

## Enhancing rural living conditions through active participation in self-help activities: Insights from Kwara State, Nigeria

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In many regions, self-help initiatives serve as crucial supplements to government development strategies, enabling individuals to take charge of their own progress. This research focuses on assessing the involvement and benefits of rural inhabitants in self-help endeavors, aimed at enhancing their living standards in Kwara State, Nigeria. Using an interview schedule, data was collected from 140 respondents, and analyzed employing various statistical methods including frequency, percentages, mean scores, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that the participants were most actively engaged in fostering peaceful co-existence through voluntary efforts (average score,  $\bar{x}=3.59$ ), organizing fundraising events ( $\bar{x}=3.57$ ), and making financial contributions ( $\bar{x}=3.47$ ). Moreover, the primary perceived benefits of participating in these self-help initiatives included the reduction of poverty ( $\bar{x}=2.80$ ), improved decision-making processes ( $\bar{x}=2.58$ ), and the promotion of social solidarity ( $\bar{x}=2.55$ ). Regression analysis further demonstrated that household income and level of education significantly influenced the participants' involvement in self-help projects, with statistical significance at the  $p<0.05$  level. Consequently, the study concludes that the rural population in Kwara State primarily engages in self-help activities to promote peaceful co-existence and has made significant strides in alleviating poverty in the region. To enhance the efficacy of self-help projects, the study recommends an increase in government support and the implementation of policies to regulate the inflation of essential materials required for such initiatives in rural communities.

**Keywords:** Self-help initiatives, rural inhabitants, alleviating poverty, social solidarity, financial contribution, voluntary effort, peaceful co-existence.

### INTRODUCTION

Rural areas in Nigeria often lack essential amenities. Rural communities are deprived of health care facility, school, electricity and other physical infrastructures needed for quality living (Aguene, 2022), necessitating self-help initiatives. Self-help activities have historically been crucial for community development, enabling the provision of necessary infrastructure and facilities in African society prior to the administration colonial masters. Self-help involved the gathering of community people in groups to proffer solution affecting members of the community. In the same manner, rural people in their locality still organized themselves in various groups to utilize community resources in providing for themselves the needed physical, social and institutional facilities that are functional (Lawal-Adebowale, 2021). For instance, study had reported the construction of rural

homesteads, roads, market, king palace and town hall through functional communal labour (Audu, Ahmed and Lawan, 2021). Self-help could be an individuals or group who provide support for community development projects or the provision for the improvement of oneself (Ukah, Akor and Ngozi, 2020).

The pursuits of self-help projects in Nigeria are basically to alleviate poverty and meeting the basic amenities. Thus, functional self-help programmes targeted at developing rural areas in Nigeria are capable to accelerates the pace of developing the rural communities by providing material and social infrastructures like drinkable water, electricity, health centre, educational institutions, job opportunities and feeder roads in order to improve the standard of living of rural dwellers (Sanchi, Alhassan, Sabo and Hamid, 2021).

The main advantage of self-help community projects is that it ensures sustainability through effective participation of

community members. Because of their contributions to the projects, community members tend to own the projects, maintain and secure it against any intruder. Thus, the implementation of community development programmes from government without the participation of the rural dwellers in the planning and execution may not be sustained as such project may not address the real needs of the rural dwellers (Tyagi, Vishwakarma, Yadav, Stanislavovich, 2021). Regrettably, observations revealed that rural communities in Kwara State lack sustainable development (Adesiji *et al.*, 2014). That is why Agueue (2022) stressed that most of the rural development projects failed because of being abandoned or even unused after completion, faulty goal specification, fraud, inadequate funding that are of low budget provision and untimely release of fund. In the same vein, majority of the projects implemented in the rural areas were done without the consents key community stakeholders and participation of community members (Ogar, Augustine, Sam, 2023). Consequently, most past efforts to develop the rural areas in Nigeria failed due to appropriate consultation and participation of potential beneficiaries. This factor contributes underdevelopment of rural communities where majority of farmers that feed the nation reside (Sanchi *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the success of these projects depends on active community involvement and proper implementation. Inadequate consultation and participation of community members in developmental projects often lead to their failure. This study aims to address the existing knowledge gap regarding rural dwellers' participation in self-help activities in Kwara State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to: (i) determine rural dwellers' participation in self-help activities, (ii) investigate rural dwellers' perceived benefits of self-help activities, and identify constraints affecting community self-help projects in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study hypothesized that socio-economic characteristics do not significantly influence participation in self-help projects.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was conducted in Kwara State, Nigeria, focusing on Ifelodun and Irepodun Local Government Areas (LGAs). The state lies between latitudes 7° 45' N and 9° 30' N of the equator. A three-stage sampling technique was used to select 140 respondents from ten rural communities known for their self-help projects. The first stage was purposive selection of the two LGAs (Ifelodun and Irepodun) premised on the fact that community self-help projects is popular in these two LGAs. The second stage was purposive selection of five rural communities in each of the two LGAs with history of community self-help projects over the past decades. Thus, ten rural communities were selected for the study. Finally, from these ten communities, 147 Community Development Association members were proportionately selected using Krejcie and Morgan sampling techniques from all the 167

registered members engaged in self-help projects. Thus, a total of 147 respondents were selected for the study using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sampling of Respondents**

LGA	Community	Total population of community development association members	Sample size determination using Krejcie and Morgan
Ifelodun	Idofian	18	14
	Layaju	16	14
	Oko-Ode	28	24
	Bayagan	10	10
	Igbo Owu	15	14
Irepodun	Omu Aran	20	19
	Iludun	11	14
	Olomi	17	14
	Agbamu	19	14
	Oko	13	10
Total	10	167	147

Source: Authors' compilation, 2022

Data were collected using a structured interview schedule. Participation of rural dwellers in the implementation of self-help projects was measured on a four point Likert-type scale: always participated, sometimes participated, rarely participated and never participated and scored as 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively. Perceived benefit of participation in self-help projects was measured on a 3 Likert-type scale: high benefit, moderate benefit, and low benefit with score 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Data analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression. The model according to Bolarin *et al.* (2022) is specified as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5 + \dots + e_i \dots \dots \dots \text{(Equation 1)}$$

Where, Y= Participation in self-help projects; X = Independent variables (X<sub>1</sub> = Age in years; X<sub>2</sub> = sex- dummy male=1, otherwise 0; X<sub>3</sub> = Membership of association-yes=1, no= 0; X<sub>4</sub> = Education (in years of schooling; X<sub>5</sub> = household Income (in naira). e<sub>i</sub> = Error term

**RESULTS**

**Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents:** As shown in Table 2, majority (73.5%) of the respondents was males and the remaining 26.5% were females while the mean age of the respondents was 39.23 years. Most (63.9%) of the respondents were married and average number of years spent in school was 11years. Regarding occupation of the respondents (34.0%) of the respondents were farmers while few (1.5%) of them engaged in other occupation. The occupation of the community members may determine their level of wealth and hence ability to contribute fund to implement self-help projects. Many (66.7%) of the respondents affirmed that they belonged to the community



development association. Many (63.9%) of the respondents have resided in the community for 21-30 years while the average duration of residence was 22.95 years and an average household income of ₦5486.39 equivalent to \$13.8 as at the time of this study.

**Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=147).**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age (years)			
18 – 25	14	9.53	39.23
26 – 35	25	17.00	
36 – 45	75	51.02	
> 45	33	22.45	
Sex of respondents			
Male	108	73.50	
Female	39	26.50	
Number of years Spent in schooling			
1 – 5	24	16.33	11.20
6 – 10	35	23.81	
11 -15	58	39.46	
> 15	30	20.41	
Duration of Residence			
1-10	9	6.10	22.95
11 – 20	33	22.40	
21 – 30	94	63.90	
31 above	11	7.50	
Membership of Community Development Association			
Yes	98	66.67	
No	49	33.33	
Annual Income			
10,000 – 100,000	28	19.04	5486.39
101,000 – 200,000	35	23.81	
201,000 -300,000	58	39.46	
>300,000	26	17.68	

Source: Field Survey, 2022

**Participation of rural dwellers in the implementation of self-help projects:** Results in Table 3 present the participation level of rural dwellers in the implementation of self-help projects. These include organization of volunteering to make peace and harmonious co-existence ( $\bar{x}$ =3.59) ranked first. The second ranked participation was by fund raising ( $\bar{x}$ =3.57) while financial contribution ( $\bar{x}$ =3.47) ranked third. Others areas of participation as indicated in Table 3 include: volunteering of ideas/information ( $\bar{x}$ =3.17) ranked fourth, sourcing of material resources ( $\bar{x}$ =3.12) ranked fifth, sharing of experience ( $\bar{x}$ =2.87) ranked sixth, participation in project evaluation ( $\bar{x}$ =2.72) ranked eight while the least was volunteering of skills/expertise ( $\bar{x}$ =2.60) ranked ninth position.

**Rural dwellers’ perceived benefits of self-help activities:** Table 4 revealed rural dweller’s perception of benefits of self-help activities. The table showed that rural communities derived benefits in self-help programme in reducing the rate of unemployment ( $\bar{x}$ =2.80) ranked first. Other benefits of participation in self-help activities as indicated in Table 4 include; ‘there is general improvement on decision making process and development of the community’ ( $\bar{x}$ =2.58) ranked second, ‘self-help project has led to development of leaders in the community’ ( $\bar{x}$ =2.57) ranked third, ‘there is provision of security through vigilante group’ ( $\bar{x}$ =2.56) ranked fourth, ‘there is increase in social solidarity’ ( $\bar{x}$ =2.55) ranked fifth, ‘self-help programme has reduced the level of poverty’ and ‘joint purchase of farm inputs and farm equipment ( $\bar{x}$ =2.53) ranked sixth positions respectively.

**Relationship between participation in self-help and some socio-economic characteristics:** The results of multiple linear regression showing the socioeconomic characteristics determining the participation in self-help projects were presented in Table 5. Findings showed  $R^2$  of 0.911 indicating that socioeconomic factors explained 91.1% of the

**Table 3. Participation of rural dwellers in the implementation of self-help projects.**

Self-help projects	AP	SP	RP	NP	Mean(SD)	Rank
	Freq.(%)	Freq.(%)	Freq.(%)	Freq.(%)		
Volunteering to make peace and harmonious co- existence	97(66.0)	41(27.9)	9(6.1)	-	3.599(0.604)	1 <sup>st</sup>
Organization of fund raising	87(59.2)	58(39.5)	2(1.4)	-	3.578(0.522)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Financial contribution	71(48.3)	75(51.0)	1(0.7)	-	3.476(0.515)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Volunteering of ideas/information	57(38.8)	63(42.9)	22(15.0)	5(3.4)	3.170(0.805)	4 <sup>th</sup>
Sourcing of material resources	54(36.7)	59(40.1)	32(21.8)	2(1.4)	3.122(0.793)	5 <sup>th</sup>
Sharing of experience	40(27.2)	61(41.5)	33(22.4)	13(8.8)	2.871(0.916)	6 <sup>th</sup>
Participate in project evaluation	26(17.7)	65(44.2)	46(31.3)	10(6.8)	2.728(0.832)	7 <sup>th</sup>
Volunteering of skills/expertise	22(15.0)	57(38.8)	67(45.6)	1(0.7)	2.680(0.731)	8 <sup>th</sup>

AP= Always Participated; SP= Sometimes Participated; RP= Rarely Participated; NP= Never Participated

Source: Field Survey, 2022



**Table 4. Perceived benefits of self-help activities.**

Perception statements	HB	MB	LB	Mean (SD)	Rank
Self-help programme has reduced the rate of unemployment	118(80.3)	29(19.7)	-	2.803(0.399)	1 <sup>st</sup>
There is general improvement on decision making process and development of the community	86(58.5)	61(41.5)		2.585(0.494)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
There is increase in social solidarity	88(59.9)	53(36.1)	6(4.1)	2.558(0.575)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Self-help project has led to development of leaders in the community	91(61.9)	50(34.0)	6(4.1)	2.578(0.572)	4 <sup>th</sup>
Self-help programme has reduced the level of poverty	79(53.7)	68(46.3)		2.537(0.500)	5 <sup>th</sup>
The children access to education has improved	79(53.7)	68(46.3)		2.537(0.500)	5 <sup>th</sup>
There is provision of security through vigilante group	83(56.5)	64(43.5)		2.565(0.498)	6 <sup>th</sup>
Joint purchase of farm inputs and farm equipment	83(56.5)	59(40.1)	5(3.4)	2.531(0.565)	7 <sup>th</sup>
Intra-community crisis has reduced tremendously	77(52.4)	64(43.5)	6(4.1)	2.483(0.578)	8 <sup>th</sup>
Team building has waxed strong in the community	73(49.7)	70(47.6)	4(2.7)	2.469(0.553)	9 <sup>th</sup>
There is greater ability to draw on local resources to meet local need	67(45.6)	78(53.1)	2(1.4)	2.442(0.525)	10 <sup>th</sup>
There is improvement in road network to transport good and services	63(42.9)	82(55.8)	2(1.4)	2.415(0.521)	11 <sup>th</sup>
There is tremendous improvement in the household access to health services.	62(42.2)	83(56.5)	2(1.4)	2.408(0.520)	12 <sup>th</sup>
Skills in budget preparation has improved	8(5.4)	22(15.0)	117(796)	1.259(0.550)	13 <sup>th</sup>
There is drastic improvement in the institutional infrastructure such as banks and higher institution	8(5.4)	8(5.4)	131(89.1)	1.163(0.497)	14 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field Survey, 2022. high benefit-HB, moderate benefit-MB, low benefits-LB

**Table 5. Multiple linear regression showing the relationship between participation in self-help and some socio-economic characteristics.**

Participation in Self-help projects	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t-stat	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.581	0.322		8.016	0.000
Age	-0.028	0.105	-0.025	-0.267	0.790
Sex	-0.014	0.086	-0.016	-0.165	0.869
Membership of association	-0.006	0.046	-0.011	-0.121	0.904
Years of schooling	0.070	0.065	0.091	1.065	0.002
Household income	0.017	0.034	0.050	0.500	0.000

R square = 0.911

Source: Field Survey, 2022

aggregation variation of participation in self-help projects while 8.9% not explained is attributed to other variables not included in the model. For the variables, the probability value of the specified variables shows to be statistically insignificant except for number of years spent in school (B=0.070, p<0.01) and household income (B=0.017, p<0.01) which were positively related and statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION

**Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents:** Low number of female might be connected to male dominant participation in rural community development association for self-help developmental issues than women in Nigeria (Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde, 2013). The mean age 39.23 years of the respondents implies that the respondents

are relatively young and mature adults who are dedicated to self-help initiatives in the study area. This indicated that the level of education is appreciable. This educational composition achievement of the respondents is a clear indication that they are knowledgeable enough to participate in the planning, operation and execution of rural community development projects (Ukah et al. 2020). This finding is similar to Cobham et al. (2020) who noted that income and educational status influenced participation in self-help project. Education makes citizens to be venturesome, take rise and easily adopt new ideas capable to help the community in executing self-help project. The government can also play a significant role in this respect. Furthermore, membership of majority in community development association agrees with study that stated that resources combination by members of community to help themselves in solving community problem



is crucial for community development in the rural areas (Nichols, 2021; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2021). This approach is common in Nigerian rural communities where various social groups jointly contribute resources to solve problems facing them. The also indicated that many of the respondents had long years of resident duration in the various communities, Thus, the commitment of community members to self-help project is expected to be high, since the project will contribute to their welfare and good living. The implication is that community members join resources to solve the community problems which may include construction of roads and bridges, town hall, school. The may further form watch group to maintain compliance and defend them against offenders. It is obvious that poverty is prevailing in the community with income earning which is less than the minimum wage of the nation. Thus, community members will find it difficult to donate money for purchase of basic goods and services to improve rural livelihood and condition of living. This confirmed the assertion by Nichols (2021) who found that the level of members' income influences community participation in community-led infrastructure development.

**Participation of rural dwellers in the implementation of self-help projects:** Findings showed that the rural dwellers in Kwara State participated mainly in self-help projects for peace making and harmonious co-existence, fund raising and financial contribution for members and community development projects. Volunteering effort maintain peace and harmonious co-existence as the topmost project may be a reflection incessant conflict and social unrest in Nigeria in recent times, most especially in rural communities where farming is their main occupation (Nofiu, Isaac, Ayanda and Salau, 2020), rural dwellers volunteering to make peace and harmonious co-existence indicated that security, peace and harmonious co-existence of its people is paramount important to people rural communities of Kwara State which is an affirmation of what the state is known for as "State of Harmony". The second and third ranked participation were by fund raising and financial contribution respectively signify that financial contribution of members was one of the main means to implement self-help project. This finding is confirm earlier report by Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) who found that fund raising and donations by community members were the main sources of funding to implement self-help projects in Kwara State. In recent times, studies have argued that the provision of social amenities in rural communities in Africa countries were mostly motivated and implemented by members self-resources mobilization, most especially for housing and other capital projects (Amadi and Olew, 2023).

**Rural dwellers' perceived benefits of self-help activities:** Findings have shown that rural dwellers' main benefits of involvement in self-help projects were provision of employment, improvement on decision making process and development of the community as well as increase in social

solidarity. This finding indicated that self-empowerment for job creation was the leading benefits derived from self-help programme of the rural people. This will increase livelihood and standard of living of the people. This finding is in line with report by Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) who found that self-help projects in Kwara State has increased the standard of living of the people in rural areas. Similarly, Ukah *et al.* (2020) found that that community participation helps in the sustainability of developmental projects in Imo State.

**Relationship between participation in self-help and some socio-economic characteristics:** Positive significant relationship existing between years of schooling, household income and participation in self-help projects could be inferred that as income increases, it becomes finically easy for the rural dwellers to cope with demand such as payment of levy for self-help project. This finding signifies that more income earned by household members, the more financial capacity to participate in self-help project. It becomes easy for higher earners to contribute fund to implement projects. Also, more years of spent in school may increase their capacity to implement, manage and monitor self-help projects. This finding corroborates report by Cobham *et al.* (2020) who found that rural dwellers' participation in self-help projects had statistical significant influence on their education and economic empowerment for well-being.

**Conclusion:** Following the major findings of this study, it was concluded that community members had appreciable formal education and actively participated in community self-help projects through volunteering to make harmonious co-existence, fund raising and financial contribution. Rural dwellers' involvement in self-help projects had greatly enhanced successfulness in implementation evaluation and sustainability of projects among members, reduce the number of unemployed members, improved decision making ability of members, increased social solidarity power among members, serves as platform to groom future leaders and general community development. Based on this finding, it was therefore recommended that the government should support community dwellers with fund and equipment for execution of cumbersome project. This will facilitate community involvement and improve the living condition of people. In addition, because education attainment has positive and significant effect on participation in self-help project, this should inform recommendation for increase awareness campaign on education for adult literacy, children and youth education in the rural areas. The government can also award scholarships to youth for furthering their education. There is also a need for well to do members in the community to empower the youths with scholarship so as to further their education. This will enhance the knowledge and skills of community dwellers in the area. In addition, there is need for support and encouragement for more participation in self-help project. This study suggests that government



intervention that aimed at improving existing rural livelihoods and entrepreneurship activities of the people and provision of enabling environment for the jobless rural youths. This will improve the economic status of the rural people to enable them participate in more in self-help initiatives. This study suggests awareness campaign by relevant government and non-governmental international agencies among active rural self-help organizations to adopt more programmes that promote fair share benefits among members irrespective of gender and women empowerment as road map to achieving the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is important that the community addresses all forms of constraints starting from the most severe. It is also important that the government should provide enabling environment such as provision of funds and equipment that may alleviate obstacle to self-help projects. Consequently, communities should be encouraged to form cooperative society so as to be able to contribute immensely towards the development and transformation of the community. This would improve their level of income and improve the living condition of the people living in the country at large.

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