

Village renewal and development programmes in cross river State, Nigeria

¹Felix Onen Eteng, ²Bassey Anam

¹ Ph.D Department of Public Administration University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

² Ph.D Institute of Public Policy and Administration University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

Village renewal as a development programme is a new phenomenon in Cross River State. The founding fathers of the state did not give attention to village renewal policy, instead, their attention was directed towards urban renewal programmes. Village renewal as a comprehensive plan of development covers areas like agriculture, infrastructure, culture, partnership, environment, empowerment, and creating awareness which serves as anti-vandalism mechanism for the village projects. Although, there are challenges here, and there, this study recommends that an integration approach which involves community participation is a veritable tool for a successful village renewal and development programmes in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Village renewal, development programmes, integration approach, empowerment, community participation

1. Introduction

Cross River State (formally called south eastern state) is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of modern Nigeria. The state consists of few urban areas, which also serve as administrative headquarters for the existing local government areas. A large part of the state is predominantly rural with several villages scattered *insitu*, and without any form of development. The main features of these villages include: backwardness, lack of infrastructure, poor environment, peasant farming, and absence of modern amenities like zoo gardens, parks, etc. In terms of population, there are homogeneous with strong family ties, and in some areas sharing common historical traditions. Most villages have common cultural heritage, language, identity, and historical patterns of migration that help to unit them together.

The idea of village renewal and development as a covet phenomenon arises from the desire of all people to seek for improvement in their standard of living, and promote socio-economic well-being of the people. Village renewal as a sub division of rural development, is village centered, and with a bottom-up approach. The process requires a village architectural plan that highlights the structure of the village, preservation of ancient monuments, renovations of ramshackle buildings, construction of village roads, tarring of village streets, cultural revival, and provision of infrastructure to make life easy. Therefore, village renewal as a comprehensive plan may span over time, and is gradual (Bob Adams, 2010) [2].

Village renewal is a new phenomenon which requires ideas, and targeting the beneficiaries. In Germany, Ireland, and other parts of Europe village renewal has a long historical tradition which places Europe on the threshold of development far above the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In Cross River State, since its creation in 1976, the founding fathers of the state never paid attention to village renewal policy. Their emphasis has been on urban renewal programmes. To be precised, from the inception, experts in the state, Town and Country Planning Ministry, Rural Development Agency, and the State Planning Commission never got involved in village renewal and development

programmes. At present, there is no enabling Act or law on village renewal in the State. This neglect of the village sector has resulted in serious dilapidating conditions of most villages in Cross River State.

Village life is boring and without care. The natural features of a village environment are gradually becoming unattractive to tourists, school leavers, and the unemployed. Consequently, many prefer to drift to the nearby cities for comfort and for gainful employment. The migration of people into the urban areas results in most villages becoming lonely and consequently inhabited by the aged, children, and indigenous animals that most often roam the village streets.

In view of these socio-economic conditions of the village life, this study is conducted to provide the general direction that can be utilized to change the situation through strategic village development programmes.

2. Conceptual clarification

It is necessary to explain the terms used in this study. This will eradicate difficulties in understanding the keywords utilized for the study. Therefore, the following terms will be clarified so that this study will be strongly rooted: village renewal, development programme.

2.1 Village renewal

The concept of village renewal proposes that there are current practices that need to be incorporated into the village planning and development. This is distinct from the periodic traditional practices of decorating village squares, play grounds, shrines and palaces during annual festivals and ceremonies to attract visitors and tourists. Magel (1994) [7] described village renewal as a "methodical changing and strengthening of rural estates and villages". Village renewal involves public and private sector investment (Bob Adams, 2010) [2]. It is therefore a process which requires restructuring a countryside so as to give it an ultra-modern outlook through the provision of infrastructure, and preserving the village features like mountains, streams, valleys, settlement pattern, sites, forest, economy, and population.

2.2 Development programme

This refers to a coherent plan of activities that are usually incorporated in the development plan of a government with the aim to achieve specific goals within a time frame, and with a budget. "It highlights logical linkages between the required inputs, planned activities, expected outputs, and objectives" (Ndongko, 1994) ^[9].

3. Theoretical assumptions to the study

This study will adopt the theoretical assumptions of the modernization theory, and the integrated development theory. The modernization theory posits that the traditional African societies are "self contained" group of people with a dual economy (modern and traditional). The theory attributes lack of development in traditional societies to primitive economy, lack of funds, absence of aids, and technical assistance. The theory assumes that these societies require a big push through the support of the national bourgeoisie to break the vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment for the necessary take-off (Offiong, 1980) ^[10]. The state in this case is expected to provide the necessary funds with collaboration with other donor agencies, organizations, and philanthropic groups. The essential attribute of this theory is that it provides the framework on which African societies can depend for successful development.

The integration development theory is likened to the systems theory. The theory places emphasis on interdependence of the different sectors of the economy, and in which, a break down in one sector can affect other sectors. For instance, what affects electricity can equally affect industry or water; what affects transportation can also affect agriculture, education, and market, what affects infrastructure can affect health. The theory assumes that there are certain discernable elements of culture and tradition that are not progressive to development, and therefore need to be eradicated (Ebong & Animashaun, 2009) ^[5]. The theory assumes that mobilizing human (including the village dwellers) and material resources is imperative for successful development programme. The theory also assumes that the concept of development covers all sectors of the economy like agriculture, water, education, health, industry, transportation, telecommunication, market, infrastructure, and electricity (Olisa & Obiukwu, 1992) ^[11]. All these sectors have linkages and need the support of the other sectors for continuous existence, and maintenance. In line with this, Ebong & Animashaun, (2009) ^[5] observed that "planning for one areal unit within the planning region involves consideration of its implications on other units".

This study will however, depend on the theoretical assumptions of the two theories above. The theories assumed that the traditional African societies are antithetical to progress. They also emphasized the use of human, and material resources as tools for development. Therefore, these theories can be used for the study as they provide the ground on which development programmes take place.

4. Strategic framework for village renewal and development programmes in Cross River State

Village renewal as already indicated is a serious business with a comprehensive plan involving a bottom-up approach. The process requires ideas, opinions, and decisions for successful programme formulation, planning, and implementation. This is why a strategic framework as an indispensable instrument is

required for the programme in Cross River State. The following strategies are therefore imperative for village renewal and development programmes in the state.

Integrated development plan: The starting point in village renewal and development is to gradually evolve a sustainable integrated village development plan (Bob Adams, 2010) ^[2]. As usually expected, like the Town and Country Plan, a good village development plan will provide answers to the following questions in the plan process:

1. How was the village development plan produced?
2. Who was involved or consulted in the process?
3. What is the project description?
4. What are the objectives of the plan?
5. What are the specific ranges of actions to be taken in specific areas like infrastructure, agriculture, health, job creation, etc?
6. What are the strategies utilized for the implementation of the village renewal and development programme?
7. What is the cost of the project?
8. What is the source of funding of the project?
9. What are the intended benefits?
10. Does the programme actually achieve the intended goal?
11. Is there any positive impact on the target group?
12. Is there any on-going research work on village renewal and development in the state?
13. Is there any evidence of completed research work or published research findings on village renewal and development in Cross River State?

Therefore, answers to the above questions tend to provide the background value for a successful village renewal and development programme in Cross River State.

4.1 Partnership

This process requires targeting, fashioning, and strengthening links with the village dwellers particularly the leadership. Partnership requires collaboration and co-ordination of all stakeholders to address the problems associated with village renewal and development. This will involve mutual agreement, and understanding between individuals, donor agencies, and the government. It also requires commitment and community participation in providing a painted background of village squares, places, shrines, roundabouts, schools, churches, market, stalls, and statue, etc. This requirement adds value to the cultural tradition of the people, and promotes village pride. The process also gives understanding of the sincerity of the programme, and eliminates suspicion, and ignorance that most often characterize development programmes and result in their vandalization in the State.

4.2 Culture

Culture is what gives identity to a people and unite them together. It includes food habit, lifestyle, songs, poems, heritage, artifacts, language, and music. In Cross River State, there are different cultural traditions. Some of these include: Leboku yam festival, Moninkim dance, Abang, Ekombi, and Ekpe festival. These cultural practices attract and promote tourism. Several multinational telecommunication industries have been attracted by the unique cultures and practices of the people. In central Cross River State, the role of the Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN) and the Globacom (GLO) is indescribable. These telecommunication groups at various

periods have put smiles on the faces of the villagers through the award of cars, farming tools, phones, sewing machines, cassava grinding machines, generators, motor cycles, and hair dressing accessories. This strategy also results in village pride, promotes competition, and serves as catalyst to cultural revival of the people especially at the grassroots. It is therefore a useful tool for village renewal and development programme since it empowers the people as the target group for development.

4.3 Agriculture

Agriculture is the main occupation in the village. The dominant part of the population is engaged in peasant agricultural practices with low income earnings. This condition has given rise to poverty and affliction which is difficult to eradicate. Village renewal strategy therefore requires preserving the essential features of a village settlement. These include agricultural occupation, economy, patterns of settlement, forms and shape of settlements, site and situations, distribution of agricultural land, population, etc. (Nagle, 2001) ^[8]. The process involves keeping these village settlement features in their original conditions without any alteration (Magel, 1994) ^[7]. The strategy also requires providing modern facilities to farmers, and village businesses. These include warehouses, cooling houses, funds, technical assistance, training of farmers, introduction of improved variety of crops, seed, grains, and vegetables.

4.4 Environment

Environment is commonly associated with conditions in our surroundings that usually has serious impact on human behaviour, and can affect the life, and development of an individual. As an integral element of village renewal and development, the environment need to be structured, and physically designed to enhance human capacity building, and improvement in the quality of life. This requires, establishing open flower gardens, parks for public relaxation, trees and grass planting, establishment of zoological gardens for wild animals and for public view, village fishing ponds, tarring of village roads, and streets, construction of water drainages, widening of village streams and roads, landscaping, waste management, and control of village businesses. (Magel, 1994) ^[7]. There is also the need to establish a village biosphere for the native trees, and indigenous animals.

4.5 Infrastructure

This strategy involves providing amenities or services that are vital for the smooth running of the community, and can promote the happiness of the people. People generally need comfort and easy life. Therefore, to improve the quality of life of the people, village renewal requires establishing village health centers, maternity homes, renovation of houses, provision of amusement parks, marine resort, portable water, water fountains, libraries, recreational centers, widening of existing playgrounds, opening of new village farm roads, and village squares. The village electrification project should include street lights, lightening of village squares, playgrounds and palaces.

4.6 Empowerment

This important strategy requires giving people the power to

improve their living conditions through job creation, and providing the opportunity for capacity enhancement through skill acquisition, technical assistance, funds, aids, and artisanship. This strategy, not only increases productivity, but also promotes improvement in the quality of goods produced. There is also need to improve the conditions at the place of work including village farms, markets, petty industries, and other forms of businesses.

The empowerment strategy also requires providing the village dwellers a three wheel passenger vehicle (also called Keke Napep) for the purpose of wealth creation as is currently practiced in urban areas of the state. This will help farmers to convey their crops to the village warehouses, and assist the unemployed youth to be self reliant. The approach have been utilized in time past by the political leaders in the state to better the socioeconomic conditions of their supporters, and to seek for more support during electioneering campaigns. The scheme recorded colossal success in poverty reduction, and helped to minimize the incidence of violence and crime in the state.

4.7 Awareness

Creating awareness is a veritable instrument that mobilizes the community for participation in the programme. This requires the sensitization of the people, and the passing of information about the village projects through the next-door-neighbour, village announcer, village council, village assembly, age grade (peer group) and family heads (Eteng & Iwasam, 2016) ^[6]. This strategy serves as anti-vandalism tool for preserving or protecting the village renewal and development programme.

4.8 Community participation

It is clearly submitted that "Community participation occurs when a community organizes itself and takes responsibility for managing its problems. Taking responsibility involves identifying the problems, developing actions, putting them into place, and following through". Chamala (1995) ^[3] observed that "community participation is the process by which individuals, families, or communities assume responsibility for their own welfare and develop a capacity to contribute to their own and the community's development". It is a strategy for effective village renewal. Anam (2015) ^[1] aligns with the view that "community participation refers to an active process whereby community members influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefits" (www.waberconference.com). This has specific objectives.

- "Sharing project costs: participants are asked to contribute money or labor (and occasionally goods) during the project's implementation or operational stages".
- "Increasing project efficiency: beneficiary consultation during project planning or beneficiary involvement in the management of project implementation or operation".
- "Increasing project effectiveness: greater beneficiary involvement to help ensure that the project achieves its objectives and that benefit go to the intended groups".
- "Building beneficiary capacity: either through ensuring that participants are actively involved in project planning and implementation or through formal or informal training and consciousness- raising activities".

- Increasing empowerment: defined as “seeking to increase the control of the underprivileged sectors of society over the resources and decisions affecting their lives and their participation in the benefits produced by the society in which they live” (Anam, 2015) ^[1].

White (1981) ^[12] and Curry (1993) ^[4] agree that there are a number of useful reasons for community participation. “With participation, more will be accomplished, and services can be provided more cheaply. Participation has an intrinsic value for participants; is a catalyst for further development; encourages a sense of responsibility; guarantees that a felt need is involved; ensures things are done the right way; uses valuable indigenous knowledge; frees people from dependence on others’ skills; and makes people more conscious of the causes of their poverty and what they can do about it” (www.socialcapitalresearch.com).

Community participation in the village renewal process implies the involvement of a significant number of communal members in shaping their economic decisions, situations or actions that enhance their well-being. “There is evidence that community participation enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects”. Participatory development has emerged as one of the most effective strategies “enabling communities to help themselves and sustain efforts in development work. Communities are not seen as recipients of development programmes; rather, they are important stakeholders that play important role in design, implementation and the management of programmes and projects in their areas”.

Projects and programmes that have local content as also cited in Curry (1993) ^[4]

“are sensitive to local circumstances that will not only be more effective in taking the uniqueness of local social structure, economy, environmental, and culture into account, but also, through the involvement of the local community, will be more likely to be successful in their implementation, communities that have a say in the development of policies for their locality are much more likely to be enthusiastic about their implementation” (www.socialcapitalresearch.com).

Community participation is a core strategy in efforts towards village renewal. The strategy respects the rights and ability of community members to design and implement programs within their community. Through participation, communities act responsibly in the direction of their collective welfare. It greatly enriches and strengthens development projects that are significant in transforming the socio economic landscape of the village economy.

5. Challenges of village renewal

At present, the condition of life of the people living in villages is gloomy. The problems of villagers are many and varied. Among several factors, lack of capacity on the part of the villagers and political will from government are challenges that can affect village renewal in Cross River State.

- The villagers are poor, ignorant and superstitious. Ignorance affects their level of involvement in decisions making. Community participation in the village renewal process implies the involvement of a significant number of communal members in shaping their economic decisions, situations, or actions that enhance their well-

being. Illiteracy among villagers must be reduced to the barest minimum.

- Most villages do not have basic amenities like; good roads, schools and hospitals. This affects their social and economic well-being. Their ability to express a sense of responsibility in taking major economic decisions that affect their well-being is at stake.
- Villagers do not have access to proper medical services. This undermines their physical and mental health. Without sound health, capacity to contribute in the design and implementation of community development projects is affected.
- Government lacks the political will and commitment to design programmes, provide adequate funds, implement and monitor village development. Lack of political will hampers renewal process and development in environment, roads, market, education, health institutions and civil centres in the villages.

6. The way forward

For effective village renewal strategy, concrete programmes should be designed and be carried out to enhance local capacity. The federal, state, and local government areas as well as non-governmental institutions should work together to address the following:

- Provision of mass education and capacity programmes in all the villages across the state. This should be made compulsory and free.
- Roads and other means of communication in villages should be improved.
- Cottage industries should be revived and agriculture modernized.
- Villages should be electrified to encourage the growth and sustainability of small and medium scale businesses. Electricity make village life pleasant and tends to reduce rural urban drift.
- Every village should have a hospital or a primary healthcare centre which is capable of providing effective medical services to the villagers.
- Rural banking should be encouraged and financial assistance be given to the village people.

7. Conclusion

The main thrust of this study is to identify a comprehensive approach to a successful village renewal programme in Cross River State. This requires a strategic framework that needs improvement in important sectors like agriculture, environment, infrastructure, and culture. It also involves increase in the level of empowerment to village dwellers; mobilization and sensitization for participation; effective collaboration with government and Donor Agencies, and strengthening of linkages with the stakeholders.

An integrated village renewal plan as an “initial platform” showing the progress that will be made in key sectors of village programme is an indispensable tool for effective implementation of village renewal programmes. This will remove doubt and suspicion, and establish the confidence needed for successful plan implementation. Generally, the goal of a sustainable village renewal programme is therefore to raise the people’s livelihood and welfare. Community participation approach is advocated in

order to enhance local involvement and promote social and economic well-being of the villagers. Participation creates a spirit of cooperation among local people, and this further guarantees the sustainability of village projects. Enhancing rural capacity and basic infrastructure will strengthen village economy, and make villages not only habitable but also attractive and prosperous.

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