

Community Development Projects: An X-Ray of Nsit Ubium Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the community development projects in the Nsit Ubium local government area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria by tracing the trajectory from the pre-colonial era till date. The secondary method of data was used to obtain the relevant information needed for the study. The study revealed that the Nsit Ubium local government's constituent has implemented many community development projects from the pre-colonial till date. Following this, the study concluded that while performing these development projects, the Nsit Ubium local government faced certain challenges, which were insufficient funds, delay in the approval of projects by the Akwa Ibom state government, and low levels of participation of the local people. In line with this, the study then recommended that there should be administrative and financial autonomy, increased share in the national treasury, participation of the Nsit Ubium's traditional institutions in community development, and encouragement of the local people's participation.

Keywords: Local Government; Community Development; Community Development Projects; Community Development Associations.

INTRODUCTION

Local government has continued to be a driving force of community development projects in Nigeria, its importance and impact in development cannot be over-emphasised. The purpose of the local government in community development is to work together with the community to address issues and needs that cannot be handled by an acting individual alone (Anikeze, 2014). Nevertheless, a form of local administration predates any form of central government where people in various communities cater for their social needs through a self-help approach (Odewale, 2019). In line with this, the decentralisation theory, one of the theories of community development, states that the local government is to provide development to the majority of people who live in rural areas by mobilising human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public (Nwachukwu, 2018). This is why the local government is commonly referred to as the government at the grassroots level or the closest level of government to the people.

In Nigeria, the history of the local government administration can be traced down to pre-colonial and colonial times. During these two periods, traditional institutions acted as the government at the local level. According to Ajayi, (1992), the traditional institutions were the existing ruling bodies in the different ethnic groups that were joined together to form a central government called Nigeria. Not only were these institutions responsible for creating laws, but they were also responsible for community development activities in their local communities such as constructing local bridges, roads, and marketplaces. Although the ethnic groups were diverse, they each had the same traditional institution that handled community development projects, which was the age grades (Akpan, 2017). In colonial Nigeria, the traditional institutions became bracketed under the Indirect Rule System and the Native Authority System which were both introduced by Frederick Lugard, the then Governor General of the country.

The Native Authority System metamorphosed into the adoption of the Westminster structure of local government in various regions of Nigerian federations, towards the tail end of colonization in the 1950s. These continued until 1976 local government reforms came into being, which recognised local government in Nigeria as the third tier of government. This recognition of the local government improved the outlook and operations of the local government in community development. According to Olowu and Ayo (1985), “the most apparent implication for community development was the transfer of Community Development Departments into the Ministry of Local Government.” Olowu and Ayo (1985) go on to state that the community development projects initiated by the local government after the 1976 reforms increased in number, compared to the number of community development projects carried out before the reforms. They support this claim by adding that the local government in Nigeria had an increase in its community development grants starting after 1976, which was caused by the number of projects it undertook that year. Abah (2000) also support the assertion by saying that a good number of western and southern states implemented community development projects by renovating old school buildings and churches. Since 1976 local government reform has been put into practice as the third tier of government, local government has responsibilities that are clearly practice stated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria towards achieving community development at the grassroots level. The performance of local government can be measured by the amount of community development projects delivered to the populace by the local government, be it in a direct or indirect approach.

In line with this, this paper looks at community development projects in Nigeria by using the Nsit Ubium local government of Akwa Ibom state as a case study. Not only does it highlight the community development projects initiated in pre-colonial era Nsit Ubium till date, but it also discusses the challenges the Nsit Ubium local government faced while carrying out community development projects. To do this, the paper is divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part is the methodology, the third part is the conceptual review, the fourth part is the discussion of findings, and the fifth part presents the conclusion and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The Nsit Ubium local government has its headquarters at Ikot Edibon and was established out of the Etinan Local Government on May 3, 1989. Following the separation of the present Nsit Ibom local government Area from Nsit Ubium in September 1991, Nsit Ubium was left with its two current clans: the Nsit clan, which has 31 villages and the Ubium clan, which has 33 villages. The villages in the Nsit clan are divided into four groups: Ibiakpan, Obotim, Nduo Eduo, and Afia Nsit. At the same time, the villages in the Ubium clan are divided into three groups: Ise, Afaha, and Ukat. The Nsit Ubium is under the Uyo Senatorial District in Akwa Ibom North East and covers a land mass of 242.942 sq kin. According to the 2006 National Census, it has a total population of 128,231. 68,163 of them are males while the remaining 60,068 are females. Nsit Ubium is situated around 6 kilometres to the east of the local governments of Eket, Okobo, Nsit Ibom, Etinan, Ibesipko/Asutan and Nsit Atai. And shares a common boundary with the Eket and Nsit Ibom local governments. The Nsit Ubium local government area is naturally blessed with the Qua Ibo River, which is its major source of water and is also responsible for the area’s swampy areas and marshes. This paper used the secondary method of data collection to gather relevant insight on the Nsit Ubium local government and community development. The secondary data sources it used were books, websites, articles, and research papers.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Community Development

The term “Community Development” means different things to people, such as a process, a method, a program, or a social movement. Paul (1962) states that different opinions are acquired by the activities people associate the concept with. Supporting this claim is Akukwe (1996) who asserts that community development has been associated with different names like social education, mass education, and rural constructive work.

The most popular notion of community development is that it is a process. The United Nations (1992) supports this claim by defining community development as “a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.” Similar to this definition is that of Ekong (2003), who defined community development as a process by which efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the communities' economic, social and cultural conditions. Additionally, Rahim and Asnarulkhadi (2010), state that community development is a process that brings changes in the social, economic, cultural, and environmental facets of community life. From these definitions, community development can be defined as a process that must be completed to achieve some set goals, which may be economical, social, cultural, or even environmental – depending on the objective of the people – and which requires the effort and participation of the people and their governmental authorities to be carried out.

According to Forgead (2017), community development is usually carried out by employing three principles. Forgead (2017) identifies them to be the self-help, participatory, and felt-need principles. According to Ndukwe (2005), self-help is a “strategy that does not involve the actions of the government for inducing progress in rural communities.” This means that the self-help principle depends on the involvement of community members. Another definition of the self-help principle is that of Omeje (2014), who defined it as “a combination of individual efforts and talents, with a better of communities.” Here, individual efforts refer to human resources while talents are the material resources. This means that the self-help principle uses the available human and material resources in a community. The second principle, the participatory principle, is defined by White (1981) as the “involvement of the local population actively in the decision-making concerning development projects or in their implementation Ndekha et al (2003) define it as “a social process whereby specific groups with shared needs living in a defined geographic area actively pursue identification of their needs, take decisions and establish mechanisms to meet these needs.” These two definitions stress the fact that the participatory principle must be carried out by the community members, who must be actively involved in the entire process of community development. According to Onyenemezu and Olumati (2013), the felt-need principle “focuses on the identification of needs by the people.” This means that community development projects and goals are identified by the community members, based on their present needs.

Community development also comes in different forms. Ekong (2003) says these forms can be direct, non-direct, or mid-way direct. Boyea-Robinson (2016) defines the direct form as when community development projects and goals are not determined by the members of the community but by people outside the community. Supporting his view is Forgead (2017) who says that the direct approach is when members of a community are not included in the community development processes meant for them. This means that the direct form is when community development projects are initiated by outsiders without consulting the community members. The second approach, which is the non-direct approach, is when the community members are involved in their community development project processes Abah (2000). This form, according to Agboeze et al (2021) is the opposite of the direct approach and requires the community members themselves to identify their community development goals and objectives. The mid-way direct form, according to Kayo (2023), is when community members identify their community development goals and objectives but employ the assistance of governmental authorities to achieve the goals. This form of community development is a type of partnership between the community members and their governmental authorities, especially the local government.

Finally, community development projects are prioritised using two approaches. Buye (2021) names them to be the need-based and the assets-based approaches. Buye (2021) further goes on to say that the need-based approach “focuses on the community's needs, deficiencies and problems.” While assets-based is the “basis that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing, but often unrecognized assets.” Supporting this definition is Kayo (2023) who claims that the asset-based approach “involves using the strengths and experiences already existing within a community to take action and achieve goals.” This means that, for the needs-based approach, a community's needs, difficulties, and problems must be first addressed to achieve community, while the assets-based approach, should focus on what it currently has and then develop it to strengthen its development.

Local Government

The local government can be defined in different ways, depending on the knowledge of the person defining it.

For example, Wraith (1984) defines the local government as “the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution.” Awa (1981) defines the local government as “a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority to disperse or decentralising disperse or decentralise the local government as a political authority that was created out of decentralisation. Odewale and Benson (2016) observe that local government serves as a “political and administrative structure facilitating decentralization, national integration, efficiency in governance, and a sense of belonging at the grassroots”.

According to Mawhood (1983), decentralisation is when the central government delegates part of its authority, power, and functions to political institutions at the lower levels. Smith (1985) asserts that decentralisation happens when there is the need to create a political authority to represent people at the lower levels. This means that the local government is some type of lesser government that represents lower, or in this case, local people. This summation draws support from Adeyemo (2005) who states that the local government “is an administrative agency whose control and authority relates to the people at the grassroots or periphery.”. Odewale & Oladokun, (2021) also assert that Local governments in the world over are established to assist with the needs of the local populace. In Nigeria, local governments are established to facilitate grassroots development. It is created to see to the development of the socio-economic and political affairs of the grassroots.

Another definition of the local government is by Emezi (1984) who defines it as the “system of local administration under local communities that are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social amenities, and encourage cooperation and participation of inhabitants towards the improvement of their conditions of living.” This means that, apart from representing people at the local level, the local government is to also administratively control their affairs by creating local laws, also known as bye-laws, as well as providing them with their basic needs and encouraging them to participate in community development projects that will improve their livelihood. In Nigeria, the local government has institutional roles in community development. The local government also acts as an anchor of community development between the state and federal governments, and also as an anchor between Community Development Associations and the local people.

Local Government and Community Development in Nigeria

Globally, local government and community development are two inseparable entities due to the bond they share. The concepts of local government and community development are not new in Nigeria. Both have existed together since the history of the country. Ehizo (2022) says that the local government and community development activities in Nigeria can be divided into three eras, namely, the pre-colonial era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial / independence era. During the pre-colonial era, community development projects had a different form from what they have now. Agboeze et al (2021) say this is because, during the pre-colonial era, community development was localised in nature. During this period, the different ethnic groups, like the Igbo, Ibibio, Hausa, and Yoruba, lived as “villages.” Their economic obligation, which included community development, was assigned to their age-grade societies. According to Akpan (2017), the age grades societies were made of children and youths born within the same period. The age groups, using the non-direct approach, carried out self-help community development projects in the villages, like clearing bushes, constructing homes, rest areas, roads, markets, bridges, paths, and cleaning up their immediate surroundings (Idode, 1989).

During the colonial era, the traditional institutions, under the guardianship of Lord Lugard, became the Native Authority System. Unlike the pre-colonial era, community development during this period was handled with the mid-way directive approach. Ehizo (2022) says this was because of the Western development style the British colonists brought into Africa. The introduction of new construction that involved iron, cement, and other building materials that could not be produced locally, changed the localised nature of community

development and made the native authority system, which consisted of the local institutions, depend on the formal institution for financial aid. According to Odenigwe (1977), the formal institutions were officers or “bureaucrats” created by the British government to replace the warrant chiefs, and who were to handle community development projects that would benefit the nation as a whole, rather than some villages. During this period, the direct approach was also used to carry out assets-based community development. Agboeze et al (2021) point out that the British colonists carried out a lot of community development projects in local towns without asking the locals, to greatly improve the country’s tradable assets, such as cocoa. Agboeze et al (2021) support Odenigwe's (1977) claim by saying that the British colonists did it to promote national, commercial and industrial growth.

In the post-colonial / independence era, community development started soon after 1960, the year Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. Once again, the non-direct approach and community self-help were used to carry out simple community development projects like building pathways, roads, and markets, dredging rivers and streams, and cleaning public land (Idode, 1989). However, when the local communities wanted to construct schools and dispensaries, or tar roads and pipe water, they used the mid-way directive approach. Akpan (2017) says that community members partnered with their native authorities when the community financial assistance for projects that were too big and expensive for them to carry out by themselves. In 1976, when the “native authority” became “local government,” the number of community development projects they handled increased as a result of the authorisation the reforms granted the local government in community development. According to Akpan (2017), here, the local government maintained the style of community development aiding national development through the assets-based approach. The significant efforts of the national government on community development projects during the independence era were the National Agricultural Development Authority (NALDA), The Green Revolution (GR), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW). More recently, community development projects have been carried out by the state and federal governments in collaboration with the local government. Some of these projects are asset-based in nature across various communities in Nigeria which include; The Non-Motorised Transport Initiative in Lagos, the Self-Service Registration Portal in Dogo-Ruwa, Abuja, the Civic Centre in Ile-Oluji, Ondo State, the installation of a transformer in Nwagboso, Abia State, and the Ibom Deep Water Port in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This research has its discussion of findings broken down into five sections, namely the community development projects in pre-colonial Nsit Ubium, the community development projects in colonial Nsit Ubium, the community development projects in independent Nsit Ubium, the community development projects in recent Nsit Ubium, and lastly, the challenges the Nsit Ubium local government faced during the community development process.

Community Development Projects in Pre-Colonial Nsit Ubium:

Pre-colonial Nsit Ubium was located in the southern part of what is now Nigeria and was made up of three clans: Afaha, Nsit, and Ubium. These clans were further divided into the villages that made up Nsit Ubium. Nsit Ubium had traditional institutions that controlled its administrative, executive, social, political, and economic affairs. For community development, Nsit Ubium used its age grades (Abouty develop the villages in its three clans. The community development projects of the age grades involved rebuilding village housing centres that had been weathered over time and creating new paths and market centres. The age groups developed their villages locally. To rebuild village centres, they used bricks, which they developed by mixing straw and clay. To create new paths, they cut down trees and cleared the bushes with simple equipment like cutlasses and hoes. This view goes in line with Akpan (2017), who asserted that in pre-colonial Nsit Ubium, the age grades carried out simple and localised community development projects. During this period, community development was carried out using the self-help approach. And because the projects focused on bettering the villages in each of the clans, there was voluntary participation of the villagers. A notable example of the age-grade activities in community development was during the family season. For example, in the Akai

village, before the farming season, farmers usually cleared their lands in preparation for the cultivation of crops. Since farming activities in the village were done according to seasons, everyone in the village farmed at the same time. In the Akai village farming seasons were divided into two: the dry season (which started in October and ended in April) and the rainy season (which started in May and ended in September). In between these two seasons, the Akai farmers cleared their farmlands. Since the communal relationship was encouraged in Akai, it had an organised “labour group” was created based on the self-help principle of community development. In Akai, this is based on the idea that farmers could employ the outside support of the labour groups when clearing their farmlands. The labour group was the age grades and during the planting season, farmers usually employed them to assist them in clearing their farmlands. As a reward for their efforts, the farmers offered the age grades food and drinks. This method of the age grade in community development was also practised in Ukat, another village in Nsiium. Here, the planting season was divided into the dry and the rainy seasons. Ukat, like Akai village, also had a labour organisation which was their age grades. And like Akai, the Ukat farmers also employed their assistance while clearing their farms. And their age grades willingly participated in the cultivation activities.

Community Development Projects in Colonial Nsit Ubium:

In 1914, Nsit Ubium which was a southern community, was amalgamated with different communities to form Nigeria. When Lord Lugard changed the traditional institutions into the indirect rule, it did not affect the role of the age grades in community development, as they worked alongside with the local chiefs to identify the felt needs of the villagers. This goes in line with what Akpan (2017) stated: that the age grades during the colonial era, had discussions with the local chiefs to identify the basic needs of the community. The age grades, during this period, continued to carry out local and simple development projects until the 1940s when Western community development ideas were introduced into Nsit Ubium by the British colonists through a direct approach. These ideas, were new forms of money, western education, and transportation. Because of this, much of the local community development projects done in pre-colonial Nsit Ubium were destroyed. Also, the spread of Christianity by the missionaries, who also advocated for education and health care, changed the outlook of community development in Nsit Ubium. What was once a local and simple activity changed into a broader process that included mass education, economic development, and social well-being. Once the Ubium people became acclimated with the Western ideas, the native authorities focused on building missionary schools and churches, health care centres in some prominent villages in its three clans, like Ikotene, Ndukpo Ise, Ikot Edibon, Ikot Essen, and Ikot Ekwere. However, they faced a lot of challenges while trying to do this. One challenge was the low level of participation of the Ubium people. The native authorities wanted to build missionary schools and churches which were Western developments the native Ubium did not believe in. Since they did not believe in education or Christianity, the first, which questioned their knowledge, and the second which contradicted their faith in their local gods, they didn't participate in the projects. Another challenge the native authorities faced was waiting for the central government to approve the projects and support them financially. In most cases, the central government did not approve their projects. And when they did, it was late. In most cases, the native authorities got financial support from the missionary unions in Nsit Ubium and through their help, were able to achieve their community development goals.

Community Development Projects in Independent Nsit Ubium:

The Nsit Ubium local government was created out of the Etinan local government in 1989. In September 1991, another local government, Nsit Ibom, was created out of Nsit Ubium. This removed the Afaha clan from Nsit Ubium and left it with its two present clans: Nsit and Ubium. The Nsit Ubium local government has ten wards divided into five districts. Its ten wards are Etebi Akwata Ward, Ebe Ekpi, Ntak Inyang, Ekpene Obo, Ebighi Okpono, Ikpa, Edor, Etebi Idunga Assan, Uquo, and Akpautong. Its five districts are the Ndiya District with 9 villages, the Ubium North District with 16 villages, the Ubium South District with 22 villages, the Itreto District with 9 villages, and the Ibia Akpan Obotim with 14 villages. A lot of villages in Nsit Ubium are surrounded by rivers whose source is the Qua Iboe River. Community development projects were carried out on a needs-based approach with the mid-way directive form. During this period, the main concern of the Nsit Ubium local government was to stop its indigenes from using the contaminated rivers to cook and wash. To do

this, the Nsit Ubium local government dug wells and constructed boreholes in the villages of Afia Nsit Atai, Ikot Edibon, Ikot Abasi Ufat, and Ikot Ewang. The Nsit Ubium local government also renovated old primary and secondary schools like the Ikot Edibon Primary School in Ikot Edibon village, the Salvation Army Secondary School in Akai village, and the Community Secondary School in Ikot Oson village. Although these projects were all successful, they took time to be implemented. This was because the Nsit Ubium local government had to submit full reports of the projects to the Akwa Ibom state government for approval and financial assistance. During the implementation of the projects, community development activities were slow because the Nsit Ubium local government received no help from the Ubium people.

Community Development Projects in Recent Nsit Ubium:

A more recent community development project carried out by the Nsit Ubium local government was the NSIT UBIUM BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SUMIT (NUBES) in 2019. The purpose of this community development project was to build, drive, innovate, and empower the community by developing its economic assets. The Nsit Ubium community is blessed with a lot of rivers and is a good source of agricultural fishery. This community development plan unlike the others follows the assets-based approach. NUBES's goal was to develop the business and economic aspects of Nsit Ubium, which is its fishery, to generate more finances for the community, which will lead to its development. In early 2021, the Inter-ministerial Direct Labour Coordinating Committee (IMDLCC), together with the Akwa Ibom State government and the Nsit Ubium local government, approved 21 projects to be carried out in Nsit Ubium. The 21 projects each focused on renovating the old primary schools in major villages in the Nsit Ubium community. Like the 2019 NUBES Project, this community development project employed the assets-based approach. However, in late 2021, out of the 21 schools, only one primary school in Ikot Ekpene Udo was renovated. The reason for this was because of the little financial resources the Nsit Ubium local government had to carry out the projects. Finally, in 2022, another community development project was carried out in Nsit Ubium, this time, in the Ikot Obio Ndua community. The project focused on the emergency provision and installation of solar-powered street lights. Unlike the other two projects, this project used the felt-need approach to community development.

The Challenges the Nsit Ubium Local Government Faced:

In the pre-colonial era, handling community development projects was simple because of its low-cost nature and also because of the active participation of the villagers in their community development projects. However, during the colonial era, the native authorities of Nsit Ubium, faced some problems while trying to carry out community development projects. These problems were a low level of the people's participation, shortage of funds, and dependence on the central government for financial assistance and approval of their community development projects. In most cases, like in the construction of military schools and churches, the native authorities depended on the missionaries for financial assistance. In the independence era, the Nsit Ubium local government was created. And even though it was granted the authority to carry out community development projects, it still waited for the projects to be approved—only this time, by the Akwa Ibom state government. Also, the Nsit Ubium local government depended on the Akwa Ibom state government for financial assistance. During this period, the participation of the Nsit Ubium people in community development had reduced. And since the local government was separated from the traditional rulers, who were given other duties, their participation in community development was also reduced, compared to the pre-colonial and colonial times.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that the Nsit Ubium local government has carried out a lot of community development projects dating back to pre-colonial times when traditional institutions were responsible for community development. The study also revealed that as it carried out community development projects in its locality, the Nsit Ubium local government faced different challenges which either hindered its work or slowed it down. The study also revealed that the Nsit Ubium local government, in recent times, is still facing the same community development challenges it faced during the late independence period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. The Nsit Ubium local government should be given financial autonomy so it will have the financial freedom to source and generate its revenue without depending on the Akwa Ibom state government for grants.
2. The Nsit Ubium local government should be given administrative autonomy so it will be able to exercise control over its internal departments and will have the power to recruit its staff instead of depending on the local people for help.
3. Sufficient funds from the National treasury should be given to the Nsit Ubium local government for community development. The funds should be used to support its other sources of revenue, which are rates, taxes, fees, etc.
4. The Akwa Ibom state government should be given supervisory roles and not excessive control over the Nsit Ubium local government's affairs.
5. The Nsit Ubium local government should involve the traditional institutions in community development, as their participation will encourage the local people to become active in the community development agenda.
6. The Nsit Ubium local government should try to involve its people in community development projects, to encourage a sense of belonging in the community.
7. Lastly, all the challenges of the Nsit Ubium local government in community development, like insufficient funds and excessive control by the Akwa Ibom state government, should be sufficiently addressed.

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