

## COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN OHAFIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Steve Otonye Tamuno and Williams Okwara Iroh

Department Of Economics, University Of Portharcourt, Choba, Portharcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

Community self- help projects are known to play a significant role in the improvement of the quality of life of rural dwellers. The role however depends on the extent to which community self–help scheme is adopted as a relevant strategy for rural development. This study examines the relationship between community self-help projects and improvements in several socio-economic indicators such as infrastructural provision, employment generation and income. The study draws on survey data from a sample of 293 respondents in ten communities in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State. Tables and simple percentages were used in the analysis. The study discovered that there is a significant level of improvement in the socio-economic indicators of development. Thus leading to sustainable development

**Keywords:** Community, Self-help projects, Rural development, Sustainable development and Ohafia

### INTRODUCTION

The rural areas of Nigeria are inhabited by the bulk of the nation’s population. They serve as the country’s principal market for domestic manufactures. In general terms, the rural areas engage in primary activities that form the foundation for any economic development. In spite of the importance attached to the rural areas, they are not attractive to live in. There is the absence of infrastructures which improves quality of life. Usually, there is the lack of portable water, electricity and good road networks. The rural people have low purchasing power and standard of living.

Attempts at solving the rural problems had been the main objective of development planning in Nigeria since the inception of planning periods. Examples of such activities are evidenced in the following programmes, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). The intention of policy makers is that rural infrastructure, if adequately provided, can enhance the quality of rural life.

However, it is observed that the rural people have benefited very little from most rural development programmes. The process of rural development can be more sustainable when all the members of the family are involved. Therefore sustainable

rural development should be an important concern for the developing countries in order to attain economic development and welfare of the people.

This paper attempts to explore the effectiveness of sustainable rural development through self-help approach; particularly the assessment of the different forms of rural development projects earmarked and embarked upon by the members of the different communities; the evaluation of the extent to which the projects have impacted on the communities in terms of: employment generation, infrastructural provision and income generation. Also to attain socially cohesive and stable communities with viable institutions, sustainable economies and universal access to social amenities, able to attract skilled and knowledgeable people, equipped to contribute to their own and the nation's growth and development. The strategic aim of the paper is to highlight the great possibilities of self-help programs in transforming rural Ohafia into an economically viable and socially stable and harmonious region that makes a significant contribution to the nation's GDP. A successful strategy to achieve integrated sustainable rural development will reflect the local people actively participating in the origination and organization of the projects.

The paper is subsequently sectionalized into the followings; the area of study, data base, sample design and analytical tool, review of related literature, impact assessment of community self-help projects, the conclusion.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Harris (1982), citing the World Bank definition of rural development as "...a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor." He went further to identify four major factors, namely: increased concerns about the persistent and deepening rural poverty; changing views on the meaning of the concept of development; emergence of a more diversified rural economy in which rural nonfarm enterprises play an increasingly important role; and increased recognition of the importance of reducing the non-income dimensions of poverty to achieve sustainable improvements in the socioeconomic well-being of the poor.

From the above definition, rural development focuses particularly on poverty, inequality and the improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. Since the government was "far" from the rural areas in terms of development, and with the realization that government alone cannot provide all their needs, the people had to learn to "do-it-themselves".

According to Sumitra Bithi Kachari and Dukhabandhu Sahoo (2008), self-help approach is a new paradigm in the field of rural development, whose main goal is rural development. Specific objectives of the approach are to increase the well-being of the poor people, and provide infrastructural facilities. It is a voluntary and self-managed group of people belonging to similar socio-economic characteristics, who come together to initiate ideas that will promote sustainable development. The self-help approach of rural development in the form of undertaking economic programmes, provide employment, infrastructures that a community can provide for themselves, acquainted with skills and occupational diversification. Also, it provides social welfare programmes to improve health, nutrition and general community welfare.

According to Tamuno (2009: 162), result of studies in the execution of self-help projects in the Rivers State of Nigeria shows that the local people can on their own volition initiate and execute programmes aimed at checking the problem of rural backwardness.

As Chief R. O. M Offor, community development adviser of Shell Petroleum Development Company, put it in 1987, “Development is not a cluster of benefits given to people in need but a process by which a populace acquires a greater mastery over its own destiny”. Self-help calls for a firm recognition of the role of self, a definition of self in such a manner that sees the local community, the local government, the state and indeed, the nation as forming an inseparable aggregate of inter-linked selves. It calls for a stage by stage process of drawing out of the selves schemes and projects which arise from the innermost longings of each gradation of the self-schemes and projects which enjoy the emotional and intellectual attachment of the different levels of self and therefore, projects which are not likely to be abandoned as soon as a slight difficulty is encountered, or those entrusted with its execution have made their money, earned their promotions, earned national honours or left the scheme in retirement or disgrace, (Afigbo,....)

Also, under the self-help approach to rural development, the logic is that individual effort or community effort determines their fate. This philosophy of development is an attempt made to enlist and inspire the people in the determination of desirable change in goals and in the implementation of programmes to bring about the change deemed desirable. It also highlights community development as the involvement of the people.

Self-help projects are focused on local participation by the people who identify their needs, plan, take decisions and implement them to enhance their living standard. The idea involves the spirit of “give and take”, joint efforts, social cooperation and self-reliance. Locally, people are advised to say their problems with the view to finding answers to them, depending on their initiatives, this involves the provision of technical and social support services on a mutual basis. Through self-help, unused local resources like the government funds are reserved, and the people at the local level acquire skills, become competent and confident in the management of their affairs. Self-help connotes more food for the needy, better health, better primary /secondary education, developed infrastructure, self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment in the life of rural dwellers, (Nath, 2008).

The community participation in rural projects development is an important element and a sure way to the speedy development of the rural areas of Nigeria and is well attested to in development literature; Okafor (1984), Udoye (1985), Muoghalu (1986) and Agboola, (1988)

The need to develop rural areas to a large extent will reduce the contrasting scenario of urban opulence and rural decadence. It has equally received ample documentation in literature, (Hansen and Schulz, 1981). Strategic option for the liquidation of these imbalances traceable to social class distinctions, regional disparities in economic development and intra urban variations in achievement of economic well-being have been recommended, (Solomon 1970, Friedman 1981, Udoye 1985, FGN 1986).

The findings from various literature stated that rural development processes will generate increase in the capacity of the rural people to control all aspects of rural life – social, economic, cultural, and political and it has some inter-linkages with poverty alleviation, (Banerjee 2004).

An article by Bhagyalakshmi (2004) tries to throw light on the importance of information oriented rural development programmes. Empowerment and information go hand in hand; without information, no development can take firm root. The new opportunities can be provided when all the information needs of the community can be met to stimulate their awareness and better their capabilities.

Briefly, the review of literature reveals that in the process of rural development, the society needs to organize itself to satisfy their developmental needs (Tamuno: 2009 and Akpomuvie: 2010). The self-help approach promotes awareness among the rural people to expand their capabilities to satisfy their functional needs and identify the problems that they encounter most in their lives. In other words, we are talking of the creation of an environment for the flowering of self which will then make it possible for this self to be the originator and designer rather than the passive receiver of these supposed goodies or items of modern development and civilization. In recent times, rural development is seen from the perspective of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). The primary objective of sustainable development is to reduce the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social instability.

Development will be sustainable to the extent that it contributes to increased local growth that rural people can see, and are able to access the resources to keep it going. Thus, sustainability implies effective participation to assure that the projects and activities undertaken respond to articulated priorities at the local level. A sustainable strategy will thus have to enhance the revenue base of local people over time (although initially the contribution will be small). It will, moreover, have to define a major role for local government in coordinating the participatory decision-making and in mobilizing available resources.

Social sustainability is an important dimension of a successful strategy. Rural communities hold a wealth of social capital in the form of extended networks of mutual solidarity, shared beliefs and traditions, and commitments to retain long-standing practices of daily life. Development projects when defined through sound participatory processes can reinforce and sustain social capital. Conversely, incremental resources brought into rural communities can be divisive and destructive if various groups compete for access through a process that is not generally accepted and understood. One need not idealize the degree of social cohesion within villages. Rural society is not homogeneous, and widespread poverty creates tensions. Growth necessarily brings change, and change can cause conflict. Because the social dynamics of rural areas present challenges to which there are no easy answers, the participatory process should be designed to be as transparent and broadly inclusive as possible, and at least a portion of benefits should be targeted to particular groups that might otherwise be under-recognized, such as women and young people (David Baldock, Janet Dwyer, Philip Lowe, Jan-Erik Petersen and Neil Ward: 2001).

## **AREA OF STUDY, DATA BASE, SAMPLE DESIGN AND ANALYTICAL TOOL OF THE STUDY**

The present study is conducted to ascertain the role of community self-help projects on rural development. The area of study is confined to the Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State. The Ohafia local government has twenty five communities: Elu, Amaekpu, Ebem, Akanu, Asaga, Okon, Okagwe, Amangwu, Isiugwu, Ndi Uduma, Ndi Uduma Awoke, Abia, Ezi Afo, Ndi Orieke, Nkwebi, Ndi Ibe, Ufiele, Amuma, Amuke, Ndi Nku, Oboro, Ihe Nta, Ndi Okala, Ndi Amogu, and Amangwu.

Basically, primary data was used for the study. The primary data was collected through the use of direct observation, oral interview, and administration of well-structured questionnaire. The personal observation was used to identify the forms of community self-help projects that have been undertaken in the sampled communities. This was necessary in order to examine the various individual self-help projects as they exist in the various communities. The oral interview was used with respect to the leaders of the Community Development Committees (CDC), Women Organizations (WO) and Youth Organizations (YO) in the sampled communities. The essence was to ascertain the various projects executed by their groups and the conditions that necessitated the establishment of such projects. Also, the oral interview was used to confirm the responses on the questionnaire. The well-structured questionnaire was administered to community development committee members, women organization members, and the youth organization members who have been promoters and beneficiaries of the various self-help projects undertaken in their various communities. In administering the questionnaire, ten of the twenty five communities in Ohafia Local Government Area were randomly selected. Together, data on the results achieved by community self-help projects of the sampled communities was used. A total of three hundred persons were interviewed for this study. The study used descriptive statistical tools like the tables and percentages.

### **IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS**

In this section data are presented and analyzed in the following way:

- 1) An inventory of self-help projects earmarked and embarked upon in the studied area.
- 2) Evaluation of the projects impact on the communities in the following areas:
  - (i) Employment generation
  - (ii) Infrastructural provision
  - (iii) Income generation

#### **An inventory of self-help projects in the studied area.**

From the table 1 below, a total of 164 projects were undertaken in the sampled communities. The following projects (164) accounted as follows, primary schools (12), secondary schools (10), health/maternity centres (7), cottage hospitals (9), markets (6), motor parks (3), Town halls (41), civic centres (7) feeder roads (6), bridge/culverts (26) street lights (4), toilets (9), rural water supply (16), tower clock (1), other lock up shops (1), palm plantation (1), rural electrification (3), computer and equipment centre (1), palm oil processing mill (1).

From the study, 153 projects were solely executed by the communities, while 11 projects were jointly initiated and executed by the communities and the Abia State Agency for Community and Rural Development Project (Abia- CSDP).

The table also shows that in the study area, development projects are dominated by projects such as Town Hall, bridge/culvert, rural water supply, education, health care and toilets. Mr. Agwu Iroha contends that “the projects reflected the

felt needs of the people, hence the emphasis on them”. The pattern that emerges from these is that, in terms of number, the communities preferences are reflected on the projects they embarked on.

**Table 1 showing FORMS OF COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN THE SAMPLE COMMUNITIES**  
**NAMES OF COMMUNITIES**

S/N	TYPE OF PROJECT	AMAEEK PU	EL U	EBE M	ASAG A	AMU KE	AKAN U	AMU MA	AMAN GWU	OKO N	NS I- IB E	TOT AL
1.	Comm. Pri. Sch.	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
2.	Comm. Sec. Sch.	1	-	2	2	-	1	1	1	1	1	10
3.	Comm. Health/Maternity	-	1	2	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	7
4.	Comm. Cottage Hospital	1	-	2	2	1	-	1	1	1	-	9
5.	Market	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	6
6.	Motor Park	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
7.	Town Hall	4	3	6	5	5	7	2	4	3	2	41
8.	Civil Centre/Play Ground/Village Hall	1	-	3	1		1		1			7
9.	Feeder Road		1	2	1				1	1		6
10.	Bridge/Culvert	1	2	5	3	3	4	2	3	2	1	26
11.	Street Lights	-	-	2	1		2		1			4
12.	Toilets	-	1	2		1	2		2	1		9
13.	Pipe Borne Water		2	6	2		2	2		1	1	16
14.	Lock up Stores			1								1
15.	Palm Plantation					1						1
16.	Tower Clock			1								1
17.	Electricity			1			1		1			3
18.	Comp &equipment	1										1
19.	Palm oil processing mill									1		1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>164</b>

*Source: field work 2011*

**Evaluation of the projects impact on the communities in the following areas:**

**i. Employment generation**

From table 2 below, 57.3 percent of the respondents interviewed agreed that community self-help projects have impacted positively on the people through the generation of employment opportunities in the community primary schools while 26.6 percent of the respondents disagreed to this position, 16.1 percent of them were undecided. Also from the table, 54.3 percent of the respondents agreed that generation of employment opportunities in the community secondary schools is an impact of community self-help project on employment opportunities for the people while 20.5 percent of the respondents disagreed to this, 25.2 percent of them were undecided. Table 2 also shows that 36.9 percent agreed that generation of employment opportunities in the community health/maternity centres is another impact of self-help project on employment general for the people while 36.5 percent of the respondents disagreed, 26.6 percent of them were undecided.

Finally, 68.3 percent of all the respondents interviewed agreed that community self-help projects have impacted on the people through the generation of employment opportunities in the community markets and motor parks while 16 percent of the respondents disagreed on the issue, 15.7 percent were undecided. The local people who were educationally qualified were employed in the primary and secondary schools as teachers. While others, were employed as cleaners and security personnel.

**Table 2 showing PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS OPINION ON THE IMPACT COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS ON EMPLOYMENT GENERATION FOR THE PEOPLE IN OHAFIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA?**

**RESPONSES**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	YES	NO	UND	TOTAL
i.	Generation of employment opportunities in the community primary schools	168 (57.3)	78 (26.6)	47 (16.1)	293 (100)
ii.	Generation of employment opportunities in the community secondary schools	159 (54.3)	60 (20.5)	74 (25.2)	293 (100)
iii.	Generation of employment opportunities in the community health/maternity centres	108 (36.9)	107 (36.5)	78 (26.6)	293 (100)
iv.	Generation of employment opportunities in the community markets and motor parks.	200 (68.3)	47 (16.0)	46 (15.7)	293 (100)

*Source: adapted from table 5.2a*

**ii. Infrastructural Provision**

From Table 1, it is evident that self-help projects have contributed in the provision of infrastructural facilities. Some of the infrastructural facilities are school buildings, electricity, health centres/cottage hospitals, feeder-road, bridges/culverts, rural water supply etc.

Maintenance and reconstruction of access and feeder roads because of their associated importance with evacuation of farm produce. Aggressive rural electrification to boost rural development and meaningful production, establishment of potable rural water scheme through harnessing and treatment of surface water and bore-hole construction.

Also, the massive refurbishment and construction of primary schools to ensure improvement in literacy level, improvement in school enrolment figure, reduction of cost of schooling, creation of employment opportunity etc.

The communities also ensure that the health centres built are functional by providing;

- ❖ Adequate number of trained personnel
- ❖ Basic medical equipment and drugs
- ❖ Enhancement of medical personnel welfare



- ❖ Continuous mobilization of rural populace to embrace immunization and hence, control of the six child-killer-diseases
- ❖ Staffing and equipping newly established Health centres

### iii. Income Generation

The study shows that there is a considerable improvement in the income level of the people as a result of the self-help projects embarked on by them, because, majority of the rural dwellers were living under zero income before the self-help projects were embarked upon. From Table 3a below, 66 percent of the respondents interviewed agreed that the level of their income before the establishment of community self-help projects in their communities is between N0 – N2,100 while in Table 3b only 7 percent of the respondents interviewed fall under this income level after the coming of community self-help projects in their communities.

Also in Table 3a, 19 percent of the respondents agreed that the level of their income before the coming of self-help projects in their communities is between N2,101 – N3,200 while in Table 3b, 28 percent of the respondents fall under this income level after the establishment of community self-help projects in the area.

Furthermore, in Table 3a, 9 percent of the respondents agreed that the level of their income before the establishment of community self-help projects in their communities is between N4,201 - N6,300 while in table 3b, 42 percent of the respondents fall under this income level after the establishment of community self-help in their communities.

Finally, in Table 3a, 6 percent of the respondents interviewed agreed that the level of their income is between N6,301 and above while in table 3b, 23 percent of the respondents fall under this income level after the establishment of community self-help projects in their area.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the establishment of community self-help projects has brought an improvement in the income of the people in Ohafia Local Government Area. Those that were involved in direct labour such site clearing and those that worked with the contractors in erecting the various buildings were paid and most of them started petty businesses with the money.

**Table 3a: OPINION OF C.D.C.M, W.O.M. AND Y.O.M ON IMPACT ON PRE- COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS INCOME PATTERN (%)**

S/N	INCOME PATTERN (N)	C.D.C.M		W.O.M		Y.O.M		GRAND TOTAL	
		(N= 105)		(N=81)		(N=107)			
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	0 – 2, 100	54	51	65	80	74	69	193	66
2.	2,101 – 4, 200	25	24	12	15	18	17	55	19
3.	4, 201 – 6, 300	16	15	4	5	6	7	26	9
4.	6, 301 and above	10	10	0	0	9	8	19	6
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field work, 2011*

**Table 3b: OPINION OF C.D.C.M, W.O.M. AND Y.O.M ON IMPACT ON POST  
COMMUNITY SELF-HELP PROJECTS INCOME PATTERN (%)**

S/N	INCOME PATTERN (₦)	C.D.C.M		W.O.M		Y.O.M		GRAND TOTAL	
		(N= 105)		(N=81)		(N=107)			
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	0 – 2, 100	0	0	6	7	15	14	21	7
2.	2,101 – 4, 200	28	27	27	33	27	25	82	28
3.	4, 201 – 6, 300	45	43	38	47	39	36	122	42
4.	6, 301 and above	32	30	10	13	26	25	68	23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field work, 2011*

## CONCLUSION

Based on this research, a conclusion could be reached that self- help is a relevant strategy for rural development in Ohafia Local Government Area. The ‘self- help’ movement in Ohafia rest on the age grade system. We found also that the communities in Ohafia have been undertaking self- help projects for some time. But the latest development in self- help activities is the partnership which the government now forms with the people.

Nevertheless, despite the rate with which self –help is embraced among communities in Ohafia Local Government Area, rural backwardness still persist. This is evidenced from the fact that illiterate groups are still found in the area. The finding shows that to an extent self-help projects have reduced unemployment in Ohafia Local Government Area. This does not mean that majority is employed, high rate of unemployment still persist in the area. The implication of the finding is that the establishment of community self- help projects has contributed to the employment of the rural people both within the community and outside the community and not that unemployment do not exist in the area.

Secondly, the study showed that several infrastructural facilities such as schools, health centres/hospitals, civic centres, rural water supply, and bridges/culverts etc. were embarked upon by the communities.

Finally, majority of the rural dwellers were living near zero income in Ohafia Local Government Area, but there is a considerable improvement in the income level of the people as a result of the self- help projects embarked upon by them. So, on the basis of the foregoing discussions, self- help projects have led to the improvement of the living conditions of rural dwellers, which is the essence of sustainable development.

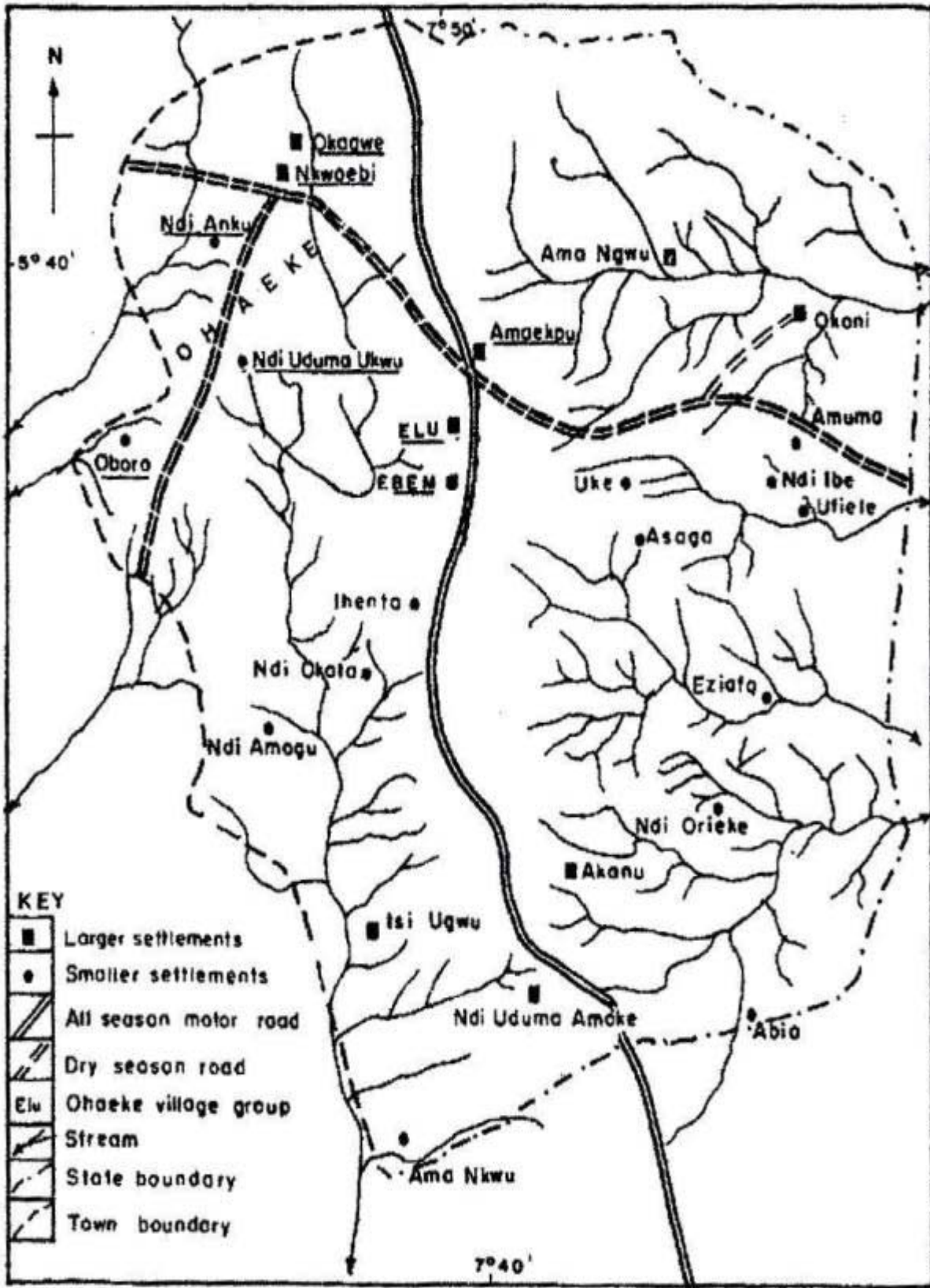


Figure 1: Map of Ohafia showing the 25 village-groups with the Ohaeke-groups underlined

(After Nsugbe, 1974:4)

**Source:** Adapted from Azuonye, Chukwuma. 1979. *The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo*. Geneva Afrique. Boston.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Steve O. Tamuno is a Professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Williams Okwara Iroh is affiliated with the Department of Economics of the University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.