

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Performance of faith-based grassroots non-governmental organisations in rural development in Nasarawa State, Nigeria**

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**The study assessed performance of faith-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in rural development in Nasarawa State. Eighty (80) randomly selected beneficiaries from two purposively selected faith based NGO were used. Data were collected by the use of structured interview schedule and analysed using percentage, and mean scores. Faith based NGOs implemented several overlapping programmes for the target communities ranging from loan disbursement (92.5%), HIV/AIDS awareness education (87.5%), support for HIV/AIDS infected/affected persons (75.0%), provision of water and market information (65.0%), adult literacy class (62.5%), processing of farm produce (57.5%) and construction/ rehabilitation of schools (50.0%), and computer training (70%) , road rehabilitation (62.5%) and cooperative formation (50.0%). Participants benefited from loan facilities (80.0%), HIV/AIDS education and support (80.0%), adult literacy (70.0%) maternal/ child health care (60.0%), skill acquisition training (65.0%), and others. The beneficiaries participated in planning (57.0%), decision making (50.0%), leadership position (55.0%) and attend regular meeting (70.0%). Performance of the NGOs was rated good in about 11-13 programmes/activites. The study recommends greater participation of beneficiaries to evolve need/demand -oriented interventions and sustainability of programmes. The NGOs should collaborate and foster linkages for optimal use of scarce resource, to minimize duplication and confusion at the grass root.**

**Key words:** Programmes, Non- Governmental Organization (NGOs), performance, beneficiaries, rural, development.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Rural development is a veritable tool for fighting poverty and achieving economic prosperity at the grassroots level (Nwachukwu and Ezeh, 2007). As an integral part of the overall national development, rural development is given prominent attention in development circles because dominant proportion of the population in most developing countries including Nigeria live and derive their livelihood

in rural areas. Also scholars in economic and broader social science literature have paid special attention to issues of agricultural and rural development, and their interaction with industrial and urban development (International Development Research Centre - IDRC, 2004). In most developing countries, the public sector plays a dominant role in the provision of agricultural and

rural development services. However, it has been observed that government alone cannot provide resources for rural development, because of dwindling national resources and ever increasing competing needs. Besides, the public sector is being criticized as outdated, top-down, paternalistic, inflexible, subject to bureaucratic inefficiencies and thus unable to cope with the dynamic demands of rural populace (Rivera et al., 2000). This has paved way for an enhanced and more extensive civil society involvement in activities previously carried out by the public sector, such as delivering social services, promoting grassroots development, and preventing environmental degradation. It has also resulted in upsurge establishment of NGOs and civil-society organizations (CSOs) with increased capacity to engage people at the grassroots level.

According to Ekong (2000), NGOs are agencies set up by private citizens, foundations, church organisations, volunteer workers, etc, to tackle specific social problems and, particularly, the alleviation of poverty and administration of relief materials to the needy. They play complementary, advisory and advocacy roles in agricultural and rural development. Also some NGOs engage in human rights advocacy, women empowerment, small-scale industrialization and community development activities. According to Global Forum on Agricultural Research—GFAR (2003), NGOs are increasingly building networks and consortia around thematic and/or geographic interests to increase their impact through the exchange of ideas and information as well as in mobilizing grassroots support. Farinde and Adisa (2005) also noted that NGOs assist citizens in finding out the activities of government agencies involved in rural development. The special qualities in their style of functioning such as flexibility in operation, sensitivity to changing needs, locality, community-oriented, specific high level of motivation of the functionaries and innovations provide comparative advantage over government organizations.

In Nigeria there has been increasing involvement of NGOs in rural development activities. However, in more recent times, it has been observed that certain factors limit their performance in contributing to rural development. Farinde and Adisa (2005) reported that the constraints facing NGOs in Nigeria ranges from poor collaboration with government agencies, political instability and strong affiliation to over dependence on donor partners. Traditionally, most donor organizations work only with NGOs with a legal status and which are able to produce project proposals, to plan properly, and to handle budget administration and produce financial and technical reports regularly. Unfortunately, most grassroots NGOs in developing countries do not comply with these requirements and therefore cannot benefit from donor funds. Moreover, inconsistency, first between vision and concrete development activities with stakeholders; secondly, between the chosen activities, the organisational structure and the principles of participation

and empowerment also affect the performance of NGO. In most cases NGO staff, supporters and the outside world get confused, actions do not combine and support each other in optimal ways, there is a loss of focus and energies become dissipated (Fowler, 2000). Other problems include the issue of project replicability and their innovativeness with characteristic scaling-up which often leads to loss of advantages of smallness and group cohesion (Riddle and Robinson, 2006).

Given the above scenarios the concern on the performance of NGOs in rural development becomes pertinent. Of greater concern, however, is the performance of faith-based NGOs, given the religious affiliation which limits participation of the intended beneficiaries in their activities; and popular relationship between many NGOs and their founders (Niekisch, 2006). Leurs et al. (2006) observed that the nature, scale, activities and relationships of faith-based organizations (FBOs) remain poorly understood and documented, despite their acclaimed importance in service delivery, humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development.

There are many grassroots NGOs operating in Nasarawa State. These include; Project Agape, Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN), Family Health Care Foundation (FAHCF), and Community Participation for Action in the Social Sector (COMPASS), among others. Project Agape and YMCA were the earlier once and faith based NGOs. While Project Agape was established in 1999 by a team of concerned youths in Lafia, the Nasarawa State Capital, the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) Mada Hills is an affiliate of the National Council of YMCAs of Nigeria established in 1969. A non-profit making, private and a Christian youth organization for both males and females. These organizations had laudable goals and programmes and for several years had operated in the rural communities. Therefore, the study assessed the performance of these faith-based NGOs in Nasarawa State. It aimed to:

- (i) Ascertain the roles/activities of faith-based NGOs in rural development in the target communities;
- (ii) Ascertain the level of participation of beneficiaries in the programmes;
- (iii) Assess perceived effects and impact on the beneficiaries and
- (iv) Assess the beneficiaries' perception of the performance of faith-based NGOs.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Nasarawa State, North central Nigeria. Beneficiaries of Project Agape and YMCA Mada Hills both of which are faith-based NGOs constituted the population. Project Agape is a non-profit, non-political and non-governmental organization whose vision is to ensure an equitable and just society, empowered for sustainable holistic development. Its mission is to empower the poor and vulnerable communities using participatory development

approaches. The goals of Project Agape are to:

- (i) Achieve economic empowerment of the poor with particular reference to women and children;
- (ii) Enhance delivery of formal and non formal education to the poor in target communities;
- (iii) Enlighten and empower the poor and marginalized to be able to assert and advocate for their rights;
- (iv) Promote innovative livelihood and health care systems;
- (v) Mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS and enhance safe reproductive health practices.

Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) Mada Hills, on the other hand, is an affiliate of the National Council of YMCAs of Nigeria, a non-profit making, private and a Christian youth organization for both males and females. Young Men Christian Association was founded in 1969 with the aim of rehabilitating wandering youths to become better citizens of their respective communities as well as mobilize communities towards self-help for poverty alleviation. Its mission is to facilitate relevant community based programmes and services that empower the youth, communities, and the less privileged economically, spiritually, socially, and physically on the basis of equality and justice and in accordance with the Christian mandate. Its activities include mobilization for actualization of self help projects; training/facilitation in sustainable agriculture for improved yield and standard of living amongst the rural populace; youth development programmes and moral education; HIV/AIDS Education/awareness; training and consultancy on first aid using medicinal herbs for rural communities; women empowerment programmes in the area of training on local crafts for economic empowerment.

The awareness, participation, benefit, and support (APBs) framework proposed by Obasi and Oguche (1995) for assessing programmes was employed. It is a framework that adopts assessment to the principal objectives of a programme. It is hinged on the fact that a new and innovative programme targeted at specific section of the society would, among other things, require that such a target group should become aware of the programme as a basis of:

- (i) Getting their cooperation through participation;
- (ii) Providing them the opportunity of seeking for, and benefiting from the programme; and
- (iii) Securing support necessary for the continued sustenance of the programme

A Multistage sampling procedure was used. First, four (4) Local government areas (LGAs) each in which the two NGOs operated were purposively selected. Secondly, for each NGO, two (2) benefiting communities were purposively selected from each of the 4 LGAs giving a total of 8 communities for each NGO. Thirdly, for each NGO, five (5) beneficiaries were randomly selected from each of the 8 communities giving a total of 40 respondents for each NGO. Overall, a total of 80 respondents were used for the study. Structured interview schedule was used for data collection.

To ascertain the roles/ activities of the two NGOs in rural development, respondents were asked to indicate among list of items, the programmes/projects executed by the NGOs in their communities that contributed to rural development. Performance of the NGOs was assessed based on level of participation of the beneficiaries, benefits derived, and the perception of the respondents. Respondents indicated the level of participation in the programmes. Also list of possible benefits were provided and respondents asked to indicate benefits accrued from the programmes. Data on the respondents' perception of performance of the NGOs were addressed by rating various activities of the NGOs using a five point Likert type scale with options: excellent =5, very good = 4; Good = 3; Poor = 2, and very poor = 1. The

values were summed thus,  $(5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 15/5 = 3)$ . Data generated were analyzed by the use of percentage and mean scores. Mean scores  $\geq 3$  were regarded as good performance, while mean scores  $< 3$  were considered poor performance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Programmes/projects executed by the NGOs

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to programmes/projects executed by the NGOs in the communities. The most popular programmes executed by Project Agape include loan disbursement (92.5%), HIV/AIDS awareness education (80.0%), support for HIV/AIDS infected/affected persons (75.0%), provision of water and market information (65.0%), adult literacy class (62.5%) processing of farm produce (57.5%) and construction/ rehabilitation of schools (50.0%). Similarly, the major programmes executed by YMCA include supply of farm inputs (90.0%), HIV/AIDS awareness (87.5%), and computer training (70.0%), support for victims of HIV/AIDS (75.0%), road rehabilitation (62.5%) and cooperative formation (50.0%).

On the contrary, Project Agape was not involved in road rehabilitation, computer training, and skill acquisition. Generally, the two NGOs have multiple activities/ programmes, probably in response to the priority needs of the target beneficiaries. However, Project Agape seems to be more involved in construction/rehabilitation of schools, adult literacy, loan disbursement and agricultural market information service; while YMCA concentrated on road rehabilitation, supply of farm inputs, and computer training programme. This is in line with the opinion of Sule (2006) that only an integrated rural development programme with multi-sectoral approach can bring about an improvement in the quality of life of the rural people, and the overall national development. However, the infrastructure and human resource needed to size the activities may constitute a formidable challenge to the organizations. The results further show some overlap of activities among the two NGOs, especially in the areas of HIV/AIDS awareness and support, supply of farm inputs / credit and political/leadership training. This suggests lack/poor coordination among agricultural and rural development agencies in the state. The need for effective coordination of activities of agricultural and rural development organizations is crucial given the increasing policy support for pluralism in development efforts. Coordination holds great potential for efficient use of scarce resources, concentration of efforts, promote comparative advantage, and benefits of synergy in the system.

### Level of participation of beneficiaries in programme

Majority (70.0%) of the beneficiaries of Project Agape

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents according to programmes/projects executed by the NGOs in communities.

Projects executed	Project Agape (n=40)		YMCA (n=40)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Road rehabilitation	0	0.0	25	62.5
Water supply/sanitation	26	65.0	10	25.0
Construction/rehabilitation of schools	20	50.0	0	0.0
Adult education programme	25	62.5	5	12.5
Support for HIV/AIDS patients/orphans	30	75.0	30	75.0
HIV/AIDS awareness education	32	80.0	35	87.5
Supply of farm inputs	5	12.0	36	90.0
Loan disbursement	37	92.5	10	25.0
Market information service	26	65.0	6	15.0
Computer training programme	0	0.0	28	70.0
Women skills acquisition centre	0	0.0	15	37.5
Processing of farm produce	23	57.5	19	47.5
Political education/advocacy	18	45.0	16	40.0
Cooperative formation/training	19	47.5	20	50.0

Multiple response.

**Table 2** Distribution of respondents according to level of participation.

Level of participation	Project Agape (n=40)		YMCA (n=40)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Passive recipient of benefits	8	20.0	4	10.0
Holding leadership position	20	50.0	22	55.0
Involved in decision making	4	10.0	20	50.0
Participate in programme planning	20	50.0	23	57.5
Participate in programme implementation only	12	30.0	2	5.0
Serve as programme facilitator	12	30.0	4	10.0
Donated land for projects	8	20.0	2	5.0
Attend meeting regularly	28	70.0	24	60.0

were involved in attending meetings regularly, while 50.0% each were involved in planning programmes and leadership, respectively (Table2). Beneficiaries of YMCA also participated in regular attendants to meetings (60.0%), programme planning (57.5%), leadership (55.0%) and in decision making process (50.0%). Only about 20.0% (Project AGAPE) and 10.0% (YMCA) beneficiaries were passive recipients of the benefits. The result shows high level of participation of the beneficiaries. Largely, it shows that the organizations employed participatory, people centered and community-oriented approach to rural development. This agrees with the common features of most NGOs evident in the popular strategy of collective action and people mobilization for the purpose of achieving the desired objectives. According to Biswambhar Panda et al. (2003), NGOs play crucial role in making the people environmentally aware and sensitive to take part in the development

process. Above all, participation is also guaranteed because they are more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of poor communities, minorities and women. Consequently, they tend to command more legitimacy in the eyes of the poor than most governmental agencies (Ofosu-Appiah, 2003). Also the high participation of the respondents might have been influenced by degree of certainty of availability of output and extent to which output will be available as a result of collective action. Active participation of beneficiaries at all levels of programme planning, execution, monitoring and decision making process enhances sustainability of development programme.

### Benefits derived by beneficiaries

Table 3 shows the various benefits received from the

**Table 3** Distribution of respondents according to benefits received from the NGOs.

Benefits	Project Agape (n=40)		YMCA (n=40)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Provision of farm inputs	8	20.0	16	40.0
Loan facilities	32	80.0	22	55.0
Portable water	6	15.0	14	35.0
Processing of farm produce	4	10.0	0	0.0
Marketing of farm produce	4	10.0	8	20.0
Road rehabilitation	8	20.0	4	10.0
HIV/AIDS education/support	32	80.0	16	40.0
Adult literacy	28	70.0	6	15.0
Maternal/child health care	24	60.0	8	20.0
Skill acquisition training	2	5.0	26	65.0

\* Multiple responses

**Table 4.:** Distribution of respondents on perceived impact of the NGOs on their socio economic life.

Variable (impact areas)	Project Agape (n=40)		YMCA (n=40)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Increase in income level	16	40.0	14	35.0
Easy access to credit	12	30.0	12	30.0
Easy access to farm inputs	20	50.0	36	90.0
Improved health & sanitation	32	80.0	20	50.0
Increased literacy level	36	90.0	28	70.0

\*Multiple responses

NGOs by participants. Majority (80, 80, 70 and 60%) of the Project Agape participants benefited from loan facilities, HIV/AIDS education and support, adult literacy and maternal/ child health care, respectively. The beneficiaries were also provided with farm input (20.0%), portable water (15.0%), skill for processing of farm produce (10.0%), marketing facilities (10.0%) and road rehabilitation services (20.0%). In the same vein, beneficiaries of YMCA received skill acquisition training (65.0%), loan facility (55.0%), provision of farm inputs (40.0%), and HIV/AIDS education/support (40.0%). Only 20.0, 15.0 and 10.0% benefited from portable water, marketing facilities, and adult literacy, respectively. Unlike with Project Agade, YMCA participants were not provided with skill for processing of farm produce.

Surprisingly, most of the participants of the two NGOs did not benefit from services that address major farm problems being the major occupation of rural communities. This suggests that the NGOs are not primarily concern with agriculture and other agrarian-related issues. Otherwise, according to Faride and Adisa (2005) NGOs in Nigeria concerned with agriculture, poverty eradication, capacity building and empowerment should focus on the progress of activities in the areas of group formation for small-scale farmers, upgrading farmers' condition,

providing services on processing of crops, preservation, utilization, regular visit to farmers etc. Certainly the benefits received depend on the input of their programme which is a function of several variables particularly donor mandate and policy, available funds, organizational style and others.

#### **Perceived impact of the NGOs on respondents' socio-economic lives**

Beneficiaries of Project Agape indicated that the NGO had impacted positively on their level of literacy(90%), improved health and sanitation (80%), access to input (50%) and increase personal income (40%) (Table 4). Also programmes of YMCA improved participants' access to farm inputs (90%), increase literacy level (70%), improved health and sanitation (50%), and personal income (35%). The findings show that the NGOs positively influenced the socio-economic life of the participants. This agrees with Akpabio and Aboh (2007) who revealed that women NGOs' empowerment activities provided critical economic and social benefits to their clients. Also Ijere (1992) confirmed that NGOs perform certain roles that promote socio-economic transformation in rural

**Table 5.** Mean scores on perceived performance of the NGOs.

Areas of performance	Project Agape (n=40)		YMCA (n=40)	
	Mean score (M)	Std dev	Mean (M)	Std dev
Mobilization of membership	4.0	1.0	3.9	0.8
Involving members in decision making	4.0	1.1	4.2	0.8
Basing programmes on interest/needs of beneficiaries	3.7	1.0	3.4	1.0
Effective communication flow to members	3.7	1.2	4.1	0.8
Farm inputs supply	3.9	0.8	2.9	1.2
Credit disbursement	2.9	1.1	3.1	1.2
Net-working with other agencies	3.7	0.7	3.5	0.7
Building capacity of members	4.1	0.9	2.9	0.9
Projects monitoring/supervision	3.9	1.0	3.5	1.0
Funding of projects	3.6	0.8	3.2	1.3
Transparency and accountability	3.6	1.3	3.6	1.0
Involving members in project conception/design	3.7	0.9	3.3	0.8
Equity in dealing with all clients	3.9	0.9	3.2	1.2

communities. This is expected to be a welcome development because most rural areas in Nigeria lack access to simplest essential amenities. The positive change expressed by the respondents is expedient to reduce the income gap, and the pressure of rural-urban migration severally reported as one of the major challenges of development in the rural sectors.

### Beneficiaries perception of performance of the NGOs

Performance of the Project Agape was rated good in all the 13 activities namely; building capacity of members (M = 4.1), involving members in decision making (M = 4.0) and membership mobilization (M = 4.0), project monitoring and supervision (M = 3.9), equity in dealing with clients (M = 3.9), farm input distribution (M=3.9), effective communication (M = 3.7), basing programme on interest of beneficiaries (M = 3.7) and others (Table 5). On the other hand, YMCA was rated good on involvement of members in decision making (M = 4.2), effective flow of communication (M = 4.1), membership mobilization (M = 3.9), transparency and accountability (M = 3.6), project monitoring and supervision (M = 3.6), networking with other agencies (M = 3.5) and others. The respondents however, expressed poor performance for Project Agape in credit disbursement (M = 2.9); while YMCA performed poorly in capacity building (M = 2.9) and farm inputs supply (M = 2.9). There is similarity in respondents' rating in some areas of good performance, example on involvement of members in decision making and membership mobilization. This suggests high participation of the beneficiaries in the programmes of the NGOs. Certainly, this may have contributed to the performance of the NGOs in most of their activities, because lack of effective participation has been reported as one of the causes of

poor performance of NGOs (Fowler, 2000). Generally, the performance of the two NGOs was high in most of the activities. It signifies high acceptability and confidence of the participants on the NGOs. Possible reasons according to Akpabio and Aboh (2007) include ability to satisfy beneficiaries' needs and aspirations, high volume of loan disbursement and ability to raise beneficiaries' income status. In addition, NGOs have firsthand experience and knowledge of local needs, problems and research at local level; they are closer to the mind and hearts of the people and are with commitment of zeal for voluntary action (Dhillon and Hansra, 1995).

### Conclusion

Faith-based NGOs contributed to rural development by implementation of several development programmes ranging from loan disbursement, HIV/AIDS awareness education, support for HIV/AIDS infected/affected persons, provision of water and market information, adult literacy class, processing of farm produce, and construction/ rehabilitation of schools, computer training, road rehabilitation and others. However, findings indicate an overlap in some of the projects of the two NGOs, suggesting lack of collaboration among the agencies. Also result shows high participation of the beneficiaries in the activities of the NGOs. Consequently, many benefits were amassed by the participants in form of loan facilities, HIV/AIDS education and support, adult literacy and maternal/ child health care. The NGOs impacted positively on the level of literacy, health and sanitation of the respondents and had good performance ratings in about 11-13 activities/programmes. The study therefore recommends that the NGOs should evolve activities/interventions that could improve income and level of

living of the beneficiaries. Target beneficiaries should be actively involved in all stages of development programmes to enhance effective patronage, greater impact and sustainability. Above all, NGOs involved in rural development should collaborate and foster linkages to reduce duplication of programmes and waste of scarce human and material resources.

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