

Rural Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of rural empowerment on socio-economic development in Delta State of Nigeria. This is because of the rising extreme poverty in rural areas, which has resulted in the poor socio-economic development of the rural areas in the state. The System Theory by David Easton was used. The theory explores how interaction occurs in the political system regarding binding and authoritative value allocation since the system is interconnected. The finding showed that rural areas are characterized by poor infrastructure, low skill, extreme poverty and absence of social amenities. These have made the area unattractive for social and economic investment and have affected the areas' socio-economic development, forcing the able men and women to drift to the urban city, leaving the vulnerable who lack the needed skills and training to improve the living condition of the rural areas. This study concluded that the empowerment of the rural people will change their poor living, which will bring about improvement in their socio-economic development. This paper recommends construction of infrastructure and provision of basic amenities in rural areas to make them attractive for local and foreign business. In addition, the Delta State government should broaden all empowerment programmes and job creation schemes to address the need of the rural communities in Delta State.

Keywords: Rural, Empowerment, Community, Socio-economic, State, Dwellers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Societies are made up of people residing in different parts of a particular entity based on choice or prevailing circumstance. Societies are open to changes and growth. Some once rural areas grew into towns and cities due to the status quo changes. That is to say that rural and urban areas are differentiated based on modern artifacts and the level of socio-economic development in the area over time and the population of the area. Rural areas refer to areas with fewer people, houses and social amenities. Most of what is described as rural areas can be called hunt, hamlets, camps and small towns with some commercial activities on some selected days. The way of life is more communal than the urban areas. This makes them relate and have access to one another without barrier. Most rural dwellers are engaged in small scale farming and other petty trades to make a living and take care of their families. In this regard, rural empowerment revolves around how these rural areas can be empowered to improve their living conditions and environment and live a decent life without the need to migrate to cities for greener pasture. Rural empowerment is the process and steps taken to transform the rural areas by organising training and skill programs to improve their living conditions and environment (Wrihatnolo&Dwijowiyoto, 2002 as cited in Santosa, 2014). Socio-economic development bothers on developing a social and economic aspect of man and his environment. The typical indicators of assessing socio-economic development status include life expectancy ratio, literacy, and gross domestic products. Others include educational level, gender, poverty, unemployment, and housing. Rural empowerment is an instrument for inculcating in the rural people the necessary skill and training that will enable them to better their lives and boost their productivity.

The study location of this study is Delta State, Nigeria. Looking at the condition of most rural areas, many are living in a deplorable state, absence of basic services, lack of skills and training needed for their transformation. These have consequently led to an increase in rural poverty and a surge in rural to urban drift, leading to overstretched city facilities and increased crime. The continuous plight of the rural areas which is an indication that existing rural empowerment programs are unable to fast-track rural development became the *raison d'être* for seeking a lasting approach that will alleviate the deplorable conditions of rural areas in Delta State. Because if left unresolved, it will further create more problems that will affect the general living condition of the rural parts of the state.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Rural Empowerment

Rural empowerment is the enablement of individuals and groups residing in the rural areas with training and skills required to live a decent life, transform their environment and boost the overall social-economic development of the entire state. Like most other concepts and variables in the social sciences, the word rural has multiple meanings. Scholars have often defined rural areas based on the discussion topic because no unanimously agreed definition. Definition defers from country to country depending on the discipline of study. From the geographical perspective, the rural pertains to location and or map identifying a region. It has also been argued that rural is commonly used to represent social settings, communities sharing a common interest. According to Jordan & Hargrove (1987), a unified definition has become a “nagging problem” because rurality is complex and challenging to designate and not think of defining it.

According to Plessis et al. (2002), an area can be designated as rural on measurement and indexes such as the area’s population, the size, the density and the context of the study. Also, they identify six essential features that suggest an area to be rural. These features include the census figure of the area, the entity is rural and or of a small town, the area in its setting is a rural region in outlook, lacks the features of areas that give an entity metropolitan feature and lastly, the postcodes of the area. The description above suggests that rural areas are not urban and lack the features of cities and big towns. In comparative terms, there are more modern artifacts in the urban areas with a larger population than in the rural areas. In Bealer et al.’s (1965) categorisation, an area is rural if the area’s population is less than 20, 000 people. The central argument here is that population density distinguishes villages and cities. Therefore, an area can grow from a village to become a city when the population density of the place increases. In Olawoye’s (1987) conceptualisation, rural area is best understood in comparative terms with urban areas. Because there is a difference between cities (urban) and villages (rural areas) in their essential features and characteristics, he went further to say that rural area in his historical settings refers to areas with low population density, an entity with small size, relatively isolated, agrarian, and similarity in the way of life and or exhibits homogenous behaviour. According to Imoudu (1986), the major characteristic of rural areas in Nigeria is the absence of a good road network, the nonexistence of white-collar jobs. Thus, the majority of the people depend on agriculture for survival, no electricity, absence of portable drinking water and poor communication network. It could be said thus that rural areas are those areas where there are slight or non-existent government services in terms of social amenities like what is obtained in the cities. In the context of this research, the word rural or rural area, as it will be used, refers to villages and communities with relatively small population density, homogenous population, whose environments are local, and agrarian with the dearth of social amenities.

One of the major challenges of developing countries is extreme poverty; majority of such people live in the rural areas because many of them are unemployed, subsistence farmers and those in business operate in small-scale. Rural empowerment seeks to increase the productivity of the rural people and reduce poverty and mass hunger among rural dwellers. Similarly, rural empowerment is imparting special skills and training on people who live in these rural areas to empower them toward living life that is commensurate with the prevailing international standard of living and enable them to contribute to socio-economic development.

Socio-economic development

This refers to social and economic development. Where development means the qualitative and quantitative improvement in living condition and environment of the people. Socioeconomic empowerment is critical to achieving the government's development goals and will aid in the formation of community partnerships with a shared vision. This vision, in theory, should encourage people and future generations to become economically active by establishing small, medium, and micro businesses (SMMEs). Distinctively, social development is transforming social institutions toward building the people’s capability in society to meet their ambitions. In other words, social development can be defined as the qualitative transformation in society toward having and living a progressive life. It similarly involves investing in the people and removing all bearers, preventing them from reaching their full potentials. This involves most result-oriented methods. Economic development refers to the qualitative and quantitative advancement of an area’s wealth for the people’s well-being. Economic development goes beyond growth which is the mere increase in GDP, income and per capita income and real national income (“Socio-Economic Development and Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups”, n.d). Economic development seeks to improve the political, social and general welfare of the people. Socio-economic development can also be conceptualised as human development, which is about freedom of the individual, an opportunity for all, and general well-being. Socio-economic development embraces development that addresses the social and economic needs of the people. Most rural areas hardly experience the state and central governments’ socio-economic development in their respective communities. The lives of the rural people, just like their urban counterparts, are surrounded by social and economic needs; in the absence of meeting these needs, life generally becomes miserable occasioned by poverty, hunger and underdevelopment. According to Metu et al. (2017), socio-economic development addresses the problem of

drinkable water, energy supply, ease of communication, good road network, quality education, healthcare and takes care of the people's welfare. These are integral to rural development because most rural areas are into agriculture.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – SYSTEM THEORY

This study adopted the system theory by David Easton. System analysis was first applied to biological studies by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in the early part of the 20th century. By the 1920s, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski adopted the analysis to study a primitive tribe behavioural pattern. Similarly, the system approach found its way into sociology by Robert K Merton and Talcott Parsons in their research. Considering the nature of the political phenomenon, the approach was considered helpful in analyzing the political system. Thus, between the 1950s and 1960s, the system approach was introduced into political science by David Easton, Gabriel Almond, G C Powell, Morton Kaplan, Karl Deutsch and other behaviouralists. The political system is defined as the communication that takes place in a setting from which “binding and authoritative allocations are made” (Easton, 1990). The political system has also been conceptualised as the communication in all the independent states playing the role of “integration and adaptation” (Almond, 1970). The major component of the system theory is the system, environment, boundary, input, conversion, output, disturbance, stress, regulation, responses, feedback (Conteh-Morgan, 2003).

This theory is relevant to this study because it reveals how a political system functions in the state and the environment it operates and how input (demand and support) affects the functionality of the political system. Since the system needs input in the form of support, it is expected that support can only be received from the rural areas when they are productive. Therefore, rural empowerment will make the rural areas more productive and support the political system when they have the needed skills and learning on how to harness the resource in their environment. The empowerment of the rural people is then demanded in the political system. This demand will make the rural area have more capacity to support the political system. These require the authorities to take decisive decisions and implement them. When this is done, the output returns to the system and boosts socio-economic development. The output is critical to the political system (Easton, 1953/1957). Therefore, the conversion process must be active and feedback is taken seriously to have a functional political system because the ultimate goal of the political system is goal achievement, goal modifying to achieve a self-transforming system.

This theory was criticised for being a borrowed theory from the sciences where it was used to study life science and not social events. Similarly, the theory was majorly criticised for not taking the occurrence of political and socio-economic crises into consideration. For this reason, it was alleged that system theory in political science is abstractive and complicated. Jackson & Tansy (2014) criticised Easton's system theory claiming that the political system is analytical. They faulted Easton's argument that the political system can respond to input from another environment by output, which can affect the environment to stabilize it. Jackson and Tansy (2014) maintained that Easton did not consider the rationality and irrationality of the people. These notwithstanding, the system theory showed excellently the events that occur in the political system, examining and interpreting political life interaction with the environment, people, resources and their functionality.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN DELTA STATE

Considering the agrarian nature of rural communities and other features, Nigeria's first to fifth National Development Plan) tended to address rural areas' needs through policies and programs. In addition to these development plans, there have been other programs and schemes to improve rural areas' conditions. The Delta State government through the various ministries have initiated various empowerment programmes to address unemployment and to generally empower Deltans. However, these programmes have rich outlook, but in operation have not been able to address the plight of the rural areas across Delta State, which portray city bias. The Delta State Government launched Rural Youth Skill Acquisition Programme (RYSA) (Vanguard, 2020, November 10). The program made provision for practical/hands-on training and the Community Business School (CBS) training. However, the program is basically for age bracket of 18-29 and require formal education before one can benefit from the scheme (Delta State Job and Wealth Creation Bureau, 2021). Therefore, it is evident then that the empowerment is limited and not capable of solving the problem of poor socio-economic development in Delta State rural areas. Similarly, Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) was another programme initiated with good intend, but most rural communities are not even aware of the program (Ahon, 2021, May 9). Also, due to the poor educational background of most rural areas, they do not have the required WAEC entry requirement to benefit from the program. In order to encourage youths to engage in farming, the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) was initiated to encourage youth to participate in agriculture. However, the program is limited to a few segments of the population and mainly to the

exclusion of rural areas (Ahon, 2021, September 15). The Graduate Employment Enhancement Programme (GEEP) is basically for urban dwellers, leaving out the graduates who reside in rural areas.

According to Delta State Job and Wealth Creation Bureau (2021), there is a microcredit scheme. The microcredit, which includes providing tailored loans to artisans, farmers, traders, women, and young entrepreneurs, made no provision for rural people in practice. Instead, the Agroindustry are the primary beneficiaries. Another scheme related to the microcredit scheme is the WESAP (Women Empowerment and Skills Acquisition Programme), which makes provision for renting for women to the sum of N60, 000 for each of the 70 beneficiaries (Vanguard, 2021, January 14). Similarly, the Production and Processing Support Programme (PPSP), which Subsidized inputs and production technologies for crops, livestock, and fish farmers, focused on agriculture in urban cities and large-scale farmers, leaving the peasant farmers who are the primary producers of agricultural produce. The rural farmers need to be educated on the use of modern farm implements for crops production as this will result in increased food production since they constitute the largest population of people engaged in farming. There is also Girls Entrepreneurship and Skills Training (GEST) program (Kwubosu, 2020, November 23). However, like other empowerment, common targets are urban dwellers, therefore as noble as some of these empowerments portrays to be and achieve, the rural dwellers are not benefiting from the schemes.

V. THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF POOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN DELTA STATE OF NIGERIA

Most rural communities in Delt State are worst off compared to what they used to be in time past. The nature and causes of poor performances in terms of the level of socio-economic development can be found in the manner and way the rural communities have been structured. As captured by system theory, the state is a system of input-output mechanisms. Satisfaction of demand in the form of empowerment is an instrument for the development of the rural areas, enabling the rural community to offer practical support in the form of taxes and levies to the political systems. Several programs and schemes have been initiated in time past, but these have not yielded a significant impact on the socio-economic status of rural communities.

Despite plans, schemes and other programs and strategies for rural development, the condition of these rural areas has not changed. By nature, rural areas are characterised by poor road networks. According to Ngezahayo (2019), countries' development is primarily tied to the motorable road networks, as good road networks ease traveling risk, reduce time spent on the road, ensure the safety of the road users and make the movement of goods easier. Means of transportation is considered a major human need and a core part of infrastructure development. In Delta State currently, most of the rural roads are not motorable, leaving the communities in misery as they cannot access other communities with ease, making it difficult for them to transport their crops. This has been a major limitation to their socio-economic well-being. According to Ahon&Akuopha (2021, September 2), people of Ndokwa East in Delta State have continued to lament the poor road network in almost all their rural villages. Over 30 road networks that were initiated have been abandoned, and the government has kept mute. The situation led to mass protest across the affected communities, some of which include: Ase, Akaraietiti, AkaraiObodo, Asaba Utchi, Azagba, Lagos Iyese, Umuolu, OnitchaUtchi, Onya, Ekpe, Ibedeni, Akaraietiti, Ibrede, Ayamah, Obama among others. The frustration of the road situation made many residents of this communities fault the popular nick name of the governor, "roadmasters." Some of the protesters noted that the condition of roads across most Ndokwa communities negates what many conceive of the governor. In a similar vein, residents of the Asaba-Ase community noted that the road constructed in the community was destroyed by the heavy flood of 2012. The government is yet to fix the road as promised and this has made the community which is a commercial hub around the riverine areadifficult to access by road (Osuyi, 2019, August 27).

In Okpe local government area, the rural road conditions also a nightmare. According to Okoro (as cited in Research Clue, 2019), roads across the state's local government are in poor condition. However, the rural people cannot help the situation. Instead, it is on the deplorable road condition that they undertake their socio-economic activities. They have to trek for hours and swim through the flooded parts to access their market. Similarly, school children have to suffer this condition before going to school to learn. Most rural communities across the state are in poor conditions; these communities make many contributions to the state's wealth through agriculture and being host communities to oil exploration. The Isoko Youth Agenda (IYA), lamented that, rural communities like Idheze and Uzere in Isoko South are oil-producing communities but these communities have been neglected in terms of social and economic development. This is also the situation other Isoko communities like Oleh, Irri, Olomoro, Igvide, and Ozoro (Akenzua, 2017, July 31). The National President of Isoko Youth Agenda (IYA), SabastineAgbefe, noted that communities' poor socio-economic conditions pushed the productive labour force to migrate to cities like Warri, Ughelli, Sapele and even other

parts like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja. This is the consequence of oil exploration, which has destroyed farmlands without the government addressing the situation. He noted that Isoko land provides 28% of crude oil and gas to the State economy; despite that, no visible infrastructure development is taking place there. Similarly, the Isoko Development Union also noted that despite the contribution of Isoko land to the nation, both federal and state communities had neglected the plight of their communities (Ibe, 2020, October 20). TIPA, the Isoko Professionals Association, has also lent her voice to the issue of poor infrastructure in Isoko South and North local government areas in spite of the huge contribution to the Delta State and Federal Government economy through its rich oil deposits (Vanguard, 2021, January 13).

In addition to this, rural areas are also characterised by large dependence on peasant agriculture. According to Imoudu (1986), urban areas most often go into agriculture as an option or just to produce some vegetable crops, but rural people are dependent on agriculture. For this reason, he noted that the concept of rural is primarily equated with agriculture and other menial jobs. However, rural agriculture is often on a small scale, but they still make up the bulk of local food production in the state. Rural areas are also known for poor infrastructural facilities and social amenities. Water and electricity are hardly found in most rural communities, which has made many of the rural dwellers resort to lanterns, candles (Research Clue, 2019). Similarly, many drinks from the stream and ponds thus exposed many to avoidable illness, of which there are no available health care services at their disposal. Also, these rural areas lack human capital development and investment. These factors have resulted in alarming unemployment rates in most rural areas and most policies of the state in terms of welfare are urban bias, short-changing the rural areas, the consequence of which is hunger and poverty in rural areas (Bertolini et al. 2008).

These have together constituted the causes of poor socio-economic development of rural areas. Put differently, poor social and infrastructural facilities have made rural areas unattractive for investment and abode; this increases rural-urban drift, makes the environment unattractive, and difficulty in accessing school and training, increasing illiteracy. Consequently, rural areas have high population of people without skill and training, resulting in their inability to have decent occupation, thus unemployable. Most people who engage in agriculture are peasant farming (small-scale); their production is small because of crude implements. Therefore, their production is basically for households, and even the surplus for exchange most often perish as there is no road network and communication to market these products at all times. It should be noted that rural areas have poor socio-economic development partly because most of the people that migrate from the rural areas to the urban areas are the best brain and agile population, leaving out the weak and vulnerable in the rural areas, which are not able to make the positive impact needed to boost socio-economic activities (Ocheni et al., 2012). This automatically affects rural income and standard of living following the dearth of professionals capable of creating and sustaining rural development.

VI. IMPACT OF RURAL EMPOWERMENT ON RURAL AREAS SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Rurality is now synonymous with poverty as it has become the poorest' home. Poverty is a major issue in most rural communities across developing countries. Over 88 percent of those categories of people living in extreme poverty reside in rural areas. The figure is four times higher than that of the urban cities (International Labour Organisation, 2016). This is because decent jobs are commonly located and found in urban cities and deficits in rural villages. The employment in rural areas is more of under-employment as most of them are still poor, with 20 percent of employed rural people still living in extreme poverty compared to 4 percent of those of urban employment who live in extreme poverty.

The poor socio-economic development of rural areas has increased rural poverty and misery due to the absence of rural empowerment. Rural empowerment is a critical part of rural socio-economic development in Delta State. Unfortunately, most rural areas in Nigeria are neglected. However, at the same time, the federal and state government generate most of their resources from these rural areas yet fail to initiate functional empowerment programs and social amenities that could boost rural areas' environment and living conditions. Mammud (2019) noted that food production depends on rural farmers' production; likewise, crude oil is found in commercial quantity in most rural areas in Nigeria. However, despite generating the bulk of resources used to develop the urban areas, the rural communities where these resources are obtained suffer disadvantages. There is no electricity, good road, and water supply in most communities in Delta State, where crude oil is found and exploration is going on.

Socio-economic development of rural areas seeks to better the living condition of rural areas. In line with this, Olayide et al. (1981 as cited in Mammud, 2019) conceived the idea of rural development to be a process in which coordinated efforts are made to facilitate a considerable rise in rural resource production. The primary goal is to increase rural income and provide employment opportunities for rural residents. These provisions will improve the living conditions in rural areas, which will also checkmate rural-urban drifts. The rural locality is also the major player in food production. Therefore, rural development must consider the

physical, social, and mental health well-being of the rural people. Success in the socio-economic development of rural areas could be judged using indices based on the availability of drinkable water, good road network, presence of housing scheme, electricity at affordable rates, model community market, access to quality and affordable education, enhanced health care delivery, and food and agricultural product availability for rural settlers (Obot (1987).

The achievement of rural development in Delta State should be centred on three cardinal pillars. These pillars include community empowerment, holistic development, collaboration and partner.

Community development is the act of making provision for a whole community to be part of economic and social development through local initiatives (Screwvala, 2020). It seeks to manage the generation of resources, allocation and redistribution to boost the socio-political awareness of the causes of the prevailing changes. It does not necessarily change the status quo; instead, it rejuvenates the existing traditional political system and value orientation (Lee, 2001). Therefore, rural empowerment can be achieved through community development. This is the adoption of a group approach instead of approaching empowerment individually. According to screwvala (2020), empowering the community as a whole is more result-oriented than taking them individually. He noted that poverty is both a material and mental lapse but when transformed such mentality could then be used for productive ventures. When a community mentality is re-oriented for productive purposes, such people will be actively involved in building and partaking in a roadmap that can boost their community's socio-economic development. The training will enable them as groups to fully take charge and participate in programs and schemes that will boost the socio-economic activities in their respective regions. Most of the failed rural development programs were based on the failure of the government to see community development from the perspective of empowering the communities to be fully part of the schemes. Thus, the programs died off with the regime/administration that introduced them. Put differently, forming and developing community unions in rural areas is a productive strategy for rural areas to have the authority to solve more significant problems and increase their socio-economic well-being. Community unions or community development unions are typically formed to bring together diverse social systems (families, schools, workplaces, media, and civic organizations) to address issues that affect them based on need assessment (Perkins, 2010)

Secondly, rural empowerment in Delta State must be holistic; that is all-encompassing. The empowerment of rural areas must be holistic because empowerment needs to be complementary. Empowerment of the rural areas should go beyond mere construction of market and or provision of health care. It will be out of place to have a good education program in the rural areas without having good roads to the built schools. It should be noted that rural empowerment involves equipping the people with different skills and training to enable them to impact all aspects of human endeavours' as obtainable in their communities and this will completely address the issue of rural-urban drift. According to Screwvala(2020), rural empowerment entails taking a geographical approach and developing a comprehensive 360-degree holistic development model because everything in the society is connected in the form of a system. He emphasized the need for rural empowerment to be initiated to make learning blissful.

Similarly, adopting a village approach is also a form of rural community empowerment. These programs engage on the leadership abilities of community people in one location to implement a broad yet integrated plan in that community, with active community participation. The initiative's ultimate goal should be to promote individual and family self-sufficiency and help them reinvigorate their neighbourhood by reducing extreme poverty. The approach is also holistic and a community-driven sustainable development model that seeks to use empowerment to solve the problem of education and poverty (Akinola et al., 2013).

Thirdly, rural empowerment in Delta must also be driven through corporation and partnership. The analyses of this entail that rural empowerment must not be in isolation. There is a need for partnership and collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private organisations, and willing private individuals. Such approach of empowerment will broaden the scope and productivity of the rural areas. The emphasis here is that empowerment of the rural can be achieved when the government provides public health and sanitation for the rural areas. Through the local government, the government can carry out community development in health by training some rural people on this aspect. Having a clean and safe environment will prevent prevalent illnesses in rural areas. Rural empowerment must address the problem of illiteracy. Therefore, there is a need to have a functional educational system in rural areas. Also, in the rural areas, agriculture is their major occupation. Therefore, rural empowerment must take into cognizance the role rural areas play in food production, which is also a major contribution to food security and agriculture contribution to Gross Domestic Product. Therefore, rural empowerment must include providing training to rural areas dwellers on the use of modern farm implements and provision of credit facilities to enable them to acquire these tools for production and communicable markets where they can dispose of their products.

Beyond these three cardinal approaches on rural empowerment in Delta States. Some practical steps are needed in the short run because of the peculiarity of the different communities' needs and primary sources of income. Addressing local agriculture barriers in rural areas is instrumental in increasing food production, which will help reduce the problem of food scarcity and hunger in rural areas in Delta State (Rotary Service and

Engagement, 2018). This kind of empowerment entails one-on-one interaction with rural dwellers on barriers they face in farming and opportunities they cannot exploit due to limited resources and training. Insecurity has also become an issue hindering development and agriculture production. In recent times, most communities in Delta State have continued to witness an unprecedented act of violence ranging from armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping and violence caused by criminals claiming to be herdsmen.

In the rural communities, the rural people can be empowered through training to acquire special skills. These can be on the area of need of each individual. Some of the skills these people can be trained on include electrical, electronic, fashion and designing, carpentry, driving, soap making, computer networking, event management, hair dressing & make-over, aluminium profiling, pop and screed-making, welding, plumbing, electrical installations and repairs, interlocking/ tiling, catering & confectioneries. When rural people are provided with the required skills based on their interest, they will benefit themselves and their community. Because this will enable them to perform better in their current means of livelihood for those that already have something doing, it will also enable those that were unemployed somethings that they could make a living with. In this way, they will play an active role in reducing unemployment, poverty and boosting socio-economic development in their respective community.

Most rural dwellers engage in full-time farming. After providing skills and training to them, there is further need to assist them by granting financial assistance in the form of soft loan and grants to enable them to establish themselves and give room for expansion. This provision will enable them to acquire farm implements and take care of their crops till harvest. This will increase their output, provide more food needed for social-economic development and generate more finance for diversity. Other categories can use such loans to start a new business, while people already in business can use the fund for expansion (Rotary Service and Engagement, 2018).

Rural empowerment must be gender sensitive as well. Women empowerment in recent times has gained much attention because women have become key players in the state and major breadwinners in some homes, while they are also major supporters of men in times of need. Food security globally is mainly dependent on rural women; therefore, the empowerment of rural women is necessary and must be given the needed attention. Empowerment of women involves giving them a fair opportunity like their male counterparts and eliminating all forms of attack and discrimination against the virtue of them being a woman. Considering women's role in rural socio-economic development, Bokoyeibo (2018) identified five ways women could be made more productive. These include adult education and training. It emphasises the need to give the young girls good education to have the needed education and knowledge. This will make them have entrepreneurial skills that will make them productive. Put differently; Women will be largely self-sufficient when they have the needed access to high-quality holistic personal, emotional, and business development training. They gain confidence and can speak out against all forms of abuse and violence.

VII. WAY FORWARD

The rural areas are what they are today because of insensitivity of programmes and empowerment of the state government. The state government empowerment programs should be broadened to incorporate the rural areas to enable them benefit like their urban counterparts. The need to support and encourage rural farmers through policy and grants. The rural farmers are the major food producer in the state. They must be empowered enable them to sustain food production which is needed to avoid worsening the problem of food insecurity. In addition to community programs, the state government should empower people through policy changes by incorporating the rural areas in infrastructure development and providing social amenities offered in the rural areas.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper concluded that rural empowerment goal is to improve the living condition of rural communities in Delta State. Without empowerment, socio-economic development will be challenging because people are the centre of development. Availability of natural environment and resources are not enough to achieve socio-economic development; therefore, the rural people being empowered with the needed skills, training, and supports will be able to improve their well-being and environment, which will enable them to live decently. Rural empowerment thus is a holistic and all-encompassing improvement that touches all need aspects of the rural communities and is age and gender-sensitive. The success of boosting one's socio-economic well-being is necessary for general socio-economic development. Its failure is the prevalence of increasing rural extreme poverty and poor socio-economic development. Therefore, since the success of socio-economic activities has a positive impact on socio-economic development vis visa, it becomes necessary to adequately empower the rural people for the achievement of the socio-economic development of the entire state since the state is like a system in which all parts must function affectively for the success of the entire system.

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