



Grassroots Empowerment: Assessing Community-Based Organizations and Sustainable Rural Development in Akure-South, Ondo State - Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the influence of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) on the sustainable development of rural communities within the Akure-South Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. This research aimed to evaluate the structure, functions, and challenges of CBOs operating in the study area, as well as their overall contributions to community transformation. The study was guided by four specific research questions and employed a descriptive survey design to elicit both quantitative and qualitative insights. The population comprised all residents of communities under Akure-South Local Government, from which a representative sample of two hundred (200) respondents was selected. Data were gathered through a structured instrument titled "Questionnaire on the Role of CBOs in the Development of Rural Communities in Akure-South Local Government, Ondo State." Instrument validity was established through expert review, and reliability was confirmed using the test-retest approach, producing a coefficient of 0.87 via the Pearson Product Moment Correlation method. Data analysis involved frequency counts, simple percentages, and mean scores. Findings revealed a broad typology of CBOs active in the study area, including microfinance institutions, village development committees, common interest groups, networks of CBOs, landlords' associations, women's and youth associations, farmers' cooperatives, and trade unions. Their operational activities typically occur on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis, reflecting the varying rhythms of community engagement. Despite their developmental relevance, CBOs face critical challenges such as limited financial resources, insufficient manpower, restrictive government policies, poor administrative capacity, inadequate inter-organizational collaboration, and weak leadership dynamics. The study concludes that while CBOs serve as vital mechanisms for grassroots empowerment and rural development, their potential impact remains underutilized due to systemic and organizational barriers. It recommends an integrated development framework that strengthens partnerships between government agencies and community structures, promotes capacity building, and enhances financial and institutional sustainability. Furthermore, future research should interrogate the complementarities and divergences between government-driven and community-initiated projects to expand the development frontiers accessible to rural dwellers.

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INTRODUCTION

Significant disparities persist between urban and rural development levels in Nigeria, reflecting a longstanding pattern of spatial inequality across many subnational regions. Urban centers continue to attract concentrated investments, while rural areas remain largely marginalized and neglected. Most rural communities lack essential social and physical amenities such as potable water, reliable road networks, functional schools, adequate health facilities, and accessible markets, rendering them persistently underdeveloped (Ekong, 2010; Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2022).

In broad economic terms, rural dwellers are primarily engaged in subsistence-oriented activities such as farming, trading, and artisanal production, which constitute the foundation of national economic growth. However, despite their economic relevance, rural populations experience chronic infrastructure deficits that limit their quality of life. Inadequate access to clean water, electricity, and transportation continues to exacerbate poverty, while low purchasing power and minimal income opportunities further depress living standards. As of 2010, Nigeria's rural population stood at approximately 79.5 million, representing 50.2 percent of the national total (World Bank, 2010), and recent estimates suggest that the rural share remains above 45 percent (World Bank, 2023).

The continued deterioration of rural conditions and the escalating pace of rural-urban migration illustrate the cumulative effect of decades of neglect by successive governments (Tunrayo, 2009; Adepoju, 2021). Initiatives such as the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and the Better Life for Rural Women Programme achieved limited success in transforming the socio-economic landscape of rural Nigeria. Common challenges underlying these shortcomings include weak policy coherence, discontinuity in project implementation, and inadequate institutional coordination (Deji, 2002; Eze & Okafor, 2020).

Consequently, the quest to meet local needs has increasingly driven the emergence and

consolidation of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), particularly in rural environments. As noted by Wahab (2000), citizens in developing societies have traditionally relied on governments to deliver essential social and economic services; however, the inadequacies of state-centered models have prompted new grassroots-oriented approaches. Many African governments have experimented with both top-down and bottom-up frameworks to promote sustainable community development, which often involve the establishment of anchor institutions or lead firms at strategic hubs to generate employment, provide infrastructure, and leverage local resources to stimulate regional growth (Abegunde, 2003; Adisa & Afolabi, 2021).

The growing disenchantment with the inefficiency of top-down strategies and the limited inclusivity of bottom-up mechanisms has weakened public confidence in centralized governance systems. As a result, communities increasingly seek empowerment and resilience through locally organized institutions, whose participatory orientation reflects a broader shift toward decentralized and people-centered rural development models (Onyema, 2022).

As communities increasingly channel their trust and energy into local institutions, the role of these entities in mobilizing collective action and fostering local development becomes ever more apparent. These organizations, rooted in community identity and mutual support, often emerge as a pragmatic response to the inadequacies of centralized governance systems. Local associations are consequently associated with the principle of self-help and the drive to bridge developmental gaps within their immediate environments (Ogundipe, 2003). Through these grassroots initiatives, citizens take ownership of their development process by pooling resources, skills, and local knowledge to address pressing needs, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and community resilience (Okonkwo & Udeh, 2021).

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), also referred to as local groups or community associations, operate under various names depending on locality and function. These include community development associations,



neighborhood councils, cooperative unions, and similar grassroots collectives that embody participatory governance. CBOs are typically composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds who live or work within the same locality and are united by shared objectives. Such organizations extend the base of self-governance and promote inclusive participation in local decision-making (Adeyemo, 2002; Nwachukwu, 2020). They are widely recognized as voluntary, non-profit, and non-governmental bodies whose primary purpose is to enhance community welfare and economic empowerment (Abegunde, 2004; Musa, 2023).

The growing prominence of these local institutions, particularly in developing nations, underscores the effectiveness of "bottom-up" approaches in identifying and responding to grassroots needs. CBOs frequently undertake essential functions including community mobilization, education, health promotion, social welfare, and empowerment programs for vulnerable groups. The World Bank emphasizes that CBOs are distinct from other non-governmental organizations because they are primarily membership-driven bodies formed to advance shared social or economic interests such as women's groups, credit cooperatives, youth associations, and farmers' networks (World Bank, 2020). These groups embody participatory democracy and provide platforms for sustainable local development and self-reliance (Olawale & Abdulkarim, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, CBOs have long represented instruments of self-help and collective advancement. Many communities, particularly in the southern regions, have sustained traditions of forming voluntary associations that mobilize funds and human capital for community projects. Annual meetings are often convened to deliberate on developmental priorities, launch new initiatives, and raise contributions for execution. Through such mechanisms, rural communities have independently financed and implemented projects such as the construction of classroom blocks, health centers, boreholes, and access roads that have significantly improved living conditions where government intervention remains minimal. These experiences reaffirm the centrality of local

initiative and participatory development in advancing inclusive growth (Ekanem & Okechukwu, 2023).

CBOs thus represent a cornerstone of community transformation and participatory governance. Their ability to influence public attitudes, mobilize collective energy, and sustain development actions underscores their role as effective change agents. The persistent shortcomings of top-down development frameworks and the exclusion of grassroots actors from formal policy processes continue to highlight the enduring importance of these community institutions in shaping Nigeria's developmental landscape.

The persistent failures of top-down governance and the limited inclusion of grassroots actors have eroded public confidence in centralized authorities. Consequently, communities now find greater assurance in indigenous institutions such as Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), which mobilize local knowledge, voluntary resources, and shared commitment to implement development initiatives that directly respond to their immediate needs (Adisa, 2013). These organizations have become active agents of change, addressing the daily realities of rural people and serving as effective mechanisms for self-reliance, social inclusion, and participatory governance (Ekanem & Okechukwu, 2023).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the involvement of CBOs in rural project development constitutes a crucial driver of sustainable local transformation. Their initiatives have produced tangible outcomes in diverse sectors including education, healthcare delivery, agricultural support, infrastructure provision, and environmental management (Yankson, 2000; Olojede & Adeyemi, 2022). CBOs also foster community dialogue and accountability, helping to align collective interests with developmental priorities while promoting ownership and maintenance of public assets. Their participatory nature often enables faster implementation and greater transparency than bureaucratic, state-led approaches (Mensah & Amankwah, 2021).



Despite these achievements, many rural areas across Nigeria remain deprived of essential services such as potable water, functional schools, accessible healthcare facilities, good roads, and organized markets. This continuing deprivation underscores the limitations of state-led interventions, which have often been inconsistent, fragmented, or inadequately funded. In principle, the activities of community-based organizations should serve as complementary efforts that strengthen and extend the reach of governmental initiatives, rather than substitutes for formal rural development responsibilities. However, persistent governance gaps have left CBOs to shoulder a disproportionate burden in delivering basic services that fall within the domain of the state (Ajaero, 2022).

It is within this context that the present study seeks to explore and critically assess the role of CBOs in the development of rural communities within Akure-South Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study aims to determine the extent to which these organizations contribute to social and economic progress, the challenges they face, and the potential for stronger collaboration with public institutions to achieve inclusive and sustainable rural development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The quest for rural development in Nigeria is neither recent nor uncharted. Successive governments have introduced numerous initiatives and policy frameworks aimed at transforming rural economies, most of which were articulated within various National Development and Rolling Plans. Beginning with the First National Development Plan (1962–1968) and the Second National Development Plan (1970–1974), rural development was largely equated with agricultural modernization, a legacy inherited from colonial planning systems. The Third National Development Plan (1975–1980) marked an attempt to broaden this focus, introducing policies designed to increase rural productivity, enhance income levels, diversify the rural economy, and improve living conditions through the provision of social infrastructure.

Subsequent strategies, including the Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985), the Rolling Plans (1990–1998), Vision 2010, Vision 20:2020, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), sought to institutionalize rural progress.

Nevertheless, empirical and field-based observations indicate that these state-led efforts have not achieved their intended outcomes. Structural inefficiencies, weak policy implementation, and lack of local participation have constrained their impact (Olujimi, 2020). Consequently, local communities have turned increasingly to CBOs as alternative platforms for initiating and managing development projects that address their socio-economic priorities and foster community self-determination.

The problem that this study sought to address lay in the unclear and underexplored role of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in complementing or filling the vacuum left by ineffective government interventions in rural development. Although CBOs were recognized as vital agents of grassroots participation and self-help, there was insufficient empirical understanding of the extent of their contributions, the challenges constraining their operations, and the nature of their collaboration with government agencies. In the absence of such understanding, policy responses remained fragmented and ineffective. The study was therefore conducted to critically investigate and delineate the specific roles, impacts, and limitations of CBOs in promoting sustainable rural development in Akure-South Local Government Area, with the ultimate aim of providing insights to guide more inclusive and integrated development strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this study was to examine in depth the role of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the development of rural communities within Akure-South Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. The research was motivated by the persistent developmental gaps left by government-led initiatives, particularly in rural settings, and by the increasing recognition of CBOs as critical drivers



of grassroots transformation. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and classify the various types of CBOs operating in rural communities of Akure-South Local Government Area.
2. To assess the regularity and consistency of CBO activities in promoting rural development within the study area.
3. To determine the specific roles performed by CBOs in fostering community growth and social advancement.
4. To investigate the range of challenges and constraints hindering the effectiveness of CBOs in delivering services to rural communities.

Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of Community-Based Organizations are present in the study area?
2. To what extent are the activities of CBOs conducted regularly in the development of the community?
3. What roles do Community-Based Organizations perform in the development of the study area?
4. What are the major challenges hindering the effectiveness of Community-Based Organizations in rural communities?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design, which was considered appropriate for capturing the views, experiences, and perceptions of community members on the operations and contributions of CBOs. The design facilitated the collection of both quantitative and descriptive data that reflect the lived realities of rural populations.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all inhabitants of Akure-South Local Government Area. The choice of this population was informed by the diversity of socio-economic activities within the local government and the presence of multiple community-based groups actively involved in grassroots development.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select a sample of 250 respondents from five representative communities within the study area. This sampling approach ensured both geographical spread and demographic balance, thereby improving the reliability and representativeness of the findings.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in line with the research questions. The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A gathered demographic information such as age, sex, marital status, and educational background; Section B addressed substantive issues on the types, activities, roles, and challenges of CBOs.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts from the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education and one expert from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, University of Benin, Nigeria. Their feedback helped refine the items to enhance clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method. The correlation of the two sets of scores, analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), yielded a coefficient of 0.82, which indicated that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for data collection.



Administration of the Instrument

The researcher, assisted by four trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents. This direct administration method was adopted to ensure accurate completion, minimize non-response, and facilitate the timely retrieval of the questionnaires.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores. These tools were

considered appropriate for identifying trends, patterns, and respondent perceptions relevant to the research questions.

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

What are the various types of Community-Based Organizations in the study area? Responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Distribution of responses on the various types of Community-Based Organizations in the study area*

Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
User Associations (UAs)	200	2.2650	Rejected
Microfinance Institutions (MFIs)	200	2.7200	Accepted
Village Development Committees (VDCs)	200	2.9350	Accepted
Common Interest Groups (CIGs)	200	2.6350	Accepted
Networks of CBOs	200	2.6350	Accepted
Landlord Associations	200	3.5450	Accepted
Women's Associations	200	3.4750	Accepted
Youth Associations	200	3.4673	Accepted
Farmers' Organizations	200	3.3600	Accepted
Trade Unions	200	3.2700	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The data show that items with mean scores above the criterion of 2.50, including MFIs, VDCs, CIGs, networks of CBOs, landlord associations, women's associations, youth associations, farmers' organizations, and trade unions—were accepted as valid types of CBOs

operating in the study area. User Associations, however, did not meet the criterion mean and were not considered significant contributors. These results highlight the diversity of organizational structures within Akure-South and confirm the significant presence of both formal and informal community collectives.

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Research Question 2:

How often are CBO activities carried out in the study area?

Responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of responses on the frequency of CBO activities in the study area

Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
Rare Activities	200	2.2550	Rejected
Weekly Activities	200	2.5050	Accepted
Monthly Activities	200	3.4250	Accepted
Yearly Activities	200	3.2650	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The analysis indicates that the majority of CBOs in the study area conduct their activities on weekly, monthly, or annual bases. Monthly activities recorded the highest mean score, suggesting that CBOs frequently mobilize resources and engage members at this interval. The rejection of "rare activities" demonstrates that most CBOs are active and consistent in their engagements. These findings suggest that CBOs provide a reliable framework for periodic community mobilization, and their structured activities contribute meaningfully to sustaining developmental momentum.

INTERPRETATION

The results affirm that CBOs in Akure-South are both diverse in type and active in operation. By organizing activities on a regular basis, these organizations maintain social

cohesion and drive initiatives that support rural development. The frequency and inclusivity of their engagements underscore the importance of grassroots participation in sustaining community-driven progress.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that only weekly, monthly, and annual activities achieved mean scores above the criterion value of 2.50, while "rarely" did not. This finding suggests that CBOs in the study area maintain structured and predictable engagement with their members. The predominance of monthly activities (mean = 3.4250) further highlights that CBOs operate with a rhythm that sustains member participation and ensures continuity in developmental interventions.

Research Question 3:

What roles do CBOs play in the communities under study?

Responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of responses on the roles of Community-Based Organizations in the study area

Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
Sponsor Training	200	2.3250	Rejected
Financing Projects	200	2.7850	Accepted
Liaison with Government	200	2.9950	Accepted
Promoting Mutual Understanding	200	3.4000	Accepted

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Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
Raising Funds for Project Execution	200	3.1350	Accepted
Planning of Programmes	200	3.1950	Accepted
Economic Empowerment	200	3.0300	Accepted
Cooperation with Other Organizations	200	2.9650	Accepted
Protecting the Image of the Community	200	3.3450	Accepted
Trade Union Functions	200	3.0300	Accepted
Security for Community and Government Projects	200	3.3500	Accepted
Harmonizing Rural Dwellers for Agricultural and Rural Growth	200	3.3800	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The analysis shows that all items except “sponsor training” achieved mean scores above the criterion mean. This indicates that the core roles of CBOs in the study area revolve around financing projects, liaising with government agencies, promoting mutual understanding, raising funds, planning developmental programmes, enhancing economic empowerment, cooperating with other organizations, safeguarding the community's

image, ensuring security of community and government projects, and harmonizing rural dwellers for agricultural growth. These results highlight CBOs as versatile institutions whose functions extend across socio-economic, cultural, and political spheres of community life.

Research Question 4:

What challenges hinder the services of CBOs in the communities under study?

Responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Distribution of responses on the problems hindering CBO services in the study area*

Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
Finance	200	3.7200	Accepted
Manpower	200	2.5300	Accepted
Government Policies	200	2.8450	Accepted
Poor Management	200	3.0850	Accepted
Lack of Cooperation	200	2.8700	Accepted
Cooperation with Other Organizations	200	2.5850	Accepted
Bad Leadership	200	3.1450	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The data reveal that all listed items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, meaning that financial constraints, inadequate manpower, unfavorable government policies, poor management practices, lack of cooperation, weak inter-organizational linkages, and bad leadership are significant challenges faced by CBOs in

Akure-South. These limitations directly constrain the effectiveness and sustainability of their developmental interventions.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study's key findings can be summarized as follows:

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1. CBOs in Akure-South include microfinance institutions, village development committees, common interest groups, networks of CBOs, landlord associations, women's associations, youth associations, farmers' organizations, and trade unions.
2. CBO activities are carried out primarily on weekly, monthly, and yearly bases, with monthly activities being most prevalent.
3. The main roles of CBOs include financing projects, liaising with government, promoting mutual understanding, raising funds, planning community programmes, empowering members economically, cooperating with other organizations, safeguarding community identity, providing security, and unifying rural dwellers for agricultural development.
4. The principal challenges hindering CBOs are financial constraints, manpower shortages, restrictive policies, poor management, lack of cooperation, weak collaboration, and bad leadership.

CONCLUSION

Based on these findings, the study concludes that CBOs constitute essential development agents in the rural communities of Akure-South. They not only mobilize resources for infrastructure and welfare projects but also act as platforms for socio-political participation and grassroots empowerment. Despite their critical role, the challenges they face limit their effectiveness as sustainable vehicles for rural transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Further studies should investigate the similarities and differences between government-initiated community

projects and those initiated by CBOs, as such research will illuminate areas for collaboration and maximize development opportunities for rural dwellers.

2. The government should adopt targeted, formal, and systematic strategies to support rural development initiatives, particularly those that build on and complement CBO activities.
3. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations should prioritize the strengthening of adult education agencies and institutions, since improved adult education enhances civic awareness, capacity building, and participation, which in turn increase the effectiveness of CBOs.

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