

PRO-NATURA Newsletter

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Member of IUCN, World Conservation Union

Partnership and development in Nigeria, IN THE NIGER DELTA

SINCE 1997 PRO-NATURA MANAGES A SUCCESSFUL PROCESS IN A REMOTE AND NEGLECTED COASTAL COMMUNITY OF 30,000 PEOPLE ON THE EXTREME SOUTHERN EDGE OF NIGERIA. AKASSA LIES ON THE COASTAL SAND RIDGES BETWEEN THE ATLANTIC AND THE MANGROVES OF THE NIGER DELTA. TODAY AKASSA PRESENTS A MODEL THAT GENERATES WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED «AN ATTRACTIVE REVOLUTION» WHICH STARTS SPREADING ACROSS THE NIGER DELTA.



■ An Akassa village
| in the Niger Delta.

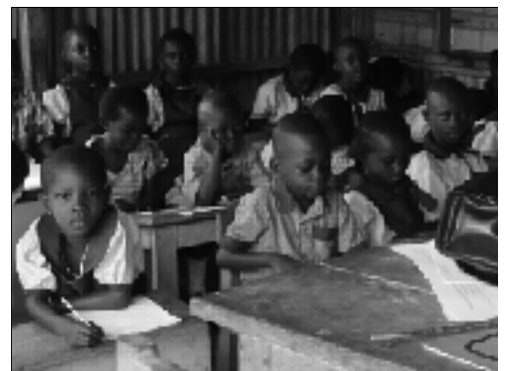
There was no master plan to read, no blue print to follow, just a process that had been successfully tried and tested in many parts of the developing world. The process was, and still is, considered innovative in Nigeria where the traditional top-down approach to development has littered the country with failed and abandoned projects. We would like to put what we have learned from the process into the public domain and we recommend that others adopt and adapt it to suit themselves. Development is possible in the Niger Delta with the right approach and the right partners, in this case Statoil as the main contributor.

The Process began early in 1997 with a Participatory Appraisal by a gender-balanced and multi-disciplinary team of interested Akassa villagers and impartial external Pro-Natura observers. The community was thus involved from the very start of the process which is often called the «Bottom-up» approach. The appraisal

was done by living in Akassa with the people; moving from village to village; listening and learning from everyone, not just from the Chiefs but also from the poorest of the poor and the traditionally marginalised. The Youths had their say, the Women too. What were their problems? What could be done to solve them? What were they willing to do to help themselves? Who might help them to help themselves? By the end of 1997, after a series of workshops at the interest group, village, area and Clan levels, the villagers had produced their own Akassa Community Development Plan. This has been implemented between 1998 and the end of 2001 as the Akassa Community Development Programme (ACDP). In 2002 it will be replaced with a new «Akassa National Development Plan 2002-2006».



■ The creation of nursery schools and adult literacy courses have been one of the five priority goals in the Poverty Alleviation programme.



INNOVATION TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The villagers have produced their own Akassa Community Development Plan

The first component, Poverty Alleviation through Income Generation has resulted in a successful Micro-Credit Scheme for which the Seed Money came from the villagers themselves. People with similar interests formed small «ogbos», held regular meetings and formed the habit of first saving in a common box and then both lending their own money and repaying it. At the end of the year the money

was not «shared», as is commonly done in other communities. These were new habits and they had to learn not only to keep accounts but, in the process, also to be honest and transparent and to trust each other. For many people this was a new, even revolutionary process. In time, individual ogbo joined with others to form Area-level, then Clan-level, Savings and Credit Schemes (S & CS). When the villagers' small weekly savings eventually amounted to 2 million Nairas (17,000 euros), their S & CS began to attract funding from outside, first from Statoil and latterly from UNDP. Today their fund totals 5.5 million Nairas. Its Directors and Managers are village



From the beginning, women's groups have been very active in the micro-credit Scheme.

residents. The ogbo borrow from the S & CS and make loans to individual members. The ogbo then make sure their members repay the money. Default on payment is minimal and where non-repayment has happened it has largely been unintentional. The S & CS is now offering training and funding for Small and Medium-scale Enterprises.

Human resources development was the target of the second component. The villager's first priority was primary health. Such was the neglect of this remote area that in 1997 villagers, particularly those under 5 years, were either «healthy, lucky or dead». By 2000 they were boasting «We have Health for All by the Year 2000» because they had built themselves a chain of 18 simple health posts; had trained

Health Post and Traditional Birth Attendants; had their own Drugs Revolving Fund; and had helped Government to get their Health Centre to function. Lacking the funds to properly tackle the enormous problems in their primary and secondary schools they have concentrated on adult literacy and setting up nursery schools. This initiative was driven mainly by the women. Otherwise what money the villagers have managed to raise for human resources development has been spent by on the development of a Skills Training and Resource Centre. There, computer training, sewing and accountancy skills are being taught while training courses in metalwork and carpentry are being developed. Meanwhile, materials and equipment are being procured to make a TV Centre, Home Economics, Craft and other sections functional.

Natural resources-related problems: the villagers have measured their remaining forest and fisheries resources and developed their own management plans and bye-laws. These they want Government to help them enforce. They have taken an initiative to conserve Sea Turtles. This has literally resulted in Nigeria joining the international Convention of Migratory Species from which it had previously been excluded. The villagers are demanding that Government stop the deep-sea trawlers from entering their coastal waters and catching the fish on which they depend for their livelihoods and the sea-turtles that make Akassa attractive for Eco-tourism.



Thanks to small weekly savings, the Akassas have created a Savings and Credit Scheme to finance their programme of Poverty Alleviation.

Works and infr astructures: whereas previously villagers in Akassa thought only in terms of big projects, by implementing their own micro-projects, they have since learned that projects must be linked with institutional development and capacity building to be sustainable.

Institutional development and capacity building: in 1997, there where no institution in Akassa capable of taking responsibility for

development. There was literally no Government activity in the rural areas. At village level, the traditional Chieftancy existed but was discredited. Community Development Committees were largely controlled by Benefit Captors.

The State Women's organisations did not touch women in this rural area, youth were amorphous and the rural Church represented by a mixture of charismatic religions and witchcraft held back rather than promoted development.



18 health posts have been constructed to fulfill basic health needs.

Developing a viable home-grown system of local Government



At first, the Akassas gave priority to essential micro-structures: here a well building.

When the Programme began, with the permission of the Akassa Council of Chiefs, it had little contact with Government despite attempts to develop a working relationship. Only the Ministry of Health showed interest. Therefore the Programme focussed on developing local institutions that would initiate and manage activities in the fields of poverty alleviation, health, education, natural resources, most of which are areas of Government responsibility.

The Akassa Development Foundation is a legally incorporated Trust, registered both at the State level and with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Abuja. A board of Trustees elected by the Akassas comprises 10 men, 10 women and 2 representatives of the disabled, a man and a woman. Their role, so far, has been that of employers of the programme staff of whom the majority are

Akassas. There is in such communities a mass of hidden capacity (retired civil servants, employed graduated...) just waiting to be recruited. Others, apart from 2 Pro-Natura advisers are 7 English and Nigerian volunteers.

The Akassa Development Foundation has implemented the Akassa programme with funding from several sources . The seed funding came from Statoil which is the prime contributor to the community. Other funding has included community savings, grants from Chevron, BP, the French, Austrian, Canadian, and Irish Governments as well as Bayelsa State, funding from UNDP and IUCN, from the Leventis and Mac Athur Foundations and from Shell and Agip.

An «attractive revolution»

That it took so long to develop the Akassa model is not surprising and it should be possible to replicate elsewhere more quickly. Today it presents an attractive model. It has not been imported but locally generated in response to local circumstances and it can be easily adapted by other communities. It promotes accountability and transparency. It does not promote the Westminster-style «one man one vote» but the more African «Consensus Democracy». It is Community led but is inclusive of local Government while imposing expectation of Good Governance upon it.



> Those in charge of the project

- Niger Delta Programme Director:
William D. Knight
- Chairman of Pro-Natur a (Nigeria):
Chris Alagoa
- Project Manager:
Phillip Arkell
- Regional Co-ordinator:
Philip Hall OBE.



Visitors from other Delta communities who are interested in the project, standing around Bill Knight, the Niger Delta Development Programme Director.

The «revolution» is extending across the Niger Delta into other local Government areas in Akwa Ibom and Rivers State through Pro-Natura «Coastal development initiative»

The Akassas have decided to protect endangered sea turtles of their coasts.

This extension, with funding from TotalFinaElf, focuses on good governance, conflicts management, community development and institutional development. This is being attempted under the aegis of the Federal Government's Niger Delta Development Commission in the hope that synergy can be developed with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and the oil industry on the one side and with the National Planning Commission, international donor and aid agencies on the other. However, both the Delta and the task of extending the process are huge and there is more work to be done than Pro-Natura can do on its own. So, it is to help other NGOs and community-based organisations to join hands and to share the effort that Pro-Natura is trying to further develop the training facilities that it has established.



the Niger Delta will continue to be a troubled region, no matter how much money spent. For that reason we believe that Akassa must be replicated with the help of our so-called «Living University of Akassa» which has three main components:

- A Skills Development and Resource Centre where the people of Akassa learn;
- Akassa itself, in which the village is a classroom, the villagers are the teachers and the students are villagers and visitors from other communities who want to learn about the Akassa process;
- Pro-Natura's Training Centre where other NGOs, CBOs and even Government Officers and the oil industry's Community Development personnel can share ideas about participatory community development and test them in the field.

Computer course at the Skills Development and Resource Centre, where are given accounting, ironworks, handicrafts courses...



in brief... in brief... in brief...

BIOMASS CHARCOAL

> A demonstration Centre has been set up in the South of France, in the Camargue area, it is producing a substitute for charcoal from any agricultural residues.

JOHANNESBURG

> Pro-Natura International will attend The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg from the 26th August to the 5th September and is a member of " JO'BURG 2002 ", the French NGO network.

The «Living University of Akassa»

Akassa has taught us that a participatory process approach to Community Development in the Niger Delta Region can be successful if it is combined with both institutional development and capacity building, particularly in those areas that have been traditionally marginalised. Otherwise development will neither be sustainable nor will its benefits be shared by the people who perceive themselves to have been forgotten and cheated. In that case

> Pro-Natura as an organisation



Created in Brazil in 1986, Pro-Natura is a non-governmental organisation that specialises in sustainable development. In 1992, after the Rio Conference, Pro-Natura became one of the first NGOs in the Southern Hemisphere to gain international status. Today it is a global organisation that is composed of two major hubs: Instituto Pro-Natura in Brazil, which is responsible for the Americas and Pro-Natura International in France, responsible for Europe, Africa and Asia. A strategic co-ordination Council manages the organisation.

www.pronatura.org

INNOVATION TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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