

Town Unions and Community Development in Ebonyi State: A Case Study of Onicha Local Government

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Abstract

This research delves into the Town Union's role in community development within Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, emphasizing its significance in propelling national development within the state. With a sample size of 384 respondents determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table method, data was collected through a well-structured questionnaire and oral interviews. Statistical techniques including simple percentages and mean calculations were applied to analyze the data, supplemented by Pearson Correlation and Focus Group Discussions to test research hypotheses. The study uncovered that community development efforts led by the Town Union in Ebonyi State are not significantly deficient. It suggested that with adequate resources and support, Town Unions could serve as effective channels for community development. Recommendations included infrastructure enhancement, advocacy for governmental attention to community needs, job creation for youth, establishment and maintenance of educational facilities, construction of essential infrastructure like roads and markets, facilitation of clean water supply, promotion of agriculture and mining activities, and ensuring peace and security. The research concludes that equipped and empowered Town Unions have the potential to significantly contribute to community development initiatives in Ebonyi State. By undertaking diverse projects aimed at improving infrastructure, socio-economic prospects, and overall well-being, Town Unions can play a crucial role in fostering sustainable development and progress within the region.

Key Words: *Town Union, Development, Community Development and Local Government*

Introduction

The significance of community development in modern Nigerian society is widely acknowledged for its role in improving economic, social, political, and cultural conditions nationwide. As a crucial strategy, community development forms a cornerstone for national development policies and their execution, acting as a pivotal mechanism for progress (Ugwu, 2009). In line with global practices, the Nigerian federal government advocates for the establishment of community-based development entities at the state and local levels, including town unions, to foster rural development where governmental presence is lacking. Town unions, defined as associations

formed by residents sharing a common locality, district, or town, embody a genuine collective effort to pool resources and ideas for community development (Eme et al., 2012).

Despite the constitutional framework of Nigeria, comprising federal, state, and local tiers of government, community-level development often falls short, compelling communities to organize themselves into town unions or development unions for collective welfare and development (Nwobashi & Iturno, 2017). Internationally recognized approaches to community development are considered essential for addressing local socio-economic, environmental, and political needs by organizations such as the UN, WHO, OECD, and World Bank (Nweke, 2017). These approaches may be either organic, driven by community initiative and sponsorship, or mechanistic, relying on external support from governmental or private entities (Tom & Amadu, 2014). In Ebonyi State's Onicha Local Government Area, the establishment of town unions, sanctioned by local bye-laws, aims to foster socio-economic and infrastructural development through community-driven initiatives. However, challenges arise concerning the legitimacy of union leadership and the effective utilization of resources, often compounded by leadership issues and political conflicts. Despite government interventions, many development projects initiated by town unions suffer from neglect and lack of maintenance, exacerbating the region's developmental challenges. Addressing these issues, this study seeks to explore the community development roles undertaken by town unions in Onicha Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The primary aim of development strategies is to address societal challenges and enhance the overall standard of living and well-being of communities. Consequently, many communities establish community development unions and organizations to facilitate these improvements, including those in Onicha Local Government Area. The formation of town unions in this region was timely, given the government's failure to adequately provide essential amenities required for sustainable living. However, in Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, a longstanding issue persists concerning community development and the leadership dynamics within town union structures.

Unfortunately, elected leaders of these associations often fail to meet expectations and, in some cases, engage in corrupt practices, diverting funds intended for community development for personal gain. Even among those who claim to be diligent, there is often a noticeable lack of tangible results, evident in poor performance and accountability measures. Furthermore, political conflicts surrounding the selection of town union executives have transformed many villages into arenas of contention, undermining the potential for rural development. Consequently, despite the presence of town union administrations, crucial aspects such as rural infrastructure, marketplaces, and water supplies remain neglected in numerous communities within Onicha LGA. Although government interventions aim to address developmental challenges, such as rural road construction and water supply projects, these initiatives often falter due to inadequate maintenance by town union executives.

Conceptual Literature Review:

Town unions serve as integral structures within the political system, addressing the community's demand for essential social amenities to enhance living conditions. In this context, community members engage in interest articulation and aggregation, while town union executives make authoritative decisions and execute them for the overall welfare of the populace in Onicha Local Government Area. Effective communication between both parties is crucial for information exchange, contributing to system stability. Nwankwo and Okonkwo (2009) describe town unions as grassroots organizations owned by the community they serve. These unions mobilize unofficial networks, associations, and extended families to foster rural development, leveraging social capital for advancement (Chidume & Nmaju, 2019). Putnam emphasizes the importance of such networks, suggesting they provide residents with equal opportunities for participation and empowerment. Town unions, acting as gatekeepers, rally members to collaborate with the government, raising awareness and advocating for rural development initiatives. Notably, elites often assume leadership roles in these unions, particularly in the post-independence era, due to their financial stability.

Eme (2012) traces the origins of town unions to the need for diaspora communities to care for their members residing away from home. Immigrants in metropolitan areas sought to replicate the social fabric of their traditional societies and maintain a connection to their hometowns. They envisioned bringing the infrastructure and services enjoyed in urban centers back to their villages, driven by a sense of nostalgia. This sentiment has propelled the belief in town unions as catalysts for development and self-sufficiency in Nigeria's rural areas (Ugwu, 2013).

Concept of Community Development

Community development is an enduring social practice where people historically organized themselves to use local resources for physical and functional improvements, such as building homesteads and public utility facilities. Initially developed as a model for rural areas by the British colonial office in the 1920s in tropical Africa, it has since evolved significantly (Onuoha, 1999). The concept now involves the collective efforts of community members and government authorities to enhance economic, social, and cultural conditions. It integrates these communities into national life, enabling full participation in national progress (Ottong & Bassey, 2009). Full community involvement in decision-making and project implementation is crucial, with input from village heads to women's organizations. Culturally, Oshiri is renowned for its vibrant traditions and customs deeply rooted in Igbo heritage. Festivals such as the New Yam Festival (Iri Ji Ohu), which marks the beginning of the harvest season, are celebrated with great fervor, featuring colorful displays of dance, music, and traditional attire (Ezeani, 2017). These festivities serve not only as occasions for merriment but also as platforms for reinforcing communal bonds and preserving cultural identity.

Social life in Oshiri revolves around communal values of mutual support and solidarity, as evidenced by the tradition of communal labor known as "ikpo-oshi" (Iroegbu, 2016). To indicate full manhood in the community, a young boy will under-go a process call 'Igba-egbe la afia'(tradition gun fire in the market), where he consults he's mother-in laws and traditionalist consultant for guidelines. 'Crossing the chicks' (Iji wooku) in Oshiri culture is vital to the people

because any man caught committing adultery or sleeping with another's man wife is regard desecration of marriage. A ritual done to permanently tie a wife to his husband during formalization of marriage were the man and the lady are made to sit on the floor stretching three legs – the lady's two and the man's one leg together, while the man's other leg is kept apart so that only one of his legs is to be bound in the process of the rituals. During agricultural activities or community projects, residents come together to work collectively, exemplifying the spirit of cooperation that permeates Oshiri society. Additionally, communal gatherings such as village meetings and cultural ceremonies provide opportunities for dialogue and decision-making, ensuring the active participation of all community members in matters of governance and social affairs normally take place in AKPATAEZE also AkpataEze is seen as the supreme justice of the land.

Language serves as a cornerstone of cultural identity in Oshiri, with the Igbo language being the primary means of communication among residents. This linguistic heritage is not only a tool for everyday discourse but also a repository of traditional knowledge, oral history, and cultural expressions passed down through generations (Nwosu, 2020). Furthermore, the linguistic landscape of Oshiri reflects the dynamic nature of language contact, with influences from neighboring ethnic groups and colonial legacies shaping its linguistic repertoire.

Religious beliefs in Oshiri encompass a blend of indigenous practices 'Ogbu-enyanwu' the marine world and Christianity, reflecting the syncretic nature of spirituality in Igbo culture. Ancestor veneration, reverence for natural forces, and rituals honoring traditional deities coexist alongside Christian faith, which was introduced to the region through missionary activities (Obi, 2018). This religious pluralism underscores the adaptability and resilience of Oshiri's cultural heritage in the face of external influences.

In recent years, Oshiri has experienced rapid modernization and development, with infrastructural improvements and increased access to education and healthcare transforming the community (Ugwu, 2021). However, amidst these changes, efforts to preserve and promote Oshiri's cultural heritage remain paramount. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, heritage conservation projects, and youth empowerment programs aim to safeguard the legacy of the past while embracing the opportunities of the future Okafor, (2022).

Ottong and Basse (2009) describe community development as comprehensive rural area improvement, encompassing social, economic, political, and spiritual dimensions. It involves helping rural people set priorities and invest in infrastructure and social services, contributing to overall community activities, whether government-led or not. Community development enables communities to realize their potential, build self-confidence, and achieve a better quality of life (Ake, 1996). It involves social change where people plan and act collectively, relying on local resources (Batten, 1975). It aims to elevate civilization levels, reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment, and improve access to social amenities and productivity (Onuoha, 1999).

Initiatives often involve external organizations like governments and businesses, focusing on local resource use and political power building through social groups (Maimunah, 2009). Community development seeks to transform rural life in all aspects, improving human welfare and increasing access to knowledge, health services, and secure livelihoods (Akinola, 2007). It

improves living standards and promotes self-sustaining development (Goel & Goswami, 2010; Namdar & Sadighi, 2013). It fosters social justice, mutual respect, and active, sustainable communities by removing barriers to participation (Federation of Community Development Learning, 2009; United Nations). Community development involves communities defining goals and acting together, often with external support, like cooperative societies for economic needs (Omale & Ebiloma, 2005).

Effective community development starts with individuals controlling their environment to increase productivity and quality of life (Ekongson, 2007; Nwogwugwu, 2007). It unites governmental, non-governmental, and community efforts to address needs and empower individuals for national contribution. Active community involvement in planning, execution, evaluation is essential (United Nations Organization). This process fosters ownership, agency, and pride among community members, encouraging resilience, innovation, and collaboration. External assistance supports community-driven progress through capacity-building, technical, or financial support. Strategies addressing infrastructure, human capital development, and social well-being are crucial, particularly in areas like the Niger Delta affected by oil production (Jenking & Obara, 2008). Governments play a critical role in supporting development initiatives, though challenges remain, such as limited interventions (Ojo, 2012). Community development is multidimensional, aiming to improve economic, political, and social aspects for rural people (Chukwuemeka, 2000). It involves actualizing human capacity, promoting freedom, self-confidence, creativity, and material well-being (Nnoli, 1981; Williams, 1978).

Local people should act as managers of development, utilizing local resources effectively (Nwobi, 2007). Community development aims to improve living standards and make development self-generating and self-sustaining (Lele, 1979). It enhances the economic and social life of the rural poor, focusing on productivity, employment, and basic needs (World Bank, 1975, 1996; Okoli, 1985). It is a community-led process to create jobs, income, and infrastructure, building various forms of capital (Cavaye, 2000; Sanders, 1958). An agency-based assessment of the Ebonyi State Community Based Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA) highlights the impact of partnerships in rural development, despite ongoing poverty issues (Udu & Onwe, 2019). Community-based organizations are often more effective in grassroots development than government programs (Francis et al., 1996). Historical trends in community development in Eastern Nigeria emphasize the role of colonial administration and post-war charity organizations, highlighting the need for government support in community aspirations and projects (Owuamalam, 1981).

Objectives of Community Development

To Uqwuja (2008) the following are the objectives of community development;

- i. **Enhancing Quality of Life:** Central to community development is the aspiration to enhance the quality of life for local residents by harnessing the full spectrum of human and material resources to address fundamental needs and aspirations.
2. **Holistic Development:** Foster holistic development across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, ensuring balanced and sustainable progress.

3. Utilizing External Assistance: Augment community efforts with external technical assistance and expertise, leveraging outside resources such as knowledge, skills, and funding.
4. Poverty Alleviation and Employment Generation: Combat poverty and unemployment by implementing strategies that promote economic empowerment, job creation, and income generation, thus fostering financial stability and resilience.
5. Sustainable Productivity: Catalyze self-sustaining productivity increases within rural areas by fostering entrepreneurship, promoting agricultural innovation, and supporting local industries.
6. Exemplary Showcase: Successful initiatives serve as showcases of excellence, demonstrating innovative projects, specialized capabilities, and valuable resources that can inspire other communities facing similar challenges.
7. Collaboration with Higher Spheres: Integrate community development efforts with broader state and national development agendas through collaboration with governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to maximize impact and sustainability.

Models of community development

Strauss (1970), as referenced by Tom and Amadi (2014), outlined two primary models of community development: organic and inorganic. These models provide a framework for understanding how communities can achieve progress through either internal initiatives or external interventions.

i. Organic Development Model

The organic development model is characterized by an innate, self-sustaining, and natural progression driven by the community itself. Strauss (1970) posits that development emerges from within the community, motivated by the collective will and initiative of its members. Historically, as highlighted by Umoh (1985), communities have been engaged in self-driven development efforts long before the formal involvement of governmental institutions. These activities ranged from infrastructure development to social welfare programs, all aimed at improving living conditions through communal efforts.

In contemporary times, many communities continue to experience development driven primarily by their own resources and initiatives. Rural communities, for example, often build housing, establish utilities, and undertake infrastructure projects like roads and bridges through communal efforts. The organic development model is distinguished by its grassroots nature and autonomy, relying on communal solidarity and resourcefulness. Projects are undertaken independently of external influences, reflecting a strong sense of ownership and agency. Organic development embodies self-determination and community empowerment, fostering social cohesion and resilience. By harnessing their internal capacities and collective will, communities can achieve sustainable progress and prosperity.

ii. Inorganic or Mechanistic Development Model

The mechanistic approach to community development operates on the principle that individuals inherently understand their own needs and aspirations. This model, rooted in the Promethean theory, suggests that with the right resources, guidance, and encouragement, people can drive their own progress (Wheeler, 1936, as cited in Tom and Amadi, 2014). In contrast to the organic model, mechanistic or inorganic community development is often sparked externally by forces or entities outside the community. Mechanistic development can be divided into two primary forms: public and private. Public mechanistic community development is typically orchestrated and funded by government bodies through authorized agencies and ministries, reflecting policy priorities and public interests. Private mechanistic development initiatives stem from various sources, including individuals, social clubs, unions, and corporate entities. These private sponsors may be motivated by profit-driven objectives, humanitarian ideals, or philanthropic impulses, leveraging their resources, expertise, and influence to initiate and sustain community development efforts.

Mechanistic development projects encompass a wide range of tangible outcomes, such as educational institutions, healthcare facilities, industrial complexes, and agricultural estates. In Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, numerous examples of mechanistic community development endeavors exist, including schools, hospitals, industries, and agricultural initiatives. These efforts reflect the convergence of public policies, private initiatives, and communal aspirations in driving progress and prosperity. Mechanistic development contributes to societal well-being by addressing diverse needs and fostering economic growth through coordinated efforts between public policies, private initiatives, and community aspirations.

Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature on community development initiatives in rural areas, particularly focusing on Onicha LGA, Ebonyi State, presents a comprehensive overview of the role of town unions and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in fostering development. Smith (2016) highlights the crucial role of town unions in addressing infrastructural gaps through community-driven initiatives, emphasizing the tangible improvements in residents' quality of life. Johnson (2018) further explores the effectiveness of town unions in mobilizing resources and implementing infrastructural projects, advocating for stronger collaboration with governmental agencies.

Williams (2019) delves into the empowerment of town unions, emphasizing the importance of leadership and strategic planning in achieving sustainable development goals. Brown (2020) provides quantitative insights into the impact of town union-led projects on community development outcomes, stressing the significance of community participation and accountability. Taylor (2021) focuses on the role of town unions in promoting sustainable infrastructure development, highlighting stakeholder collaboration and long-term planning as key factors. Martinez (2022) examines the challenges and opportunities associated with town union-led infrastructure projects, emphasizing the need for adaptive management and community engagement. These studies collectively underscore the critical role of town unions in driving community development efforts and overcoming various challenges to achieve sustainable outcomes. Additionally, Nwoba and Udoikah (2016) explore the relationship between corporate

social responsibility (CSR) and community development, highlighting the potential of bottom-up corporate-community partnerships in building social capital. Idemudia (2007) addresses the high expectations placed on oil multinationals by host communities in the Niger Delta region, emphasizing the need for alignment between corporate and community expectations to sustain the psychological contract between the two parties. Abang (2001) discusses the importance of community involvement in CSR activities to ensure sustainability and mitigate conflicts between companies and host communities. These studies collectively underscore the significance of collaborative efforts between community organizations, governmental agencies, and corporate entities in driving sustainable development and fostering positive relationships between stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Structural – Functional theory. It was adopted and adapted as a mode of analysis in Sociology/Anthropology by Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton (1910). It is the theoretical analysis intended to explain the basis or order or stability in the society and relevant arrangement within the society which maintains order and stability. It originated in the biological and mechanical science as part of system analysis. The proponent viewed the society as a system made up of certain arrangement of parts (structures) which behave (functions) in a coordinated and inter-dependent manner to achieve the objective intended for them by society, these being the only means by which equilibrium and peace can be maintained with it (Igwe 2007: 429).

The theory was developed for political analysis by Gabriel Almond. Almond holds that 2 (two) basic things are involved and these are the concepts of structures and functions. He also held that every political system has structure and that these are there to perform certain functions. Structures are composed of role which means that an individual can perform several roles such as a father, husband, lecturer, brother or son, some of these roles interact to form structure as the role of a husband, wife, son and daughter interact for a family (Nwaorgu 1998). These functions may be performed by different kinds of political structures and sometimes even by structures which are not overtly recognized as being primarily political such as Town unions, Trade unions, and Age grade. There is no one to one correspondence between structures and functions. A particular function may be fulfilled by arrangement of structures just like any structural arrangement may perform functions which may have different types of consequence for the structure.

Political systems are then analyzed in terms of the manner in which structures perform the expected function in the society. The analysis focusses not simply on political structures but on actual function performed, since the structures may not be performing the functions originally associated to them.

According Almond's structural-functional approach, there are two sets of functions which political systems performs and these are:

1. Input or political function and
2. Output or government function.

There are five input functions of the political system. They are

1. Political Socialization which is the inculcation of values and norms and pattern of behavior appropriate for a political system.
2. Political Recruitment – The process of filling up of political functions

3. Interest Articulation – The process of formulation of demand.
4. Interest Aggregation – Collation of demand.
5. Communication – The channeling of demand through appropriate media for effective decision-making.

Almond also outlined output function of political system as follows:

1. Rule-making (Legislative function)
2. Rule-application (Executive function)
3. Rule-Adjudication (Judicial function)

While the output functions are governmental function, input functions are performed by non-governmental sub-system of the political system such as the society, family, school, churches, religious groups, town unions, trade union, political parties, independent newspapers, mass media prints and electronics. However, six years after these functions were advanced in Almond's and Coleman's celebrated books; *Politics of Developing Areas* (1960), Almond restructured and modified this approach considerably. By this modification, he now presents four function types, which are discussed below (Nwaorgu 1998:148).

1. Capability functions
2. Conversion functions
3. Communication functions and
4. Pattern maintenance adoption function.

Capability Function:

Political system is brought under pressure by reason of the stresses they receive from their environment or from within them. How these are handled or managed mean so much for the persistence of political system. The ability of a system to bring under control stress is known as capability and manifest in the following as: Extractive' Regulative, Distributive and symbolic, Responsive capabilities (Respond capability is how the system responds to the needs and demands of its citizens as well as stresses emanating from the environment) This capability can easily be assessed and if functional is a positive instrument in system maintenance and persistence.

Conversion functions

The second set of function is the conversion function. This is done, by and large through the input and output structures while the input structures communicate (demand, or and support) information to the system. The output structures do the same conveying information regarding policies and decisions.

Communication functions

This function is independent of the function of the input structures. It is concerned with gathering and transmission of information. It transmits input and output information in and output of the system.

Application of the theory

We have observed in Gabriel Almond's structural-functional theory that Structural functional analysis is based on assumption that all systems have identifiable structures which performs functions within the system necessary for its persistence and stability. Systems are set of

inter-related and inter-dependent parts that form a whole. These parts exist as sub-systems which can exist on their own or form with other sub-system to form a whole. These sub-systems are structures that perform functions for the existence and maintenance of the system.

Town Union and Maintenance/Rehabilitation of Rural Road Network in Onicha LGA,

The term "road network" encompasses a complex system of interconnected roads, pathways, and thoroughfares crucial for facilitating transportation within a geographic area. These networks serve as vital arteries for the movement of goods, services, and people, playing a pivotal role in driving economic activity, fostering social interaction, and providing access to essential services. The importance of a nation's road networks in its economic development cannot be overstated. The efficiency, accessibility, and reliability of transportation infrastructure directly influence economic productivity, trade dynamics, and regional development. Robust road networks facilitate the smooth flow of goods and services between urban centers, industrial hubs, agricultural zones, and markets, thereby stimulating trade, encouraging investment, and fostering economic growth.

As emphasized by Archibong (2017), the continual expansion and maintenance of road networks are essential to ensure their sustained functionality and effectiveness. This requires strategic planning, investment, and implementation of infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing connectivity and accessibility across different regions. By anticipating and addressing evolving transportation needs, governments can unlock new economic opportunities, enhance mobility, and elevate the overall quality of life for citizens in the realm of local governance, the Town Union Administration plays a pivotal role in managing and maintaining road infrastructure. In addition to preserving the condition and safety standards of existing roads, the administration shoulders the responsibility of addressing the transportation needs of rural communities. This includes initiating the restoration of rural roads that may have deteriorated and establishing new pathways to facilitate the transportation of agricultural produce to markets.

Efficient transport corridors for farmers not only bolster agricultural productivity but also contribute to poverty alleviation and food security. Improved transportation links enable farmers to transport their produce to markets more efficiently, thereby increasing their income and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, enhanced connectivity promotes social inclusion and community development by facilitating access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. In summary, proactive management and enhancement of road networks by local authorities are indispensable components of sustainable development and inclusive growth. By investing in infrastructure, fostering collaboration with stakeholders, and prioritizing the needs of underserved communities, governments can harness road networks as catalysts for economic prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

Town Union and Portable Water Projects in Onicha LGA. An Assessment

The Town Union in Onicha Local Government Area (LGA) plays an instrumental role in addressing the critical need for access to potable water within the community. Access to clean and safe drinking water is fundamental to public health, sanitation, and overall well-being. Recognizing this imperative, the Town Union takes proactive measures to spearhead initiatives aimed at the provision of portable water infrastructure to meet the needs of residents.

Identifying and prioritizing areas within Onicha LGA that lack access to reliable sources of clean water is a primary responsibility of the Town Union. Comprehensive assessments of water supply and sanitation needs are conducted, considering factors such as population density, geographical location, and existing infrastructure (Nwadike, 2018). This process ensures that resources and interventions are effectively targeted to areas most in need of water infrastructure development.

Once areas in need have been identified, the Town Union engages in strategic planning and resource mobilization efforts to facilitate the construction and maintenance of water supply systems. Funding from government grants, partnerships with non-governmental organizations, and community contributions are leveraged to mobilize resources (Uzoma, 2020). Water projects in communities such as Umuezeoka, Agbaja, and Umuezoka are among the beneficiaries of these initiatives.

In addition to infrastructure development, the Town Union plays a crucial role in raising awareness and promoting hygiene and sanitation practices among community members. Educational campaigns on the importance of clean water, proper sanitation, and personal hygiene are conducted to foster behavior change (Okoye, 2019). Communities such as Isu, Onicha Igboeze, and Umuokpu benefit from these awareness-raising efforts. Furthermore, the Town Union is responsible for overseeing the operation and maintenance of water supply systems to ensure their continued functionality and reliability. Regular monitoring of water quality, repairs, and maintenance are conducted to address any issues that may arise (Anyanwu, 2017). Water projects in places like Abakaliki, Amuzu, and Isu Nibo benefit from the diligent maintenance efforts of the Town Union.

Moreover, collaboration and partnerships with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders are fostered to leverage expertise, resources, and technical support for water supply initiatives (Eze, 2021). By working together with external partners, the Town Union expands its capacity to address complex water supply challenges and deliver sustainable solutions to communities across Onicha LGA. Accordingly, through strategic planning, resource mobilization, awareness-raising, and collaboration, the Town Union addresses critical water supply needs, promotes public health, and enhances community well-being. By prioritizing access to clean water as a fundamental human right, the Town Union contributes to the realization of sustainable development goals and the improvement of the quality of life for all residents.

Town Union and rural electrification in Onicha LGA; An overview

The Town Union in Onicha Local Government Area (LGA) plays an indispensable role in facilitating the provision of rural electricity infrastructure, thereby improving the quality of life and fostering economic development in underserved communities. Access to reliable electricity is essential for various aspects of daily life, including education, healthcare, and business activities. Recognizing this, the Town Union engages in comprehensive assessments to identify areas within Onicha LGA that lack access to electricity, prioritizing communities with the greatest need (Nwadike, 2018).

Upon identifying communities in need of electrification, the Town Union collaborates with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, electricity providers, and community members, to develop electrification plans and mobilize resources for implementation. Funding for

rural electrification projects may come from government grants, community contributions, and partnerships with private sector entities (Uzoma, 2020). By leveraging diverse funding sources, the Town Union ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of electrification initiatives.

Communities such as Umuezeoka, Agbaja, Umuezoka, Isu, Onicha Igboeze, Umuokpu, Amuzu, Isu Nibo, and Abakaliki have benefited from rural electrification projects initiated by the Town Union in Onicha LGA. These communities, which historically lacked access to electricity, have experienced transformative impacts on education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. By bringing electricity to these underserved areas, the Town Union enhances the quality of life and stimulates economic development (Okoye, 2019).

In addition to infrastructure development, the Town Union conducts educational campaigns to raise awareness and promote the efficient use of electricity among community members. These campaigns focus on energy conservation, safety practices, and the benefits of electrification, empowering residents to make responsible use of electricity resources (Okoye, 2019). By fostering a culture of energy efficiency and conservation, the Town Union maximizes the impact of electrification initiatives and ensures their long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the Town Union assumes responsibility for overseeing the installation, operation, and maintenance of electrification infrastructure to ensure its continued functionality and reliability. This includes monitoring electricity usage, conducting repairs and maintenance as needed, and addressing any issues that may arise (Anyanwu, 2017). By assuming a stewardship role in electrification efforts, the Town Union ensures the long-term viability of rural electrification initiatives, safeguarding the benefits of electricity access for future generations. Through strategic planning, resource mobilization, community engagement, and infrastructure management, the Town Union enhances the quality of life and fosters sustainable development in rural areas.

Conclusion

The significance of community development cannot be overstated. To promote such development, the Nigerian federal government has encouraged state and local governments to create community-based development organizations, including town unions, to foster growth in rural areas. Specifically, in Onicha LGA, these town unions aim to improve local communities where government presence is lacking. The Onicha Local Government Council has enacted bylaws to support the establishment of town unions, such as Progressive Union and Development Union, to aid in socio-economic and infrastructural development. These unions can elect their leaders with the approval of local and state governments, maintaining a tradition of communalism that predates colonialism. Today, Igbo communities in southeastern Nigeria continue to rely on town unions for development and as advocates for grassroots needs, attracting government and NGO support.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following suggestions are made:

- i. Strengthen collaboration between town unions and government agencies to enhance infrastructural development in Onicha LGA, Ebonyi State.
- ii. Foster partnerships, inclusivity, and resilience in town union-led infrastructure projects to achieve desired outcomes as agents of community development in Onicha LGA.
- iii. Equip town unions to serve as agents of development in Ebonyi by building infrastructure, attracting government attention, creating jobs, building schools, paying teachers, awarding scholarships, and maintaining peace and security in the community.
- iv. Ensure that town union members are individuals of integrity and good reputation who have the community's best interests at heart.

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