

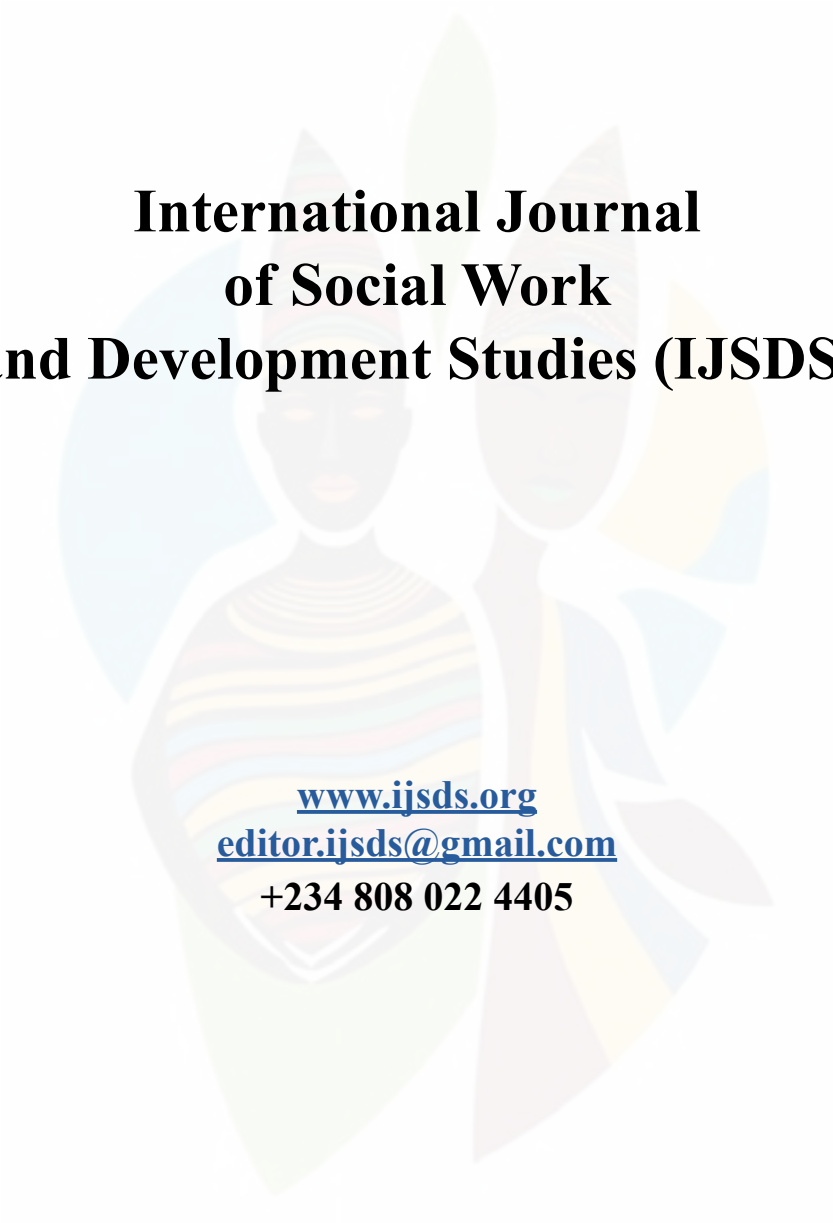
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**SOCIAL WORKS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
IN ESSIEN UDIM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
AKWA IBOM STATE**

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Community development in most parts of the world particularly Africa and in Nigeria has been sluggishly pursued. To enjoy modern amenities of society, and to have a vibrant economic status, Social workers have an important role in helping people to improve their community life style. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between social work and community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To achieve this objective, Community Development theory was used to anchor the study. The study used a survey design, with 246,600 population of Essien Udim, LGA of Akwa Ibom State (2025 estimated). The sample size was four hundred (400), which was determined using the Taro Yamen formulas with 95% confidence interval. The main research instrument used in collecting data for this study was a well-designed questionnaire whose responses provided the necessary data for validating the research hypothesis. The Data for this research were collected from two sources: primary and secondary sources. The reliability coefficient of the items created to assess the relationship between social work and community development was 0.87. The method of data analysis was the Karl Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed that there exists a significant relationship between social work and community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others, that Essien Udim Local Government Area should increase the number of professional social workers in various communities to advise and give support to leadership and development issues. Also, Essien Udim Local Government Area should increase social work awareness at the community level. More so, the benefits opened to individuals and members of associations both locally and internationally are highlighted.

Keywords: social work, community participatory, community and development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The idea of social work and communal assistance which forms the basis of the present day community development among the rural dwellers is deeply rooted in the rich traditions of the African people in which evidence abound of how communities have, for generation successfully organized themselves to construct roads, build bridges, palaces, market stall, dwelling house among many others. Every individual in society aspires to live a healthy, tolerant, safe, inclusive, and fair life. Social work services have an essential contribution to make it possible in achieving this goal. Thus, the importance of social work as a cornerstone of community development cannot be overstated.

Globally, social workers do not only leverage local resources but also strengthen accountability and transparency in project execution. When communities contribute labor, land, or materials, they feel a sense of ownership and are more likely to ensure the longevity of such projects (Ezeokoli, 2022). Mohammed (2025) noted that Community participation has increasingly been recognized as a critical component of sustainable development across various sectors, especially in rural development. Field practitioners and social work trainees have become a force to alleviate the community's most pressing needs, turning towards meeting local needs and adopting local techniques to resolve issues of an individual, the group, and the community by adopting Community development skills initiated by social work.

The history of social work originated from the works of charity organizations. The emergence of the Charity Organization Society in England in 1880 is regarded in most works of literature as the foundation for the administration of social welfare. The Charity Organization was initiated with the primary purpose of coordinating charitable works for individuals and groups displaced as a result of the industrial revolution

(Aroh, 2002). Iwarimie-Jaja (2007) noted that social work has a problem-solving approach that can meet human needs and aspirations recognized by society.

Recent studies have also emphasized that empowering communities through training and awareness improves their capacity to engage with service providers effectively. This suggests that investing in community development is not merely desirable but essential. Adebayo & Yusuf (2020) stated that meaningful community engagement in planning and development contributes to better outcomes, especially in rural settings where state resources are limited. Sadly, despite these advantages, there are persistent barriers to effective community development in some rural communities in Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. These include limited awareness, weak policy frameworks, illiteracy, and socio-cultural constraints that hinder active involvement of women and marginalized groups (Lawal & Garba, 2021). This situation calls for innovative and inclusive approaches, such as increased community involvement, to bridge gaps. Thus, this study seeks to explore how social work influences community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of social infrastructural facilities in grassroots development and poverty reduction cannot be overemphasized, whether in urban or rural environments. Research shows that adequate infrastructure reduces the costs of production, which affects profitability, output levels, and employment. When it does not work, citizens suffer, particularly the poor and rural residents. Thus, economic renewal and societal welfare are halted. A place like Essien Udim Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State does not have enough social infrastructural facilities to service

the needs of the dwellers in the communities.

The existing living conditions in the area of study shows that there is a lack of community development compared to some other Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State. This is because the spatial distribution of those facilities is also not equitably distributed across the state and is mainly located in urban centres. Because of this condition, some people in the rural areas of Essien Udim have limited access to social infrastructure. Rural areas in Nigeria are generally deprived of basic needs of life, such as housing, medical care, postal communication services, education, transport facilities, recreational facilities, neighborhood utilities, credit facilities, and opportunities for personal and professional development. In view of the increasing number of problems facing community development in the country, measures such as good governance and the empowerment of the profession of social work can go a long way to ameliorating the challenges facing development in local communities. It is presumably argued that social work can play a significant role in ensuring the speedy development of rural areas in Nigeria. However, sadly, the state's development is not witnessing the desired pace. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the role of social workers in community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study were to investigate the relationship between social work and community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social work and community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1 Social Works

Social work is mainly used interchangeably with community work and community participation. Community work is concerned with working collectively with communities and groups for positive social change, inclusion, and equality. Over the past fifty years and more, voluntary and professional community work has supported communities in seeking such change (Kirst-Ashman, 2010). According to Gordon (1995), Community work or community development involves an analysis of social and economic situations and collective action for change based on that analysis. It is centered on a series of principles that seek to go beyond consultation to participation and beyond capacity building to consciousness-raising and empowerment. It recognizes the changing and often hidden nature of structural inequalities based on "race", class, gender, and disability, to name but a few. It seeks to be transformative rather than conforming and empowering rather than controlling.

According to Ugwu and Aruma (2019), social work can be defined as a process whereby members of participating communities mobilize themselves to participate in groups as community members for the common purpose of addressing their problems with a view to improving people's living conditions in the concerned communities. In the view of Desai (2011), social work means a situation whereby people act in groups in order to influence the direction and outcome of development projects, which will ultimately affect them in society. The ultimate purpose of stimulating social work in community development projects is to elicit adequate involvement of members of the participating communities not only in project implementation, but at various stages of community development projects, including the decision-making process, in order to improve the living conditions of people in

the concerned communities.

2.2 Community Development

By definition, Alli (2019) defined community development as being “about promoting positive social change in society in favour of those who benefit least from national and global social and economic development, it seeks to challenge the causes of poverty and disadvantage and to offer new opportunities for those lacking choice, power, and resources”. Community development can be defined as a community initiative that helps to improve the living conditions of people on a sustainable basis in the participating communities (Ugwu & Aruma, 2019). Community development encompasses a range of definitions, models, and approaches aimed at improving the well-being and quality of life within communities (Eneji & Agri, 2020). At its core, community development involves empowering individuals and groups to address their own needs and aspirations through collective action and participation (Omitola, Akinrinde, & Omitola, 2021). This process is inherently multidimensional, addressing economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of community life (Hilda & Asiazor, 2021).

Community development includes the development of community members or building the capacity of people for them to reach their full potential. It includes any process or activity that enables the community to improve its standard of living through its own efforts and sometimes in co-operation with agencies from outside its community (Friedman, Machedi, Ngubo & Southgate, 2006). Olisa (2001) defined community development as a progression from a lower and often undesirable state of things to a higher and preferred one. Such a progression requires that a correct characterization of the higher state be available. It is only then that one can search for the best strategies for reaching the highest state. According to this author, community development is “a continuous pro-

cess involving structural transformation of society.

2.3 Social Work and Community Development

According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2011), social workers have a special interest in the welfare of the people. They are employed in social work institutions or social welfare agencies, and they design social welfare programs to prevent, alleviate, or remove social problems identified in individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Also, Woyike & Uzorka (2021) affirmed that Social work practices can enhance social security and social work programs at various levels, such as governments at local and federal levels, Non-Governmental Organizations, Intergovernmental organizations, co-operatives (private and corporate), as well as the international oil companies.

The target groups of this social work method can be individuals, groups, families, communities, agencies, or departments. The basic methods of social work, such as social casework, social group work, and community development, play a vital role when administered to host communities. At the same time, social casework is used with individual beneficiaries in the administration of social services. Social group work is used with families and groups, which are at the heart of every society. Social group work is also used in working with neighborhood groups (Woyike & (2021). It is also used to improve the effectiveness of working for various committees, which are part of the social welfare administration. Community development can be the deliberate use of resource mobilization and equitable distribution of services at the community level. Social welfare planning for the vulnerable group is an important component of social welfare administration. Social professionals and only related professions are the only ones that can perform the task defined above. According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2011), delivering social welfare services refers to social work or social welfare intervention.

Social work promotes the active participation of people in the affairs of their local communities in order to promote sustainable community development in various communities in the human environment. Social Work participatory rural appraisal is a community assembly where all the various segments of participating communities meet to discuss issues of common concern in community needs assessment and prioritization of the identified community needs (Ugwu & Aruma, 2019). Aruma (2017) viewed social work as community development learning process where the members of the participating communities actively participate as relevant stakeholders, project participants or project beneficiaries by coming together to explore ways of identifying their community problems with a view to prioritizing the identified problems, preparing community development plan, implementing, managing, monitoring and evaluating community development projects and programs in order to improve people's living conditions in the participating communities.

In a community needs assessment, the members of participating communities express their views about their community problems, prioritization of the identified community needs, and the desirable change for improved living conditions of people in the concerned communities in society. Suppose people really want to achieve sustainable community development. In that case, they should stop focusing on the size of their numerous problems and start focusing on their potential to address their problems in order to improve their living conditions in various communities (Imhabekhai, 2009).

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Community Development theory was used to anchor the future of this study on the relationship between social work and community development. Community Development Theory, which originated from the

work of scholars such as Paulo Freire, Robert Chambers, and John McKnight, focuses on empowering communities to identify and address their own needs and priorities (Freire, 1970; Chambers, 1997; McKnight, 1995). The central theme of this theory is participatory decision-making and bottom-up approaches to development, emphasizing the importance of community ownership, self-reliance, and capacity building (Chambers, 1997). Community Development Theory is highly relevant to the study of the role of social work in community development, as it highlights the agency of community members in shaping their own destinies. By integrating insights from this theory, researchers can explore how social work facilitates community-driven initiatives, fosters collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and promotes inclusive and sustainable development outcomes (Warren, 2017).

3.1 Empirical Review

Woyike and Uzorka (2021) conducted a study on Social work practice and community development in Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State. The study attempted to provide an overview of social work practice and community development, giving a comprehensive study of the Ikwerre Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. This study aims to develop an understanding of community development as a core component of social work practice in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. The researcher found out that Ikwerre Local Government does not have enough social infrastructural facilities to serve the needs of local people in the community. Thus, this necessitates the role played by social workers to ensure community development in Ikwerre LGA. The theoretical framework employed is the Social Planning and Social Action Theories. The study is descriptive and employs content analysis of existing literature and research data to explain the community development issues in Ikwerre Local Government. The study concludes that there is a need

for professional social workers in the area. Therefore, the recommendation is that an increased number of professional social workers should be employed in government parastatals to provide advice and support on leadership and development issues. Also, an increased awareness at the community level on the formation of community-based organizations should be carried out through awareness campaigns led by opinion leaders in the communities. These campaigns should highlight the benefits available to individuals and members of associations, both locally and internationally. Community-based organizations should seek ways of partnering with all tiers of government for development projects in Ikwerre Local Government Area, and the government should encourage community-based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by providing subsidies in the locale.

Ugwunand Aruma (2019) studied Community Participation as a Tool for the Promotion of Sustainable Development. The paper examined community participation as a tool for the promotion of sustainable community development. The paper explored the concept of community participation and sustainable community development. The paper identified areas of community participation in sustainable community development, including community needs assessment, community development planning, and community mobilization, among others. The highlights of the benefits that accrue from community participation in sustainable community development are community empowerment, promotion of meaningful change, community participation as a mechanism to address community problems, and provision of learning opportunities. The highlights of the recommendations based on the issues discussed are: There is an obvious need to strengthen awareness among people for community participation in sustainable community development. Relevant stakeholders in community development projects should embark on sustainable

mobilization for effective community participation in community development, among others.

Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) investigated "The role of community self-help projects in rural development of Kwara state, Nigeria. The study attempts to examine the impact of self-help projects in rural development using Irepodun Local Government Area as a case study, Kwara State, Nigeria. A sample of 200 respondents was interviewed using a questionnaire. In the course of the study, it was revealed that income encouraged people to embark on self-help projects. Community unions/associations contributed immensely to the execution of self-help projects and the subsequent rural development. The Chi-square and correlation results concluded that the inhabitants of the area are not equally satisfied with self-help projects and amenities.

Furthermore, the results showed a relationship between population and self-help projects, and that self-help projects have increased the standard of living of the people in the area. There is an unequal distribution of self-help projects in the study area. Moreover, since the level and efficiency of self-help projects in rural communities commonly influence the development of the rural areas, governments should redirect their rural development towards capital and developmental projects in rural areas and focus on population growth for all communities in the rural areas. This will ensure an equitable distribution of self-help projects, an essential tool for balanced socio-economic development of the rural areas, especially in Nigeria.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research methodology. A survey design is chosen because it allows the researcher to get data from a representative sample of a large population.

In this study, 246,600, being the entire population of

Essien Udim, Akwa Ibom State (project population, 2025), formed the study population. The sample size was four hundred (400), which was determined using the Taro Yeman formula's 95% confidence interval. Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

4.1 Sources of Data

The main research instrument used in collecting data for this study was a well-designed questionnaire, whose responses provided the necessary data for validating the research hypothesis. The Data for this research were collected from two sources: primary and secondary sources.

The reliability coefficient of the items created to assess the relationship between social work and community development was 0.87. Cronbach's alpha is primarily used for internal consistency reliability calculations when the test items are non-differential scores. The method of data analysis was the Karl Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to look into the trend of the link between social work and community development. The study was run by Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0, a statistical program. The following is the formula for the Karl Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient:

$$r =$$

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

Four hundred copies of questionnaires were distributed to the participants in the eleven (11) wards of the local government area using the purposive sampling technique. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 386, representing 96.5%, were adequately completed and properly returned.

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

The formulated hypothesis was statistically tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient statistical tools.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between social work and community development in Essien

Table 1: Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis table for hypothesis one

Correlations			
		Social Work	Community Development
Social Work	Pearson Correlation	1	.667**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	386	386
Community Development	Pearson Correlation	.667**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	386	386
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical technique was adopted in testing all the hypotheses. While social work remains the independent variable (X), community development remains the dependent variable (Y). The result of the analysis, as presented in Table 1, shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.667, while the p-value was 0.000 using the sample size (N) of 386. The result ($P < 0.05$) indicates that social work has a significant relationship with community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Thus, social work accounted for 66.7% influence on community development.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between social work and community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. In the test of the hypothesis, it was revealed that social work has a significant relationship with community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The finding above resonates with a study by Iwarimie-Jaja (2011), which states that social workers have a special interest in the welfare of the people. Also, Woyike & Uzorka (2021) affirmed that Social work practices can enhance social security and social work programs at various levels, such as governments at local and federal levels, Non-Governmental Organizations, Intergovernmental organizations, co-operatives (private and corporate), as well as the international oil companies. Aruma (2017) viewed social work as community development learning process where the members of the participating communities actively participate as relevant stakeholders, project participants or project beneficiaries by coming together to explore ways of identifying their community problems with a view to prioritizing the identified problems, preparing community development plan, implementing, managing, monitoring and evaluating community development projects and programs in order to improve people's living conditions in the participating communities.

Our research revealed that social work plays a crucial role in community development in Essien Udim Local Government Area. Social workers, through their various methods like direct practice, advocacy, and community organization, empower communities, foster social change, and improve the quality of life. They act as facilitators and advocates, mobilizing resources to address issues such as poverty, health, education, and housing, thereby building more resilient and inclusive communities. Their influence stems from their deep understanding of local needs and their

ability to mobilize community support. Some of the community development projects initiated through social work in Essien Udim Local Government Area are detailed below.

S/N	Wards in Essien Udim Local Government Area	Development Project
1	Okon Ward	Family council hall
2	Afaha Ward	Market Shade at Uduak Ato
3	Odoro Ikot Ward	Construction 5 Lock up stores at urua ebom Market
4	Ekpenyoung Ward	Palm Oil extraction mill
5	Adiasim Ward	Cassava processing machines
6	Ukana East Ward	Mini water project
7	Ikpe Annang	Rehabitation of internal truck C roads
Source; Field Survey, 2025		



6.0 CONCLUSION

The ultimate purpose for promoting social work is to stimulate people-oriented participation or popular participation that will bring about improved living conditions of people through the instrumentality of sustainable community development initiatives in various participating communities. According to our findings, it is concluded that social work helps people of various wards in Essien Udim Local Government Area to build strong confidence and courage to address issues of common concern in their communities. The issue of social work as a technical matter demands that when more people are involved in the decision-making process concerning community development, they become integral to the process. Their input leads to better decisions for the ultimate benefit of improving people's living conditions in their communities. The members of various communities, through the instrumentality of social work, certainly overcome the forces that militate against them when they engage in community participation to address their problems in their community. Social work in community needs assessment, planning, mobilization, implementation, training, and evaluation for effective management, maintenance, and sustainability of community development projects and programs becomes imperative in order to guarantee sustainable community development in various communities in society.

6.1 Recommendation

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made.

- Essien Udim Local Government Area should increase the number of professional social workers in various ways. These social workers will provide advice and support on leadership and development issues, such as community needs assessment, planning, mobilization, implementation, training, and evaluation. Their expertise will be

instrumental in the effective management, maintenance, and sustainability of community development projects and programs.

- Essien Udim Local Government Area should increase social work awareness at the community level on the formation of community-based organizations. These organizations play a significant role in sustainable development, and their importance cannot be overstated. Such an awareness campaign should be carried out via opinion leaders in the communities, and the campaign should highlight the benefits opened to individuals and members of associations and the communities, both locally and internationally.
- Essien Udim Local Government Area should ensure that community-based organizations seek ways of partnering with all tiers of government for development projects in the Local Government Area. Such partnerships can provide additional resources, expertise, and support, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of community development projects.
- Essien Udim Local Government Area should encourage community-based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by providing subsidies in the locale.

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