

The Influence of Rural Group Organization in Agricultural and Rural Transformation of South East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This survey investigates the role of rural group organization in agricultural and rural transformation. The major aim is to examine the role of group organization in agricultural and rural transformation in the study area. Mean, simple percentage and a 2-point scale were used in data analysis. Questionnaire, focus group discussion and personal interview were for data collection. Multi stage random sampling technique was used to selected three States in south-east Nigeria. One hundred and forty respondents were randomly selected from the three selected States. The study observes that rural group organization is a complementary component in promoting agriculture and rural transformation. Rural group organization has proved the most effective means in promoting agriculture and rural transformation in rural areas. But there is a controversy on whether rural group organization can really bring about change. The study also observes that, if rural group were properly managed with other modes of promoting agriculture and rural transformation, it would be at a higher level. Proper human capital development should be developed and maintained to eliminate the paternalistic view which assumes that rural people are passive and fatalistic, uninterested in improvement of their lives and incapable of making initiative for improvement.

Keywords: Rural group organization, Agricultural and rural transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The bedrock of agricultural transformation in Nigeria is rural transformation, without which all efforts of agricultural transformation will be a mirage (Ogunlela and Mukhar (2009). The majority of the small holder farmers and artisans, some three-quarters live in rural areas where they draw their livelihood from agriculture and related activities (Ogunleye and Oladeinde, 2013). Agricultural and rural transformations have the potentials of enhancing the role of agriculture as the engine of inclusive national economic development leading to rural employment, wealth creation and diversification of the economy. If we succeed in transforming our rural areas, we would have laid a solid foundation for a national economic development (Ezeh and Ijeoma, 2007). Rural transformation is a multi approach not a single approach like agricultural transformation. Rural transformation requires the application of the knowledge and skills of all the relevant national and international service in the cooperative and in an integrated manner. In order to improve the quality of life of the

neglected rural majority in Nigeria, programs of agricultural production, health delivery, investment in education and training both formal and non-formal, rural electrification cooperatives, water supply and rural credit. The rest are entertainment and road construction should be planned and implemented in an integrated manner with due consideration for projects that mutually support and interlock with one another in an overall rural transformation plan (Olatunbosun, 1975). Technological development is a progressive increase in the application of technology for the economic development of the society. Technology is essential for agricultural and rural transformation (Akande, 1999). Rural group organization can be primary or secondary groups with their social networks and interactions. Rural communities constitute the major site of agriculture which provides means of livelihood for the people of south-east Nigeria in particular and the entire nation in general. It is disheartening that, the rural areas are characterized by pervasive and endemic poverty, made manifest by uncommon spread of hunger, malnutrition, poor health, lack of access to formal education and different forms of social and political solution compared with urban counterparts (www.ijab.webs.com, 2012).

The essence of social groups' organization is to build strong capacity to lift rural poverty. Social groups consist of aggregates or categories of persons who have a goal or consciousness of membership and interaction (Igbokwe and Ajala 1995). Secondary groups' also called voluntary formal association will be the focus of this work. Formal groups help to accomplish task, prestige, self worth goals and economic gains. The rest are higher responsibilities, democratic dividends, and provides social network. Rural group organization is all about unity, honesty, cooperation, service education and strength (Igbokwe and Ajala, 1995). Rural Transformation is all about political empowerment, restructuring of the power relations between the urban and the rural as well as between the rural and national interest to which rural area has always been perpetually sacrificed. Despite the proliferation of rural organization groups in South-East, Nigeria, agricultural and rural transformation have not been felt. The study examined the role of rural group organization in agricultural and rural transformation in South East, Nigeria. The specific objectives were pursued in other to achieve the aim of the study. These specific objectives included:

- i to determine the socio-economic characteristics that affect rural group organization membership.
- ii to examine the role of rural group organization in agricultural and rural transformation in the study area.
- iii to identify the problems of rural group organization that affect agricultural and rural transformation in the study area.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Nigeria is a country with a population of over 140 million (NPC, 2006). It is divided into six geo-political regions: namely North Central, North West, North East, South west, South east and South south. Agricultural wise, it is divided based on the agro-ecological zones: the dry savannah, (North East, North West part and part of North Central), the humid forest (part of south west, south east, North central and south south) and the moist

savannah (some part of south west, South east, North central and South south). The fourth agro ecological zone, the mid attitude is a mainly small part of the North Central Nigeria (Oni and Yusuf, 2007). This study was carried out in the south-east of Nigeria, situated east of River Niger and covering area of 29,908 square kilometers, with a population of about 16, 381, 729. The region lays on the latitude 50 and 70 75' north and longitude 60 85' and 80 and 46' east. It consists of five States namely; Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi and Abia. The states in the zone share similar characteristics (NPC, 2006). The zone consists mainly of Igbo-speaking ethnic group. By territorial size, the south-east zone is by far the smallest in Nigeria, accounting for only 3.2% of the national space, (Nwakwasi, 2013). Even though, the 2006 census data credited it with 11.7% of the population, which is about a population density nearly four times the nations average (Nwakwasi, 2013). High population pressure is a basic fact in the zone. Analysis of migration data shows that the south East is a zone of strong net emigration, with some 15 percents of persons born in the zone resident outside the zone coming from outside the zone (Nwakwasi, 2013).

Economic and transformation indicators of the south-East zone are mixed when compared with other geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The south-east compares well in national income poverty metrics and general literacy, it performs relatively poor in physical infrastructure, regulatory efficiency and overall business environment. Igbo land experienced rapid economic and social changes with the advent of colonial rule. People of the zone quickly embraced western education, which increased social mobility and opportunities in commerce, limited opportunities in agriculture and animal husbandry as a result of scarcity of land. The zone is a net consumer of food. The zone is a homogenous ethnically and religiously homogenous as Christians constitute 95% of the population (Nwakwasi 2013). Christianity has been very important in explaining collective misfortunes, mobilizing grievances and organizing for solutions in the South East zone (Eboh, 1995).

The population of the study consisted of all the rural poor small holder farmers in the selected three States of the south-east Nigeria, namely Imo, Ebonyi and Abia State. A multi-stage random sampling was employed to select the three States out of the five States that make up south east zone of Nigeria. Two agricultural zones were randomly selected from each of the three selected States. This gave a total of six agricultural zones. Two Local Government Areas were selected from each of the six agricultural zones, giving a total of twelve Local Government Areas. The fourth was the random selection of three communities from each Local Government Area, giving a total of thirty-six communities. The next stage was the random selection of four farmers/households from each of the selected villages which gave us a sample size of 144 small holder farmers for the study. Data collection was basically from primary the source. These include data collected with the use of structured questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion and oral interview. Three communities were selected from each of the States. The focus group discussion gave insight to the study and validated the responses from the interview. The data generated were descriptively analyzed. The socio-economic characteristics of farmers and role of rural group organization in agricultural and rural transformation takes the model.

$$Y_i = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots, X_{14}, + e)$$

Where Y_i	=	index of role of rural group organizations.
X_1	=	age (years)
X_2	=	tender (sex) (male, female)
X_3	=	marital status (dummy, 1=married 0=otherwise)
X_4	=	farming experience (years)
X_5	=	education level (years in school)
X_6	=	contact with extension and agreed (No of visits)
X_9	=	farm income (Naira)
X_{10}	=	membership in rural group organization (dummy variable membership =1 and non-membership = 0) e= error term.

The instrument was based on a 10 item statement with a 2 point scale of agree or disagree based on the 2-point scale, the frequencies and percentages of those roles were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The determination of the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers will help to understand the influence of rural group organizations in south-east, Nigeria. The socio-economic variables investigated were age, sex, marital status, farming experience, farm size, household size, level of education, level of income, extension contact and membership of organizations. Table 1 shows that a significant proportion of the respondents in the selected States had the mean ages of 44 years (Abia) 43 years (Ebonyi) and 45 years (Imo). The mean age of respondents in South East was 44 years, these implies that young men and women who are vibrant and strong participate in farm work. The young and reproductive age of farmers have a positive effect on the economic activities, this is in line with (Alade and Kioponiyi, 2010). The variant in age which lead to divergent preferences in economic participation are due to group participation.

The table also shows the percentage proportion of both sexes with 66%, 79.2% and 72.5% for females' farmers in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo State respectively, while the percentage male for the three States were 34%, 20.8% and 27.5%, respectively. It also revealed mean farming experiences of 14, 16 and 15 years for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo State respectively, this implies that older farmers production capacity is less than that of the younger farmers, hence, negative implications in productivity. The mean farming experience of farmers in South-east is 15 years. The table shows 1 hectare, 3 hectares and half hectares of farmers household farm size in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively with mean household farm size of 15 hectares in South-east Nigeria. This implies that small scale farmers predominant South east Nigeria. Also, it shows that household size for Abia is 8 and above for Ebonyi and 7 for Imo, this means that Ebonyi State farmers implore more of family labour than, both Abia and Imo States. The education level affects the agricultural and rural transformation, the table indicated that education level in Abia was 18 years, 12 years in Ebonyi and 18 years for Imo State with mean year of 16 years in south east Nigeria. The mean farm income of 20,111.3 in South east. The major occupation in South east was farming as evidenced with higher percentage of respondents across the

States. Generally, the results show low participation to rural group membership participation and extension contacts were low in Ebonyi and Imo State with high extension contacts in Abia State, 90% in Abia and 50% for both Ebonyi and Imo States. Table 2 shows that the roles of the rural group organization (RGOs) are numerous as these are required for rural and agricultural transformation of the communities in South-east Nigeria. All the items analyzed on the table received favourable response from the respondents in all the three States showing that they are veritable tools or played the whole role outlined on the table. These roles were mobilization of rural labour, community market and their resources, provision of thrift, solving the problem of land communal tenure system, determination of community needs and wishes, provision of rural effective leadership, provision of capital for youth program, means of settling of disputes, conflicts and reconciliation for peace and security and helps in technologies dissemination and information. They are involved in political consciousness of the rural people, they provide mouth piece of their communities, liaise with government and communities in project initiation, evaluation, planning and decision making based on the human and material resources available.

The results obtained as presented on table 2 indicate that RGOs contribute greatly to rural and agricultural transformation in the communities that make up South-East Nigeria. To support this finding, Chukwuezi (2003) emphasizes that RGOs combine the efforts of their members in pulling resources together to attain one form of development. This is in brief with the associational or group spirit, and orientation found in traditional Igbo society of Nigeria. Eboh (1995) also asserts that in Abiriba town in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State, they are graded within intervals of three years. Also in Okigwe local government area of Imo State, town union, women group, and church group play positive roles in agricultural and rural transformation. Njoku (2012) asserts that the Ezeji group in Mbaise area of Imo State, play virile role in promoting and disseminating innovations in yam production as it had become an annual event (new yam festival). The findings, Nwugo (1989) and Abdulahi (1986) emphasize that RGO are important in decision making process in communities, disseminate information about new technologies adoption. They came to a conclusion that for success of any agricultural and rural transformation or extension work, it has to work through the ladder of RGOs, who will articulate the needs of the members, legitimize (legalize) the transformation and mobilize them into action. This is also in line with Ugboh and Tibi (2012), who in their separate studies adduced that community based organizations are major veritable tools/agents of rural and agricultural transformation in Delta State, Nigeria.

Table 3 reveals information on the problems of respondents on the sustainability of rural group organization in the study areas. Entries on the table show that in the three States, rural groups were not sufficiently educated with mean scores of 3.44, 3.43, and 3.28 for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively, the table also reveal a mean of 3.38 across the study area. Political forces hamper the formation and sustainability of rural group in the study areas as 3.33, 3.09 and 2.70 the respondents agree that political forces negatively affect rural group performance in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively. The result indicates that the mean scores of 3.32, 3.32 and 3.08 for Abia, Ebonyi and

Imo, strongly agree that religious inclination affect rural group organization in South east Nigeria. However, the respondents in the study area vehemently disagree that poverty is not a major problem of rural group in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States as testified by 1.98, 1.95 and 1.65 respectively. The table indicates that non-payment of dues and levies of members is a constraint to rural group sustainability in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States as shown by 2.78, 2.68 and 2.52 as mean score agreed. Overlapping of functions due to lack of clear objectives as testified by respondents 2.85, 3.55 and 3.11 from Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively. The rampant breaking of conflict between members constitute problem as testified by 3.40, 3.27 and 2.52 for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively.

Corruption and fraud by the executives and leaders constitute impediments to rural group performance in agriculture and rural transformation in South-East Nigeria, as 3.09, 2.87 and 2.87 from Abia Ebonyi and Imo testified that corruption and fraud is a bane to rural group organization's and its sustainability in South East Nigeria, cultural norms/belief is a problem to rural group organization as testified by 2.51, 3.37 and 3.27 for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively, social disorganization negatively affect rural group formation and sustainability and directly or indirectly affects agriculture and rural transformation. This is in line with Nwachukwu and Ukoha, (2011) who confirm that well developed rural community and citizenry is a necessity for social stability and geo-political strength. Ekong (2003) agrees that it is imperative to develop the rural areas for the sector to continue to perform efficiently and effectively.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of farmers in mean (n=48)

Variables	Abia	Ebonyi	Imo
Age (Years)	44	43	45
Gender			
Male %	34	20.8	27.5
Female %	66	78.2	72.5
Farming Experience (years)	14	16	15
Household farm size (hectare)	1	3.0	0.5
Level of Education (years)	18	12	18
Farm income (yr)	18,250	20,167	21,917
Major occupation/farming	79.2	83.2	56.7
Rural group membership	54.2	39.2	56.7
Extension contact	90.0	50.0	50.00

Source: Field survey, 2011

Table 2: Analysis of the role of rural group organization in rural and agricultural transformation in South-East Nigeria

Roles	Agree	Disagree
Mobilization of rural labour	144	0
Community market mobilization of rural areas and their resources	124	20
Provision of rural thrift System/traditional credit Practice	134	10
Social mobilization on enabling System/pattern/leadership	134	9
Determination of felt needs of the community.	120	24
Sources of human Resource to the communities	132	12
Provision of Effective Leadership	110	34
Mobilization of capital for youth Programmes	100	44

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to the problems of Rural Group Organization that affect agricultural and rural transformation in the study area

Problems of Rural Group	Abia		Ebonyi		Imo	
	mean	remark	mean	remark	mean	remark
Organization indicators						
Low level of Education	3.44	agree	3.43	agree	3.28	agree
Political forces	3.03	agree	3.09	agree	2.70	agree
Religious/Inclination	3.32	agree	3.32	agree	3.08	agree
Poverty	1.98	disagree	1.95	disagree	1.65	disagree
Non funding/payment levies	2.78	agree	2.68	agree	2.57	agree
Overlapping of functions	2.85	agree	3.55	agree	3.11	agree
Conflicts	3.40	agree	3.27	agree	2.52	agree
Fraud/Corruption	3.07	agree	2.83	agree	2.87	agree
Cultural norms/belief	3.07	agree	3.37	agree	3.27	agree
Social Disorganization	3.33	agree	3.17	agree	3.24	agree
Grand mean	2.97		3.06		2.73	

Hints: Midpoint 2.50, any mean score less than or equal to 2.50 is Disagree while any mean score greater than 2.50 is agree.

Source: Field Survey, 2011

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the role of rural group organization in South-East Nigeria in agricultural and rural transformation. Results indicate that despite the positive role of rural group organization in agricultural and rural transformation, it was not devoid of problems which impede its sustainability, prominent among them were, low level of education as asserted by the mean of 3.44, 3.43, and 3.28 for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo states respectively. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents indicated the mean age of 44, 43 and 45 years for Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively with the total mean of 44 years across the States. The results show that females belong to rural group organization more than males as evidently testified by 66%, 79% and 72.5% of female respondents in Abia, Ebonyi and Imo States respectively belong to group while 34%, 20.2% percent, and 27.5 percent of respondents Abia, Ebonyi and Imo belong to rural group organization is negatively affected by the tedious aspect of farm labour operations in the South-East-Nigeria.

The study therefore recommends that deliberate policy aiming at organizing, training for rural farmers on the role of rural group organization with a view to removing/minimizing the perennial hydra-headed poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, ill-fed, ill-housed, and disease stricken predominant in the rural areas. The rural farmers/communities must realize that the only way to solve their problems must be by themselves; hence all hands must be on deck. Teaching and Propagation of cooperative philosophy and peaceful coexistence to the rural dwellers and education forms the bedrock for rural transformation, these should be encouraged. Proper human capital development should be developed and maintained to eliminate the paternalistic view which assumes that rural people are passive and fatalistic, uninterested in improvement of their lives and incapable of making initiative for improvement.

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