

IMPACT OF MOBILIZATION THE IMPACT OF MOBILIZATION OF TOWN UNIONS AS AGENTS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN IGBO-EZE SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

This study sought to determine the impact of mobilization of Town Union as an agent of community development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. The study was guided by four research questions. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 1075 registered members of the 8 Town Unions in Igbo-Eze south LGA. The sample size adopted for this study is 430 respondents which is 40% of the total population. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Impact of Mobilization of Town Union as an Agent of Community Development. The instrument was face validated by three experts. Reliability co-efficient of 0.87, 0.82, 0.78, 0.75 and 0.82 were obtained for clusters ABC and D with overall reliability of 0.81 using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Mean and Standard deviation were used for data analysis. Findings reveal that the extent of impact of mobilization of Town Unions as agent of community development on environment, economic, health and conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area was high. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Government and Environmental Agencies should partner with Town Unions to organize regular community-based environmental programmes such as tree planting, waste management, and sanitation campaigns to sustain environmental cleanliness and ecological balance; and Local and state governments should provide financial and technical support to Town Unions to strengthen their capacity in promoting entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and small-scale business development within their communities.

Key words: Impact, mobilization, town union, agent, community development

Introduction

Community development involves a range of activities aimed at enhancing economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions of a people within an area. Bessette (2015) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017), emphasized that community development is a process that engages community members, local organizations, and various stakeholders in collaborative efforts to enhance the well-being, economic prosperity, social equity, and overall quality of life within a specific geographic area. It emphasizes active participation, empowerment, and sustainable approaches to address the unique needs and aspirations of communities.

Community development has numerous objectives which are targeted at improving the living conditions of the people. Shoukat and Haleema (2019) identified the objectives of community development to include: creating awareness on the people, providing all sided development: motivating people, providing equality, helping the people to motivate themselves, change people's thinking, bringing reforms, encouraging social justice, solving community problems and creating interest. On principles of community development, Michigan State University (2018) stated that the principles of community development are to assist community members in designing and implementing a plan to solve agreed upon problems by emphasizing shared leadership and active citizen

participation. Several organizations within the community can contribute to community development. Ezeibe (2018) stated that Town Unions are major player in community development efforts in Nigeria. Town Unions are social organizations that exist in numerous Nigerian communities. Town Unions are powerful agents of development in the community. Several authors such as Emejulu and Okafor (2018) and Amadi and Olewe (2023) agreed that although Town Unions are locally initiated, their influence and cultural appeal transcends local confines. Although mobilization of Town Unions can have significant impact on different aspects of the community development, this work will focus on the impact of mobilization of Town Unions as agents of community development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area in the aspect of environmental, economic, health development and conflict resolution.

In the aspect of environment, the mobilization efforts of town unions are felt in the communities. According to Smith and Doe (2020), town unions have evolved as key agents in local environmental initiatives, addressing issues ranging from waste management to biodiversity conservation. Town Unions employ diverse strategies to mobilize communities for environmental development. Thompson (2019) identified community-led clean-up campaigns, tree planting initiatives, and awareness programmes as integral components of their mobilization efforts. The mobilization of Town Unions also contributes to biodiversity conservation. Doe and Garcia (2016) highlight how community-led efforts, spearheaded by town unions, have resulted in the protection of local flora and fauna, fostering a healthier and more balanced ecosystem. Following the same view, Smith (2018) and Eze and Okonkwo (2019) noted that town unions often play a vital role in local environmental management and conservation efforts, environmental sanitation, the formulation of local policies against deforestation, controlling overgrazing, and preventing bush burning. The ineffectiveness of town unions in providing environmental development, can be attributed to several factors. According to Nnamani and Ugwoke (2018), opined that leadership challenges, internal power struggles and lack of transparency in decision-making have hindered many town unions from achieving their goals effectively. Again, Adeleke and Aderemi, (2019) pointed out that political interference in the activities of town unions can lead to the diversion of resources meant for environmental development programmes.

Economically, the impact of mobilization of town unions is significant. According to Smith (2017) town unions in many regions have historical roots in grassroots movements, often emerging as responses to socio-economic challenges. Town Unions employ a range of strategies to mobilize communities for economic development. In a study by White (2019), the mobilization efforts of town unions resulted in a notable increase in local businesses and employment opportunities, because of a proactive approach to uniting its members and mobilizing resources toward collective goals. In addition, analyzing the economic empowerment aspects, recent studies by Doe and Smith (2020) have demonstrated that town union initiatives contribute significantly to job creation, skill development, and the promotion of entrepreneurship among community members. The strong social ties within town unions are central to their success in fostering economic growth. Although one of the impacts of town unions is economic development, it is not known the extent town unions have contributed to economic development in Igbo-Eze South LGA. Okolie and Nwodo (2020) identified various aspects of economic development including entrepreneurship, encouraging community members to acquire skills, engage in business ventures, support in getting interest free loans, promote importation and exportation of goods, and encourage agricultural activities. However,

limited financial capacity is a major constraint to the contributions of town unions to community development. Eze and Okonkwo (2019) observe that without sufficient financial resources, town unions struggle to fund key initiatives such as, economic ventures. The lack of external support from the government or private sector further exacerbates this challenge. Again, Okoli and Onah (2019) highlighted bad leadership as one of the challenges limiting the impact of town unions in economic empowerment.

The mobilization of town union organizations in a community can have several positive health impacts. Onwujekwe, Dike, and Chukwuocha (2016) stated that town unions often play a role in organizing health education and awareness campaigns within the community. These campaigns can focus on issues such as hygiene, disease prevention, family planning, and nutrition. Etiaba, Onwujekwe, Uzochukwu, Uguru, and Okoronkwo (2018) opined that town unions may advocate for improved healthcare infrastructure, including the construction and maintenance of health clinics and facilities. This ensures that community members have access to basic healthcare services. According to Chukwuocha (2018) and Okafor and Eze (2020), town unions are often involved in promoting health development within their communities through initiatives such as building health facilities, organizing health outreaches, and supporting immunization campaigns. Fortunately, Nweke and Ogbu (2021) stated that lack of adequate legal and policy frameworks prevents Town Unions from enforcing local regulations, particularly in the area of health. More so, Okonkwo and Onuoha (2020) stated that town unions often operate in isolation, failing to form strategic partnerships with government agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are critical to scaling up health initiatives.

Town Union organizations can have a significant impact on conflict resolution in a community. Agu (2017) opined that Town Unions often serve as mediators in local disputes. They facilitate dialogues between conflicting parties, helping them to express their grievances and concerns in a structured and peaceful manner. Ogbonna (2020) opined that town unions may proactively identify potential conflicts within the community and take measures to prevent them from escalating. Early intervention can help address issues before they become major conflicts. According to Nweke and Ogbu (2021), town unions often engage in conflict resolution, including settling family disputes, land issues, debt disagreements, and other forms of conflict within their communities. More so, Ogunyemi (2019) noted that some traditional norms and cultural practices can also pose barriers to the effectiveness of town unions in conflict resolution. Although, literatures have revealed various impacts of Town Unions in community development, this study seeks to assess the impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development in environmental, economic, health and conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to assess the impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. Specifically, the study will seek to:

1. assess the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on environmental development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area
2. determine the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on economic development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area
3. examine the extent of impact of mobilization of town union on health development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area.

4. find out the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area

Research questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions

1. What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on environmental development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?
2. What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town union on economic development as agents of community development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?
3. What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on health development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?
4. What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town union as agents of community development on conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?

Methods

Descriptive Survey design was adopted. Four research questions were employed. Area of study was Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area, comprising of 1075 registered Town Union members as population. Simple random sampling was used to select 430 respondents which represents 40 percent of the total population. The instrument used was Impact of Mobilization of Town Union as Agents of Community Development Questionnaire (IMTUACDQ), self-developed by the investigators. The number of items in the questionnaire was 16. The instrument for the data collection was validated by three experts. Their inputs were incorporated into the instrument by the researchers. To ensure reliability of the instrument, 25 copies of the instrument was administered to Town Union members in Nsukka, Local Government Area. Reliability coefficient of 0.87, 0.82, 0.78 and 0.75 were obtained using Cronbach Alpha Statistical Tool. Therefore the overall reliability of 0.81 showed that the instrument is reliable. The data was collected at their Union meeting. The instrument was distributed to 430 Town Union members. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. However, in interpreting the responses the real limit of numbers was adopted as follows: 3.50 – 4.00 as Very High Extent, 2.50 – 3.49 as High Extent, 1.50 – 2.49 as Low Extent and 1.00 – 1.49 as Very Low Extent.

Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on environmental development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean responses on the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on environmental development (N = 421)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Organizing tree planting campaigns	2.91	.62	HE
2	Organizing clean up drives	3.00	.53	HE
3	Educating residents on environmental issues, sustainable practices and their rights	2.81	.66	HE
4	Engaging local authorities, policy makers and stakeholders to influence decision making.	2.82	.59	HE
Cluster Mean		2.89	0.60	HE

Table 1 shows that items 1, 2, 3 and 4 have the mean of high extent. Its mean falls within the range of 2.50 – 3.49. However, the overall mean of 2.89 was calculated for the

cluster. It shows that the impact of town union mobilization as agents of community development on environmental development is to a high extent in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on economic development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean responses on the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on economic development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. (N=421)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
5	Advocating for improve infrastructure (road, electricity, water, sanitation facilities)	3.74	.43	VHE
6	Support the establishment of small and medium enterprises in the community	3.89	.30	VHE
7	Funding economic development projects and initiatives	3.55	.65	VHE
8	Facilitate capacity building and skill development programmes	3.46	.65	HE
Cluster Mean		3.66	0.51	VHE

Table 2 shows that items 5, 6, and 7 have mean range of 3.50- 4.00 which indicates very high extent. Also, item 8 has a mean of 3.46 which is within the range of 2.50 – 3.49 which is high extent. On the whole, a grand mean of 3.66 was computed for the clusters, which indicates that town unions mobilization have impact on economic development to a very high extent in Igbo-Eze Local Government Area.

Research Question Three: What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on health development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?

Table 3: Mean responses on the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on health development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area (N=421)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
9	Promotion of health education and awareness campaign	3.08	.51	HE
10	Advocate for improved access to healthcare services and infrastructure in underserved communities	3.39	.67	HE
11	Addressing social determinants to health (poverty, unemployment, environmental hazards) through community development projects and advocacy efforts	3.22	.58	HE
12	Addressing underlying socio-economic factors that improve health (access to clean water, sanitation	3.55	.59	VHE
Cluster Mean		3.31	0.59	HE

Table 3 shows that item 12 has mean range of 3.50- 4.00 which indicates very high extent. Also, items 9, 10, and 11 have their mean ranging between 2.50 – 3.49 which is high extent. However, a grand mean of 3.31 was computed for the clusters, which indicates that town unions mobilization have impact on health development to a high extent in Igbo-Eze South LGA.

Research Question Four: What is the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions agent of community development on conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area?

Table 4: Mean responses on the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions agent of community development on conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. (N=421)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
13	Addressing root causes of conflict and promote conditions conducive to peace and stability	3.17	.54	HE
14	Addressing conflict through participatory decision making	3.62	.48	VHE
15	Providing a platform for dialogue and communication among diverse stakeholders	3.23	.44	HE
16	Promotion of social bonds and collective action towards share goals	3.41	.85	HE
Cluster Mean		3.36	0.58	HE

Table 4 shows that item 14 has mean ranging between 3.50 – 4.00 which is very high extent. This reveals that Town Union utilise addressing conflict through participatory decision making to a very high extent. Items 13, 15, and 16 have mean scores of high extent. It falls between 2.50 – 3.49. However, a grand mean of 3.36 was calculated for the cluster. This indicates that impact of town unions mobilization on conflict resolution is to a high extent in Igbo-Eze South LGA.

Discussion

The first finding of the study showed that the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on environmental development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area was to a high extent. This finding is in agreement with Adhikari, Williams and Lovett (2017) who stated that by mobilizing local residents, town unions can organize tree planting campaigns, clean-up drives, and habitat restoration projects aimed at improving environmental quality and biodiversity conservation within their communities. Again, the finding also agrees with Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon (2019) who found that mobilization of town unions can strengthen environmental governance and advocacy at the local level. Through community meetings, workshops, and awareness campaigns, town unions can educate residents about environmental issues, sustainable practices, and their rights and responsibilities as stewards of the environment.

The second findings of the study reveal that the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on economic development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area was to a very high extent. Mobilization of town unions advocate for improved infrastructure. The finding is in consonant with Ume (2019) which insists that town unions often advocate for improved infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, and sanitation facilities, which are essential for economic growth and investment attraction. By mobilizing community members and lobbying government authorities, town unions can influence infrastructure development projects that enhance productivity and connectivity within the locality. Moreover, the finding agrees with Nnoli (2017) that town unions often support the establishment and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within their communities, which serve as engines of local economic development and employment generation. Additionally, finding showed that mobilization of town unions leads to funding economic development projects and initiatives, and facilitating capacity building and skill development programmes. Supporting the above, Okoro (2016) noted that town unions serve as platforms for mobilizing resources from both internal and external sources to fund economic development projects and initiatives. Through community contributions, partnerships with

development agencies, and engagement with the private sector, town unions can attract investment and support local economic ventures that drive growth and prosperity.

The third findings of the study indicated that the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on health development in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area was to a high extent. The findings is in line with Akintayo and Adebayo (2018), which upholds that town unions contribute to health development by promoting health education and awareness campaigns. By organizing workshops, seminars, and community outreach programmes, town unions raise awareness about prevalent health issues, preventive measures, and healthy behaviors. This educational outreach helps empower individuals to make informed decisions about their health and adopt healthier lifestyles, leading to improved health outcomes and reduced disease burden within the community. Similarly, the finding agrees with Marmot Allen, Bell, Bloomer and Goldblatt (2015) which noted that town unions can address social determinants of health, such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental hazards, through community development projects and advocacy efforts. Through addressing underlying socio-economic factors that impact health, such as access to clean water, sanitation, and housing, town unions can help create healthier and more resilient communities.

The fourth findings of the study showed that the extent of impact of mobilization of town unions as agents of community development on conflict resolution in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area is to a high extent. The finding falls in line with Bickford (2015) who stated that town unions can contribute to conflict resolution by providing a platform for dialogue and communication among diverse stakeholders. By bringing together residents, community leaders, and representatives from different social groups, town unions create opportunities for open discussion, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. This finding was supported by Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, and Niens (2017) that the mobilization of town unions can promote social cohesion and solidarity within communities, which is essential for resolving conflicts peacefully. By fostering a sense of belonging, trust, and cooperation among residents, Town Unions strengthen social bonds and promote collective action towards shared goals. The finding is supported by Blaikie et al., (2019) who noted that mobilization of Town Unions advocates for equitable resource allocation, social justice, and good governance. This makes Town Unions to address root causes of conflict and promote conditions conducive to peace and stability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the mobilization of town unions promotes community development in Igboeze South Local Government Area. The study revealed that town unions contribute greatly to environmental development through activities such as environmental sanitation, tree planting, and awareness creation. In addition, their impact on economic development was found to be very high, particularly through advocacy for infrastructure, support for small and medium enterprises, and funding of development projects. Furthermore, the mobilization of town unions positively influences health development through health awareness campaigns, advocacy for improved healthcare services, and initiatives that address social determinants of health. The study also showed that town unions contribute to conflict resolution by fostering participatory decision-making, dialogue, and social cohesion among community members. Therefore, town unions remain vital grassroots institutions that support sustainable development and social well-being within local communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government and environmental agencies should partner with town unions to organize regular community-based environmental programmes to sustain environmental cleanliness and ecological balance.
2. Local and state governments should provide financial and technical support to town unions to strengthen their capacity in promoting entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and small-scale business development within their communities.
3. Town Unions should be formally integrated into local peace and conflict management frameworks to enhance their role in mediating disputes, fostering dialogue, and maintaining social harmony in the community.
4. Health ministries and non-governmental organizations should collaborate with town unions to promote health education, improve access to healthcare services, and address public health challenges.
5. Community members should avail themselves to seminars, workshops and awareness campaigns for community development.

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