

Grassroots Administration and Rural Development of Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The research study investigated the grassroots administration and rural development of the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area in Imo state. The study aimed to investigate the involvement of local government in coordinating self-help and agro-based rural development efforts in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state. Based on the stated objectives of the study, two research questions and hypotheses were generated and subsequently tested. The study was based on the principle of decentralisation as a framework for analysis. The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. The sample consists of 399 respondents selected from a population of 251,900. The collected data were analysed, and the study's findings indicate that the local government in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state is involved in coordinating self-help and agro-based rural development activities. The study suggests that the state government in Imo state, Nigeria should create a strong legal framework that can be adopted by local council authorities. This framework should incorporate self-help development initiatives into the overall structure for community and rural development.*

Keywords: Grassroots, Local Government Administration, Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

The capacity of humans to overcome nature and harness the possibilities in their surroundings, while minimizing any environmental risks, is a crucial element of progress that every government attempts to achieve. Man's adaptation to the environment, whether it be immediate, intermediate, or external, is the foundation for all other forms of development, such as economic, socio-political, and infrastructural growth. Hence, the aspect we will focus on in our analysis of development in this study is the human perspective of development. The reason for this is that individuals constitute the true assets of nations. The fundamental objective of development is to establish a milieu that facilitates individuals to experience a prolonged, robust, and innovative existence.

For development to be successful, it must be pursued as a widespread popular movement that prioritizes the complete utilization of the desire, enthusiasm, intelligence, and efforts of all individuals. To accomplish this, coordination is indeed essential. This coordination necessitates the involvement of the government in this matter. The government assumes a prominent role in guiding and organising the endeavours of individuals and groups to achieve developmental goals and objectives by formulating and implementing suitable policies.

Development, as a goal focused on the well-being of individuals, should primarily be concentrated in areas where the majority of people live. It is important to note that rural development is a significant indicator of social change and development in the present day. The statement is valid since a country cannot claim to have achieved development if a significant portion of its rural population continues to suffer from extreme poverty, deprivation, and socio-economic destitution (Akhakpe, Fatile, and Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012). According to Obasi (2013), rural development is the fundamental basis of national development.

The bulk of Nigeria's population resides in rural areas, making it largely a rural society (Ele; Nwuke; in Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013). Approximately 70 per cent of the Nigerian population resides in rural areas (Aboyade, in Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013). Rural areas are defined as geographical regions outside densely populated metropolitan centres, such as towns, cities, and suburban villages. The people living in these areas are mostly involved in agricultural activities, as well as basic or primitive forms of secondary and tertiary economic activity.

A rural area, in contrast to an urban area, is a countryside region where the population is mostly engaged in activities related to primary production, such as agriculture, fishing, and livestock keeping. According to Nyagba (used in Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013), around 90 per cent of the rural workforce is involved in agriculture either directly or indirectly. Rural development is a long-standing occurrence in the political history of Nigeria. Indeed, it has penetrated the three significant political eras, specifically the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods, under various designations. In the pre-colonial era, self-help development operations in Nigeria focused on mobilising both human and material resources to achieve self-improvement. They utilised collective endeavours as a means of mobilising community resources to offer physical enhancements and financial amenities. The community

utilised self-help methods to construct homesteads, paths, roads, bridges, and a market (Idode, 1989). This task was executed by appropriate institutions such as age grade, town union, or village council, among others.

During the colonial period, British policy transformed community development efforts into a mandatory and forceful endeavour by implementing the warrant chief system, imposing taxes, and coercing labour from the population. The measures that disrupted community development initiatives during the pre-colonial era were considered contrary to the notion of collective self-help. The colonial policies resulted in significant disparities in community development, which continue to have an impact even after independence. As a result, the government placed great importance on self-help initiatives to supplement their efforts, particularly in the post-civil war period (Anikeze, 2014).

The government made additional attempts to stimulate the development of the grassroots, resulting in the implementation of the 1976 local government reform, which aimed to foster new opportunities for future progress. However, the period from 1973 to the present has been a significant turning point in the initiatives aimed at developing rural areas in Nigeria. During this time, the government made intentional efforts to mobilise the population for rural development. Several task forces and organisations were established to coordinate, supervise, and collaborate directly with individuals for self-help initiatives. Notable among these programmes include. The National Directory of Employment (NDE), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS) Mabogunje (1980).

The significant voids formed by colonial policies in the organisation of community and rural development have yet to be filled. Therefore, the government's efforts to improve rural areas in Nigeria have not been successful due to numerous problems faced by the local government. This study aims to investigate these issues.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The topic of development, both in general and specifically in rural areas, has been a matter of discussion among scholars, experts in development, and others with a vested interest in the matter. This has been demonstrated via the implementation of many policies and programmes aimed at tackling the developmental issues confronting Nigerian society. Various administrations, from the National Development Plans to the Transformation Agenda, have implemented initiatives to reduce poverty, foster economic growth, create jobs, and enhance the overall welfare of the population.

The rural residents find themselves in an ironic scenario where the necessary elements for their development are readily available within their immediate surroundings. Their inability to effectively influence government attention towards their situation, combined with their limited knowledge of available resources and opportunities, as well as the absence of necessary organizational structures to utilize these resources for improving their living conditions, hinders the development of these resources.

The local government, which is responsible for creating a system to effectively and efficiently utilise local resources, both human and material, has been unsuccessful in doing so. The local government, being the government level closest to the people at the grassroots level, is expected to take a prominent role in the community and rural development initiatives by utilising the agricultural capabilities of the population and mobilising the community for self-help endeavours, among other tasks. This is because the central government may be disconnected from the specific issues faced by local government areas due to the vastness of its responsibilities.

Unfortunately, the federal government has taken the lead in rural development efforts by imposing standardized solutions to address local difficulties that vary in type, and scale, and are specific to distinct regions. An illustrative instance is the federal government's proposition to create the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) spanning diverse local communities in Nigeria, without considering that certain rural villages may possess greater potential in fishing or farming rather than livestock herding.

The situation mentioned above highlights the ongoing problem of limited independence for local governments to express their unique developmental requirements and fulfil them, taking into consideration the capabilities, distinctiveness, and sensitivities of the local population. Therefore, despite ongoing scholarly debates on the persistence of local and grassroots administration, this research focuses on examining the administration at the grassroots level and its impact on rural development in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to investigate grassroots administration and rural development of the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Ascertain the relationship between local government and community self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.
2. Examine the relationship between local government and agro-based rural development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What relationship exists between local government and community self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state?
2. What nature of relationship exists between local government and agro-based rural development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state?

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. **Ho:** There is no significant positive relationship between local government and community self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.
2. **Ho:** There is no significant positive relationship between local government and agro-based rural development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Local Government

Local government can be defined as government at the local or grassroots level exercised According to the Local Government Reform Handbook of 1992, representative councils are legally created to execute specified powers within defined boundaries. A local government is a form of administration that operates at the grassroots level to address the specific needs of the local population. Modern municipal administrations have emerged as a result of the fusion of Western and traditional cultural influences. The English pattern has served as a significant source of inspiration for English-speaking countries and other regions that have been influenced by them, such as Asia and Africa. To comprehend the current state of local government, it is crucial to grasp the foundation of its historical development and progression. The establishment of local government did not occur to create a coordinated system of administration for a certain set of services. Instead, it gradually grew in response to many individual needs and requests.

Historically, modern local government emerged as a component of the libertarian movements throughout the early 19th century. The introduction of local government systems in most nations was driven by a strong ideological belief in granting liberty to local communities to develop according to their preferences. The concept of local self-government was regarded as a manifestation of societal freedom. In the United States, the expansion of local government institutions occurred as a result of a combination of residents' requests, pressures from interest groups, and the state government's acceptance. The jurisdiction of the Local Government is restricted to a specific geographic area, and its responsibilities mostly involve providing civic amenities to the population under its jurisdiction.

A Local Government operates within the parameters set by the statute that established it. The Local Government is subject to the authority of the state or provincial government, which oversees and regulates its operations. However, the Local Government carries out a significant number of functions. The Local Government has been engaging in many operations that involve either regulating the behaviour of citizens or providing services such as mass transportation, constructing dwellings for the impoverished, supplying power, establishing health centres, parks, playgrounds, and similar amenities.

Rural Development

Rural development is a constituent element of the overarching objective of national development. Rural development is unequivocally the bedrock of national growth (Obasi, 2013). Emphasizing the point, a rural area is defined as a geographical region that is located outside of heavily populated urban areas such as towns, cities, and suburban villages. The people living in rural areas are primarily involved in agriculture, as well as basic and rudimentary forms of secondary and tertiary activities. A rural area, in contrast to an urban area, denotes the countryside where the population mostly engaged in primary production activities such as

agriculture, fishing, and livestock keeping. According to Nyagba (cited in Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013), over 90 per cent of the rural workforce is involved in agriculture, either directly or indirectly.

Rural development refers to the initiatives undertaken by the government or its agencies to enhance the quality of life for people living in rural regions by providing them with necessities (Ewuim, 2010). The World Bank report referenced in Ewuim, (2010) defines rural development as a deliberate approach aimed at enhancing the economic and social well-being of a particular demographic - the impoverished rural population. It entails providing the advantages of progress to the impoverished individuals who rely on rural areas for their livelihood. Rural development should be understood as the comprehensive and profound alteration of economic and social structures, connections, and processes that occur in rural areas (Todaro and Smith, 2006). Among its broad goals are:

- The creation of more employment opportunities both on and off farms;
- More equitable access to arable land;
- More equitable distribution of rural income;
- Broadly distributed improvements in health, nutrition, and housing; and
- A broadened access to the kind of formal and non-formal education that will have direct impact and relevance to the needs and aspirations of rural dwellers.

This necessitates the formulation of a development strategy that focuses on the "rural individual", taking into account their requirements, ambitions, and the resources at their disposal. This development strategy aims to eliminate backwardness in rural areas by addressing all aspects of human endeavour, including economic, social, intellectual, cultural, moral, and fundamental human rights. It emphasizes justice, individual rights, and peace. The underlying principle of rural development is to implement intentional programmes that provide capital and credit, infrastructure facilities, essential public utilities (such as water, electricity, basic education, and healthcare), and employment opportunities in rural areas. This is done to improve the well-being of the people living in rural areas. Therefore, although rural development may still be understood as an increase in per capita income, it should also result in significant changes in terms of long-lasting enhancements in quality of life, such as the reduction of poverty, unemployment, socio-economic inequality, ignorance, hunger, diseases, and homelessness.

Rural development is a deliberate endeavour to improve the living conditions of people living in rural areas and alleviate their difficulties, to enhance the overall quality of life in these communities. Rural development is a complex method that involves multiple sectors of the economy and institutions, including the local government, interest groups, civil society organizations, and community-based organizations. The coordination of the activities of these organizations in sectors like as agriculture, infrastructure, healthcare, and education is essential, and this is where the local government, as a governmental entity, plays a crucial role. The local government, as a legitimate and authoritative institution, has an advantage over other institutions in coordinating joint efforts between agencies to achieve the aims of rural development.

Local Government, Self Help and Rural Development

The self-help approach to rural development has been a longstanding practice in traditional African civilizations. Before the establishment of colonial rule, individuals throughout history had formed various groupings and utilised shared resources to enhance the physical infrastructure and functional amenities inside their communities. Communal labour was utilised in various tasks such as the construction of homesteads, clearing of farm areas, and roads, and even the creation of public facilities like market stalls and town halls (Akpomuvie, 2010).

The communal self-help method of development refers to a collective effort by community members to organize themselves, create groups, and establish individual plans to address their needs and resolve their issues. The plans are implemented, relying heavily on community resources and effort. The self-help model requires the active involvement of all community members. Individual participation in rural development activities entails engaging inhabitants in a project that necessitates a democratic approach. The premise is that every member contributes to the resolution of issues that directly impact them.

Nitzberg (2005) defines the self-help strategy as a method for individuals or groups to enhance their contributions for personal gain. He contends that a community that exclusively depends on the government or external organisations to fulfil their requirements is not actively involved in cultivating an autonomous society, but rather a community that will perpetually face financial insolvency and remain stagnant. Nitzberg (2005) said that self-help should be achieved through a sense of ownership, sponsorship, or involvement from the group. It should cultivate a feeling of personal satisfaction in one's accomplishments. Even if individuals provide only a minimal proportion of the resources to the project, their contribution will undoubtedly instil in them a sense of pride

and ownership as a collective. Individuals who actively participate in effective self-improvement endeavours frequently develop into a valuable source of community guidance and influence.

The opinions presented by Nitzberg, (2005) in the preceding paragraph have a remarkable similarity to one of the scholastic rationales for the presence of local government within a broader system of governance. The arguments presented by advocates of the democratic participation theory are firmly grounded in the self-help methodology. The principles of the democratic participatory theory resemble the self-help approach, in which the local population is afforded the chance to democratically organize themselves and choose their local representatives. The self-help strategy, although still encompassing political mobilization, extends to encompass various participatory actions aimed at improving the environmental and living conditions of the local population.

The notion of community self-help emphasises that growth should originate from the people themselves, achieved via collaborative endeavours and utilisation of available resources. The scholar also suggested that self-help in rural development requires community people to utilise their knowledge and abilities, along with the available resources, to improve and develop their communities. These findings align with the research conducted by Brennan, Barnett, and Lesmeister (2006), which suggests that the acquisition of relevant skills and a positive mindset can empower individuals to meet their fundamental needs, become self-sufficient, and reduce reliance on other organisations. Self-help promotes the idea that individuals should take responsibility for improving their situation by utilising local efforts and resources. The approach has been acknowledged as a novel paradigm for rural development. The concept of self-help is integral to the language of rural development and is closely linked to ideas such as self-reliance, mutual assistance, indigenous engagement, and national progress.

Based on the statement above, it is evident that the main advocates of rural development believe that self-help activities mostly arise from the needs of the people themselves, rather than being prompted by community agents. Specifically, the initiative must align with the desired objectives of the individuals involved and originate from inside the group itself. Furthermore, it requires the pooling of financial and other resources to collectively work towards achieving these goals. Therefore, the majority of self-help initiatives are conducted to reduce the occurrence of poverty in rural areas. Poverty is a state of life marked by poor health, inadequate nutrition, lack of education, and living in extremely unsanitary conditions, to the point where it hinders the ability of individuals and society as a whole to reach their full potential. The local government's function in this context is to organize and facilitate the many components of the rural community in their collaborative efforts to achieve rural development objectives.

Local Government, Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture is the primary pillar of numerous economies. Across the globe, the establishment of a sustainable economy is closely intertwined with the progress of agriculture. Agriculture is widely regarded as a catalyst for the comprehensive advancement of any nation. Therefore, the sector plays a crucial role in promoting economic growth and industrialization in emerging countries, as well as being a key factor in reducing unemployment rates. Hence, the growth of agriculture is of utmost significance in guaranteeing food and nutritional security, generating income and jobs, and fostering industrialization and the general economic progress of the nation. The technological advancements achieved by the world's most developed economies can be traced back to innovations in agriculture. Although the sector's proportion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many nations has been decreasing, it nevertheless remains a significant portion of the GDP, particularly in emerging countries.

Development economists have consistently seen the agriculture sector as a crucial component of the development process. However, the perception of its relevance has changed over time. Early development theorists prioritised industrialization, relying on agriculture to supply the required food, raw materials, and workforce that would eventually transition into the industrial sector. Subsequently, there was a shift in focus towards agriculture in the development process. The anticipation of technological advancements in agriculture, known as the 'green revolution', indicated that agriculture may catalyze economic growth (Wilber and Jameson, 1992).

The agricultural sector had a crucial role in driving the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, propelling the agrarian economies of several European countries forward (Ojenagbo, 2011). Undoubtedly, the significance of agriculture in the economy of any nation cannot be overstated. For example, in the United States of America, agriculture accounts for approximately 1.1% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product. In China, it accounts for 13% of the country's GDP. In Australia, it provides 2.6% of the GDP. South Africa sees a 9% contribution, while Israel's GDP is boosted by 2.5%. Australia's GDP is further supported by 12%, Argentina by 9%, Egypt by 13.5%, and Nigeria by a significant 26.8% of its total GDP. Similarly, agriculture serves as a significant source of employment in many emerging nations. It constitutes 25% of the workforce in Brazil, 32% in Egypt, 3.7% in Israel, and a substantial 70% in Nigeria.

The aforementioned statistics indicate a negative correlation between a country's level of development and the proportion of agriculture's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product. Hence, the significance of the agricultural sector in creating jobs and fostering general economic progress in a developing nation like Nigeria cannot be underestimated. The majority of public policies in Nigeria, particularly since gaining independence in 1960, have been designed to enhance food security, supply the agricultural resources required by the manufacturing sector to generate sufficient employment and income for poverty reduction, and also to generate significant foreign exchange earnings.

Upon gaining independence, Nigeria implemented a mixed economy. The reliance on both oil and agriculture increased her potential for economic growth. Agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, and fishing accounted for almost 66% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). During that time, Nigeria held the title of being the top global exporter of groundnut and palm produce, as well as the third largest producer and exporter of cocoa. The abundance of these natural resources bestowed each location with a distinct characteristic. For instance, the cultivation of palm produce was predominantly concentrated in the Eastern region, while cocoa was primarily grown in the Western region and groundnut in the Northern region. Since gaining independence,

Nigeria has implemented multiple agricultural initiatives to foster employment, spurring industrialization, and promoting general economic growth in the country. In Nigeria, an agrarian economy relies on land as the fundamental basis for agricultural production, which is crucial for achieving sustainable development. Agricultural output continues to be the primary pillar of the Nigerian economy. Due to the predominantly agrarian population, agriculture has historically served as the primary means of sustenance for our community. Agriculture supports the livelihoods of more than 70 per cent of the people and serves as a significant supplier of raw materials for agro-allied businesses. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in generating the necessary foreign exchange (Okumadewa and Olayemi 1999). After gaining independence, the Nigerian economy was mostly dependent on the agricultural sector, which played a central role in the development of the region.

Agriculture constituted around 66% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nevertheless, the industry has experienced a significant decrease in its significance and contribution to national development throughout time. Prostitutes have been forsaken in the quest for crude oil. The crisis originated with the 'Oil boom', which subsequently resulted in the swift deterioration of the Agricultural sector. As a result, Nigeria shifted from being a significant exporter of agricultural products to becoming a significant importer. As a result, there was a decrease in the number of people engaged in agricultural activities in Nigeria, leading to a rise in unemployment rates in the region.

The current economic predicament in the country has been attributed by development economists to the underperformance of the agriculture sector. The agriculture industry in Nigeria saw a significant decline during the oil boom era (1972-1975), which is seen as the most severe damage inflicted on the sector. Research on Nigeria's agricultural production landscape reveals that the majority of production is carried out by small-scale rural farmers, who account for approximately 85 per cent of the overall output. The small-scale farmers exhibited a significant reliance on the agricultural labour market, minimal or nonexistent savings or storage facilities, unfavourable cultural habits, and high labour costs. The farmers' socio-economic and production characteristics, along with inconsistent and unfocused government policies, as well as an inadequate infrastructural base (including poor road networking and transportation system), have collectively hindered the sector, leading to low production and subsequently high prices of food items.

This inevitably impacted the unemployment rate in the country. To achieve this objective, the local government can utilize the agricultural capabilities of the rural communities to develop suitable policies and programmes that will facilitate the provision of essential support systems, such as roads, storage facilities, and credit schemes, to enhance agricultural production. This is because most of the fertile grounds suitable for optimal agricultural productivity are located in rural communities rather than highly populated city centres.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher bases this analysis on the principle of decentralization. Decentralization refers to the transfer of legitimate authority and duty from the federal government to sub-national governments. This transfer of authority encompasses political, administrative, and financial jurisdiction, along with the corresponding obligations that accompany it. Within the research, two primary types of decentralization are identified: de-concentration and devolution (Olowu, as referenced in Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, and Nkomah, 2016).

De-concentration refers to the process of shifting governmental responsibilities and resources from the central authority to the local level, while nevertheless operating under the same administrative framework. It signifies an internal method of assigning responsibilities among officials within the organization. However, devolution involves the delegation of specific duties and resources

to the community, typically through its elected (rather than appointed) representatives. Decentralization is currently seen as a method for developing nations to utilize local resources and promote national development.

Given the clear evidence that neither federal nor state governments can ensure rural development on their own, it is essential to transfer power, authority, and responsibility from the central or state government to the local government. This transfer is necessary to promote development in rural areas. Therefore, it is common for many industrialized and developing economies that function under a federal system of government to decentralize certain areas of their public budget.

Application of the Theory to the Study

The principle underlying decentralization is that local government, as a component of sub-national government, should be granted authority over their affairs and progress (Nyerere, cited in Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Nkomah, 2016). This is significant due to the geographical isolation of the federal government from rural communities. Decentralization is thought to enhance the competence of local governments in managing their affairs. The theory of decentralization, which elucidates the delegation of authority and responsibility for public activities from the central government to subordinates, renders it more fitting and relevant for this subject. To achieve the goals of this study more effectively, it is important to transfer the outlined responsibilities of the first two objectives with the appropriate autonomy and authority, as suggested by the decentralization hypothesis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design employed in this study consisted of a blend of survey and historical research designs. The survey study design allows us to utilize questionnaire items to collect data to describe the characteristics of a current state or situation. The focus of this study is on individuals, specifically their ideas, opinions, attitudes, motives, and behaviours, which are crucial aspects of their lives. A historical research design aims to gather, authenticate, and integrate material from the past to establish factual information that supports or challenges a hypothesis. The methodology employed involves the utilization of secondary sources alongside a diverse range of primary documentary material, including diaries, government records, reports, archives, and non-textual information.

Population of Study

The population of the study constitutes the inhabitants of the Ohaji/Egbema local government area of Imo state. The population size of the study is 251,900. This figure is according to the 2016 population projection figures from the National Population Commission.

Sample Size Determination

In determining the sample size, the researcher used the Taro Yamane (1967) method. Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes. This formula will be used to calculate the sample size for this study below. A 95% confidence level will be assumed. Thus, the formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Sampling error (in this case 5 per cent)

1 = Constant

The sample size is therefore computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{251,900}{1 + (251,900 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{251,900}{630.75}$$

$$n = \frac{251,900}{1+251,900 (0.5\%)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{251,900}{1+629.75}$$

$$n = \frac{251,900}{630.75}$$

$$\text{Therefore, } n = 399$$

A total of three hundred and ninety-nine (399) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, out of which three hundred and forty (340) were filled and returned. This represents 85.2 per cent of the total respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The survey data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics were employed to get the mean, while the correlation coefficient analysis was utilized to assess the hypotheses. This is an attempt to determine the nature of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The chosen threshold of significance was set at a 5 per cent confidence interval. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized, with Strongly Agree assigned a numerical value of 5, Agree assigned a value of 4, Undecided assigned a value of 3, Disagree assigned a value of 2, and Strongly Disagree assigned a value of 1. Mean $[\chi] = \frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5} = 3.0$

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Decision Rule: The criterion mean was set at a cut point of 3.0. Consequently, any mean score equal to or more than 3.0 was categorized as Agreed/Accepted, and any mean score below 3.0 was classified as Disagreed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Test of hypotheses using SPSS version 23

Decision rule: If the probability is below the alpha threshold, the alternative hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted. The level of significance is set at 0.05.

Hypotheses One

Ho: There is no significant positive relationship between local government and community self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Hi: There is a significant positive relationship between local government and community self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Correlations

		Local Govt.	Self-help initiatives
Local Govt.	Pearson Correlation	1	.609
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042
	N	340	340
Self-help initiatives	Pearson Correlation	.609	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	
	N	340	340

The correlation coefficient for hypothesis one, namely the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, is 0.609. This implies a good association between local government and self-help development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Decision Rule: Based on the calculation above, the probability value of 0.042 is below the significance level of 0.05. Thus, we refute the null hypothesis and embrace the alternative hypothesis, which asserts a substantial positive correlation between local government and community self-help development initiatives in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Hypotheses Two

Ho: There is no significant positive relationship between local government and agro-based rural development initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Hi: There is a significant positive relationship between local government and agro-based rural development initiatives in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Correlations

	Local Govt.	Agriculture

Local Govt.	Pearson Correlation	1	.558
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.045
	N	340	340
Agriculture	Pearson Correlation	.558	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	
	N	340	340

The correlation coefficient for hypothesis two, namely the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, is 0.558. This implies a good association between local government and agro-based rural development activities in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Decision Rule: Based on the calculation above, the probability value of 0.045 is below the significance level of 0.05. Thus, we refute the null hypothesis and embrace the alternative hypothesis, which asserts a substantial positive correlation between local government and agro-based rural development activities in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Summary of Findings

The following findings were made from the Analysis:

1. There exists a notable and favourable correlation between the local government and community-driven development projects in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area in Imo state, Nigeria.
2. There exists a substantial and favourable correlation between the local government and agro-based rural development projects in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state.

Conclusion

The study argues that rural development plays a crucial role in the establishment and continuation of local government, as it is through this process that the people at the grassroots level directly experience the effects of government. The persistent underdevelopment of rural areas in Nigeria prompts concerns over the ongoing viability of local government institutions. These concerns revolve around the core purpose of local councils in Nigeria. To guarantee that local council authorities are attentive and fully aware of their obligations, the following recommendations are essential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions reached in this study, we recommend the following;

1. The state government in Imo, Nigeria should establish a strong legal framework that will be adopted by the local council authorities. This framework will incorporate self-help development initiatives into the broader framework for community and rural development.
2. The Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state should involve the rural farmers to effectively utilise their agricultural capabilities for swift and enhanced economic growth and development. The agro-based strategy should aim to include all aspects of the value chains in agricultural processing, raw materials development, and export potential.

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