

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS AS AGENTS OF POVERTY ERADICATION: THE CASE OF LAPO IN NIGER-DELTA COMMUNITIES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research work examined the contribution of NGOs, as agents of poverty eradication with lift above poverty organization (LAPO) in the Niger Delta basin of Nigeria on focus. Five LAPO branches located in five communities out of a population of thirteen branches in similar communities were studied. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Thirty two (32) LAPO staff manning the five branches as well as seventy (70) client (the poor) were the respondents. Descriptive statistics were mainly employed for data analysis and it included percentages, Likert –scale measures, means and chi-square (x^2) statistic. Results showed that LAPO services were inclined to poverty eradication and indeed focused on the right target; the poor, within the communities covered. LAPO services were as well accessed by the poor and that it fairly met industrial standards in terms of depth of outreach. There were challenges though in the delivering of LAPO services and it centred on the remoteness of the clients domain, poor infrastructure such as roads and associated high cost of reaching them; low savings mobilization from clients; high interest from loans; and the smallness of loan sizes. Increased capacity-building activities of LAPO to the afflicted credit-groups; re-examining of its leverage gap between interest on savings and credit; and the re-assessment of its repeat loan regime, so as to achieve meaningful progression in sizes, were some of the strengthening measures suggested.

Key Words: Community, Development, Non-governmental Organizations, LAPO, Active poor.

INTRODUCTION

The requirement of mankind for sufficient functioning in any society is “fund”. AN individual who does not have sufficient fund to meet up with his basic requirements of human survival including feeding, clothing and housing is considered to be in the category classified as poor. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are organizations that ensure that the active poor in the rural and urban areas improve their standard of living through coordinated economic activities. Omofonmwan and Odia (2009) emphasized that NGOs evolves from experiences, interests, and innate zeal to respond to societal needs. In same manner has the Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) evolved. In 1980s, Nigeria experienced a sharp increase in spread and intensity of poverty. In this context, in 1987, Mr. Godwin Eligiamuso, filled with vision and

passion, set up LAPO in Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria, to lift its beneficiaries out of the grip of poverty (LAPO 2011). In Nigeria, the poor, has been in the political center of all policies but it is very doubtful if the poor have benefited much from the anti-poverty policies of the government. (Jekayinfa 2010). It was therefore important that NGOs make their own mark towards poverty alleviation.

Statement of the Problem

Effectively addressing the issue of poverty is a major challenge as a great percentage of the populace particularly in rural areas live in abject poverty. In a Central Bank (CBN) survey, only about 1.5 million poor was reached by microfinance institutions (MFI) out of about 140million Nigerians. (CBN 2003). According to Anyanwu (2004), financial outreach is a major challenge of poverty alleviation. The outreach problem is traced to paucity of fund to meet the ever increasing demand for microcredit. LAPO has involved itself in micro-business management to enhance better resource utilization and efficient funds management through training and has provided opportunity for the poor to learn certain skills such as sewing, food processing, confectionary, soap making and a host of other income generating activities to alleviate poverty (Jekayinfa 2010). Over the years, LAPO has grown from a small informal development organization into a big, formal developed institution. Today, LAPO is well equipped with the systems and structures necessary for delivering sound financial and social services for alleviating poverty and empowering the disadvantaged in Nigeria. (LAPO 2011). This study is challenged to assess the developmental role of LAPO in Delta State communities of Nigeria. It seeks to certify if indeed LAPO services are being accessed by the rural poor and if they do, whether the depth of their outreach to the poor is satisfactory.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to appraise the performance of LAPO as a case in poverty eradication amongst rural communities in Delta state, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include to:

- i. Ascertain the organizational structure of LAPO and the services it renders.
- ii. Examine the channels of LAPO services to the poor.
- iii. Find out how LAPO raises fund for its activities.
- iv. Determine if LAPO services are accessed by the poor and the depth of their outreach.
- v. Assess the challenges of LAPO in providing services to the poor.
- vi. Make recommendations on strengthening the activities of LAPO as an agent of poverty eradication.

Hypotheses of the Study

To ensure that the aforementioned specific objectives are fully addressed, the understated hypotheses were tested.

Ho₁: LAPO services are not significantly accessed by the rural poor in Delta State Communities.

Ho₂: There is no significant depth in the outreach of LAPO to the rural poor in Delta State Communities.

Literature Review

In the present policy context of globalization and development, most of the alternative efforts of fighting poverty and economic growth are focused at the community rather than global level. “Think global, act local”. This means acting at the community level and fostering economic, social and cultural growth. Community refers to people that dwell in a particular area (geographical area), locality, society etc. often times, the community provides little or no leisure and neither employment opportunities nor social entertainment. Nwobi (2007) viewed community development as the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities so as to integrate there national life. Omofonmwan and Odia (2009), reiterated that community development entails the provision of infrastructural facilities to the people. The provision of these social amenities can be attained through a number of organizations which includes; the Government, Community Development Associations, Non-Governmental Organizations. Umebali (2006), averred that community development has an economic growth component a modernization and human development component, and socio-economic transformation or durable social and economic benefits.

Community development provides an alternative to traditional recreation programming it focuses on a process of involving citizens in decision making and result in changes in their lives and in the local community. (Hatchison and Nopgradi, 2006).

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

The term NGO is used as an acronym to refer to a range of organizations that normally share the understated characteristics as stated by Salamon and Helmut (1994).

- NGOs are not created to generate personal profit; although they may have paid employees and engage in revenue generating activities, they do not distribute profits or surpluses to members or management.
- NGOs are voluntary; this means that they are formed voluntarily and that there is usually an element of voluntary participation in the organization.
- NGOs are distinguished from informal or ad-hoc groups; by having some degree of formal status or other governing documents setting out their mission, objective and scope. They are accountable to their members and donors.
- NGOs are independent of the government and other public authorities and of political parties or commercial organizations.
- NGOs are not self-serving in aims are related values. Their aim is to act in the public arena at large, on concerns and issues related to the well-being of people specific groups of people or society as a whole. They do not pursues the commercial or professional interest of their members.

Alhamed and Pitter (2006) defined NGOs as any international organization which is not established by inter-governmental agreement. The main facts are that an NGO cannot be profit maximizing, it cannot advocate the use of violence, it cannot be a school, a university, or a political party and any concern with human rights must be general rather than restricted to a particular command group, nationality or country.

NGOs exist for a variety of reasons, usually to further political or social goals of their members or funders which include improving the state of the natural environment, encouraging the

observance of human right, improving the welfare of the disadvantaged, or representing a corporate agenda. Sinnvas (2000) observed that NGOs ideal and popular. “agents of change”. It is their flexibility in adapting to local situations and responding to local needs and therefore able to develop integrated projects.

List Above Poverty Organization (LAPO)

LAPO is described as “a development, relief and campaign organization dedicated to finding lasting solution to poverty and suffering around the country”. In LAPO, loans are not given to individuals rather they are given to groups. Group formation begins when sufficient members (not less than 10) show interest in the programme. In the course of group formation, a name and administrative officer are chosen and forwarded to the branch manager who forwards same to the area manager for approval. Subsequently, members register and start saving pending when their loan application is approved.

The objectives of LAPO include to:

- Provide microcredit facilities to members
- Provide microsavings to clients
- Provide agricultural development support through loan and purchase of agricultural tools.
- Provide social empowerment to members
- Supply health care facilities to members
- Social economic characteristic of household
- Microfinance training (Academy) to clients
- Micro investment services
- Impact on the lives of the poor.
- Provide micro insurance to clients.

The Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) in Nigeria developed their poverty measurement tool after visiting Grameen Bank in 1990. Their tool provides a scoring system between 25 and 100 with the higher scores indicating greater poverty. People are eligible for a loan from LAPO if they score 50 points or above, as their economic situation would correspond similarly with people living below Nigeria’s official poverty line. (Simanowitz et al 2000).

The Role of LAPO in community Development

There is no gain saying the fact that community development increased through LAPO as an NGO. This is because of the nature of co-ordinated social and economic activities of this organization in the field of battering the standard of living of its clients. It provides the following services;

- Provision of insurance services
- Social empowerment
- Health empowerment
- Provision of loans
- Mobilization of fund
- Economic empowerment

- Financial education

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on Delta State, an important state in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The State has borders with Edo State to the North, Ondo State to the West, Anambra State to the East and River State to the South. The economic activities of Delta State includes: Fishing, Farming, Rubber tapping, Palm oil production and trade. Delta State also is among the major crude oil producing States in Nigeria. The population of the study consists of thirteen (13) functioning LAPO branches, operating in thirteen (13) rural communities. Five (5) branches were sampled and they include those in Asaba, Isele-uku, Ogwashi-uku and Agbor communities. The respondents comprises of Seventy (70) poor clients of LAPO and thirty two (32) LAPO staff. The sources of data used in carrying out this research work were both obtained through group- focused discussion for LAPO clients, whereas questionnaire was administered to LAPO staff, followed by interview where necessary for emphasis. Secondary data were also used and consisted of journals, seminar papers and resource materials from LAPO office. The research instruments were administered by the researchers at group meeting of LAPO clients and as well to LAPO staff through the assistance of the branch managers. Data were analyzed basically through descriptive statistics which included frequencies, means, percentages and chi-square(X^2) for testing the hypothesis.

Results and Discussions

Socio-Economic characteristics of LAPO clients.

The socio-economic characteristic of LAPO clients were captured as it gave insight to their poverty status. As the result revealed (Table 1), there was balance in the sex composition of the client, while their average age

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by socio-economic characteristics of LAPO clients

Characteristics	Frequency (N = 70)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	30	43
Female	40	57
Age (years)		
20-30		7
31-40	5	43
41-50	30	43
51-6-	30	7
61 and above	5	-
Mean (x) = 40-	-	
Educational Background		
FSLC	18	26
WASC/GCE/NECO	39	56
NCE/Diploma	2	2
HND/B.Sc	-	-
M.Sc/Ph.D	-	-
None	11	16
Marital Status:		
Married	63	90
Single	4	6
Divorced	-	-
Widow	3	4
Widower	-	-

Occupation:		
Farmer	26	37
Trader	39	56
Artisan	7	3
Civil Servant	-	-
Retiree	-	-
Computer (Okada rider)	3	4
Family Size:		
1 – 3	18	26
4 – 6	41	58
7 – 9	11	16
10 and above	-	-
Mean (x) = 5 —		
Experience with LAPO (years)		
1 – 5	63	63
6 – 10	7	7
11 – 15	-	-
16 – 20	-	-
21 – 25	-	-
26 – 30	-	-
Mean (x) = 4 —		

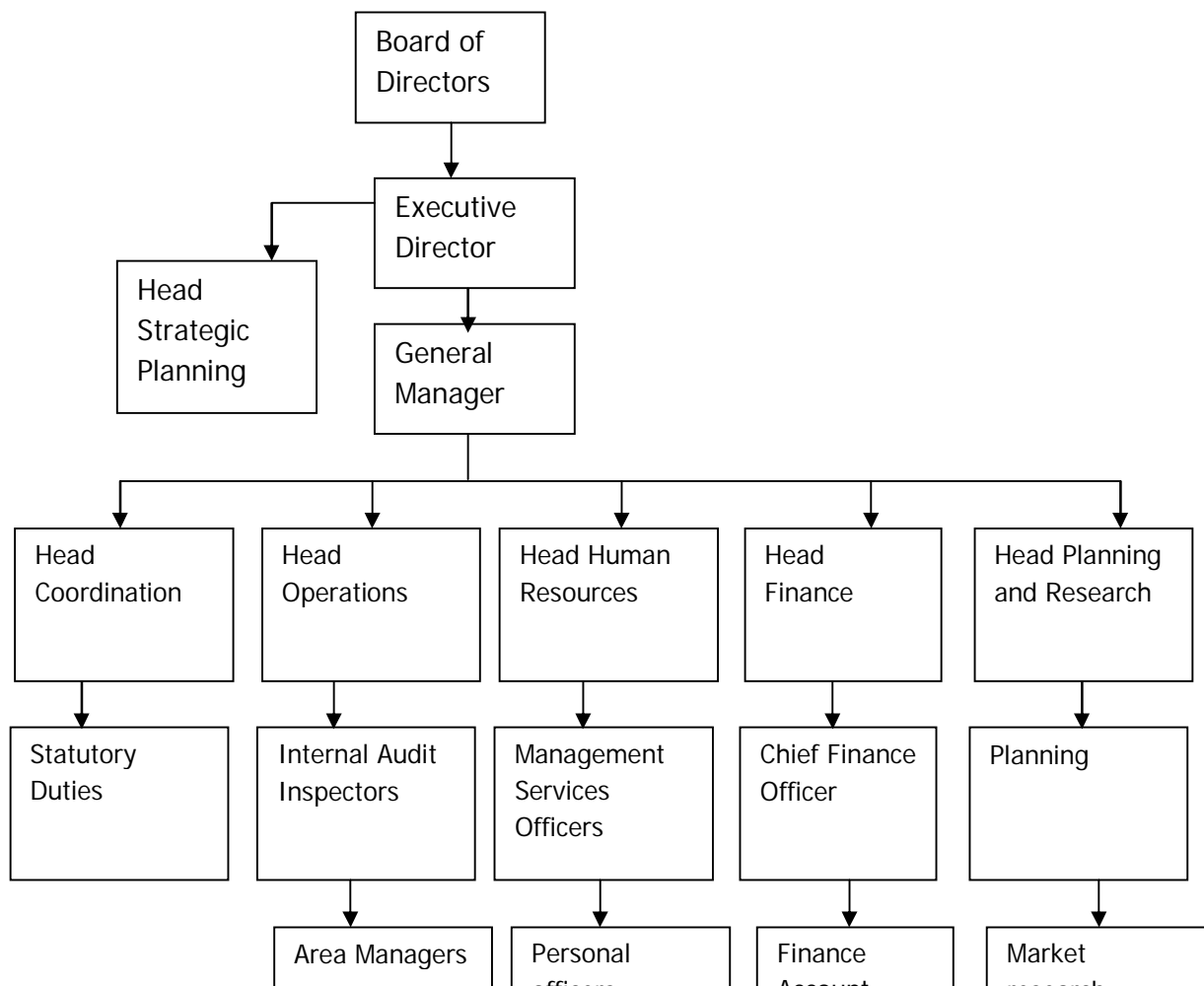
Source: Field survey, January, 2012

was found to be 40 years. These results showed gender sensitiveness in the selection of LAPO clients. It as well meant that the clients were at the productive age of their life. Majority (82%) did not get beyond post-primary (WASC/GCE/NECO) education. Quite notable was that some (16%), did nor even have formal education. Almost all (90%) of the clients are married, and they are mainly traders (56%) and farmers (37%) by occupation. In terms of family size, the average was found to be four (4) children, while their average years of experience with LAPO is four (4). These socio-economic profile of LAPO clients, are characteristics of the poor and indeed proved that LAPO targets the right clients, the poor, within the communities.

Organizational Structure of LAPO Services

The structure of operation of LAPO was sourced through document on its organization. At the top of the organizational structure of LAPO is the Board of Directors that the Executive Director is responsible to. The Executive Director is in charge of the General Manager and the Head of Strategic Planning. The various head of units are responsible to the General Manager, including the heads of coordination, operations, human resources, finance, planning and research. Under these heads of units are other subordinates as represented on the chart (Fig.1). The Branch Managers who are at the bottom of the structure dwell and operate amongst the communities dealing directly with the poor. He mostly operates a branch with Credit Officers responsible for awareness creation and credit activities and an MIS officer for data capturing and record keeping.

Fig.1: Chart of LAPO Operations



Profile of LAPO Services

Table 2: Distribution of LAPO staff by Services Provided

Service	Frequency (N 32)	Percentage (%)
Group formation	32	100
Capacity building of groups	19	60
Cultivation of savings behavior	32	100
Provision of microcredit	32	100
Provision of insurance service	19	60
Campaign against gender discrimination	19	60
Campaign against female circumcision	6	20
HIV/AIDS Education	32	100
Basic Health care Education	25	80
Sex Education	12	40

*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, September, 2012.

LAPO provides a lot of services as indicated above to its clients. The most outstanding services it renders include: group formulation (100%), cultivating the savings behavior in clients (100%),

provision of microcredit (100%) giving HIV/AIDS education (100%); and, basic health care education (80%).

Funding of LAPO Services

Table 3: Distribution of LAPO staff by Sources of Funding their Services

Source of fund	Frequency (N 32)	*Percentage (%)
Registration fee from affiliated groups	32	100
Savings from affiliated groups	32	100
Grants/donations from foreign partners	25	80
Loans from development/financial institutions	25	80
Donations from the public	6	20
Donations from the private sector	-	-
Loans from financial institutions	32	100
Interest raised from loans to clients	32	100
Profits raised from subsidiaries (LAPO, MFB, LAPO Academy)	32	100

*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, September, 2012.

Table 3 showed that LAPO is funded through a number of ways, most significant of which are through registration fee from affiliated groups, savings from affiliated groups, loans from financial institutions interest raised from loans to clients and profits raised from their subsidiaries (LAPO MFB, LAPO Academy).

Channels of outreach of LAPO services

Table 4: Distribution of LAPO staff by Channels of outreach of services

Channels	Frequency (N)	*Percentage (%)
Television	-	-
Radio	-	-
Groups	25	80
Visit to clients	32	100
Clients visit to LAPO branch	32	100
Seminar/workshop/conferences	32	100
Meetings	32	100

*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, September, 2012.

Table 4 above indicate that the mass media is not utilized as a channel of outreach for the LAPO services outreach have implies either the promotion of its services or it delivery to clients. The

respondents all noted that the channels include visit to clients, clients' visit to LAPO branch seminar/workshop/conferences and meetings. This implies that the outreach of LAPO services is mainly based on close contact and group-focused.

Community Access to LAPO services

Table 5: Distribution of LAPO client By Access to their Services

Degree of Access	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Excellent (100%)	45	64
Very High (80-99%)	14	20
High (60-79%)	1	2
Low (40-59%)	8	11
Very Low (0-39%)	2	3
Total	70	100

Source: Field Survey, September, 2012.

Table 5 is a revelation of the degree to which the communities through clients of LAPO have access to LAPO services. From the result, 45 (64%) of those sampled affirms that it is excellent, as all the members of their group have benefited from LAPO services. Further (20%) of the clients, observed that a very high (80-99%) number of their group member have had access to LAPO services. Also one(1) group indicated that (60-79%) of their had access, while 8(11%) of the clients returned a low access (40-59%) verdict of LAPO services. Altogether, sixty (86%) of the client positively indicated that their members have had access to LAPO services.

To further attest if LAPO services were been accessed by community duelers (clients) where they operate. Hypotheses I was tested. To achieved that, table 5 is a 3-point Likert-scale of access to LAPO stratified across farmer, trader and artisan clients of LAPO. Table 6 is a follow-up summary of the chi-square (χ^2) analysis showing if there is a relationship in the rating of LAPO client (Famers, Traders, Artisan) on their access to poverty alleviation services.

Table 6: Observed and Expected frequencies by level of clients access to LAPO services

Level of Access to LAPO Services	Occupation of clients			Total
	Farmer	Trader	Farmer/Trader	
70-100% (High)	25(23)	30(28)	4(8)	59
40-69% (Fair)	0(0)	0(1)	1(0)	1
0-39% (Poor)	2(4)	4(5)	4(1)	10
Total	27	34	9	70

Based on the summary of chi-square (χ^2) analysis of relationship in the rating of core-strata (Farmer, Traders, Artisan) of the poor in Delta state rural communities covered by LAPO, which determined whether or not LAPO services are accessed. The result (Table 7) showed $\chi^2_{cal} = 13.51$; $\chi^2_{tab} = 3.33$; $df = 10$; and at 0.05 level of significance. The implication therefore is that a

significant relationship exists in the attestation (rating) of the core-strata of poor rural dweller client of LAPO in Delta communities.

Table 7: Summary of chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Relationship in the Rating of clients (Farmer, Trader, Artisan) Access to LAPO services.

Observed Frequency (F_0)	Expected Frequency (F_e)	$F_0 - F_e$	$F_0 - F_e^2$	$F_0 - F_e^2/F_e$
25	23	2	4	0.17
30	28	2	4	0.14
4	8	-4	16	2
0	0	0	0	0
0	1	-1	1	1
1	0	1	1	-
2	4	-2	4	1
4	5	-1	1	0.2
4	1	3	9	9
				13.51

The calculated chi-square (X^2) = 13.51
 The Tabular value $X^2_{0.05}$ = 3.33

Depth in outreach of LAPO to the communities

The depth in outreach at which LAPO reaches out to communities dwellers (clients) was assessed by determining the average coverage of a LAPO staff to clients (CBN, 2011). Industrial average gives 300 clients per staff as a critical number that depicts effective outreach ()

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents by Depth of outreach of LAPO services

Estimate of no of clients per staff	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Remark
1 – 99	9	28	Low
100 – 199	9	28	Average
200 – 300	14	44	High
Total	32	100	

Mean (\bar{x}) = 161 units (average)

Source; Field Survey, September, 2012

As depicted in table 8, 28 (9%) and 28 (9%) of the staff had client outreach of between 1 – 99 (low); 100 – 199 (Average) respectively. A good number (44%) were found to have performed highly (200 – 300 client). In all, LAPO with a deduced average of 161 client per staff, was accessed to have fairly performance in depth of outreach.

To further attest the depth in outreach of LAPO to the communities in Delta state, H_0 was tested. The hypothesis determined whether there was a significant depth in the outreach of LAPO through 3-point Linkert rating of low outreach, average outreach and High outreach. The result showed $X^2_{cal} = 4.2$; $X^2_{tab} = 3.9$; $df =$ and at 0.05 level of significance. The implication

therefore is that there is a significant depth in LAPO outreach to the rural poor in Delta State communities.

Table 9: Summary of chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Depth in outreach of LAPO staff.

Observed Frequency (F_0)	Expected Frequency (F_e)	$F_0 - F_e$	$F_0 - F_e^2$	$F_0 - F_e^2 / F_e$
987	990	-3	9	0.009
1800	1797	3	9	0.005
493	495	-2	4	0.008
617	617	0	0	0
1066	1064	2	4	0.0038
9	6	3	9	1.5
9	12	-3	9	0.75
5	3	2	4	1.33
4	4	0	0	0
5	7	-2	4	0.57
				4.176

Calculated $X^2 = 4.176$

Tabular $X^2_{0.05} = 3.94$

Since $4.176 = 3.94$ (Reject the Null hypothesis)

Since the calculated chi-square (X^2) is greater than the tabular value $X^2_{0.05}$, we reject the null hypothesis which is that there is no significant depth in the outreach of LAPO services in eradicating poverty in Delta state communities and then accept the alternate hypothesis.

Challenges of LAPO Operations

The respondents (LAPO staff and clients) were asked to state the challenges they face as stakeholders in LAPO operations. Table 10 is a multiples response-capture of their responses.

Table 10: Distribution of Respondent by challenges of Executing LAPO Activities

S/N	Challenges	LAPO Staff		LAPO clients	
		Frequency (N = 32)	*Percentage (%)	Frequency (N = 70)	*Percentage (%)
a	Distance in reaching LAPO	-	-	27	39
b	High cost reaching clients	28	88	-	-
c	Default in loan repayment	17	53	27	39
d	Poor communication	13	41	31	44
e	Low savings mobilization	15	47	43	61
f	Untimely disbursement of loan	-	-	10	14
g	Security (collateral) demands	-	-	2	3
h	Difficulty in accessing bigger loan	-	-	40	57
i	High registration fee with LAPO	-	-	22	31
j	High interest on loan	-	-	48	69
k	Low interest on savings	-	-	40	57
l	Smallness of loan size	-	-	45	64
m	Payment of insurance on loan	-	-	8	11
n	Low awareness about LAPO	11	34	31	44
o	Poor access road in communities	27	84	41	58
p	Remoteness of the communities	23	79	19	27

q	Irregularity of group meetings	21	66	38	54
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*Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, January, 2010.

In order of importance the challenges that were highly noted include: High cost in reaching out to clients (88%), apparently as a result of the remoteness of the communities (79%); and poor access roads (84%). The other challenges observed are: Low savings mobilization (61%); high interest on loan (69%); smallness of loan sizes (64%); low interest on savings (57%); difficulty in accessing bigger loan (57%); and defaults in loan repayment (53%).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The structure of operations of LAPO notably at the communities (Branch office) appeared modeled after Grammean Bank of Bangladesh and (ASA) is grassroot focused and ideal. Its outreach to its host communities through the Branch manager and other four complimentary staff; three credit officers and Management Information System (MIS) personal made the rendering and capturing of its services effective. The services of LAPO centred around group development, cultivation of savings behaviour and delivery of microcredit. The other key services rendered include provision of insurance services, campaign against gender discrimination, HIV/AIDS and basic health care education. These services were found to have indeed target the poor. The activities of LAPO are funded mainly through its mobilized savings from members, grants and loans from financial institutions, whereas it delivers its services through group contacts, educational fora and meetings. Majority of LAPO clients in the communities studied attested to accessing their services, while the depth in the outreach of such services was reasonably high, going by industrial standard. Key challenges of LAPO noted include the remoteness of the domains of clients and the associated high cost of reaching them high interest on loan. Irregularity of group meetings, smallness of loan size, and low savings mobilization amongst others.

In time with the outcome of the study the researches herewith recommends for the strengthening of LAPO guest to eradicating poverty the following:

- Capacity-building activities of LAPO to the affiliated credit-groups should be upstaged through training, particularly on small business operations, regular monitoring and evaluation of their funded activities to ensure compliance to loan repayment.
- The leverage gap between interest on savings and credit should be re-examined. Deduction from the study indicates complaints of low interest on savings as well as high interest on loans by client. A fair and accommodating balance through participating dialogue should be reached between LAPO and their clients.
- LAPO should re-assess the size of their loan in line with the progressive capacity of their client. Credit-users are better motivated with availability loans, so long as they are performing.
- Irregularity of group meetings shows signs of weak leadership and group organization. This challenge appeared evident in the study. LAPO should step-up the leadership development and organization of its credit-groups.

Efforts should be made to strengthen communication between LAPO client and its host communities, to raise more awareness and access to the landable programmes of LAPO.

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