SELF HELP ACTIVITIES AS A STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF RURAL PEOPLE: A CASE STUDY OF ODUKPANI LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates self help activities as a strategy for economic advancement of rural people using a case study of Odukpani local government of Cross River State, Nigeria. A sample size of 200 was adopted using stratified random sampling. Two hypotheses were tested in this study using one-sample T-test. The findings of the study showed that Farming activities can significantly be used as a self-help activity for the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, and Cooperative societies’ activities can significantly be used as a self-help strategy for the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made which include that rural households and communities should take a more proactive role in economic advancement.

Keywords: Economic Advancement, Rural Development, Nigeria.

JEL: O1, O18, P25, R51.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Akpomuvie (2010), the odds against rural development in Nigeria are rather immense. The configurations of government plans were tailored strictly to facilitate the exploitation of the natural resources of the rural areas for the development of the few urban centres. Consequently, most of the initial infrastructural development in Nigeria was skewed in favour of the urban areas to the detriment of the rural areas where the majority resided. Since the government was “far” from the rural areas in terms of development and with the realization that government alone cannot provide all their needs, the people of rural areas have to learn to “do-it-themselves”. This alternative strategy of self-help and the communitarian philosophy of the people not only has the potential to accelerate the level of growth, but can also spread the benefits of development to the rural areas in Nigeria. However, where the government is properly playing its expected role, self-help activities could complement rural development the efforts of the government.

Community development includes all strategies, interventions or coordinated activities at the community level aimed at bringing about social and economic development. Idiode (1989) however emphasized the need for the service approach to community development. 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 to community development is known as “self-help” in Nigeria. It is at this level that self-help activities are most apparent. This refers to the rural community actively engaging in activities that add value to themselves, their communities, and for which people in urban centres (or other communities outside) can pay financial value. Self-help activities could be well articulated activities and effort to assist individuals to acquire attitudes, skills and concepts required for their democratic participation in the effective solution for a wide range of community improvement problems as possible, in order of priority determined by their increasing level of competence (Udoye, 1992).

Since development is an on-going process, there is probably no community in the world that would not benefit from further development (Sautoy, 1970). Apomuvie (2010) opined that the initiative for the attainment of the goals of self-help activities could derive from several sources; the individual, the community, socio-cultural organizations, institutions, governments or the government acting in concert with any of these bodies. Self-help should have its roots fully entrenched within the sociocultural and economic milieu within which it is to be practiced. In other words, the proposed self-help activities should be in line with the perceived culture of the people, and also add economic benefits to the target community and people. It is the internal dynamics of these socio-cultural and political praxis that galvanizes and strengthen motivation to achieve developmental goals. An improper articulation of this perspective may ultimately weaken group cohesion and hence, the propensity to achieve development targets.

It is in line with this that this study intends to investigate self-help activities as a strategy for economic advancement of rural people of Odukpani Local Government. Self-help projects are focused on local participation by the people who identify their needs, plan, take decisions and implement them to enhance living standard. The idea involves the spirit of “Give and Take”, joint efforts, social cooperation and self-reliance. Locally, people are advised to say their problems with the view to finding answers to them, depending on their initiatives, this involves the provision of technical and social support services on a mutual basis. Through self-help, unused local resources like the government funds are reserved, and the people at the local level acquire skills, become competent and confident in the management of their affairs. Self-help connotes more food for the needy, better health, better primary/secondary education, developed infrastructure, self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment in the life of rural dwellers (Nath, 2008).

The self-help activities approach promotes awareness among the rural people to expand their capabilities to satisfy their functional needs and identify the problems that they encounter most in their lives. In other words, we are talking about the creation of an environment for the flowering of self which will then make possible for this self to be the originator and designer rather than the passive receiver of these supposed goods or items of modern development and civilization. In recent times, rural development is seen from the perspective of sustainable development (Tinuno, 2009; Akpomuvie, 2010). The instinct to survive is strong not only in the individual, but also in the community.

Odukpani local government areas of Cross River State consist of clans which make up the Local Government Area. The vegetation of area is mangrove swamps along coastlines and creeks, and rainforest in the hinterland. The traditional occupations are farming, fishing and trading. Observable self-help activities in Odukpani include farming activities, cooperative society’s activities, to mention a few. The need to make rural people more comfortable and attractive both to the inhabitants of these rural communities, and to the dwellers of urban centres has been a long time problem for the Nigerian nation, and to Cross River as a state, and to Odukpani as a Local Government Area in particular. This informs the need for such a study as this.
1.1 Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks to: Examine the extent to which agricultural activities influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria; and, ascertain the extent to which cooperative societies’ thrift activities influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

1.2 Research Question

- To what extent does farming activities influence the economic advancement of people of Local Government Areas?
- To what extent does people’s involvement in cooperative societies’ thrift activities influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Areas?

1.3 Hypotheses

- Farming activities do not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State
- Cooperative societies’ thrift activities do not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Areas of Cross River State

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

2.1 Sampling Technique

The stratified random sampling technique is used for the purpose of this study. Stratification is done based on whether the respondents practice farming activities and cooperative society’s activities in the study area (Odukpani Local Government Area). Among the people who practice farming and cooperative society’s activities, respondents are randomly selected.

2.2 Sampling, Instrumentation and Data Scoring

Sample size of 200 is adopted for the purpose of this study. This is achieved by interviewing 100 residents of Odukpani who practice farming activities, and 100 residents of Odukpani who practice cooperative society’s activities (i.e. They belong to at least one cooperative society). For the purpose of data collection for the study, the questionnaire was considered the most appropriate instrument for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Section A deals with demographic data of respondents. Section B consisted of items that measured the variables that are concerned with the hypotheses of the study. For the purpose of this study, the response from the respondents rank on a Likert scale as follows: Strongly Agree: 5; Agree: 4; Undecided: 3; Disagree: 2; Strongly Disagree: 1. A copy of the research instrument (i.e. questionnaire) is attached in the Appendix

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics for responses on agricultural activities as a self-help strategy for economic advancement of rural people and their communities. A
mean value of 4.10 suggests that respondents tend toward agreeing with the notion that agricultural activities can be a self-help strategy for economic advancement of rural people of Odukpani Local Government.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Response on Agricultural Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural activities</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics for responses on cooperative societies’ activities as a self-help strategy for economic advancement of rural people and their communities. A mean value of 4.01 suggests that respondents tend toward agreeing with the notion that cooperative activities if harnessed can be a self-help strategy for economic advancement of rural people of Odukpani Local Government.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Response on Cooperative Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative activities</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.958</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test of Hypotheses

(a) Hypothesis One:

H₀: Farming activities can not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State
H₁: Farming activities can significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State
H₀: Mean = 3 vs H₁: Mean >3. (3 is used as test Mean because 3 represents undecided on the Likert scale for responses in the research instrument).

Table 3: One-Sample T-Test for Agricultural Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Activities</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.095</td>
<td>0.96, 1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decision rule: when Test Statistic T is greater than tabulated statistic t, reject H₀ and accept H₁, but when Test Statistic T is less than tabulated statistic t, accept H₀ and reject H₁

Test Statistic T = X-µ/(s/√n)
Where X = observed mean
µ = population mean (i.e. test mean)
s = standard deviation
n = number of observations
4.10 – 3 / (0.962/14.14)
= 16.171
Decision: since the Test Statistic T (16.171) is greater than the tabulated statistic (16.066), we therefore do have enough statistical evidence to reject $H_0$ (which states that Farming activities can not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State), and accept $H_a$ (which states that Farming activities can significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State). Based on the above, we conclude that Farming activities can significantly be used as a self-help activity for the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State.

(b) Hypothesis Two:

$H_0$: Cooperative societies’ activities can not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State

$H_a$: Cooperative societies’ activities can significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State

$H_0$: Mean = 3 vs $H_a$: Mean >3. (3 is used as test Mean because 3 represents undecided on the Likert scale for responses).

Table 4: One-Sample T-Test for Cooperative activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Value = 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.991</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decision rule: when Test Statistic T is greater than tabulated statistic t, reject $H_0$ and accept $H_a$, but when Test Statistic T is less than tabulated statistic t, accept $H_0$ and reject $H_a$. Test Statistic $T = (X-\mu)/(s/\sqrt{n})$. Where $X = \text{observed mean; } \mu = \text{population mean (i.e. test mean); } s = \text{standard deviation; } n = \text{number of observations; } 4.09 - 3 / (0.958/14.14) = 16.088$

From the empirical results, it can be said that, since the Test Statistic T (16.088) is greater than the tabulated statistic (15.991), we therefore do have enough statistical evidence to reject $H_0$ (which states that Enhanced Cooperative societies’ activities can not significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State), and accept $H_a$ (which states that Cooperative societies’ activities can significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State). Based on the above, we conclude that Cooperative societies’ activities can significantly be used as a self-help strategy for the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State.

4. DISCUSSION

From the findings of the study, it is shown that agricultural activities practiced by the rural people are a potent self-help strategy for economic advancement of rural communities of Odukpani. According to NBS (2007), the more likely a farm (rural) household is able to sell produce, the more likely they are to be more economical and financially advanced. This view is supported by Omonona (2009) who posited that rural Nigerians principally draw their livelihoods from agriculture. However, many rural households cannot earn sustainable livelihoods based on their incomes from agriculture or from many of the other economic...
activities they pursue. This could be because possibly because the full potential of farming activities as a self-help activity in the household and community have not been harnessed. According to Omonona (2006), those rural households in the lowest quintile group receive about 49 percent of their total per capita income from nonfarm employment and about 51 percent in farm employment. This clearly shows that farming activities remain a viable source of income for rural households, and therefore can be used as a self-help activity for economic advancement of those households. Omonona (2009) further stated that Broad efforts to enhance the productivity, profitability, and sustained growth of the rural economy of Nigeria will be necessary to enhance the resilience of Nigerian agricultural households and to lift them out of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. This can be best carried out by the rural communities and their households themselves.

The findings of the study also showed that Cooperative societies’ activities can significantly influence the economic advancement of people of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State. This view is supported by Omonona (2009) who categorized organizations such as cooperative societies as social capital or Local level institutions. Omonona (2009) posits that these local level institutions have been understood to play a major role in sustaining development process. These institutions, traditional and modern; at the community, local, regional and national levels; and in the public, private and civil sectors, are the vehicles through which social change and social action occur. Cooperative societies as Social capital is the network of horizontal connections, which leads to mutual commitment and trust and enables people and their institutions to function effectively. It is often understood to be a social resource, which is created through formal and informal relationships between people within a community. Cooperative societies have been found to have great impact on the income and welfare of the poor by improving the outcome of activities that affect them (2009). It improves the efficiency of rural development programs by increasing agricultural productivity, and facilitating the management of common resources in both rural and urban areas. Finally, it can reduce poverty through micro and macro-channels by affecting the movement of information useful to the members and by improving growth and income redistribution at the both at the local and national level. A common example of local level institutions functioning as social capital is cooperative societies. This can be taken advantage of by rural people and their communities also.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Neglect of the potentials for income from the vast agricultural resources in rural areas remains a problem affecting the economic advancement of rural people even in the present democratic dispensation as evidenced in Odukpani. The rural people should take the responsibility for their financial and economic advancement by harnessing agricultural resources at their disposal. This view is corroborated by Idode (1989), who citing a portion of the 1975-80 Nigeria National Development Plan stated that: It is necessary to recognize that about 70% of the Nigerian population live in the rural areas and have benefited relatively little from the rapid economic growth of the past few years. The improvement in the welfare of the average Nigerian will therefore require a substantial increase in rural income. The government (in this case, the State Government) should intensify its efforts in developing and executing agricultural development policies, programmes and projects for rural communities, this remains a potent strategy for the economic advancement of rural people and their communities.

Cooperative societies represent social capital. Enhanced social capital from cooperative societies in addition to the regular agricultural activities of the rural people would significantly contribute to the economic advancement of rural communities. This self-help strategy for economic advancement has to be tapped into by the rural people
themselves. They should put their joint human (and other) resources together to forge a better life for themselves and their communities.

Although farming is the basic activity and source of income among rural communities in Nigeria, there is need for rural households to explore and combine non-farm income with their farm income. In addition to this, a farmer’s choice of farm enterprise has economic implications. It is recommended that farmers engage more in commercial crops (such as cocoa, oil palm, cassava) rather than just staples such as maize, vegetables. According to Omonona (2009), Many programs and projects have been put in place in Nigeria to impact positively on the rural poor, but few have had success. Nigeria has had problems with poor implementation and lack of political will that have made programs that have succeeded elsewhere fail in Nigeria. This has been especially true of the government programs. This underscores the need for the rural communities to take a more proactive and self-initiatory role in their economic situation and its advancement, and not continue to wait for outside (government or other) intervention.

REFERENCES


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