

Youths Empowerment Scheme by Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Rural Development in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Sunday Simeon Adaka, Ph.D

*Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Federal University Lafia
Nasarawa State, Nigeria*

Ekpenyong David Oboqua, Ph.D

*Department of Adult and Continuing Education
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu
ekpenyongoboqua@yahoo.com*

Abstract

The study investigated the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) community-based poverty alleviation programmes and rural community development in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. One null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study, while stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting 1300 respondents. A 20-item questionnaire titled: Youths Empowerment Schemes and Rural Community Development Questionnaire (YESRCDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated and the reliability estimate, using test retest reliability method, ranged from 0.78 to 0.90. The hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between youths empowerment schemes and rural community development. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made among others that more youth skills acquisition programmes should be designed to empower the youths.

Keywords: Youths, empowerment, schemes, rural, community, development.

Introduction

Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their situations and they take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitudes. The mission of the empowerment programmes is to provide education, employment assistance, health, housing referrals and support services for youth who are in disadvantaged position due to incarceration, poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS infection and/or involvement in the criminal justice

system. Youth empowerment is of good importance to both the society and the empowered. Youth empowerment aims at improving quality of life. These programmes can be through non-profit organizations, government organizations, schools or private organizations. Youth empowerment is different from youth development which is centered on developing individuals, while empowerment is focused on creating greater community chance that relies on the development of individual capacity (Martin & Hulme, 2003).

In a study, carried out by Udom (2006), on the impact of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on rural community development in Niger Delta States of Nigeria, it was reported that most NGOs' rural youth empowerment schemes were not employment schemes. They were a series of programmes designed to meet the community needs: training opportunities, skills acquisitions, employment opportunities, wealth creation through enhanced income generation and improved social status of youths in the community. Udom (2006) asserted that the scheme was primarily aimed at economically empowering the rural youths, making it more than an employment scheme. The scope of Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), according to NAPEP (2001), includes generation of data on employment opportunities, productivity improvement, skills acquisition, preparation of training programmes for youths, unemployed and retrenched workers.

Ator (2004) showed that community needs have always been considered by Micro Project Programme for Six States (MPP6) in their community programme. In defining the roles of rural youth empowerment, MPP6 places emphasis on the active participation of the youths in community development taking into account the fact that their class ranges from stark illiterates to semi-literates. MPP6 prepares well-articulated plans to make the youths and the vulnerable groups of the community have relevant roles to play in poverty alleviation projects. The rural communities provide institutions for youth capacity building and training through the capacity building empowerment programmes in the major occupations of the rural communities' labour force. Ator (2004) asserted that the European Union's (EU) capacity building and empowerment schemes are in line with National Poverty Eradication Programmes (NAPEP). However, EU strongly operates a community based poverty reduction programme where the agency has to be aware of the community so as to tailor training to match the needs of the community.

Community involvement is important in most NGOs' poverty alleviation programmes. Most of the evidence reviewed here compares community-driven poverty alleviation

projects with communities that are otherwise similar but have no community based anti-poverty projects or have projects of unclear method and provenance. One exception is Rufus (2004) evaluation of community-based projects funded by NGOs in Esit Eket, Akwa Ibom State. Rufus compared a random sample of these projects with other projects in the same village that involved no community participation. He found out that community-managed poverty alleviation projects are better maintained than projects managed by the local government. Rufus also noted that community participation in technical decisions reduced the quality of maintenance, while community participation in a non-technical decision significantly improved performance. The same observation was reported in a study conducted by Ita (2007) in Ikot Edo, Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. He observed that a significant relationship existed between projects with large community participation and the ones initiated and implemented by the local government.

Community-based poverty reduction, according to Ita (2007), is the bedrock of rural economic principle. Sustainable development is built on community-driven poverty alleviation which is the focus of most NGOs. Alesina and Ferrara (2000) stressed that development that does not reduce poverty is never sustainable. They agreed with the Rio Declaration or Agenda 21 (1992) or the Earth Summit in its principle No. 2 that it goes beyond sustainable argument that if youth empowerment is to succeed, it must be such that would reduce poverty on a sustainable basis.

Akpan's (2005) study found that the EU has implemented mechanisms to address youth empowerment in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. The present policies and actions of EU community-based poverty alleviation are meant to address the region's tremendous potentials for economic growth and sustainable development. Akpan asserted that the youth empowerment scheme of the EU is a community-based poverty alleviation programme. The programmes which have a strong emphasis on youth participation in project implementation have had positive impacts on the youths of these two EU programme States.

Ayuk (2006) evaluated the youth empowerment aspect of community-based poverty alleviation programmes in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State using five communities to determine the impact of community-based poverty alleviation programmes on youth empowerment. The communities were similar in social structure. The programmes had been available for 5 years in form of projects and institutions for capacity building. Ayuk drew evidence from a sample of 450 respondents using a survey research design and well validated research instrument.

The researcher also used the focus group discussion technique to draw evidence from those not involved in filling the questionnaire. Findings show that the youth empowerment scheme of its community-based poverty alleviation programme is a development model that aims to satisfy the yearning of the youth to promote self-reliance, preserve the environment and bring about positive changes in the socio-economic and political patterns of the youths. Ayuk stressed that this programme brings a total and balanced growth spread evenly across communities. He agreed with Iwuchukwu (2002) that community-based development is a development structure which grows from below upwards and not imposed from above. It draws sustenance locally.

Agba (2006) conducted an evaluative study on youth empowerment and community-based poverty alleviation programmes in three communities in Yakurr Local Government Area and two communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area. He concluded that most NGOs are poised to eradicate youth poverty in the Niger Delta communities and move towards sustainable growth and development. Agba stressed that while focusing on youth ownership of development process, it also seeks to reinvigorate the communities in many areas of human activity and create clear awareness that poverty reduction is a possibility.

In another study conducted by Basil (2006), it was concluded that the youths empowerment programme of EU community-based poverty alleviation programmes seeks to focus on human development where youths in communities would play a major role in the development of their own communities making use of local resources. Basil (2006) asserted that in Nigeria, especially in Niger Delta region where National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) has enjoyed additional support from the EU, youths empowerment schemes have become the fountainhead for sustainable elimination of social exclusion of the vast majority of youths as the basis for future economic prosperity and poverty reduction in the region.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between youths empowerment schemes by NDDC and rural community development in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically the sought to investigate:

1. Youths empowerment scheme by NDDC and rural community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment by NDDC and rural community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. The sample included 1300 respondents randomly drawn from 18 communities in the study area. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Youths Empowerment Schemes and Rural Community Development Questionnaire (YESRCDQ) designed by the researchers. The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A had respondents' demographic information while section B was a 20-item questionnaire in the form of modified six-point rating scale of Very Strongly Agree (VSA) – 6, Strongly Agree (SA) – 5, Agree (A) – 4, Disagree (D) – 3 Strongly Disagree (SD) – 2 and Very Strongly Disagree (VSD) – 1. The scoring for negatively worded items in section B was reversed. The instrument was duly validated and its reliability estimate established at 0.78 to 0.90 using test retest reliability method. The reliability coefficient was considered high enough to justify the use of the instrument for the study. The copies of the instrument were administered personally by the researchers with nine research assistants trained for the purpose. At the end of the exercise, all the copies of the questionnaire were collected back by the researchers and the research assistants. For ease of data preparation, code was assigned to each item and a coding schedule was prepared by developing a key for each of the constructs of the instrument. The data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Ho1: Youth empowerment schemes by NDDC does not significantly relate to rural community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State.

The dependent variable in this hypothesis is rural community development while the independent variable is Youths empowerment schemes by NDDC. The statistical tool adopted to test this hypothesis is Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between youth empowerment scheme by NDDC and rural community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State (N=1300)

Variables	ΣX ΣY	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-cal
Youth empowerment scheme by NDDC	20436	324674	445839	0.38
Rural community development	28291	618203		

*P<0.05, df=1298, critical r=0.196

Table 1 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.38 was greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 at 0.05 level of significance, and 1298 degree of freedom. This implies that there exist a significant relationship between youth empowerment by NDDC and rural community development. The positive r-value indicates that increase in youth empowerment schemes such as skills acquisition, computer literacy and employment creation by NDDC will certainly lead to increase in rural community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State. Consequently a decrease in youths empowerment by NDDC will reduce community development in Uyo senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of findings

The finding of this study revealed that there exist a significant relationship between NDDC youth empowerment programmes and community development in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the finding revealed that NDDC youth empowerment programmes such as skills acquisition, computer literacy and employment creation have significantly led to increase in rural community development. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Ayuk (2006) who evaluated the youth empowerment aspect of NDDC community-based poverty alleviation programmes in Cross River State using five communities to determine the impact of NDDC community-based poverty alleviation programmes on youth empowerment. His findings showed that the NDDC youth empowerment scheme of its community-based poverty alleviation programmes is a development model that aims to satisfy the yearning of the youths to promote self-reliance, preserve the environment and bring about positive changes in the socio-economic and political patterns of the youths. Ayuk also stressed that this programme brings a total and balanced growth spread evenly across communities where NDDC presence is available.

This finding is also in agreement with the finding of Agba (2006) who conducted an evaluative study on youth empowerment and NDDC community-based poverty alleviation programmes in three communities in Yakurr Local Government Area and two communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area. He concluded that NDDC is poised to eradicate poverty among youths in the Niger Delta communities and move towards sustainable growth and development. Agba stressed that while focusing on youth ownership of the development process, it also seeks to reinvigorate the communities in many areas of human activity and create clear awareness that poverty reduction is a possibility.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment schemes by NDDC and rural community development in the study area. Every Nigerian youth stands the chance to be self-employed and must be encouraged to take entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes seriously.

Recommendations

1. NDDC should ensure that the target group should be the beneficiary of the skills acquisition programmes.
2. More youth skills acquisition programmes should be designed to empower the youths.

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