



Age Grade Associations' Activities in Enhancing Community Development Projects in Odukpani and Biase Local Government Areas of Cross River State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated age grade associations' activities in enhancing community development projects in Odukpani and Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Five hundred (500) respondents were randomly selected from ten (10) council wards in Odukpani and Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State using stratified and simple random sampling. The role of age grade associations in enhancing community development projects questionnaire (AGAECDDQ) was used for data collection. Data were analysed using population t-test analysis for single mean. The research findings revealed that the extent to which age grade associations provide educational and loan facilities in enhancing community development projects is not significantly high. Therefore, it was recommended that governments at all levels should provide capacity building programmes for age grade members whose contributions are inevitable for implementation of community based projects in the study area.

INTRODUCTION

Age grade system is a traditionally structured arrangement which has held ancient societies together and is today the bedrock of the community socio-economic development. A long time ago before the white men came and introduced letters and numbers to our people, the community had ingeniously devised a system whereby people were grouped according to the same age grade to carry out development projects. Apart from other noble benefits, this method served also as a kind of census as no record of birth and death were kept.

Age Grade Associations' Activities for Community Development

According to Onor (1994) age grade is a social institution encompassing males and females born within two to three years of the same period. An age set represents a combination of about ten to fifteen age-grades put-together. An analysis of the forgoing reveals that an entire community from the youngest to the oldest implicitly belong to one age grade or another. Age grade associations are indeed a vital social reality and they have profound impact on the behaviour of children, adolescents and adults. The norms and values children learned in the family are modified by age grade associations. The children of the same age grade usually organized themselves as playmates and perform important task in the community such as clearing the village square, market and road or tract leading to the community source of water (Odonnel, 1985). Age grade groups in the spirit of communal participation assist in the implementation of major projects such as provision of electricity, pipe-borne water and recreational centres in rural areas. Azubuike (1985) States that age grade association also play leadership roles, not only organizing fund raising activities, but also showing example by being the first to pay their levies or making donations to finance rural development projects.

Age grade associations also assist the rural community in some communal work like carrying stones, clearing sites and digging foundations when community projects are to be executed. In the same vein, Dunham (1999) maintains that age grade associations help in creating jobs for the youths in the rural areas. They ensure that members of age grades have vacations by which they earned a living. Similarly, Ezewu (1991) asserts that age grade associations contribute to rural development through enhancing the literacy level of people in the community. It is on the basis of this that Onor (1994) maintains that age grade associations foster a strong spirit of cooperation among its members and the much needed social cohesion necessary for over all societal growth and development.

Statement of the problem

Age grade associations have been commended for varied and crucial roles in expediting the completion of community development projects such as provision of health facilities, educational facilities, good water supply to mention but a few. However, recent developments in some rural communities of the state show that members of different age groups are involved in activities which are perceived to retired grassroot development. Some who are members of this age grade groups are restive since they lack visible means of livelihood needed for effective participation in community development. Yet the Cross River State government has recently reiterated the urgent need to ensure that age grades are mobilized for implementation of community development projects. It is against this unsavory backdrop that this study investigated the role of age grade associations in enhancing community development activities as it affects selected

communities in Odukpani and Biase Local government areas of Cross River State .

Purpose of the study

The study was designed to find out the role of age grade associations in enhancing community development projects in Odukpani and Biase Local Government Areas of Cross River State. Specifically the study sought to ascertain:-

1. The extent to which age grade associations provide educational facilities in enhancing community development projects.
2. The extent to which age grade associations provide loan facilities in enhancing community development projects.

Research hypotheses

The following null hypothesis were formulated to guide the study

1. The extent to which age grade associations provide educational facilities in enhancing community development projects is not significantly high.
2. The extent to which age grade associations provide loan facilities in enhancing community development projects is not significantly high.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Age grade associations and provision of educational facilities

According to Itari (2005) education is a means of releasing man from the chains of ignorance to the true form of knowledge and ideas. It has to do with various activities and processes aimed at developing the individual's knowledge, attitude, values and understanding of what is required in all works of life. It is therefore, a means of liberation from bondage to freedom and from darkness to light. Obasi (1998) asserts that education is an indispensable tool for the improvement of life. It helps in the improvement of life of an individual as well as that of the community and the society at large. When education is inculcated into the community. Its aim is always to produce people who can choose for themselves the kind of development and self actualization they want to undertake.

In this case, education is used to prepare man for social, civil, political and economic role that goes beyond the limit of rudimentary literacy training which merely has to do with reading and writing. This is why individuals, families, communities and even the entire nation embrace education in order to update their cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage. Education is therefore an agent of social change. Denga (1999) observes that Nigeria educational system is in a state of serious crisis and rapid state of collapse,

Age Grade Associations' Activities for Community Development

because of inadequate school facilities resulting in poor performance of teachers, students and pupils at all levels.

Age grade associations carry out enlightenment campaigns to expose the community to the benefits of education which may help in day to day business and interaction within the environment and interaction with the environment. Unachukwu (1991) maintains that age grade associations often organize adult education classes that involve productive activities. These help members of the community to restructure needs and goals towards development that is, it creates an opportunity for the rural people to understand all it takes to engage in sustainable trading and farming. Age grade associations also organize income generating activities to enable members raise capital for renovation of schools in their communities. Such capital can be raised either through membership dues, levies, revolving loan funds, and sales of shares. Azubuike (1985) asserts that age grade associations contribute to educational development by fostering the need for young generation to be enrolled in educational activities, award of scholarship and equipping libraries.

The active participation of the citizenry in community development programmes cannot be achieved when men, women youths and children are not educated. Such a community stands the risk of not being able to choose for themselves the kind of development projects they want for their community.

Since education is a prerequisite for economic development, it diminishes exploitation and poverty and serves as a contact point for achievement of liberation and abolition of oppression (Duke, 1995). Age grade associations encourage illiterates in the community to register in adult literacy classes and also provide scholarship for children and youths from poor families as well as for its members. This helps them to embrace new visions, and effectively participate in community development projects. Odennel (1983) maintains that age grade associations donate in kind such materials as books, desks, pens, chalk and office furniture to schools in rural areas. Age grade associations to a great extent have actually alleviated the problems of people who would have depended entirely on the government. Okoye (1992) indicates that dependency on the government by citizens hinder economic recovery, particularly in developing countries where government is often regarded as a rich generous institution and where people think of receiving as much as possible from the institution with little or no feeling that they have duties and obligations to render as well. Age grade associations provide funds for educational programmes without dependence on the government. They also provide financial assistance to vocational improvement centres which train road side mechanics, masons, electricians, furniture makers, hair dressers, plumbers among others (Ezewu, 2005).

Age grade associations and provision of Loan facilities

The role of age grade associations in granting loan for community development cannot be over emphasized. Loans are often given according to Azubuike (1985) by age grade associations to enable the rural people hire labour, buy seedlings, farm implements, fertilizers and insecticides. At times they may decide to purchase these items in bulk and distribute to its members at the end of the harvest or after sales of farm products. The products are given at subsidized prices to members and non-members. Age grade associations make sure that products are processed by releasing processing machines at cheaper rates. They also provide storage facilities as well as marketing of such products such as cocoa, palm oil, cassava among others. Similarly, Dunham (1991) assert age grade associations give loan to its members and non-members to embark on small scale business such soap making, beading to mention but a few. Age grade associations through their activities as Micro financiers influence the social and economic well being of the rural populace in particular and the rural economy in general.

For instance Ezewu (1991) states that age grade associations organize savings and loan schemes with emphasis on savings mobilization as the key to their micro finance schemes Ezewu adds that even though loans are granted, much is not done in this aspect because of the poor loan port folio of age grade associations and the high rate charge. In the same vein, Ogundipe (1999) assert that age grade associations do not provide adequate micro credit facilities and loans. Age grade associations encourage her traders and farmers to form cooperatives where loans are granted to interested members who have come together into a borrowing cluster of 10 or 12 people. The essence of the cluster is to provide guarantee for each other in the cluster. Agreed interest rates are paid monthly during the monthly meetings (Azubuike, 1985).

METHODOLOGY

Design

The survey descriptive method was employed for the study.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all the inheritance of Odukpani and Biase local Government Areas between ages eighteen and above.

Sample for the Study

Stratified random sampling was adopted to select ten (10) council wards from the two local government areas. From each ward, simple random sampling technique was used to select two communities. From the two communities,

Age Grade Associations' Activities for Community Development

fifty (50) adult male and female respondents were selected to participate in the study. In this case the researcher used “the hat and draw” (balloting) method. Numbers were written on slips of papers, each of the slips was rolled into a paper ball mixed thoroughly into a container and blindly the required number of respondents were selected.

Instrumentation

The role of age grade associations in enhancing community development projects questionnaires was the instrument used for data collection. It was a – 5 point rating scale questionnaire used with reliability value of 0.70 obtained through the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient method after a test-re- test of the instrument. This was done to confirm the reliability of the instrument after experts had validated the instrument.

Procedure for data Collection

The validated questionnaire was administered in each of the communities sampled for the study. The respondents were informed about the essence of providing honest responses which were treated with strict confidentiality. The help of reliable friends and leaders of each community were elicited which ensured a hitch-free data collection exercise. At the end of the exercise, five hundred (500) questionnaires were successfully completed and used for the study.

Data Analysis

The data collected were collated and analyzed using population t-test or (t-test of one sample mean). The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis One

The extent to which age grade associations provide educational facilities in enhancing community development is not significantly high. Testing this hypothesis involves comparing the sample mean on this variable with a hypothesized or inference mean value obtained by multiplying the average of the scores assigned to the five responses to the questionnaire items by the number of items measuring the variable. Therefore the population mean was $2.50 \times 5 = 12.50$. In testing this hypothesis, t-test of one sample mean was used. Therefore, the percentage analysis of responses to items is presented in table 1, while the result of the t-test analysis is presented in table. 2

Table 1: Percentage analysis of responses to items on age grade associations provision of educational facilities in enhancing community development.

S/No	Items	Agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Age grade associations do provide facilities like desk and books	210	42	290	38	500	100
2	Age grade associations award scholarship to school children	250	50	250	50	500	100
3	Age grade associations donate laboratory equipment in school	161	32	339	68	500	100
4	Age grade associations donate money towards construction of classroom blocks	224	45	275	55	500	100
5	Age grade associations participate in decision making to improve education service	227	45	273	55	500	100
	Average %	214	43	286	57	500	100

Table 2: Population t-test analysis of whether level of age grade associations provision of educational facilities in enhancing community development is significantly high.

Variable	Sample Mean	Sample SD	Reference Mean x	t- value
Enhancing community development Provision of educational facilities by age grade associations	11.74	3.59	12.50	-4.74*

* Significant .05 level: Critical t= 1.96; df=499 N = 500.

The result in table 1 reveal that the calculated t- value which is -4.74 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance at 499 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is upheld, this implies that the level at which age grade associations provide educational facilities in enhancing community development is not significantly high.

Hypothesis Two

The extent to which age grade associations provide loan facilities in enhancing community development is not significantly high. To test this hypothesis, t-test of one sample mean was used. The percentage analysis of the responses to items is presented in table 3 while the result of the t- test analysis is presented in table 4.

Age Grade Associations' Activities for Community Development

Table 3: Percentage analysis of responses to items on age grade associations provision of loan facilities in enhancing community development.

S/No	Items	Agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Age grade associations inform people of existing loan facilities	263	53	273	47	500	100
2	Age grade associations help people to form cooperatives	247	49	253	51	500	100
3	Age grade associations grant loans to members of the community	208	42	292	58	500	100
4	Age grade associations do stand as sureties for people to secure loan to start small business	205	41	295	59	500	100
5	Age grade association have really encouraged people to go for loan to start business	240	48	260	52	500	100
	Average %	232	47	267	53	500	100

Table 4: Population t-test analysis of whether the level of age grade associations provision of loan facilities in enhancing community development is significantly high.

Variable	Sample Mean (X)	Sample SD	Reference Mean (X)	t- value
Enhancing community development Provision of loan facilities by age grade associations	12.81	3.86	12.50	1.81

* Significant at .05 level; critical t= 1.96; df=499, n =500.

The result in table 2 shows that the calculated t- value which is 1.81 is lower than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance at 499 degrees of freedom. Based on the decision rule, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that the level at which age grade associations provide loan facilities in enhancing community development projects is not significantly high.

DISCUSSION

The extent to which age grade associations provide educational facilities in enhancing community development is not significantly high

The result obtained from the analysis of hypothesis one revealed that the extent to which age grade associations provide educational facilities is significantly low. This result corroborates the findings of Denga (1999) that education is a capital intensive as well as long term, most rural people rather prefer short term ventures that yield immediate results or outcomes. Besides, most age grade associations in this study area do not have enough funds and manpower to create the requisite awareness in rural communities meant to support the provision of educational facilities.

This situation substantiates why the Nigeria educational system is in a state of serious crisis and rapid state of collapse, as a result of the inadequate provision of school facilities and subsequent poor performance of teachers, students and pupils at all levels especially in the study area. Because of inadequate school facilities resulting in poor performance of teachers, students and pupils at all levels especially in the study area.

However, this contradicts the views of Azubuikwe (1985) who stated that age grade associations contribute to educational development by energizing young people to be enrolled in educational activities, through the award of scholarships and equipping libraries. The result of the finding is also contrary to the view of Unachukwu (1991) who maintained that age grade associations often organize adult education classes that involve productive activities. This helps members of the community to restructure needs and goals towards development.

The Extent to which age grade associations provide loan facilities in enhancing community development is not significantly high.

The result obtained from the analysis of hypothesis two revealed that the extent to which age grade association provide loan facilities in enhancing community development is significantly low. This result supports the observation of Ogunpide (1999) that age grade associations do not provide adequate micro credit facilities and loans. Ezewu (1998) adds that even though loans are granted, much is not done in this aspect because of the poor loan portfolio of age grade associations in the study area. The low income generation status of most age grades in the area under investigation impedes the provision of loan facilities to embark on income generating activities such as small scale businesses like soap making, hair dressing etc. Age grade members who generate income through small scale businesses have potentials to contributing towards community development projects.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the study revealed that age grades do not have a viable financial base required for sustained support of community development projects in the study area. Therefore governments at all levels should provide requisite capacity building programmes to empower age grade members on whose contributions and successful implementation of grassroots development projects partly hinges.

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