
Self-Help as a Strategy for Rural Development in Nigeria: A Bottom-Up Approach

Akpomuvie, Orhioghene Benedict, Delta State University
(Abraka, Nigeria)

Abstract: *This paper is aimed at examining the imbalances in the living conditions of the urban and rural dwellers and the determination of the rural poor to bridge this gap through self-help development activities. The odds against rural development in Nigeria were 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 were skewed in favour of the urban areas to the detriment of the rural areas where the majority resided and inadvertently created a dualism. 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 had to learn to “do-it-themselves”. This alternative strategy of self-help and the communitarian philosophy of the people has not only accelerated the level of growth but has 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 should complement rural development and not replacing it.*

1. Introduction

One of the major characteristics of the developing countries is the increasing disparity between the urban and rural areas. This gap according to Igboeli (1992) has its roots in the neo-classical economic theories which presumed that “development can be accelerated by concentrating investments in the cities and that rural poverty will be ameliorated by the trickle down of benefits from the urban industrial growth”. With the so-called growth-centred strategy, the developing countries have continued to witness imbalances in the living conditions between the urban and rural dwellers. Consequently, development theories over the years have been searching for alternative strategies that

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would not only accelerate growth but also spread the benefits of development to the rural areas.

The distortion of Nigeria's development pattern has been sufficiently highlighted in the relevant literature. Aboyade (1980) has specifically decried the profound dualism between the urban and rural areas and the proportionate costs and consequences of rural infrastructural lag behind urban modernism. Onimode (1982) has even gone much further to pinpoint the historical origin of the dualism in contemporary Nigeria between the rural and urban areas. According to Onimode (1982:63) some eighty percent of the population in rural areas either had no medical services or made do with rudimentary facilities scattered over wide distances.

Olatunbosun's volume, *Nigeria's Neglected Rural Majority*, is an indictment of both colonial and independent governments not only for neglecting the majority who live in the rural areas but also for "milking them dry" for the benefits of the British metropolis and the urban minority in Nigeria. Nigeria's development financing has been derived mainly from direct and indirect taxation of rural people who have benefited little or nothing from economic development activities. The author argues for a radical change in priorities and in attitudes toward the rural sector as an economic and social necessity.

Similarly, Muoghalu (1992) contended that rural development has become a national imperative in Nigeria and gave the following reasons for his position. His first argument stems from the proportion of the national population resident in the rural areas of Nigeria. That in 1963 census, 80.7% of the national population were resident in the rural areas. By 1985, this proportion has gone down to 70.13% and by 1990; it is expected to drop to 69%. It is therefore clear that despite our high level of urbanization, Nigeria remains largely rural.

Secondly, is the realization that a dangerous gap exists in the development levels of both the urban and rural areas. This seems to be threatening the political and social stability of the country. Despite having the overwhelming proportion of our national population, the rural areas are characterized by pervasive and endemic poverty, manifested by widespread

hunger, malnutrition, poor health, general lack of access to formal education, livable housing and various forms of social and political solution compared with their urban counterparts.

Thirdly, it is being recognized that the problems of our urban centers cannot be solved unless those of the rural areas are solved, or at least contained. These problems emanated from the unprecedented rural-urban migration which in turn derives from rural stagnation or underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment. With our major cities growing at annual rates ranging from 5-17.5%, they suffer from severe pressures on available resources thereby worsening already bad situations in urban employment, management, service delivery and livability. The rural areas on the other hand experience labour and capital flight to the cities. Therefore, rural development is directed at both getting the migrants back to the rural areas and preventing further streams of migrants from leaving the rural areas.

Consequently, between 1973 and 2000, the federal government of Nigeria launched successively, five national rural development programmes with more than eight supportive schemes. The low level of infrastructural and human capital development of these rural areas is clear signs of the weaknesses and ineffectiveness of these programmes and schemes. The decay and worsening rural conditions and the attendant increasing rural-urban migration are evident in the long years of neglect of these areas.

Despite the efforts made in the past to effect rural development, the conditions of the rural dwellers have not improved, rather they have further deteriorated. It is against this background that the paper examines "self-help approach" as a veritable tool for sustainable rural development in Nigeria. Since the government (federal, state and local) was "far" from the rural areas in terms of development and with the realization that government alone cannot provide all their needs, the people had to learn to "do-it-themselves". However, where government is properly playing its expected role, self-help activities should complement rural development, not replacing it.

2. Self-Help Conceptualized

Community development includes all strategies, interventions or coordinated activities at the community level aimed at bringing about social and economic development. Idiode (1989) however asserted that three major approaches to community development in Nigeria have been identified – the extension approach, the project approach and the service approach. The extension approach involves directly teaching the rural people improved methods and techniques of either farming, health care or how to read and write. The Ministries of Agriculture and Health use this approach. The project approach to community development is generally motivated by the government's desire to improve the economic conditions in the rural areas. It is, therefore, characterized by the establishment of economic ventures, such as government farms or rural industries. In the government circles in Nigeria, the project approach to community development is usually referred to as "rural development."

The service approach to community development calls for the active participation and initiative of the local people. Used as the main strategy for community development in Nigeria. The service approach concentrates on the provision of social amenities such as postal agencies, maternity centres, pipe-borne water, dispensaries, electricity and so on, in the rural areas. These are provided at the initiative of the community itself. The service approach to community development is known as "self-help" in Nigeria. It is at this level that self-help programmes are most apparent.

Self-help development according to Udoye (1992), should be both an object (what) and a process (how). As an object, it should be an induced change for the achievement of community improvement. As a process, it should be a well articulated programme and effort to assist individuals to acquire attitudes, skills and concepts required for their democratic participation in the effective solution of as wide a range of community improvement problems as possible, in order of priority determined by their increasing level of competence. For the United Nations (1956), it is the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with

those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities, to integrate these communities in the life of the nation and enable them to contribute fully to national progress.

Since development is an on-going process, there is probably no community in the world that would not benefit from further development (Sautoy, 1970). The initiative for the attainment of this process-goal equation 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 socio-cultural and economic milieu within which it is to be practiced. It is the internal dynamics of these socio-cultural and political praxis that galvanise 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.

For purposes of convenience and because of relatedness, community development and self-help will be used interchangeably in this paper to describe the service approach to community development. Besides, both terms are so used in the community development literature on Nigeria. The attention given to self-help in this paper stems from the fact that it enables us to identify, as a movement, the massive local involvement which has helped to popularize the initiatives of the rural people in efforts to develop their areas. More than ever before, self-help still attracts a great deal of attention in the rural areas as it is used by the people and the government as a sort of mobilizational force to induce the people to work together for the common good of their community.

3. Evolution of Self-Help Development Activities in Nigeria

That community participation in rural project development is an important element and a sure way to the speedy development of the rural areas in Nigeria is well attested to in development literature (Udoye, 1986 and 1987; Muoghalu, 1986; Okafor, 1984). The need to develop the rural areas and to a large extent, reduce the contrasting

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scenario of urban opulence and rural decadence has equally received ample documentation in literature (Hansen and Schulz, 1981). The evolution of the practice of self-help development activities has the following periodic dimensions; the pre-colonial, the colonial up to 1939, the period from 1940 to the Nigerian Civil War, the civil war years and the post civil war years to the present democratic settings.

Before the onset of colonial administration, communities across Nigeria had employed communal efforts as the mechanism for mobilizing community resources to provide physical improvement and functional facilities in the social, political and economic aspects of their lives. Communal labour was employed in constructing homesteads, clearing farm lands, roads or path way, construction of bridges and for the provision of other social infrastructural facilities required by the people. Some of the relevant institutions were the age-grades and the village councils. Though some of these institutions have persisted, the difference between self-help activities undertaken in the past and those prosecuted today are not hard to find. Differences exist in the scope of the operations, equipment utilized and the extent of government involvement.

As Idode (1989) observed, in the past, self help efforts in Nigeria particularly in Bendel State now Edo and Delta States mainly related to the construction of footpaths or roads, dredging of rivers and streams, clearing of public land and market places. Later, Idode further observed, the scope of operation included the building of schools and market stalls. Projects such as pipe-borne water, road tarring, dispensaries, cottage hospitals and so on, were not usually attempted. Furthermore he continued, equipment used was simple; hoes, cutlasses, diggers and shovels were generally utilized. The construction of walls did not follow any standard measurements as the people used their imagination to plan and construct such projects. At this stage, there was little or no government involvement as the planning and execution of these self-help projects was the sole responsibility of the people. Where the government was involved at all, was for the purposes of taking over completed projects for operation or maintenance. But where neither

the state government nor the local government councils were interested in such project, the missionaries took over.

During the colonial period, community development efforts took a compulsive and coercive turn. The alien governmental apparatus with its clientele (Warrant Chief) arrangement, extorted taxes and compulsory labour from the people. Taxation by itself questioned the rationality of further labour conscription for road and other infrastructural development at the instance of the District Commissioner. The contradictions in the new development effort, therefore, did not fire the corporate imagination of the people and this was given expression by the tax debacle of 1929, popularly known as the Aba women riot. It questioned the whole essence of the tax laws as established then, the imposition of the Roads and River Ordinance and the apparent shirking of development responsibility by a government that had already extorted taxes for this purpose.

Apart from the establishment of governmental exploitative infrastructural apparatus, linking the major seats of government through forced labour, no serious self-help programmes eliciting popular participation was encouraged. Any development that occurred was a by-product of profit (Hancock, 1942). Nonetheless at very local levels, the family, interfamily and village settings, the pre-colonial trappings of mutual assistance through self-help persisted for the construction of homesteads, clearing farmlands, clearing water points and for providing other socially felt needs. Church organizations were also able to cooperate with members for the building of schools.

By the late 1940's however, an element of modern community concept in rural development was introduced in the form of mass mobilization for self-help activities. This was heralded by the abrogation in Britain of the Colonial Development Act which was replaced by the Development and Welfare Act in 1939. As rightly noted by Arndt, (1981), this gave a positive economic and social content to the philosophy of colonial trusteeship by affirming the need for minimum standards of nutrition health and education. At the local level, the earlier Native Authority Councils were replaced by the Country Council. Suffice it to say that this development led to the establishment of Community Development Division at the local level and thus became an

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important organ of government, charged with the responsibility of channeling and coordinating the efforts of the people towards promoting social and economic development (Onwuzuluike, 1987). The Development and Welfare Fund provided for the colonies by the British Government was thus able to permeate to the grassroots level through this third tier of government..

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By the beginning of the war in 1967, the observations of Sir James Robertson, aptly typified the state of development needs and awareness and the immense role the governments expected self-help activities to play to compliment their efforts. After the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the need for massive reconstruction work further aroused the people a revival of the spirit of self-help which is deeply rooted in their rich traditions. Most communities realized that the only way for immediate reconstruction of the war ravaged facilities was through self-help. This period also marked the evolution of a multiplicity of social clubs with aims consonant with social insurance and self-help. Further efforts by government to motivate development at the grassroots, led to the enactment of the 1976 Local

Government Reform to create new growth centres for further spatial spread of development. In addition is the creation at the state level of local government service commission, the conferment of wider powers and functions to the Local Governments by the 1979 constitution and the enactment of the special Development Fund Law, aimed at generating more funds for community development at the local level. Thus, deliberate government support became necessary to increase the spate of development activities by the various communities.

The period between 1973 and 2007 marked a watershed in rural development efforts in Nigeria. The period witnessed deliberate government efforts at mobilizing the people for rural development. A number of task forces and bodies were set up to oversee, organize and to direct partnership with the people on self-help activities. They include: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI), Rural Electrification Schemes; Credit Schemes to small holders through various specialized institutions such as People's Bank, Agricultural and Cooperative Development Bank, Community Banks, NERFUND, SME Credit Schemes, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Universal Primary Education Schemes and Low Cost Housing Schemes, Health Scheme as the Primary Health Care Programme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women Programme as well as the Family Support Programme (FSP).

More recent programmes include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) as well as the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Schemes (SMIEIS). The various state governments had also articulated blueprints on rural development, adopting the Integrated Rural Development Strategy as their strategic option to carry development to the masses of the people. From the foregoing historical analysis, two principles underlying self-help activities have emerged. These are (a) the principle of individual and corporate survival and (b) the principle of societal "felt need". These two principles have variously acted as the motive force in organizing and mobilizing the people in their pursuit of self development.

4. Lessons From Experience in Delta State: Self-help Activities Among Communities in Urhoboland

Akpomuvie, Orhioghene Benedict, *Delta State University (Abraka, Nigeria)*

This study so far has made exposition of the inner dynamics of self-help programmes in Nigeria. It has also established the fact that the survival instinct and the societal felt-needs inform most self-help activities. This community-based or community-dictated development approach involves the movement of the people designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation of, and if possible on the initiative of the community concerned. According to Dunham (1970:172), community development is not concerned with anyone aspect of life such as agriculture, business, health or education: it is concerned with the total community life and needs. Ideally, it involves all the members of the community and requires their fullest participation in first making and then implementing decisions. The people work together to shape their future. As Williams (1978:16) asserted, community development entails that the people themselves exert (their own efforts along side those of government authorities to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions. Okafor (1984) however observed that if the initiative is not forthcoming from members of the community concerned, then the government can stimulate their interest through various strategies, including enlightenment campaigns, the initiation of projects and financial aid for specific projects.

Williams (1978: 17) has identified four essential elements in the complex process of community development: "(a) it encourages analysis of local problems with a view to improving the level of living and as much as possible on the initiative of those concerned; (b) it provides technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative and cooperation; (c) it considers the local community, the basic unit for planning and development; and (d) it diffuses the decision-making power by emphasizing the principle that those affected by community change should themselves select and manage such change."

The contribution of self-help development activities to rural development depends largely on the existence of committed local leaders in the rural areas concerned as well

as the extent to which government encourages local planning and participation. The wide variations in the scope and impact of self-help activities on the welfare of rural dwellers in different parts of the study areas, reflect the nature of community leadership and their inclination towards self-help programmes. This implies that in those areas where there are no effective self-help groups, community development activities have not made much impact on the social welfare of the rural population.

It is often taken for granted that people in the local communities will at one level or the other participate in the development of their communities. Little attention is therefore paid to their level of participation and the outsiders be it government, planners, companies and individuals carry on the development business as if the community is the problem and they are the solution. The result of this, as expected is that most projects designed by the government to develop these rural areas, often fail to achieve totally the set objectives.

Every community has a traditional structure to ensure the participation of inhabitants in projects and programmes that have positive effects on the life of the majority. It has been established in this study that projects identified, planned, executed and managed by the community themselves; outlive those imposed by a benefactor with little or no community participation. Sustainable development is what every community wants, and as of right deserve; anything less is not development. Our concern now, is to apply same to definite self-help activities of communities to see the impact of these dynamic forces in the attainment of projected goals.

This section is the outcome of data collected in 2006 and 2007, in which 280 people in twenty communities in Ethiope East and West local Government Areas, were interviewed (11 communities in Ethiope East and 9 communities in Ethiope West, tables 1 and 2). This was to assess the level of community participation in development in the areas, as reflected in tables 1 and 2 below. Moreover, it also provides an overview of the nature of community development efforts especially their perception of what

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constitute their development, identification of problems/needs to the final stage of achieving the set goals. In all, 150 and 130 respondents came from Ethiope East and West respectively (tables 1 and 2).

Table1: Respondents interviewed on Community Participation in Development (Ethiope East local Government Area).

Communities	No of respondents	Male	Female	L.G.A	Total
Umeghe	9	5	4	Ethiope East	9
Ekrejeta	20	16	4	"	20
Erho	10	6	4	"	10
Ekue	15	8	7	"	15
Igun	17	12	5	"	17
Samagidi	10	6	4	"	10
Oviorie	18	12	6	"	18
Isiokolo	15	10	5	"	15
Okpara Inland	14	9	5	"	14
Orhoakpo	12	8	4	"	12
Kokori	10	5	5	"	10
Total	150	97	53		150

Table 2: Respondents interviewed on community participation in Development (Ethiope West Local Government Area)

Communities	No of	Male	Fema	L.G.A	Total
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	responden ts		le		
Ovade	12	9	7	Ethiope West	12
Ugbenu	14	9	5	“	14
Oghara junction	15	10	5	“	15
Ijomi	10	7	3	“	10
Idjerhe town	15	9	6	“	15
Irhodo	12	8	4	“	12
Okueka	9	5	4	“	9
Okuodibo	10	7	3	“	10
Otumara	12	8	4	“	12
Total	130				130

Tables 3 and 4 below show self-help projects carried out by some communities in Ethiope East and West Local Government Areas respectively. These communities did not receive any support from either the local, state or federal governments in executing the projects. According to Chief Mebradu Johnson:

“The projects were executed by the communities through the money realized from fund raising for such projects, donations, fines and so on”.

“Similarly, the projects executed in our community (Urhuoka) was through the sweat and commitment of and those who were fortunate to get political appointment” (Chief Onyewoko G., personal communication, 2008).

The tables show that of the 395 projects undertaken in the 20 communities, 68 were roads and bridges projects; 48 were educational projects; non were agricultural projects; 19 were civic center projects; 21 were market and motor park project; 9 water projects; 6 were health projects, 9 were communication projects and 15 were drainage projects.

The tables also show that in the study area, development projects are dominated by projects such as water supply projects, road, education, market and motor

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park, civic center projects and health care. Pastor Oghenekaro, J. Moses Uge, madam Ejovwoke, R. contended that: “the projects reflected the felt needs of the people, hence the emphasis on them”. The pattern that emerges from these, is that, in terms of number, the communities preferences are reflected on the projects they embarked upon. It is vital to note that agriculture is not reflected in all the projects executed by the communities studied.

Table 3: Self-Help projects in some communities in Ethiope East Local Government Area.

Community	Roads & Bridges	Markers	Dispensary	Hospital	Postal agency	Grammar school	Primary school	Town halls	Coop fishing	Maternity	Wells & water tanks	Pipe borne water	Public latrine	Fish pool	Lighting
Urhuoka	4	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	6	-	-	-
Oria	4	1	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	5	-	-	-
Ekue	5	2	-	1	-	2	2	1	-	4	-	4	-	-	-
Kokori	3	2	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-	15	2	-	-	-
Orhoakpo	2	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	5	2	-	-	-
Okpara Inland	5	1	-	1	1	2	2	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
Ovu	3	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
Okpara Waterside	3	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
Okurekpo	2	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
Igun	2	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	-

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Total	33	12	-	-	6	12	14	10	-	4	20	37	-	-	-
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Table 4: Self-Help projects in some communities in Ethiope West Local Government Area.

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Community	Roads & Bridges	Markers	Dispensary	Hospital	Postal agency	Grammar school	Primary school	Town halls	Coop fishing	Maternity	Wells & water tanks	Pipe borne water	Public latrine	Fish pool	Lighting
Orhokpoko	2	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	5	4	-	-	-
Idjerhe town	4	1	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-	15	6	-	-	-
Ejenesa	3	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	9	2	-	-	-
Irodo	4	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	12	4	-	-	-
Okuemore	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	6	4	-	-	-
Mosogar	4	1	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-	8	6	-	-	-
Ogharefe	5	1	-	-	-	1	3	1	-	-	11	9	-	-	-
Oghareki	3	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	10	10	-	-	-
Ajamuonya vwe	4	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	9	8	-	-	-

This confirms the position of Okpala (1980) that rural communities have different perceptions from that of the government as to what constitutes their development and as such they do not share government's enthusiasm for agricultural development. The communities undertake other

types of projects that they think are more relevant to their felt needs and aspirations. *Idjerhe, Ekrejeta, Oria, Samagidi, Ovu, Eku, Igun, Kokiori, Irodo, Mosogar, okpara and Oghara* comities believe:

that development, entails a wide range of mixed activities and programmes include projects to improve health and education, to expand and improve transportation and communication and to improve the general civic infrastructures.

In fact, rural communities do not voluntarily set up agricultural projects. It is clear from respondents and personal observation that development projects will, of course, vary with the requirements and priorities of the community involved. One of the respondents (Mr. Okobia Samson) who is a student suggests "the need to make a distinction between rural development and agricultural development".

The respondents also gave reasons for the success of self-help projects embarked upon in the area. First, that the development projects were an expression of the people's preference, to which they want to spend their money and energies on. Such decisions were largely influenced by the prevailing local environment and what the people consider to be their pressing needs. Secondly, the people derived special satisfaction from projects which they plan and execute through communal labour. They see themselves as being part and parcel of the community and actively contributing to its development. They are also delighted to see the practical fruits of their collective endeavour. Thirdly, the high rate of embezzlement of public funds, which usually characterized the failure of governments in Nigeria, is avoided in self-help activities because the publicity given to the projects and the collective nature of the contributions reduce the chances of misappropriation. These views are similar to those of Idode (1989) on his reasons for the success in self-help projects in the then Bendel State.

Among the communities studied, participation in community activities can be determined in several ways. First, activities that are carried out essentially at individual

and family levels, second, activities involving community participation and thirdly membership in community based organizations.

As this study has demonstrated, there are many such organizations in all communities in Urhoboland, ranging from social clubs (Elite Club at *Okpara Waterside* and *Ighene Club* at *Ekú*), to service and church organizations to mutual assistance organizations. Of the respondents interviewed in the area, (52%) belong to at least one community based organisation and many of them belong to more than one. Men and women belong to such organizations (48% are men while women have 42%). While the remaining 10% are indifferent to such organizations.

In addition to membership, interest in community matters is shown through contributions to local projects. In the 2006 survey, 40% respondents reported that they had contributed to least one project. More men than women reported such contributions. As to the type of projects, some respondents (Egbegbedia Thomas, Ukere John, Ajamo Eko and Umude Uvo). simple said “the development of the town” while others specified projects such as community secondary schools, the *ovie’s* palace and others. The most commonly reported way of contributing, was to donate money. (78% made financial of those who contribution while 22% contributed their service.

Self-help projects have been successful in Urhoboland simply because, participants see them as their own, meeting and satisfying their needs. As such 100% involvement is the case from conception to execution and sustenance of the facilities.

In this study, we have seen how roads, bridges, schools, maternity centers, post offices/postal agencies and town halls have been completed through self-help by the local people through their various socio-cultural associations. However, the practice of leaving the rural areas to cater for themselves through self-help tended to improve the lots of the relatively rich communities who were able to contribute more for the execution of self-help development project. As was the case for *Mosogar*, *Oghara* and to a lesser extent, *Okpara Inland*.

This was one of the reasons that led the then Bendel State Government to appoint Nwanwene Committee to review the matching grant principle under the “development administration” system in 1975. The recommendations of the committee according to Idode (1989), were overtaken by the local government reforms of 1976 which abolished the development administration system. In any case, the unpublished report, called for a review of the matching grant principle. Since 1977, the principles of quota and equality have guided the award of grants-in-aid for self-help projects in the then Bendel State. Under the new arrangement, the estimated cost of a project may influence the amount of grant paid but the overwhelming criterion was the principle of equality.

Idode (1989) however, observed that the mere introduction of a more equitable system of grant-in-aid did not solve the problem of inequalities among rural communities. According to him, the richer communities were still able to contribute more towards self-help projects and thus widen the gap between them and the poorer communities. He further contended that the government needed to ensure that adequate grants were paid to all communities and encourage them to work harder for the development of their areas, take appropriate steps to site some viable projects in poorer communities as a means of improving the standard of living in such areas. Good roads, health centers, small scale industrial projects are some of the projects that can be contemplated.

The involvement of everyone or nearly everyone in their community and commitment to assisting it, does not mean that there are no conflicts or tensions. On a general note, Urhobo communities are not homogenous. They are rather complex with varying groups and factions. Even the smallest of the communities, has the potential for division along various structural lines; family and kinship networks, religious affiliations, occupations and what have you. However, key potential sources of tension and conflict within communities are the struggle for *Ovieship* (kingship) or chieftaincy titles and land disputes. Good examples of these cases are the *Idjerhe* and *Mosogar* on one hand and *Umiaghwa* Abraka and *Oruarivie* in Abraka Clan on the other hand. Others include differences between those who are

living at home and those outside and between the wealthy elite and the ordinary “grassroots” community members. Conflicts can also result from perceptions that individuals are not fulfilling their obligations to the community. There is also the potential for conflict or disagreement over the setting of the agenda for development.

The Urhobo of Delta State have a framework of laid-down conventions or rules by which conflicts are resolved or managed. They also have a body of rules that define and quality people’s relationships with each other and the state. These rules and regulations form the law of the land. In such communities, there may not be a written constitution, the basic set of standards which individual members have been socialized from childhood to conform to and from which other standards in the culture derive, become the framework of conflict management and regulation. For example, conflicts arising within communities such as struggle for oversight(kingship) or chieftaincy titles and land disputes are resolved by the “Elders’ Council” at the instance of the community development agents.

The symbolism of authoritative decisions associated with elders’ cultural trusteeship and customary practices, has sustained conflict resolution and management in Urhoboland. The constitution of the king –in- council or of village or town councils and their legitimacy of interventions in conflict situations, are well known events in various communities in the area.

The elders according to Otite and Albert (2001) may not have physical power to enforce decisions but rely on the leaders of the various age- grades or youth associations to bring about and monitor peace on the basis of the negotiated terms in particular conflicts or of the known institutionalized forms of conflict management. Kings and chiefs of various designations and statues, practice their indigenous cultures admirably in resolving, managing and transforming conflicts within and between their domains. Yet, those who disagree with the verdict of these functionaries proceed freely to settle their conflicts in the modern westernized sector, for example the courts. This was the case between Umiaghwa in Abraka and Oruarivie in Abraka clan over their struggle for ovieship (Kingship).

Town councils are also agents of conflict prevention, resolution, transformation or management within and between communities. The basis for this mode of intervention is the people's surviving confidence, trust and reliance on culture as a means of rallying and mobilizing people to behave in patterned ways, a condition which can thus be used to handle conflict problems at the ethnic or inter-ethnic levels.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the foregoing discussions, a conclusion could be reached that self-help is a relevant strategy for rural development in Nigeria. Like the cooperative movement, the self-help movement in many parts of Nigeria rest on the rich tradition of the people. We found also that local communities in Urhoboland in Delta State and other states in Nigeria, have been undertaking self-help projects from time immemorial. But the latest development in self-help activities is the partnership which the government now forms with the people.

It has been established that there is a relationship between time related events and the motive force that sustained self-help development activities in Urhoboland in Delta State. These motive forces have been idealized to relate to (a) the instinct of self and corporate survival and (b) the societal felt need. It is these two principles, which are known to vary spatially and temporally, that govern the inner dynamics of self-help activities and thus dictate the observed spatial variations in the attainment of economic well-being.

In self-help strategy, intrinsic value is accorded to participation. This is reflected in the opinions of development scholars that if development is to benefit the people, they must participate in planning and implementing their development plans. In some communities, most people are mere participants in self-help activities but do not in the actual sense play a meaningful role in initiating and controlling development projects in their own interest. Community elites do not often perceive their interests as identical with those of the community as a whole though

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sometimes they contribute more than their share both in terms of financial contributions and individual efforts.

Furthermore, people's participation cannot be said to have increased when some development projects were imposed on them by outsiders who may be ignorant of the real needs of the communities. In most cases, particularly where technical assistance or matching grants are made available to the self-help groups, bureaucratic control over decision making becomes a prominent feature of self-help activities.

Lastly, the success of self-help efforts in Nigeria is sometimes hindered by the corrupt attitude of both development officials and the community elite. It is a common feature to hear of various situations where the rural elite spearhead self-help projects as an avenue for self enrichment and political gains. Community development officials in like manner, fall victim to the same offence by receiving grafts to render services which are supposed to be given free of charge.

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