

## **Age Grade-Facilitated Projects and the Socio-Economic Development of Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** The study examined the contributions of age grade-facilitated projects to the socio-economic development of the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was used for the study, with three hundred and eighty four questionnaires distributed to respondents purposively selected from the study area. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation technique at the 0.5 level of significance. The results showed that age grade-facilitated infrastructure significantly contributed to the socio-economic development through improved power supply, access roads and portable drinking water in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. Age grade-facilitated educational establishments also contributed significantly to the socio-economic development of the area. Thus, we suggest that government and (international) donor agencies should recognize the existence and value of age grade associations by funding them to execute projects designed to better the lot of the rural dwellers.

**Keywords:** Age grade, socio-economic, development, security, and rural communities

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The efforts of government and other development partners in third world countries have failed to address the recurring problem of poverty, insecurity, environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructural amenities, underdevelopment, disease, and unemployment (Agbaet *al.*, 2009; Ukwayiet *al.*, 2018). In Nigeria, the deteriorating living conditions, characterized by pervasive and endemic poverty, uncontrolled population growth and other social problems such as insurgency, kidnapping are indicative of the weaknesses and failure of government development programmes (Agba et al. 2014; Ebingha et al, 2019). The inability of government to bring about sustained progress in socio-economic development of both rural and urban areas, fifty nine years after independence has justified the need for an alternative institutional development structure that will provide essential services in terms of security, construction and maintenance of roads as well as sustainable grassroot development in Nigeria (Olowu 1997; Agba et al., 2014; Ebingha et al, 2019). Nevertheless, since the government at all levels has given little attention to rural development and with the realization that government alone cannot provide all the needs of rural people, citizens themselves have devised a means of survival and self-help through the age grade system. The age grade system is one of the oldest surviving organizations in Nigeria's cultural setting. It has played significant roles in bringing development to people in rural areas, through educational, economic, and social infrastructures (Erimet *al.*, 2011, Okpa, et al, 2018). As a social institution, the age grade constitutes an essential system in which the social structures of Nigeria's society develops. It is an association of persons who were born within a period of time, whose activities are centered on a set of common goals and a set of codes, which regulate their conduct.

Over the years, the age grades in different communities have distinguished themselves in the performance of roles aimed at enhancing the socio-economic life of the people. Age grades operate mostly in the spirit of communal participation, which is meant to assist in the implementation of major projects such as provision of electricity, pipe-borne water, security, moral checks on members and recreational centres in rural areas. According to Ezenwaji (2002) age grade associations also play leadership roles, not only through fund raising activities, but also showing example by being the first to pay their levies or make 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. Ordu (2011) reported that age grade associations help in creating jobs for the youths in the rural areas, by ensuring

that members have vacations by which they earned a living. They also contribute to rural development by enhancing the literacy level of people in the community (Ikwor, 1994).

In the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, age grade associations perform such functions as maintenance of law and order, settlement of disputes between warring members, construction and maintenance of roads and markets, maintaining the cleanliness of local streams as well as protecting their communities from external aggression. They also contribute to community developmental projects such as provision of health amenities, educational facilities, good water supply among others. In-addition, children of the same age grade usually organize themselves as playmates and perform such tasks as clearing the village square, markets and roads or tracts leading to the community source of water (Oyelude, 2002; Okpa, et al, 2018). Edwin (2008) considered that age grade associations foster a strong spirit of cooperation among their members and the much needed social cohesion necessary for overall societal growth and development. Despite the huge contributions of age grade associations to community development, little empirical work has been undertaken to validate their crucial roles in the development of rural communities. Our objective was to provide quantitative evidence of the essential contributions of age grade associations to the development of Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. We hypothesized that age grade-facilitated:

- (i) Infrastructural amenities could contribute to the socio-economic development of the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State
- (ii) Educational facilities could contribute to the socio-economic development the Senatorial District.

## II. METHODS

The study was carried out in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. According to 2006 National Population Census, the District is one of the largest in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It consists of seven local government areas - Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Biase, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South and Odukpani with a total of seventy five (75) wards. The population was one million, one hundred and ninety thousand, three hundred and fifty-four (1,190,354) people (National Population Census, 2006).

We used the cross-sectional survey research design to allow us select and study samples drawn from the population that provides insight into social variables relevant to this work (Isangedighiet al., 2014; Ukwayi&Okpa, 2017; Ebingha et al, 2019). We purposively selected 384 participants from sixteen wards in four local government areas of the Southern Senatorial District for study. Form each of the wards, twenty-four respondents were selected. The sample size was determined through the use of survey monkey sample determinate. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. Generated data were coded and analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

## III. RESULTS

Of the three hundred and eighty four questionnaires distributed, three hundred and seventy five were retrieved, while three hundred and seventy were considered valid and used for analysis.

### *Hypothesis one*

In the null form, hypothesis one states that age grade-facilitated infrastructural amenities could likely contribute to the socio-economic development in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. In this hypothesis, the independent variable is the infrastructural facility while the dependent variable is socio-economic development. As shown in Table 1, the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.94 is less than the tabulated value of 0.113. Thus, based on this the null hypothesis is accepted. It therefore means that, there is statistical significant relationship between the provision of infrastructural facilities and socio-economic development in terms of improved power supply, access to motor-able roads and portable drinking water.

### *Hypothesis two*

Data testing the null hypothesis two that age grade-facilitated educational facilities contribute to the socio-economic development of the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State are summarized in Table 2. Here, the calculated table  $r$  - value of 0.97 exceeded the critical value of 0.113 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, a statistical significant relationship exists between the provision of educational facilities and socio-economic development in terms of construction of class room blocks and provision of teaching and learning materials.

**Table 1**

PPMC analysis of age grade-facilitated infrastructural facilities and socio-economic development

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Coding scores	15	55	1448	0.94
No of respondents	370	40092		

Significant at 0.05, r.cal = 0.113, r-critical = 0.94  
**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

**Table 2**

PPMC analysis of age grade-facilitated educational facilities and socio-economic development

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Coding scores	15	55	1425	0.97
No of respondents	370	37826		

Significant at 0.05, r.cal = 0.97, r-critical = 0.113  
**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

**IV. DISCUSSION**

**Age grade facilitated infrastructural facilities and socio-economic development**

The statistical analysis for hypothesis one shows a significant relationship between age grade-facilitated infrastructures f and socio-economic development in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. We observed that some communities in the District enjoy portable drinking water, courtesy of humanitarian services of age grade. In recognition of the harmful effect of inadequate water supply to the quality of an individual health, the age grade system has made frantic effort to address the water needs of rural dwellers in the District. This has improved the health condition of the people, thus improving their socio-economic well-being. The age grade effort also contributed to the construction and maintenance of roads and rural electrification in the area. The combined availability of potable water, motorable roads and electricity has greatly improved the health, well-being and general quality of life of the people as reported previously (Calderon, 2009; Fakayode, 2008; Babatunde et al., 2014; United Nations, 2011;ILO, 2010; Jones and Forded,2005; Okpata, 2003; Okpa, et al, 2018). The provision of accessible community infrastructure contributes to the quality of life for all in rural areas.

The age grade system over the years recognizes infrastructural development as a critical factor in rural development. The system work hand-in-hand with communities to build or improve local infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospital buildings, water and sanitation systems, as well rural electrification (Bulus&Adefila, 2014). A particular age grade may identify the need for a particular infrastructural project, and engages with the community throughout the construction process. The age grade carries out the supervision of the contractor's work, helping the community organize a management and maintenance committee to take responsibility for the project, as well as conducting the needed training to enable the committee to perform this role. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) (2010), the contributions of age grade to the provision of infrastructural facilities in host communities has significantly enhanced the living standard of the rural populace. It has also promoted a sustained and orderly development of vast resources available for the benefits of the people and the creation of a suitable infrastructural base, which is conducive for profitable investment. Access to essential infrastructural facilities like motor-able roads enhances input supply and agricultural products evacuation; pipe-borne water, and rural electrification are momentous achievement of the age grade system. According to Jones and Forded (2005), in some communities, age grade contribution to rural electrification focused on the rehabilitation of falling poles and provision of generating sets for pumping of water where power is not available.

**Age grade-facilitated educational facilities and socio-economic development**

The result of the second hypothesis shows that the age grade facilitated educational facilities affects socio-economic development in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. This is achieved through the provision of educational materials like books, pencil, pen,erasers.The age grades also contribute to the construction of classroom blocks and carry out periodic maintenance on structures in most schools in the Senatorial District. They provide desks and teaching materials to schools. Prentice (2003) asserts that education

is an indispensable tool for the improvement of life of an individual as well as that of the community and the society at large. 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 through membership dues, levies, revolving loan funds, and sales of shares. Azubuike (1985) asserts that age grade associations contributed to educational development by fostering the need for young people to be enrolled in educational activities, award of scholarships and equipping libraries. Some age grade associations donate in kind such materials as books, desks, pens, chalk and office furniture to schools in rural areas (Chaskin, 2007) while others have actually alleviated the problems of people who would have depended entirely on the government. 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 (Goetz, 2008).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In the study, we examined the contributions of age grade-facilitated projects to the socio-economic development of the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, with emphasis was on infrastructural and educational facilities. We concluded that age grade age grade-facilitated projects considerably support socio-economic development of the study area through provision of portable drinking water, motor-able roads as well as rural electrification. Therefore, we recommend that:

- I. Government and (international) donor agencies should support age grade associations by financially assisting them to execute projects designed to better the lot of the rural dwellers and
- II. Government should as a matter of necessity, ensure that the modus operandi of all age grades or clubs, are constitutionally defined to enhance their contributions to rural development and avoid any unwholesome practice.

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