

Community Leader and Its Roles in Rural Development in Bayelsa and Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined community leader and its role in rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers state. The central objective of the study is to examine how community leader can bring about rural, development in Bayelsa and Rivers state. Two research questions were formulated in line with the objectives. The research work employed a survey research method, using quantitative and qualitative designs. Four thousand (4,000) respondents from the eight (8) selected local government areas in Bayelsa and Rivers state as the sample size. Structured questionnaires were distributed to the four thousand (4,000) respondents, out of which three thousand nine hundred and ninety-one (3,991) copies were retrieved for data analysis. Four-point Likert scale for structured research questionnaires using arithmetic mean for data analysis. The findings revealed that look of infrastructural development in rural incessant high rate of corruption in governance amongst others are the problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers state. In this regard, the study recommended amongst that there should be synergy between the community leaders and development agencies that wish to embark on rural community development projects for effective execution, supervision and sustainability of the projects and programmes. Disciplinary measures should be taken against community leader and their representatives and development agencies representatives who are involved in embezzlement and misappropriation of funds no matter whose ox is gored to entrench transparency and accountability in rural development projects.

Keywords: Community Leader, Development Agencies, Rural Development, Projects, State

Introduction

Rural development is in tandem with Sustainable Development Goals, which of aim to enhance socio-economic development for the well-being of the rural dwellers. Before the advent of colonial masters, people engaged in rural transformation through community service and communal life to meet their socioeconomic needs with the available human and material resources on the philosophy of communal self-help under the leadership of community leaders. This exercise continued during the colonial era in Nigeria, because the colonial government was not interested in the socio-economic development of the rural communities (Nwosu, 2010; Okoko, 2023).

However, after political independence in 1960, in 1976 Department of Rural Development was created in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture for the transformation of the rural communities. Despite progressive efforts by various governments, it has not been able to the needed development in the rural areas. With particular reference to the Niger Delta that are characterized by poor execution, and abandonment of projects because of the top-bottom approach to rural development. This shows that community leaders and their representatives are not actively and effectively involved in the development of their communities. Most of the rural communities in the Niger Delta have four major leadership groups that are actively involved in the actualization of rural community development They consist of The Council of Chiefs, Community Development Committee (CDC), Youth Association, and Women Association (Ijere, 1992; Torutein, 2011; Adelubu, 2019; Okoko,2023). Thus, community leadership is a necessity for rural development. Sequel to the above, the World Bank (2022) reiterates that "Community-Driven Development Programmes should operate on the principles of transparency, participation, local empowerment, demand responsiveness, greater downward accountability, and enhanced local capacity". Therefore, community leadership is central to rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State. The study therefore examined community leaders and its role in rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

Statement of Problem/Justification

Rural development can only be achieved through active and effective community leaders' participation with the development agencies that will bring about improvement of quality and standard of living of the rural people. This will enable them to identify their felt needs by being involved in the decision-making, planning, execution and sustainability of the projects/programmes. To achieve this, in 1976, the Department of Rural Development was established in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture for rural community development (Okoko, 2023). However, this aim has not been achieved to meet the needs of rural dwellers; especially in Bayelsa and Rivers State where there are many poor execution, abandonment and unsustainability of projects. In this light, the non-involvement of community leaders is one of the reasons for the poor execution and abandonment of rural development projects that are littered everywhere in Bayelsa and Rivers State. Based on the fact that community leaders are not actively and effectively involved in the identification of felt-need planning, implementation and protection of the project after the withdrawal of the development agencies.

Also, the problem of lack of transparency, accountability, and honesty of the development agencies has resulted in corruption, hence the project cannot be established according to specifications and design. For example, interventionist agents such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), their motorized boreholes with overhead metal water tanks at Famgbe Atissa and Okutukutu-Epie were initiated, executed and commissioned by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) without involvement of the community leaders. These and many others are all in the nooks and crannies of the Bayelsa and Rivers State (Okoko, 2023).

The main objective of rural development is to improve the standard of living of rural dwellers to mitigate rural–urban migration. Hence, poor execution and abandonment of projects by development agencies and wanton non-involvement of the community leaders are challenges to rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State. Therefore, the problem is how to overcome the issue of non-involvement of community leaders in the planning and execution of rural development that is bringing about a high rate of poor execution, abandonment and unsustainability of rural development projects. To achieve this, the study examined community leaders and their role in rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The carnal objective of the study is to examine how community leaders can bring about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Ascertain the roles of community leaders in bringing about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.
- ii. Identify the problems facing rural development Bayelsa and Rivers State.
- iii. Make recommendations to address the problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

In consonance with the objectives, two research questions were developed for analyses as follows:

- i. What are the roles of community leaders in bringing about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State?
- ii. What are the problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Who is a leader?

In every organisation or community, not everyone can be a leader because a leader must be pragmatic and charismatic to influence others in his community. Thus, everybody tends to follow those whom they see as a means of satisfying their aspiration and desires. Wiley- Cordine (2021), sees a leader as “someone who performs managerial roles in an organisation, such as decision-making and implementing plan”. Wang (2023), defines a leader as "someone who has followers". This simply means a leader is a person that can influence, persuade, motivate and inspire a group

or a community towards the actualization of a set goal (Okoko, 2017). This classic leader cannot be referred to as an effective leader.

From the foregoing, Adisaya (1990), in Kelvin (2010), reiterates that an effective leader is "a person who is not only able to make his subordinates follow him but recognizes that they must be motivated to ensure that goal, the objective of the organisation are met". It is therefore implied that effective leaders will not work alone to realise the community-set goals for sociocultural and economic development. Thus, community leaders must have these characteristics to accomplish and realise the community set goal on rural development in conjunction with the council of chiefs, community development committee (CDC), youth association, women association and other noble men and women in the community.

Taking a clue from the above, the process of carrying out the duties and responsibilities of a leader is known as leadership. Given this, Wang (2023), defines leadership as a "process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others toward the achievement of a greater goal". Therefore, in the context of community, the leader is a man or a woman who can identify the felt need of the people and work harmoniously with others for the achievement of a set goal. This depicts that a leader cannot actualize his visions without the company of other community members.

Leadership Styles

Rural development can be achieved through community leader who stands between the people and the developmental agencies. However, there are many effective leadership styles, but for this work, the following leadership styles will be discussed:

- i. The authoritative leadership style:** Autocratic leadership is "one-man rule" which implies that the leader takes decisions alone without consulting subordinates as power is centralized in one. He expects obedience from subordinates without questions. Thus, the autocratic leader is a dictator and always conscious of his position. This portrays that the subordinates always obey him out of fear and not respect for leadership (Torutein, 2011; Okoko, 2017; Ogbomah, et al, 2019).
- ii. Democratic leadership style:** A democratic leader is a participatory leadership style that is widely considered the most desirable leadership style in this contemporary time. In this leadership style, both the leader and the leader participate in decision-making and policy formulation. Thus, the leader and the subordinates are responsible for their actions and inactions that are failures or successes of the organization or the community. (Torutein, 2011; Okoko, 2017).
- iii. Laissez-faire leadership style:** The word laissez-faire is a French terminology which refers to "let the thing go their way". This means that things should be allowed to sort themselves out. It is a situation where the followers are allowed to behave the way they like in the organization or community. The leader is a symbolic leader who does not exercise authority over the followers. He does not interfere with the affairs of his

subordinates. This gives room for laxity because he lacks self-confidence (Torutein, 2011; Okoko, 2017).

Role of Community Leaders in Rural Development Efforts in Nigeria.

The role of a community leader in collaboration with their representatives usually achieves active and effective participation. Under the aegis of community-based organizations (CBOs). Sequel to the above, (Torutein, 2011; Okoko, 2023) in their work identify the role of community leader and their representatives as follows:

- i. **Identification of felt- needs:** He opines that community leaders are familiar with the problem of the people. Thus, community leaders use the democratic process to identify their felt- needs through cross-fertilization of ideas about their needs in rural communities (Torutein,2011).
- ii. **Link between his community and development agencies:** The community leader serves as a link between his community and the development agencies (both government and non-governmental organisation). This is because the success of the community depends on the workable synergy between the community and the development agencies.
- iii. **Maintenance of laws and order:** This role of a community leader brings about peace, laws and order for harmonious working relationships in the community.
- iv. **Creates unity in the community:** It is the duty and responsibility of the community leader to create unity amongst all groups and associations in the community. This mutual relationship helps to coordinate the activities of various groups towards successfully setting goals of distinct organizations or the community.
- v. **Implementation of government policies:** The community leader assists the government in explaining and implementing policies through their democratic power over their community members.
- vi. **Supervision of projects and programmes:** Rural community Carries out projects through community self-help and community service in conjunction with socio-economic development through government non -non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This means that after the withdrawal of the development agents, the community leader supervises the project for proper implementation according to specifications and design.

It is therefore implying that for the principles of sustainable development to strive in any community, the role of community leader cannot be over-emphasized. The community has to work harmoniously with the development agencies through the instrument of community leaders and

their representatives for the sustainability of projects and programmes.

An Overview of Rural Development

Rural development is a compound word derived from rural development that denotes the development of the rural areas which is always the focus of the political office holder philanthropist. They aim to better the standard and quality of life of the rural dwellers (Torutein, 2011).

Okoye (1997, p.207), defines rural development as "the process of making life more satisfying and fulfilling for millions of people who live in the rural areas". World Bank, in Eberinwa (2010, p.120), define rural development" as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people who live in the rural areas". In the words of Agbonifo, Eberinwa(2010), defines rural development as "a general improvement in the life of rural inhabitant namely their income, health and their intellect or capacity to sustain the improved living conditions.

Combs, in Torutein, 2011, p.23), also reiterates that rural development is “the transformation, changes of the method of production, economic institutions, political, infrastructural development, as well as the transformation of human relationship and opportunities for the downtrodden”.

A cursory look at the definitions above, rural development is the process of integration and strategy designed to improve the social, economic, educational, and political conditions for the general well-being of rural dwellers. This means that rural development will create opportunities for employment, technological advancement, and good health, amongst others for the rural poor which constitute the majority of the nation's population in developing countries like third world nations.

The Problems Facing Rural Development in Nigeria.

The rural communities in Nigeria are facing numerous problems in terms of development. Thus, developmental constraints have made the condition of the rural people more pathetic in comparison with urban areas. However, the following are some of the problems facing rural development as discussed below:

Lack of infrastructural development: The rural communities like the following facilities which include.

- (i) Lack of health centre,
 - (ii) Lack of electricity,
 - (iii) Lack of motorable borehole,
 - (iv) Poor and unventilated living house,
 - (v) Dilapidated and abandoned old primary and secondary schools.
- i. **Lack of industries:** Lack of industries in rural areas serves as an impediment to paid jobs. Thus, increasing youth restiveness in the rural areas.
 - ii. **Social problem disease:** One of the major problems in rural communities is disease mostly during times of epidemics and pandemics in the country. It has claimed lives, especially in rural areas where modern health facilities to meet the needed challenges proved abortive.
 - iii. **Lack of mechanized system of agriculture:** In the context of Nigeria, the rural areas depend on manual labour for agricultural production. This has led to low production of agricultural products could have enhanced the living standard of the rural dwellers. This ugly trend serves as an impediment to advancement into a mechanized system of agriculture as in the Western world.

- iv. **High degree of corruption:** Corruption is a monster that is fighting against developmental advancement in all phases of the economies. This has led to poor execution, abandonment and not sustainability of projects in rural communities.
- v. **High rate of poverty:** Many in the rural areas live below the poverty line. Hence, cannot provide the necessities of life for their households. poverty has hindered development because many cannot afford basic education, good shelter, and health facilities, to mention but a few (Mund, 2008; Aroh, 2010; Erondu, 2010; Okwu, 2011; Okoko, 2023).

From the foregoing, it depicts that rural development cannot advance in terms of agriculture, infrastructure, technology and creative innovation in our rurality. Predicated on the poverty rate and bad governance that are bedeviling rural development in all the nooks and crannies of the country.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research method, using both qualitative and quantitative designs that is primary and secondary sources of data collection and analysis. The two states from the Niger Delta region were randomly selected with four (4) local government areas each, giving a total of eight (8) local government areas within the two states for this research. The two states and the local government areas namely: Bayelsa State (Sagbama, Southern Ijaw, Kolokuma/Opokuma and Ogbia); and Rivers State (Degema, Okrika, Gokana and Ahoada West). The study employed purposive sampling technique using four thousand (4,000) as the sample size. The instrument for data collection was eight (8) items researcher structured questionnaires that depend on the Likert scale method (4-point scale) of strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), disagreed (DA), and strongly disagreed (SD) rated 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. Arithmetic mean(x) was used to analyse the data collected from the eight (8) items structured questionnaire that was formulated from the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 and above was used to make decisions. Four thousand (4,000) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. However, three thousand nine hundred and ninety-one (3,991) copies were retrieved from the respondents for analysis. This was successfully done through the assistance of eight (8) research assistants, one (1) each from the eight (8) selected local government areas of Bayelsa and Rivers State. Oral interviews were also conducted to substantiate the structured questionnaire.

Data Analysis of Research Questions

Research Questions One (1): What are the roles of community leaders in bringing about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State?

Table 1: The roles of community leaders in bringing about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

S/N	Items' Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total	N	\bar{x}	Decision
1	Helps in identification of felt needs of the people.	(8,600)	(3,006)	(416)	(631)	12,653	3,991	3.20	Accepted
2	Serves as link between the community and the development agencies.	(7,960)	(5,400)	(202)	(100)	13,662	3,991	3.40	Accepted
3	Helps to create harmonious working relationship in the community	(6,008)	(3,003)	(1,200)	(888)	11,099	3,991	2.80	Accepted
4	Helps in implementation of government policies through sensitization and community meeting	(7,560)	(5,250)	(202)	(250)	13,262	3,991	3.30	Accepted
	Arithmetic Mean	3.20							
	Criterion Mean	2.50							

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023.

Table 1, depicts that the arithmetic mean of (3.20) is greater (>) than the corresponding criterion mean of (2.50). In this regard, it is therefore implied that the response of the respondents of the items' statements (1-4) are some of the roles of community leaders in bringing about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

Research Questions Two (2): What are the problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State?

Table II. The problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

S/N	Items' Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total	N	\bar{x}	Decision
5	Lack of infrastructural	(7,400)	(5,220)	(400)	(201)	13,221	3,991	3.30	Accepted

	development in the rural areas.								
6	Lack of mechanized system to meet the modern trends of agricultural production.	(7,924)	(5,403)	(210)	(104)	13,641	3,991	3.40	Accepted
7	Incessant high rate corruption in governance	(7,120)	(5,010)	(600)	(241)	12,971	3,991	3.30	Accepted
8	High rate of poverty to meet the basic necessity of life.	(7,008)	(5,421)	(408)	(230)	13,057	3,991	3.30	Accepted
	Arithmetic Mean	3.30							
	Criterion Mean	2.50							

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

The data in table II, shows that the arithmetic mean of (3.30), is greater (>) than the corresponding criterion mean of (2.50). This suggests that the response of the respondents of the items' statements (5-8), are some of the problems facing rural development of Bayelsa and Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in table I of the study revealed that community leader helps in identification of felt-needs of the people; serves as link between the community and the development agencies; helps to create harmonious working relationship in the community; and helps in implementation of government policies sensitization and community meeting. The findings are in tandem with (Torutein, 2011; and Okoko, 2023), which affirmed that the above roles of community leader help in bringing about rural development and sustainability of rural projects and programmes. To substantiate the findings in table I, oral interviews were conducted and affirmed that above are some of the roles of community leader in rural areas that have helped to improve standard of living of the rural people and advancement of rural development projects and programmes.

In table II, revealed that the problems of rural development are lack of infrastructural development in the rural areas; lack of mechanized system to meet the modern trends of agricultural production; incessant high rate of corruption in governance; and high rate of poverty to meet the essentials needs of life. The findings are in assertion with (Mund, 2008, Aroh, 2010; Erondu, 2010; Okwu, 2011; and Okoko, 2023), they affirmed that the above problems of rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers are some of the basic factors that contributing to rural underdevelopment in these two

states and Nigeria at large. In substantiating the findings in table II, oral interviews were conducted in rural areas of some of the selected local government areas of Bayelsa and Rivers State. It was affirmed that the problems facing rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State as enshrined in table II, and others are the impediments to rural community development in Bayelsa and Rivers State.

Conclusion

The study examines community leader and its roles in rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State. The inherent objective is to examine how community leader can bring about rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State. The study revealed that lack of infrastructural development in the rural areas; lack of mechanized system to meet the modern trends of agricultural production; incessant high rate of corruption in governance; high rate of poverty to meet the basic necessity of life, amongst others are the problems of underdevelopment in the rural areas in Bayelsa and Rivers State. Despite the above elements of underdevelopment enlisted above, if the recommendations are implemented will rejuvenate rural development in Bayelsa and Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

Recommendations

In light of the problems identified, the following recommendations were made.

- i. There should be synergy between the community leaders and development agencies that wish to embark on rural community development projects for effective execution, supervision and sustainability of the projects and programmes.
- ii. Community leaders should walk on the pathway of leadership style that would promote honesty, probity, transparency and democracy through the trajectory of their administrative prowess, sagacity and adroitness in the management of community development affairs.
- iii. Disciplinary measures should be taken against community leaders and their representatives, and development agencies representatives that are involved in the embezzlement and misappropriation of funds no matter whose ox is gored to entrench transparency and accountability in rural development projects.

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