

SELF-HELP, COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA 1976-1991: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The desire to provide basic necessities, infrastructures and social amenities that could improve the living condition in the rural areas and enhance the well-being of rural dwellers is known to be of concern to communities in Igbo society. Government in recognition of this zeal synergized with the efforts of the people to provide their felt-needs. There is need to analyze and describe these efforts within a geo-political context and in time perspective. This paper undertakes this task with respect to Anambra State in the period, 1967-1991. This is against the backdrop that extant studies do not provide comprehensive and complete picture of the subject matter, nor do they present their analysis in an encompassing time horizon. Using data obtained from primary and secondary sources that are presented thematically and chronologically in which the qualitative and quantitative methods of research are deployed, this paper posits that self-help played key role in the provision of essential amenities in rural communities in Anambra state. This received more impetus when government galvanized the developmental zeal and self-help drive of the people, though its financial input to self-help projects drive remained infinitesimal.

Keywords: Self-help, Felt-needs, Community efforts, Infrastructures, Social amenities Government and Synergy.

Introduction

Self-help is recognized as the sure way people can provide the social amenities and basic infrastructure which will enhance the well-being of the rural dwellers and improve the living conditions in the rural areas. This is predicated on the belief that government resources are highly limited to provide needed infrastructures and the pride which self-help projects elicited from the people. Self-help also engenders positive competition amongst the communities in Igboland in general and Anambra State in particular. These necessitate the study of self-help in Anambra State, Nigeria. The extant studies on self-help in the state, do not provide complete picture of the subject nor are they presented in

an encompassing time frame. For instance, Egbo (1986) highlights the different instruments of rural self-help and their role in community development in Igboland. As valuable as the study would appear, it does not discuss the subject matter in time perspectives nor does it show the varying emphasis on self-help projects over time. The focus of the book on Igboland limits its capacity to present a complete and detailed account of what transpired in self-help in Anambra State. Moreover, its terminus is 1985, consequently post 1985 developments and issues on self-help are not captured in the work. Udoeye (1982) does a micro-study on self-help in the state by focusing on Oraukwu, a community in Idemili LGA. Muoghalu (1986) appraises the structure and pattern of community self-help developments in Nigeria, with Anambra State in focus. Furthermore, Okoye (1985) discusses Social clubs, Resource Management and Rural development in Nigeria, lessons from Anambra State. Its focus is on Ihiala, one of the 23, LGAs of the state then. Moreover, its emphasis is on social clubs, which was one of the instruments of self-help in Anambra State. Onibokun (1976) and Igboeli (1992) provide theoretical perspectives on self-help which are not set within geo-political context while Okafor (1982) and Kolawole 1982 focus on Bendel State and Kwara State respectively, in their analysis of grassroots' engagement in rural development. In the same vein, Owuamalam (1981) establishes a linkage between self-help and community development in eastern Nigeria up to 1979.

Much as these studies provide useful insights, comments and analysis on self-help, they are patchworks and piece studies which present incomplete and fractured pictures of self-help in Anambra State or are set outside the geopolitical contexts of the present study. The present study draws useful insights from them in its bid to provide a complete picture and encompassing analysis of self-help in Anambra state.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that self-help in Anambra is desirous of scholarly attention. It is this task that this paper seeks to address. The paper discusses self-help in Anambra State with a view to establishing the contributions of various instruments of self-help to rural development in state, the level of governments involvement and synergy with the local communities and in the execution of self-help projects. It also appraises self-help as an agent of rural development. This study focuses on 'old' Anambra state which existed between 1976 and 1991. For the purposes of time perspectives, this paper is set in two periods, 1976-1983 and 1984-1991. The timeline provides framework to highlight the variations on the emphasis of self-help help projects overtime.

Based on available evidence, it argues that self-help played significant role in rural development. However, government involvement to self-help projects through grants and financial assistant was rather inconsequential. It is the view of this paper that government

involvement in self-help projects should lie more on the provision of technical guidance and directives to the communities.

This paper is organized in five sections for the purpose of achieving its task. Each of these sections provide detailed information relevant to the paper. The first is the introduction which provides an overview of the paper. The second discusses conceptual issues on self-help, community development and rural development, while the third provides the geo-political setting of the study area. The fourth analysis the various instruments of self-help. Finally, the Fifth section makes concluding remarks on the paper.

Conceptual Clarifications

Three concepts, namely; Self-help, Community Development and Rural Development stand out in this paper. They are clarified in the context of their application therein.

Community Development

This is the effort of a community, either independent of, or in partnership and collaboration with the various tiers of government, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, to initiate projects for the purposes of improving the socio-economic conditions of its members. This is done through the provision of their felt-needs, such as infrastructural and social amenities, creation of income-generating activities as well as instituting peace building processes and crises resolution mechanisms.

Rural Development

This paper aligns itself to Ollawa (1977) which sees Rural Development:

As the restructuring of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses, and to promote collective incentives to participate in the process of change. This involves a host of multi-sectoral activities including the improvement of agriculture, the promotion of rural industries and the creation of requisite infrastructure and social overheads, as well as the establishment of appropriate decentralized structures in order to allow mass participation.

The aptness of this definition lies in the fact that it takes into consideration the two key components of rural development. These are; widening opportunities for rural dwellers to realise their full potentials through education and sensitization, creating enabling environment for them to participate in decision-making processes and actions that affect their lives; and providing them with basic amenities and infrastructures. These would alleviate poverty; ameliorate diseases and ignorance prevalent in the rural areas and ensure longevity of the rural dwellers.

Self-help

The idea of the people providing their felt need is self-help. Government on its part encourages and advocates this form of citizen participation on rural development through community self-help actions. However, on occasion government decides to provide such infrastructures without recourse to and consent of the people, it becomes assumed-needs. This should not be encouraged because the benefiting communities may, in most circumstances, consider them not to be their priority need. Hence, they could be subjected to abuse and neglect. This accounts for the preponderance of self-help projects in the landscape of rural development.

By self-help we mean the efforts of individuals, groups or community as a whole to provide those infrastructure and social amenities that would uplift the living conditions in the community as well as flatter the pride of the community in relation to others. For the United Nations:

It is the process by which the efforts of the people are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities in the life of the nation and enable them to contribute fully to national progress (quoted in Udoye, 1992).

Igboeli (1992) identifies three broad approaches to self-help and these apply to the state. These approaches are: Non-directive, directive and coercive approaches. With respect to the Non-directive approach, individuals, groups and the community as a whole undertake to provide their felt-needs without government's assistance or assistance from international agencies or philanthropic organizations. The projects embarked upon through this approach include: building of school and colleges, construction of feeder roads, bridges and culverts, rural water supply, building of town/village halls and civic centres, markets/motor parks development and the provision of health care facilities. Much as individuals or the community as a whole plan and execute the projects, it could, however, involve some elements of manipulation by the local elite. While this approach bestirs the peoples' zeal for development, it has some inherent limitations. Self-help projects implemented through this approach require creative and dynamic leadership, active participation and mobilization of material and human resources, expertise and the will to accept responsibilities which have often been found lacking in local leadership. This may account for the inflated cost and the prevalence of unfinished, uncompleted and still-born projects associated with self-help.

Under the Directive approach, governments, voluntary and donor agencies, philanthropic organizations work hand in glove with the communities in the design, planning and execution of rural development projects. Government involvement through the provision

of technical aid comes in the forms of advice from staff of the Community Development Division and Rural Development Officers (RDOs) attached to the local governments and the services of the Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Health, the Water Corporation and Rural Electrification Board. Government's financial assistance served as matching grants and grants-in-aid to complement the contributions by communities for project execution. Voluntary/Donor agencies and philanthropic organizations offer interventionist efforts, especially in areas of critical need. One easily remembers the involvement of voluntary/donor agencies and philanthropic organizations, such as Jimmy Carter Foundation, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) among others, in the bid to curb the menace of guinea-worm in Abakaliki area.

The Coercive approach is one in which the individuals, groups or the community as a whole make mandatory financial contribution for the execution of development projects. Under this approach, government imposes 'development levies' or various forms of taxes on the people for the generation of fund for community or state-wide development project. Examples are the special Development Fund initiated by Governor Jim Nwobodo in 1982, the Anambra State Education and Technology (ASET) fund and Oba Airport special levy. In Imo State, for example, tax payers were made to pay the compulsory 'Survival Levy' as a source of internally generated revenue for execution of development projects. This approach could be seen as being extortionary as it weighed heavily on the already impoverished rural people, especially in the face of the economic hardship of the time. The concepts clarified above are linked in an intricate web: self-help enhances community development which, in turn, engenders rural development. This interconnectedness necessitates their study in Anambra State, Nigeria in the period 1976-1991.

Anambra State: A geo-political setting

The geopolitical setting of Anambra State has been eminently discussed elsewhere Odife (2022) and does not deserve a rehash here. But suffice it to say that Anambra State was that state in Nigeria which existed between 1976 and 1991 under the 19 and later 21 states structure of the Nigerian federation. It had 23 and later 29 Local Government Areas recognized by the Nigerian Constitution.

Instruments of self-help: An analysis

The instruments of self-help are those bodies' organs and agencies through which self-help projects are executed. These were the Town Union Organizations, Social clubs, Age grades, Community-based Gender organizations/Annual Women's August meeting and Faith-based organizations. An exposition and analysis of these instruments is germane.

The Town Union Organization is the most profound of the instruments of self-help. It is the body set up by the various communities for initiating and executing their development projects, uniting the various groups within the communities as well as instituting the legal framework (Constitution) with which the affairs of the town are run. Such organization come with different appellations – Improvement, Progressive, Patriotic and Development Unions. It encompasses the indigenes resident in the community (Home Branch) and those in the Diaspora, that is, major urban centres across the country and overseas with their leadership. The latter are known as “Abroad” Branches and are identified by the towns, for example, Oraukwu Improvement Union, Lagos Branch, Awka Development Union, Enugu Branch, Ihiala Progressive Union, Aba Branch etc. The overall leadership of the organization resides in the democratically elected President General (PG) and the Executive Council. The tenure of office of the Executive Council and functions of each organ of the organization are clearly and unambiguously stated in the Union’s Constitution. The PG liaises between the community and the state Government and also represents the Town/Community in the Association of Anambra State Town Unions (ASSATU). While the leadership of the town union oversees the socio-political and economic development of the community, the ‘Igwe’ Traditional-ruler-in council acts as the custodian of the people’s culture, adjudicates on inter-personal and intra-communal disputes and ensures the well-being of members of the community. However, there is need for a synergy and cooperation between the Town Union Organization and the Igwe-in-council for the desired development objectives to be achieved. There were four hundred and forty-one communities in the state and each had a town union organization duly registered and recognized by government.

The sources of fund for community self-help projects were graded levies paid by adult male members of the community, proceeds from fund raising ceremonies and launching activities, pledges and donations of members and friends of the community, proceeds from community farms and plantation and financial aid and technical assistance from government.

Self-help projects embarked upon by the communities tended to be influenced by the need at a particular period and this would appear to account for the varying emphasis on different self-help projects over time. An analysis of project by project distribution of self-help efforts in the periods of this paper, 1976-1983 and 1984-1991, shows that the following broad areas of self-help projects accounted for the following proportions. The table and illustrations below show the distribution of Self-help projects in Anambra State over time and percentage proportion and its graphic presentation, respectively.

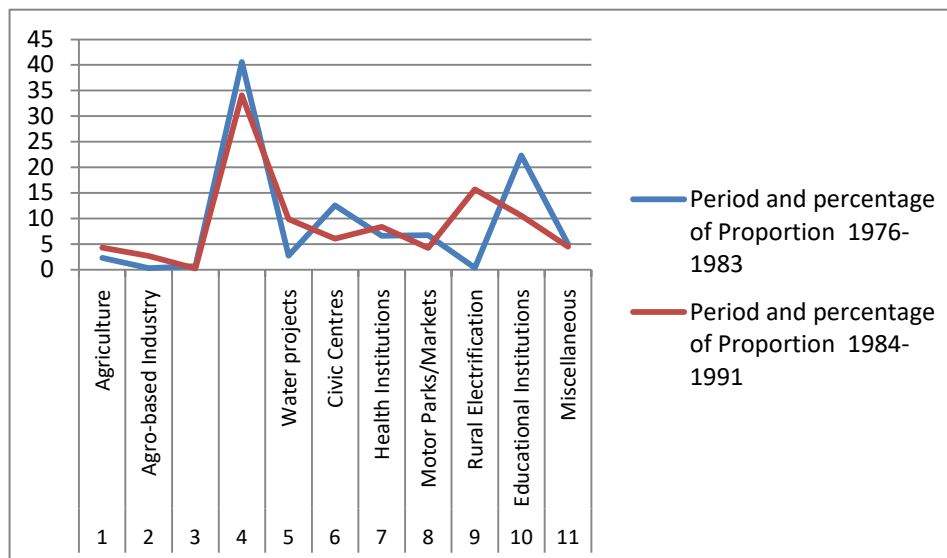
Table 1: Distribution of Self-help projects in Anambra State over time and percentage of proportion

S/N	Project	Period and percentage of Proportion		Level of Increase/ Decrease
		1976-1983	1984-1991	
1	Agriculture	2.27	4.31	+*
2	Agro-based Industry	.28	2.68	+**
3	Village integration/settlement	.65	.20	-**
4	Roads, Culverts and Bridges	40.61	34.05	-*
5	Water projects	2.73	9.87	+***
6	Civic Centres	12.53	6.02	-**
7	Health Institutions	6.58	8.34	+*
8	Motor Parks/Markets	6.71	4.20	-*
9	Rural Electrification	.34	15.65	+****
10	Educational Institutions	22.34	10.54	-***
11	Miscellaneous	4.96	4.45	-*
	Total	100	100	

L E G E N D	
+	= Increase
-	= Decrease
*	= Proportionality of increase/decrease

Source: *Computed from Anambra State of Nigeria, Annual Reports on Local Government Council and Self-help Project 1976/1977 – 1991, Compiled by The Research and Monitoring Unit, Community Development Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Matters, Enugu.*

Illustration 1: A Graphic Presentation of Distribution of Self-help Projects in Anambra State over time and percentage of proportion



The figures in this table could be analysed two-fold; project distribution in each period and comparison of the distribution of self-help projects between the two periods. With respect to the former, it shows a preponderance of social service infrastructural facilities, especially on roads, culverts and bridges, educational institutions, civic centres and health institutions. Rural electrification and water projects received very low attention. It could also be observed that agriculture and agro-based industries which were the major income-generating projects received an appalling attention in the entire self-help projects in the earlier period. In the Second period, 1984-1991, the old order in which social infrastructural facilities constituted the main thrust of self-help efforts still obtained. However, a comparison of the distribution of self-help projects between the two periods reveals a significant shift on the emphasis on some projects. There was significant drop in the following projects: civic centres/town halls; schools and educational institutions and Roads/culverts and bridges. On the other hand, a significant rise was recorded in the following projects, rural electrification, rural water projects and health institution. Also, agriculture and agro-based industries recorded significant growth in the period under review.

The overall emphasis on social service infrastructure derives principally from the people's interpretation of development as being synonymous with availability of social services. Consequently, the communities competed in their provision as a mark of being better than the others. Again, the provision of social amenities accorded well with the national propensity for conspicuous consumption and as government promised to reward

communities that embarked on 'meaningful projects', most communities embarked on them as a way of attracting government's assistance.

With respect to specific projects, one could easily observe a drop in town hall/ civic centres, motor parks/markets and educational institutions. The explanations for this lay in the fact that the Rural Development Officers in the LGAs and staff of Community Development Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy matters had advised communities against such 'White Elephant Project' that lacked economic values and potentials or could not directly impact on the life of rural dwellers. More so, as most communities had already built Town Halls/Civic centres, educational institutions/schools and developed their motor parks and markets, their attention was shifted to other projects, such as health institutions and water projects. The need to build laboratories and workshops for Introductory Technology in the curriculum of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, introduced within the period, was central in the sustained investment on educational institutions. Thereafter, further investment on educational institutions and schools were principally to maintain existing facilities, rehabilitate dilapidated school structures and to engage teachers for the secondary schools in the face of dearth of teachers owing to the unwillingness of government at the period to employ new teachers and failure to reinstate teachers who had gone on Study Leave as a result of the embargo placed on employment (Offor, personal communication, 2011)

The figures further reveal that rural electrification and water supply were on the upward curve. These were as a result of the intensified government efforts to make these facilities available to as many rural communities as possible. The various communities, therefore, gave them increased attention. Specifically, with reference to rural electrification, government had overcome all the challenges that encumbered its execution in the earlier period and the Rural Electrification Board became reinvigorated to discharge its functions. The various communities embarked on rural electrification projects as a way of keying into the emergent trend. Furthermore, as the income level of the rural dwellers increased, they began to seek for those facilities that enhanced ease of life and provided comfort. In the same vein, the 'Abroad Branches' of most Town Union organizations considered electricity and water supply the key facilities that would make rural areas livable and provide the basis for rural industrialization (Udoeye, 1992). All these were in addition to DFFRI and state's Rural Development Agency's drive towards making them available (Odife, 2021).

Other projects that received increased attention were agriculture and agro-based industries, which jointly rose from 2.55 to 6.99 percent, representing more than two hundred per cent increase. The trend was as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which had made agriculture very profitable and stimulated the growth

of agro-based industries. For instance, production of food crops was stepped-up to assuage the increased food scarcity due to the ban on importation of food and increase in the price of imported food items, owing to foreign exchange restrictions occasioned by SAP. Again, products of agro-based industries, for instance, cashew-nut, palm oil and palm kernel attracted export value. It was at this period that the number of oil palm presses in the state increased from one thousand, two hundred and eighty-seven (1,287) in 1986 to two thousand five hundred and seventy-nine (2,579) by 1989 (Odife,2021). Furthermore, quite a few of the laid off and retrenched staff of the urban industrial, manufacturing and construction sectors returned to their home towns where they engaged in agriculture and aggregated capital to establish agro-based industries like hand-press palm oil mills and palm nut cracking/shelling machines and rice mills. It is also important to state that the DFRRI, through its mass mobilization approach inspired the growth of different aspects of agriculture. It is on record, for instance, that concrete fish ponds became so widespread in the state that its number exceeded one thousand by 1990 from the paltry one hundred and twenty it was by 1986. Also, the government embarked on oil palm tree development programme which was massively embraced across the state (Odife, 2021).

However, in spite of these significant increases in agriculture and agro-based industries, they still occupied insignificant proportion of self-help projects in the state. This could be attributed to the fact that agriculture and agro-based industries were not considered important self-help projects by the communities in the state. It rather exposes their predilection for social service infrastructure over income-generating activities.

The responsibilities of Town Union organizations were not limited to physical and infrastructural development of the communities. Some did initiate policies that were aimed at impacting positively on social values and re-directing the moral tones of their communities. Typical examples were legislations that tend to reduce bride wealth, the cost and duration of funeral activities. The *Nzuko Ora Nnewi* blazed the trail in this respect. In 1986, it came out openly to denounce the ostentatious and frivolous spending associated with traditional marriage, (*Igba Nkwu*) ceremonies by imposing a ceiling on the number of guests and quantity of drinks and food items to be served on such occasions. It also banned wake-keep sessions laced with revelry and limited the duration of funeral activities to two days. Fines were stipulated for the infraction and breach of these rules (Onwuka, 2017). Although, some wealthy and well-to-do persons opted to pay the fines and have their way, such restrictions were laudable efforts at checking wasteful expenditure and inculcating abstemiousness on the people. Most Town Union

organizations in the state were inspired to modify such activities in their communities along the *Nzuko Ora Nnewi* example (Odife, 2021).

An issue of note on community self-help project was government involvement and participation. We had observed earlier that these were in the forms of matching grants and grants-in-aid as well as technical advice that came from government at the state and local government levels. Available records indicate that grants to communities by government amount to about 6.38 percent of the cost of self-help projects (OMG/CD/S.432). Yet, government technical advice to communities was known to be tenuous. Such *laissez-faire* attitude exhibited by government did not augur well for rural development through community self-help projects.

Another instrument of self-help was the Social Clubs. These were purely socio-economic and mutual-aid societies that sprang in parts of Anambra State in particular and Igboland in general at the end of the Nigerian Civil War. Such societies were incorporated under the Companies Act, Decree No.45 of 1968 and registered with the State's Ministry of Social Welfare, Youths and Culture. According to Okoye (1985), membership of these organizations was made up of wealthy traders and contractors. The typical rural population and civil servants, as it were, were excluded from the membership of these organizations, because they could not afford the high registration fees, frequent and sudden levies and donations and the ostentatious life style of the members of the club. Two main types of social clubs can be identified in the state- those whose membership is restricted to the town or community after which they take their names, for example, Ugwuoba Progressive Social Club (UPSC), Ihiala Social Club, Ihiala, Ichie Ibenda Obollo Social Club, Red Star Social Club of Lilo and so on; and those whose membership cut across communities in the state and had branches in the major urban centres in the country, for example, Peoples Club of Nigeria, Awka Branch, Onitsha Branch, Abakaliki Branch, among others.

The era of social clubs came with the oil boom of the mid-1970s, which gave rise to a new class of rich people mostly in the distributive and retail subsectors of the nation's economy. The principal objective of these *nouveau riche* that formed the clubs was to cater for the welfare of their members and tangentially, to develop their communities. The welfare schemes include giving flamboyant and 'successful' burial to deceased members, assisting families of deceased members financially, attending members' marriages, title taking and funeral of relatives, and other such festive occasions. The Organizations' perception of development of their communities entailed the provision of urban social amenities and recreational facilities. Such amenities include club halls, civic centres and rest houses. They also made special donations to community fund raising and

launching ceremonies for development projects. Occasionally, they single handedly or in conjunction with other clubs undertook the execution of community projects.¹

Projects embarked upon by the social clubs comprise mainly of recreational facilities, civic centres and club halls, for instance, the storey building of Ugwuoba Progressive Social Club (UPSC) (which is now in utter desolation) and the Igwebuikie Hall of Ihiala Social Club, which is still functional and used by club members for their social functions, could be hired out to the public for same purpose and a section of it rented to liquor distributor. Such projects executed by social clubs were too numerous to mention as it would be monotonous to do so. The few examples provide signposts for understanding the true picture.



Plate 1: The dilapidated Ugwuoba Progressive Social Club (UPSC) House

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 17th October, 2017

The tenuous and slender involvement of the social clubs in the provision of social services such as roads, schools, health institutions and water projects and economic ventures such as small-scale agricultural and industrial projects that could touch directly on the welfare of rural dwellers can be explained by the following factors. First, the organizations' conception of self-help did not align with rural development goals. It was focused principally on the provision of recreational services for the comfort of their members. Secondly, the social background of the club members influenced their conception of the process of rural development. Being composed of mainly rich traders with little formal education, the class as a whole lacked proper conceptualization and planning of rural

development. Some of the structural challenges that bedeviled the clubs were speculation, over-pricing of projects, high level corruption in the management of the finances of these organizations, fictitious and bogus financial claims by the officials of the clubs and absence of transparency in effecting change of leadership. In some of these organizations, financial accounts were never rendered by those in charge of the affairs of the organization who would rather wish to perpetuate their stay in office indefinitely and would prefer the collapse of the organization to relinquishing office or rendering accurate account (Okoye, 1988). The continual drop in the number of members was yet another threat to the social clubs. It is feared that such trend gradually withered the organizations as their members quit the stage through death. The younger generations are known to be more interested in forming their own social clubs rather than enlisting and working for the survival of the existing ones. This may account for the threat of extinction and utter desolation of the facilities of some of the Social clubs (Odife, 2021)

It could be gleaned from the foregoing analysis that social clubs were not veritable instruments of self-help. Their projects were at best tangential to rural/community development. Hence rural development was not the major thrust of their objectives. Much as the social clubs were at liberty to prioritise on their projects, they could have become veritable instruments of rural development had their projects impacted significantly on rural dwellers and improved the infrastructural facilities in the rural areas.

Age grades also contributed to self-help efforts in the state. The Age grade system is an age long practice among the people. Age sets consist of people (male and female) who were born within a definite period, perhaps 2-4 years bracket. Members of each age set could be said to be of the same age bracket. They take their names from landmark events coeval with the period members were born. For instance, in Onitsha INDEPENDENCE Age grade, 1960-62 symbolize the attainment of political independence in Nigeria; the OSONDU Age grade of Nimo, 1968-70 signifying the period the people sought refuge outside Nimo as a result of the dislocation of the Nigerian Civil War (Akude, 1992)

As natural and traditional bodies, the Age sets, unlike the Social clubs were neither incorporated nor registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Youths and Culture. The main objectives were the socio-economic welfare of members, contributing to community development projects and in peace building. The aspects of the objectives of the Age grades that boarder on self-help are contributions to community development projects and in peace building. It must be stated from the outset that the number of Age grades were numerous and therefore their activities and contributions to self-help effort in the state could not be entirely captured. However, this paper discusses the general trends in the self-help efforts of Age grades. The Age grades contribute to the development projects of the Town Union and could also unilaterally embark on self-help projects which they

presented to the town. For example, in Ezioiwelle, Idemili LGA, Dozieobodo Age grade in 1982, built a standard post office in the town to facilitate postal services. Again, the Igwebuike Age grade of Amawbia played fundamental role in resolving the crises that engulfed the town as a result of intra-communal land dispute that almost tore the community apart (Jideama, 2016; Okeke, 2017, personal communication). Such examples could be replicated in most communities in the state.

Another instrument of self-help was Faith-based organizations. As the name implies, these were organizations whose membership is drawn from the various Christian missions in operation in the state. Typical examples were the Catholic Women's Organization (CWO) the Mother's Union and Women's Guild in the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion. A distinguishing feature of these organizations is the fact that their activities come under the auspices of the church and are principally for the benefit of the members of the respective missions. Their activities lie in the area of capacity building for members, though none members could benefit tangentially. A typical example of the self-help projects was the Skill Acquisition Centres established in the Parish centres for training women in basic Home Economics, Domestic Science and culinary skills. They also establish 'Daycare' centres, Creche and Nursery schools to relieve women of the duty of childcare in order to enable them engage in productive economic activities. In some instances, they built Maternity homes and Dispensaries. These were usually managed by the local church. Beyond the contributions to physical development of the towns, the Faith-based organizations were active in teaching moral values which were invaluable for both temporal and spiritual needs of the people (Igwe, 2012; Odimegwu, 2019, personal communication)

Allied to Faith-based organization was the Annual Women's August Meeting. The essence of the meeting was to provide platform for women in the churches or community to discuss issues of importance to the community or church that would foster harmonious relationship and further self-help.

The Annual Women's August Meeting has an interesting historical backdrop. Its origin could be traced to the Annual Meeting held by women within the Christmas period to discuss issues of relevance to the town/church. Over the years, it was discovered that the December period was crowded with a lot of Yuletide and end of the year activities which distracted them from effectively discussing all issues of concern. Subsequently, the month of August was adopted. The month of August was preferred for the following reasons. First, farm work is usually at the lowest ebb at the period, and this allowed the rural women ample time to devote to the meeting. Secondly, the schools are usually on holidays and this would relieve the women from the task of school run and attending to

the cares of children of school age and finally, the raining season which peaked at this period creates general lull in business (Igwe, 2012; Okeke, 2017; Odimegwu, 2019, personal communication).

The main thrust of activities of the August Meeting was to discuss issues pertaining to the growth of the church and welfare of the community depending on whether the August Meeting held at the auspices of the church or the community. Over the years, the Meeting grew in popularity as it attracted Non-governmental Organizations and Government officials who presented talks and educated women on issues of personal and group interest. At these meetings, key issues on the welfare of the community such as bride wealth, dress patterns for the youth, the dangers in the consumption and use of illicit substances, orgies and proclivity for gambling were highlighted. It was expected that these women would apply the knowledge drawn from these sessions in the family and for nurturing their children. At the Annual Meeting, women reviewed the progress of work on the various projects being executed in the community/church and planned for new ones. For the community, they donated to ongoing community projects – such as rural electrification, provision of potable water and rehabilitating the community dispensaries, health centres and maternity homes. Under the auspices of the church, they contribute in enhancing the facilities in the parsonages, Rev Father's Residence as well as constructing Daycare, crèches and primary schools in the face of growing decay in public schools and government's neglect for pre-primary education (Igwe, 2012; Odimegwu, 2019, personal communication).

Having done an extensive review on the concept of self-help and the instruments for executing self-help projects, it is now pertinent to analyse it with a view to spotlighting its appropriateness as a rural development strategy and to offer necessary suggestions on how to improve on it. In the first place, self-help stirs the zeal for the people to embark on such projects which they consider critical to the uplift of their living conditions and the rural environment. Thus, the development ventures were expressions of the people's preferences as to which projects they want to commit their resources and energies on. These were influenced by the prevailing local environment. Again, they embarked on the projects which flatter their pride in relation to other communities, by 'meeting up' with others or even surpassing them. In this way, the people derive special satisfaction from projects which they plan and execute

However, in the face of these strengths, self-help had weaknesses. In the first place, local leaders of the various instruments of self-help did not appear to be very knowledgeable on conceptualization, costing and prioritization of projects. It was observed earlier that the preference for projects by town union leadership, the social clubs' officials, among others were on social services, grandiose and white elephant projects, with scant attention on

employment and income-generating projects. Again, some such leaders lack accountability, as a result of which embezzlement and peculation were rife in the leadership of the instruments of self-help.

Poor conceptualization of self-help philosophy hindered the integration of self-help into local development policies on continuing bases. The lack of system vision led most communities to initiate costly and gigantic projects with lean financial resources. This led to the phenomenon of abandoned or uncompleted projects. Again, self-help strategy was characterized by haphazardness and poor coordination and integration of projects. Communities embarked on projects without adequate clearance from government. For instance, most social institutions proliferated within short distances without regard to minimum threshold consuming population or consideration on how such could be managed. The case of health and educational institutions readily come to mind. Government did not have the personnel to run most of the health institution established by most communities nor could such communities raise fund for the sustenance of the needed personnel. This would account for such infrastructure lying idle or being under-utilized. Such communities, as a last resort, rented the facility to private medical practitioners. The case with the Lilu community hospital project which was completed and commissioned by the Town Union in 1986, but rented to a private medical practitioner (Alajemba, 2012, personal communication), was one of such several examples. The case with secondary schools was somewhat similar to that of health facilities. Between 1977 and 1981, there was an unprecedented proliferation of secondary schools in the state: virtually every community established its secondary school. Yet, the communities could not produce the minimum threshold student population needed to sustain the schools. Consequently, some of those schools were merged in order to meet the required student enrollment. A typical example was the merger of Community Secondary School, Ideani with Girl's High School, Ideani.

There is no gainsaying the fact that self-help effort, over the years, played significant role in the provision of social amenities and infrastructure in the rural areas. In fact, there was a predominance of self-help projects over other rural development efforts. However, self-help could be better harnessed through a systematic involvement of government in the choice, planning and execution of self-help projects. The practice whereby government involvement was by matching grants and technical assistance which were very infinitesimal and tenuous, respectively, should be discarded.

Most development projects in the state were either partially or exclusively executed through self-help or had strong inputs from self-help. Government recognized the important role self-help could play in rural development by working out "a structural

linkage between the local government and the respective town or community unions, social clubs, age-grades and other similar organizations within each local government area.” (ASN, 1987). It gave a legal approval of this strategy through the enactment of the Rural Development Fund (Management) Edict in 1986 (ASN,1986). Further recognition of the indispensable role of self-help to rural development was exemplified in DFRRI’s delineation of towns across the country with a definite instruction that each should embark on, at least, a development project of its choice with close supervision from the Agency’s officials (Odife, 2021). Self-help in Anambra State recorded such tremendous success and was executed in synergy with government’s rural development scheme that it was publicly acclaimed that:

in Anambra State, self-help is a way of life; a philosophy embraced by the government and the people alike ... what is perhaps new is that for the first time a direct and conscious effort is being made to harness this somewhat intangible but abundant resources (African Guardian Magazine, quoted in Okoye,1992).

Concluding Remarks

This paper establishes the pivotal role of self-help in community development which engenders rural development. It shows that self-help projects were propelled by the need of the community that embarked on them as well as for prestige purposes. Similarly, some of the investments of self-help such as social clubs and age grades were bereft of clear-cut philosophical vision on projects which could engender positive development in the host rural communities. Hence, they embarked on such projects which impacted minimally in community development. Government recognized the invaluable role of self-help in community and rural development and galvanized the latent potentials in the people symbolised in self-help in the execution of projects that enhanced the living condition in the rural areas and improved the standard of life of rural dwellers. However, there is need for improved involvement of government in self-help efforts by providing matching grants for project execution and increased directive to communities in the choice of projects.

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