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Abstract- The benefit of infrastructure services has been inadvertently ripped apart by non inclusion of the rural inhabitants in the development strategy. The government in many instances has been largely unsuccessful in providing independently the much needed and envisioned goal of infrastructure development. Therefore, the paper examines the extent of participation and level of involvement of the rural inhabitants on physical infrastructure development in the niger delta region of Nigeria. The study used mainly secondary source of information and, adopted content analysis technique. From the findings there exists, ostensibly, missing link on government policy. It is evidenced that the Government infrastructural rural development policy is increasingly less concern with the actual content and participation of the users themselves (rural population that will benefit from the project). The paper identifies clear frustrating approach, amongst which are; lack of rural values, imprecise social objectives, uncoordinated and unguided inputs. It recommends broad-based and inclusive development frameworks, having the inhabitants inputs guided and coordinated by representatives of the area, and a creative "bottom up" planning approach viewed as mass – oriented. This will more likely deliver better results, combined local feedbacks and evaluation by establishing a scene of collaboration with the indigenous rural population.

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Rural Inhabitants Participation in Infrastructure Development in Niger Delta, Nigeria: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

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Abstract- The benefit of infrastructure services has been inadvertently ripped apart by non inclusion of the rural inhabitants in the development strategy. The government in many instances has been largely unsuccessful in providing independently the much needed and envisioned goal of infrastructure development. Therefore, the paper examines the extent of participation and level of involvement of the rural inhabitants on physical infrastructure development in the niger delta region of Nigeria. The study used mainly secondary source of information and, adopted content analysis technique. From the findings there exists, ostensibly, missing link on government policy. It is evidenced that the Government infrastructural rural development policy is increasingly less concern with the actual content and participation of the users themselves (rural population that will benefit from the project). The paper identifies clear frustrating approach, amongst which are; lack of rural values, imprecise social objectives, uncoordinated and unguided inputs. It recommends broad-based and inclusive development frameworks, having the inhabitants inputs guided and coordinated by representatives of the area, and a creative "bottom up" planning approach viewed as mass – oriented. This will more likely deliver better results, combined local feedbacks and evaluation by establishing a scene of collaboration with the indigenous rural population.

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I. Introduction

Stretching across the national development plan of Nigeria, the cardinal thrust of infrastructure development have been rise in the standard of living, favourable changes in the way of life of the people concerned and their needs. This indeed, suppose to have started with providing basic needs of the people, including the capacity to make their own decisions, and participating in decisions that affect their lives. In other word, rural services suppose to have institutions and individuals through whom it can function, have goals that are adjusted as implementation proceeds, in line with experience and the changing conceptions of the groups and sponsors concerned (Leye 1993). Basically, the functionality is to provide suitable development in rural area.

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Often time development programme are carried out on behalf of the people by the government institutions believing that it knows everything concerning rural population and consider the rural population not yet ripe to participate in the management of their own affairs. The provision of infrastructure are so often the responsibility of the different agencies or ministries: some provided by local government; state government; national (federal) government; International oil companies; Faith base organization; Nongovernmental organizations. There is rarely the needed coordination between them. Rural population is not taken into consideration the existence of its peculiar problem and commitment of the appropriate institutions to effective rural services. The provision of rural infrastructure was not based on participatory approach, where infrastructural services is heightened on sustainability and self-reliance manner and, which aims for the realization of social and institutional improvement in the community. It is most important to have information on current state of needs/demands of the rural inhabitants that aid the people in choosing their own development path and the activities in which they would participate. It is on this note that the paper examines the extent of indigenous rural involvement in participation on physical infrastructure development in rural Communities of Niger delta region of Nigeria.

II. Conceptual Explanations

a) *Infrastructure Development*

The importance of physical infrastructure development such as road, portable water, electricity, health, education, housing, transportation and communication in the overall development of rural area cannot be underplayed. Infrastructure development is a large-scale system of services and facility of a country or region that are necessary for economic activities (Ajakaieye, 2003). It is an umbrella term for many activities referred as social overhead capital and, most often regarded as one of the key levers of rural development, which attempts to utilize in a coordinated and deliberate way the information and resources available in the area.

Infrastructure development is essential in improving and enhancing the quality of life of the rural

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inhabitants. No doubt, it brings about enduring changes with enhanced standard of living that translates a process by which a set of technical, social, cultural and institutional measures are implemented for the inhabitants of the area with the aim of improving socio-economic conditions of the populace. In a rural setting, development of infrastructure is important to promote growth and high economic rates of return to investment (Tarique, 2008). Beyond economic and social indicators, it transient mainly with people's capacity in a defined area over defined period to induce and manage positive change; that is to predict, plan, understand, and monitor change, and reduce or eliminate unwanted or unwarranted change.

According to Leye (1993) the basic objective of rural development is ensuring improvement in quality of life in the rural areas by providing basic infrastructural facilities. Improving living standard revolve around physical development (telecommunication, transport and water supply) and serve as the wheel and, social infrastructure (encompassing health and education) viewed as the driving force of rural development. United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization had observed the kind of rural participation practiced in developing nations as voluntary contribution of people infrastructure development, but without taking part in decision making. In the same vein Ijere (1990) postulated the underlying principles of rural development as: 'total community involvement; utilization of cultural values and practices of the people; policy commitment to the philosophy of rural inhabitants for the improvement of the area.' It is important taking the need and opinion of rural residents into account as much as possible in the formulation and implementation of developmental policy.

b) The Rural inhabitants

The term 'Rural inhabitants' has often be referred by most Scholars as those who dwell outside the densely built-up environment of towns, cities and sub-urban villages and engage in primary as well as rudimentary forms of secondary and tertiary activities. Sometimes the criteria for classification are based on political, population and administrative consideration. In recent time, demographic and socio-economic criteria are mostly used to define rural area. It is calculated as the difference between total population and urban population (World Bank, 2010). In most Africa countries, active engagement in economic activities of subsistent farming, grazing, lumbering, forestry, hunting, fishing and mining is considered rural activities, with utmost insecure livelihood; a small scaled area with low density. Rural community in Nigeria is a population of less than 20,000, constitute over 80 percent of over 170 million total population of Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2006). In some countries, it specifies area with not more than 2,500 inhabitants outside urbanized areas (The Hindu, 2014).

The Niger delta rural settlement is an area which contains all or most of the elements of a common life and, most often, predominantly distinguished by paucity of social services, infrastructures, adequate institutional and administrative frameworks for the provision of basic utilities such as water, electricity, good (tarred) road, leading to poor standard of living. Rural Niger delta is often characterized by dominant economic activity of farming, fishing, craft and informal economy that form the foundation of the economic development, which provide livelihood for the nation. The population comprises the teeming mass of under privileged illiterate and poverty stricken population with no knowledge of their rights and privilege and who, most times, are not privileged to participate in development issue that affect their quality of life (Obinna 2008). Some Scholars portrayed the rural Niger delta as the population of the deprived group, suffering from cultural, economic, political, and social deprivations.

c) Participation

According to a German development agency, participation is a ''co determination and power sharing which entails involvement in development processes.'' It entails social development in which people as subjects in their own environment seek out ways to meet their collective needs and expectations and to overcome their common problems. It is not a dichotomous entity but rather, a continuum based on the degree of people's involvement and engagement of people in activities within the communities. As stated by Fung (2006) Indigenous involvement in infrastructure development seeks to get things done in a representative manner based on a fixed quantifiable development goal and ensures that development process is much more valued by the people. The process ensures that the relevant agencies is synthesized in a way that addresses parties concerned, and that those who may benefit from the infrastructure development are sufficiently well informed and meaningfully involved in the development process. The participation process develops people's capacities or abilities to recognize and improve their inherent potential, and provides them with opportunities to influence and share power, i.e. power to decide and to gain some control over their lives (Silverman, 2005). But, the weak organizational capacity that characterized rural area makes it difficult for the indigenous people to fully participate in the process of development. The People interest is not (stakeholders) influenced and does not share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them.

One of the cardinal policy thrust of the 'African Development Board (ADB)' is to encourage and expresses the needs and interest of the target population by engaging the rural inhabitants in initiating

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design for their benefit in the hope that infrastructure development will be more sustainable. This engages rural inhabitants in initiating design for their benefit and achieves greater individual fulfillment, personal development, self-awareness, some immediate satisfaction and essential for long lasting role in promoting quality of life. Participation is an indispensible element in the promotion of infrastructure development and therefore capacity to participate in infrastructure development must directly involve the people who share, enhance, monitor, analyze and evaluate their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and act.

III. Institutional Interventions in Infrastructure Service Development in the Niger Delta

The discovery of Oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a strategic resource that powers the economy of Nigeria. With over 600 Oil fields, revenue earned from the region in the past 50 years is estimated at over $600 billion. It has contributed immensely to the overall socio economic development of the Nigerian state (Watts 2007). Despite this stupendous wealth and its contribution to the Nation's economy, the continued exploration of oil and its production in commercial quantities have created problem of ecological degradation thereby affecting the peoples' conditions of living, constricting its livelihoods and local economy. Evidenced by some scholars, in the past 50 years, the trend has placed infrastructure development in Niger delta in dire state and has a history of non-performing government infrastructure development institutions. Very little of the oil revenues have been ploughed back for the development of the region. The lives of the people have turned into a harbinger of misery, poverty and anguish.

There have been concerns over the years by Policy makers to employ rural infrastructural development as a strategy to redress the problems of rural areas, especially the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Its challenges lied in the many contentious policy initiatives by involving provision of rural infrastructure services to address the problems of the Niger Delta, which date back from 1958, when Henry Willink's Commission identified the region as being poor, backward and neglected. Emphasizing on Willink's report the British Government had proposed that the Niger Delta be declared "A Special Federal Territory" for focused sustainable development. The idea was to create opportunity and assume best strategy for the development of the Niger delta region (Willink, Hadow, Mason and Shearer, 1958). The 'Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB)' was then created, to carter for the unique developmental needs of the region (Igwe and Adeyemo, 2008). This tried to change in a radical way the nature of relationship between the people and the government. The scheme was short lived and had lacked the indigenous participation and hence did not satisfy the development need of the people. Also, the scheme failed to achieve any desirable results due to structural defects, fairness and justice in revenue allocation (Olowononi, 1998). The situation gave rise to frustration that had led to the establishment of Niger-Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1972. Although the policy thrust was aimed at addressing ecological problems in the deprived rural areas of the region, the institution was also to serve as a veritable means of sustainable infrastructural development in Niger Delta. Again, this institution was bedeviled with administrative and political scheming and very much inadequate for the massive challenges it had to contend with. This acted as a setback in their operations and not much was achieved before it was replaced to defunct Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993. Considering the magnitude objectives and functions of OMPADEC, it is obvious that the Commission did not achieve much, therefore was short lived and supplanted to Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000, with more responsibilities amongst other things to cushion the effect of grinding poverty and acute infrastructural deprivation in the Niger Delta. Regrettably, this body is witnessing failure due in part to corruption, poor governance and lack of accountability.

Also, there are plethora and deliberate policies from Federal, State and Local governments, respectively, for the development of the rural areas. For example, the Ministry of Niger Delta was created in 2008 as a bastion of the region's development. The Ministry as one of its primary responsibility is saddled with coordinating and making efforts to tackle the challenges of infrastructural development in the region. The existing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is now a parastatal under the Ministry. Past administration in 1986, created 'Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DEFFRI)', which among other objectives was charged with the responsibility of working for the steady development of the rural areas. Emphasis was on solving the basic needs of the entire population of the region through increased production, comprehensive planning process, and active involvement of the population (Obinna, 2008). Even though DEFRRI contributed to socio-economic development of the region, it lacked proper planning and consequently resulted to, inefficiency, lack of accountability and transparency in service delivery. DEFRRI failed as an integrated rural development (IRD) programmes. Indeed, the evidence clearly shows that governments have been largely unsuccessful in providing independently the much needed and envisioned goal of infrastructure development.

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IV. Situational Analysis of Participation in Infrastructure Development

The infrastructure development surprisingly in the area, in many occasions, does not have bearings to the needs of the target population. It is noted that most times, the rural inhabitants were not adequately consulted prior to the implementation of projects. Continuity in the implementation of development policies has been problematic. Appropriate functional institutions and managerial capacity to address this problem is lacking. Most of the Projects were not implemented on a self sustaining basis and completely left out and abandoned. There is a missing link on how and by whom were the infrastructural development plan formulated and the basis of which concerns. There exists a sharp contrast between policy formulation and its implementation, thereby placing little value which fails to take account of rural needs and necessities.

The promise of infrastructure services inadvertently ripped apart by non inclusion of the local participation in the development strategy leading to disappointment and disillusionment. Most of the projects are seen as an end rather than a means and serve selfish interest of the proponent rather than those of the rural inhabitants who suppose to benefit from the project. This implies that rural infrastructure strategy is not centered essentially on altruistic reasons for improvement of the rural communities, a significant view that infrastructure development has not brought automatic improvement in the standard of living of the people. The unexpected consequences and contradiction about the way these projects are implemented show a frequent reflection of a mode and a value system which wholly or partially at variance with indigenous rural expectation.

This frustrating condition to failure emanates from lack of philosophical base, lack of cohesive identity, inadequate community participation, lack of grassroots planning among other problems. At one end of the spectrum, the peoples participation is non obligatory and often not community oriented. It is not surprising that the plan targets are never realized, and the resultant effect has become more hardship and poor standard of living amongst the indigenous dwellers. This ultimately alienates the inhabitants accustomed in many cases to have to take decision about its fate. Ostensibly, it negates the intended strategies of infrastructure development. Infrastructure development is well achieved when coordinated within the neighbourhood or the community and indigenous participation.

According to Yazd (2007) lack of village satisfaction and participation, lack of attention to rural values and the absence of rural infrastructure are the most important drawbacks to the rural areas in Nigeria. Scholars have also listed a number of factors contributing to rural infrastructure frustration to include: Poor finance appropriated for development; inadequate manpower in effecting plans for rural development; uncoordinated plans to reflect the target objective; imprecise social objectives and hence poor guides for plan execution. Ideally, the direct involvement of the people does not only help to sustain the life of the infrastructure provided but extends the peoples' involvement in creating or establishing other new infrastructure which takes into account the ability of the rural population to participate in initiative activities by government with the support to maintain them in self-sustaining manner.

V. The Implications

The process of participation in infrastructural services is the part of the process of building effective and responsive participatory institutions related to local needs and popular demands. It is disappointing that the Government infrastructural rural development policy is increasingly less concern with the actual content and participation of the users themselves (rural population that will benefit from the project). The hiatus resignation, mismanagement and the unrealistic expectation or wrong assumptions at the outset do not always take account of local conceptions and its various functions. The peoples' efforts are not united with those of governmental authorities to improve the living conditions of the community. Presumably, this lies behind many projects failure. In general reflection, it is obvious however, that the nature of understanding of the inhabitants' participation is so often very different from that understood by government agencies. For it means participation in determining and, control, full involvement to implementation of infrastructure services.

An essential prerequisite for meaningful rural infrastructural services depend to a large extent on participation of the people that will benefit from such development. Perception, rightly or wrongly of infrastructure development as a process that change the quality of lives and also bridge the gap between deprivation and development in rural area is lacking. A Mexican Economist, Gustavo Estevan reaffirm that "development for the overwhelming majority always means the progressive modernization of their poverty." Without mutuality and understanding of the target population, development is little more than a rhetorical device. In other words, development should form rural decisions and implemented inform of participatory democracy and oriented towards the accomplishment of specific tasks An indispensable steps towards achieving this are by creating and widening opportunities for rural inhabitants to realize full potential through education, share in decision and action which affect their lives, increase rural output, create employment opportunities and root out fundamental or extreme causes of ignorance and exclusion in decision making. Giving the rural inhabitants access to

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information and know how can make such level of participation more effective (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1986). Developments that do not spring from this perception of the target population are more or less artificial and weaken the imaginative and creative capacity of the people.

VI. Conclusion / Recommendations

This paper has considered the involvement of government and the rural inhabitants' participation in the provision of rural infrastructure. It has evidenced that for the past 50 years; infrastructure development in rural Niger delta has been in dire state and has a history of non-performance. Most of the infrastructure development is not centered essentially for the improvement of the quality of life of the people. There is little value which fails to take account of rural needs and necessities. The promise of infrastructure services inadvertently is ripped apart by non inclusion of the rural inhabitants in the development strategy. The paper therefore concludes, that infrastructure development activities should involve the inhabitants' participation in initiating, deciding, planning, implementing and managing the infrastructure development activities by having their inputs guided and coordinated by representative of the enclave. This will make it more affordable for the inhabitants; operate, maintain, and own up responsibility and ownership of the infrastructure in their enclave. This demonstrates the finest accomplishments on how the inhabitants can participation in the success of rural infrastructure development.

There is need in setting up of mechanisms that reflect people's needs and desires and allows the rural people to reap more of development returns. The use of participatory research approach is important. Through Broad- based and inclusive development frameworks would more likely deliver better results, combined local feedbacks and evaluation by establishing a scene of collaboration with the indigenous rural population.

Obvious need to prioritize large scale infrastructure project is vital. This will ostensibly deliver a system needed to reduce the cost of rural infrastructural investment and to ensure smooth operation and maintenance by establishing a suitable institutional arrangement.

The top-down approach to planning is elite-oriented, performed mainly for their benefit. There should be a creative "bottom up" planning approach viewed as mass – oriented. This will warrant meaningful participation by involving a range of stakeholders from the outset, and by building capacity at the grassroots.

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