

**TOWN UNION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: CONTRIBUTIONS OF
NZUKO-AROCHUKWU TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH OF
AROCHUKWU, 1981-2017**

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Abstract

Attempts on community development have been viewed from top-bottom approach, this is responsible for the little gains recorded with national programmes towards community development; hence the need for community participation. This study focuses on the contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu to the socio-economic growth of Arochukwu. This umbrella body of the Aro has played a pivotal role in the infrastructural, economic, social and political transformation of Arochukwu, a society with rich historical and cultural narratives. Just like other towns in Igbo land, the impact of the Nigerian - Biafra war on Arochukwu was severe leading to massive infrastructural decay. The study appraises the concept of community development using the workings of Nzuko-Arochukwu to explore the prospects of town unions and their challenges in developing their communities. The study used the qualitative method based on critical analysis of events from facts available to the researchers emphasizing the combination of primary and secondary sources which include the use of books and journals. The study adopted the community action theory modeled by Paulo Freire which emphasizes on mobilization for community development. The evidence from these sources indicates that Nzuko-Arochukwu has contributed to the socio-economic growth of Arochukwu through construction of roads, provision of potable water, engaged in peace and conflict resolutions in Arochukwu and Aro settlements, educational projects, construction of health centres, completion of the age long Arochukwu civic centre, empowering the community with skills acquisition programmes including the disbursement of low interest loans through the Arochukwu Microfinance Bank and most importantly, the establishment of the Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu. It was observed that Nzuko-Arochukwu has contributed to the socio-economic growth of the town by mobilizing her people to engage in socio-economic projects. Poor finances, inadequate communication between the leaders and the people and unnecessary rivalry are some of the identified challenges militating against the performance of Nzuko-Arochukwu. The study

recommends a closer relationship with government and other town unions for exchange of ideas on community development, engaging members of the community and proper mobilization of the Aro people at home and in diaspora for a better and productive town union.

Keywords: Development, Community, Arochukwu, Mobilization, Community leadership

Introduction

There is an increasing concern among scholars and policy formulators on understanding rural development as a remedy to overall socio-economic development of Third World countries. To galvanize national economy through rural development implies a bottom / top approach to national development. This thought is a paradigm shift from the events of the 1960s and 1970s when economic theorists and development actors centred on growth resulting from national economic development plans and their multiplier effects on massive capital investment. The logic then was that once the national economy was made to flourish, the development of rural economy automatically follows suit. This thought equally influenced and dominated the research and numerous publications on the subject of rural development in the seventies and eighties. The publications highlighted on rural development as a solution to most problems of Third World countries. This paradigm shift was as a result of the failure of the national plans in addressing the needs of rural dwellers causing urban migration in most communities (Kay 2009).

Community development which is a strand of developmental studies in international studies has been acknowledged as significant for local historic, social, economic, cultural, environmental and political development by international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, World Health Organization, European Union, African Union amongst others. Different postulations have been adduced on community development. The United Nations defines community development as a process where members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. The foundation of community development is the interaction between members of a community in their collective action – collective agency – in pursuance of a common development goal with the purpose of raising the quality of their lives (United Nations 1963).

Craig (1995) further argues that Community development involves enabling and empowering members of a community in order to enhance their capacities to play a meaningful role in crafting and shaping the life of the community of which they are a part. Worthy of note in Craig's argument is the concept of empowering members of the community to shape lives in their communities. York (1984) further collaborated by opining that it is, in essence, about mobilizing and organizing community development resources, developing local competencies and mobilizing political action for collective problem solving, self-help and empowerment. In this study, community development refers to self-help efforts of a group of individuals to improve their community without much assistance from the government or any development agency.

From 1980s to the late 1990s town unions assumed a centre stage as critical keys in rural development. Undeniably, poor performance of government development programmes in meeting the socio-economic needs of the people was the major reason behind the

proliferation of town unions in Nigeria during these periods. Wahab (2002) observes that people in developing nations have until recently relied solely on their governments to meet their basic socio-economic demands. Of a truth, governments in African nations have evolved top-down and bottom-up approaches to achieve sustainable development of their people. These include the establishment of lead industries at key centres so as to create job opportunities, provide basic infrastructure and utilize regional natural and man-made resources to stimulate growth and economic development that would spread to lagging regions. Besides, Agbola (2002) noted that successive Nigerian governments have responded to both rural and urban problems by evolving poverty alleviation programmes to help stir development simultaneously at the grassroots. These programmes include the Community Banks, Directorate of Foods and Rural Roads Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life for Rural Women, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), recently introduced School Feeding Programme among others. Institutions such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) were established in 1986, promotion of rural employment is one of the core programme department of the Directorate.

Africa is one of the continents where local community leadership is highly esteemed and plays a key role in all community activities. Almost each and every community has local leaders or influential people such as traditional rulers, chiefs and town union presidents. African elders/leaders are repositories of history and they are regarded as problem solvers and peacemakers. The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria were originally not part of a centralized system of governance. The colonial masters created warrant chiefs to facilitate governance in some parts of the region with the ordinance of 1916 while some areas like Arochukwu, Onitsha and Oguta already had kings. At independence, the warrant chiefs became outdated, the military government in 1978 created autonomous communities with traditional rulers and town unions to create a democratic village republic (Falola and Kalu 2018).

As a rural community, majority of Aro people are subsistent farmers and petty traders with a GDP per capita lower than national average, poverty level is high with no government presence. Social amenities like pipe borne water, electricity and roads are inadequate where they exist. Indeed, one of the biggest difficulties in Arochukwu is access to roads. The 27-kilometers road leading to the community from Ohafia is in horrible condition. Almost all Federal regimes have campaigned with the rehabilitation of the Arochukwu road. In fact, there is a popular saying that *odighi uzo eji ga Aro di nma*. (No good road to Arochukwu). The presence of Abia State College of Education, Technical in Arochukwu appears to be a burden to the community as the influx of students to the community with no social amenities leads to the struggle for the little amenities provided through the collective efforts of the people. The town is served by one general hospital which is also used by other communities in the local government and six ill equipped health centres.

Faced with socio-economic and security challenges, Nzuko-Arochukwu was founded in 1981 when the late Eze Aro, Mazi Kanu Oji CFR, admonished Aro people (*Umu Aro*) to come under one umbrella named Nzuko-Arochukwu to tackle these daunting challenges. The union is an assemblage of various groups in Arochukwu such as the Aro League, Aro Union, Aro Youths and different women organizations. Arochukwu Joint Action Committee (AJAC) headed by Mazi Sam Nwangoro gave birth to the new Nzuko-Arochukwu for the peace, progress and development of Arochukwu town and her people. Nzuko-Arochukwu is

structured into two wings: Nzuko-Arochukwu men's wing and Nzuko-Arochukwu women's wing. It is led by a President General with branches in different cities. The union has embarked on provision of basic amenities in the villages and most importantly, they have settled conflicts that posed serious security challenges for the community and neighbouring states.

Different Igbo communities have over the years engaged in economic activities which go a long way to shaping their socio-cultural and political lives. The provision of social amenities to rural areas is in most cases hindered by scarcity of resources for such purposes. This is usually more complicated in a society like Arochukwu which is grappling with the challenge of population increase. Attempts to acquire some of the needed resources for provision of amenities lead some people to migrate to urban centres for greener pasture. At the same time, the emigrant collaborates with those who reside in Arochukwu to provide basic amenities that will generate resource to the town. It is unfortunate that despite the activities of Aro people through Nzuko-Arochukwu, attention has not been paid to proper documentation of the efforts of Nzuko-Arochukwu towards community growth. In the course of the study, it was observed that the enthusiasm with which Umu Aro embraced Nzuko-Arochukwu in its earliest formation has dwindled. This poses to be a problem because it defeats the proper mobilization expected in community self-help effort. Community participation is a prerequisite to achieving positive results in community development. Taking cognizance of this gap, this work is therefore designed to bridge this gap and produce a single readable material on the contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu to the socio-economic growth of Arochukwu and the major challenges facing the union. This will provide a base for development managers to utilize town unions as agents of development.

This study has both broad and specific objectives. The broad objective of this study is to appraise the concept of community development. The specific objectives of this study are to ascertain the progress level of Nzuko-Arochukwu in its quest for community development and give attention to Nzuko-Arochukwu; bringing them within the focus of historical scholarship by documenting the transformational roles of the union in community development.

As a historical enquiry into the history of a people, the study adopted both historical and descriptive methods in discussing the issues, this entails that the study is thematic. It also employed a qualitative approach based on critical analysis of events from facts available to the researchers. The research uses primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary data were sourced from oral interviews, on the other hand, relevant secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journal articles, constitution of Nzuko-Arochukwu and annual reports of the President General were effectively used.

This work will supplement academic research on community development efforts with special emphasis on community development unions to the general growth of the country. It is an avenue for knowledge sharing which will provide data for community developmental agencies to improve their workings for an enhanced outcome. Ultimately, it will help the leadership of Nzuko-Arochukwu to discharge their duties.

Community development is a wide comprehensive research subject. In order to make a strong argument, it is necessary to explain the scope of the study. These conditions define what is researched and what not. The study examines the contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu

to the socio-economic growth of the town. Geographically, the study covers Arochukwu. In terms of time frame, the study covers 1981 to 2017. During the 10 years anniversary of the end of the civil war, communities accessed the level of reconstruction by the government after the devastating effects of the war. It was recommended that communities should devise ways of rebuilding their societies. Eze Arochukwu called the different social clubs and village associations to come together under one umbrella hence the formation of Nzuko-Arochukwu in 1981. The year 2017 serves as a period of unprecedented infrastructural and socio-cultural development in Arochukwu.

Nzuko-Arochukwu and her commitment to the development of Arochukwu town is anchored on the theory of community action modeled by Paulo Freire. Theories are formulated to explain, predict and understand phenomena. The theory originated from Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educationist who, through his concern for the oppressed, argued that disparity between poor and prosperous residents, community-based organizations or labourers in the society can be bridged through self-determination from those in the low socio-economic class. Influenced by Karl Marx teachings and the deepening inequality in Brazil and Latin American states in the 1960s, Freire wrote the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” in 1968 which was originally in Portuguese and was translated to English in 1972. According to him, awakening of peoples’ conscience to have self-confidence assists them to attain desired goal collectively. In other words, enlightenment of mind through popular mobilization empowers the poor to collectively strive towards common goals and confront the oppressors. When this is achieved, the poor can easily develop their community to catch up with the rich class. This will give the people the ability to involve in planning with the ruling class and over time, bridge the socio-economic gap that separates residents or organizations at grassroot from those in prosperous regions or state.

One interesting factor for community development inherent in this theory for community development is the leadership of the community. Freire pointed out that community leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people rather they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress the people. Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects that must be saved from a burning building. Implicit in this theory is that residents in poor communities can team up or come together to attain socio-economic development. This means that community action theory involves participatory action research approaches and it is asset based; that is, it builds on the strength of a community to create changes from within (Racher 2007).

The community action theory is based on five assumptions. It identifies inequality in the distribution of state resources. It also believes that inequality can be bridged through awakening of mind and self-confidence of individuals in the community. That, it focuses on changing individual lifestyles and behaviour to mobilizing community members and agencies to eliminate underserved conditions. This means that the theory is designed to increase the capacity of communities and organizations to address the social and economic determinants that will positively influence their community towards development (Ryan & Racher 2004).

The community action model offers an understanding to the importance of town union as a strategy for development. The relevance of this theory to this study is hinged on the fact

that it can help us to explain the contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu in her peace initiatives to solve the age-long crisis, provision of basic education and health facilities in Arochukwu.

The Importance of Town Unions in Igbo Society

Different Igbo communities have over the years engaged in economic activities which go a long way to shaping their socio-cultural and political lives. The provision of social amenities to rural areas is in most cases hindered by scarcity of resources for such purposes. Victor C. Uchendu's *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* provides a significant study of the Igbo people as well as the roles of women in Igbo society. Uchendu (1965) was the first indigenous scholar to carry out a holistic study on the Igbo people. He briefly discussed the status of Igbo women and the roles they played in the society as agents of developments right until the colonial period. The work indicates how members of a community developed interest towards developing their community even without the existence of an umbrella body known as town union today.

Edmund O. Egbob's (1987) *Community Development Efforts in Igbo Land* gave a historical account of the origin and growth of community development unions in Igbo land, and how these communities used the unions to foster social and economic development throughout Igbo land. He also focused attention on Nigerians and the need to develop a national spirit which could make every Nigerian have regard for whatever they do so that they can develop their communities.

Furthermore, in reference to Eme, Eluwa and Ukah (2012), the idea of having a town union to look after the welfare of their members far from home was not new as could be deduced from Igbo axiom "*Nwanne di na mba*" which denotes the significance of town unionism especially in a foreign land. In the spirit of the above stated axiom, many Igbo migrants carried the various forms of social relations in their traditional societies into new area in which they moved to. They also had attachment to their homes and felt that they will come back to it. In addition, they pointed out that various social amenities and services these unions enjoyed in the city; they would want to have and enjoy in their home towns. This nostalgic feeling may be regarded as the magic wand that rural and community development have utilized in making town unions a veritable tool of self-help approach in community development in Nigeria since inception. In many African communities in general and Nigeria in particular, especially among the Igbo in the South-East part of the country, town unions through their Age Grade associations have performed various tasks depending on the felt need of the people and what was assigned to them by the town union. Today in many Igbo societies like Ohafia, Abriba etc. these age grades have accomplished important tasks and are still accomplishing various strides in community development. In Okagwe Ohafia, the Okpatemba Age Grade built an ultra-modern two storey building school hall for Isiama Secondary School situated in their community.

Worthy of mention is the Association of South East Town Unions (ASETU) which is the umbrella body of all Presidents General (PG) of town unions in Igboland. In Imo State, southeastern Nigeria, the government in 2012 established the 4th tier of government through the Community Council Government Law of 2012. The essence of this arrangement is to bring development and community governance in rural areas or communities. Originally, the Nigerian constitution created the local governments to take development to rural areas,

however, this arrangement seems to have failed to actualize its mandate due to lack of autonomy. Communities through their unions are given the opportunity to prioritize projects according to their needs and not necessarily what the state government wants for them. Similarly, in nearby Anambra state, the government is in partnership with town associations. Town unions enjoy huge government support through the unified body of town unions in the state. The Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU) has been instrumental to rural development with a peer review system amongst its member unions. Through the ‘20 Million Naira Community Choose Your Project Initiative’, town unions do engage in lofty projects that promote development in their localities as government have concluded the first and second phases while gearing for the third phase (Onwuka 2018). In Abia state, the Abia State Town Unions Association (ASTUA) consists of 739 town unions as members. Although ASTUA is struggling to receive government support like their Imo and Anambra counterparts, significant progress has been recorded in their activities. Nzuko-Arochukwu is one of the Town Unions in ASTUA and it is the study in this research.

Origin of the Aros

Arochukwu parades one of the contentious historical narratives amongst the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria that great historians like Kenneth Dike and others who have done elaborate research on Arochukwu have not been able to reach a consensus. To put things in proper perspective, it is paramount this paper differentiates between the Aros and Arochukwu. Whereas Arochukwu is the geographical location and ancestral home of all Aros, the Aros are the people from Arochukwu and over 350 Aro settlements scattered within and outside Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that there are Aro settlements outside Arochukwu homeland such as Aro Ndi-Izuogu, Aro Ngwa, Aro Obuoro, Aro Mbaise, Aro Awka, Aro Yoruba, Aro Cameroun amongst others.

Ancestrally, Arochukwu was the homeland of the Ibibio as they arrived in 300 AD from the Benue Valley to found other settlements like Ibom and Obong Okon Ita. The Ibibio occupy a great mention in Arochukwu history the same way Christopher Columbus and native Indians are tied to American history. The first trace of Igbo migration into the area was led by Eze Agwu clan from Abiriba in the 17th century. The Eze Agwu clan was led by Agwu Inobia, a powerful blacksmith and they settled in Amanagwu. Interestingly, the Eze Agwu clan are descendants of Nna Uru (who most Aro people call Nna Aro), and a relative of the founding founder of Edda and Abiriba. As new settlers, they were resisted by the regional power, Obong Okon Ita. Eze Agwu tried to cohabit the land with them but, there was no peace. Tensions escalated between the two neighbours leading to the series of Aro-Ibibio wars of 1630 – 1720 which had historic impact on the town which are still felt today. Agwu Inobia led the Eze Agwu clan while Akpan Okon led the Obong Okon Ita clan, neither group won the war. In a move to establish a peaceful neighbourhood, both sides arranged a marriage between the king of Obong Ita and a woman from the Eze Agwu clan. However, the marriage failed to establish peace between them even after they had a son, Kakpokpo Okon. Consequently, the marriage failed (Chidume and Nmaju 2019).

Angered with the activities of the Ibibio neighbours, Eze Agwu enlisted the help of a medicine man, Oke Nnachi from Amasiri in the present day Ebonyi state. Nnachi’s business journey had exposed him to many places and people before he arrived Arochukwu and settled

in Utuhugwu with Ezeka Agwu, the third son of Eze Agwu (Achinivu 2017). Nnachi was mandated to flush out the Ibibio, whom the Aro couldn't defeat during the wars. Nnachi allied with prince Kakpokpo of the Ibibio to help to overthrow the Ibibio leadership which was vehemently resisted by the Ibibio. After series of charms and concoctions on the Ibibio, Nnachi was not successful in driving them away as they had no effect on the Ibibio. Nnachi told Eze Agwu that the only option was physical warfare against the Ibibio and that they will get the services of the gun wielding Akpa warriors, who were good fighters from Akamkpa in the present-day Cross River State. This led to the ascendancy and establishment of the Akpa dynasty (Okoro and Ezumah 2017).

The Akpa warriors were led by Prince Osim Nnaubi, and Akuma Nnaubi, they were brothers and merchant princes from the Akpa king. In fact, history has it that the king of Akpa allowed his warriors to fight on the side of the Aro only if his sons will lead the Akpa warriors and the assurances of their return to Akpa after the war. Their first port of landing was at a village today known as Ugwuakuma. It was at this village that Agwu and the leaders of the Akpa warriors (Osim and Akuma) struck a blood pact; *Igba ndu*.

The Aro-Ibibio war then took a new swing after the blood pact. Unfortunately, Osim, the leader of the Akpa warriors was killed causing trauma to the rest of the warriors especially when they remember the condition of return handed to Nnachi by the Akpa King. The Akpa warrior wanted to eliminate anybody on sight causing Agwu to appeal to them. The leader of the Ibibio warriors was captured and killed. Osim Nnaubi was buried at Oror Village where the Ukwu Ovo stands, to this reason Oror became the chieftaincy town and the home of Eze Aro. The remaining prisoners were judged at Obinkita. This gave rise to Amaikpe Obinkita, where all the 19 villages gather for the yearly Ikeji Festival. The alliances between Eze Agwu, Nnachi, Kakpokpo and the Akpa defeated the Ibibio. The war did not only give birth to Arochukwu but shaped her history and perceptions (Personal Interview, Emma Kanu Ivi 2018).

At the end of the war, Ulu Okon dynasty was assimilated into the Eze Agwu lineage. Amanagwu became one of the villages in Arochukwu and most significantly, the Akpa prince Akuma Nnaubi settled in Arochukwu and became the King of Arochukwu thus, establishing the Ibom Isii kindred. Arochukwu town is divided into three kindreds: Okennachi, Ezeagwu and Ibom Isii.

One important event that happened at the death of Akuma Nnaubi was the transfer of the kingship from Akuma's Ibom Isii to Nnachi's son, Oke Nnachi. Tradition holds that the inability of Akuma to adhere to Aro customs denied the Akpa (Ibom Isii) of the chieftaincy title. Oke Nnachi was rewarded with the headship of Arochukwu up till now while Ibom Isii will be the kingmakers in Aro rulership exercise (Afigbo 1992).

Oke Nnachi kindred comprises Oror, Amankwu, Utuhugwu, Asaga, Amuvi, Isimkpu, Amangwu including parts of Obinkita and Atani villages. Ibom Isii is made up of Ibom, Agbagwu, Ujari, Ugwuakuma, Amasu and Amukwa while the Eze Agwu kindred consists of Amangwu, Ugbo, Ugwuavo, Amoba, parts of Oror, Atani and Obinkita villages. This classification is very important in Aro history owing to the decade long tussle between Aro villages for the throne of Arochukwu. owing to the court cases. Okoro (2012) succinctly chronicled it in *The Making of Eze Aro* as the veracity of the system of choosing an Aro king did not require the interpretation of the modern court but the case encouraged a thorough

study of the system and popularized the knowledge beyond those directly concerned with the selection. The system of the IKWU and the role of the three kindreds – Okennachi, Ibom Isii and Eze Agwu - are now better known in Arochukwu just as the history is more popularized.

Contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu

This section assesses the contributions of Nzuko-Arochukwu to the development of Arochukwu nation through self-help mechanisms. In this study, community development refers to self-help efforts of a group of individuals to improve their community without much assistance from the government or any development agency. This is not to say that the efforts and contributions of governments and development partners are not needed. In fact, due to paucity of funds available to town unions, they should partner with governments and donor agencies for the actualization of their mandates; community development.

Road Maintenance: The usefulness of a good road network in the rural areas cannot be over emphasized or relegated to the background. It is very crucial and occupies important position in the socio-economic lives of the people particularly where the people are largely farmers and traders as in the case of Arochukwu. Owuamalam (1981) shares this view when he argued from the economic point of view that roads link food producing areas with places or towns where adequate markets would be found for them. From administrative point of view, they make the enforcement of law and order easier, because without roads linking villages in local government, taxes and rates cannot be collected from the people, neither will crime and violence be easily checked. Often times we have seen fire fighters complain of lack of good roads to disaster areas.

In the same vein, Ikeme (1990), writing on the challenges of agriculture in Nigeria development, posits that farming villages are often located in remote places that are hardly accessible because of lack of motorable roads. Enormous difficulties are therefore encountered in evaluating agricultural produce and great losses occur in transit. Farmers resort to selling their products in the farm at cheaper rates. Provision of motorable road network will help in timely evacuation of produce and consequently in the reduction of transit losses. An efficient distribution system which results from a good transport network will ensure a fairer price to the farmers and at the same time ensure that farm produce is made timely in areas of concentrated population where they are needed. Nzuko-Arochukwu are fully aware of these aforementioned facts when they embarked on road construction and rehabilitation of existing ones of various kilometers in the town.

There is an age-long saying in Arochukwu that *odighi uzo eji ga Arochukwu di mfe* (no good road to Arochukwu). Arochukwu can be accessed through four major roads; Arochukwu-Atani Anyiom -Itu road, Arochukwu Nkana- Ikot Ekpene road (both are inter-states roads), Arochukwu- Ohafia road (Federal road) and Arochukwu – Ndi Okereke – Ozu Abam road (State road); unfortunately, almost all are in bad shape. The Nkana section of the road from Akwa Ibom state is motorable courtesy of the Akwa Ibom State Government unlike the Abia State section of the road leading to Arochukwu.

The Ohafia-Arochukwu road has been in terrible shape and has appeared in all federal budgets of all administrations since 1999 and some before 1999. Indeed, the Arochukwu - Ohafia road has been a sore thumb that has transcended several administrations. In the early

1960s, the regional government of Dr. M.I. Okpara started the construction. By 1986, Nzuko-Arochukwu led by its first PG Mazi Okoronkwo Avonta led a delegation to Dodan Barracks to appeal to General I.B. Babangida to reconstruct the failed road, RCC actually repaired the road however, it failed after few years. During the military era of Gen Sani Abacha, the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) awarded contract for the road in 1993.

In 2004, the PG Mazi Emma Ivi set up government contacts committee on Arochukwu roads and water headed by Mazi Oji Ogbonnaya led Nzuko-Arochukwu. The committee was mandated to liaise with governments at all levels to restore water to Arochukwu and repair the poor road network in the town. Subsequently they met with the Federal Minister of Works, Ogunlewe in February 2004. Subsequently in the same year, Nzuko-Arochukwu paid a visit to president Obasanjo and it was awarded to Hapel Nig Ltd, a company owned by a man from Arochukwu. This time, Nzuko-Arochukwu pressured the contractor to start from Arochukwu end, only two villages Amuvi to Agbagwu were covered before the project was abandoned. In 2012, after agitations from Nzuko-Arochukwu, the Jonathan administration awarded the contract to Beks Kimse Nig Ltd for 4.8 billion Naira. Unfortunately, the road did not cross St. Paul's junction in Ututu leading to the splitting of the contracts into two parts. The 27-kilometer road from Ohafia to Arochukwu was re-awarded by the Buhari government. The second phase of the construction is ongoing but not without unnecessary delays.

The 34km Arochukwu – Ndi Okereke -Ozu Abam road has not been without series of 'promise and fail'. By October 1984, Nzuko-Arochukwu special projects contact committee led by Col. A.O. Eze Rtd led Nzuko-Arochukwu to General Ike Nwachukwu to construct this 34km road. By 1986, the road was awarded to Hapel Nig Ltd. By 2011, Chief T.A. Orji awarded the road to Masta Services Ltd owned by an Aro family. By April of 2016, Governor Okezie Ikpeazu in a town hall meeting announced that he has paid 60 million naira to Masta Services for this road that every state administration claimed to have budgeted for.

In the midst of all these failed promises, Aro people have suffered untold hardship on the roads. In June of 2016, Nzuko-Arochukwu took the bull by the horns and resorted to self-help. Nzuko-Arochukwu led by Mazi Ezumah took over the rehabilitation of Arochukwu-Ozu Abam (Okobo road) to minimize the suffering of Aro people and also to ensure that Arochukwu community is not eventually cut off from the world. From 2016 -2019, Nzuko repaired that road two times (Aro News 2016). The union sent a delegation to the state government to inform them of Nzuko-Arochukwu's plan to rehabilitate the road, however the state government declined the request, at the second request after months of first decline, the state government gave Nzuko-Arochukwu the authority to grade the road only. The grading covered the 18 km Amuvi to the bridge.

Arochukwu – Nkannah road is one of the roads that link Abia State with Akwa Ibom State. People accessing Arochukwu through Aba and Port Harcourt use this road. For decades, this road has been in deplorable condition. It is said that the bridge was constructed by the colonial officers of the district and neglected by both Federal and State governments for a long time. The bad road had severe socio-economic implications between the two communities. Nzuko-Arochukwu has been at the vanguard for the rehabilitation of this road including visits to Akwa Ibom State government. Finally, a new bridge has been constructed

by the Akwa Ibom State government to ease movement and trade between Abia and Akwa Ibom border communities (Personal Interview, Obot 2019).

In another development, the umbrella union of Umu Aro under the leadership of Mazi Ezuma graded internal roads in the ancient town to alleviate the suffering of the road users. These roads include the Ugwuavor to new layout, Akama to Amangwu, Avia Ovuru to Ibom, Ujari Utuhugwu and Amuvi roads. In 2017, Nzuko Arochukwu leaders with support from Mazi Alex Otti (*Aro Uzo Ije*) and Mazi Emma Kanu Ivi lobbied and attracted the road construction from Asaga through Ndi Ivi, Amaikpe market square road, Isimkpu Amangba junction, Aro Civic centre road, Amaoba through Jubilee road Obinkita (personal Interview, Kanu Ivi 2018). Although this project was executed by the Federal Government through the NDDC, it goes a long way to show that community development is achievable when all members of the community participate. This resonates with the community action theoretical model propounded by Freire which this work already adopted as its theoretical framework.

Education: From time immemorial, education has maintained to be the bedrock of every society. Any society that wishes to develop must create a conducive environment for academic activities and researches. Basic education is the greatest industry in the Local Government. According to the Universal Basic Education (UBEC) Act 2004, basic education is the responsibility of local governments in Nigeria. At this juncture, it is imperative to restate that the theory adopted by this work, community action theory, was propounded by a Brazilian educationist who advocates that communities can develop when they are enlightened. According to Friere, awakening of peoples' conscience to have self-confidence assists them to attain desired goal collectively. In other words, enlightenment of mind through popular mobilization empowers the poor to collectively strive towards common goals and confront the oppressing challenges of the community. Having explored the role of education in the country, one can conclude that it is not easy for government to implement these roles effectively singlehandedly. To this effect, Nzuko-Arochukwu has contributed in renovating schools and upgrading educational facilities. Their focus has been to enhance community infrastructure through improved education.

It can be said without mincing word, that the people of Arochukwu have an insatiable quest for educational excellence. This can be attested to by the life and times of Arochukwu born educationist Alvan Azinna Ikoku, whose face adorn the Nigeria 10 naira note. In 1931, Ikoku founded the first indigenus private secondary school in Nigeria known as Aggrey Memorial Secondary School in the memory of his Ghanaian teacher James E K. Aggrey located in his native village of Amangwu. By 1935, Aro Government School was added to Aggrey as the primary school section, Ikoku's 1962 "Education Bill of Right" made it possible for free primary school education in Nigeria. Ukeje, Akabogu and Ndu (1992) admitted that prior to Ikoku, Schools were established by governments or missionaries. They further argued that the first private and indigenus community participation in education in Eastern Nigeria was by the late Alvan Ikoku. In recognition of his contributions to the education sector, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, now Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, was named after Ikoku.

Nzuko-Arochukwu had in the past awarded scholarships and also encouraged prominent Aro sons and daughters to key into the programme by adopting Umuaro for

educational purposes. These scholarship schemes are of different categories: Scholarships given to orphans and vulnerable children who do not have any means of accessing formal education and scholarships given to the very exceptional and scholarships for intelligent ones who do not have anyone to sponsor their education. Quite a number of individuals were thus sponsored from primary school to the university. Recipients of these scholarships received free text books and other writing materials, school uniforms and free tuition (Personal Interview, Okoroafor Sunday 2018).

Furthermore, Nzuko-Arochukwu was instrumental to the retention of the zonal library in Arochukwu. There were plans to relocate the state zonal library out of Arochukwu due to lack of conducive accommodation to house the library and its offices. Nzuko-Arochukwu mobilized Umuaro under the chairmanship of Elder K.E. Kalu, the Local Government Chairman for Arochukwu to provide a suitable housing for such a project at Nkwu-nabo. Nzuko-Arochukwu succeeded in ensuring that the library was not relocated out of the town. The essence of a library in a society can never be over emphasized.

One outstanding contribution to the development of education in Arochukwu is the role of Nzuko-Arochukwu to the establishment of Abia State College of Education (Technical) Arochukwu (ASCETA). Dr. Ogonnaya Onu, the first civilian governor of Abia State had promised to cite a College of Education (Technical) in Arochukwu but left office without actualizing it. Then came Colonel Ike Nwachukwu who sought to relocate the site of the college to Ihe in Isialangwa South LGA where according to him, there were facilities already in place for the smooth take off of the institution. According to Sam Oluabunwa, a former PG of Nzuko-Arochukwu, Aro quickly took up the challenge and spearheaded the erection of facilities in a section of Aggrey Memorial College, which served as the take-off site for the College of Education. Aggrey Memorial School, as discussed above, was founded by Alvan Ikoku and has a spacious environment for boarding activities. Some of the facilities were converted to ASCETA leaving Aggrey a shadow of itself. Nzuko-Arochukwu under the leadership of Mazi U.K. Udonsi in 1993 taxed adults in Arochukwu and delivered the projects in record time leading to the take-off of the College of Education in Arochukwu (Personal Interview, Okafor Esther 2019). Again, this underpins the essence of our mobilization as discussed in the theory adopted by this work.

Provision of Potable Water: “Water is life” is a popular saying in Nigeria. Good drinking water supply is a problem which confronts many parts of Nigeria. The standard of rural water scheme in the southern part of the country has been relatively impressive. One of the targets of goal 7C in the Millennium Development Goals is to increase the proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source for both rural and urban areas with emphasis on rural communities like Arochukwu. Nigeria’s report after 15 years of the MDGs preceding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicates that most rural communities in the country are without potable water for households.

Arochukwu is blessed with many rivers and streams including enough rainfalls which enrich the underground water making other sources of water such as well and borehole sustainable. In a study by Omoboriowo (2012) and others aimed at appraising the quality of ground water in Arochukwu area, detailed study of the physical and chemical quality of several groundwater samples of 10 boreholes was carried out in an attempt to assess the

portability of groundwater in the town and its surrounding areas up to Afikpo. The waters did not have objectionable colour, odour or taste and were not turbid. The groundwater in the area is generally soft and free from salt water intrusion with low iron constituents; therefore, it is generally acceptable and safe for households, industries and agriculture.

When accessed critically the *Iyi-varas* that runs through some of the villages which border the neighbouring state; Nkana/Itu river basin are just one single river. It comes into Arochukwu through the Ihechiowa/Amuvi axis at Iyi Ochanta running through Edemkpuke, Mkpum-mkpuoba and continue to Iyi-agwu Asaga, Iyi ukwu Atani up to Anyim Amaasu. Over the years, rivers and streams have remained a dependable source of water supply, sea foods and recreation to Aro people (Ezumah 2015). However, just like most things in Aro, the river has suffered great neglect, misused and mismanagement as a result of pollution, inundation of sludge on the river bed, lack of dredging or removal of fallen trees leading to blockage and inhibition of smooth flow of the river at various points. As a result, where the river was hitherto wide, deep and fresh it has narrowed greatly becoming shallow, polluted and in some cases stagnate.

During the course of this research, it was realized that Ngele Ogo Asaga, a stream that served many households in the past had dried up due to unsafe practices thereby rendering residents of the area without water. They trek distances to neighbouring villages to access water. Respite came their way when Nzuko mobilized Hon. Uko Nkole (Federal Member representing Arochukwu/Ohafia) to sink a borehole at *Ime ezi ndi Ivi* for the village. This was made possible through the mobilization by Nzuko Arochukwu.

Nzuko-Arochukwu over the years have embarked on the provision of a potable drinking water to Arochukwu community. Since the commencement of the rural water project, some villages namely Oror, Ujari, Ibom, Amasu and Amuvi, have benefitted from this water project. Due to inadequate finance, they mobilize their representatives in government and friends of Aro to embark on water project for the community. The Amuvi water scheme is a big one as it was done in phases in conjunction with the Federal Government. The maintenance of these boreholes is a problem and most times a burden to the villages. In fact, during Nzuko-Arochukwu meeting with Governor Theodore Orji on 21st July 2009, the second challenge presented to him by Nzuko-Arochukwu was the issue of pipe-borne water. Nzuko leaders reminded him that the community had several self-pumping boreholes that needed only government reticulation efforts to provide water for entire Arochukwu (Kanu Ivi 2009).

Healthcare: The most evident display of Nigeria's underdevelopment condition is the rural areas and that the deplorable condition of the Nigerian rural health sectors is emphatic. Very curious and most worrisome is that the rural health development policies and programmes initiated and implemented by governments at all levels over the years have not yielded the desired results. The rural dwellers in Nigeria still lack access to basic health facilities, water, sanitation, hospitals and good laboratories despite all efforts made by both government and non-governmental organizations to improve the system.

Arochukwu is served by one Government General Hospital at Baraki and about six other health centers spread across different villages. The first major project of Nzuko-Arochukwu was the total rehabilitation of the General Hospital Arochukwu. This was

completed in 1983. Nzuko-Arochukwu has continued to contribute immensely towards the improvement of health care delivery in Arochukwu since inception. The health centers at Ugwuavo, Atani, Amuvi and Obinkita were built by Umuaro. Ugwuavo health centre was originally meant to serve as a maternity home before it was upgraded to a health center due to the high demand for medicare in that village. The construction of Ugwuavo health which started in 1984 was completed in 1994 and handed over to Arochukwu local government. In extension, an orphanage was constructed to cater for the children without parents (Personal Interview, Okoronkwo Chidi 2018).

Nzuko-Arochukwu under Mazi Ezumah was able to attract a hospital project from Total Nigeria Limited. The modern and equipped hospital was a result of the health initiatives programmes embarked upon by Nzuko-Arochukwu. Every year, Aro people look forward to the medical outreach organized by Nzuko-Arochukwu supported by All Aro USA (AAUSA), the umbrella of all Aro unions in North America. The union constructed a medical clinic in Arochukwu, hired a doctor, nurses and laboratory technician and equipped the clinic with medical facilities. They took care of the aged, also started an endowment fund for the aged in 2001. From this fund, money, food, provisions and drugs were given to the elderly ones across the 19 villages of Arochukwu. According to the president of the union, in 2017 alone, they reached out to over 300 patients during its medical outreach excluding those that walk into the clinic on daily basis for medical issues. They also provided water and power to the building. The union is currently fundraising 8.3 million naira to fence the clinic and control the encroaching erosion around the area (Frank 2018). This resonates with the theory adopted by this study that community development is possible when enlightened and empowered community members come together to improve the lives of other community members. They raise awareness on key health issues such as cancer, HIV AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections which is seriously increasing in Abia State amongst other health concern targeted at healthy living.

Alternate Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Peace is a panacea for development as no meaningful development can take place in a conflictual environment. Almost all town unions in Nigeria incorporated peace and development in their motto, this signifies that the two go like hand in glove. Ebisi (2016) connected the nexus between town union and conflict resolution pointed out that town unions handle issues, problems and concerns of the entire village particularly that of adjudication and peace building initiatives as they play an important role in the maintenance of peace and security in the community.

Nzuko-Arochukwu initiated some peace missions which resolved crisis in some villages like Ibom, Oror, Ugwuavor, Asaga, Amuvi, Amaoba, Agbagwu and Isinkpu. Of special mention was the Amaoba crisis which divided the village into many groups for over 25 years. Although the crisis at Agbagwu was thwarted by powerful persons in the village, Okpankpo Aro, the highest decision-making body in Arochukwu wielded in and it was resolved.

Nzuko-Arochukwu brought the conflict between the three (3) kindred Ezes to an end with the signing of the 2nd January 2015 Peace Accord amongst the three kindred Ezes after many failed attempts to reconcile them. The cases were in two folds: Eze Aro vs Eze Ibom

Isii and Eze Ezeagwu on one hand over the illegal dissolution of the Okpankpo Aro (decision making body). Eze Ibom Isii and Eze Ezeagwu vs Eze Aro and some Eze Ogos (heads of the 19 villages) on the other hand leading to the institution of a court case. The case instituted by Ndi Eze Ogo against Eze Ibom Isii and Eze Ezeagwu on their flagrant disrespect to Eze Aro In-Council and frequent harassment of Ndi Eze Ogo with policemen was withdrawn for peace to reign. Although Eze Ibom Isii refused to sign the accord initially however, he signed after one month of pressure. The significance of this accord is that it is now a reference material to resolving independence of Eze Ogo Aro issues in Aro villages as well as giving directions in relationships amongst the Aro royalties towards resolving other critical conflicting issues in Arochukwu town (Kanu Ivi, 2009).

In Orumba North LGA of Anambra State, almost all the seven communities had land disputes with their neighbours. Ndi Owu had issues with Ufuma, Ndi Okpalaeze had land case with Ogboji, Ajali issue with Akpu. History has it that Nzuko-Arochukwu peace initiatives restored peace in these Aro settlements. Nzuko-Arochukwu visited Ajalli for more than six times and hosted Ajalli at Arochukwu two times and three times in Lagos. Nzuko-Arochukwu took it upon herself to settle the dispute between Ajalli welfare union and Prof. Humphrey Nwosu. (Personal Interview, Nwosu 2018). This move doused the tension in Ajalli leading to the coming together of Ajalli people to host the All Aro National Conference in 2005. To foster the peace achieved in the community, all the three kindred Ezes from Arochukwu attended the conference. Similarly, Nzuko-Arochukwu was instrumental to restoring peace and rehabilitation of the people of Aro Obuoro. In series of unending border crisis, the Aro Obuoro were displaced from their land that they had called home for over 200 years.

Promotion of Culture and Tourism

The role of culture and tourism in community development can never be over emphasized and they have important roles in building local economies. Tourism enhances the social standards of any given community. Ikeji Aro is one of the oldest festivals in Igboland. It is a unique opportunity to celebrate the rich Aro culture and tradition in its pure and original form. It is also an avenue to drive up tourism and many Aro in diaspora and non Aro visit Arochukwu. Nzuko-Arochukwu has been at the vanguard of protecting this agelong festival from attacks by religious institutions. At its 1105th celebration in 2017, Nzuko Arochukwu rebranded the festival to a very high status including attracting sponsorship from reputable companies. Of particular interest to this research is the theme of the festival, *Ikeji Arochukwu: Culture for Development*. This signifies that Nzuko-Arochukwu is ready to transform Arochukwu using every available tool.

Arochukwu is home to some historical sites arising from her activities in the past. The Okoro Orji Museum House in Ujari village houses the vestiges of slavery. There is also the Long Juju of Arochukwu Cave which is one of the sites recognized by the World Heritage Centre and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with a rating of VI (6) out of 10. This site is the main oracular shrine of the Ibini Ukpabi which contains a shrine with a throne of judgement, a hill of rags leading to the water fall. It was believed that due to the oracular power of this site in the past, many people came from different parts of Igboland to seek for blessings and judgement.

In furtherance to Nzuko-Arochukwu's contribution to the socio-economic growth of the town through civic halls, they have rebuilt the pavilion Amaikpe square at Obinkita popularly known as Shagari hut. It was constructed several years ago for a reception party for Alhaji Shehu Shagari when he visited Arochukwu as a president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The old and tattered structure which was renovated was used for the 2005 Eke Ekpe Aro festivities as well as events marking the 10th anniversary of Eze Aro on the throne. The square has a special place in Arochukwu history, culture and tradition hence it must be projected and protected.

The 5000-seater Aro cultural centre was completed in 2017 by Mazi Alex Otti, who is a native of Isiala Ngwa South LGA but from one of the Aro settlements in Diaspora. After 42 years, the Aro cultural centre was commissioned. Umuaro can now hold their activities in a befitting environment. Again, Freire's community action theory is relevant as the issue of mobilization comes to fore. The ability of Nzuko-Arochukwu to attract Aro sons and daughters from Aro settlements is commendable.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, town unions hold a great promise to providing the much-needed socio-economic infrastructure in the developing countries. They are increasingly making up for the shortcomings of the state, particularly in developing countries where the state is weak and conspicuously absent in the development of communities, hence their recognitions in some states in southeastern Nigeria. It is identified that people of Arochukwu are having an adequate understanding of community participation; involvement in developmental projects. This influences the capacity to participate in developmental programmes. Therefore, community participation in Arochukwu has been measured as a key factor in the success and sustainability of development projects. The literature review indicates that community participation has more benefits as opposed to its drawbacks. We could therefore, value community participation and making it a spontaneous activity to do, in order to carry out development initiatives.

In the case of Arochukwu, it could be said that there are community members who are trying to avoid conflict by not being artificial. This should not be the case as conflict should not be avoided when it comes to community participation and development. Discussions could take place, and in the process the stakeholders could have a common vision, but other people's views could also be appreciated. Just as Freire's community action theory which this work adopts as framework, community leaders should always strive to mobilize community members along in all their actions. This reduces unnecessary rivalry among community members while channeling resources towards development.

However, it could be concluded that the success of community meetings should not be measured against the attendance but by its ability to transform needs and wants into tangible solutions. Community meetings should not end with display of colourful attires but should start translating to colourful tangible projects. It is the position of this research that Nzuko-Arochukwu cannot and should not be seen as an institution that can solve all problems of Aro people but because of their role in the provision of social facilities for the people, they can be seen as supplementing government efforts in socio-economic development, which they have been doing. Based on the above, this study proffered some recommendations.

Recommendations

From the analysis of the findings, results, as well as inferences drawn, the following recommendations are made:

Government at all levels should encourage the establishment of town unions and economically support the goals and objectives of towns through their town unions, creating a common forum or public sphere where both governmental and nongovernmental organizations could contribute their quota to the development of these rural based unions like Nzuko-Arochukwu. This will take development down to the people where they are needed.

The advantages of fund raising by Nzuko-Arochukwu has been well recognized and utilized by the union, many of the town unions have organized series of fund-raising activities but have not been able to realize their targeted amount due to low turnout of members of the community. The government and the general public can complement the efforts of these unions by donating generously to them so that they can finance local projects for the people. It took Alex Otti from the Aro community in Isiala Ngwa South LGA for Arochukwu to realize their civic center project after 42 years.

Project initiators should create an enabling environment for participation and this should include addressing the factors influencing community participation as well as the capacity gaps within the community in order to achieve effective community participation. Engaging the community to know project priority will foster community participation and subsequent implementation of projects.

Rural communities should become more conscious of their own situation, carefully understand rural socio-economic reality around them, have mutual understanding amongst community members, avoiding bad publicity and unnecessary rivalry, knowing their problems, the causes of these problems, and what measures they themselves can take to begin changing their situation.

The essence of town unions is to mobilize the problem to tackle the challenges of the community. The recognition and mobilization of the potentials of all stakeholders and the people themselves can make a significant contribution to achieving effective community participation and development. From the study, the people identified different ways through which they have contributed to the socio-economic growth of the community. Many Umuaro are not in the knowing of the activities of Nzuko-Arochukwu. There is need for proper connection between the leaders and the people.

The study observed that there is the practice of doing it alone among town unions, many of them have little or nothing to do with each other, in fact some of them are not aware of the existence of other town unions of neighbouring communities irrespective of the fact that there is an umbrella body for all town unions in majority of Southeastern states. Therefore, the study recommends a networking of town unions as a peer review because most of them have common issues. This network can be used to form a mega organization in order to attract financial assistance from government and other agencies on inter communal projects. Government, or international agencies can be catalysts, facilitators and organizers in this respect and by extension ease tensions in many border communities. For example, a synergy between Nzuko-Arochukwu and the Ohafia counterpart will help in putting the bad Ohafia-Arochukwu road in order. After all, both Arochukwu and Ohafia make up Arochuku/Ohafia federal constituency.

This study makes a case by pointing out that this work decided not to dwell on the huge developmental projects embarked upon by Arochukwu women at different levels. This work believes that the roles played by Aro women in the socio-economic growth of the town can be studied as a topic. This research recommends that further research should toe that line.

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Interviews

No	Names of Informants	Occupation	Places of Interview	Age	Date
1	Ivi, K. Emma	Business	Arochukwu	68	10 November 2018
2	Obot, Sunday	Trader	Nkannah	61	16 September 2018
3	Okoronkwo John	Farmer	Arochukwu	68	9 November 2018
4	Okoroafor, Sunday	Civil Servant	Arochukwu	40	14 December 2018
5	Okoronkwo, Chidi	Retired Civil Servant	Arochukwu	63	11 November 2018
6	Nwosu, Pascal	Civil Servant	Awka	49	16 September 2018

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