

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OBUDU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates community empowerment and sustainable socio-economic development in Obudu Local government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were tested based on unidentified dependent variables of vocational skill acquisition and local cooperative societies. The research design adopted was the cross sectional survey design. Data for testing the hypotheses were gotten using a 15-item focus group discussion guide (FGDG). Data were gotten from 40 respondents selected through snow balling sampling technique from the 10 wards in Obudu Local Government Area. The tested hypotheses showed that community empowerment has a significant relationship with vocational skill acquisition; also, community empowerment has a significant relationship with local cooperative societies. The study recommends, among others, that vocational skill acquisition should be simultaneously carried out along with entrepreneurial skill in order to enhance self employability. Also, communities yet to involved in local cooperative societies should do so to enable people participate because it allows individuals have access to interest free credit which enhanced sustainable socio-economic development.

Keywords: *community empowerment, sustainable socio-economic development, vocational skill acquisition, local cooperative societies.*

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling condition under which people can act on their own behalf, and their own terms, cultural process whereby people gain the ability, authority, and confidence to

make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including both youths and adults. People can be considered as empowered when they themselves, acknowledge that they have created, or can create, choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make informed decisions freely, take actions based on those decisions, and accept responsibility for the consequences of those action (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007, cited in Hope Sr., 2012).

The implication for empowerment is that the individual is equipped or supplied with the ability or enablement for some tasks or programme like technology, agriculture among others (Anaele, Adalokun, Olumoko & Kanu, 2014). The World Bank Group (2011) cited in Anaele, Adalokun, Olumoko and Kano (2014) views empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or group to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Community empowerment is a way of motivating individuals in the community to be productive, self-reliant and self-dependent by inculcating into the individuals technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills (Ogbe, 1996; cited in Anaele, Adalokun, Olumoko and Kano, 2014).

Uyang, Ejeje & Aniah (2016) state that empowerment is the level of control in decision-making positions, control over the allocation of resources, the determination of policy, regulation and law. It involves the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, social, economic or political power so that people can take decision to improve their life situation. Community empowerment is a process that strengthens and activates the capacity of the people to satisfy their needs, solve their problems, and acquire the necessary resources to take control over their lives. Community empowering the people is important because empowerment leads to competence and confidence, which, in turn, are linked to self esteem and self actualization (Hope Sr., 2012).

Community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition is manifestation of ideas and knowledge through training which is geared toward instilling in individuals the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful sustainable socio economic development. It implies that if individuals are given the chance to acquire relevant skills needed for self sustenance through self employment, it will promote their charisma in any work environment (Donli 2004; cited in Anaele, Adalokun, Olumoko Kanu, 2014).

Vocational skill acquisition is the type of skill acquisition which provides individuals with skills, knowledge and attitudes for effective employment in a specific occupation. This implies that vocational skill acquisition is a type of skill acquisition given to individual to develop their creative and manipulative potentials for the benefit of humanity. Through community empowerment, various skills are developed for human socio-economic development (Anaele, Adalokun, Olumoko & Kanu, 2014).

According to Akpama, Esang, Asor and Osang (2011), vocational skills reduce poverty among young adults who participated in skills acquisition programmes. According to Adebayo (1998) cited in Dokubo and Dokubo (2014), right from time immemorial, community empowerment through vocational skills is passed from one generation to the next. Vocational skills acquisition will greatly empower people economically and also make them have the pride of their vocation (Dokubo & dokubo, 2014). Ezeji (2005) cited in Dokubo and Dokubo (2014), argued that there had been a lot of youth restiveness, militancy and other social vices that would have been averted in Nigeria if appropriate vocational skills acquisition were inculcated into the youths through community empowerment.

According to Arikpo (2007) cited in Dokubo and Dokubo (2014) community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition is that skill acquisition which assists Nigerians to acquire the necessary skills and competence for occupation. Community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition programmes serves as a means of empowering rural dwellers, it is essential for self-reliance and self employment, which are measures of sustainable peace and eradication of poverty in the economy (Dokubo & Dokubo, 2014). Adofu and Ocheja (2013) conducted a study on vocational skills acquisition in alleviating poverty and unemployment in Kogi State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that 65% of the respondents agreed that lack of vocational skills acquisition among the youths is responsible for high rate of poverty and unemployment. The findings also revealed that 60% of the people that benefitted from vocational skills acquisition programme can afford the basic necessity of life.

Local cooperative societies through community empowerment have the potential to foster economic growth at the community and regional levels (Zeuli, 2002). These societies through community empowerment play a phenomenal role in uniting people and marching them towards sustainable socioeconomic development. Local cooperative societies are promising strategy to empower members. Cooperative societies are possible, feasible and desirable and play an important role in sustainable socio economic development (Visha, n.d; International Year of Cooperatives Issue Brief Series, 2012).

According to Akinkugbe (2013) cited in Uyang, Akwaji and Ezikeudu (2015) most of rural dwellers in Nigeria are still not adequately served by the formal financial sector. He maintained that the rural dwellers in Nigeria continue to find most formal financial services to be unaffordable, unresponsive and unfriendly. He argued that as this limit their opportunity to save, they are forced to rely upon informal mode of saving and on the credit unions, Cooperation and Rotating Saving and Credit Association (ROSIA), and local cooperative societies. He argued further that such institutions have clearly showed the ability of the people to organize themselves at a

basic level and come together to save and borrow to their mutual benefit which lead to sustainable socioeconomic development.

Community empowerment through local cooperative societies is acknowledged as a viable alternative to conventional banking as it plays a vital role in positively affecting the socioeconomic lives of the rural people (Uyang, Akwaji & Ezikeudu, 2015). According to Buckley (1997) cited in Uyang, Akwaji and Ezikeudu (2015) local cooperative societies have become a major tool of sustainable socioeconomic development and found to be the only practical and appropriate solution to the deep seated challenges for rural development. Community empowerment through local cooperative societies increases household income, improve diet patterns, improves status of rural dwellers, participation in public life and improves network of social relation. Local cooperative societies allow low income families to save their money (Amadi, 2010; Dichter & Harper, 2007; cited in Uyang, Akwaji & Ezikeudu, 2015).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. Community empowerment has no significant relationship with vocational skill acquisition
2. Community empowerment has no significant relationship with local cooperative societies

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was cross-sectional survey design. Through this design, the researcher attempted to use the independent variable (community empowerment) to observe the dependent variable sustainable (socioeconomic development) as it manifest. It was a qualitative study.

STUDY AREA

The study area was Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It headquarters is Obudu Urban. It has an area of 379,164 square kilometers and population of 161,457 (FRN, 2009). It is located in Northern Senatorial District. It consists of ten (10) political wards: Obudu Urban 1 Ward, Obudu Urban II Ward, Begiading ward, Ipong ward, Agiaba/Begiaka ward, Alege/Ubang ward, Ukpe ward, Utugwang South ward , Utugwang Central ward, Utugwang North ward.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised all the people in the ten (10) political wards. The target population was extracted from the overall population.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The ten (10) political wards constituted a cluster from each cluster 4 respondents were selected through snowballing sampling procedure. The researcher selected 4 respondents per cluster. It was 40 respondents in all.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The instrument for data collection was Focus Group Discussion Guide (FGDG). The FGD guide made up of three sections: a, b, and c. Each section had five items, with a total of 15 items.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage %
A. Age		
Under 20 years	5	12.5
20-30	12	30
31-40	15	37.5
41-50	6	15
50 and above	2	5
Total	40	100
B. Sex		
Male	25	62.5
Female	15	37.5
Total	40	100
C. Educational level		
Formal education	8	20
No formal education	32	80
Total	40	100
D. Marital Status		
Married	25	62.5
Single	6	15
Separated	2	5
Divorce	4	10
Widow	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2017.

Table 1 indicates the socio-demographic data of respondents. The table shows that respondents below 20 years were 12.5 percent (N=5), 20-30 were 30 (N=12), 31-40 were 37.5 percent (N=15), 41-50 were 15 percent (N=6), while 50 were 5 percent (N=2). This implies that the highest number of respondents who participated in the study belong to the age bracket of 20-30 years. The table shows that males were 62.5 percent (N=5) while female were 37.5 percent (N=15). This shows that males participated in the study than female. The table also shows that 20 percent (N=8) acquired formal education, while 80 percent (N=32) did not acquire formal education. This implication is that most of the respondents are illiterate, that is have not acquired formal education. In terms of marital status, 62.5 percent (N=25) were married, 15 percent (N=6) were single, 5 percent (N=2) were separated, 10 percent (N=4) were divorce, while 7.5 percent (N=3) were widows. This implied that the greatest number of respondents were married men and women.

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis one

Community empowerment has no significant relationship with vocational skill acquisition.

Hypothesis two

Community empowerment has no significant relationship with local cooperative societies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Community empowerment and vocational skill acquisition

In the focus group discussion carried out, the discussants unanimously respondent that: community empowerment through vocational skill(s) acquisition has help us so much in this community. Both those who have gone to school and those who did not go to school benefited immensely through vocational skill acquisition. It has help us to improve our standard of living.

The discussants stressed that:

Community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition serves as a means of empowering rural dwellers, making them self-reliant, self-empowered and improving their living condition. They maintained that vocational skill acquisition has helped in reducing poverty among the youths and that it instilled entrepreneurship spirit among the rural people which in turn lead to sustainable socioeconomic development.

The findings are in line with Arikpo (2007) cited in Dokubo and Dokubo (2014), they maintained that community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition programmes serves as a means of empowering rural dwellers, and essential for self-reliance and self-employment, which serves as measures of sustainable peace and eradication of poverty in the economy. The finding are also in line with Donli (2004), cited in Anaele, Adelokun, Olumoko and Kanu (2014) who contended that community empowerment through vocational skills acquisition is manifestation of ideas and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaning sustainable socioeconomic development.

Community empowerment and local cooperative societies

Another set of discussants stated:

Local cooperative societies through community empowerment should be encouraged by other communities that are yet to join. Local cooperative societies make money readily available compared to the formal banking system that require collateral and other due process. Money from the local cooperative societies has help us in paying our children school fees, buying farm product, invest in small scale business, help us to live a good life and above all leading to sustainable socioeconomic development.

The views of these discussants were consistent with that of Akinkugbe (2013) cited in Uyang, Akwaji and Ezikeudu (2015) that most rural dwellers in Nigeria are still not adequately served by the formal financial sector. He maintained that the rural dwellers in Nigeria continue to find most formal financial service to be unaffordable, unresponsive and unfriendly. He argued that as this limit their opportunity to save, they are forced to rely upon informed mode of saving. He argued further that institutions such as local cooperative societies have clearly showed the ability of the people to organize themselves at a basic level and come together to save and borrow to their mutual benefit which led to sustainable socioeconomic development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community empowerment initiative through vocational skill acquisition and local cooperative societies are significant predictors for sustainable socioeconomic development in Obudu local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Community empowerment through vocational skill acquisition and local cooperative societies exerted significant impact on rural dwellers which enhance sustainable socioeconomic development. Community empowerment programme through vocational skill acquisition and local cooperative societies if well planned could take care of the needs of the teaming unemployed youths and adults aspiring to own small – scale

businesses and those wishing to take up employment in the private and public sectors of the economy which will in turn lead to sustainable socioeconomic development. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be more centres for vocational skill acquisition across the local government area for easy accessibility.
2. Vocational skill acquisition should be simultaneously carried out with entrepreneurship skill in order to enhance self employability.
3. The advantages of community empowerment through cooperative societies are significant. Other community yet to involve in such scheme should do so to enable people participate because it allows individuals have access to interest free credit which enhanced sustainable socioeconomic development.

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