



Global Advanced Research Journal of Management and Business Studies (ISSN: 2315-5086) Vol. 3(12) pp. 529-536, December, 2014  
Available online <http://garj.org/garjmbs/index.htm>  
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## *Full Length Research Paper*

# **Sustainable community development: An insight into the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) community development projects in Abia State**

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Accepted 15 December 2014

**Project sustainability is central in community development efforts. Since independence, successive government has come up with one developmental board/commission or the other as a tool for developing the Niger Delta area. However, it has been observed that these boards or commissions failed to attain the set goals due to their approaches and in coordinated community development activities. Sustainable development has to do with participatory development, human development and environmental protection. The federal government, thus, established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 to address the developmental challenges of the people. Consequently, the research was aimed at examining sustainable community development with reference to the people's perception of NDDC community development projects in Abia State. The purposive sampling was adopted in the study. The sample comprised of 6 communities from 6 LGAs in the state. The Focus Group Discussion and in-depth interviews were the instruments used for data collection. The sample size used in the study was 48 FGD participants and 6 IDI respondents. Data generated for the study were analysed in quotes. The study revealed that the NDDC has executed projects in all the communities under study. Moreover, the successfully executed projects have impacted positively on the quality of lives of the community members. The study further revealed that the participation of the community members in projects execution is low and this has implications in projects sustainability.**

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Perception, Community, Community development, Project

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is central to all community development effort. Without it, investment in the community development efforts are short-lived and of no effect (Nwankwo, 2010). Sustainable development has become highly popularized as a development process. Onah (1995) noted that the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report marks such popularization. According to the report, sustainable development embodies principles, ideas and values seen as desirable and necessary if the world is to deal effectively with current global problems of environment and the process of development. Sustainable development therefore, embodies the notion and idea of development process that is equitable and socially responsive. It also embodies the recognition of the extensive nature of poverty, deprivation and inequality between and within nation's classes and communities. Sneddon (2000) noted that the goal of sustainable development is to find a balance between three pillars - social, economic and environmental - of communities.

Nigeria has witnessed the proliferation of programmes aimed at developing the communities. Ikotun (2002) noted that in spite of the colossal amount of money that have gone into implementing community development programmes and the proliferation of community development agencies one after the other, not much impact has been made. He maintained that in spite of pious official pronouncements, and declaration of intentions as contained in the development plans, as at the end of each plan period community life remained unchanged. Each plan came with new promises and raised hopes that were never fulfilled. Ayida (1987) and Ijere (1992) were of the view that one of the reasons why some of these community development programmes failed to achieve the desired result is the use of directive approach and top-down approach to community development in which a group of government professionals, experts or administrators come together to deliberate on the community needs and decide on projects to be embarked upon without the consent and involvement of the community members. This was evident in many past community development programmes and it greatly reduced the participation of the community members in project execution and also the sustainability of such projects.

According to UNESCO (2005) no meaningful sustainable development can take place without the involvement of professionals in project formulation and implementation. Professionals such as Social Workers must collaborate with community members in project execution. Owing to the deplorable conditions of our communities, the need for social education becomes paramount. This form of education not only aims at

eliminating illiteracy, it also has the major role of accelerating the flow of technical knowledge. Moreover, it motivates communities to adopt and maintain useful practices in agriculture, health and nutrition. Sustenance comes in many shapes. It is expected that designed projects should be collectively maintained and protected, and this is the value that citizen participation implies.

The Niger Delta Area is the bedrock of Nigeria's crude oil. With the emergence of oil as a major resource in the country, the correspondence of the main oil producing areas and the Niger Delta has resulted in the delineation of the region to include Abia, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Imo, Ondo and River States (African Network for Environment and Economic Justice [ANEEJ], 2005). These states can be grouped into the core and peripheral states of the Niger Delta. The core states of the Niger Delta are Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers, while the other states are referred to as peripheral. The oil and gas found in these states had become the stronghold of Nigerian economy (Barrett, 2008).

Government initiatives on how to develop the Niger Delta communities started before Nigerian independence. It was in recognition of the poor state of infrastructures and the harsh terrain of the area that successive governments since independence had established special development agencies for the region (Ibeanu, 2008). The outcome of the Willinks commission in 1958 led to the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) for the area. Thereafter in the 1970s, the government used the River Basin Development Commission (RBDC) as a major tool of community development. The Niger, Delta River Basin Development Authority was established in 1976 as one of the River Basin Commissions across the country. Subsequent efforts have included the special fund created by the 1981 Revenue Act for Oil Producing Areas and the presidential task force for the development of oil producing areas that was created in 1989. In the same vein, 1992 saw the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) as an intervention strategy. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) finally came on board in 2000. The commission which derives its fund from 15% of allocations due to member states from the federation account; 3% of total annual budget of any oil producing company operating on shore and off shore in the Niger Delta area; and 50% of monies due to member states from the Ecological Fund started operation in January, 2001 (NDDC Act, 2001). The NDDC embark on community development projects that enhance the quality of life the people. The projects include road, agriculture, health, water, education and electricity among others (Dafinone, 2007).

The NDDC master plan which was designed by Gesellschaft Fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) of Germany and patterned after Alaska and Alberta plans respectively in the United States of America (USA) and Canada was scheduled for implementation in different phases. It is based on three 5 – year phases, namely: the foundation phase (2006 – 2010); the expansion phase (2011 – 2015); and the consolidation phase (2016 – 2020) (African Research Bulletin, 2007, Barrett, 2008). There were high hopes of accelerated community development at the inception of the NDDC in 2001 due to the huge financial resources that was made available. The commission was seen as a panacea to development in the Niger Delta region. However, the assessment of the performance of the commission in addressing the developmental challenges of the area can only be made by the people themselves.

Sustainability is a critical challenge for all development agencies. It is not possible to claim lasting impact in terms of community poverty reduction without ensuring this aspect of development (IFAD, 2008). Honadle and VanSant (1985) see sustainability as the continuation of benefit flows to community people with or without the programmes or organizations that stimulated those benefits in the first place. Omoyibo (1988) identified the three important aspects of development to include raising the people's living level; creating conditions conducive to growth of people's self-esteem; and increasing the people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables. Most communities in the Niger Delta area live in squalor and majority of them are fishermen and subsistent farmers who lack modern technology. The level of education and income seem to be very low (Dafinone, 2008). It therefore, becomes imperative to embark on sustainable projects to enhance the quality of life of the people.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1970) in the second National Development Plan 1970-74 outlined its objectives to include: the sustenance of self-help community development; to foster development in the rural areas; and to co-ordinate what was described inarticulate self-help community development effort. The third National Development Plan 1975-80 promised financial and technical assistance to communities that embark on meaningful projects for the upliftment of the quality of life of the members. Thus, government personnel were sent to communities to help in their development. However, the excesses of some of these government personnel and community development practitioners through the use of directive approach to community development prevented the members of the communities from taking decisions on how to ameliorate their problems. Instead of allowing the people to decide, the external agency or community development practitioner often acted as the ultimate judge for the people thus, relegating to the background the traditional

structures (Oduaran, 1994). The people were denied the opportunity of active involvement in decision - making processes on issues that affect them. Involving the people in decision-making processes makes them to look inward and rely on their own efforts in the process of development and see outside assistance as supplementary and not as a replacement of popular initiative or local efforts. However, denial from decision-making processes exposes the community to external resources that may lead to loss of independence.

Nonetheless, the extent to which the activities and performance of the NDDC is assessed by the members of the communities in the Niger Delta region need to be examined. This study therefore, examined sustainable community development: the people's perception of NDDC community development projects in Abia State.

### **Theorizing sustainability**

#### **The concept of sustainability in community development**

Sustainable development emphasizes man's ability to survive through the use of rational control of renewable resources without disrupting the ecosystem or without destroying the human and societal cultures through over exploitation of natural resources and corruption. The resources should be allowed to mature and rejuvenate themselves for posterity (Ballara, 1991).

Hsueh and Yan (2011) observed that Sustainable Community Development (SCD) aims to integrate economic, social and environment objectives in community development. SCD is based on a consideration of the relationships between economic factors and other community elements such as housing, education, the natural environment, health accessibility and the arts. SCD has emerged as a compelling alternative to conventional approaches to development. It is a participatory, holistic and inclusive process that leads to positive, concrete changes in communities by creating employment, reducing poverty, restoring the health of the natural environment, stabilizing local economies and increasing community control.

IFAD strategic framework 2007–2010 (IFAD, 2007) defined sustainability as ensuring that the institutions supported through projects and the benefits realized are maintained and continue after the end of the project. IFAD's office of Evaluation adds to this definition by considering resource flows. It acknowledges that assessment of sustainability entails determining whether the result of the project will be sustained in the medium or even longer term without continued external assistance. It therefore expands on the concept of programme sustainability by distinguishing among several factors that either contribute or detract from the long- term impact of

IFAD interventions (IFAD, 2006a):

- Political Sustainability – government commitment, an enabling policy environment, stakeholder interest, strong lobby groups and political influence/ pressure;
- Social Sustainability – social support and acceptability, community competence, social cohesion.
- Ownership – whether or not communities, local government and households accept and own the outcomes of the projects in ways that are sustainable;
- Institutional Sustainability – institutional support, policy implementation, staffing, recurrent budgets;
- Economic and Financial Sustainability – resilience to economic shocks, financial viability, reduced household vulnerability and increased capacity to cope with risks/ shocks;
- Technical Sustainability – technical soundness, appropriate solutions, technical training for operations and maintenance, access to and cost of spare parts and repairs;
- Environmental Sustainability – projects' positive/negative contributions to soil and water preservation and management, resilience to external environmental shocks.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (2003) observed that sustainability in community development implies the development that enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which the people and economies depend on. Sustainable community development strives for improved public health and a better quality of life for all its residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation and promoting efficiency and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy (Don and Kutzmark, 2006). Jepson (2007) maintained that sustainable development is premised on continuing; and at the local level; it is about residents looking ahead not just twenty years, but a hundred years or more and finding their community still striving.

Sustainable development firstly appeared in international document in 1980 by the World Wildlife fund with the support of the "World Conservation Framework", originally used in forestry and fisheries. In 1987, after 4 years of the study, the World Commission on Environment and Development, presented to the United Nations General Assembly the long report "Our Common Future", proposed a formal model of sustainable development. Sustainable development is primarily initiated from the perspective of environmental protection to maintain the progress and development of human society. It includes the demand for contemporary and future generations, national sovereignty, international equity, natural resources, ecological carrying capacity, the combination of environment and development and other important content (Lijing, Yonghong and Yanli,

2011).

It calls on people to pay attention to protecting and improving the ecological environment along with production increase and emphasized on the following three aspects: Firstly, emphasize on development. Development is the goal; it is the basic premise to meet needs of human beings. Secondly, emphasize on coordination. It is the goal and objectives of economic growth, environmental protection must coordinate together. Finally, emphasize on fairness. It is necessary to reflect the fair distribution of material wealth on contemporary use of natural resources but also reflects the present and future generations' intergenerational equity; different countries, different religions and different groups of people should strive to be fair. Sustainable development requires minimizing resource consumption, to create a relaxed environment for future generations (Lijing, Yonghong and Yanli, 2011).

#### *Effects of sustainability in community development*

Sustainable development is the harmonization of two forces, which are environmental pressure and economic growth. The approach of environmental protection for sustainable development is to achieve environmental and economic benefits which is the trinity complex system engineering; it contains scientific and technological capabilities, government regulation and control behavior, public participation (Lijing, Yonghong and Yanli, 2011).

Sustainable development brings about a lasting improvement in the quality of life of the community members (Ulluwishewa, 1993). Don and Kutzmark (2006) noted that sustainable development can enhance a sense of place, reduce crime, mitigate natural hazards, conserve energy and resources, preserve culture and heritage, improve traffic circulation and reduce waste. It can attract more viable economic development as competition among communities for high quality business becomes more intense and it can help to relate and integrate the many components of a community to achieve a synergistic whole. Bridger and Luloff (1997) further observed that sustainable communities meet the economic needs of their residents, enhance and protect the environment and promote more humane local societies. Sustainable community development emphasizes on a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives, while simultaneously enhancing local relationships.

## **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out in Abia State. Abia State is in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study population covered the entire Abia State. The state has a total population of two million, eight hundred and thirty three thousand nine hundred and ninety nine (2,833,999)

people (National Population Commission, 2006). However, the target population for the study was adults of 18 years and above. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in the study. The researcher purposively selected areas that have benefited from the NDDC community development projects. This included urban/semi-urban and rural communities from the three (3) senatorial zones in the state. Two (2) LGAs were purposively selected from each of the senatorial zones. This brought the total number of LGAs for the study to six (6). In all, three urban/semi-urban and three rural LGAs were selected. One community was purposively selected from each of the 6 LGAs for the study and this brought the total to 6 communities. The instruments for the data collection were the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and the In-depth interviews (IDIs). The FGDs and IDIs served as the instruments for the qualitative data collection. There were six (6) FGD sessions and each of the session was made up of eight (8) members. Three of the sessions were for male members, while the remaining three were for female members. For each of the senatorial zones, there were male and female FGD sessions. For the IDIs, 6 interview sessions were conducted in 6 communities. The data collection was done with six (6) research assistants that were recruited and trained by the researcher on the objectives of the study, interviewing guidelines and other relevant knowledge they required.

Information from the qualitative data was transcribed and ordered in themes to ensure that outstanding points of the responses are noted. Concepts with contextual or special connotations were pulled out as illustration quotes.

## RESULTS

### Respondents' knowledge of NDDC community development projects

During the FGD sessions, the respondents were asked of their knowledge and the type of projects embarked by the NDDC communities. One participant had this to say:

....in this community, the NDDC projects include water bore hole, health centre, school, water reservoir, roads and solar electrification. [Male trader; Ohuhu].

Another confirmed:

The NDDC projects in our community include transport scheme (buses), refuse disposal (waste bins), skill acquisition programmes, school and road [Female trader; Osusu].

And yet another noted:

...projects embarked upon by the NDDC in Oloko community are cottage hospital, electricity, road and

school [House wife; Oloko].

### Place of residence and the number of NDDC projects

During the FGD one of the participants affirmed:

Yes, NDDC completed projects in my area Osusu in Aba North LGA are road, school, transport scheme (buses) and refuse disposal bins. But the truth is that most of the refuse disposal bins are no longer in use. There is no attempt by the NDDC to replace them [Female trader; Osusu].

Another revealed:

.....completed NDDC projects in Ohuhu, Umuahia North LGA include solar energy electricity, electricity transformers, classroom blocks, mobile health clinics and the bridge across the Imo River [Male trader; Ohuhu].

### Community involvement in project execution

When the FGD participants were asked who decides on projects to be embarked upon by the NDDC, one revealed:

We are not part of any form of decision making on NDDC projects. Often they just come into the community to commence a project and since the project is for the good of the community we support them [Female trader; Oloko].

Another said:

NDDC project is government project. The staff are government agents. The problem with them is that they do not involve the community in deciding on projects to be executed. NDDC project is a free gift and so we cannot reject it [Female civil servant; Okagwe].

### Level of involvement of community members in decision-making processes of NDDC projects

The FGD and IDI corroborated this result as participants gave their opinions. One FGD participant stressed that: Hmmm to say the truth, the NDDC does not involve us in decision-making processes on community development projects. They solely decide on projects and send their contractors to execute them. Perhaps, they do not need our input in decision-making processes. I cannot say the level is low because we are not involved at all [Male trader; Ohanku].

Another revealed:

No! No! No! We are not involved in any form of decision-making concerning NDDC projects in our community.

Maybe the decision-making is between the NDDC and the government. There is no form of consultation between the NDDC and the community members on projects [Male Cabinet member, Ozuitem].

One participant from the IDI said:

Our participation is zero when it comes to decision-making on NDDC projects. In fact our level of involvement is zero. Sometimes, we only know of the projects when the contractors come to us to inform us that so so so and so project has been awarded to them. There is no form of consultation with the community members. They take whatever decision they like. For example, in a 10 kilometres road they may decide to construct 2 kilometres and leave the rest [Community leader, Ohuhu].

### **Impacts of NDDC community development projects**

To assess the impacts of the projects on the community members, the respondents were asked during the FGD's sessions whether the projects have helped in improving the quality of lives of the community members. They were also asked to comment on the ways it has helped and the projects that impacted most. One participant narrated:

I must say, it is a big relief to us. With the NDDC projects we can feel government presence in our community. For us, it would have been difficult task to execute the projects because we lack the resources. We are very happy for the executed projects because all of us are benefiting from them [Male trader; Ohuhu].

Another revealed:

NDDC projects are not the same in every community. However, I am happy about their projects because we are deriving some benefits from them. It has made life more meaningful to us and we urge them to do more [Housewife; Oloko].

Another said:

The projects are free gift from the government. It has given us a sense of belonging. I am sure by the time the on-going projects are completed, we will be a happy people and most of our problems will cease to be. So far, I can say we are feeling the impact of the projects. Yes, we can only feel the full impact when the on-going projects are completed [Male farmer; Ohanku].

Moreover, from the FGDs, it was found that the NDDC projects have helped in improving the quality of lives of the people in a number of ways. One participant had this to say:

Yes, I appreciate the fact that some of our unemployed youth are now into transport business. This was made possible through the NDDC transport scheme. Through

the scheme, the beneficiary is given a bus or a car with the inscription NDDC and is made to remit a certain amount of money for a stipulated period of time after which he becomes the owner of the vehicle. If they can continue this way, many unemployed persons in this community will get something doing and crime will reduce [Female trader; Osusu].

Another said:

To me, it has improved education. The children now learn under conducive environment. Parents are now relieved of the burden of raising fund for the purchase of pupils desks. NDDC has now provided desks to our pupils. The site for the 6 classroom blocks at Okagwe Central School was very bushy and often there were reported cases of snake bites but now everywhere has been cleared. Moreover, before now, it was only age grades that execute projects for the community, but now, NDDC has emerged as a formidable force to reckon with in community development [Female civil servant; Okagwe].

Another was of the opinion that:

Of course, I know the NDDC mobile health clinics have provided medication to members of our community. Their Doctors and nurses prescribe and administer drugs to patients free of charge. In addition, the refuse disposal bins have helped a lot. Most people now walk straight to the waste disposal bins with inscription NDDC to dispose their waste [Female trader; Osusu].

Data from IDI sessions further corroborated with that of the FGDs as the participants gave their opinions. One of the leaders revealed:

I know the projects have improved road network, enhanced trade and reduced crime rate. Today, we can easily trade with our neighbours. In the past our people lost their lives and goods as a result of boat mishap in an attempt to cross the Imo River. "Taa anyi nwere ike iwubi mmiri Imo" (today we can cross the Imo river) through the NDDC bridge. In addition, people are no longer afraid to move about in the night because of the solar light that is provided by NDDC along the streets [Community leader; Osusu].

Another confirmed:

All I can say for now is that our agriculture will improve and our relationship with our neighbours will improve when the road is completed. The Arua road that is currently under construction will be a short cut to Amaeke Abam. It will help our farmers to evacuate their products from the farm thereby reducing the cost of farm products [Community leader; Ozuitem].

From the FGDs and IDIs it was found that the

respondents were aware of the projects that impacted most in the quality of lives of the people. They enumerated such projects to include road, electricity, bridge, health centre and school among others.

One FGD participant stated:

I can convincingly say that all the NDDC projects in our community have impacted positively in the quality of lives of our people. However, those that have impacted most are link roads, bridge, mobile health clinics and solar electricity. One of our greatest problems was how to cross the Imo River but today, that is a thing of the past [Male trader; Ohuhu].

A community leader also said:

I know NDDC projects in our community are few but of all the projects, the one that has impacted most is the 6 classroom block at Central School. The school was a great burden to the community and internal arrangements were made to assign the school project to two age grade associations because of the huge sum of money involved. Thanks to the NDDC. They not only constructed the building but also finished the classrooms and offices with desks, tables and other office equipments. This is a big relief to us [Community leader; Okagwe].

Another also said:

I know about the electricity project as the NDDC project that has impacted most in my community. Perhaps it is because it is the only successfully executed project. Others like road, cottage hospital etc are still on-going [Community leader; Oloko].

### **Sustenance of NDDC community development projects by community members**

There is evidence from the FGDs and IDIs that community members find it difficult to sustain NDDC projects. People from communities where there are abandoned projects generally reported that such projects have not made any positive impact on the quality of lives of the people.

One man thus reflects:

..... None of the overhead water tanks is functioning in this community. All the NDDC water projects in our community have been abandoned. In fact, water has always been our major problem and so when they came, we thought our problems were over. For now, the Imo River tributaries are our major source of water [Male trader, Ohuhu].

Another said:

NDDC projects do not address the felt needs of our community. They are merely duplicating the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) projects by embarking on

school projects. I think they should involve us and address our felt needs [Male farmer, Ohanku].

### **CONCLUSION**

The study findings were consistent with the findings of previous researchers who found that citizen participation is crucial in sustainable community development (Holden, Roseland, Ferguson and Perl, 2008; Saleh, 2004; Wild and Marshall, 1999). These researchers further observed that increase in civic engagement by more effective participatory conditions for sustainable decision-making process at the local level is one of the ways to promote the success of sustainability.

Community development advocates for participatory approaches in sustainability as protection of natural and local values as well as executed projects cannot be managed solely by the government. The involvement of the local people in project execution gives them a sense of ownership of the projects and enhances capacity, learning and interaction of the community members. Participation is all about self-help for when there is active participation of the people in their own affairs, they are helping themselves. Citizen participation creates room for capacity building and empowerment which are the best means to achieve sustainable community development.

The involvement of NDDC as a government agency in community development stands out as an important effort in our present day democracy and has contributed to the transformation of urban and rural communities. Although the aim of NDDC has been to help in the development of the Niger Delta communities by executing projects, the study revealed that the projects have created limited effects on the community members. The projects are not fully recognized and appropriated by community members because of lack of information and non involvement of the people. The panacea to sustainable development is anchored on the establishment of community involvement.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Most NNDC projects have failed to address the felt needs of the benefiting communities. It is therefore, recommended that the NDDC should seek for the felt needs of the communities and embarks on projects that will address them. A project that addresses the felt needs of the people has the tendency to impact meaningfully on their quality of lives.
2. The NDDC should ensure effective monitoring of community development projects from the inception to the completion. The reason for this recommendation is

that if the contractors are effectively monitored, the problems of project abandonment and inferior projects will be curtailed.

3. It is also the recommendation of this study that the benefiting community should be involved in all aspects of the projects. This implies that the community should be involved in the project selection, planning, implementation and evaluation. This development will make them to see the project as “our project” and not “their project”. In addition, it will enhance the sustainability of the projects.

4. Efforts should be made to ensure that no community is marginalized. The NDDC projects should be distributed among the communities in the local government areas of the State. The issue of locating four or more projects in a particular community at the expense of others should be stopped.

5. Efforts should be made to create awareness of social workers and their roles in community development. Workshops/seminars should be organized in communities to inform the members about social workers. Moreover, the mass media should see it as a duty to inform community members of the services offered by social workers.

6. Much study has not been done on the sustainability of community development projects executed by governmental agencies. It is therefore, recommended that further research be carried out on the sustainability of community development projects executed by other governmental agencies for comparative and analytical purposes.

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