

**FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AS AGENTS OF GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF MOTHERS UNION IN OWERRI AREA IMO STATE, NIGERIA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study investigated the activities of faith-based organizations as agents of Grassroot development; empirical evidence of Mothers Union in Owerri Area Imo State, Nigeria. Data for the study were obtained using 5-item questionnaire administered to 50 purposive selected women. Data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Arithmetic mean. Results revealed that all the items investigated had mean scores greater than 2.5 and were accepted. Results indicate that items contributions had mean score of educational projects (3.52), agricultural projects (3.86), economic development of host communities (3.90), development of social life (3.84) and causal jobs means of livelihoods (3.72). Results also revealed that challenges facing the Mothers Union as agents of grassroot development has mean score of inadequate fund (3.96), lack of government patronage (3.76), cultural bias (3.74), patriarchy and dependency syndrome (3.54) and family economic problem (3.98). The study indicates that faith-based organizations contribute positively to grassroots development. The study recommends that the governments should partner with faith-based organizations, particularly those operating in the rural areas, by providing them financial supports. Cultural bias which see women as inferior, weak and irrelevant in the social scheme of things should be discouraged. Beliefs and utterances which tend to undervalue women activities and contributions to societal development should be renounced.

**Keywords:** *Faith-based organizations, grassroot, development.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Grassroot development is a complex project that cannot be achieved by the government alone, but by effective synergy and sustained cooperation among the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community based organization (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and public-spirited individuals. Ikani (2001) defines development as means of improving the total circumstances of man on planet earth, satisfying his spiritual and material needs and enabling him to master his environment. Grassroot development is development taking place among people residing in the rural areas (Njoku and

Tete 2013). It connotes growth or advancement in all areas of life among the rural population (Oresile, 1998).

Any meaningful national development, as a matter of priority, must focus first on the rural areas. This is because Nigeria is predominantly a rural country as about seventy percent (70%) of the population of the country resides in the rural areas (Oluamide 2008). National development becomes more effective, impact-oriented and accelerated when it begins from the grassroot (Nmon, 2004).

In recent times, faith-based organization (FBOs) play a vital role in contributing to grassroot development in Nigeria. A faith-based organization is an organization whose values are based on faith, beliefs, which has a mission, based social values of the particular faith which draws its members. It is a non-profit organization inspired by religious beliefs. Faith-based organization plays significant roles in community and grassroot development by promoting health and health care access among rural population. Faith-based organization such as churches, religious relief and development. They can play significant role in responses to HIV and AIDs.

Faith based organizations are propelled by their love for improving the wellbeing of the people living in the rural areas. According to Ukaegbu (1995), they see liberation of humanity from the shackles of penury and deprivation and whatever that impinges on the full realization of their potentials and self-fulfillment as part of their religious vocation and evangelization. Their grassroot development programme are geared towards complementing already existing programme embarked upon by the government to redress long-standing disparities between urban and rural population in the areas of basic rights, opportunities, amenities and human resource development. Mothers Union (M U) in Anglican Communion is one of such faith-based organizations whose contributions in grassroot development should not be underestimated. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the role of Owerri Diocesan Mothers Union in grassroot development as it affects the community in Anglican Diocese of Owerri. Grassroot development has been adopted by faith-based organizations through active participation and empowerment which involve local people. Grassroot development is community-based change through

participatory self-help. Grassroot movement is one which uses the people in a given community as development is multi-dimensional phenomenon that cuts across all facets of human life which involves both growth and actual change in different structural dimensions of society as it social, economic and political. Grassroot development refers to development at the local level. It is synonymous with rural development which aims at improving the socio-economic conditions of rural people, providing people at the grassroot with basic needs as safe and regular drinking water electricity supply, improved health care services, modern educational faculties and gainful employment (Nwosu, 2015). Grassroot development is an integral part of national development process aimed at integrating the rural poor into the mainstream of national economy. In developing countries including Nigeria majority of the population of the country resides in the rural areas (Olumide, 2008).

Any nations that aspire for rapid socio-economic, cultural, political, educational, technological and human-capital development must accord high premium to grassroot development. Unfortunately, rural areas in most cases are neglected or receive insignificant touch of the government development hands due to the complexity and peculiarity of their needs which the government alone cannot effectively cater for. There is, therefore, the need for the government to work in collaboration with faith-based organizations (FBOs) in order to bring development to the grassroots. Faith-based organizations are important agents of grassroot development, though most of their contributions receive little or no publicity. Anglican Owerri Diocesan Communion Mothers Union as a faith-based organization may have contributed significantly to grassroot development in her areas of operation, without much value and credit attached to their contributions.

The specific research problem is that the socio-economic relevance of the Anglican communion Mothers Union (M U) and other faith-based organization, especially as it affects their contributions to grassroots development has not been sufficiently established in order to accord them a place of importance in our grassroots development planning.

This study was carried out mainly to investigate the activities of faith-based organizations agents of grassroots development, with a particular reference to Mothers Union (MU) Anglican Diocese of Owerri. Specifically, the study intends to.

- i. Identify some grassroots development projects being carried out by the Mothers Union in Anglican diocese of Owerri.
- ii. Determine the extent to which the mothers Union projects have contributed

to the development of communities that fall within Anglican diocese of Owerri.

- iii. identify some of the challenges facing the Mothers Union as an agent of grassroots development.

However, three research questions were raised to guide this study

- i. What are some grassroot development projects being carried out by the Mothers Union in Anglican diocese of Owerri?
- ii. To what extent have the Mothers Union projects contributed to the development of communities that fall within the Anglican diocese of Owerri?
- iii. What are some of the challenges facing the Mothers Union as an agent of grassroots development?

## METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study was case study. The study was conducted in Owerri Area of Imo State Nigeria. The choice of case study was predicated on the fact that the Mothers Union (MU) in Anglican diocese of Owerri has attempted to distinguish herself from other Mothers Unions and faith-based organizations in other places though commitment to grassroot development projects. The state lies between latitude 5° 45'N and longitude 6°35'E of the Greenwich Meridian. It is located within the rain forest belt of Nigeria; and has an average annual relative humidity of 75 percent, which is highest during the rainy season, when it rises to about 90 percent. The temperature ranges between 20°C and 30°C. It experiences two major seasons, dry and rainy season and a short dry spell in August. (Njoku, 2016). The study was carried out ten (10) out of eighteen (18) Archdeaconries that make up Anglican diocese of Owerri. The ten (10) Archdeaconries include AmaikaMbieri, ObazuMbieri, AchiMbieri, Orogwe, AlaenyiOgwa, Uratta South, Uratta North, Eziamobiato, Umunoha and Orodo Archdeaconries. A sample size of fifty (50) women was drawn from the above ten archdeaconries (five (5) from each Archdeaconries) using purposive sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire structured in the form of a modified 4- Point Likert rating scale of strongly Agree (S A), Agree (A) , Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SD).

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot testing was conducted with five copies of the structured questionnaire administered on five women selected from an archdeaconry outside the area of the study after computing the scores with text-retest method of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, a reliability coefficient value of 0.75 was obtained. Data were analyzed using arithmetic mean.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The result or data in this study were analyzed and interpreted below based on the three research questions raised

**Research Question 1**

What are some grassroots development projects being carried out by the Mothers Union in Anglican Diocese of Owerri?

**Table 1: Means score of grassroots development projects of the Mothers Union (MU) in Owerri Area Imo State Nigeria**

S/N	Item Question	SA	A	D	SD	TNR	Sum of Scores	Mean	Decision
		4	3	2	1				
1.	MU runs modern nursing, primary and secondary schools	31	19	0	0	50	181	3.62	Accepted
2.	MU has fish, poultry, cucumber and similar agricultural farms	43	7	0	0	50	193	3.86	Accepted
3.	MU has factories for production of soaps and pomades	28	18	3	1	50	173	3.46	Accepted
4.	MU has lock-up shops and business centers	46	4	0	0	50	195	3.92	Accepted
5.	MU engages in rental services (hire of canopies, chairs, tables and cooking utensils).	49	1	0	0	50	199	3.98	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

The above table indicates that all the item questions had mean scores above 2.50 which is the bench mark of decision mean point. This implies that mother union (MU) runs modern nursery, primary and secondary schools. Mother Union has fish, poultry, cucumber and similar agricultural farms. Mothers Union has factories for production of soaps and pomades. Mothers Union has lock-up shops and business centers. Mother Union engages in rental services (Hire of canopies, chairs, tables and cooking utensils). Results shows that mothers union engage on rental services with the highest means score of 3.98. This is followed by

ownership of lockup shops (3.92), ownership of farms (3.86), running of nursery, primary and secondary schools (3.62). The implication of this findings indicates that MU contributes meaningful in the area of community development especially employment of the youths.

**Research Question 2**

To what extent have the Mothers Union projects contributed to the development of communities that fall within Owerri?

**Table 2: Mean scores of contributions of the Mothers Union projects to the development of communities that fall within Owerri Area**

S/N	Item Question	SA	A	D	SD	TNR	Sum of Scores	Mean	Decision
		4	3	2	1				
1.	MU educational projects help to cater for educational needs of the host communities	30	17	2	1	50	176	3.52	Accepted
2.	Their agricultural project contribute to food supply and nutritional needs of the host communities	43	7	0	0	50	193	3.86	Accepted
3.	MU contributes to economic development of the host communities by renting out lock-up shops at affordable rates	45	5	0	0	50	195	3.90	Accepted
4.	MU contributes to the development of social life of the people through rental services	45	3	1	1	50	192	3.84	Accepted
5.	Their various projects provide casual jobs and means of livelihood for some individuals in the host communities	37	12	1	0	50	186	3.72	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

Data in Table 2 reveal that items questions 1-5 had mean scores 3.92, 3.86, 3.90, 3.84 and 3.72 respectively which were above the mean cut off point of 2.50. This indicates that the Mothers Union educational project help to cater for the educational needs of the host communities. Their agricultural project contributes to food supply and nutritional needs of the host communities. MU contributes to economic development of the host communities by renting out lock-up shops at affordable rates. Mothers Union

contributes to the development of social life of the people through rental services. Their various projects provide casual jobs and means of livelihood for some individuals in the host communities. The result of the findings implies that MU plays important roles in grassroots development in their host communities

### Research Question 3

What are some of the challenges facing the Mothers Union as an agent of grassroots development?

**Table 3: Mean scores of the challenges facing the Mothers Union as an agent of grassroots development**

S/N	Item Question	SA	A	D	SD	TNR	Sum of Scores	Mean	Decision
		4	3	2	1				
1.	Inadequate fund is a constraint to the Mothers Union grassroots development projects	48	2	0	0	50	198	3.96	Accepted
2.	Lack of government patronage affects the MU involvement in grassroots development	41	6	3	0	50	188	3.76	Accepted
3.	Cultural bias poses a problem to the Mothers Union	39	10	1	0	50	188	3.76	Accepted
4.	Patriarchy and dependency syndrome hinder the activities of the Mothers Union	32	15	1	2	50	177	3.54	Accepted
5.	Family economic challenge limits women's participation in development process	49	1	0	0	50	199	3.98	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

From the above table, all the item questions had means scores above the mean cut off point of 2.50. This shows that inadequate fund is a constraint to the Mothers Union grassroots development projects. Lack of government patronage affects the Mothers Union involvement in grassroots development. Cultural bias poses a problem to the Mothers Union. Patriarchy and dependency syndrome hinder the activities of the Mothers Union. Family economic challenge limits women's participation in development process. Results show that family economic challenges possess the highest constraints to women participation in grassroots development, with mean score of (3.98). This is followed inadequate fund (3.96), while patriarchy and dependency syndrome possess the least constraint.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the result of the data analyzed in Table 1, it was revealed that the Mothers Union (MU) runs modern nursery, primary and secondary schools. Mothers Union has fish, poultry, cucumber and similar agricultural farms. Mothers Union has factories or production of soaps and pomades. Mothers Union has lock-up shops and business centers. Mothers Union engages in rental services (Hire of canopies, chairs,

tables and cooking utensils). This findings is in line with Iwuagwu (1997) who described the Mothers Union as a worldwide organization of Christian Mothers under the Anglican Communion which aimed at promoting the well-being of families worldwide. Ihezue (1985) corroborated the above when she observed that the Mothers Union was founded because the Anglican Communion felt the need to harness the tremendous potentials in women who are becoming increasingly more educated for evangelism, spiritual growth of the church and meaningful contributions to societal development.

Analysis in Table 2 showed that the Mothers Union educational projects help to cater for the educational needs of the host communities. Their agricultural projects contribute to food supply and nutritional needs of the host communities. Mothers Union contributes to economic development to the host communities by renting out lock-up shops at affordable rates. Mothers Union contributes to the development of social life of the people through rental services. Their various projects provide casual jobs and means of livelihood for some individuals in the host communities.

This is in line with Ezech (2009) who reported that religious organizations have always played a crucial

role in the development of Western education in our society. Establishment of primary and secondary schools to cater for the educational needs of the society has been top on the priority lists of most religious organizations in Nigeria as this is seen as an avenue of bringing people close to God. The findings also agreed with those of Anaele (2012) who found out those women contribute much to evangelism, the establishment of women empowerment programme and various economic ventures. The findings equally agreed with Onyekwelib (2012) who reported that the Mothers Union has made contribution tremendously towards the improvement of the physical structures of their churches, completing of various projects embarked upon by the church through their influencing financial supports. Their engagement in educational projects, soap making and agricultural farm projects has improved the financial status of the church and by extension improved the socio-economic wellbeing of members and other people around the area.

The result of the data analyzed in table 3 indicated that inadequate fund is a constraint to the Mother Union grassroots development projects. Lack of government patronage affects the Mothers Union involvement in grassroots development. Cultural bias poses a problem to the Mothers Union. Patriarchy and dependency syndrome hinder the activities of the Mothers Union. Family economic challenge limits women's participation in development process. This finding is in line with Okafor *et al.*, (2013) who observed that women are among the poorest class in Nigeria and they are more in the rural areas. Their achievement is, therefore limited by poverty and lack of fund denies them basic access to development process even when the will is there. It is also in agreement with Boriarinwa (2009) who noted that participation of women in developmental process has been constrained by lack of government patronage. The findings is also in line with Okwubunka (1997) who described cultural bias of considering women inferior to men, women dependency on men and male domination (patriarchy) as inimical to women realization of their full potentials in the society and contribution to national development. Onyenze (2015), observation corroborated the above by reporting that there have been negative attitudes towards the place and role of women in churches and society arising from cultural bias. Most cultures women as puppets on strings and weak sex who should solely depend on stronger men folk for directives. Women potentials, as Nwagbara (2003) pointed out that by this cultural bias unutilized or underutilized in our national development process.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the findings of the study that the Mothers Union in Anglican Diocese of Owerri, as a faith-based organization contribute significantly to grassroots development through building of modern nursery, primary and secondary school establishment

of fish, poultry and cucumber farms, building of lock-up shops and business centers, rental services etc. their achievement or success in these areas of life present a picture of what expected of other faith based organizations in different parts of Nigeria especially in our rural areas. Incentives must, therefore, be given the Mothers Union in Anglican Communion and other faith-based organizations by way of financial and moral supports in order to encourage them to step up their activities that promote grassroots development.

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should partner and foster closer cooperation with the Mothers Union and other faith-based organizations, particularly those operating in the rural areas, by providing them financial supports. This will give them additional motivation to continue and also to embark on more capital intensive projects that will impact more positively on the rural population.
2. All forms of cultural bias which see women as inferior, weak and irrelevant in the social scheme of things should be discouraged. Beliefs and utterances which tend to underestimate or undervalue women activities and contributions to societal development should be renounced.
3. The men folk in the Anglican diocese of Owerri should try to give their women adequate support and cooperation, despite family economic challenges, to enable them achieve their goals of touching lives in the rural areas positively through different women projects.

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