

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MKPAT ENIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

Rural Electrification and Rural Development have become a central focus in contemporary development discuss. Rural Electrification is an important social amenity of government to rural communities as an index of development and social services. The research focuses on the assessment of the impact of rural electrification on rural development specifically in Ekim village in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted participatory appraisal technique in identifying the various approaches of government in providing rural electrification in rural communities. The study also used descriptive survey design. For the purpose of a broader scope, the study was conducted in 3 out of 4 clans in the Local Government Area. Samples of 410 respondents, randomly selected from 3 political wards in each of the 3 clans were used as sample area of the study. The analysis of the data was done using descriptive statistics (simple percentage (%)) to analyze the research questions. The findings showed that there are several approaches of government in providing development to rural dwellers. The study recommends that government should adopt Professor Uma Lele's definition of development of '...improving the living standards of the low income subsistence population; ensuring mass participation; and making the process self-sustaining to rural dwellers'.

Key words: *Rural Electrification, Rural Development, Subsistence, Participation, Self-sustaining and Electricity.*

Introduction

According to Ekong (2010), "rural life in Nigeria to date is synonymous with poverty, alienation, and socio-economic deprivation. Every facet of life is associated with subsistence, while life expectancy is comparatively very low. Government in many developing countries including Nigeria... down to Akwa Ibom State and indeed, Mkpato Enin Local Government Area ... have engaged in various development strategies to improve the lives and potentials of the rural people. No developed or urban centre has attained its present status except that at one point or the other it was a rural community. What makes such urban centre to attain its present state is non-the-less than electricity supported by other social amenities. On the other hand, like Okereke (2002), opines "rural development is urban development of some sorts". Broadly, Lele (1998), a renowned African scholar and foremost proponent of Rural Development, has also defined rural development as "improving the living standards of the masses of the low income population residing in rural areas. Whereas the implication of Okereke's definition is that "given all the characteristics of urban areas in the rural communities, the later will be transformed into the status of the former, Lele's perspective has captured three major elements, namely: (1) It aims at improving the living standards of the low income subsistence population, implying that rural development must involve mobilization of people and resources in order to improve production capacity and output; (2) That indeed, there has to be mass participation (i.e. those at the low income bracket and the few wealthy ones). The implication is that, they first of all, have to be involved and take full participation after being fully informed, trained and educated on what the government wants to do in their area; and, (3) the process must be made self-sustaining. This implies that manpower, capacity or workforce has to be created so that when the government hands over the infrastructure to the community, there can be self-sustenance of project like maintenance, security, etc.

Nwachukwu, (2011) opines that 'development has been considered as an integrated process with social and political as well as economic and administrative dimensions'. For the purpose of meeting the social and economic or call it socio-economic needs of the people, the government of Akwa Ibom State through public-private partnership with Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDC) recently

launched an electrification sub-power station in Ekim village in Ikpa Ibom Clan in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Nwachukwu (2013), has provided two useful approaches which would help to explain the reality of inter-governmental relationship and people's participation in the rural electrification vis-à-vis rural development process. The first is the **paternalistic approach** which assumes that rural dwellers are passive, uninterested in improving their social and economic conditions, and are incapable of taking initiative in making these improvements. According to Ekong (2010), the rural people are therefore, being viewed from this perspective as being incapable of maintaining development at the grass root level. The application of this approach is in order to accelerate the pace of social and economic development of the rural areas, Ekong (2010). In our own case, rural electrification in Ekim town in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, the Federal government and its administration must provide all useful initiatives. Consequently, the pattern of development activity that emerges is a top-down one in which rural people are always the objects or recipients of the central ideas, plans, and services. In this pattern of dependent relationship with the central government, the rural communities are expected only to carry out directives and show appreciation for the services provided for them.

The second and opposing perspective or approach is the populist approach which perceives the rural dwellers as vitally interested in development, and is capable of transforming their communities with or without the assistance of the central administration. It is worthy of note, however, that Nwankwo (2013), has remarked that the above approaches do not in the real sense reflect the rural development process in the sense that, they represent ideal situations which deny the existence of complementarities among the various forms and levels of organization for development. This, he says, is because local organizations (e.g. cooperatives, faith based organizations, etc.) which are separated and isolated from the state and central governments are unlikely to acquire adequate resources (such as highly trained and competent staff, finance, information, equipment and so on which could have enabled them to make meaningful impact on development. Also, he said, that there is need on the part of local organizations to link their development efforts to the overall plans of the state and central government.

The government of Akwa Ibom State in choosing Ekim village in Ikpa Ibom Ward III in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area to site the 30 Mega Watts (MW) Electricity sub-power station seems to me as saying that since the St. Gabriel's Coconut Company (a public-private partnership) is also situated in that axis, the proposed company that will be manufacturing hospital syringes and allied products situated in the nearby Onna Local Government Area, as well as the popular Akwa Ibom State University, therefore, there will be higher demands for electricity to power these companies and institution, if they must be functional. In Prof. Uma Lele's definition of rural development, apart from the provision of electricity by the state government in this axis to power these public concerns, the electrification of that rural area will definitely "improve the living standards of the masses of the low income population residing in the rural area" of Ekim. Apart from the various attempts by government at providing sustainable development to the rural people, the concept of rural electrification has been identified as one of the major and a very important strategy for this purpose. The reason is that it will directly involve them in the project. And as they get involved, they will take the project as their own, thereby fulfilling Uma Lele's third proposition of "self-sustenance of project". This will make the people, after the government has handed over the project to the community, to provide security and adequate maintenance for the project.

Operational Definitions of Concepts

Rural Development: According to World Bank (1980), rural development is defined as strategies and policies designed at improving the economic and social life of a specific group of people.

Rural Electrification: Rural electrification may imply strategies and policies designed at improving the economic and social life of a specific group of people through the provision of electricity, Udoh (2014).

Electricity: A form of energy from charged elementary particles, usually supplied as electric current through cables, wires, etc. Wehmeier (2010).

Electrification: According to Wehmeier (2010), electrification is the process of changing something so that it works by electricity.

Sustainable Development: Wehmeier (2010), also defines rural development as economic and social developments that meet the needs of the current generation without endangering the ability of future generations satisfying their needs and choosing their lifestyle.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the theory called **Basic Resource Theory**. This theory was developed to analyse the basic natural resources that can be harnessed for human consumption and to examine the impact of rural development on the people and society. It is quite imperative to state that this theory remains very central to the understanding of this work.

Basic Resources Theory

This theory states that economic growth depends on the presence, availability, good and reliable magnitude of basic natural resources within a particular area or economic region. The development resources attract investment capital to these areas, and increase income and employment. The mere availability of resources in rural areas does not mean economic development, only when there is high technical manpower to harness them. It argues that the development of these resources attracts investment capital to these areas and increases income and enhances employment. It would be wrong to assume that the mere availability of basic natural resources in an area is a sufficient guarantee of rapid development.

The relevance of this model in the rural area is that the government should realize the need for education and manpower training for self-reliance and economic development. The dependence on imported machinery does not make for self-reliance. This goes to show why in spite of abundant natural resources in the rural area, hunger, unemployment, poor health condition, high death rate, poverty and disease have continued to threaten the survival of the rural population. The prices of locally produced goods have remained higher than their imported counterparts.

Electrification and Industrialization in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

It would be remembered that Thursday, 21st July, 2016 marked the day for the commissioning of a giant electricity (power) sub-station in Ekim village in Ikpa Ibom Clan in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State by the State Governor, Mr. Udom Gabriel Emmanuel. The project which is situated in the out skirt of Ekim village, is aimed at providing steady power supply to the people of the community and its environs.

On the day of the inauguration, the State Governor, Mr. Udom Gabriel Emmanuel, in his speech stated thus:

'The state government, in a bid to fast tract industrialization in the state, has decided to take a step further to link Akwa Ibom State communities to the national grid. This is in order to provide a steady power supply to enable both indigenes of Akwa Ibom State and residents, alike to embark on their small and medium scale businesses wherever they may reside in the state.

This is the major reason that we, in line with this policy commissioned this 30 Mega Watts (MW) electricity power sub-station this afternoon in Ekim village in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of the State. This sub-station has the capacity to supply electricity to the entire community and indeed, be extended to some other communities in the nearby Local Government Areas of Ikot Abasi, Eastern Obolo, Oruk Anam and Onna, where I come from. The St. Gabriel's Coconut Refinery that is strategically situated a few kilometers away from here will also benefit immensely from this project. The famous Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) at Ikot Akpaden is not also left out. Therefore, I do urge the people of Ekim community and those of its environs to join hands and ensure the safety, security and protection of this laudable project as it should be regarded as belonging to them.'

From my research, I have discovered that most communities in Akwa Ibom State have electricity. Some others have been wired but are yet to be connected or linked to the national grid. Only a very few communities stay without electricity facilities like poles and wires. The state government has determined to make life meaningful to all rural dwellers in the state through electrification of their various communities.

Methodology

The study was based on descriptive survey design, since it enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents without imposing any condition on them. The respondents were asked information through questionnaires as the research instrument. The design for this study outlined stages and the procedures in order to accomplish the goals of the investigation, such procedures included the identification of the population, selection of sample size, selection of respondents, data collection and data analysis.

It was conducted in three clans, namely: Ukpum Minya, Ikpa Ikono and Ikpa Ibom with restrictions only to wards three (3) of each of those clans in this order: Ukpum Minya Ward III, Ikpa Ikono Ward III and Ikpa Ibom Ward III in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area using a sample size of 410 respondents, randomly selected from the three (3) political wards and 16 villages were used as sample areas and the population comprises title chiefs, the women, youths and other indigenes, as well as residents of the communities. Data collected from both the primary and secondary sources through the use of questionnaires, books, journals, among others, were presented and analyzed with the help of **descriptive statistics** – simple percentage (%).

Research Questions

1. What are the various strategies employed in carrying out electrification projects in the rural communities toward sustainable Rural Development in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area?
2. What are the most appropriate strategies that could facilitate rural electrification which can lead to sustainable rural development in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

Data Presentation and Interpretation of Results

Data were collected mostly through the use of questionnaires. Copies of the questionnaires were circulated to the people found in the study area of this research.

Analysis of Research Questions 1

What are the various strategies employed in carrying out electrification projects in the rural communities toward sustainable Rural Development in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area?

Table 1: Response Pattern of Research Question1

RESPONSES	UKPUM MINYA WARD III	IKPA IKONO WARD III	IKPA IBOM WARD III	TOTAL	%
Ministry of Rural Development	60	40	35	135	(20.4)
Office of the S. A. to the Governor of power	20	15	30	65	(24.3)
Community leaders	10	12	8	20	(26.9)
Mkpato Enin Youths Association	50	50	30	130	(18.8)
Women Development Association	15	20	15	50	(9.6)
Total	155	137	118	410	(100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

From **Table 1**, above it was observed that factors such as inputs from the Ministry of Rural Development in the state, those collected also from the Office of the Special Assistant to the Governor on Power, Community Leaders, Youths Association in Mkpato Enin as well as the Women Development Association in the Local Government Area served as agents of enhancement to the electrification project executed at Ekim village in Ikpa Ibom Ward III in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

The table shows that, opinions varied according to the source. It was observed that out of the 410 respondents, 135 representing (20.4%) of them insisted that electrification project is the responsibility of government through the Ministry of Rural Development. 30 representing (24.3%) stated that much input about rural electrification also comes from the Office of the Special Assistant to the Governor on Power; while, 20 representing (26.9%) say that government cannot enter any community to carry out any electrification project without seeking the consent of the community leaders; 130 or (18.8%) of the respondents admitted that a successful execution of electrification project in rural areas rests on the involvement of the youths of the area. And, whereas, 50 or (9.6%) of the respondents held that Women Development Association can also play a vital role in the successful implementation of electrification project execution in Ekim village.

Analysis of Research Question 2

What are the most appropriate strategies that could facilitate rural electrification which can lead to sustainable rural development in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Response Pattern of Research Question 2

RESPONSES	UKPUM MINYA WARD III	IKPA IKONO WARD III	IKPA AND WARD III	TOTAL	%
Use of Foreign Contractors	31	23	20	74	(12.3)
Involvement of Government Officials	31	23	24	78	(21.2)
Electrification is to solve local needs	33	41	25	99	(25.2)
Introduction of motivation and incentives	28	30	15	73	(24.2)
Use of Indigenous Contractors	32	20	16	68	(17.1)
Total	155	137	118	410	(100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2 shows that 74 representing 12.3% of the total respondents sued for the use of Foreign Contractors for the electrification project in the rural areas; 78 or 21.2% supported the involvement of Government Officials in the project implementation; 99 or 25.2% argued that electrification solves local needs; and, while the need for the introduction of motivating factors and incentives to all stakeholders of the project was proposed by 73 or 24.2% of the respondents, 68 representing 17.1% argued for the use of Indigenous Contractors for the execution of electrification project in the rural areas.

Discussion of Findings

Despite the anomalies that characterized government interventionist development and electrification projects, government effort at providing sustainable rural development in our rural areas have been very significant. The electrification approach to development is not without some implementation problems. This is because like so many development approaches/programs, it is bedeviled with a lot of pitfalls. Using the qualitative research method, and the findings of this study, most electrification project implementation strategies failed to materialize in the study due to the following factors:

- a) Wrong conceptual design and planning;
- b) Incorrectly specified objectives;
- c) Wrong timing of execution of electrification project which may neither be too short (making it impossible to complete action), nor too long (creating complacency and apathy).
- d) Ineffective planning, monitoring and evaluation of project billed for execution.
- e) From all dimensions, and using available indices such as level of participation, availability of development and electrification mechanism, as well as availability of development projects and programs in the various study areas; the finding of this study therefore confirms a high degree of effective and efficient execution strategies of electrification project in the rural areas.

The present electrification execution strategies will not only sustain development in the rural areas, but will also ensure sustained livelihood of the rural people, if the problems currently bedeviling it may be reduced to the barest minimum.

Conclusion

The instrument of electrification in the rural areas of Akwa Ibom State has been seen as one of the most effective strategies to ensure sustainable rural development in most communities. There are enormous evidences that various mechanism a such as government officials from the Ministry of Rural Development, Special Assistant to the Governor on Power and his team, community leaders, Youths Association as well as Women Development Associations, etc do indeed, play complementary roles in government development efforts such as electrification of rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. Given enormous support and appropriate policy environment, they could fill so many gaps where government agencies have limitations in carrying out similar projects.

It is vividly clear that extended electrification and greater participation of the rural dwellers in government project execution exercise will enhance the satisfying of their own needs through the establishment of self-reliant, self-sustaining small and medium scale businesses in the rural areas which will lead to sustainable rural development of our rural communities.

Recommendations

What is observed in this study is that electrification scheme is still a veritable instrument for rapid and sustainable rural development. Despite this acknowledgement, an adequate strategy for its execution has not yet been put in place. It is observed that government alone cannot address the whole question of rural sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State. In order to have an effective execution or implementation of electrification scheme in rural communities in our state, the following are some of the recommendations that government must follow:

1. Electrification scheme as a major source of development should be people-centered or people-oriented. The rural inhabitants should be given opportunity to be involved in both the planning and implementation of such development project as it meets people's needs directly.
2. Electrification as an important strategy should be given a pride of place by the government if it must improve the living standards of the masses of rural low income earners and the few wealthy ones through the provision of sustainable rural development projects and programs in Nigeria at large, and Akwa Ibom State in particular, with emphasis on Ekim village electrification project in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area of the state.
3. The basic philosophy for electrification of rural areas should be that of self-sustaining, self-reliance and economic offshoot of small and medium scale businesses or entrepreneurs. Therefore, government should endeavor to electrify all rural areas in Akwa Ibom State in order not to only encourage the present industrialization policy of government but to also increase the level of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in the country, especially at this time that all hands are expected to be on deck to improve our nation's economy.
4. Since electrification is intended to solve local needs of the people and society, both the youth and Women Associations should be re-designed and re-organized along an egalitarian line. This will encourage more rural people to identify with the associations, form cooperative societies and share in the benefits that government may bring to the rural people.
5. There should be as much training as possible for local contractors in order for them to measure up with their foreign counterparts. When this is done, and government awards contracts to indigenous contractors that alone will stem the tide of youth restiveness in the rural communities. The youths who often attack foreign contractors in their areas during contract execution will be cautious when they see local contractors; they will calm down because they are sure that the money will not fly away with the foreigners as capital flight but that the money will circulate locally within their economic system.
6. It appears that governments in recent times do not seem to be so much interested in working with the socio-cultural groups of the people. This action may hamper the rapid growth of the rural areas in

Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, there is a strong need for government to make use of the existing rural organizations in the implementation of rural electrification efforts in the communities of their existence.

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