming = 1; other = 0)

X_5 = Gross Income per month (in naira).

ei = Error term

Results and Discussion

A summary of respondents' socio-economic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

	Means		
Characteristics	**Male (n=75)**	**Female (n=75)**	**Pooled (n=150)**
Age (in years)	43.40	41.87	42.64
Marital Status (dummy variable)	0.68	0.76	0.72
Educational level (years of Schooling)	7.68	7.71	7.70
Occupation (Dummy variable)	1.93	2.09	2.01
Monthly gross income (in Naira ₦)	78,653.33	57,260.00	67,956.67

Field Survey, (2016)

The result shows that the pooled mean age of the respondents was 42.64 years. This means that most of the respondents were in their active ages and as such would be active participants in rural community self- help projects in the area.

In terms of educational level, the pooled mean of years spent in schooling by the respondents was 7.70 years. This implies that secondary education was the major educational level attained by these respondents.

The pooled mean monthly gross income of the respondents was ₦67, 956.67 in agreement with the findings of Ikoro *et al.* (2016) who reported a monthly income of ₦65,739.00 in Abia State, Nigeria.

Community self-help projects of the study area are as presented in Table 2. Pipe-borne water schemes were the major self-help community projects in the area as indicated by 22% of the respondents. This was possibly so because water is key to life. This reason may have accounted

for this high priority given to the water scheme in the area. This finding agreed with that of the study of Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) in Kwara State, where water scheme was one of the self-help projects in the area.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Identified Community Self-help Projects in the study Area.

S/No	Projects	Percentage (%) (n=150)
1	Pipe-borne water	22.00
2	Community feeder-road construction	5.33
3	Market	10.67
4	Feeder-road maintenance	6.67
5	Health centre	0.66
6	Bridge	2.67
7	Primary school building	9.33
8	Secondary School building	2.00
9.	Public toilet	12.67
10	Town hall	8.00
11	Adult education centre	6.67
12	Fish pond	2.00
13	Church building	5.33
14	Skills acquisition centre	4.67
15	Scholarship programme	1.33

Source: Field Survey, (2016), Multiple response was allowed.

The second major community self-help project of valid participation by the people was public toilet construction as indicated by 12.67% of the respondents. Public toilet construction is important for enhanced sanitation for better hygiene and enhanced health condition of the members of the community. This reason may have been responsible for more participation of the community in its construction. This finding agreed with the studying of Achiv *et al.* (2014) in Agatu, Benue State where provision of toilet facilities was one of the community self-help projects provided by the people. The third major community self-help project participated by the people as indicated by 10.67% of the respondents was market. Market is important for the sale and purchase of goods and services which are produced by the community and those which are brought into the community by other people. Market is the economic hub of the rural society. This reason may have accounted for the interest of the people in market facilities provision. This finding agreed with that of Mbagwu *et al.* (2016) where market was one of the self-help projects executed by communities in Nsukka, Nigeria. The least project of participation was scholarship programme with 1.33%.

Table 3 is the presentation of gender participation rate of respondents in community self-help responsibilities in the area. Table 3 interestingly shows that the men and women participated in all the nine studied community project self-help responsibilities. Although the rate of participation was not the same between the two genders, both of them made reasonable contributions in the execution of all the responsibilities. Specifically, the results indicated that while decision on project type and location was the highest (24%) responsibility participated in by men, it was the second (21.33%) for women. While utilization of the projects was the highest (34.67%)

responsibility participated in by women, it was the second (22.67%) participated in by men. Provision of physical labour was the third most important responsibility participated in by men at

Table 3: Gender Participation Rate in Community Self-help Responsibilities

S/N	Activities	Male (n=75)		Female (n=75)	
		%	Ranking	%	Ranking
1	Decision on project type and location	24.00	1st	21.33	2nd
2	Involvement in planning stage.	8.00	5th	6.67	6th
3	Provision of Physical labour	10.67	3rd	8.00	3rd
4	Provision of construction materials	6.67	6th	5.33	4th
5	Financial contribution	9.33	4th	8.00	3rd
6	Membership of executing committee	8.00	5th	6.67	6th
7	Maintenance and repairs	5.33	7th	4.00	7th
8	External contact on project	5.33	7th	2.67	8th
9	Utilization of project	22.67	2nd	34.67	1st

Source: Field Survey, (2016). Multiple responses were allowed.

the rate of 10.67%. This responsibility, and financial contribution to the projects were the third in importance participated in by women as shown by 8.00% rate of response each. These findings imply that gender participation rate in community self-help projects was good in the study area. This connotes that both men and women were active participants in self-help project responsibilities.

The effects of self-help projects on specific rural development indices in the rural communities studied are presented in Table 4. The major effect of self-help projects in rural development was improved community action with 87.33% response. Self-help projects are people- and group-oriented and as such have a way of making people to act together in the achievement of community goals. The next effect of community participation in self-help project with 70.67% response was improved communication in the area. This finding was made possible because community self-help activities bring members of the community together. This coming together is followed with improved communication among members. The third effect was improved human relation and

Table 4: Effects of Self-help Projects in Rural Development.

S/N	Projects	Percentage% (n=150)
1	Job creation	28.00
2	Improvement of income	48.00
3	Improvement in human resource	34.00
4	Enhanced education	37.33
5	Easy transportation	43.33
6	Improved human relations and interactions	65.33
7	Improved communication	70.67
8	Improved community action	87.33
9.	Appreciation of role of women in development	24.67
10	Enhanced environment	32.00
11	Enhanced productivity	42.67

Source: Field Survey, (2016). Multiple responses were allowed.

interaction with 65.33%. Also of interest in the result was the fact that participation in community self-help projects was important in the improvement of income with 48% and job creation with 28%. These findings agree with the study of Tamuno and Iroh (2012), where self-help projects were known to have created employment and generated income for rural development. The least effect of self-help projects amongst these respondents was the appreciation of gender role in development with 24.67%. This finding tends to connote that, despite the efforts of women participation in rural community self-help projects, these efforts were yet to be fully appreciated by the people of the study area.

Table 5 shows the relationship between socio-economic characteristics and the participation rate in community self-help projects of respondents.

Table 5: Result of Linear Regression Showing Relationship between Respondents Socio-economic Characteristics and Participation Rate

Model Summary & Fitness	**Parameters**	**Linear Function**
	Multiple R Squared (R^2)	0.9541*
	F-ratio	52.021*
	P-value of the F-ratio	0.000003
Coefficients estimates	**Variables**	
B_0	Intercept	12.03 (0.43)*
Age	(X_1)	8.31 (1.31)ns
Marital status	(X_2)	9.43 (0.40)*
Educational level	(X_3)	6.38 (1.11)*
Occupation	(X_4)	83.21 (2.12)*
Monthly gross income	(X_5)	753.01 (6.71)*

Source: Field Survey, (2016).
Figures in parentheses are t-values; * = Significant (P<0.05); ns –not significant (P> 0.05).

From the result of the linear regression, R^2 was 0.9541 indicating that 95.41% of the variation in the rate of participation in self-help projects was accounted for by the joint effort of the significant variables of marital status (X_2), educational level (X_3), occupation (X_4) and monthly gross income (X_5). The remaining 5% of the changes was caused by variables not included in the model but captured by the error term. All the coefficients of the independent variables appeared with correct (positive) sign, indicating a strong relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. This implies that, a unit increase in any of these variables will bring about increase in the rate of participation by the respondents in community self-help projects.

The implication of the significant independent variables on the dependent variables is that for marital status, the rate of the participation increases with married than with single families. For educational level, those who were educated tended to participate better in community self-help projects than the illiterate respondents. For occupation, those with means of livelihood stood a better chance of financial commitment in self-help than those without means of livelihood. For gross income, those respondents with better monthly incomes also stood the chance of more financial commitment to community self-help projects than those with poor monthly incomes. Given the outcome of these findings, the null hypothesis was rejected for the significant variables of marital status (X_2), educational level (X_3), occupation (X_4) and monthly gross income (X_5) and accepted for the non-significant variable of age (X_1).

The t-test result of gender participation rate in self-help project responsibilities is shown in Table 6. The t-test results of significant difference in gender participation rate in self-help project responsibilities was not significant at 0.05 level. This is because the Computed t value of 0.56 was less than the critical t value of 1.75.

Table 6: Result of t-test of Gender Participation Rate in Self-help Project Responsibilities

	Male	**Female**
Mean	9.33	7.56
Variance	40.25	50.03
Observations	9	9
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	16	
t-Stat (t_{cal})	0.56	
P (T<t), one-tailed	0.29	
t-Critical, one-tailed	1.75	
P (T<t), two-tailed	0.58	
t-Critical, two-tailed	2.12	

Source: Field Survey, (2016).

This null hypothesis of the study was therefore accepted. This implies that the participation rates of men and women in community self-help project responsibilities did not differ significantly in the study area. This finding agreed with the study of Mgbagwu (2016) in Nsukka area of Enugu State, Nigeria where no significant difference existed between men and women in self-help projects embarked by the communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study identified the major self-help projects participated in by rural community members in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State as pipe born water, public toilet construction and market. Scholarship programme was the least self-help project of participation in the area. Further findings of the study in gender participation rate in self-help project responsibilities indicated that the highest rate of participation by men was in decision on project type and location, while this was the second for women. The rate of participation in self-help projects was reasonable for both the men and the women. Men and women importantly participated fully in all the community self-help projects in the study area. The major effects of self-help projects in rural development in the area were in improved community action and improved communication, while the least was appreciation of the role of women in development.

The study recommends more self-help projects on provision of scholarships, and the appreciation of the roles of women participation in rural development in the area.

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