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NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AS AGENTS OF DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF LAPO IN BENIN METROPOLIS OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Economic development is one of the major goals and objectives of any nation. But developing economies are struggling to meet up with the numerous demands of her people, as most of the citizens are living below poverty line. Therefore, this study assessed lift above poverty organization (LAPO) in Edo State as a platform for development in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Benin City where the researchers used both simple random sampling technique and judgmental non-random sampling technique to select 32 LAPO staff and 380 LAPO beneficiaries. Data generated were descriptively analyzed, while inferential statistics was used to test the formulated hypotheses. The study results revealed that LAPO has contributed significantly to the development of their beneficiary communities in terms of providing them with economic growth facilities, infrastructure, education; entrepreneurship skills development; etc. Also, the result indicated that the beneficiaries agreed that LAPO services have contributed positively to enhance their livelihood by empowering them economically and socially. To strengthen LAPO service delivery towards economic development, the researchers recommend that LAPO should be financed adequately so as to meet up with the needs of their beneficiaries. They should also extend their area of coverage as well as encourage beneficiaries to actively participate in LAPO activities.

KEYWORDS

Non Governmental Organization (NGO); Developing Economies, lift above poverty organization (LAPO).

INTRODUCTION

The optimal development of a nation requires harnessing of the country's assets; its human capital and natural resources to meet the numerous demands of its citizens (Uwhejewe Togbolo, 2005). But this is not the case in developing economies where the nation's government struggle to meet up with the numerous demand of its people. According to Blliot, Fernandez, Garilao; cited in Uwhejewe-Togbolo (2005), the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector may be better placed to articulate the needs of the citizens. They argue that NGOs provide services, and development, particularly, in remote areas. They opine that NGOs encourage changes in attitudes and practices necessary to curtail marginalization as well as to identify and redress threat to the environment. They also believe that NGOs are better equipped to nurture the productive capacity of the most vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, children, youth and the women. The NGOs are those private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote interest of the poor, protect the environment as well as provide basic social amenities and undertake community development (World Bank 2001).

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) formed the third sector of Nigeria economy as they are organisations not conventionally for profit making. The concept of NGO came into use in 1945 following the establishment of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) which recognized the need to give a consultative role to organizations which were not classified as neither government nor member states (Willett, 2002). Therefore, there are so many NGOs across Nigeria operating within the third sector of the economy. This study focus on the activities and programmes of Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) in Edo State of Nigeria. LAPO is an NGO with clear and broad aim of rendering assistance to people in a bid to enhance and facilitate their socio economic inclusion for sustainable livelihood. According to Omofonmwan and Odi (2009), LAPO was established in 1986 to address the hardship created by the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programm (SAP) and as at April 2006 LAPO has empowered a total of 1,483 women across Nigeria socially and economically. The mission of LAPO is to assist beneficiaries through its activities and programmes to break out from the poverty circle. Also, LAPO mission include to assist members to overcome factors beyond lack of fund; illiteracy, inequality, low self esteem as well as environmental challenges. LAPO focuses on empowering its members so as to actively and effectively participate in the informal sector with emphasis on micro enterprise development; to enhance leadership skills; literacy status; political participation among women; and, to conduct investigations on the nature and causes of poverty. In pursuance of LAPO objectives, they have involved their self in micro business management to enhance better loans' utilization and efficient funds management through training. According to report cited in Omofonmwan and Odi (2009) they confirmed that LAPO has disbursed the woping sum of N658,000,000 as micro loans to their client in 2004 and this figure jumped to one billion and hundred and five million naira (N1,105,000,000) in 2005 and this represent 67% over the previous years disbursement. LAPO also provides opportunity for women to learn vocational skills such as sewing, food processing, confectionary, soap making and a host of other income generating activities to alleviate poverty (www.google.com.ng). Therefore, the activities and services of LAPO to its members will have a great and positive impact on the economic development since the members are being empowered socially and economically and as such will reduce the burden from the government shoulder in terms of job creation and alleviation of poverty as well as infrastructural development.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nigeria governments at various levels have been working round the clock to achieve development through their various poverty alleviation policies and programmes. However, these have not yielded the much anticipated results as the people are still struggling to survive within the economy (NBS, 2007). Therefore in order to complement the efforts of the government several Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are established within the framework of law, with mission to pursue activities that will relieve peoples' suffering, promote interest of the poor; protect the environment and provide basic social services, as well as undertake community development (Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007). LAPO shares this vision with the mission to make it a reality. Indeed, many studies have been conducted on the role of NGOs in development (Omofonmwan and Odi, 2007) but much have not been done on LAPO. Meanwhile, information suggests that LAPO has made great strides spread across Nigeria and within the West African region. But not much has been done empirically to validate these claims. Thus, these necessitate this study, with focus on LAPO development activities in Edo State of Nigeria.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of this study is to explore the potential of NGOs as agents of development using LAPO, in Edo State Nigeria, as a case point. Specifically, the study is designed to:

- i. Ascertain LAPO's developmental activities being rendered to its beneficiaries.
- ii. Assess how LAPO activities has improved the livelihood of its beneficiaries.
- iii. Examine the extent LAPO activities has contributed to community development in Edo state.
- iv. Identify the challenges confronting LAPO beneficiaries in accessing its services and make recommendations that will strengthen their delivery.

STUDY HYPOTHESES

- H₀₁: The opinion of LAPO beneficiaries are not significantly different on the improvement of their livelihood through LAPO services.
 H₀₂: The opinion LAPO staff and the beneficiaries significantly differ on the contribution of LAPO services to community development in Edo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CONCEPT OF NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

The concept of NGO came into use in 1945 following the establishment of the United Nations Organization (UNO) which recognized the need to give a consultative role to organizations which were not classified as either government nor member states (Willet as cited in Lektorwe and Mpabanga, 2007). They further stated that the term NGO is broad and ambiguous and covers a range of organizations within civil society; from political action groups to sport club and this make the clear definition remain contestable. Similarly, Turner and Hulme cited in Lektorwe and Mpabanga (2007) sees NGOs as generally registered organisation, community groups, professional association, trade unions, cooperate charity organizations whose aim is to improve the well being of their members and those areas in which they operates. They further see NGOs as part of the third sector or not for profit organization. As such, it is believed that the primary aim of establishing any NGOs is not to maximize profit but to complement government efforts with the upliftment of peoples' livelihood especially the poor and the vulnerable groups. In the same vein Manan and Shefgat (2013) opined that NGOs are recognized as central partners for donor organizations, governments as well as the private sectors and have further made strong ties among themselves at local level, national and at the world level.

NGO should be privately owned and sufficiently autonomous in its activities, that is independent of direct government control or interference (Lektorwe and Mpabanga 2007). Also World Bank (2001) stated, NGO is a private organization that pursues activities to relieve suffering, promote interest of the poor, protect the environment as well as provide basic social amenities and undertake community development.

NGO AND COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Development is referred to as the total transformation of conventional or pre-modern society into the form of technology, as such, rural development is known as a process of making the quality of the life and economic well being of inhabitants residing in isolated and relatively sparsely populated areas (Manan and Shafgat 2013). Similarly, Cabaj, Ketison et al; and, Brown as cited in Gibson (2005) sees community development as a process by which community members obtain power to change their social, economic or cultural situation and this process involves local people striving towards priorities or goals that are established by themselves, for themselves, usually based on common geography, common experiences and common values. They further stressed that, common community economic development strategies include downtown revitalization, business development and social enterprise development.

It must also be recognized that NGOs have already engaged in becoming specialized actors in providing services of the public and private sector, as they provide technical and consultant expertise, manage micro finance institutions or commercialise agricultural products. As for the role of NGOs in rural development, it was revealed in the study conducted by Suresh cited in Manan and Shafgat (2013) that major rural development programmes of NGOs were agricultural programmes, health programmes, human resource development programmes, community development and industrial and trade programme. All these programmes are targeted at given people the sence of economic and social inclusion for them to take control of their life. Similarly, Omofonwan and Odia (2009) observed the role of NGOs towards the development of the society in general and they concluded that NGOs enormous and inexhaustible activities cut across all sphere of human endeavours. These activities are carefully designed to solve people problems and the process empowers them.

RESEARCH METHOD

A survey research design was adopted for this study and this was carried out on LAPO branches across Benin metropolis in Edo State Nigeria. Benin metropolis is an ancient city located in the mid west of Nigeria which is the state capital of Edo state. According to Wikipedia (2013), Benin City has an estimated population of 1,47,188 as at 2006. Most of its inhabitants are artisan; civil servants and farmers. Benin City is also known for its many historical site and symbol with rich and diverse culture. Moreso, its traditional institution, represented by the Oba of Benin, is highly revered, very strong and has indeed lasted for centuries.

In Benin metropolis, LAPO has 188 branches with 125 staff and they are servicing 108,40 clients (beneficiaries). Therefore, the researchers used judgmental and simple random sampling technique to select 32 staff and 380 LAPO beneficiaries. Thus, the sample is 412 respondents (both staff and beneficiaries). Data generated through the distribution of structured questionnaires were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

LAPO DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TO BENEFICIARIES

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ON THE LAPO DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TO BENEFICIARIES

S/N	LAPO Activities	Service Provider (LAPO Staff)		Recipient of Service (Beneficiaries)	
		Frequency n = 32*	Percentage (%)	Frequency n = 380*	Percentage (%)
i.	Provision of micro credit facilities to clients	32	100	380	100
ii.	Giving leadership training and capacity building	37	84	258	68
iii.	Skill acquisition programmes e.g. soap making	30	93	306	80.5
iv.	Health care service delivery to poor	12	37	94	24.7
v.	Farm produce processing activities	31	96	241	63.4
vi.	Rural infrastructural project e.g. water	29	90	296	77.8
vii.	Adult education scheme	32	100	374	98.4
viii.	Encourage group formation and development	23	71	199	52.3
ix.	Community sensitization on gender equality	26	81	278	73.1
x.	Saving mobilization among women	32	100	380	100
xi.	Training on how to establish micro enterprise project	32	100	327	86.1
xii.	Agricultural extension service delivery	18	56	42	11.1
xiii.	Social empowerment and human rights	30	93	286	75.3

Source: Field Survey, 2013

* Multiple Responses

The above table 1 revealed the developmental services of LAPO to its beneficiaries and the findings showed that the responses of both LAPO staff and beneficiaries correlates on the core developmental services provided to the beneficiaries. These services include provision of micro credit facilities (LAPO staff

responses = 100% while beneficiaries responses = 100%); skill acquisition programmes (LAPO staff – 93% and beneficiaries = 93%); leadership training and capacity building (LAPO staff = 84% and beneficiaries = 68%); rural infrastructural projects (LAPO staff = 90% while beneficiaries responses = 77.8%); adult education scheme (LAPO staff = 100% and beneficiaries = 98.4%); community sensitization on gender equality (LAPO staff = 81% and beneficiaries 73.1%); savings mobilization (LAPO and beneficiaries responses are 100%); training on how to establish microenterprise projects (LAPO staff = 100% while beneficiaries = 86.1%); and social empowerment and human rights activities (LAPO staff = 93% while beneficiaries responses is 75.3%). All these services rendered are targeted towards empowering the beneficiaries which will eventually trickle down to the economic development. We note also that these services rendered by LAPO according to Jhingan (2006) are indicators to economic development.

TABLE 2: SHOWING THE OPINION OF RESPONDENTS ON HOW LAPO SERVICES HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE LIVELIHOOD OF BENEFICIARIES

S/N	Contribution to Livelihood	Recipient of Service (Beneficiaries)	
		Mean (\bar{x})	Decision
i.	Facilitates mobilization of credit and capital to start up business	380	Contributed
ii.	Acquired skills for production of soap, cake etc	3.94	Contributed
iii.	Promotes self confidence and self esteem	3.26	Contributed
iv.	Opportunity to establish and manage own business	3.08	contributed
v.	Help to improve the savings habits of beneficiaries	3.75	contributed
vi.	Improvement on literacy level through adult education	3.51	Contributed
vii.	Improves leadership quality and business management	2.83	Not contributed
viii.	Creates awareness on personal health issues	1.69	Not contributed
ix.	Self reliant and reduces over dependent on spouse	3.37	Contributed
x.	Increases farm productivity	3.15	Contributed
xi.	Improvement on home management and child rearing	2.94	Not contributed
xii.	Promotes social empowerment and knowledge of ones right	3.72	Contributed
xiii.	Facilitates networking/experience-building among beneficiaries	3.48	Contributed
	Grand mean	3.27	Contributed

Source: Field Survey, 2013

The result shown in table 2 above was derived from 5 point likert scale with threshold of 3.0, that is, any variable with mean of < 3.0 indicates that LAPO services has not contributed to beneficiaries livelihood, while any variable with mean that is ≥ 3.0 justify that LAPO services have contributed to the livelihood of its beneficiaries. As such, the table shows that LAPO has contributed to the advancement of its beneficiary’s livelihood as the grand mean (3.27) justify this claim. Specifically, it contributed positively in 10 variables as captured in the table out of the 13 listed livelihood areas.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS ONE (H₀₁)

H₀₁: The opinions of LAPO beneficiaries are not significantly different on the improvement of their livelihood through LAPO services.

In order to affirm or reject, the percentage responses of the respondents from table 1 was compared with average rating of 70% as standard for beneficiaries livelihood improvement. This was done to prove the normality of available data, where observed frequency was tested with Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (0.834). Similar test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) was used for expected frequency (0.729). Therefore, both result (Expected and Observed) shows that P-values are greater than 0.05 which implies that, the available data were normally distributed.

As such T-test was used to analyse the hypothesis and the result is presented in the table 3 below.

TABLE 3: PAIRED T-TEST RESULT TABLE

	N	Mean	St Dev.	Se Mean
Observed	13	70.05	27.32	7.58
Expected	13	70.00	0.00	0.00
Difference	13	0.05	27.32	7.58

95% CI for mean difference = (-16.46, 16.56)

T-test of mean difference = 0 (Vs not = 0)

Thus; T-value = 0.01

P-value = 0.994

DECISION

The P-value of 0.994 is an indication that the observed values are not significantly difference from the expected value. This implies that there is existence of enough evidence to accept the null hypothesis and conclude that, the opinion of LAPO beneficiaries are not significantly different on the improvement of their livelihood through LAPO services.

This result of the hypothesis further strengthens the claim of the descriptive statistics of table 2.

LAPO CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

TABLE 4: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF LAPO TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

S/N	LAPO Contributions	Service Provider (LAPO Staff)		Recipient of Service (Beneficiaries)	
		Frequency n = 32*	Percentage (%)	Frequency n = 380*	Percentage (%)
i.	Promotes economic-growth by funding of small scale businesses	31	100	380	100
ii.	Enhance infrastructure and amenities development e.g. water scheme, transportation etc	32	100	318	83.7
iii.	Help in the protection of the environment	8	25	74	19.5
iv.	Promotion of peace and conflict resolution among inhabitants	10	31.3	26	6.8
v.	Facilitate farming technology diffusion and adoption among farmers	27	84.4	238	62.6
vi.	Reduces human trafficking and child abuse	30	93.8	276	75.3
vii.	Promotion of reproductive education among women	29	90.6	298	78.4
viii.	Improves literacy level through adult education	32	100	309	81.3
ix.	Improves quality health cares services and disease	26	81.3	282	74.2
x.	Enhances employment generation and reduction of rural urban migration	32	100	364	95.8
xi.	Promotes social empowerment and human rights	22	68.8	261	68.7
xii.	Provides microcredit and enterprise training	32	100	371	97.6
xiii.	Promotes research on development issues	14	43.7	94	24.7

Source: Field Survey, 2013

* Multiple Responses

Table 4 above revealed how LAPO has contributed to the community development, as the responses from both service providers (LAPO staff) and the recipient of service (beneficiaries) showed that, in some major areas of development that LAPO has contributed positively to community development.

Some of the area where LAPO has contributed includes; the promotion of economic growth by funding businesses (LAPO staff responses = 100% and beneficiaries responses = 100%); enhanced infrastructural/amenities development (LAPO staff = 100% while beneficiaries = 83.7%); facilitates farming technological diffusion and adoption (LAPO staff = 84.4% while beneficiaries = 62/6%); reduces human trafficking and child abuse (LAPO staff = 93.8% while beneficiaries responses = 75.3%); improves literacy level (LAPO staff = 100% while beneficiaries = 81.3%); improves the quality of health care services (LAPO = 81.3% and beneficiaries = 74.2%); enhances employment opportunities and reducing rural urban migration (LAPO staff = 100% and beneficiaries = 95.8%); and, provision of microcredit and enterprise training that enhance credit utilization (LAPO staff = 100% while beneficiaries responses = 97.6%).

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS TWO (H₀₂)

H₀₂: The opinion of LAPO staff and its beneficiaries significantly differ on the contribution of LAPO services to community development.

In order to achieve good result, responses of both LAPO staff and beneficiaries in table 4 were subjected to test of normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Staff: P-value = 0.903

Beneficiaries: P-value = 0.845

Therefore, the P-values are greater than 0.05 which implies that, the available data were normally distributed. As such, parametric test of T-test was used and the result is presented in the table 5 below:

TABLE 5: PAIRED T-TEST AND CI (LAPO STAFF AND BENEFICIARIES WITH 70% RATING)

	N	Mean	St Dev.	Se Mean
LAPO staff % rating	13	78.38	27.58	7.65
Beneficiaries % rating	13	66.82	30.66	8.50
Difference	13	11.56	8.71	2.41

95% CI for mean difference = 6.30; 16.82

T-test of mean difference = 0 (Vs not = 0)

T-value = 4.79

P-value = 0.000

DECISION

Considering the average (mean values), the mean for LAPO staff responses rating is 78.38 and that of beneficiaries is 66.82 which implies that the rating of LAPO staff is significantly higher than that of beneficiaries. In conclusion the P-value is < (less than) 0.05, which implies that there is existence of enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate. That is, both LAPO staff and beneficiaries do significantly have the same opinion on the contribution of LAPO services to community development.

This result further affirmed the result of table 4 which shows that LAPO have really contributed to the community development through their various developmental services delivery.

CHALLENGES THAT LIMITS LAPO SERVICES ACCESSIBILITY

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ON THE CHALLENGES THAT LIMITS THE ACCESSIBILITY OF LAPO SERVICES TO BENEFICIARIES

S/N	Challenges	Service Provider (LAPO Staff)		Recipient of Service (Beneficiaries)	
		Frequency n = 32*	Percentage (%)	Frequency n = 380*	Percentage (%)
i.	High interest rate charge by LAPO.	29	90.6	356	93.7
ii.	Insistence on collateral and guarantor before granting loan request.	10	31.3	279	73.4
iii.	Incompetent among LAPO officials and leadership.	2	6.3	281	73.9
iv.	Illiteracy among beneficiaries.	27	84.4	174	45.7
v.	High rate of LAPO membership fees.	11	34.4	201	52.9
vi.	Short loan repayment period.	29	90.6	348	91.6
vii.	Poor loan/project monitoring and inspection to evaluate progress among beneficiaries.	32	100	293	77.1
viii.	Poor funding of LAPO activities.	30	93.8	374	98.4
ix.	High cases of loan default.	31	96.9	124	32.6
x.	Small amount of loan/credit given to beneficiaries.	32	100	380	100
xi.	Using LAPO credit for unproductive activities/project (e.g. burial, wedding etc).	32	100	247	65
xii.	Difficulty in the adoption of new technology among clients.	22	68.8	225	59.2
xiii.	Failure to make use of skills acquired in LAPO.	28	87.5	304	80
xiv.	Family problem and extended family.	21	65.7	261	68.7
xv.	Ineffective/poor training of LAPO beneficiaries	29	90.6	368	96.8

Source: Field Survey, 2013

* Multiple Responses

Table 6 above shows the various challenges in the delivery of LAPO services. The findings revealed that, there are some serious challenges that hindered LAPO in delivering services to the beneficiaries. Its observed that the responses of the beneficiaries are mostly similar to the views of LAPO staff. These challenges include, high interest rate charged by LAPO (LAPO staff responses = 90.6% while beneficiaries responded with 93.7%); short loan repayment period (LAPO staff = 90.6% and beneficiaries = 91.6%); poor monitoring and inspection to evaluate progress among beneficiaries (LAPO staff = 100% while beneficiaries = 77.1%); poor funding of LAPO activities (LAPO staff = 93.8% and beneficiaries = 98.4%). Also, the responses of both LAPO staff and beneficiaries are the same (100%) on the small amount of credit given to the beneficiaries; it was also revealed that LAPO beneficiaries are not effectively and poorly trained (LAPO staff = 90.6% while beneficiaries = 96.8%).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As demonstrated in this study, Non Governmental organizations are increasingly becoming veritable agents of development in particularly developing countries. The current study attests to this as LAPO through its activities as opined by both its service providers and beneficiaries has contributed to individual and community development in key socio-economic sectors: credit access; vocational skills acquisition; business establishment and growth employment opportunities; agriculture; education and health social empowerment and human rights; self reliance and self esteem. However, despite the aforementioned positive development limitations, some challenges still persists that limits there optimal performance. Notable among which are the high interest rate charged on loans; shorter duration of its loan; small amount of loan provided; and, weak project and loan monitoring.

Efforts should be made to not just sustain the developmental thrust of LAPO amongst its benefitting communities as it has expanded within Nigeria and West African Countries. Equally, organization like it that abound, should emulate their initiatives. Government of developing economies with high rate of poverty should develop enabling policies and strategic support that promotes the emergence of well organized, widely spread and viral NGOs that service our communities as key partners and complementary agencies of rural development.

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