

Community development in Central Cross River State: The role of women self-help educational projects

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Abstract

This study examines the role of women self-help project in community development in Central Cross River State, Nigeria. Relevance literature was reviewed and Identity Empowerment theory was adopted for the study. The Survey design was used for the study, and Taro Yamane formula was used to draw respondents. Data collection Method used was the questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients was adopted to analyse the data. Findings from the study indicated among others that, a significant relationship exist between community development and women self-help education projects in central Cross River State. Based on the findings, the following were recommended among others. It is necessary for appropriate legislation to be enacted in all levels of Government to encourage women self-help projects especially in the rural communities, cultural/traditional practices that hinders and restrict women economic and political potentials should be jettisoned, financial credit pool should be created at the local government areas, to be assessed through women Self-help groups.

Keywords: Women, Self-help, Project, Community, Development

Introduction

Self-help projects are age long practices among communities since the beginning of society. It is a practice through which community members come together to initiate projects to improve the living standard of their people (Omeje, 2014). Before the advent of colonialism, people were used to organizing themselves into groups and bringing resources together to provide working facilities to improve themselves and communities (Ossai, 2020). In building houses, constructing of roads, clearing of farm roads, building markets stalls, and even in defending against insurgents; in this context, self-help as a strategy has a long history. Echegu (2018), argued that, women self-help projects are self-relevant final product of community development, that leads to the development of an area through giving the people the ability to exploit, for their benefit, resources that have been abandoned. Self-help practice is an approach or strategy which does not involve actions by external agencies or government; rather it is an approach for inducing development in communities; and a major solution to the growing unemployment in societies. It provides opportunity for employment for the people within their locality (Shobana & Junofy, 2019). In the context of community development, women have played catalytic role towards bringing tremendous socio-economic changes needed for sustainable community development. This is despite limited funding, poverty, and sometimes, very low education. Although successive administrations in Nigeria have adopted various strategies or programmes to uplift the condition of the masses especially in rural communities through programmes aimed at a better living standard, there is still general doubt on whether these strategies or programmes have been sincerely implemented and yielded the desired result. Government may have responded to the problem of poverty through policy pronouncements and implementation, hence the various strategies designed for the purpose of empowering and raising the quality of life of the masses (Ofem, Abonor, & Ubi, 2024).

Generally, in Africa, women have been seen to be engaged in community development projects through the use of self-help projects. Through their different groups, women are socially and economically empowered to attain status in their family and community. They also take action with the spheres of influence traditionally open to them. Elaborating on this, Oruwari (2017), stated that women have contributed to community development using so many ways; some are carried out at the grassroots by common people, whereas others are initiated at the highest levels and serve as sustainable solutions to problems that are common generally.

According to Minimol and Makesh (2012), since there are proves of failure of current development strategies manifesting in the hue and cry of the citizens, it is becoming increasingly obvious that women's potentials and abilities in development are being under-utilized. Self-help projects championed by women are therefore beginning to appear in all areas of social and economic life. With community-based women initiatives, such as, micro credit, education projects, and Community Association, poverty have been reduced in some communities; equality of opportunity for all has also been ensured by providing some basic felt-needs, and also improve the quality of life of not only their members but also of the entire community (Omorunyi, 2001).

Self-help projects of women are some of the many manifestations of transformations going on in some communities. It is one of the different approaches outside the conventional methods for community development. The self-help projects give local women the capacity to become involved to give meaning to their lives and shape the future of their community. Acceptance of self-help as an alternative way to community development is evidence in the avalanche of projects executed in various communities (Ganiyu, & Uzoagu, 2022). In his opinion, Akpomuvie (2018), argued that the success story of self-help is represented by the number of projects which are provided to the local people like: award of scholarship to indigent students, donation of teaching materials and increase in school enrolment among other benefits. According to Abonor, Fidelis, Paul, and Eyang (2024), one of the greatest challenges confronting various communities in Nigeria is poverty. However, the poor have the feeling of being abandoned due to government neglect and lack of strong political will to efficiently harness resources to better the qualities of lives, address challenges and forestall policy summersaults.

In Europe, self-help is a voluntary movement and an approach through which people can perform certain social responsibilities and resolve local problems (Bagheri, & Nabavi, 2021). It strengthened disadvantaged communities to be able to face burning issues such as equal opportunities, as well as social and economic justice. In his opinion, Nishan (2020), asserted that Self-help in Europe prepares participants' cooperation for a common goal and establishes the results of authentic action for community development. Basically, it establishes a clear intention, strong value and tested processes to contribute to change in the lives of communities.

After many years of exhaustive deliberations by scholars and stakeholders on how to improve the general wellbeing of the people, life has almost remained the same (Mammud, 2019). Movement away from the rural areas to the cities by both men and women is in the increase (Njoku & Mba, 2018). There is infrastructural decay and there is absence of social amenities in most communities in Central Cross River State (Lazarus, Akwaji, Paul, & Eyang, 2024). This is inspite of several strategies adopted by government aimed at improving the lives of the people at the country-side.

Surprisingly, the lives of the people are still characterized by misery, poverty, morbidity and general under-development (Obiakor & Okoroaffia, 2021). Communities in the Central Cross River State have not seen any significant improvement in terms of development despite claims of implementing several development projects by government. It has therefore, become a burden in the minds of the people and a thing of worry why the aims and purpose of development programmes are not successful in Cross River State (Garba, 2018). Poverty in several communities of the State is still persisting. People in the Central Cross River have contributed in their own little ways towards the development of their communities but their efforts seem not to make much difference. Hence the justification for this study, to examine

the nexus between women self-help educational projects and community development in central Cross River State.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between women self-help educational projects and community development in central Cross River State.

Literature Review

Self-help project

Government unwillingness to provide for the needs of the masses especially the poor in the rural areas and the awareness by the people that it is possible for them to change the narratives about their miserable lives if they engage in self-help project, has been acknowledged in different communities all over the World (Olekar, & Yadav, 2018). Women Self-help Projects are usually a small number of individuals who willingly agree to form an association with the main aim of providing for themselves some basic necessities of life. In some instances, women self-help are formed by people who are familiar with each other and residing in the same locality. Self-help according to Saravanan (2019), could be as small as between ten (10) and twenty (20) members with unique but similar identity. Members of self-help always have some features that bind them together prior to the formation of the group. Self-help association does not start by giving out credit to members, rather, they start by encouraging saving from members before giving soft loan to members to enable them take care of their needs (Lahiri-Duff, 2022).

Origin of Self- Help Groups (SHGs) could be traced to Prof. Mohammed Yunus who founded the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh in 1975. He succeeded in the course of finding a new strategy for the poor rural people in Bangladesh to have access to credit (Lahiri-Dutt & Samanta, 2022). The Grameen Bank according to Joshi (2019), gave out credits to the masses at interest free rate and without asking them for collateral or any form of bottlenecks. Women self-help projects have the sole aim of turning around the lives of members and empower them not for financial benefit only, but to give total upliftment to the overall lives of their community. It gives members the opportunity to take part in issues about their family, and also prepare them for leadership position in their environment and beyond (Nwankwo, 2017). According to Nnana, Abonor, Tangban, and Tiku, (2024), self-help is an important concept in the process of community development, which is inherent in the involvement of members of the group. This is because Taking part in one's group activities invites self-help since when people participate actively in their own affairs, they are also helping themselves. The concept highlights community development as a movement of the people which underscores the fact that social improvement can only come about from the aspirations of the people themselves. It enables the local people to exploit to their advantage, the resources which would other-wise, lie dormant and prolong the poverty of their community. In community development, self-help groups are encouraged to secure the active participation and cooperation of various groups in programmes designed to raise the standard of living and promote their development or well-being (Abonor, Augustine, & Eyang, 2024). Contributing, Odife (2022), asserts that Self-help group enables the people to get together and plan to bring their community on the path of progress, hence, through self-help Group, members can define their problems, solve them and work themselves out of such problems. Therefore, the underlying principle about the concept of self-help group is the belief that when people are given the opportunity to work out their own problem, the assumption is that they will find solutions with a lasting effort.

Self-help is about development that emphasizes the involvement of members of a community in the execution of projects for the benefit of their community (Ogunleye-Adetona

& Oladeinde, 2018). Supporting this view, Udoeye (2020), believed that self-help stimulates development of resources of a community through the ability of members of that community, without relying on external forces or outsiders. It is a strategy that encourages inward-looking of self or group improvement, which relies solely on own efforts and largely for own benefits. Under this approach to community development, the principle is that individual or community effort determines their fate. This philosophy of development, according to Figueroa (2018), is an attempt made at encouraging and inspiring people in the determination of desirable change in goals and in the implementation of programmes to bring about the change deemed desirable for themselves and their communities.

According to Spiliotopoulou (2021), Self-help is one of the bases of effective community development in Cameroon as it is also in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. The concept of self-help to them, is located centrally within the discourse of community development and it is connected to related concepts like self-reliance, mutual-help, mass participation and rural development. The Self-help strategy advocates the need for people to improve their condition using local initiatives and resources in their own hands. This concept is fast being accepted as a new approach for community development. Its widespread acceptance in the development planning of some African countries has the tendency to give greater stimulus and cohesiveness to community development in these countries (Ogbonnaya, 2020). He further contends that in some African countries, community development has depended mostly on voluntary cooperative efforts. This could follow a traditional trait of communalism that clearly underscores the virtue of self-help in most African cultures. This explains the emerging trend in community development, which sees it as an important point of take-off for better living. The emphasis is to involve groups of people in the planning of programmes from which they may gain skills that will enable them to cope more successfully with the problems of their everyday life. Self-help could therefore be seen as development on the basis of a community's own resources, involving its people based on the potentials of its cultural values and tradition (Buye, 2022). It provides individuals and Communities opportunity to define their own development according to their own needs, values and aspirations (Sharma, 2022). According to Paul, Fidelis, Abonor, and Akpan (2024). Self-help enables poor people to use community resources to alleviate their poverty, thereby meeting one of the social and economic development indices, and reduce rural to urban movement.

Community development

Community development is a vital instrument of social, economic change and transformation of society. It provides the needed tools for transforming a stagnant or dormant community to an active one (Omoruyi, 2001). Through the instrumentality of community development, poverty is reduced by a consistent increase in productivity and incomes of poor people. According to Agha (2018), community development involves the motivation of people culturally, politically and educationally and mentally to enable them take rational decisions on how to take the advantage of the resources in their environment for the socio-economic well-being of the entire community. In a book entitled "communities and their development as a process" the author argued that community development is possible when those concern agree to work together from the identification of their needs, to the planning and execution of the project for their satisfaction (Bassey, 2020). Community development is therefore about improving the living standard of the people through creating economic growth and conducive environment to promote social justice and human dignity. It is a form of a movement whereby the people come together to identify their felt-needs by relying on their ability and capabilities with or without any outside support.

Women self-help educational projects and community development

Education is seen as the tool that can break the structures of gender imbalance and dominance in our society and, in so doing, bring women to a position where they are able to

influence policy and contribute to community development. In his opinion, Okolie & Ogheneakpoje (2021), observed that education is a means of opening one's mind and eye to the knowledge of good and beautiful things; a means of releasing man from the chain of ignorance to true forms of knowledge and ideas. It has to do with the various activities and processes which aimed at developing the individuals' knowledge, attitudes, values and understanding required in all works of life.

In his opinion, Ngwu (2019), stated that since literacy is a prerequisite for economic development, it diminishes exploitation and poverty; a contact point for the achievement of community liberation and abolition of gender oppression. Women self-help education initiatives in the view of Ngwu (2019), encourage illiterate people in the community to register in adult literacy classes, increase enrolment of children in school, and award scholarship to brilliant children. It helps the women to have foresight, initiate new ideas to liberate them from socio-political and economic backwardness. In their view, Abonor, Eze, and Eyang (2024), observed that a series of awareness creation undertaking by the women is part of the self-help programmes. Objective of the awareness creation is to enable women of the community do business and interact with the environment, believing that an illiterate person cannot succeed much in his or her business transaction let alone creating a positive impact in his immediate community.

In a study on the relationship between education programmes and its impact on the development of community by Ntia (2013), he found out that women self-help education programmes encompasses: guiding the girl child to take active part in development both at the local and national levels using education as a springboard, awarding scholarship to indigent and brilliant children, donating necessary educational materials to aid teaching and learning in schools, and to motivate and arouse the desire of students and teachers. The study concluded that the major aim of self-help projects in the education sector is to uplift the condition of living of members of the community through various activities and programmes in their society.

Supporting this view, Neha, Kelyani, Alejandra, Amir, and Shinjini (2021), maintained that women in Kenya have many reasons why it is important to contribute to the development of their community through intervention in educational activities. They have realised that there is a strong relationship between education and better life, nutrition, improved hygiene, low mortality and fertility rates, and economic development. According to Neha et al, it is against this backdrop that rural women in Kenya have taken educational activities very seriously as to meet the economic and social desires of their community through improving the way and manner resources are used, which is believe will lead to economic growth and social well-being of the people.

Theoretical Anchorage

Identity Empowerment Theory (IET)

Identity Empowerment theory was founded by C. Margaret Hall in 1990, a Professor of Sociology in George Town University. The theory is anchored on documented patterns and predictabilities in interpersonal behaviour. It describes and explains major and social processes that increase the likelihood and possibility of women's wellbeing and optimal functioning. It states that women want to improve their effectiveness in their lives, and that they want to be in strong positions to live fully in both individual and social contexts. It shows how women decisions direct their lives into private or public activities. The theory illustrates some of the changes in the interplay between women's personal activities and their contributions to society and history. This theory is also based on the belief that when women become socially and

economically strong, they contribute more effectively to the overall wellbeing of their family and society in general.

The premise of identity empowerments theory is centered on the basis that the behaviour of women and their quality of life with that of the entire community can be transformed through increased awareness of women and the power of their influence within the society. IET postulates further that women can contribute to bring major change for overall improvement of their conditions and the wider society by consciously connecting personal and public aspects of their lives. In this context, women can enlarge their world and participate in broader spheres of activity traditionally reserved exclusively for men.

From the assumptions of IET therefore, the strength of women would come from their actions and activities among themselves and their society. Women empowerment is a force for social change, in that, broad social patterns result from women's decisions and actions. This theory suggests that the participation of women in self-help education projects results to changes in the lives of the members of the community.

Methodology

Survey Research Design: Survey research design was adopted for the study. This method was preferred because it describes a phenomenon as it exists at the time of investigation and makes inferences about the population under study using the sample drawn from the population (Akwaji, Uyang and Abonor, 2017). The survey design is especially useful in this study to determine the opinions, and attitudes, of respondents on women self-help project and development of community in the study area, and to generate new ideas, assumptions, and create direction for future research in the process. This design is therefore most useful to assess the role of women self-help education projects on community development and how to sustain it.

Area of study: The study area is Central Senatorial District of Cross River State. The Cross River Central Senatorial District is bounded to the North by Ogoja, Obudu and Obanliku local government areas; to the south by Biase and Akamkpa local government areas; to the east by the Republic of Cameroon and to the west by Ebonyi state. The Central senatorial district has a total population of 942,947; out of the number, 464,855 were females (National Population Commission, 2006). The area lies between latitude 5160 to 8.30 North and longitude 8090 East, with a landmass of about 200,000 meters. The Central Senatorial District has six local Government areas namely: Abi, Boki, Etung, Ikom, Obubra, and Yakurr local government areas.

Population of the Study: The Population of this study comprised all women inhabiting the six local government areas in the Cross River Central Senatorial District. The population of the Senatorial District per local government, according to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006) The total population of the inhabitants is 948,947 (NPC, 2006)

Sample Size determination: Sample size of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for sample determination. In order to guard against attrition, 20% of the sample size was added to the determined sample to add-up 480.

Sampling procedure: A multi sampling procedure was used to select sample for this study. These were the purposive, stratified random sampling and systematic. The six (6) LGAs formed the major clusters of the study, such as Abi local government area represents cluster one (with ten political wards), Boki represents cluster two (with eleven political wards), Etung represents cluster three (with ten political wards), Ikom represents cluster four (with eleven political wards), Obubra represents cluster five (with eleven political wards), and Yakurr

represents cluster six (with thirteen political wards). From these stratified clusters, simple random sampling technique was used to select wards, households and respondents for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire contains closed and open-ended questions which were divided into two sections - A and B. Section A contains items which enable the researcher to elicit information from the respondents on certain demographic information about their personal background such as age, educational level, marital status, occupation, and locality. Section B deals with substantive issues of the study. The questionnaire was the major instrument for collection of data since it covers a wide range of respondents. The questionnaire is divided into sub-scales based on the variables developed under the objectives of the study to measure how rural women self-help education projects influence community development in Cross River Central Senatorial District.

Administration of the Instruments: For easy collection of data, the researcher recruited six (6) research assistants who were fluent in English language and the local language of the respondents. This ensured that the research assistants are effective in the data collection process. They were properly trained by the researcher on the methods and objectives of the study. The research assistants were first degree holders. The researcher supervised the administration and collection of the questionnaire to reduce incidence of non-retrieval. In situations where respondents were illiterates, the researcher and his assistants were readily available to explain the items when necessary; the explanations involved translation of the questions to the language respondents clearly understood.

Method of Data Analysis: The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Data from the questionnaire were coded and cleaned using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). This software helps to reduce the time needed to analyze a large number of questionnaires manually and enhance precision. Basically, data was analyzed hypothesis by hypothesis, testing each one at the 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis

Table 1 showed over 95% of the respondents agreed that there were several self-help projects in the study area. Among them included Osusu or thrift contribution (49.8%). Almost all the respondents agreed that they were members of those projects or associations that perform many functions; these include contribution (90.3%). It follows therefore that since women are engaged in these different activities, they are aware and are contributing immensely to the development of their families and communities.

Table 1. Types of women's self-help projects and function

Category	Frequency	Percent
Types		
Farmer's Cooperative society	23	5.3
Micro-credit (Osusu) contribution	216	49.8
Women Association Functions	195	44.9
Farming	30	6.9
Contribution	392	90.3
Trading	11	2.5
Politics	1	0.2

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2. showed seven items used to measure self-help educational project and community development. All the responses were either strongly agreed or agreed, implying that, the respondents were not only seriously engaged in activities that promote teaching and

learning, but also enhances efficient use of local resources around them to boost their living condition and that of the entire community. From the table, it could be deduced that women self-help educational projects are a catalyst that enlighten, educate, and promote family and the development of community in the central Cross River State.

Table 2. Respondents rating of contribution of education projects to community development

S/N	Self-help Educational projects	SD	D	UD	A	SA	\bar{X}	SD
1.	Provide teaching materials to school	9	27	15	298	85	4.50	.915
2.	Award scholarship to intelligent and (or) indigent children	11	2	20	87	314	4.10	.637
3	Adult education is encouraged	7	9	80	88	250	3.96	.732
4	School enrolment is boosted.	12	139	46	152	85	3.54	1.310
5	Helps to innovate school classroom/building	175	48	41	98	72	2.72	1.645
6	Establish vocational training centre	42	28	50	69	245	3.65	1.101
7	Educate women on efficient use of community resources.	8	5	20	306	95	4.62	.725

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between rural women educational projects and community development in Cross River Central Senatorial District.

Dependent variable (Y): Community development

Independent variable (X): Rural women educational projects

Statistical analysis: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) was used to determine the relationship between the two major variables

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between Education projects and community development

				Correlations						
	Categories	X	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Self-help educational projects	4.47	.971	1.00						
2	Award scholarship	4.07	.700	.2	1.00					
3	Enhance adult education	3.93	.782	.395	.026	1.00				
4	Enhance School enrolment	3.52	1.327	.339**	.434	.434	1			
5	Innovation of school/classroom	2.70	1.646	.348	.219**	.023	.260**	1		
6	Vocational Training	3.62	1.125	.281**	.104*	.295**	-.136**	-.077	1	
7	Efficient use of community resources	4.58	.792	.281**	.340**	.127**	-.102*	-.113*	.129**	1

** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

Following from here, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between rural women educational project and community development was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The results also showed a positive correlation coefficient (because of the negative sign of the p-Value). This implies that, an increase in the independent variable (educational projects) directly lead to an increase in the dependent variable (community development). We can therefore conclude that, there is significant relationship between women educational projects and community development. The result above corroborated the findings of the qualitative data.

Discussion

The hypothesis which was presented in a null form state thus; there is no significant relationship between rural women educational projects and community development. The independent variable in this hypothesis is educational projects, this variable was measured continuously, while the dependent variable is community development, and this variable was also measured continuously too. After testing, the findings revealed that, there is a significant relationship between educational projects and community development.

This finding is in agreement with the work of Ihejiamaizu (2017) which maintains that education is an indispensable live of people. It improves the lives of individuals as well as the entire society. Where people imbibe the spirit of education into community development, its objective is to have community members who will be able to decide for themselves, the kind of development and self-help actualization they want to pursue. Also, this finding corroborated Neha, et Al (2021), who revealed that, women have many reasons why it is important to contribute to the development of their community through intervention in educational activities. They have come to the conclusion that there is relationship between education and healthy living, better hygiene, reduced morbidity and mortality rates, and socio-economic wellbeing. The finding further revealed the reason educational activities are taken seriously as to meet the economic and social needs of their society through enhancing efficiency in the use of social and economic resources which is believed will lead to economic growth and social well-being of the people.

The finding is also in consonance with a study conducted by Ngwu (2019), which revealed that women self-help educational initiatives encourage illiterate people in the community to register in adult literacy classes, increase enrolment of children in school and award scholarship to brilliant children. This will help them to embrace new vision, learn to respond to new initiative, agree to new existing institutions and where necessary, create new ones to serve economic, social and political ends. Likewise, Akwaji, Otu and Abang (2021), who assert that “poverty is defined as a lack of well-being that has several dimensions, including a lack of financial resources, health related wellbeing, housing and occupational and societal integration”.

Conclusion

On the basis of the research questions and statistical analysis of the null hypothesis, that directed the study, the following conclusions were deduced that rural women have been engaged in community development programmes through the use of self-help groups. The self-help projects give women the ability to be actively involve in taking decisions about their lives and community. It is delightful to find out from the study that some students who are beneficiaries of self-help group’s scholarship are in tertiary institution for higher education. They are literary of projects executed in various communities sponsored by women self-help groups as a social intervention pooling in their community, the self-help projects is a directed community development approach where members know what they want, the needs of their community. Through self-help farmers’ cooperative society, there is improve living condition of families and the communities. The government should address the myriad of problems such as poverty, corruption, unemployment, which are likely precursor to violent reaction and insecurity (Ushie, E. M., Akwaji, F. N. & Ezikeudu, C.C. 2015).

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, and also to ensure equal and more meaningful contribution to development by women through self-help project, the following measures were recommended. In order to ensure equal and more meaningful contribution to development by women through self-help project the following measures are suggested:

1. Since there is a positive relationship between education and community development, it is therefore necessary for women self-help groups to be encouraged to enable them contribute more to educational activities.
2. Activities of Women Community Association has been identified as enhancing community development. Therefore, there is need for Local Government Council to create a financial credit pool for women in self-help group through their community-based Association. This will further enhance the development activities of the women through their Association.
3. Various organs in a community should make membership of at least a self-help group compulsory. This will form the bed rock of self-help projects sustainability and community development.

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