

An Appraisal of the Role of Community Development Committees (CDCs) in Rural Communities

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Abstract: Rural development is a process whereby people who reside and work outside the urban areas are made to function without lowering their honour or quality of living. Activities and persons who are to make this possible must be seen to be determined, transparent and knowledgeable. Community Development Committees (CDCs) should be prepared in all ramifications to bring about rural development. There are functions lined out for them which many CDCs seem not to know or have abandoned. The chiefs should help their communities to make peace. Members of CDCs should have the interest of their community at heart as it is seen to be happening at Abonnema. This paper critically examined the role of CDCs and also observed works they do. It is important that accountability should be taken seriously by the members; while proper monitoring and funding by the Local Government Areas.

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1. Introduction

The desire to have good quality living is usually very high in every human being, be they urban or rural dwellers. People generally require decent surroundings, pollution-free environments, as well access to utilities and facilities to be happy. The entire world was said to have become 'urban' in 2009, but Nigeria still has a predominance of rural settlements, not out of choice, but of the difficulty of transforming the rural areas to better living places. The effort to continue and probably achieve 'urban status' as a country motivated the setting of the body known as COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (CDC) within communities. But the problem of rural - Urban migration continues unabated.

The understanding was that if the rural areas can hold their own then the urge to move out of the rural areas would be stemmed. The mass exodus of people out of the rural areas rubs the state, the country, and society generally of the potentials in fully harnessing available natural resources in the suburbs. The continued dependence on crude oil remains non-diversified; meanwhile many rural areas possess large deposits of minerals, forests, economic trees etc that can be harnessed for the benefit of all.

In the process of carrying out this work, interviews were conducted on serving and past members of the CDC in Abonnema (Akuku Toru Local Government Area - ASALGA), Amadiama (Port Harcourt City Local Government Area - PHALGA), and Omoku (Ogba Egbema Ndoni Local

Government Area - ONELGA). Published materials were sought and received from the communities, and from individuals. The last of interviews were done also in ONELGA. Visits were made to some of the sites/projects claimed to have been executed by the CDC members. The presence of CDC in our communities does not seem to have produced any meaningful transformation of the various communities. Neither has it been seen that in the near future the hope of rural dwellers will come to pass. In some communities the CDC is a source of acrimony either by the process it was constituted or by its membership make up or by the desire to perpetuate themselves as leaders.

In Amadiama community in Port Harcourt a group of past leaders (a batch of CDC) were said to have framed up and arrested their successors on false charges which the Police was able to debunk and had the people freed. At other times, specifically in Omoku, some members of a preceding CDC group were taken to the Police cm unit also on trumped up charges; not only that, at different times Court Sessions (cases instituted for hearing) have held to resolve disputes between interested parties on CDC matters.

Some persons appointed to CDC in some communities are unaware of a legal backing to their appointment. They are also unaware of any guiding operating principles. In some communities CDC receives some measure of funding while in others no funds are received. In some Local Government Areas

(LGA) there is a healthy synergy between the CDC and the LGA and in others there is none. The issues continue non-stop, and the ultimate loser is the local area of the communities.

1.1 Rural Development

Rural development is a process of not only increasing the level of per capital income in the rural sector, but also the standard of living of the rural population. The evolution of rural development institution is a continuous process reflecting the policies, strategies and level of rural development in specific societies. One major strategy that has been adopted in rural development in many under developed countries is community development. There are different definitions of community development by many writers but in all, they emphasize, the fact; that is the movement of the people designed to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation of, and possibly on the initiative of the community concerned. Community development entails that the people themselves exert their own efforts, joining with government authorities to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions.

1.2 History and Operations of CDCS

According the handbook on Community Development Committee (CDC) in Rivers State, 2014, published by the Rivers State Ministry of Chieftaincy and Community Affairs, "The idea to document Community Development practice was muted originally at the national level when Directors of Community Development Departments in the country met in Lagos on and 21st March, 1990" The same document holds that "In the past organ responsible for organizing rural development through self-help projects consisted of the Local Government, rural development inspectors and workers in the out-station who trained Community dwellers and also inspected and supervised projects. Within each was a "Planning Committee" made up of members of the community to initiate the community projects and mobilise the people for their execution.

It further holds that "this was the structure until the 1980s when a new concept was evolved, which gave birth to Community Development Committee (CDCs) in the state... and the publication of a handbook on Community Development Committee in 1986". Specifically Community Development Committee's (CDCs) were said to be legalized by Decree 4 of 1984. CDCs as they are were principally planned for individual communities, who have supervisory arms at the Local Government level with the name "Community Development Co-ordinating Committee, and another body at the state level with the name Community Development Council, while at the national level there is the 'National Community

Development Council in Nigeria (NCDCN). These bodies all have specific functions related and directed at the local or rural areas from their various levels and sphere of jurisdiction. The Community Development Committee "is the only recognizable body for the coordination of development in each community". Their membership is drawn from families/compounds, improvement unions, development associations, age groups, and women and youth organizations. Each of these bodies would be represented by one person each. There would be a total of not less than 15 persons and not more than 30 persons constituting one CDC. The Community Development Committee of each community shall have the following officers: chairman, vice chairman, secretary, assistant secretary, public relations officer, financial secretary, treasurer, and internal auditor. The tenure of each CDC is two years with the opportunity for re-elections in not more three instances.

1.3 Functions of Community Development Committees (CDCs)

The statutory functions of CDCs, as enunciated in the handbook are the following:

1. To encourage and initiate self-help projects.
2. To organize community members and guide execution of projects to improve the social, economic and cultural conditions of the community.
3. To submit proposals needing financial and technical assistance to the Local Government.
4. To maintain proper accounts and records on self-help efforts and submit periodical evaluation reports as prescribed by the competent authority.
5. To undertake such other responsibilities and duties as necessary for the successful implementation of the community development programmes.
6. Community development committee should meet regularly, at least once a month.

1.4 Community Development Committee in Abonema

Community Development Committee (C.D.C) stated over 20 years ago in Abonema. In the beginning of the formation there was conflicting interest between the community development committee (C.D.C) and Nyemoni Improvement and Society (NIS) in the aspect of functions but this was resolved in no time. The first chairman of the Committee Development Committee of Abonema (Nyemoni) was T.S.D. Sukuye. Presently the C.D.C Chairman is Mr. Gabriel Sobio, however there had been two past chairmen in-between these.

The committee is saddled with various responsibilities. It inter-faces with government and other organizations to attract physical and manpower or human capital development. Also they study and understand the nature and scope of various developmental projects and to ensure that all projects

meet the necessary specifications. However, some project come directly from the developers (Politicians or highly placed persons in the society). Such projects are mostly constituency project or free will projects or developments. Yet the committee still tries to interface with the contractor to ascertain the scope of such project, but most of the time the effort is abortive.

1.5 Projects and Developments

Various leaders of the committee put in effort to attract development to the community. Under the leadership of Mr. Minaibim Dagogo Jack his committee inter-faced with SPDC to attract some developmental project; like cold room, micro finance and computer center. Under the present leadership of Mr. Gabriel Sobio the committee is still in the business of interfacing with government and other organization for development. One of the efforts has brought in the presence of the international committee of Red Cross Society of Geneva, carryout certificate training programme, training about 30 persons in the community and the training attracted the donation of two bags of first Aid to the Community through the C.D.C. and the present C.D.C as also attracted the presence of EU' NDDSP (European Union, Niger Delta development supportive programme), the interface has attracted water project and this project will be carried out through counterpart funding; 5% from the CDC (i.e. Community), 10% from the local government council, 15% from the state government, and 70% from the EU' NDDSP.

The CDC is funded in this kind of project through the community, (Abonnema Council of Chiefs). When the EU'NDDSP Water project is carried out and completed it will attract the formation of an association called W.C.A. (Water Consumers Association), and this association will manage the project to ensure proper maintenance of the facility. The committee has also attracted some scholarship for students both in secondary and tertiary institutions. Abonnema an indigenous society, has organization or association that always sees to the development and well been of the community. Some of the organization or society are; the Nyemoni Improvement Society (NIS), Minapu-Obgo of Abonnema, Lulu Briggs Foundation and Abonnema Patriots etc.

The NIS is like the mother body of the societies or organizations, when it comes to the development and well-being of the community. Some organizations and persons contribute to the development of projects during Development-Day on every June 21st The NIS undertakes various project through the funds raised at such occasions. Some of such projects are; the building of the Abonnema Town Hall, construction of the Comprehensive Secondary School (CSS) Abonnema. To further attract more development the

NIS also founded another body called Abonnema Development Organization (A.D.O). Since Abonnema is the widely known name of the community, than Nyemon, the native name.

1.6 Other Communities

In the other communities included in our study it was seen that the work of the CDCs revolved around liaising with the companies operating around them and making those be the ones who sponsor whatever project the community or CDC was interested in. In some communities the companies were made to award scholarships to students. Those who did not have students sold out the opportunity and utilised the proceeds for food and other necessities. This was seen to be contrary to the laid objectives of the CDCs. In some other places such projects as building of culverts, drainages, renovation of community town halls and building of mini town halls were embarked.

Some communities used the presence of the CDC to achieve the installation of electricity transformers, while others had water projects executed for them. In other communities a whole tenure of a CDC body would be spent pursuing cases in courts, and people or other members being arrested for flimsy reasons. These were seen to have roots in villages where the leaders had a different aim from that of community development. Amongst these groups of communities were those who would not have a functional CDC for several years. At such times the little self-help efforts that would benefit the people is lost to acrimony.

1.7 Recommendations

1. The Community Development Committee's should be fund by the Local Government Councils, as this will provide Opportunity for proper monitoring.
2. All the supervisory bodies for CDCs should be made to function effectively.
3. Nomination and formation of CDCs should not be left in the hands of one chief, but a committee of chiefs. They should confirm the nominations only.
4. There should be proper auditing of CDC accounts.
5. The choice of projects for execution should remain as in the statute books and followed strictly.
6. All those to serve in any CDC should properly possess a copy of the handbook from the ministry for proper guidance.
7. There should be formal remuneration/wages for CDC members. This will curb the incidence of reduced interest, and corruption.
8. There should be proper training for CDC members on what rural development is.

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