

## TOWN UNIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EBONYI STATE: A STUDY OF NDIABOR ISHIEKE DEVELOPMENT UNION

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### Abstract

*This study investigated town unions and rural development in Ndiabor Ishieke Development Union of Ebonyi State. The specific objectives of the study are to determine the extent to which town union contributed in rural development and to find out the extent to which democratic governance improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State. The elite theory is used as the theoretical frame work of analysis. The design adopted is the descriptive survey method. Out of the 338 questionnaires that were distributed to respondents only 320 was returned. Therefore, the analysis was based on 320. It is pertinent to note that the data were compared with the objectives of the study and the formulated hypothesis. Based on the data analysis of this study it was observed that town union contributed in rural development and Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State. Based on the above findings the study made the following recommendations, government should provide periodic subvention to town unions to enable them have adequate fund for executing for the construction and maintenance of rural roads to the evacuation of agricultural products and movement of rural dwellers across the state and government should ensure that empowerment programmes such as agricultural and entrepreneurial loans are made accessible to the rural people in order to reduce the high incidence of poverty and improve the economy of rural communities.*

**Keywords:** Democratic Governance, Development Unions, Rural Development.

### Introduction

Town union governments are powerful agents of development through promoting peace, economic and environmental protection activities at the village community level in Eastern Nigeria (Ugwu, 2017). Igbo communities organize town unions as indigenous self-help community development associations without government influence as a platform for implementing development projects in their towns/villages. Recently Igbo State governments have begun recognizing town unions as an important tier of their governments along with the Council of Chiefs.

The idea of self-help is one of several distinguishing features of rural community development theory, practice and ideology. It is based on the premise that people can, will and should collaborate to solve community problems. In addition to the practical problem-solving utility of this perspective, self-help builds a strong sense of community and a foundation for future collaboration. It embodies the notion that a community can achieve greater self-determination within constraints imposed by the larger political economy in which it is imbedded. In community development practice, it is rudimentary that the solution to community problems is sought first within the community and its resources and capabilities

(Akpomuvie, 2014). Hence self-help embodies two interrelated features: (1) it is expected to produce improvements of people's living conditions, facilities, and/or services; and (2) it emphasizes that the process by which these improvements are achieved is essential to the development of the community. Willy-nilly, the "community" is both improved and empowered as a result (Christenson & Robison, 2014).

A town union (self help) according to Igozurike (2014) may be viewed as a regional resources mobilization system in which of the conception initiative and best of the exceptional responsibility rest with the occupants of the region or community concerned. Self help could also be defined as the theory that individuals provide for their even support and improvement in society or the act of providing for or improving oneself (illustrated Oxford Dictionary). Idachaba and Atte (2016) conceive rural development not only in terms of agricultural and economic growth but as the creation of fair sharing of social and economic benefits. Mabogunge (2013) on the other sees rural development as a systematic attempt at re-organizing and mobilizing the rural masses in order to improve their capacity to cope effectively with their daily tasks and with the concomitant changes. This is done through the provision of basic infrastructure to improve rural accessibility and the participation and perception of the rural people in their own affairs. Self help in the content of rural development is therefore the carrying out of developmental and capital projects in the rural areas through community participation. It is a shift from the earlier rural development policy which was preoccupied with generation of food and fiber surpluses to over all formulation of a national rural development strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural poverty and enhancement of the quality of rural life.

The importance of community development in contemporary Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized, as much as it cannot be relegated to the background; as its significance stems from its recognised role in the process of achieving the improvement of economic, political, social and cultural conditions of the communities. As a strategy, community development ensures rapid national development hence Ugwu's (2017) assertion "community development is one of the major planks upon which National developmental policies and their implementation are hinged". This is why the group dynamic perspective of rural community development becomes imperative especially as issues in rural community development with special emphasis on self-help approach tend to rely on the "felt need theory" and the traditional democratic theory". These theories are indicative of the place of people's participation in the development of the rural populace. Hence the search by development theories over the years for alternative strategies that would not only accelerate growth but also spread the benefits of development to the rural areas, the distortion of Nigeria's development pattern as decried by Aboyade (2015) when he wrote about the profound dualism between the urban and rural areas and the proportionate costs and consequences of rural infrastructural lagging behind urban modernism. Consequently, some eighty percent of the population in rural areas either had no medical services or made do with rudimentary facilities scattered over wide distances (Onimode, 2015). This obvious neglect of the rural majority of Nigerians in the developmental scheme of things, is an indictment of both colonial and independent governments not only for neglecting the majority who live in the rural areas but also for "milking them dry" for the benefits of the British metropolis and the urban minority in Nigeria.

Contemporarily, rural community development has become a national imperative in Nigeria and the following are the reason. Firstly, the proportion of the national population resident in the rural areas of Nigeria is higher hence the 1963 census, which place the figure at 80.7% of the national population. By 1985, this proportion went down to 70.13% and by 1990; it further dropped to 69%. It is therefore clear that despite our high level of urbanization, Nigeria remains largely rural. Secondly, is the realization that a dangerous gap exists in the development levels of both the urban and rural areas which threatens the

political and social stability of the country. Hence the development of a country cannot be completed with the singular act of developing the urban areas at the detriment of the rural area which supplies the urban areas with food and labour. Disheartening as it may sound and seem, the rural areas are characterized by pervasive and endemic poverty, made manifest by widespread hunger, malnutrition, poor health, general lack of access to formal education, livable housing and various forms of social and political solution compared with their urban counterparts. Thirdly, it is being recognized that the problems of our urban centers cannot be solved unless those of the rural areas are solved, or at least contained. Hence these problems emanated from the unprecedented rural-urban migration which in turn derives from rural area underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment (Akpomuvie, 2014). Despite the efforts made in the past to effect development at the rural areas, the conditions of the rural dwellers have not improved, rather they have further deteriorated.

The failure of governments' top-down approach and lack of involvement of the people at the grassroots in the bottom-up strategy have weakened the confidence of the public in the central authorities. Communities therefore seek solace in indigenous institutions, which pressurize government for attention to development problems in their communities and/or undertake development programmes and projects that they observe that are very needful in their immediate communities. The indigenous organizations are associated with self-help (Ogundipe, 2013). They constitute the media for resources mobilization to confront local challenges. These include the finance and execution of projects, lobbying and nomination of representatives to government offices to air their views and press their needs and developing human resources against future developmental needs of their immediate communities. Thus, their impacts have been felt in the areas of economic development, policy matters, health and infrastructure, environmental and physical development among others (Agbola, 2015).

Following the acknowledged accomplished achievements of the community based organizations in the late 1990s there have been expectations that democratic governance that was ushered in 1999 would invigorate and spur more participation of community based organizations in rural development drive. There is a general consensus among development scholars that democratic governance holds the key to popular participation of local governance actors such as town unions to development communities (Kiyaga-Nsubuga, 2015).

However, there have been serious shortcomings with the community development efforts in Nigeria. Firstly, the programmes have historically been limited mainly to provision of social amenities in the rural areas. They have not been used for promotion of rural capital and economic development of the rural areas. But the community development strategy could have much better paved the way for Future industrial development if rural communities had included agricultural production in the list of programmes and activities towards which they mobilized their efforts.

Secondly, the communities often do not make use of experts in the planning and execution of their various projects. Many of the committees appointed to deal with projects that call for professional expertise are not often disposed to seek the advice of experts. Cases abound of building committees that neither include architects, building engineers and related professional nor are disposed to employ the services of such people. Thirdly, fund generation for many of the rural development projects is done in an adhoc manner. Money is usually raised for specific projects only when the occasion demands. This is done through levies, contributions or donations which are not always guaranteed.

## **Review of related Literature**

Darby and Morris in Nkwede (2013), defines community development as “an education which would raise levelsof local awareness and increase the confidence and ability of community groups to identify and tackle their ownproblems. Ogunna (2014), believes that most writers on community development are influenced by their fields ofstudy in their definition of the concept. Thus, some economists would consider it in terms of “encouraging somelocal material development”.

While some political scientists emphasize such value as “enlargement of individualfreedom and mass democratic process”. On the other hand, some Sociologists stress “group development andgroup action”. The concept of community development has been used in different contexts and for different purposes by different scholars. A more comprehensive definition of community development has been expressed in the community development guidelines of the International Co-operative Administration of the United States (cited in Ndukwe, 2014).

According to that agency, community development is “a process of social action which the people of a community organize themselves for planning an action, define their common and individual needs and problem; execute these plans with a maximum reliance upon community resources and materials from governmental and non-governmental agencies outside the community”. From all these definitions, community development is not concerned with one aspect of life, but involves total community life and needs. Ideally, it involves all the members of the community, it requires their fullest participation in decision making and then decision implementation.

People work together with or without extra support to shape their future and that of the community. Community development has to do with the elimination of such limiting circumstances of life as poverty, hunger, ignorance, sickness and fear, in a bid to bring about improvement in the standard of living of a people. Equally, community development can be said to mean participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living and the provision of technical and social services in ways, which encourages initiative and self-help. Similarly, Uma Lele, in 2013, compiled what is popularly called the World Bank 'Bible' for developing countries. In a foreword to that book, Robert McNamara, the then president of the World Bank spelt out the rationale for the book – to raise productivity among the rural poor in developing countries (Uma Lele, 2013).

This task is urgent because according to him over 80 percent of the population of developing countries reside in the rural community. For this reason, Uma Lele, sees rural development as “improving the living standards of the mass of the low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining” (Uma Lele, 2013).

But as MC Namara observed, the more rural development packages are unfolded over time, the worse the conditions of the rural population became. Yet, nobody has stopped to ask the question why has every rural development plan failed to uplift the living standard of the rural population? For instance, the accelerated food programme of the Gowon administration, the Operation Feed the Nation of the Obasanjo regime and the Green Revolution of the Shehu Shagari era were all rural development packages unfolded in quick succession for the rural population of Nigeria. We are all living witnesses to how each of these packages fared (Udu, 2015). How then, can community development be conceived? In the first place, it is imperative to view development as a multi-dimensional process of qualitative transformation of the populace. Thus, development is a societal as well as an individual phenomenon and cannot very easily, either analytically or concretely be limited to a specific locale. Changes in one area of the society invariably affect and sometimes stimulate changes in other areas either directly or indirectly. For instance, programmes to increase literacy level in the community may affect manpower demand and supply at all

levels of the society. Development is a complex and pervasive process and should be seen as such. Seen from this perspective, it becomes unrealistic to speak of 'Community' 'Rural' 'Urban' development. It seems more appropriate to speak of an integrated national or societal development programmes as applied at the different levels of the society (Okoli, 2013). The current attempts to dichotomize and categorize development as 'community' and 'national' with different measuring rods do not appear appropriate. Potentially, useful efforts are wasted in the bifurcation of what ought to be an integrated programme into mutually exclusive categories (Okoli, 2013). It is however, pertinent to point out that the above logic does not imply that the emphasis on 'community', rural or 'urban' development does not concern itself with national aspirations. It does, but implicit in the notion of community development for instance, is the idea of a better society.

However, more often than not, community development agents are swept off their guard by the imperatives of local problems and this leads to the elevation of 'community' development to an end in itself. When this happens, 'community' development assumes an independent status from 'national' development even though this has never been intended. But an emphasis on national development programmes starts off with the premise that societal or national betterment is the goal and by stressing application at different levels, it highlights the need for coordination and continuity. The development agent at the community level is constantly reminded of the need for harmonization of efforts with those at other levels. It is therefore necessary to stress national as opposed to community development.

### **Town Unions and Construction of Rural Roads**

Burgess (2013) examined the contribution of democratic governance to road building in Nigeria from 1963 to 2011. Specifically, the study examines whether the transition in and out of democracy under the same president constrains or exacerbates expenditure on roads. The study applied descriptive survey design. The area of study includes seven Kikuyu dominant districts and six Kalenjin dominant districts. The data collected were analyzed using two approaches, a graphical approach and a regression approach. The results showed that between 1963 to 2011 periods, districts that share the ethnicity of the president received twice, as much expenditure on roads and have four times the length of paved roads built. This is unequivocal evidence of positive relationship between democratic governance and roads construction. Even though the study examined how democratic governance facilitated the construction of roads but failed to emphasize on how democracy could spur town unions to embark on the construction of roads in rural communities which is the focus of this study.

In another study, Agboola, Ifesanya&Akanmu (2012) examined the contributions of town unions to funding of rural roads projects in rural communities in Akinyele and Kajola Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. The study made use of descriptive survey and applied the instrumentality of questionnaire in the generation of data while chi square analytical technique was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that the town unions in Kajola Local Government Area of Oyo State carried more of roads rehabilitation project between 1996 and 2011. It concluded that the town unions made some significant contributions in the rehabilitation of rural roads in Oyo State within the period under review. However, the study failed to establish how the respondents were sampled, in addition to demonstrating the trend in terms of contributions of town unions to rural development in a democratic dispensation which is the basis of this study.

Onyeozu (2010) carried out a study that focused on analysis of contributions town unions to the development of social amenities such as rural roads in Rivers State, Nigeria. The data for study were



collected with the aid of structured questionnaire from 960 randomly selected respondents in the study area and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that town unions in Rivers State contributed significantly to the building and renovation of community roads. The weakness of this study lies in the fact that the study is too general as it fails to segregate the study area into urban and rural areas which would show how town unions contributed to the development of these areas respectively.

In separate study, Ugwu (2013) investigated the contributions of town unions to the development of rural roads in some communities in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state of Nigeria. The study utilized survey method through self report technique of data collection which deals mostly with sourcing information from the primary sources and analytical induction sourcing information from secondary sources. Data collected were analyzed using quantitative methods. The study revealed that town unions in Nsukka LGA embarked on road rehabilitation covering a total 46.5 kilometers of roads at an estimated cost of N23,550,000 and expenditure of N25,050,000 on roads constructions as of 2010. The survey also indicated that majority (81%) of the respondents agreed that Town unions contributed positively to rehabilitation of roads in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu. Despite the beauty of the work in segregating the contributions of town unions to this sector, it failed to explain how democratic governance could enhance contributions of town unions to construction of rural roads.

Ibem (2009) examined town unions to the provision of infrastructural development such as rural roads in low-income communities in developing countries. The study was carried out in Ohafia, in Abia state of Nigeria. The study employed primary data that were generated from field-work enquiries with the aid of questionnaire. The sampling frame consisted of the 26 communities in the town. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used in selecting six communities based on a number of factors, namely, geographical and autonomous community representations, absence of local government administrative presence, and the existence of at least two completed and two ongoing community-initiated developments projects, as well as five town unions.

The findings indicated that the principal sources of fund for financing community development projects came from levies, voluntary donations, fines, interest on loans to members and bank deposits. Relying on the data from a survey, the study identified six organizations and three funding arrangements in infrastructure provision in the communities. Using this case-study, this study attempted to identify how the mobilization of resources in project initiation, design, implementation and funding influenced the type of infrastructure projects. He concludes that the findings have conceptual and policy implications for understanding the socio-economic and political dynamics in harnessing local resources and integrating community-based approaches into development process in developing countries.

Toyobo & Muili (2016) investigated constraints militating against effectiveness of community development projects in Ilesa Local Government Area. Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources, field observations, oral interviews, focus group discussion and intensive literature search. The primary data were collected through the use of two sets of questionnaire. From the sample frame of three hundred of twenty four (324) town unions in the area, ninety seven (97) of the town unions were interviewed using random sampling technique. The data were analysed using simple statistical techniques in form of frequency tables. The study showed that town unions actually financed and executed rural road projects based on the financial capabilities of the town unions. Most of the projects done by town unions were in the areas feeder road construction, road rehabilitation, construction of culverts and bridges.

### **Challenges of Community and Social Development Programme**

Issues of institutional capacity, accountability and transparency are critical to sustainable development in Nigeria. Public institutions in the country are not efficient enough to address the challenges of poverty reduction despite the numerous programmes initiated by successive governments in Nigeria in this direction. Pervasive poverty in the country is evidenced by the fact that 55 per cent of the country's population live on less than US\$1 per day (CPS) and 60 per cent of the 75 million of Nigerians particularly, those at the rural communities are wallowing in abject poverty. (EB-CSDA, 2013). Furthermore, Nigeria is faced with the daunting task of achieving growth rates of greater than 5 per cent in the non-oil economy in order to significantly reduce poverty rates. Hence, poverty and poverty reduction in the country poses enormous challenge to community and social development programmes. The majority of Nigerian citizens are poor; the community and government machinery are in dire need of capacity improvement and the provisions of the vision 20:20:20 and its attendant country partnership strategy culminate to further challenge the commitment of the Agency.

The challenges of CSDP are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs/sub-headings. In spite of the huge amount of money disbursed to micro-projects in various communities of different Local Governments of Ebonyi State, the per-capita income and Human Development Index of the people still remain low. This may be attributable to the distribution approach. It is believed that training and development of individuals within the communities in various Local Governments would have been the fundamental step so that the money earmarked for the programme can be disbursed to individual beneficiaries. It is the story view of this paper that this approach will be more sustainable. In situation where disbursement is made for micro-projects based on communities may not be sustainable and grass-root enough since the elites among the various communities may scuttle the entire arrangement.

#### **(1) Local Government and Human Development**

Consequent upon the 1976 Local Government Reforms in Nigeria, more roles were assigned to the Local Government and presently, the number of local government areas in the country increased to 774, with clearly delineated functions and responsibilities. The relationship between the local government and the state as well as the federal government is also specified in the 1999 constitution. The constitution assigns specific duties to the LGAs in recognition of the fact that local governments are closer to the grassroots; hence, ought to exercise sufficient autonomy to be able to discharge its constitutional roles and responsibility to the grassroots. However, the constitutional autonomy of LGAs in Nigeria, are merely in principle; in practice, this autonomy has been restricted by higher levels of government not only through statutory means but also by limitations on their discretion in making and extending their budgets and in control of their personnel in the form of guidelines having the force of law periodically issued by state governments as policy (EB-CSDA, 2013).

Again, the Level of autonomy is incumbered by the fact that local governments direly depend on revenue from the central government-a situation that is further worsened by the level of poor revenue generation at these levels of government. In general, most projects at the LG are solely sponsored by government or donor agencies with little or no involvement whatsoever of the grassroots. As a result of lack of requisite skills, proper planning and coordination, there are still evidences of duplication and multiplicity of projects despite the pitiable states of resources at their disposal. The readiness of some LGAs to work with the communities notwithstanding, most of them have poor understanding of poverty- focused efforts, thereby, posing more challenge to the development agency.

## **(2) State Government and Local Development**

Evidently, local governments have some commitment to community- based poverty reduction over the years. However, existing side by side of the observed commitment are the general lack of capacity to design and implement multi-sectoral programmes. This is because, state governments are used to expenditure allocated along sectoral lines. It has also been noted that state government pay insufficient attention to monitoring and evaluation of projects to ensure success and sustainability as well as needs assessment which is so central to programming and planning- all these are lacking in the project cycle of state governments. The implication of this is that, while resources for development may be available to state governments, there still exist a whopping capacity gap at that level of government.

### **Poverty in Ebonyi State: Social and Economic Context**

Poverty in Ebonyi State is a pervasive issue characterized by low levels of income and social deprivation. The federal office of statistics reports that 52.6 per cent Ebonyians are poor (Udu, 2013). The indicators for social sector development are favourable for Ebonyi State in general 10 and worse for the poor. Indicators of poverty are glaring everywhere in the state and manifest in worsening severity despite the vast human and natural resources, and the economic development potentials Ebonyi State is endowed with. A direct effect of poverty can be seen in virtual lack of such basic infrastructure and socio-economic amenities as good road network, health facilities, schools, portable water supply, etc. overt poverty shows up among the malnourished population, particularly among vulnerable groups, most often women and children.

Unemployment rate is acute, particularly in the rural areas where over 70 per cent of the population lives. In the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2002) Human Development Report, Enugu and Ebonyi “ranked low (0.466) in the Human Development Index (HDI); a combined measure of longevity (physical health, knowledge (education)”, and income (purchasing power). This low expectancy is attributed to life expectancy at birth which “is estimated to be below 59.2 years for male and 60.7 years for female. Mortality rate for children under 5 is 191 per 1000 life births” (UNICEF Report, 1994). One-third of the state population is still without safe water and sanitation. Approximately, half of the population of rural dwellers obtains water from rivers. There is also high level of illiteracy. Evidently, Ebonyi State as one of the South-East States (from the old Eastern Region), was one of the theatres of hostility during the civil war in Nigeria between 1967 – 1970.

Consequent upon the vicious war, injustice and obnoxious post-war policies of past administration in Nigeria, economic and social development of Ebonyi State was stifled. In addition, erosion has devastated most of the rural farmlands especially in the southern zones of the state; thus, rendering majority of the farmers unproductive and poor. Millions of naira would be required to check these ecological disasters and this, certainly, is beyond the financial capability of the state government. Similarly, the social service sector is in deplorable condition due to the hitherto marginalization. There is also a resurgence of disease, especially the preventable ones like malaria, tuberculosis, STD/HIV/AIDS, guinea worm, as well as others like hypertension, diabetes mellitus; etc. All these are compounded by poor nutrition and high fertility rate of 7.0 (Udu, 2014). The above scenario clearly depicts Ebonyi state as one of the poorest states in Nigeria. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition exist in such a high-scale that they seem to defy political, economic and social efforts to eliminate them. It is against this background that Ebonyi State was selected by the Federal Ministry of Finance and National Planning Commission as one of the six pilot states in Nigeria for the Phase II.



Community-Based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP). Be that as it may, investments in education, health and nutrition, etc, are necessary to minimize the scourge of poverty. Similarly, investments in roads, water and environmental infrastructure is critical for the provision of reasonable access for these facilities to the poor rural dwellers. Unfortunately, the top-down management style and over centralized administrations in the past, created hurdles to managing development programmes; in addition to severe capacity limitations of the government and communities. For instance, where communities are unable to pull together their respective contributions and instead tend to resort to looking up to the government to support and partner them, coupled with lack of finances as well as technical aids. Therefore, improving the level of participation of communities in planning and execution of projects at the community levels and adopting a “bottom top” approach has been noted as an element of the development process (Udu, 2016). The approach, recognized that all community needs cannot be met all, at once. Hence, priority projects are identified by the communities themselves. Community participation in identification, preparation and financing, improves prioritization and efficiency.

Unfortunately, it is recognized that even though a lot of poverty related data abound in Ebonyi State, they are not used effectively to enhance understanding of poverty phenomenon in the state. In the light of the foregoing, the Ebonyi State government has placed its highest priority on poverty reduction. This is based on the recognition that the benefits of economic growth have failed to trickle down to the majority of the population. The next section, would focus on these efforts by the state.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The elite theory is used as the theoretical frame work of analysis. The proponents of elite theory are Wilfred Pareta, GactanoMosca, Robert Michaels, Karl Max, Karl Bumham, C. Wright mills, among others. The theorists were in agreement over the belief that every society is ruled by a minority that takes major decisions in the society and maneuver that ways into political offices, lording themselves over the masses. In every society, there is always a division line among groups either by the reason of intelligence, academic achievement, wealth, status, influence or all of the above. The advantaged group is the “elite group”. This group constitutes the minority in the society, but takes the majority of the decisions. The elite can also be those few who are considered socially, intellectually or professionally superior to the rest in any group or society. So it can be said that the elite group can be found in the church, political party, social club, trade union, in government and even among the aimed robbers.

The relevance of this theory in this work is to exemplify the existence of elite groups in the Ebonyi State political system. They may or may not be politicians, but they decide and control the electoral process in Ebonyi State. Even though we claim that democracy is a majority rule, it is the minority that rules over the majority. It is interesting to note however, that it is not all those who have the top job are members of the elite but those who have the reputation and are capable of influencing the decision making process. For instance, a man may occupy a top position but in real terms, he is a mere appendage as he has no hands to bear the inevitability of a small governing elites emerging in the society to pursue what amounts to their own selfish interests. So, almost all governments appear oligarchy in nature.

According to Robert Michaels, “historical evolution mocks all the preventive measures against oligarchy”. If laws are passed to control the dominant group, it is the law, which gradually weakens, and not the leaders. From what he formulated as “iron law of oligarchy”. Robert tried to explain the practical unattainability of a real democracy given the inevitability of inequalities arising from the objective conditions of social life. The elites are potentially capable of exploiting their positions so as to preserve

their domination. This elite group, because they are well organized, control the electoral process to their advantage.

This elite group, because they are well organized, control the electoral process to their advantage. They manipulate elections to their own advantage through coercion, thuggery, buying of votes and use of propaganda, all in a bid to make sure that they (or their candidates) win. Though town union (self-help) and rural or community development has been defined and conceptualized variously by different scholars, its mode of operation is made up of three essential elements like participation by the people as well as local organization management ability; the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative and therefore strengthening the community as an entity. The improving living standard and popular participation are thus central to the concept of rural community.

## Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is quantitative research methodology as primary data was used. The design adopted is always determined by the nature of the research and purpose of the study. Therefore, the design adopted is the descriptive survey method which uses the administration of analysis of question to arrive at dependable answer to any research problem. The area of this study is Ebonyi local government area. Ebonyi is a [Local Government Area](#) of [Ebonyi State, Nigeria](#). Its headquarters are in the town of Ugbodo. The population under which this study is carried out is number of people living in Ebonyi Local Government area which is 126,837 at the 2006 census.

The sample size of this work was determined using the Taro Yemeni formula to arrive at 400.

### Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

#### Demographic characteristic of Respondents.

**Table 1 Distribution of Respondent by sex**

variables	no of respondents	percentage %
Female	250	78.1%
Male	70	21.9%
Total	320	100

**Source:** Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.1 above shows that 250 respondents were female representing 78.1% while 70 respondents were male representing 21.9% from the above table, it can be observe that the female respondents are more than male respondents.

**Table 2 Distribution of Respondent by Age**

Variable	no of respondent	percentage%
18-24years	49	15.3%
25-29years	30	9.4%
30-34years	109	34.1%
35-40years	80	25%
41-50 and above	52	16.2%
Total	320	100%

**Source:** Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.2 shows that 49 respondents representing 15.3% were within the age bracket of 18-24years, 30 respondents representing 9.4% were within the age bracket of 25-29 years, 109 respondents representing 34.1% were within the age bracket of 30-34, 80 respondents representing 25% were within the age bracket of 35-40 years, and 52 respondents representing 16.2% were within the age bracket of 41-50 and above. This result shows that greater percentage of respondents were between the age of 30-34 respectively.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondent by Educational qualification**

Variable	no of respondent	percentage %
Primary	90	28.1%
Secondary	100	31.3%
Tertiary	130	40.6%
Total	320	100

Source: Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.3 shows that 90 respondents representing 28.1% had primary Education, 100 respondent representing 31.3% had secondary Education, and 130 respondent representing 40.6% had tertiary Education respectively.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by marital status.**

Variable	no of respondents	percentage
Single	70	21.9%
Married	26	8.1%
Separated	10	3.1%
Divorced	108	33.8%
widows/widowers	106	33.1%
Total	320	100

Source: Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.4 above shows that out of 320 respondents, 70 respondents representing 21.9% were single, 26 respondents representing 8.1% were married, 10 respondent representing 3.1% were separated, 108 respondents representing 33.8% were divorced and 106 respondent representing 33.1% were widows/widowers. It therefore shows that 33.8% of the total samples studied were divorced.

**Table 5 Distribution of respondents by occupation.**

Variable	no of respondents	percentage %
Civil servant	80	25.0%
Traders	15	4.7%
Farmers	95	29.7%
Others	130	40.6%
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.5 above shows that 80 respondents representing 25.0% were civil servants, 15 respondents representing 4.7% were traders, 95 respondents representing 29.7% were farmers, while 130 respondents representing 40.6% were involved in other occupations.

**Table 6: Distribution of respondent by religious affiliation**

Variables	no of respondents	percentage %
Christians	21	6.6%
Islam	37	11.6%
Pagan	90	28.1%
Other	172	53.7%
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 4.1.6 indicates that 21 respondents representing 6.6% were Christians, 37 respondents representing 11.6% were Islam, 90 respondents representing 28.1% were pagan, and other 172 respondents representing 53.7% were from other religions. These implies that greater percentage of respondent were those belonging to other religious group.

**Table 7: Town union contributed in rural development**

Response	no of respondent	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	215	67.2%
Agreed	100	31.3%
Strongly Disagreed	03	0.9%
Disagreed	02	0.6%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources:Field work survey, 2024

Table 7 shows that 215 respondents representing 67.2% strongly agreed that Town union contributed in rural development, 100 respondents representing 31.3% agreed that Town union contributed in rural development, 3 respondents representing 0.9% strongly disagree that Town union contributed in rural development, 2 respondents representing 0.6% disagreed that Town union contributed in rural development while no respondent was undecided. Table 4.2.1 therefore shows that most of the respondent (215 representing 67.2%) agreed that Town union contributed in rural development

**Table 8: Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State**

Response	no of respondents	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	145	45.3%
Agreed	99	30.9%
Strongly Disagreed	26	8.1%
Disagreed	50	15.6%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 8 shows that 145 respondents representing 45.3% strongly agreed that Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 99 respondents representing 30.9% agreed that Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 26 respondents representing 8.1% strongly disagreed that Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 50 respondents representing 15.6% disagreed that Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, while no respondents was undecided.

**Table 9: There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State**

Response	No of respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agreed	160	50%
Agreed	130	40.6%
Strongly Disagreed	16	05%
Disagreed	14	4.4%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 9 shows that 160 respondents representing 50% strongly agreed There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 130 respondents representing 40.6% agreed that There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 16 respondents representing 05% strongly disagreed that There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State, 14 respondents representing 4.4% disagreed that There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State while no respondent was undecided. Table 9 therefore shows that most respondents strongly agreed that there are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State.

**Table 10: Empowerment of town union by the government will help in rural development**

Response	no of respondents	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	220	68.8%
Agreed	100	31.3
Strongly Disagreed	-	-
Disagreed	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024



Table 10 shows that 220 respondents representing 68.8% strongly agreed that Empowerment of town union by the government will help in rural development, 100 respondents representing 31.3% agreed that Empowerment of town union by the government will help in rural development. Table 10 therefore shows that most respondents strongly agreed that Empowerment of town union by the government will help in rural development

**Table 11 Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development**

Response	no of respondent	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	210	65.6%
Agreed	105	32.8%
Strongly Disagreed	02	0.6%
Disagreed	03	0.9%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 11 above shows that 210 respondents representing 65.6% strongly agreed that Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development, 105 respondents representing 32.8% agreed that Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development, 2 respondents representing 0.6% strongly disagreed that Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development, 3 respondents representing 0.9% disagreed that Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development. Table 11 therefore shows that most respondents agreed that Provision of office by the government will enhance rural development

**Table 12 Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development**

Response	No of response	percentage %
strongly agreed	120	37.5%
Agreed	100	31.3%
strongly disagreed	40	12.5%
Disagreed	60	18.8%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 12 shows that 120 respondents representing 37.5% strongly agreed that Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development, 100 respondents representing 31.3% agreed that Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development, 40 respondents representing 12.5% strongly disagreed that Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development, 60 respondents representing 18.8% disagreed that Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development while no respondent was undecided.

Table 12 therefore shows that most respondents strongly agreed that Staffing of the town union leaders will encourage rural development

**Table 13: Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development**

Response	No of response	percentage %
strongly agreed	120	37.5%
Agreed	100	31.3%
strongly disagreed	40	12.5%
Disagreed	60	18.8%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 12 shows that 120 respondents representing 37.5% strongly agreed that Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development, 100 respondents representing 31.3% agreed that Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development, 40 respondents representing 12.5% strongly disagreed that Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development, 60 respondents representing 18.8% disagreed that Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development while no respondent was undecided.

Table 13 therefore shows that most respondents strongly agreed that Youth programmes and empowerment will encourage rural development

**Table 14: Town union planners has significant roles in rural development**

Response	no of respondents	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	220	68.8%
Agreed	100	31.3
Strongly Disagreed	-	-
Disagreed	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

Table 14 shows that 220 respondents representing 68.8% strongly agreed that Town union planners has significant roles in rural development, 100 respondents representing 31.3% agreed that Town union planners has significant roles in rural development. Table 10 therefore shows Town union planners has significant roles in rural development

### Test of Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were propounded for this study the null hypotheses are denoted by  $H_0$  while the alternative hypotheses are denoted by  $H_1$ .

In this section data from respondents were analyzed and tested with the aid of appropriate statistical technique. Chi-square test under the use of “Goodness of fit test” analysis was employed for this purpose.

In testing the hypotheses, a comparison between the calculated value of the test statistics and the critical value of the statistics was made. The table value served as a criterion value.

## Hypotheses 1

$H_0$ : Town union does not contributed in rural development

$H_1$ : Town union contributed in rural development

The data for the validation of the above Hypotheses are computed and given below.

**Table 15: Town union contributed in rural development**

Response	no of respondent	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	215	67.2%
Agreed	100	31.3%
Strongly Disagreed	03	0.9%
Disagreed	02	0.6%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

**TABLE 16: COMPUTED CHI-SQUARE ( $\chi^2$ )**

Options	fo(observed frequency)	fe(expected frequency)	fo-fe	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> / fe
Strongly Agreed	215	64	151	22801	356.3
Agreed	100	64	36	1296	20.25
Strongly Disagreed	03	64	-61	3721	58.1
Disagreed	02	64	-62	3844	60.1
Undecided	0	64	-64	4096	64
Total	320				558.75

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

$$\text{Recall } \chi^2 = \sum (fo - fe)^2$$

fe

From the computed table above:  $\chi^2_{cal} = 558.75$  note:  $fe = \sum fo/n$

Where:

fo= total sample size

n= number of variable involved

Hence:  $fe = 320$

5

=64

Note: degree of freedom (df)

Df= n-1

Where  $n=5$

Hence  $df=5-1$

$=4$

### Critical value:

The test was conducted using 4 degree of freedom at a significant level of 0.05 which gives a table value of 9.488.

Hence:  $\chi^2_{cal}=558.75$

$\chi^2_{tab}=9.488$

### Decision rule:

Reject the null Hypotheses ( $H_0$ ) since the computed chi-square value (558.75) is greater than the critical (table) chi-square value (9.488), and accept the alternate Hypotheses ( $H_1$ ).  $H_1$ : Town union contributed in rural development

### Hypotheses II

$H_0$ : Democratic governance does not improve the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

$H_2$ : Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

The data for the validation of the above Hypotheses are computed and given blow.

**Table 17 : Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State**

Response	no of respondents	percentage %
Strongly Agreed	145	45.3%
Agreed	99	30.9%
Strongly Disagreed	26	8.1%
Disagreed	50	15.6
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

**TABLE 18 COMPUTED CHI-SQUARE ( $\chi^2$ )**

Options	fo(observed frequency)	fe(expected frequency)	fo-fe	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> / Fe
Strongly Agreed	145	64	81	6561	102.5
Agreed	99	64	35	1225	19.1
Strongly Disagreed	26	64	-38	1444	22.6
Disagreed	50	64	-14	196	3.1
Undecided	0	64	-64	4096	64
Total	320				211.3

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

$$\text{Recall: } x^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2$$

$f_e$

$$\text{Thus, } x^2_{\text{cal}} = 211.3$$

$$\text{Hence: } f_e = 320/5$$

$$= 64$$

Therefore: Degree of freedom (df)

$$Df = n - 1$$

Where

$$n = 5$$

$$\text{Hence } df = 5 - 1$$

$$= 4$$

### Critical value

The test was conducted using 4 degree of freedom at a significant level of 0.05 which gives a table value of 9.488

$$\text{Hence } x^2_{\text{call}} = 211.3$$

$$X^2_{\text{tab}} = 9.488$$

### Decision Rule:

Reject the null Hypotheses ( $H_0$ ) since the computed chi-square value (211.3) is greater than the critical (table) chi-square value (9.488), and accept the alternate Hypotheses ( $H_2$ ).  **$H_2$ :** Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

### Hypotheses 3

**$H_0$ :** There are no measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

**$H_3$ :** There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

**TABLE 19 : There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State**

Response	No of respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agreed	160	50%
Agreed	130	40.6%
Strongly Disagreed	16	05%
Disagreed	14	4.4%
Undecided	-	-
Total	320	100

Sources: Field work survey, 2024



TABLE 20 COMPUTED CHI-SQUARE ( $\chi^2$ )

Options	fo(observed frequency)	fe(expected frequency)	fo-fe	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> fe
Strongly Agreed	160	64	96	9216	144
Agreed	130	64	66	4356	68.06
Strongly Disagreed	16	64	-48	2304	36
Disagreed	14	64	-50	2500	39.06
Undecided	0	64	-64	4096	64
Total	320				351.12

Sources: Field work survey, 2024

$$\text{Recall: } \chi^2 = \sum (fo - fe)^2$$

fe

$$\text{Thus, } \chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 351.12$$

$$\text{Hence: } fe = 320/5$$

$$= 64$$

Therefore: Degree of freedom (df)

$$Df = n - 1$$

Where

$$n = 5$$

$$\text{Hence } df = 5 - 1$$

$$= 4$$

**Critical value**

The test was conducted using 4 degree of freedom at a significant level of 0.05 which gives a table value of 9.488

$$\text{Hence } \chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 351.12$$

$$\chi^2_{\text{tab}} = 9.488$$

**Decision Rule:**

Reject the null Hypotheses ( $H_0$ ) since the computed chi-square value (351.12) is greater than the critical (table) chi-square value (9.488), and accept the alternate Hypotheses ( $H_3$ ).  **$H_3$ :** There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

## **Findings**

1. Town union contributed in rural development
2. Democratic governance have improved the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State
3. There are measures that will enhance the contributions of town unions to the construction and maintenance of rural roads in Ebonyi State

## **Summary**

The study investigated the role of town rural development union in Ebonyi state and found out that democratic governance in Nigeria has led to increased contributions of town unions to construct and maintain rural development in some communities in Ebonyi State. This was made possible through increased collaboration between the town unions and members of the communities in the initiation, planning, funding, execution and maintaining of rural development projects and programmes. The people oriented nature of democratic governance has brought the town unions executive closer than ever to the people and as such increased the synergy between the people and members of the town unions in many rural communities in execution of developmental projects. Following this positive development, the number of projects and programmes executed under the democratic dispensation has increased remarkably. This is evident in the areas of infrastructural development especially in the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and culverts. The people in the rural communities are now seen as partners in progress in the provision of rural development projects in many rural communities of Ebonyi State. However, town union executives failed to operate with committees on education, works and health which run count to the democratic principle of delegation of authority, thereby affecting the town unions' capacity to maximally be accountable to the people. Moreso, town unions have failed to improve provision of roads in rural communities in Ebonyi State due to the prevalence of partisan interests, clientele patronage, beneficiary interests, political differences and political intolerance among town union executives in running the affairs of the rural communities in the State.

## **Conclusion**

The situation is same in rural communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria where town unions provided and maintained feeder roads in rural communities. Furthermore, democratic governance motivated the town unions in Ebonyi State to engage the rural people in the construction and cleaning of drainages in their rural communities. Since the inception of democratic governance in 1999, the participation of rural people in the construction and cleaning of drainages have received accelerated attention across rural communities in Ebonyi State. Democratic governance has also increase the levels of awareness and involvement of community members in the cleaning of rural roads in Ebonyi State. The town unions from time to time organize clean-up exercises across the rural roads in Ebonyi State (Umeh, 2017). Again, there should be regular seminar, workshops and symposia to increase the skills and knowledge required for effective and efficient smooth operations of town unions. Besides, there should be legislation mandating town executives to possess a minimum academic qualification of SSCE and there should be re-orientation of the rural people and their leaders to imbibe the culture of placing community interest above party interest in order to accelerate the contribution of town unions to the development in rural communities in Ebonyi State.

## Recommendations

Based on the above findings the study made the following recommendations:

- (1) Government should provide periodic subvention to town unions to enable them have adequate fund for executing for the construction and maintenance of rural roads to the evacuation of agricultural products and movement of rural dwellers across the state.
- (2) Government should ensure that empowerment programmes such as agricultural and entrepreneurial loans are made accessible to the rural people in order to reduce the high incidence of poverty and improve the economy of rural communities.
- (3) Leadership trainings and enlightenment programmes should be organized on regular bases for the town unions to equip and enlighten them on the leadership skills that meet the best global acceptable practices on rural development.

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