



Global Partnership/Co-operation and Pragmatic Community Development: An Assessment of an EU-Micro Projects Programme (EU-MPP) in Selected Communities in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

This study carries out a post-evaluation (Social Impact Assessment) of European Union Micro-Projects Programmes (MPP) ₆ and ₉ in Akwa Ibom State so as to ascertain the impact of donor funded project(s) on the sustainable development of participating rural communities. The specific aim of the study is to objectively assess the effectiveness of the intervention strategies of EU-MPP ₆ and ₉ as leverage for sustainable development of the rural areas. The theoretical Index Pinning of the study is based on the premise that donor programmes and activities must be integrated in the framework of a locally owned strategy with strong local commitment, participation, capacity development and ownership. Data for this study were derived from 225 sampled respondents using interview and focused group discussion methods and analysed using descriptive statistics. The results reveal that the EU-MPP ₆ and ₉ have been very successful and have contributed to the infrastructure development of the affected communities. Having observed few militating factors, the study recommends broad-based strategies to enhance the expansion of EU MPP to most communities, especially those not yet able to access these programmes.

Keywords: EU; MPP; donor-funded programmes; Social Impact Assessment; Co-operation; Partnership; Infrastructural Development; Micro-Project.

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INTRODUCTION

This exploratory paper is a Social Impact Assessment or post evaluation of the European Union Micro-Project Programme, aimed at assessing levels of development partnerships in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and how this donor agency has sustainably heighten the tempo of community development in the study area (Akwa Ibom State). A Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is a pragmatic approach for assessing whether a certain development project has met its objectives and set in motion its desired consequences. Social impact analysis is a method for assessing the social implications of key structural reforms and development projects in a given country (Modo, 1995).

The concept of Development Co-operation and Partnership (DCP) generally involves a complex of bilateral and multilateral agreements between recipients, individual donor organizations, international donor organizations and governments. As noted by Boas (2004:547), multilateral and bilateral institutions occupy a dominant position in the developing world as they provide the loans and technical assistance required for sustainable development. The terms bilateral and/or multi-lateral institutions are used to describe the many different global institutions which, within the context of this paper, include the multi-lateral development banks (MDBs) – the World Bank and the three largest regional banks: the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU) and related United Nations agencies. The relationships between these institutions, which in proper parlance, are called donor agencies, partnering organizations, or international interventionist organizations, are not only complex, but reflect the wide range of different tasks and programmes they offer to recipient societies or countries.

Since the emergence of modern development practice (Development Co-operation-Partnership) in the 1940s, the concept has undergone a number of reforms and readjustments to suit the peculiarities of both old and newly emerging societies. The notion of development co-operation, which until the 1950s and 1960s was perceived as merely a technical issue, has shifted to focus on a new range of cross-cutting themes such as governance, indigenous peoples, gender issues, community development, and so on.

One of the emerging issues in development co-operation today is the increasing importance attributed to community level involvement. Since the 1990s, promoting partnerships in sustainable community development has likewise been an important element in development co-operation. In Nigeria, donor or partner organizations have vigorously pursued policies and programmes of community-led assistance, particularly infrastructure development, in both rural and semi-urban Local Government Areas (LGAs) since the 1990s.

Beginning in the 1970s, the justification for development assistance or co-operation has increasingly become the need to build “human capital”, stressing the crucial importance of human capital to economic growth. One of the arguments advanced by development experts and policy makers has been that development aid or co-operation in the form of aided self-help community development will increase the capacities of poor nations to make the most productive use of international development investment resources (Eberstadt, 1985). This underscores the fact that nation states cannot achieve sustainable development, security and prosperity on their own. In the views of Messner (2004:11), in a globally networked world, constant policy and programme failure looms unless there is a cross border co-operation.

This paper is anchored in the changing pattern and nature of rural community development in Nigeria, specifically Akwa Ibom State. Most of the rural area under study has been the object of long-term neglect and desolation, resulting in a high prevalence of poverty, unemployment, poor living standards, poor infrastructural facilities and social disintegration (Olisa, 1992; Ijere, 1992; Mabogunje, 1985; Chambers, 1974; Obinozie, 1999; Idachaba, 1985; Dauda, 2002; Oshuntogun, 1986). Following the major food crisis of 2007/2008, and a realization that 925 million people are currently suffering from hunger and poverty and three quarters of these people live in rural areas and that by the year 2050, multilateral and bilateral institutions are again concentrating a major part of their development co-operation efforts on rural areas (Panel Discussion at GFFA Berlin, Germany on Rural Development Policies, January 21, 2011).

Rural community development which originated as a form of “communal self-help” and later became “government-sponsored community projects”, has today culminated in donor-aided or funded programmes with increased flow of aid or assistance from international donors and programs including UNDP country programmes; World Bank community-based projects; World Bank Health Systems Development Projects (HSDP); the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United States Department for International Development (USAID), the British Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union Micro Project Programme (EU-MPP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Rural Financial Institutions (RUFIN) Programme, and UNICEF/WHO health-related programmes. Akwa Ibom State is a state in which a number of these donor agencies operate.

A number of studies have attributed the failure of development projects to achieve their desired impact on the local people to the non-involvement of development partners and project beneficiaries in the assessment of the performance of the projects (Oladipo, 2000). There have been a number of dismal and persistent failures by many self-help and government-funded projects for rural development in the study area alone.

Putting the needs of the people at the centre of development and international cooperation has become the mandate of various donor organizations following a number of summits and conventions aimed at addressing the development challenges of less-developed societies. Donor organizations such as the EU and UNDP have slowly come to appreciate the ingredients needed for self-sustaining development in rural developing communities. These

organizations are thus today seen as catalysts that could usher in positive social change and the economic uplifting of rural people.

The validity of the above assertion constitutes the crux of this study, which involves an impact assessment of the European Union's Micro Projects Programme (MPP₆ and MPP₉). The EU today plays a very significant role in promoting development. It is the largest donor in the world, providing more than half of all international development funding. In 2006, it accounted for about EUR 25 billion, more than half of the world Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Gettu, 2006). It is a major source of financing for UN programmes, as well as for specialized agencies and specialized funds. Current EU development policy is predominantly focused on poverty reduction and supporting sustainable development (Gettu, 2006).

This study which differs from previous studies on donor-funded development projects both in methodology and problem content, is a coordinated attempt to fill burgeoning gaps in development literature on the effectiveness of EU-funded micro project programmes in Akwa Ibom State. This study covers easily identifiable EU-MPP₆ and EU-MPP₉ projects implemented in the state between 2003–2008 and 2009–2010 respectively.

Objectives

This study focuses on the following objectives in the aforementioned study area:

- i) identifying EU-funded projects;
- ii) examining issues of accessing the EU-develop funds and projects;
- iii) assessing the problems confronting the implementation of EU-funded projects;
- iv) empirically assessing the social and economic impact of the projects on participating communities; and
- v) recommending strategies for expanding the coverage of EU-funded projects across the state.

Research Questions

In view of the above, the research questions considered necessary for this study are:

- i) What are the impacts of EU-funded micro projects on the target groups or benefiting communities?
- ii) Are mechanisms required to sustain the benefits of EU-funded projects in place?
- iii) How can this interventionist programme be effectively used to leverage and enlarge the coverage of an efficient rural development policy in the state?

METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data sources were used in this study. The primary data was derived from interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) with the respondents in the selected project areas (communities). The services of six (6) field assistants were enlisted throughout the study. Secondary data sources included official documents and pamphlets published by the EU-programme, textbooks, journals and other text-based documents.

This study was conducted between November 2007 and December 2011 and covered the planning and implementation phases of the projects so that the researcher was able to ascertain the magnitude of the impact and sustainability of the programmes. The sample was comprised of male and female respondents aged twenty-five years and older. A greater percentage of the respondents were petty traders and farmers with only a First School Leaving Certificate, while a few had obtained some secondary education and above.

A purposive sampling technique was applied so as to select at least two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each of the three (3) senatorial districts where EU-Micro Project Programmes (EU-MPP₆ and ₉) were found. Communities with EU-MPPs were identified through official documents and personal visits/community tours. Two (2) communities were purposively selected from each of these Local Government Areas as it was not possible for all communities in the Local Government Areas to access and benefit from the programmes. With the help of six field assistants, interviews were conducted with the selected respondents in their own homes at agreed upon dates/times.

The focused group discussion was conducted differently among three sets of ten (10) respondents in three (3) separate communities in each of the senatorial districts in the study area. Questions centered on their visualization of the project in their area, their level of participation, their assessment of developmental impact and any envisaged problems. Six (6) Local Government Areas and twelve (12) communities were selected for participation in the study. The sample was comprised of two hundred and forty (240) respondents, with twenty (20) respondents selected from each community of which two hundred and twenty five (225) respondents were

contacted for interviews and focused group discussion. The data gathered were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed, using simple percentages.

BASIC CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Development Cooperation/Partnership

The concept of development co-operation/partnership has been used to refer to development aid, development assistance, technical assistance, international aid, etc. According to Gettu (2006), the term international development co-operation is now used in place of the one-sided term “assistance”, and implies working closely with partner countries to strengthen capacities to formulate, implement and monitor development policies and programmes. Development cooperation expands our understanding again and takes into consideration how societies work and how international systems function. Development co-operation activities demand complex sets of interventions by multiple actors.

The idea of development cooperation is premised on the fact that the developmental challenges of developing countries, including poverty, environmental desertification, unemployment, civil strife/disobedience, political instability, poor standards of living, etc. can be solved using development aid from more advanced nations (core nations). UNDP commissioned research (1988, 1997) on the social policy factors and perceptions that encourage industrialized countries to support development cooperation, concluded that there was little or no correlation between the volume of external trade links and the scale of development co-operation. The two correlations the study did uncover involved the domestic rate of government expenditure, that is, the internal distribution of wealth and the image citizens in a particular country held of the effectiveness of the development cooperation undertaken. Based on this research, the under-listed are important in the context of development co-operation:

- A society where there is a high level internal redistribution of wealth is more open to development co-operation and supports a comparatively high level of spending relative to national income.
- Public support for devoting a substantial proportion of the annual budget to development co-operation depends on how the society in question views the work actually done in the field.

The partnership element of the concept ensures the availability of the financial resources needed to make real development happen. Partnerships also enable organizations to improve efficiency and increase competitiveness, particularly in service delivery (Gettu, 2006, p. 1). The concept of partnership, as a principle for development co-operation, describes a relationship based on horizontal cooperation rather than a vertical relationship between donors and recipients. This simple and unambiguous tool or distinction is often misconstrued in practice (Gettu 2006: 2-3) as partnership in development co-operation does still imply power disequilibrium between the supporting and the supported organizations.

Partnerships have been widely used where more than one organization or interest is involved in the formulation and implementation of a project or programme. Partnership allows co-operating stakeholders to capitalize on each partner’s intrinsic strengths, reflect shared goals and objectives and build on existing achievements (Gettu, 2006). While in practice, partnerships should go beyond mere signatures and embody participatory approaches to development management, this is not necessarily how they are currently being practiced in many countries around the world. At a fundamental level, development co-operation relies on building successful partnerships, which take time and in turn rely on a number of critical factors, some of which include:

- The establishment of an agreement that a partnership is needed;
- The development of a shared vision of what might be achieved and how it is to be achieved;
- Shared mandates and agenda granting respect and generating trust between different interests;
- Relationships based on respect, reciprocity and openness;
- Good communication and collaborative decision making with a commitment to achieving consensus; and
- Institutionalizing effective organizational management.

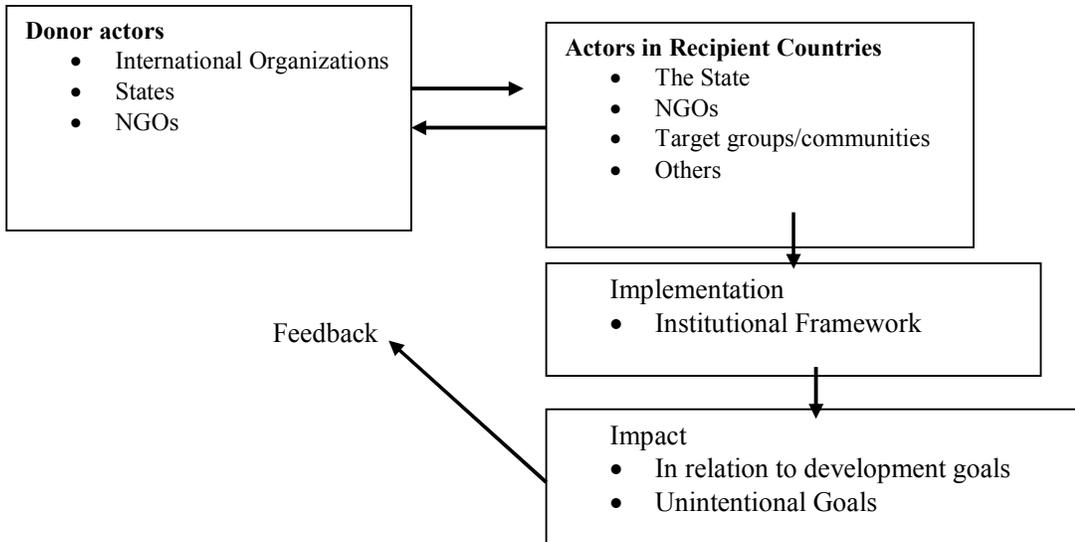
These factors hinge on the realization that partnership is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve a common objective and to promote better development outcomes (Gettu, 2006).

According to Messner (2004, p. 112), an agenda for strengthening multilateralism in development co-operation must go beyond piecemeal approaches, and include a coherent structure for global governance. The agenda should include the following conflict-prone questions:

- How can the effectiveness of development co-operation be strengthened?
- How can the co-operation of organizations be improved on the basis of their respective specialization advantages?
- How can civil society actors (and not just governments) from developing countries become responsible players in the international system in terms of voice, capacity-building and power sharing?

A dynamic model of development co-operation/partnership is shown below:

Figure 1: Model of International Development Co-operation (Foreign Aid as a Process)



Source: Adapted from John & Paul (2003).

An Overview of the EU-Micro Projects/Programme (EU-MPP₆ and EU-MPP₉)

The European Union Micro Project Programme (EU-MPP) is an interventionist development programme aimed at the economic and social development of rural communities, in this case, in response to the felt needs of those living in the Niger Delta. The Programme is the result of a co-operative instrument developed by the European Community between it and some of its member countries to finance local level micro-projects that have an economic and social impact on the lives of those in developing countries (EU-MPP₉ Fact Sheet). The Programme aspires to achieve, among other things, the provision of basic healthcare facilities, education, rural transportation, water supply and sanitation, access roads, and increased awareness around issues or gender, HIV/AIDS, the environment, conflict and human rights, transparency and accountability in local government administration, and income generating and other non-conventional projects as may be desired by the participating community.

The European Union through the European Development Fund (EDF) and Europe Aid has so far embarked on three (3) phases of its micro-project programmes in Nigeria. The MPP₃ was executed between November 2001 and 2006, covering three (3) states in the Niger Delta Region: Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. The programme funded 858 micro projects in those areas. The MPP₆ was executed between May 2003 and April 2008, in six states of the Niger Delta Region: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States at a cost of 40.6 million Euros for 1,921 micro projects. The programme saw 1900 micro projects (EU-MPP₉ Fact Sheet) through to completion.

The MPP₉ was initiated in the nine Niger Delta States in April 2009, and will continue until the end of 2012, with a target of 1200 micro projects. The programme also includes an additional 125 pilot projects in the Etung Local Government Area of the Cross River State. The main purpose of the MPP₉ is to contribute to poverty reduction in rural and peri-urban communities in the nine (9) Niger Delta states through the promotion of participatory and gender equitable local development governance and improved socio-economic development. This

it is hoped will in turn contribute to strengthening peace and stability in the Niger Delta and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MPP₉ programme is funded by a grant of 9.2 billion naira from the 9th European Development Fund and represents a continuation and expansion of earlier EU micro project interventions in the Niger Delta (MacRae, 2012).

The MPP is designed to be a bottom-up approach to development facilitated by Civil Society Organizations (CSO) selected through calls for proposals. Local communities are involved in the planning, supervision and implementation of the chosen project through the Project Management Committee (PMC), a democratic structure formed through a Community Mobilization Process. Interested communities must complete the participatory self-diagnosis form (IMPACT Form) obtainable through their Local Government Area. With the assistance of an assigned Civil Society Organization (CSO), the community then validates the Community Development Action Plan (CDAP). The CDAP consists of annual schedule of activities to be carried out to achieve the required 25% contribution. Communities contribute 25% of cost of the micro-projects in cash or in kind (10% for Etung Local Government Area), while Local Government Authorities contribute 25% (30% for Etung) of the cost of project, which has to be contracted using the contract procedure of government and must be contracted before EU funding (50% funds) can be released. The average cost of a micro project is 44,000 EUR. Once the CDAP and proposal are approved by the MPP, a memorandum of understanding is signed between the National Accounting Officer, the Local Government Area and the community, describing the proposed Micro Project (MP), the implementation modalities and the contributions from all parties.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS/RESULTS

In this section of the study, the data elicited from respondents is analyzed and presented. This section also shows EU-MPP₉ identified/completed projects as well as projects that are earmarked and on-going. The respondents views are classified as “Yes”, “No” and “Do Not Know”. Only the 225 successfully completed interviews have been included in this analysis. In the first question, respondents were asked: “Are you aware of any EU-MPPs in your community? Their responses are as presented in the table below:

Table 1: Respondents’ Awareness of and Participation in MPPs

Responses	Aware of EU- Project in their area	Participated in the Project
Yes	156 (69.33%)	134 (59.56%)
No	64 (28.44%)	86 (38.22%)
Don’t know	5 (2.23%)	5 (2.22%)

Source: Field Survey (2007 – 2011)

The above table shows that a larger proportion of the respondents 156 (69.33%) were able to identify some of the micro projects realized in their communities through EU-funded programmes. This is confirmed in the almost as larger share of respondents (59.56%) who further noted that they took part in the project. Field observations revealed the presence of EU-funded projects in most identifiable communities.

As a follow-up question, respondents’ opinions were sought on the various forms of involvement/participation they had in the project(s). Their responses are as presented below:

Table 2: Respondents’ Involvement/Participation in the MPPs

Responses	Financial Contributions	Labour	Material Donations	All of these Forms	None
Yes	84 (37.33%)	23 (10.22%)	18 (8%)	9 (4%)	No
No	---	---	---	---	86 (38.22%)
Don’t Know	---	---	---	---	5 (2.22%)

Source: Field Survey (2007 – 2011)

As shown in Table 2, among the 134 (59.56%) respondents who played an active role in the programme, a greater proportion (37.33%) did so through financial contributions/community levies. Other forms of involvement varied depending on capabilities. Focused group discussion and field observations in some areas helped to further reveal the degree of some respondents’ involvement.

Another follow-up question sought to determine the nature of some of the identified EU-funded projects in the study areas and responses are captured below:

Table 3: Respondents' Identification of Actual EU-MPP Projects in their Areas

Responses	Health Centre	Mini Borehole	School Project	Mini Market	Micro Processing Project	Others	Cannot Identify Any
Yes	33	35	28	23	18	19	
No							64
Don't know							5

Source: Field Survey (2007-2011)

The responses in Table 3 concur with those in Tables 1 and 2 and highlight several identifiable EU-funded projects in the respective study communities.

Another follow-up question sought to assess respondents' notion of the EU-funded programme vis-à-vis their impact on community socio-economic development. The responses are presented below:

Table 4: Respondents' Assessment of EU-Funded MPPs in their Communities

Variables	Yes	No	Don't Know
Programme has met community's pressing basic needs	128	92	5
Community leadership organization is involved	133	87	5
Projects are executed by competent hands	149	71	5
Project implementation cycle is usually short	156	66	3
There is effective supervision by donor agency	173	50	2
Community projects are usually executed according to specification	179	43	3
Community funds are released on time	127	83	15
Projects have physical sustainability	126	81	18
Projects are accessibly located	118	78	29
Community takes over after implementation	155	58	12

Source: Field Survey (2007-2011).

The overriding sentiment of all of the assessments/evaluations of the EU-MPPs from the various community respondents (as presented in Table 4) suggests that the project(s) is/are very significant to community development. This is mostly expressed in terms of their fulfilling pressing community needs, involving community leadership, demonstrating competent project execution, and the accessibility and physical sustainability of projects. The responses further imply that the programme has been successful in most of the study areas.

A programme of this nature and magnitude is, of course, not without some besetting factors as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Factors Besetting EU-Funded MPPs in the Study Area

Responses	Poor Counter-part Funding	Lack of Interest from Communities	Poor Post-Project Management	Poor Enlightenment or Awareness	Lack of Local Gov't Interest	Corruption	others
Yes	196	119	165	194	189	177	125
No	12	22	14	34	38	41	43
Don't Know	4	3	2	2	1	3	1

Source: Field Survey (2007-2011)

The data in Table 5 suggest that the expected deliverables, in terms of impact on the communities surveyed, are sometimes hampered by challenges which include poor funding and a lack of community interest in accessing projects due to the lack of articulated civil society organizations (CBOs, VSOs, self-help bodies, etc), incompetence in managing the deliverables, corruption (which has characterized the nation's psyche), poor enlightenment or awareness by the donor body in calling for proposals from communities thus pushing a number of

poor communities out of the programme via poor local government leadership who, out of ignorance, have refused to make their various communities aware of the programme. Other challenges include a limited number of projects embarked upon in a particular state may prevent all communities from being able to benefit from the programme.

Table 6: Identified and Completed EU-Funded Projects in Selected Communities in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	PROJECT TYPE	LOCATION
1	Renovated Four (4) Educational Blocks	Ediene Abak, Abak L.G.A
2.	Constructed Market Stall (income generating project)	Ikot Ewe, Essien Udim L.G.A
3.	Mini-Water Project	Ikot Obong Edong, Ikot Ekpene
4.	Constructed Four (4) Classroom Blocks	Obot Mme, Ini L.G.A
5.	Constructed Four (4) Classroom Blocks	Ndot Ikpe, Ini L.G.A
6.	Furnishing and Provision of Desks and Tables	Ukpom Anwana, Ini L.G.A
7.	Road Construction	Ikot Ukpong, Etinan L.G.A
8.	Road Construction	Mbiotto II, Etinan L.G.A
9.	Constructed Four (4) Classroom Block	Ikot Umiang Ide, Etinan L.G.A
10.	Renovated Primary Health Centre	Ikot Mfon, Etinan L.G.A
11.	Constructed Market Stalls	Nkana, Etinan L.G.A
12.	Renovated Primary Health Centre	Obotim, Nsit Ibom L.G.A
13.	Constructed Primary Centre	Oku Uyo, Uyo L.G.A
14.	Constructed Primary School Block	Ikot Ekot, Etinan L.G.A
15.	Provision of Computer Sets with Solar Energy	Ikot Ebak, Etinan L.G.A
16.	Constructed Market Stalls	Mbiabong Etoi, Uyo L.G.A
17.	Constructed Market Stalls (income generating project)	Nkari, Ini L.G.A
18.	Mini Water Project	Ofi, Oron L.G.A
19.	Market Stall	Mkpanak, Ibeno L.G.A

Source: Field Survey, Observational Visits to selected benefiting communities (2007- 2011)

Table 6 above provides information on the selected communities benefitting from EU-funded projects. Some projects cut across communities in the three (3) senatorial districts of the study area. More importantly, the project type and location help to show the rural nature of the EU-funded projects strategy.

Table 7: Proposed/Ongoing (2012) EU-MPP, Community-Based Projects in Akwa Ibom State, Senatorial District by Senatorial District

S/N	PROJECT TYPE	BENEFITING COMMUNITIES AND LGAs
Uyo Senatorial District		
1	Oil Processing Mill	Ikot Nkang Asuna, Etinan LGA
2.	Cassava Mill	East itam 3, Itu L.G.A
3.	Educational Block	Eman Uruan, Uruan L.G.A
4.	Water Project	Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono Ibom L.G.A
5.	Health Post	Ikot Obio Nko, Ibesikpo Asutan L.G.A
6.	Oil Processing Mill	Ikot Ebre, Mbiaso, Nsit Ibom L.G.A
Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District		
7.	Market	Ebebit Afaha Obong, Abak L.G.A
8.	Health Post	Omum Unyam, Etim Ekpo L.G.A
9.	Water	Ikot Enea, Ikono L.G.A
10.	Educational Block	Ibiakpan Akanawan, Ikot Ekpene L.G.A
11	Water	Atan Ukwok, Ini L.G.A
12.	Market	Ikot Ekpat, Ukanafun L.G.A
Eket Senatorial District		
13.	Educational Block	Idung Offiong, Eket L.G.A
14.	Educational Block	Idung Assang, Esit Eket L.G.A
15.	Health Post	Ikot Okwo, Ikot Abasi L.G.A
16.	Educational Block	Ikot Etefia, Ukam, Mkpat Enin L.G.A
17.	Educational Block	Idung Ukpong, Okobo L. G. A
18	Water	Ukuko, urue Offiong/Oruko L.G.A

Source: EU-MPP, Programme launched in Akwa Ibom State, June 2012.

Data in Table 7 clearly show the various categories of projects currently earmarked and underway in the EU-MPP, in six (6) selected communities in each of the three (3) senatorial districts. The above projects are just a selection of the sixty (60) projects in the participating Local Government Areas and the benefiting communities of the State.

CONCLUSION

This paper has offered an appraisal of the European Union Funded MPP in Akwa Ibom State, which for the most part has spanned four years. The approach of this programme is premised to be bottom-up through the call for micro-project initiatives from active communities – an inclusive and participatory approach to sustainable development.

The conclusion of this Social Impact Assessment of an interventionist programme is that despite its limited coverage, it has significantly touched lives in the rural communities under study which is a core element in sustainable development. This is evidenced in the high level of satisfaction expressed by most of the benefiting communities towards their EU-funded projects. Many of these communities which thus far have not been able to benefit from government funded projects, can today boast of a donor-funded project, whose quality and impact in many cases surpasses government-run development projects. In many other ways, the EU-MPP has complemented the state government's aggressive drive towards sustainable rural development as it has liberated a number of communities and their people from the dearth, somnabulence and frustrations of their basic infrastructure.

The synergetical approach of the EU-MPP is also important to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Based on this knowledge and the findings of this study, it is imperative that within the spirit of co-operation, collaboration and partnership exhibited by this donor body (EU-MPP), local actors proactively take the lead while external partners assume greater responsibility for their own possible contributions and role in development by forging new relationships and identifying new development mechanisms that reflect the particular local circumstances.

Recommendations

This study has shown that the EU-MPP Programme has the capacity to advance sustainable development in developing societies if the quality of development assistance is increased so as to absorb larger quantities of assistance and co-operation in the future. This study has offered a number of useful strategies, which if taken into consideration, stand to improve the quality of development outputs by European Union and other donor organizations in Akwa Ibom State.

- The EU-MPP Programme should be re-adjusted to meet the peculiarities of the local communities by relaxing the conditionalities for accessing micro projects. This requires reducing the present 25% fund commitment by communities to 10% to enable more rural communities access this form of donor assistance.
- The call for proposals procedure for micro projects from various communities in the state should be re-invigorated by means of increased awareness or sensitization to enlist broader support and participation of would-be benefiting communities.
- EU-Micro projects must be tailored to the specific needs of the local people if they are to improve the living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable recipients in the rural communities.
- State and local Governments should intensify efforts to generate interest in EU-funded projects by making it mandatory for local communities to send proposals for EU-community-funded programmes.
- Civil society organizations should be chosen for participation on the basis of eligibility, proficiency and effectiveness without which the validation of community proposals may be faulty and biased.
- It is critical that local mechanisms for the ongoing management of handed-over projects be established if projects are to be maintained and sustained and communities are to truly benefit from their EU-funded micro-projects.

- There must be transparency and equity in the choice of project and project site to suit the needs of people in the various communities.
- Benefiting communities must meet their commitments to their projects by remitting their proportion of counterpart funding on time for prompt the commencement and implementation of projects.

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