

NON STATE ACTORS AND POVERTY AMELIORATION; THE ROLE OF LIFT ABOVE POVERTY ORGANIZATION (LAPO) IN BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the role of non-state actors in the alleviation of poverty in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. This civil society serves as a substitute for some of the governments' activities by encouraging the initiation of socio-economic empowerment programmes geared towards poverty reduction. Many works of literature have recorded a reasonable number of success stories concerning their effort in ameliorating poverty in Nigeria; however, the impact of their activities on people living in some areas in Bayelsa State is still scanty. The study adopted the survey research design and the combination of both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling procedures. The study selected 379 respondents who were administered questionnaire and in-depth interview sessions were held with ten respondents of LAPO staff in the three branch offices in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Consequently, the study revealed that beneficiaries of LAPO have been empowered socially, economically, educationally and otherwise. However, the major beneficiaries of the scheme are people in business specifically those in medium and small scale businesses in Bayelsa State. The study therefore recommends that the government should enact more effective policies enhancing the capacity of other non-governmental organizations to increase the scope of persons benefitting from crucial poverty alleviating schemes in the state.

Keywords: Bayelsa State, Non-State Actors, Poverty Alleviation, NGO, LAPO.

Introduction

Civil society has been defined in many ways, but generally, it is assumed to be the institutional space between the state, the market and the family. In this social space, citizens organize

themselves and pursue their interests presumably within the legitimate institutional framework of the society (Zalanga, 2018). He further clarified that such civil society organizations and groups transcend horizontal and vertical differences among people and transcend kinship and patronage ties, by forming solidarity associations. Examples of such civil society associations are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, religious groups, and community-based organizations, networks of activist groups, media agencies and professional associations. Non-government organizations are to a large extent dedicated to the service of humanity in many parts of the society that have been hitherto neglected by the governments and other official institutions of the society; primarily, to ameliorate the deplorable living conditions of the vulnerable groups (Potapkina, 2009). In any case, definitions of what constitutes an NGO tend to vary. For example, for radicals who seek to explore alternative visions of development, some NGOs may be seen as vehicles for progressive change. Aall (2015: 89) conceives the definition of NGO as follows:

NGO means a private, self-governing, not-for-profit organization dedicated to alleviating human suffering; and/or promoting education, health care, economic development, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution; and/or encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society (Aall, 2015: 89).

Historically, tracing the origin of NGOs back to 1807 the British abolished the slave trade, some well-organized, non-profit movements that addressed issues related to slavery emerged. In that period, the leading NGO formed with global recognition is International Red Cross and Red Crescent (founded in 1864), with the major function of caring for casualties in conflict areas as well as distributing relief materials to war victims. Subsequent organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee, which was established in 1917; Save the Children, which came to being in 1919, followed by Oxfam in 1942 also emerged with similar objectives. It is probably impossible to say how many NGOs there are in the world since there are no comprehensive or reliable statistics. Some estimates put the figure at one million if both formal and informal organizations are included, while the number of registered NGOs receiving international aid is probably closer to 'a few hundred thousand'. The United Nations currently estimates that there are about 35,000 large established NGOs no rare there accurate figures available for the amount of aid overall that NGOs receive, but there is an agreement that the increase has been dramatic since the 1980s when almost all foreign aid tended to be provided to governments. In 2004, it was estimated that NGOs were responsible for about \$US23 billions of total aid money, or approximately one-third of total overseas development aid (Riddell 2007: 53).

Based on the prevailing outbreak of wars in this era, all of these organizations were initially oriented in addressing the aftermath of the war to the victims to improve on people's welfare. Similarly, after the World War II, there were series of service-oriented organizations, which avoided political confrontation but chose the path of neutrality in conflict emerged areas such include Salvation Army, Young Men's Christians Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christians Association (YWCA), Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), which specifically dealt with war relief, aid, and postwar reconstruction (Potapkina, 2009). In the contemporary era, however, the activities of NGOs have gone beyond reacting to

problems like refugees after wars or natural disasters. As Aall (2015) added, NGOs activities have been fundamental on the development of vital projects in the society such as funding of agriculture projects, infrastructural facilities, education, employment generation, including business-oriented programs such as small-scale business, education, health, social welfare and economic improvement, especially among disadvantaged sectors. Some are founded on issues related to population programs such that people are informed on how to access various family planning methods, health and nutrition programs, immunization programs, as well as education and counselling about HIV/AIDS (Aall, 2015, p. 127).

Because of this, NGOs are quickly losing their perceived “inferior status” (Fitzduff and Church, 2004); and now take on roles of serving as a substitute for some of the governments' activities by encouraging the growth of civil society through the initiation of socio-economic empowerment programmes gear towards poverty reduction and meeting societal needs (Aall, 2010). In Nigeria, there are several NGOs whose major roles are to alleviate poverty among the youths and most especially amongst women as well as people living in the rural areas whose activities have not been given the utmost attention and the full support needed to sustain their activities through policy frameworks and partnership with the government. One of such NGO is Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) with branches all over Nigeria including Yenagoa City (Bayelsa State) and headquarters in Benin City, Edo State Nigeria. Although the efforts of the government to meet up with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 1 i.e eradicating poverty in all its form in the world) concerning its target of reducing poverty by at least 50% in 2030 set by the world highest body has not been achieved. Data shows that 836 million people still live in extreme poverty and a significant majority of these people live on less than \$1.25 a day (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

This is partly as a result of the failure of the government to eradicate extreme poverty in the nation; for this reason, the participation of some institutionalized stakeholders like the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in community development becomes relevant. As Ehigiamusoe (1998) rechristened the NGOs, they are regarded as the third sector which evolves from experiences, interests, idea and innate zeal to respond to or remedy the observed phenomena or desires in the society so that the menace of poverty can be fought and eradicated. Although, many works of literature have recorded a reasonable number of success stories concerning NGOs effort in improving the socio-economic lives of people in Nigeria, especially in Bayelsa State (Fitzduff and Church, 2004; Omofonmwan and Odia, 2009; Potapkina, 2009), the empirical justification of the impacts of their activities over a wide range of communities and amongst women living in the rural areas is still scanty. Shinimol (2016) argued that women empowerment can be considered as an important indicator for socio-economic development. There are various programs which non-governmental organizations have initiated to improve rural women's economic and social empowerment. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of enhancing the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the various socio-economic programmes LAPO Non-government organization has implemented or executed to its beneficiaries in Bayelsa State; identified the criteria for selecting beneficiaries to improve the overall socio-economic conditions of the populace in Bayelsa State, Southern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Socio-Economic Empowerment as Development

The development has always been a complex and contested term. Lewis, (2017) simply defined development as “the reduction of material want and the enhancement of people’s ability to live a life they consider good across the broadest range possible in a population”. Until relatively recently, development was seen by Westerners primarily in economic terms. The emphasis was on economic growth rather than distribution, and often on statistics rather than people. But this view has been augmented, or sometimes challenged, by a range of other perspectives on development that place more emphasis on ‘people-centred approaches such as empowerment, gender and participation, rights-based development approaches, and new interest in concepts such as ‘social exclusion’ and ‘social capital’. Development is a widely participatory process of directed social change in society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment. Hence, development is a constant process of transformation. It is a dynamic concept denoting a state of ceaseless change. Socio-economic development is the improvement of the living standards of the low-income population living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis, by transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities (Lewis, 2017). In essence, socioeconomic development implies a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the masses to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with changes consequent upon this. Also, Todaro and Smith (2011) development imply the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising their levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom. The broader analysis would reveal at least three basic components or core values that serve as a conceptual basis and practical guideline for understanding the inner meaning of development. These core values – sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom - represent common goals sought by all individuals and societies (Todaro and Smith, 2011). Sustenance means access to basic goods and services, such as food, clothing, and shelter that are necessary to sustain an average human; self-esteem the feeling of worthiness that society enjoys when its social, political, and economic systems and institutions promote human values such as respect, dignity, integrity, and self-determination; and freedom society at disposal to have a variety of alternatives from which to satisfy its wants and individuals enjoy real choices according to their preferences.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

The role of NGOs in Development in Nigeria cannot be overestimated. Most of the developmental projects which have affected the lives of the majority of Nigerians have been that of NGOs. Some of these contributions have been grouped into the following headings:

NGOs and Health Provision

Health is wealth, and health is one way NGOs are creating wealth in Nigeria. The scourge of HIV/AIDS in the country propelled NGOs’ activities in the areas of prevention and enlightenment programmes. UNAIDS in collaboration with NGOs across African including Nigeria embarked on a programme called – World AIDS Campaign with Young People UNAIDS (Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014). The programme placed the issue of

HIV/AIDS among young people on national and international agendas and has brought significant attention to the force for change that young represent in reversing the course of the epidemic especially in rural areas. It raised the profile of young people in the discussions about HIV/AIDS and increased their participation in events, programmes and decision-making bodies, Pilot (Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014).

NGOs are also involved in the protection of the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. About 200 NGOs were involved in such operations in 1997. Human right NGOs have been at the forefront of setting standards for human rights and of promoting and protecting those rights. The role and tasks of the United Nations in the field of human rights is greatly enhanced by the generous input of NGOs. In 1997, NGOs in collaboration with the United Nations Human Right Committee (UNHRC) addressed issues such as non-discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, protection of families of infected persons, right of those living with HIV/AIDS to participation in political and public life at national and international levels, right to privacy among others UNAIDS (Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014). In Cross River State, Civil Society on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (CISHAN) partnered with the state government on the campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS. In this regards, CISHAN has since 2003 recorded a significant milestone in the State. Its activities include among others advocating for treatment centres, mapping and validation strategic framework (MVSF) on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (Uneze, 2005).

NGOs and Educational Development

Education remains the most vital tool for rural transformation in Nigeria; surprisingly there were very few schools in Nigeria especially in rural areas that can genuinely claim to have adequate school physical facilities for teaching and learning. Scholarships are not adequate, many students drop out of school because of finance. This is an indication that government alone cannot adequately fund education (Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014). This precarious situation of the education system especially in rural communities informed the intervention of NGOs. In response to this, Courage Education Foundation (CEF) gave a scholarship to children whose parent cannot afford basic primary education in Nigeria. In Gbagada, Lagos State CEF awarded Scholarship to 12 children whose parents cannot afford basic primary education. CEF scholarship is open to all members of the public especially rural dwellers who are less privileged Kamanu (cited in Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014). Girls Power Initiative (GPI) is another NGO that is transforming the Nigerian educational system. GPI established libraries in the South-South and South-East Geographical Zones. These libraries provide services to adolescent girls especially the less privileged. GPI also run counseling units throughout these zones for adolescent girls.

Between July 1999 and March 2006, GPI graduated hundreds of adolescent girls in her schools. Most of their graduates were trained on how to read and write, health, humanities and different skills for easy employment Utak (Agba, Akpanudoedehe & Stephen, 2014). International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH) in partnership with Chevron Nigeria Limited provided basic education for primary school children, adult literacy classes, and training for primary school teachers. Specifically their objective include – training approximately 1,000 youths for self-employment, provision of basic education for primary

school children, adult literacy classes as well as the provision of basic business skills and small business credit access (Agba, Akpanudoedehe& Stephen, 2014).

Theoretical Framework-Relative Deprivation Theory

The construct of relative deprivation (RD) was first articulated by Stouffer, Suchman, De Vinney, Starr and Williams in 1949 to explain a series of unexpected relationships between feelings of satisfaction and one's position in the army. Relative deprivation suggests that there is a lack of resources to sustain certain lifestyle or activities as well as amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong (e.g. soft loans from NGOs) (Townsend, 1979) but not extended to other group members. In that, it can be measured as an objective comparison between the situation of the individual or group compared to the rest of society. Relative deprivation may also emphasize the individual experience of discontent when being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled but not given (Walker and Smith, 2002). This means that relative deprivation is what people think they should have relative to what others have, or even compared with their past or perceived future. It thus, explains the idea of the feeling of deprivation and discontent when relating it to the desired point of reference (i.e. reference groups). Feelings of relative deprivation arise when desires become legitimate expectations and those desires are blocked by society. Social satisfaction is the opposite of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is generally considered to be the central variable in the explanation of social movements and is used to explain the quest for social change that inspires social movements; social movements emerge from collective feelings of relative deprivation (Morrison, 1971). This also implies that feelings of deprivation are relative, as it comes from a comparison to social norms that are not absolute and usually differ from time and place. This differentiates relative deprivation from objective deprivation (also known as absolute deprivation or absolute poverty) - a condition that applies to all underprivileged people particularly the rural dwellers who most often, do not have the full benefits of some of the activities of NGOs to alleviate rural poverty in their areas. This leads to an important conclusion: while the objective deprivation (poverty) in the world may change over time, relative deprivation will not, as long as social inequality persists and some humans are better off than others.

Materials and Methods

The study area is located in Bayelsa State, South-South Nigeria and was carried out in 2017. Bayelsa State is geographically situated within Latitude 04° 15' North, 05° 23' South and longitude 05° 22' West and 06° 45' East. It shares boundaries with Delta State on the North, Rivers State on the East and the Atlantic Ocean on the West and South. So also, Bayelsa is a state in the south-south geopolitical zone (Niger Delta region) in Nigeria located between Delta State and Rivers State. It has its capital at Yenagoa City. According to the USAID/Nigeria (2018), the majority of the populations in the state are predominantly rural dwellers, at the same time, they engage in fishing on a subsistence and commercial basis. Topographically, most of the communities in the State are inaccessible by road due to the estuarine and water bodies that composed of its topography. Bayelsa State consists of eight (8) Local Government Areas which include Brass, Ekremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, and Nembe. Others are Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa.

The study used the mixed research method comprising of a quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. The questionnaire was used for the quantitative data given a general statistical data while the in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with relevant knowledgeable persons to supplement the statistical data. The selection of this design was motivated by the nature of the phenomenon under investigation which enabled the researcher generate a robust data reflecting the underlying meanings are experience of respondents. To access the respondents' multi stage sampling technique was utilized. The researchers started by first clustering Bayelsa State into three senatorial districts; using the simple random sampling technique the study selected one local government each (Ogbia, Sagbama and Yenagoa) from the senatorial districts. The simple random sampling technique was further used to draw respondents from the list(s) of LAPO beneficiaries in the selected local government area in Bayelsa State. Thereafter, the researcher reached out to all randomly selected beneficiaries using their addresses for the administration of instrument of data collection. The sample size for the study is three hundred and eighty-nine (389) generated using availability sampling. For the quantitative data, the researchers, with the aids of trained research assistants, administered the research instrument (questionnaire) using availability method to research three hundred and seventy-nine (379) respondents who were beneficiaries of LAPO scheme. While for the qualitative data, ten (10) in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with LAPO staff in the three branch offices located in Bayelsa State, to validate the findings from the beneficiaries. The in-depth interview was conducted using a semi structured IDI guide and electronic devices used for recording, this was supplemented by the research assistance taking notes of the proceeding.

The quantitative data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS.21). Analyzed data are presented using descriptive statistical tables with frequencies & percentages. For the qualitative data, experts examined the data meticulously to guarantee systematic themes were drawn from the thoughts generated. The transcripts were crosschecked and accommodated with the sound chronicles before being brought into NVivo 10 to analyze. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the officials of LAPO to consult the various beneficiaries of the various schemes in the three local government areas. In addition, contacts were made with LAPO staff in the selected communities to inform them of the purpose of the study and to seek their consent. All participants gave their consent prior to being interviewed and participation was absolutely voluntary. Wahyuni (2012) suggest that a researcher educate the research participants and starts off the interview by giving a brief explanation on the aim of the research and emphasizing confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of the study. With the participants' permission, each questionnaire administration or interview was recorded and treated as confidential. To protect the identity of respondents, the study employed the use of special labels to identify respondents.

Results & Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the study with emphasis on the socio-economic programmes implemented or executed by LAPO and criteria for selecting recipients

for socioeconomic empowerment. The results are based on the beneficiary respondents self-reported experiences and supported with field observations and relevant literature.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
LAPO Branch Office		
Akenfa	115	30.3
Opolo	142	37.5
Swali	122	32.2
Total	379	100.0
Gender		
Male	204	53.8
Female	175	46.2
Total	379	100.0
Age groups		
15-19 years	6	1.6
20-24 years	10	2.6
25-29 years	162	42.7
30-34 years	42	11.1
35-39 years	134	35.4
40-44 years	24	6.3
45-49 years	1	0.3
Total	379	100.0
Local Government you operate your business		
Ogbia	2	0.5
Sagbama	1	0.3
Yenagoa	376	99.2
Total	379	100.0
Marital status		
Never married	96	25.3
Ever married	277	73.1
Widowed/widower	2	0.5
Divorced/ Separated	4	1.1
Total	379	100.0
Highest level of education		
No schooling	20	5.3
Primary	139	36.7
Secondary	158	41.7
NCE/ND	61	16.1
B.Sc/HND/B.Tech/Eng	1	0.3
Total	379	100.0
The average income per month in Naira before LAPO's intervention		

<N5,000	1	0.3
N5,000-N9,999	40	10.6
N10,000-N14,999	274	72.1
N15,000-N19,999	32	8.4
N20,000-N24,999	14	3.7
N25,000-N29,999	6	1.6
N30,000-N34,999	11	2.9
N40,000-N44,999	1	0.3
Total	379	100.0
Average income per month in Naira after LAPO's intervention		
<N5,000	1	0.3
N5,000-N9,999	4	1.1
N10,000-N14,999	9	2.4
N15,000-N19,999	40	10.6
N20,000-N24,999	154	40.6
N25,000-N29,999	165	43.5
N30,000-N34,999	5	1.3
N40,000-N44,999	5	1.3
N50,000 and above	1	0.3
Total	379	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

The structured questionnaire was distributed across the three branches of LAPO in Bayelsa state and the data is as follows, 115 respondents out of the total respondents with 30.3% are from Akenfa branch office in Bayelsa State, 142 respondents which consist of 37.5% are from Opolo branch office while 122 respondents out of them with 32.2% are from Swali branch office. The gender distribution of the respondents also indicated that the male constitutes (53.8%) representing 204 respondents while the female constituted (46.2%) representing 175 respondents; the result, therefore, shows that the male respondents outnumber the female respondents. Similarly, the majority of the study's respondents 162 with a percentage of 42.7 are within the age bracket of 25-29 years which implies that they are within the workforce of the teeming population of Nigeria. This is duly followed by those within the age bracket of 35-39 years which are 134 in number and 35.4% respectively. Those within the age intervals of 20-24 years are 10 in number with a percentage of 2.6%, those within the age bracket 30-34 years are 42 in number with 11.1% while those who are within 40-44 years are within 24 respondents with 6.3%, and those within 45-49 years have a frequency of just 1 and a percentage of 0.3 making it the lowest number of respondents among the various age brackets. More so, the result also revealed that most of the study's respondents (376) with 99.2% operate their business in Yenagoa LGA, 2 respondents with 0.5% operate from Ogbia LGA while 1 of the respondents with 0.3% operate from Sagbama LGA. The marital status of the respondents indicated that 25.3% are never married, majority of the respondents with 73.1% are ever married while the lowest frequency of 2 which represents 0.5% of the respondents are either widowed/ widower and finally, 4 respondents with 1.1% are divorced or separated. Similarly, the educational qualification of the respondents shows that 20 of the respondents with 5.3%

had no formal education, 139 respondents with 36.7% had primary school education, 158 respondents with 41.7% had secondary school education, and 61 out of the respondents with 16.1% had NCE/ND educational qualification while 1 of the respondent with 0.3% had tertiary educational attainment. Furthermore, in determining the average income per month of the respondents before LAPO's intervention, the result showed that the highest number of respondents (274) with 72.1% percentage earn between 10,000-14,999 per month before the intervention of LAPO, the least number of respondents (1) with a percentage of 0.3% earn below 5,000 monthly, similarly, one (1) of the respondents also earn between 40,000-44,999 monthly before the intervention of LAPO.

The result also showed that 10.6% of them (40 respondents) earn between 5,000-9,999 per month, 32 of the respondents which constitute 8.4% earn between 15,000-19,999 monthly, 14 respondents with 3.7% earn between 20,000-24,999 per month before the intervention of LAPO in their business, the result also revealed that 6 respondents with 1.6% earn between 25,000-29,999 while only 11 of the respondents with 2.9% earn within 30,000-34,999 monthly before the intervention of LAPO. After the intervention of LAPO, the average income of the respondents per month have also improved significantly as shown in the results, 1 of the respondents with 0.3% earn below 5,000 and 1 respondent with 0.3% also within 50,000 and above. The result further indicates that 4 respondents with 1.1% earn within 5,000-9,999 after the intervention of LAPO in their business, 9 respondents with 2.4% earn within 10,000-14,999, 40 respondents with 10.6% also earn between 15,000-19,999, the result further showed that 154 respondents with 40.6% and majority of the respondents 165 (43.5%) earn between 20,000-24,999 and 25,000-29,999 respectively. 10 of the respondents earn between 30,000-44,999 monthly after the intervention of LAPO through soft loans, grants and other forms of assistance.

LAPO Socio-Economic Programmes Quarterly Performance Report

Table 2: 1st Quarter Performance Report at a Glance

PROGRAMMES	Male	Female	Total number reached
HEALTH SERVICES			
Antenatal care	0	410	410
Training of health sensitization	59	112	171
Blood Sugar Tests	303	1, 106	1, 409
Blood Pressure Tests	2, 196	7, 406	9, 602
Malaria Tests	420	1, 104	1, 524
HIV Tests	454	1, 481	1, 935
Referrer Services	40	279	319
Universal Access to female condom project	403	594	997
World Water Day	116	280	396
Workplace Policy on HIV	2, 376	3, 024	5, 400
Economic Empowerment	13	3	16
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT			
Gender sensitization	1, 487	6, 340	7, 827
Micro Business Management Training	168	240	308

Social Commodity Marketing	51	460	511
Adult Literacy	0	8	8
LEGAL AID			
Legal Aid Sensitization	147	526	673
Legal Aid Intervention	0	4	4
RURAL AGRICULTURE			
Agricultural Extension Services	159	48	207
The total number reached with direct services			42, 735
The total number reached via IEC materials			24, 481
GRAND TOTAL			67, 216

Source: LAPO (2015)

Table 3: 2nd Quarter Performance Report at a Glance

PROGRAMMES	Male	Female	Total Number Reached
HEALTH SERVICES			
Health sensitization	4, 154	8, 813	12, 967
Antenatal care	1	366	367
Training of health sensitization agents	45	99	144
Blood Sugar Tests	528	2, 954	3, 482
Blood Pressure Tests	1, 981	8, 880	10, 781
Malaria Tests	675	2, 341	3, 016
HIV Tests	661	2, 722	3, 383
Hepatitis Tests	24	209	233
Referrer Services	106	1, 088	1, 194
Universal Access to female condom project	61	357	418
World Malaria Day	224	514	738
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT			
Gender Sensitization	3, 051	8, 226	11, 277
Micro Business Management Training	95	164	259
Social Commodity Marketing	82	629	711
LEGAL AID			
Legal Aid Sensitization	293	830	1, 123
Legal Aid Intervention	0	6	6
RURAL AGRICULTURE			
Agricultural Extension Services	331	149	480
The total number reached with direct services			50, 579

The total number reached via IEC materials	27, 144
GRAND TOTAL	77, 723

Source: LAPO (2015)

Table 4: 3rd Quarter Performance Report at a Glance

PROGRAMMES	Male	Female	Total number reached
HEALTH SERVICES			
Health sensitization	1, 377	5, 674	7, 051
Antenatal care	5	351	356
Training of health sensitization agents	85	176	261
Blood sugar tests	787	3, 363	4, 150
Blood pressure tests	1, 162	5, 990	7, 152
Malaria tests	720	2, 506	3, 226
HIV Tests	512	1, 992	2, 504
Hepatitis Tests	3	6	9
Referrer Services	61	561	622
Universal Access to female condom project	108	548	656
Economic empowerment	0	1	1
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT			
Gender sensitization	1, 138	5, 115	6, 253
Micro Business Management Training	107	244	351
Social Commodity Marketing	49	167	216
LEGAL AID			
Legal sensitization	59	329	388
Legal Aid Intervention	0	6	6
RURAL AGRICULTURE			
Agricultural Extension Services	9	11	20
The total number reached with direct services			33, 222
The total number reached via IEC Materials			148, 187
Grand Total			181, 409

Source: LAPO (2015)

Table 5: 1st Quarter 2016 Performance Report at a Glance

PROGRAMMES	Male	Female	Total Reached
HEALTH SERVICES			
Integration of health education with microfinance services	2, 316	7, 423	9, 739
Health screening (BP, BS, Hepatitis, HIV & Malaria)	6, 548	21, 827	28, 375
Malaria drug provision	14	9	23

Female condom promotion	3, 679	3, 400	7, 079
Antenatal care sensitization	1	282	283
Sub-Total	12, 544	32, 932	45, 499
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT			
Integration of social education with microfinance services	1, 481	7, 591	9, 092
Enterprise development	32	133	165
Legal sensitization	163	1, 030	1, 193
Legal aid services		7	7
Int'l Women's Day	62	304	366
Sub-Total	1, 738	9, 065	10, 803
Total number reached with direct services	14, 282	41, 949	56, 302
Total number reached via IEC materials			26, 354
Grand Total			82, 656

Source: LAPO (2016)

A brief description of the achievement of LAPO in the socio-economic empowerment of beneficiaries buttressed the following deductions; Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO) have empowered (financially) thousands of women, some of whom are now fully independent in their respective businesses., the result revealed that LAPO organized several programmes to boost the socio-economic conditions of the populace ranging from health services programmes, social empowerment services such as educational support, legal aid, social commodity marketing, micro-business training and agricultural extension services. The performance report in the first quarter in 2015 revealed that a total of 67, 216 persons benefitted from their services to a great extent and has affected the lives of the beneficiaries' positively. Similarly, the report of the second and third quarter also showed that females benefitted more from the various programmes than males. More so, it can be deduced that during the first quarter of 2016, a total of 45,499 participated in the various health programs ranging from health education, microfinance services, health screening exercise, malaria drug provision as well as antenatal care services for women while 53, 302 people got social empowerment. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that LAPO has immensely endowed the lives of people especially women that participated in the different socioeconomic programmes initiated by the non-governmental organization. The performance report also revealed that LAPO's financial and non-financial programme increased the income and social status of its beneficiaries. The impact of the socio-economic empowerment on the clients' poverty status was very significant such that about 86% of clients moved from the rank of poorest and poor to less poor and least poor members of the society.

Table 6:Distribution of Respondents on the various socio-economic programmes executed by LAPO to its beneficiaries in Bayelsa State

Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
What category socio-economic program have you benefitted from LAPO?	Business	80	21.1
	Agricultural grants	59	15.6
	Soft loans	115	30.3
	Health services	125	33.0
	Total	379	100.0
How did you get to know about LAPO's programme in this State?	Through friend	223	58.8
	Through the media	3	0.8
	Through LAPO's staff	153	40.4
	Total	379	100.0
How will you describe the effectiveness of the services after its execution?	Excellently effective	38	10.0
	Very effective	313	82.6
	Poorly effective	7	1.8
	Not effective	18	4.7
	None of the above	3	0.8
	Total	379	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

In this section, the perception of the respondents with regards to the various socio-economic programmes LAPO has implemented or executed over time to its beneficiaries in Bayelsa State was investigated. We found that 21.1% of the respondents affirmed that they have received empowerment by LAPO in their business; 15.6% opined that LAPO has also contributed to the growth of their agricultural business while 30.3% of the respondents also noted that they have benefitted immensely from LAPO through their soft loans and grants; 33.0% posited that they have received free health services from LAPO. The result also revealed that 58.8% of the respondents affirmed that they got to know about LAPO's socio-economic programme through their friends, 0.8% of them noted that they knew about the programme through the media while 40.4% of the respondents asserted that they got to know about LAPO's programme in this State through LAPO's staff. We can deduce that a reasonable number of respondents are well informed about the various socio-economic programs implemented by LAPO in Bayelsa state. Similarly, the respondents were also asked to describe the effectiveness of the socio-economic programs of LAPO after its execution; the data revealed that 10.0% of the respondents noted that the programmes have been excellently effective after its execution, 82.6% which represent a vast majority of the respondents affirmed that the program has been very effective after its execution, 1.6% of them noted that the implementation of the LAPO program has been poorly effective, 4.7% of them asserted that the program has not been effective so far while 0.8% which represent a minute fraction of the respondents did not choose any of the options describing the effectiveness of the LAPO program after its executed.

The general opinion gathered from the in-depth interview revealed that both males and females have benefitted from the socio-economic programs initiated by LAPO with the sole aim of alleviating poverty in Bayelsa state. Some of the respondents who were interviewed made the following observations:

“The specific areas LAPO implemented or executed her empowerment for the beneficiaries include businesses; health and technical aids etc” (Male, Swali Branch, Bayelsa State)

Another respondent from Opolo Branch also asserted that:

“LAPO has impacted businesses and Agriculture, for those into Agriculture. Asset loans are given for income-generating assets like Keke, housing etc” (Male, Opolo Branch, Bayelsa State).

Similarly, another respondent from Akenfa LAPO Branch also added that:

“LAPO has supported its beneficiaries in so many areas such as improving the business sizes of the clients and give better chances to their socio-economic life. Agricultural businesses/activities are also encouraged and those actively involved are also empowered to make more progress” (Female, Akenfa Branch, Bayelsa State).

Selection criteria adopted by LAPO in selecting beneficiaries for the socio-economic schemes

The criteria of selection of LAPO's beneficiaries in Bayelsa State dwell majorly of the following factors: age, health status and type or nature of business of the claimant. Age is a major determining factor to the access to a loan in LAPO organization as loans are often given to people within the ages of 21-60 years who fall within the active members of the labour force of the nation. Also, the nature of the business of the claimant is substantiated through adequate monitoring and verification of the business; health condition is also very essential to ensure the repayment of loans. The respondents noted that the selection criteria used in choosing beneficiaries' pose as a challenge especially to the aged who seeks to participate in the scheme. The conditions are quite stern. The conditionality's for soft loan repayment also act as a challenge to the beneficiaries. Similarly, some of the responses of the respondents that participated in the IDI session made the following observations.

“The criteria of selecting LAPO's beneficiaries in Bayelsa State entail so many factors. As a regular branch, we ensure beneficiaries belong to a union and we consider their age, so they can be productive. The nature of business is a criterion too; we ensure the business is such that can be accounted for. Clients' level of education is not an issue, we try as much as possible to enlighten them with the languages they understand, on how to continue in business and save at the same time. We consider age, for the aged, we reduce their loan to reduce their risk. (Female, Akenfa Branch, Bayelsa State).

Another interviewee added that:

“Age is considered, only those active are considered; not minding their educational levels. Those for regular loans, that is those in different co-operatives/union, must have been members for at least two weeks after registration before they can access loan facilities. Then those for SBL, access loans after four weeks. People in any form of legal business are illegible for LAPO loan facilities. (Male, Opolo Super Branch, Bayelsa State).

Going by the findings of this present study, it could be submitted that the socio-economic lives of the people of Bayelsa have improved greatly through the different interventions introduced by LAPO in improving the socioeconomic status of the beneficiaries in the State. We discovered that the beneficiaries of LAPO have been empowered socially, economically, educationally and otherwise through acquisition of loan facilities. The beneficiaries have also been alleviated from the poverty line and have been given a means of livelihood and sustenance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

LAPO is a credit product designed specifically to support small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) operators in Nigeria irrespective of the enterprise the individual is operating. LAPO focuses on assisting the poor, especially the women, in raising their socio-economic statuses. Similarly, the specific areas LAPO implemented or executed her empowerment for the beneficiaries include the following areas: loan facilities to medium, small scale business; health insurance schemes; access to better medical – care; training on customer relationships; agricultural aids/technical training; education loans/scholarship scheme; businesses and health technical aids have also been impacted. However, the major beneficiaries of the scheme are people who are business inclined and those who engage in both medium and small scale businesses.

The study therefore, recommends the following:

- The government should enact more friendly policies to encourage other non-governmental organizations in alleviating poverty in the state.
- The non-governmental organization should sensitize people on the importance of volunteerism, share their success stories and encourage people to participate in voluntary services to enhance the wellbeing of the citizenry living below the poverty line.
- The non-governmental organization should also focus on assisting the poor, especially women in rural areas to raise their socio-economic statuses. It should not only act as a microcredit institution but also assists clients in overcoming problems beyond the lack of funds, such as illiteracy and environmental degradation which often aggravates poverty.
- Non-governmental organizations should do more to project the course of the small and medium scale enterprises to persuade both public and private efforts in the improvement of the welfare of the citizenry.

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