

**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

As a strategy of rural development, community development is an integral part of national development. At present, rural communities in Nigeria suffer from several setbacks; inadequate provision of social services, poor social infrastructures, low life expectancy, malnutrition, diseases, etc. There is an economic gap between the urban and rural communities in the country. To achieve sustainable development in the country, community development must be given a face-lift in the national agenda and achieving this is the central theme of this paper. Data for this study are derived from the research and analysis of scholars, analysts, practitioners, government documents, recent newspaper and journal articles. This means extensive review of available literature for an in-depth analysis of the problems facing rural communities in Nigeria forms the methodology adopted. The study highlights approaches, strategies and challenges affecting rural community activities in Nigeria. It submitted that three factors are keys to achieving sustainable rural community development in Nigeria; creating more community awareness, promoting communal empowerment and increasing the level of communal participation in the development process.

**Keywords:** *Political Economy, Rural Communities, Development, Self-help, Participation*

**Background to the study**

A community can be many things. Often when we think of community, we think in geographic terms. Our community is the city, town or village where we live. When community is defined through physical location, it has precise boundaries that are readily understood and accepted by others. Defining communities in terms of geography, however, is only one way of looking at them. Communities can also be defined by common cultural heritage, language and beliefs or shared interests. Communities are social organisations where people are bounded by common values and orientation. It is usually a small social unit of any size that shares common values. It is a social group whose members live in a certain locality and share a historical or cultural heritage. Community is a group of people that live near each other that help one another out. It is a demonstration of good will and cooperation towards a similar goal of happy living.

The term “development” often carries assumptions of positive change, growth, expansion, transformation and so on. However, many people question the concept of growth for numerous reasons – a realization that more isn't always better or an increasing respect for reducing outside dependencies and lowering levels of consumerism. By implication, a nation's economy can be growing without improvement in the social and economic lives of the people. So while the term “development” may not always mean growth, it always imply change. Development is change, a process of unfolding from an unmanifested, latent or previous condition to a more advanced or effective condition. In the process, qualities reveal possibilities, capabilities emerge

and potentials are realized. Development, from its inception, is a kind of totalistic movement and community development is not an exception. Therefore, community development is a multi-dimensional process by which the productivity, income and welfare, in terms of health, nutrition, education and other features of satisfactory life of communal people can be improved upon or transformed through their supporting or participatory effort. Activities in community development are efforts undertaken that integrates political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors in a process aimed at transforming the structures of society for the benefit of the poor and disenfranchised majority (Penaranda, 1994). It is gainful to establish therefore that community development is about the active involvement of people in the issues which affect their lives. It is a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives. It is based on this recognition that community development initiatives places people at the center stage of the process. The people, working through their own organizations have the vision, know-how, capabilities and experience to confront and solve the problems of underdevelopment. External support is needed only as a complement to their resources and efforts to fashion a society where they are the architects, implementers and beneficiaries of development.

There are several strategies for community development. For most scholars community development strategies are the same with rural development. Community development is a strategy of rural development. The issues generally addressed on the rural development phenomenon are centrally focused on organizing human and natural resources designed to provide a solution to the perennial problems of poverty and deprivation of the rural folks with a view to raising their living conditions. Rural development is the quantitative change or upliftment in the standard of living of people in the rural areas, brought about through integrated approach, by both governmental and non-governmental agencies and the people themselves. Community development emphasizes a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community's initiative. While rural development is holistic, with greater involvement of the government in designing and implementing development initiatives, community development is inclusive; a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives; orders or ranks these needs or objectives; develops the confidence and will to work at these needs and objectives; finds the resources (internal/external) to deal with these needs or objectives; takes action concerning their needs; and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community.

The Integrated Rural Development (IRD) approach captures the place of community development in the overall structure of community development. The Integrated Rural Development approach was officially introduced in Nigeria during the Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980. It was regarded, within the official circles, as an entirely new dimension to rural development and constituting a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach, which is deeply rooted in the understanding of the realities of the rural life. This approach had come to operate under the auspices of agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) sponsored by the World Bank, which brings about a set of programmes ostensibly to improve the lots of the rural folks.

The central focus of this approach is people and their social and physical environments. Thus people have to actively participate in the social, political and economic affairs that affect them through Community Development efforts. In essence, the main features of Integrated Rural Development indicate that: the primary target for identification is the rural poor, the objectives of the programme range from agricultural productivity, equitable distribution of income to agrarian reform, popular peoples' participation and employments. The approach gives recognition to local initiatives and mobilization of resources, which also

explains community development process. Community development connotes self-reliance, which constitutes an important part of Nigeria's development objectives. This paper reviews basic strategies and challenges of community development in Nigeria. It identifies alternative policy measures to improve the social and economic conditions of rural communities in Nigeria.

### **Research problem**

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960 till date, the vast rural communities of the country are in a deplorable state. Anyanwu (2002) had stressed that the majority of Nigerians that live in rural communities which are characterized by illiteracy, disease, neglect, exploration and equality been oppressed by the nation. Adeleke (2003) added that most of our rural areas suffered from inadequate provision of social service, from social infrastructures and employment opportunities, high birth and death rate, low life expectancy, malnutrition, diseases. There is therefore a large economic gap between the urban and rural communities in the country. This is obvious in the level of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities, standard of living and general liability.

This situation creates a difficult social and economic opportunity wherein the poor cannot acquire certain essentials of life, let alone contributing meaningfully to the progress of the society within a national setting. High illiteracy level, lack of adequate funding, lack of basic equipment, politics, rivalries, envy and the inability to accept change in traditional and cultural practices affects community development process. Dike (2007) further attributes these setbacks to poor leadership, which affects social integration. He argued that, how well a community performs economically, politically and socially in many ways, is dependent on the responsiveness of political leadership in addressing basic social, economic and environmental challenges faced by rural communities. These unaddressed challenges affect social cohesion to integrate strategies for communal transformation.

Consequently, when individuals in a community are experiencing harsh economic and social conditions what often sparks off is often a movement (or migration) of individuals from harsh rural communities to the adjoining urban communities. This often leads to various types of socio-economic and political problems including political instability, social crisis, rising unemployment, crime rates and shortage of social services, et cetera (Ferguson & Dickson, 1999). This has continually widened the economic gap of rural communities in Nigeria. It is imperative to review community development strategies; examining constraints and promoting improved measures for sustainability.

### **Methodology and source of data**

The materials for this paper were derived from the research and analysis of scholars, analysts, practitioners, government documents, recent newspapers and journal articles. This is to say that the primary method of the study was an extensive review of available literature for an in-depth analysis of the problems facing rural communities in Nigeria. The sources of information were carefully evaluated and analyzed to determine their veracity.

### **Conceptualizing community development**

Community development has a long history. In *Gemeinschaft und [and] Gesellschaft* (1887), a German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies labored to distinguish between two types of human association or community: *Gemeinschaft* [often interpreted as "community"] and *Gesellschaft* [perceived as "society" or "association"]. In this classic work, Tönnies (1887) perceived *Gemeinschaft* to be a tighter and more

cohesive social entity, owing to the presence of a “unity of will.” He noted that family and kinship “were the perfect expressions of *Gemeinschaft*” (Tönnies, 1887, p.22; Christensen & Levinson, 2003). On the other hand, *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887) is perceived as a group “in which the individuals who make up that group are motivated to take part in the group purely by self-interest” (p.22). He, however, warned that “in the real world, no group was either” *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft* only “but a mixture of the two” (*Gemeinschaft* and [and] *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887, p.22). But whatever form or shape the associations have taken it requires good governance and leadership to improve the living conditions of the people in rural communities (Christensen & Levinson, 2003).

Community development explains a process where community members come together to take collective action and develop the way forward to their common problems. Community wellbeing (economic, social, environmental and cultural) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots or communal level. Community development ranges from small initiatives within a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community. It is this grassroots process by which communities become more responsible, organize and plan together, develop healthy lifestyle options, empower themselves, reduce poverty and suffering, create employment and economic opportunities, achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental goals. The entire process promotes local participation, communal needs assessment and collective implementation of strategies, which will in turn improve the quality of life of the people.

According to Akpomuvie (2010), community development includes all strategies, interventions or coordinated activities at the community level aimed at bringing about social and economic development. He cited Idiode (1989) for classifying three major approaches to community development in Nigeria to include– the extension approach, the project approach and the service approach. He said the extension approach involves directly teaching the rural people improved methods and techniques of either farming, health care or how to read and write. The project approach to community development is generally motivated by the government's desire to improve the economic conditions in the rural areas. It is, therefore, characterized by the establishment of economic ventures, such as government farms or rural industries. In the government circles in Nigeria, the project approach to community development is usually referred to as “rural development.” While the service approach to community development calls for the active participation and initiative of the local people. Used as the main strategy for community development in Nigeria. The service approach concentrates on the provision of social amenities such as postal agencies, maternity centres, pipe-borne water, dispensaries, electricity, among other things in the rural areas. These are provided at the initiative of the community itself. The service approach to community development is known as “self-help” in Nigeria (Akpomuvie, 2010).

In the same direction, the United Nations Organizations (1978) quoted in Anyanwu (1992:3) viewed community development as:

A process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and enable them contribute fully to national progress.

The definition of the United Nations stresses on the need for local effort, involvement in form of active participation and self-help in initiation, planning and execution of projects in communities with much

reliance on their local resources, and the vital role of governmental and non-governmental sources of assistance in the areas of technical and financial services to encourage communities in the achievement of specific goals. In its contribution, the Economic Commission of Africa (ECA) as reported in Hanachor (2005:7) defined community development as:

The outcome of a series of quantitative change occurring among rural population. It is a process by which a set of institutional measures are implemented with and for the inhabitants of rural areas, with the aim of improving the socio-economic condition of the rural populace.

Since community development implies change for better, the concept suggests that people are not whatever circumstance detects for them. They have the capacity to make creative impute to the improvement of their situation and the mastery of their environment. This may have informed the definition of Nzeneri (1995) who attributed it to hard work and maintains that community development is “self-help and hard work freely undertaken by youths and adults through the inspired vision for better standard of living for the country as a group”. Barikor (1984) gave an all-embracing, contemporary definition of community development. He submits that community development by contemporary standard is “an amalgam of many dynamic and complementary factors involving education, economic, socio-political, cultural effort to emancipate the community from retrogressive tradition, poverty, ignorance and disease”.

Community development seeks to increase the capacity, confidence and self-reliance of community members so that they can take charge of their own future. Apart from the various meanings ascribed to community development by different authors, scholars, national and international organizations associated with the concept, it is also needful to examine the views of other professions on the concept. The field of education identifies community development with adult education discipline or basic and fundamental education. This is because, some aspects of adult education do go beyond instruction in formal courses in programmes of local action and these can be viewed as part of educational process. Supporting this view, Anyanwu (1994) said, as an educational process, “Community development is usually employed as a means of educating the people of a community to help themselves both as individuals and as groups”. The development process is often achieved through the help of community organizations. The organization work primarily in helping people within a local community identify social needs, consider the most effective ways of meeting these, mobilize available resources and set about doing so.

### **Theorizing community development strategies**

Theories for what they are involve propositions or hypotheses that are problematic and not verified (though they may be verifiable). There are constructed by formulating a coherent group of propositions designed to help understanding and/or making judgments. Community development theories provide a guide to what should be done in a given situation. They represent intellectual attempts and explanatory accounts by scholars of various disciplines to explain the presence or otherwise of development in different rural communities. However, functionally they are interactive and interdependent.

Many theories are used in community development. Most rural development theories are also used in explaining conditions of rural communities. The earliest ones tended to adapt economic or agricultural development models (Mezirow, 1963). From that time, the range of theories called upon has increased, spanning from symbolic interactionism (Foote and Cottrell, 1955) to cybernetics (Parsegian, 1973). Each provides some understanding or guides action regarding a particular capacity of people or structures

expected to have strategic value in improving capacities of community systems. None are thought to be sufficient to cover more than a limited part or aspect. None are considered operationally complete theories with which to effectively guide the entire development process. This explains why there is often a mixture of theoretical application. Let's examine some of the theories below,

### **1. Systems approach to community development**

Advanced from the works of (Bertalanffy, 1968), the systems theory involves a process of working toward practical prescriptions for behavior supporting community improvement is no easy task. Within the purview of system analysis, communities are conceived as entities that reasonably can be differentiated from what is around them (environment). They have some kind of boundaries, and interactions take place across the boundaries with the environment. Transactions from the environment to the community systems are inputs. However, the community systems are selective in what is accepted as input, and have criteria by which to sort acceptable inputs from other potential stimuli, coding. (At this stage of elucidating the model, discussion is limited to a stimulus/response framework. Eventually, open systems theory is added to take into account the possibilities for spontaneous internal action and other forms associated with living behavior).

Community systems do work and perform transformations with inputs. The products of the work are discharged into the environment, outputs. Information about the reaction in the environment may be transmitted back to the system as a form of input, feedback. In the most general terms, the community system is conceived in relation to the environment. Application of this simple framework requires considerable elaboration. However, this general pattern is similar to some of the schemata popular in the social sciences (Easton, 1965). To conceptualize the internal structure of community systems, community development turns to social systems theory. While social systems operate by the action of people, the basic unit is not taken to be a person. The basic unit is a role. While roles in this context are performed by persons, a person is considered much more than and is definitely not defined by a role (Biddle, 1979). The same person may perform multiple roles in the same social system, may perform roles in a number of social systems and may maintain life spaces not involving social systems. The differentiation of a person from the civic roles they may perform is very important in community development practice.

### **2. Functional approach to community development**

Also known as structural functionalism, the functional theory to community development has its origin from Anthropology. The functionalist perspective, also called functionalism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. It has its origins in the works of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Society is more than the sum of its parts; rather, each part of society is functional for the stability of the whole society. The different parts are primarily the institutions of society, each of which is organized to fill different needs and each of which has particular consequences for the form and shape of society.

Functionalism is related to the systems theory earlier discussed above. However, the functionalist emphasize that societies contain interdependent structure, each of which performs certain functions essential for societal maintenance. It is the activities of these interdependent structures that promote the course of community development. There is social cohesion and partnering of existing community structures in promoting common social and economic good. This partnering helps local people decide,

plan and take action to meet their own needs with the help of available outside resources; helping local services to become more effective, usable and accessible to those whose needs they are trying to meet; taking account of the interrelation between different services in planning for people; forecasting necessary adaption to meet new social needs in constantly changing circumstances (Gulbenkian 1968).

### **3. Holistic approach to community development**

According to Ogilvy (1979), the holistic approach involves relational thought. Instead of thinking about each element by itself, each is envisioned in the context of a totality. Community development's advocacy of a holistic approach is largely a reaction to the failures of sector approaches. Often other strategies for development try to isolate the seminal sector. Usually, these have been thought to be economics or agriculture. Efforts then concentrate on and in this single sector. This theory works as if the selected sector is the primary source for community or societal improvement. If change is in a positive direction, as in an increase of per-capital income or of agricultural production, it is expected that the whole system will be better automatically. This theory suggests that there is one piece of the system on which everything else depends. Strategically then, it is not necessary to directly consider things beyond the chosen segment. The idea is that a trickle down process is normal. It involves the notion that if the most important part is improved, it is the nature of things that benefits will step down through the rest.

This theory, and operations in line with it, is frequently recommended as an efficient approach. The justification goes along the line that there are not enough resources, knowledge or energy to deal with everything, so it makes sense to concentrate whatever is available in the most important sector. There are cases when thought was given only to technology designed to increase production with the result that on its introduction, the cultural system was destroyed and anomie emerged (Eckstein, 1966). There are also cases that show it working in the other direction. Modern technologies have been introduced only to have the cultural system prevent them from reaching the anticipated level of increased production (Nair, 1979). The emphasis on the holistic point of view guards against improvements in one sector bringing unintended consequences in other sectors the negative impact of which outweighs the intended benefits.

### **4. Integrated approach to community development**

An integrated design is in a constant state of building. The patterns involved in integrated development activities are varied with the scale and functions being performed. In the integrated approach, the management system of communal projects reflect a system of organized events designed to provide an important role for local people in planning, decision making and implementation of projects. The main emphasis is on rational development and coordination of all principal factors required community development (Anyanwu, 2004).

The integrated approach to community development is comprehensive, involving detailed planning based on careful definition of needs and resources of the target population and the setting up of appropriate institutions for implementing communal projects. The main feature is that development should be based at village level where people know each other, have mutual confidence and understanding amongst themselves and can organize themselves into achieving communal goals. It promotes communal mobilization process. This involves the process of pooling together, harnessing, activating, actualizing and utilizing potential human and material resources for the purpose of development. In the integrated process, people are made to be aware of resources at their disposal and also motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resources for improving their material, social, environmental and economic wellbeing.

### **5. Participatory approach to community development**

Citizen participation in the community development process, need not to be over emphasized. It is the hallmark of community development initiative. It is assumed that citizen participation is a desired and necessary part of community development activities. Spiegel noted that, "Citizen Participation is the process that can meaningfully tie programs to people" (1968). This approach Citizen Participation in community decision-making can be traced as far back as Plato's Republic. Plato's concepts of freedom of speech, assembly, voting, and equal representation have evolved through the years to form basic pillars upon which the United States was established. Citizen participation is not just the essence of democracy, but also defines the framework within which community development is tied.

In the late 1960s there was a series of debates around 'participation' (see, for example, Pateman 1970). While 'participation' may be a vague term its advocates often rely on two key arguments about its value. It: makes for justice in decision-making - people have some say in, and influence on, collective decisions has an educative value. Through participation people learn (Beetham 1992). These interests became formalized in a number of United Nations reports including "Popular Participation in Development (1971) and Popular Participation in Decision Making for Development (1975)".

According to Midgley et al (1986) the notion of popular participation and that of community participation are interlinked. The former is concerned with broad issues of social development and the creation of opportunities for the involvement of people in the political, economic and social life of a nation, 'the latter connotes the direct involvement of ordinary people in local affairs'. One United Nations document (1981: 5) defined community participation as: the creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development. This is a very general definition and raises as many questions as it answers (Smith, 2006). As with other traditions of community intervention the theoretical base for the work is relatively patchy (see Abbott 1996). There is material around the context and the specific problems within different societies; and there is a longstanding tradition of writing around political theory. However, much of what is written around process remains at the level of 'practice wisdom' and is not worked into a wider ranging framework (Smith, 2006).

Participation remains a significant process by which members of a community actively take part in the programmes and projects of the community. In most cases, this is always a problem to the practitioners, as it is always difficult to ensure that everybody in the community gets involved. To the practitioners, it is acceptable, if a good number of the members of the community are involved in a programme or project. As earlier stated, this most times is best achieved through popular participation. The underlining factor is that, since not every member of the community can be made to participate in community development programmes or projects, a good representation of all segments of the community, men, women and youth irrespective of their economic status, political affiliation, religion, level of education etc, should be involved in the planning and implementation of programme and projects designed for the improvement of their community (Imhabekhai 2010).

### **6. Self-help approach to community development**

Self-help is based on the premise that people can, will, and should collaborate to solve community problems. In addition to the practical problem-solving utility of this perspective, self-help builds a stronger sense of community and a foundation for future collaboration. It embodies the notion that a community can achieve greater self-determination within constraints imposed by the larger political economy in which



it is embedded. Without a commitment to self-help, a community may exist as a place, an organization, or an interest group but be lacking the capacity building strategy. It is a style of planning, decision making and problem solving which is endemic to the very idea of community, especially that of the small face-to-face community.

Ugwu (2009) noted that self-help is emphasized not only as a goal to be achieved in and of it, but also as a strategy for the accomplishment of broader development objectives. Helping communities achieve a capacity for self-help is fundamental to both the theory and practice of community development. If a spirit of self-help doesn't exist within a community as an extension of the members' dedication to common goals and mutual respect; then, from the perspective of community development or empowerment, a capacity for self-help may be instigated with the assistance of an outside community development practitioner.

It is this idea of intervention to produce a greater capacity for self-help among residents of a place that is a cornerstone of the community development profession. In community development practice, it is rudimentary that the solution to community problems is sought first within the community, and its resources and capabilities. While the community development approach does not assume that all important social, economic, or political problems of communities can be resolved by a community's own efforts, the idea of mobilizing broad community participation is prescribed as a goal of any community development effort and most definitions of community development include self-help. Self-help embodies two interrelated features:

- i. It is expected to produce improvements of people's living conditions, facilities, and/or services)" and
- ii. It emphasizes that the process by which these improvements are achieved is essential to development of the community.

The "developed community" is both improved and empowered as a result of these two features, the self-help perspective emphasizes that the process is more important in the long run than the improvements because the collaboration that derives from a strong sense of community can be the means to continuing improvement of community services and quality of life. By contrast; if community services, facilities, or improvements are contributed by an outside agency or organization with little or no community involvement, such "improvements" are likely to be transitory, to increase community dependency, to contribute little to a greater sense of community, and to diminish the community's future capacity to act on its own behalf. Thus, a self-help approach not only emphasizes what communities achieve, but more importantly, how it achieves it.

### **Assessment of Development Strategies in Nigeria**

Community Development in Nigeria is as old as the history of the nation. It could be traced to the early man and his settlement into community which was brought about by the discovery of fire and farming. Before the coming of colonial masters, Nigeria as a whole has employed commercial efforts as the means for mobilizing community resource with aim to developing her localities. This supports the position of Hanachor (2008) that community development practice in Nigeria has revolved around both the traditional and modern community development concepts. The early advocates of community development such as the Cambridge summer conference of 1948, Ashridge conference of 1954 saw it as the promotion of better life, and a method of helping local communities to become aware of their needs. This perception and concept may have given rise to such top-down programmes and projects, as Better Life for

Rural People (BLRP). Operation feed the nation (OFN) Green revolution (GR) Mass literacy programme (MLP) in most states of Nigeria etc. which had been faulted by recent researches.

The post-independence advocates of community development as Murry (1966), presented community development as the utilization under a single programme of approaches and techniques using local communities as units of action. This may have given rise to the most popular Nigeria integrated community development programme (DIFRRI). Biddle and Biddle (1988) saw it as a process of social action of people of a community in identifying their needs and executing their plans with the support of government and non-governmental agencies, the outcome of which gave rise to self-help projects. In line with this is the view of United Nations organization, which advocated for the unity of the efforts of the people and those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the people of the communities.

At this stage of the development of the concept, in most parts of the Nation, there is several community development projects though initiated by the community members but was assisted by the government or non-governmental agencies. Contemporary advocates of community development such as Barikor (1984), Nzeneri (1995) Hanachor (2009) had included into the concept of community development such terms as voluntary participation, collaboration, empowerment, and emancipation from tradition, poverty, ignorance and diseases. Programmes in line with these contemporary views of the concept include, National poverty eradication programme, the roll back Malaria programme, micro credit and empowerment programme, Mass transit programme etc. These programme/projects had their degree of their success and failures. In recent years, there are changing strategies in community development in the country. There is greater government and international development agencies intervening in the provision basic infrastructures in community areas in the country. At state levels, the Cross River State government had set up an agency to promote community development in the state.

#### **a) The Cross River State Community and Social Development Agency (CRS CSDA)**

The Cross River State Community and Social Development Agency (CRS CSDA) is an Agency established by law of Cross River State House of Assembly to implement the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP). CSDP is a World Bank assisted project in Cross River State and another laudable initiative which drives His Excellency, Senator Liyel Imoke's administration for rural transformation. CSDP utilizes the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach, a bottom-up development strategy which places the poor on the driver's seat of development by giving them a voice in decision making for development. It is a participatory and socially inclusive approach which allows the poor to identify, design, part-finance, implement, manage and own assets created towards poverty reduction.

Using this methodology has enabled Agency to approve and fund 192 CDP comprising 531 multi-sectoral micro projects as at press time. Out of this, 301 micro projects are completed and put to use by beneficiary communities. This micro projects have far reaching effect on the fight against poverty, the attainment of the MDGs and Federal Government vision 20:20:20. The Project Development Objective of CSDP is to "sustainably increase access of poor people to improved social and natural resource infrastructure services". Its performance indicators include,

- I. Increased number of poor people (of which 70% are women) with access to social services.
- ii. Increased number of poor people with access to natural resources infrastructure services.

- iii. Increased percentage of participating Local Government budgets that incorporate
- iv. Community Development Plans.

It may be important to briefly examine CSDP Project Menu to help in understanding their direction.

- a. Education: Construction/Rehabilitation of primary and Secondary school classroom blocks, Construction/Rehabilitation of Secondary school science Laboratories/Workshops, Construction /Rehabilitation of Secondary school Students' hostels, Construction/Rehabilitation of Secondary school staff quarters, Construction/Rehabilitation of primary and Secondary school examination halls, Construction/Rehabilitation of Secondary school Libraries, Construction/Rehabilitation of Information Technology (IT) Centre.
- b. Health: Construction/Rehabilitation/Equipping of Primary health Centres, Construction/Rehabilitation/ Equipping of community health Clinics, Construction/Rehabilitation of community health Centre staff quarter, Provision of standby generator to community Health facilities, etc.
- c. Water: Construction/Rehabilitation of hand pump boreholes, Construction/Rehabilitation of motorized borehole with overhead tank and reticulation, Provision of rainwater harvest facilities, Construction/ Rehabilitation of deep open concrete wells etc
- d. Transport: Construction/Rehabilitation of community rural road, Construction of community mini bridge and culverts, Construction/Rehabilitation of jetties, Support for water transport (engine boat, canoes, etc).
- e. Rural electrification: Connection to national grid, Extension of rural electrification, Supply and installation of transformers.
- f. Socio-economic: Construction/Rehabilitation of multi-purpose community centers, Construction/ Rehabilitation of community market stalls, Construction/Rehabilitation/up grading of community skill acquisition centers, Construction/Rehabilitation of community security posts.
- g. Natural resource and environment: Construction/Rehabilitation of community VIP toilets, Construction of incinerators, Reclamation of erosion/flood site, Erosion control, Construction of Drainages, Establishment of agro-forestry(Woodlots wind breaks), Rehabilitation of community forest areas/grazing reserve.
- h. Vulnerability/gender: School feeding/provision of books/uniforms for the poor and the vulnerable groups, Construction/Rehabilitation of skill acquisition Centre's for the vulnerable persons, Fee waiver/Scholarships, Workfare

(<http://www.csdpnigeria.org/crossriver/Home.aspx>).

This community-based driven initiative has brought about a lift in the profile of Cross River State communities. Several towns without basic infrastructure like electricity have been connected to the national grid. Water is running in places where it did not. Roads are fixed and dwellers are happy. Schools have been rehabilitated and the standard of education is improving. Identifying quality education as a major weapon to combat poverty and other ills in the society, the state government, through the CRSCSDA has helped in bridging the literacy gap in poor communities in the state by over 90 per cent, Ovat (2007) said.

He further maintained that using the community-driven development approach, where the beneficiaries drive their development agenda by identifying, designing, part-financing, implementing and managing the assets upon completion, he said the agency supported communities to construct 149 classrooms, rehabilitate 51 classrooms and provided furniture including desk (2650), tables and chairs seating 7275 pupils/students. In line with the State Government vision to build science and technology base in the state, Agency provided funds to poor communities with which the construction, furnishing/equipping of 6 science laboratories, and 2 ICT centres was achieved.

“These efforts have been deeply appreciated by beneficiary communities as such science and technology inclined education facility never existed before intervention. The benefits of these facilities are far reaching bringing a positive change in the knowledge and skill levels of both students and teachers alike. Agency also assisted some communities with construction and furnishing/equipping of library facilities thus stimulating reading culture of students in beneficiary schools. This intervention stimulated school enrolment recording a marginal increase of 23.39 percent for secondary school and 185.03 per cent for primary schools. It is also promoting reading habit at that level,” Ovat said.

In Cross River State, like in most other parts of the developing counties, most people with some level of education prefer to live in towns and cities. This is so because of the perceived opportunities that abound. Another reason for this may be connected with the presence of social infrastructure like electricity, potable water, good roads, etc. These made it difficult for providers of social services like teachers to show commitment when deployed to rural areas. In line with this, Agency assisted communities who had similar challenge of accommodating teachers posted to their community schools, to construct staff quarters with complementary facilities as water and VIP toilets in some cases. This holistic provision of facilities at the rural level has helped teachers to accept their posting or deployment to such schools, thereby improving student access to teachers and by extension attendance. An outcome survey of CSDP intervention in the state was conducted by an independent consultant in December 2012 for CSDP beneficiary communities in the state to investigate changes if any that may be attributed to CSDP intervention.

The analysed results of the report revealed that secondary school enrolment increased from 2775 before intervention to 3424 after intervention. This amounts to over 23 per cent increase. The survey also revealed that primary school enrolment increased from 294 before intervention to 838 after intervention accounting for over 185 per cent increase in school enrolment in CSDP beneficiary communities in the state. There has also been a positive change in the number of students studying science subjects in schools with a record increase of 58 per cent enrolment.

Ovat said CSDP currently has intervention in 192 communities in the state with education incline projects contributing over 26.2 percent of the total number of micro projects supported. This is a pointer to the fact that the state was in dire need of educational development. His words: “The enrolment of wards in schools is essential to eradicate poverty due to ignorance. It is also an empowerment process that prepares the children and youths as future leaders. The good thing is that CSDP intervention is needs based and thus has potential for sustainability. In Cross River state, over 98 percent of support has gone to rural and indigent communities with evident need for development and poverty reduction. Some of the beneficiary communities had no school of theirs before intervention but rather trek to distant communities to attend schools. Others had school but never had science laboratories for study of science subjects. This affected

their enrolment for certificate examinations like West African Examination Council (WAEC) or National Examination Council) NECO thus, science students during period of examination had the choice of discontinuing or enrolled in another school distant from the community. There was therefore an evident problem of access that CSDP has since corrected in such communities.” (<http://thenationonlineng.net/new/a-boost-in-cross-river-communities>).

### **b) European Union Micro Project Programmes EU-MPP in Niger Delta Regions of Nigeria**

At the international level, the World Bank has also played a significant role in providing a new direction in community development initiative. The European Union Micro Project Programmes EU-MPP emerged as an interventionist initiative to improve the social and economic conditions of rural communities in Cross River State. In 2000, the programme was first established in 3 states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States (MPP3) and latter extended to 6states (Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo, and Ondo (MPP6). A new approach in MPP9 (now involving 9 states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) is that in addition to community contributions, the local governments are actively involved in the funding and implementation of projects.

The MPP9 European Union – Federal Government (EU- FG) programme is aimed at reducing poverty in the rural and sub- urban communities in the region, through the promotion of gender equality and participation in local governance and development. Other areas of focus for the projects are transparency and accountability in local government administration, provision of more access to basic facilities in health, education, water supply and sanitation and roads, and awareness creation on critical issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, the environment, conflict and human rights.

The purpose of the MPP9 programme is to support reforms, through offering models of transparency and participation in micro projects which increase access to socioeconomic infrastructure services, income generating options, sustainable livelihood options, gender equity and community empowerment (including youth). The MPP9 interventions will arise through community-prioritised proposals resulting from community-developed action plans. The Communities will be assisted through facilitation by CSOs, to be engaged through this Call for Proposals. Communities will be involved in the planning, supervision and implementation of micro projects through Community Based Organisations represented by Project Management Committees (PMC), operating democratic structures formed through community mobilisation processes. Communities will contribute 25% of the cost of the micro projects in cash or in kind. Local Government Authorities will contribute 25 % (to be contracted using Government contract procedures and to be contracted before EU funding can be released). The average cost of a Micro project is anticipated to be approx. EUR 44,000(MPP9 Guidelines for grant application, 2008).

The process involved in the implementation the project captures the premise of community participatory approach to community development earlier examined. In the Community Development Action Plan (CDAP), the underlined processes are carried out.

- a. Facilitating participatory needs assessment exercises (i.e. PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal) and inclusive planning processes, including through participatory self-diagnoses using MPP9 formats.
- b. Facilitating socio-economic mapping, livelihoods assessment and data collection exercises within the localities.

- c. Encouraging formation of interest groups (youth, women, disabled, minority, etc.) and their participation in planning processes to ensure representation of all stakeholder interests.
- d. At a minimum, ensuring that women, youth and vulnerable members of the community feel free to voice their preferences and register their preferences in the CDAP through development of action plans for each interest group, and feeding those plans into overall community deliberations.
- e. Ensuring that each community prepares a Gender Action Plan and a Youth Action Plan, each forming a subsidiary component of the CDAP.
- f. Ensuring adequate discussion of what communities can do for themselves, what help MPP9 can provide, and what help other donors/programmes may be able to provide.
- g. Ensuring that planning processes cover a range of considerations (not only potential MPP9 contributions), whilst being clear on the types of projects which can and cannot be funded with the assistance of MPP9 (MPP9 Guidelines for grant application, 2008).

The creation of these opportunities enables community members to actively participate and contribute in their development process. People affected by the problems are actively involved in all phases of the organizing process: needs identification, capability building, resource identification and utilization, other decisive actions to solve the problems, and evaluation. Substantial evidence exists as to the success of MPP3 and MPP6 in improving the conditions of living of community dwellers in the Niger Delta where the projects were targeted. These impacts can be summarized in three perspectives,

- (i) Improvement in governance at the local level;
- (ii) Engendering active participation of target communities;
- (iii) Leveraging government response to service delivery in a participatory and transparent manner at the communities.

#### Problems Associated with Community Development Activities in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the level of success noted above much is still more to be desired. There are certain problems which affects the effective implementation of community development programmes in Nigeria. Some of these are identified to include,

1. **Mobilization of Community Members:** Rural communities are made up of different categories of people; the rich, poor, educated, illiterate etc. As these categories are, so are their level of understanding and reaction to issues. Most people have natural tendency to resist innovations or change especially when they are not informed of the innovations. To be able to elicit the participation of a greater number of the member of the community, in any community development programme or project, the community development practitioner is faced with the problem of mobilization, which poses great challenge to the success of the programme or project. Mobilization is the process of putting people (individuals or groups) into readiness for active service or arousing their interest and consciousness for programmes or projects which will be of benefit to them (Imhabekhai 2010)
2. **Culture and Tradition:** Culture is the way of life of a people, the totality of their custom, norms and tradition (Hanachor 2005). Most community members are addicted to the culture and tradition of their community. In most cases these cultural practices and tradition tend to go at variance with the focus and expectations of community development practitioners, thereby posing difficulties in the

execution of such development programmes or projects targeted at liberating the people from their retrogressive cultural practices.

3. **Conflict and Crises:** Conflict and crises are integral part of human life. Conflicts are forms of disagreement, resulting from divergent perception of issues of common interest. Conflict can be described as a collision of two or more sets of needs, interest and motives within individuals or groups (Imhabekhai and Oyitso 2002). The management of conflict in communities is a great challenge to community development practitioners, hence they need to make assurance double sure that they take control of the situation. When conflicts are poorly managed, they degenerate into crises, a situation of intense danger.
4. **Adoption of Change:** Development is a change process. In course of exposure and interaction of individuals with people outside the community, they learn certain practices, belief system; new methods of doing certain thing, which if adopted could transform their community. Not everybody embraces change, even when it is positive. This therefore poses a challenge to the development process.
5. **Finance:** Adequate funding has always remained a challenge to development process, either at local, state or national level. Sometimes, resources mobilized by the community may not adequate to enhance the execution of development projects, this calls for concern. At other time, state intervention may be hampered by inadequate funding or misappropriation and often projects remain uncompleted. Adequate funding of any programme or project guarantees successful execution.

### **Policy implications and the way forward**

Given the premise above, community development revolves around the people and any meaningful attempt to improve the process must begin from increasing awareness on the need for involvement and contributing meaningfully to the development of their environment. Adedeji (2002) said "Enlighten a man, you develop the community". Therefore community development has to be man's oriented. It should be for the people and must be designed to meet their needs. This means that rural community development efforts must be derived from the felt-needs and aspirations of the rural people and not in response to the needs of the urban political economy such as unemployment, food shortfalls and rural-urban migration.

First, it is important to employ concerted efforts in addressing the above identified problems affecting community development activities in Nigeria. In addition, the under listed strategies should be addressed.

1. **Creating more awareness:** It is worthy of note that the level of involvement of members of a community in community development programmes or projects, is a function of the level of awareness created in the members. To elicit popular participation of the people, the information concerning the programmes or projects designed to improve communal lives should be communicated adequately to all concerned, to appeal to their conscience. There are people in communities that have natural tendencies to resist innovations and change. But with adequate information and awareness they will see the need for the change.
2. **Promoting communal empowerment:** Community empowerment deals with enhancing personal growth and an improvement in self-definition that occurs as a result of the development of capabilities and proficiencies (Staples 1990). Another definition suggests that empowerment is a combination of personal

strengths, initiative, and natural helping systems to bring about change. This strategy can be applied to community development by empowering the people within the community to develop their own community.

3. Increasing the level of communal participation in the development process: This means that more opportunities should be given to the rural people for participation in decisions that govern their lives. Therefore, proper human capital development should be developed and maintained so as to eliminate the paternalistic view which assumes that the rural people are passive and fatalistic, uninterested in improvement of their lives, and incapable of making initiatives for improvement.

### **Conclusion**

The paper underscores that community development is one of the strategies of rural development. Unlike other development initiatives, it explains a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community's initiative. Among several strategies examined, self-help has been acknowledged as the most significant in contemporary communal setting. This is predicated on the premise that it is a style of planning, decision making and problem solving which is endemic to the very idea of community, especially that of the small face-to-face community. More mobilization of community members, empowerment and participation in determining communal problems and strategies for solving them are further strategies identified by the paper for effective community development.

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