

**SOCIAL CAPITAL, EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN SOUTH  
EASTERN NIGERIA  
(A CASE STUDY OF COOPERATIVES IN OWERRI, NIGERIA)**

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for  
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By

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## ABSTRACT

Their poverty condition and inadequacy of government assistance at all levels (from federal to state to local) in Igbo communities of South-eastern Nigeria propels the locals to explore the self-help pathway in cooperative association as an alternative means for addressing their collective and individual needs. Over the years, the cooperative ideal has become a sustainable model of support for the Igbos of this region particularly in the rural village communities. However, the advancement of this form of livelihood in the area is fraught with many difficulties ranging from members' distrust of government development policies, 'nominal' (defunct and struggling) cooperative formation, poor membership education/illiteracy, group leadership problems, youth urban migration, group patron clientism, urban-rural encroachment and group gender disparity issues.

Social capital is arguably the dominant concept for examining cohesion and cooperative acts among people (Bourdieu, 1997 and Putnam, 2000). 'Trust and reciprocity', as principle attributes of social capital that condition most sustained cooperative interactions among members of the groups, is examined in this thesis. This research also assesses the inter-linking (bridging) bond that exists between the cooperative groups, their communities (including dispersed community members elsewhere in Nigeria and abroad) and the government. For example: Why do the 'nominal' cooperatives in the study communities lack this attribute? Does 'trust' determine the type of attention that community cooperatives receive from their government? What factor(s) facilitate assistance from the government and other community development groups especially the diaspora? Are there avenues to achieve best practice in these relationships for sustained cordiality?

The thesis applies the Igbo cultural understanding of social capital as *ugwu* in discussing relational bonds within select cooperatives and non-cooperative farmer groups in the study communities using field tools adapted from the World Bank's Social Capital Implementation Framework (SCIF). Previous studies conducted by some African scholars such as Uchendu (1965), Mbiti (1969), Njaka, (1974), Ekeh, (1975), Iroegbu, (1997), Ohadike, (1994), Korieh (2006), Nwagbara, (2007) were drawn upon in the discussions. The researcher adopted a mixture

of qualitative (un-structured interviews) and quantitative methods (questionnaires) in gathering and analysis of data.

The research found that members of active smallholder cooperative societies uphold their mutual integrity (ugwu) and membership ties but contrastingly adopt a prebendalist attitude (similar to the 'nominal' cooperatives) in interactions with the government. Cooperative societies' 'ugwu' - social capital - bond did not necessarily antecede bridging social capital particularly at interactions with the government. The research recommends that since 'ugwu' is central in Igbo cooperative life; the government could work closely with local institutions to formalize and strengthen this and in the process rebuild bridging trust with the locals. The churches and other traditional community institutions are mediators that could help in this process. It is hoped this study will help encourage best practice in smallholder cooperative functions and rural development practice.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the love of my life, my sweetheart and better half - Chioma - and to our dearest son and daughter [Ike & Olaedo] - for the abundant love, support and prayers you sustained me with all through the period of this study. I owe you all the whole world.

**&**

To my guardian late Mr. Fabian Okere who instilled in me passion, dedication and focus in life, I am sure you are smiling from up above.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0. Introduction:**

This research looks at smallholder community cooperatives in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Smallholder cooperatives in the study area are independent organisations and are regarded as partners in the government's Poverty Alleviation programme. The participating societies are required to go through a registration process for record purposes and that qualifies them to apply for government's support such as loans and agricultural incentives whenever available. Although this standard is criticised in Nigeria as governments' antics for controlling cooperative societies but the practice is still in-effect till date. Agbo (2009:170) argues that this government meddling is demonstrated in its policy insistence that "the only way farmers can benefit from government promoted agricultural development programmes is for them to join cooperatives". However, most functional smallholder cooperative societies found in the area depend more on themselves than on these support hopes from the government. Although the operations of these societies are not necessarily comparable to the large scale types of cooperatives such as the cocoa farmers cooperative of Nigeria (now known as the Cocoa Association of Nigeria), in terms of size, functions and business volume; they nevertheless observe the seven cooperative principles of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) which address members' social and economic needs within their communities.

Existing also within the same area but in contrast to these accustomed smallholder cooperative groups, are the groups I describe as 'nominal cooperatives'. They are formed arbitrarily by a coalition of individuals of undefined interests in the communities in response to government incentives. This thesis enquires why many of these other nominal cooperative societies, though formally registered and with similar conditions of operation as the stable and thriving ones, still struggle or finally disintegrate in the long run. The research therefore investigates the disparity in the motives behind the formations of these two group types as observed in the study communities. The study also seeks to understand the nature of the relationship between the state and smallholder cooperative groups, functional and otherwise in the region. It examines how the

operative smallholder cooperatives and traditional farmer groups leverage assistance from available support networks against the backdrop of government inadequacies in the area.

Also of interest to this research is the notion of ‘ugwu’ which is the Igbo interpretation of the social capital concept argued as the social glue that coheres the form of associational life experienced in some of these active smallholder cooperatives in the area (Ijere, 1992; Ofoku & Urang, 2012; World Bank, 2013). Ugwu is described as the “the right or worthiness of goodwill that inheres in an individual or a group” (Afigbo, 1982:18). It is a key concept in Igbo interactive philosophy with synonyms such as respect, trust, reciprocity, mutuality, dependability, and character. Based on this interpretation, therefore, the research looks at how the practice of ‘ugwu’ within these smallholder cooperatives and traditional networks blend with the modern cooperative ideal which are advocated by the state. Furthermore, the research discusses some of the on-the-ground stressful factors such as group leadership problems, youth urban migration, political patron clientism, urban-rural encroachment and group gender disparity issues that challenge the attainment of laudable ‘ugwu’ observance in cooperative practices within the communities. These stressors are most observable particularly in the peri-urban communities experiencing government rural land displacement for development purposes. However, the instances in these areas are not to be taken as representative of the entire study areas’ associative behaviour and do not undermine or explain away the communitarian ardour of the rest of the Igbo community groups in the area. Instead it awakens the research to the realities of the effect of urbanisation on rural community cohesion.

### **1.1. Background context of study**

Discussions about cooperative functions in the rural communities of Nigeria directly reveal the big picture of poverty and the consequent measures taken by the locals to survive the hardship of everyday life in the regions. Poverty, despite being a complex phenomenon that diminishes the individual’s life’s fulfillment, is arguably conceptualised by some researchers in shallow economic terms to simply mean lack of money (Smith & Ross, 2006). Spence (2005) goes beyond such conceptualizations to describe poverty as “a condition that deprives the individual

of the basic necessities for existence such as food, water, shelter, and clothing, including other fundamentals like health, education, security, opportunity, and freedom” (pp351-52). Similarly, Sen (1999), and Wanyama, Develtere and Pollet (2008) argue, not only is poverty the deprivation of basic needs, but it also includes the consequences that result from these deprivations such as exclusion of the individual from his/her society’s associational life within which essential social capital bonds are formed and developed. This associational framework for livelihood implies that bonds shared through interactions and membership of community groups, such as cooperatives, mediate rural people’s access to the resources required to support and improve livelihood in their rural community. In Nigeria, as Onuoha (2001) and Agbo (2012a) note, although cooperative societies are susceptible to governance from political authorities such as their immediate local, state, federal and even international governments, their contributions in the rural development process are seen as more supportive of communities than as mechanisms of political arrangement. In other words, cooperatives help reduce the potentials for poverty especially in the rural areas (Wanyama, Develtere and Pollet, 2008).

Since the associative forum of cooperative societies is a means of addressing poverty situations in the rural area, it then becomes problematic when this medium of interaction is employed by some persons to serve an instrumental or individualistic purpose. Agbo (2009) notes this danger when he argues that the cooperative channel is being exploited for covert reasons such as when government incentives are the motivators for the formation of a group. The research therefore discusses in part this attitude, leveraging insights from Ekeh’s (1975) seminal work on the theory of the two publics. In this theory he (Ekeh) argues that socio-political life in post-colonial Africa is conditioned by the continent’s long association with colonialism, which has created a two publics (primordial locals and the civic public) scenario instead of one as in the west. He posits that an amoral type of relationship exists between the two publics in which one public (the civil) is debauched in order to sustain existence in the other public (the primordial). This life style, Ekeh (1975) argued, was nurtured from the colonial governance model of carting away resources from Africa to their home countries.

In the study area, alongside the remarkable stories of some resilient smallholder cooperative groups, are other members of the community who take advantage of the few government promoted benefits for smallholder cooperative societies for their personal ulterior motives. They connive with some government officials to register multiple nominal cooperative groups, using phony names and membership lists to acquire formal registration with the government. In their desperation to access promoted incentives such as loans, grants and agricultural inputs when available, they inundate the application process crowding out the submissions made by the authentic smallholder cooperative societies. This research, in cognizance of Agbo's (2009) stance on this and caveats from Ekeh's (1975) theory on colonialism and the two publics<sup>2</sup>, questions why such behaviours have persisted in the cooperative strategies of the rural people of the study area. It enquires of the ways through which best practices could be pursued.

The observed field realities of smallholder cooperative formation and sustenance in the study communities therefore challenge the general assumptions and conceptualization of what a cooperative society is believed to be. It raises questions on the issue of authenticity and the motivations behind people's move to join cooperatives or form groups. It calls for a reassessment of cooperative's values and collective integrity based on individual groups' motives and modes of operation rather than generalized conceptual assumptions.

It is important to underscore at this point that despite the odd cooperative abuse cases (see chapter five & six), the Igbos<sup>3</sup> of this research area still appreciate cooperative values in their associational lives. This is because of the similarity of their traditional socio-communitarian worldview to the tenets upheld by the modern day cooperative movement (Onyeiwu, 1997). This

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<sup>2</sup> In his theory of colonialism and the two publics, Ekeh (1974) argues that colonialism created a two public society in Africa unlike the one society (public) in the West (see chapter 3).

<sup>3</sup> "The Igbo people are an ethnic group of south-eastern Nigeria. Traditionally, the Igbos live in villages or village groups surrounded by their farm lands. The village group is the primary unit of socio-political activity as we will later see in the main body of this study. There was no sustained model or system of centralized states within the Igbo society. Instead, there were strong ties within the village community, the extended family system, the age group/grade associations, and the various religious or social groups that maintained law and order in the Igbo communities. It should also be noted at this point that the Igbo were highly influenced by the foreign contact with the Christian missionaries who arrived in the early 19th century. Later, in 1884, both Anglican and Catholic missionaries arrived in Onitsha town along the River Niger to commence their missionary tasks" (Ekechi, 1972: 72).

necessitates cooperative functions in the communities to be openly participatory and inclusive, evolving from traditional (gender) groups, native associations, tradespersons and farmer coalitions. Activities and operations within these community groups are regulated by ‘thick’ social capital bonds between members, undergirded by sustained familial or ethnic relational acquaintances (Chukwuezi, 2001). It is this homogeneity that arguably reproduces reciprocity within Igbo community groups. Cooperation and reciprocity are major elements of social capital that thrive in an environment lubricated by trust and reinforced by the familiarity or similarity of the members. The absence of any of these two indicators (trust and reciprocity) casts doubt on the genuineness of the other (Ofuoku & Urang, 2012). Nevertheless, the people’s traditional spirit of cooperation and communitarianism helps in shaping their modern day cooperative societies resulting in a broader platform for seeking solutions to commonly felt problems. Membership participation in the studied cooperatives entails commitment efforts from both genders without fear of discrimination and where such occurs and is reported, the cooperative society uses their solidarity front to address the incident (see chapter two and six). Hence, an all-encompassing collaboration is sought between the community authorities, active cooperative groups and other progressive community based organisations in the area to support proposed self-help development projects regardless of the encumbrances that may result from government policies. Occasionally, some parts of the study communities have had to deal with disputes between families arising from anxieties created by government development incursions on family and community lands. This apprehension impacts the people’s (inter-intra personal) relationships in the communities as it exacerbates their general loathing towards every level of government impacting the area.

Previous studies conducted by some Igbo African scholars such as Achebe (1958), Uchendu (1965), Afigbo (1972), Njaka (1974), Ekeh (1975), Isichei (1978), Iroegbu (1997), Ohadike (1994), Korieh (2006) and Nwagbara (2007) concentrated on the broad ethnographic description of the Igbos as a cultural people with few details on their values and community life, especially in relation to their pre- and post-colonial era contacts. None attempted to discuss the sociological rudiments that stimulate the associational drive of the Igbo person in the present day. Although there exist some studies on cooperative functions in Africa, there has not been any known study



(ies) that discusses the abuse of the cooperative pathway as it is being experienced in recent times in the study area of south eastern Igboland, Nigeria and the way in which traditional values integrate with modern forms.

## **1.2. Geographical context of the research**

### **The country Nigeria:**

The amalgamation of the entity called Nigeria was conceived in 1914 by the then British colonial government of Lord Lugard, and was granted full independence in 1960. Prior to the amalgamation the unit was made up of a conglomeration of independent and self-governed states, empires, kingdoms and nations that inter-traded amongst themselves. Geographically, Nigeria is located in West Africa on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, a part of the Atlantic Ocean in the south, with Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north (see appendix map 1). The northern section of Nigeria consists of arid grasslands that share borders with the Sahara Desert. The central and southern parts contain hills and plateaux. Nigeria is acclaimed to hold approximately one-eighth of the African continent's people. The Nigerian population is estimated at 150 million (based on the July 2008 census projection) with a population density of 116 per square kilometres which is unevenly distributed with the south having a higher density than the north (CIA World Factbook, 2013). On the whole the country occupies a terrestrial space of 923,768 square kilometres with 700 kilometres along the coastline (CIA World Factbook, 2013). According to the Nigerian census, its population is almost evenly divided at 51% male and 49% female (National Population Commission, 2006). The variety of customs, languages, and traditions amongst Nigerians are estimated to include up to 250 ethnic groups or nations that give the country its rich cultural diversity. Although there were inter-tribal differences, the colonial 'divide and rule'<sup>4</sup> strategy' deepened the acrimony that has continued

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<sup>4</sup> **Divide and rule** (or divide and conquer) "is gaining and maintaining political power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into small chunks that, individually, have less power. The strategy uses all destructive means to pitch the small power structures against each other as rivals, preventing them from linking up to form a formidable opposition front. The British rule of Nigeria from 1900 to 1960, unconcernedly reclassified different regions of the country, regardless of ethnic and tribal differences, for administrative purposes. The conflict between the Igbo and Hausa made it easier for the British to consolidate their power in the region. Regional, ethnic, and religious splits remain a barrier to uniting Nigeria" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divide\\_and\\_rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divide_and_rule)).

since independence. The federation of the Republic of Nigeria presently comprises thirty-six states and one capital territory, Abuja.

Nigeria's largest and most influential ethnic groups are the Hausa in the North, Igbo in the South and Yoruba in the West; each of these ethnic groups speaks their own language. In addition there are many other minority ethnic groups. Commonly referred to as the 'Giant of Africa' due to both its status as an economic powerhouse in the 1960s/70s and its large population, Nigeria is rich in oil, gas and mineral resources and is presently the largest economy in Africa. Nigeria exudes enormous political and economic influence and is currently one of the most influential African countries on the political scene. Its huge oil and gas reserves along with its strong human resource base offer great potential for growth and development. Viewed as the flagship of Africa, Nigeria is said to have great potential to provide regional leadership on economic and political issues. Yet the country presents an ironic situation, with over 70% of the population living in conditions of absolute poverty (National Population Commission, 2011). The problems of Nigeria are multi-faceted, including: (i) the nation's colonial past and continued neo-colonial control of governance and resources (oil); (ii) the size of the country which makes governance difficult; (iii) systemic corruption reinforced by the structure of the government; (iv) multi-ethnicity with more than 250 ethnic groups of different cultures, religions, ideas, languages, dialects and physical appearance.

### **Imo State south-east Nigeria**

**Location:** The name Imo State was derived from the Imo River, a central river in the state which takes its course from the Okigwe/Awka upland. Imo State lies within the latitudes of 445'N and 715'N, and longitude 650'E and 725'E. (Imo fact book, 2010) It occupies the area between the lower River Niger and the upper and middle Imo River. Imo State is bounded on the east by Abia State, on the west by the River Niger and Delta State, and on the north by Anambra State, while Rivers State lies to the south. Imo State covers an area of about 13,700 square kilometres (see appendix maps 4, 5 & 6).

**Demography:** Besides Owerri municipal centre, which is the state's capital city, Imo State has other major towns such as Okigwe, Oguta, Orlu, Mbaise, and Mbano (see appendix map 3, 5 & 6). According to the 2006 census, Imo State had a population of about 3.63 million people and a growth rate of about 3%, based on the 1991 population census<sup>5</sup>. The population density varies from 686 persons per square kilometre in Oguta/Egbema area, to about 1,500 persons per square kilometre within the semi-metropolitan sites of Owerri, Mbaise, Orlu, Mbano and Mbaitoli areas. The state is divided into three geo-political zones namely Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu. Imo State has 27 Local Government Areas or councils and several autonomous communities. The major cash crops of Imo State include palm oil, raffia palm, rice, groundnut, melon, cotton, cocoa, rubber and maize. The staple food crops that are produced in large quantities include yam, cassava, cocoyam, plantain, banana and maize.

### **1.3. The Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria**

The Igbos are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria with a population of about 30 million people. Igbos are predominantly located in the South-eastern parts of the Nigerian states, viz Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi. Also, a significant number of Igbo communities are found in other states like Delta (Oshimili, Aniocha and Ndokwa LGA), Akwa Ibom (Ika LGA), Cross River, Rivers (Ikwerre, Bonny-Opobo and Ahoada LGA), Lagos and Kaduna (Afigbo, 1982). Igbos highly value education and are the most widely travelled group in Nigeria. Adventurous in pursuit of trade and commerce opportunities, Igbo people have built vibrant economic communities in various parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana and Chad. The Igbo culture is centred on families, villages, clans, groups and societies for economic, social and political organization. Igbo language belongs to the 'kwa' group of languages spoken in Central and Western countries of Africa (Northrup, 2000). Igbo is the main language of trade and commerce in Imo State, Abia State, Anambra State, Enugu State and Ebonyi State. Proficiency in Igbo language means having a good knowledge of the cultural proverbs (see chapter 5). There

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<sup>5</sup> The Census figure of the National Population Commission is always a contested issue in Nigeria, with every ethnic sector of the nation alleging malpractice in the head-count. This is because national resource allocations and local government creation are usually based on the given figures. So there is always the anxiety about figure manipulation to favour one particular region (especially the north) by the other regions. We are therefore better off working with estimates than the given figures.

are about 30 geographical dialects of the Igbo language with varying inter-intelligibility; however the standard Igbo language is based on the dialects of Owerri, Onitsha, Orlu and Umuahia, all in Nigeria.

#### **1.4. Owerri Igbo communities in Imo State**

The terrestrial area known as Owerri is divided into three geo-political zones viz Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West. Of these three zones two are rural (North and West) leaving only the Municipal to qualify as urban. The two local government councils of Owerri West and North on the map are shaped like a peninsula surrounding the Municipal centre (see appendix map 3). These two areas are rural and Ijere (1992) characterised such areas as having low per capita income, low agricultural output as a result of poor soil, primitive tools, weak infrastructures and unemployment. Both locations contain small densely populated villages or towns with household numbers of about a thousand or more per square kilometre. In all these rural sites, basic infrastructures are limited and services inadequate and inefficient. Consequently, access to supposed basic public goods and services are perceived as luxuries and limited to only a small proportion of the local people who could afford them. These infrastructure services included health care services, electricity, treated tap-water, tarred roads (passing through the communities or close by), local wells and postal agencies. A few of the villages have access to an irregular electricity supply, but none of the rural local government area communities have access to a reliable water supply (pipe-borne). Besides farming occupations and trading, other minor trades include hunting, artisanship, civil service employment, palm-wine tapping, labouring, hair-dressing, crafts (pot-making, mat weaving, calabash decoration), tree felling, firewood selling and food processing.

#### **1.5. Urbanization impact on rural community relations in Imo State**

In some of the study communities, the locals are concerned by the loss of their local farmland to expanding urbanization. This is “manifested primarily in an outward expansion of built-up areas and the conversion of prime agricultural lands for residential and industrial purposes” (Kwasi, 2004:2). This expansion heightens public concern for food security, preservation of a rural

lifestyle, environmental protection (health), and interpersonal land disputes in the rural and peri-urban areas (Brennan, 1999; Kwasi, 2004) In these locations, the continued encroachment creates tension between the new occupants and the agricultural production operations that struggle to survive in the same location (Kwasi, 2004).

The case of Umuguma community in Owerri West that hosts the nominal UMG PGM farmer's cooperative is one of the isolated instances of reference. I understood there are other community organisations within the Umuguma village which I did not have the resources to study. But opinions from the UMG PGM group informants lead me to believing that their group situation is peculiar because they confirmed to me of belonging to these other more organized non-cooperative groups in their stressed community. Umuguma, a small village community suburb of about 7-10,000 people suffers urban encroachment due to its proximity to the newly created wing of the New Owerri Municipality Council site. The new layout attracts a wave of local migrants, especially construction site labourers from other communities around the state to the formerly quiet Umuguma community. Market prices for the community farmland sky rocketed as property prospectors and developers bought out the fallow lands. As a result, the rural dwellers felt alienated from their once familiar community. A village-man from the community noted thus:

*Our once peaceful community is gradually slipping away, there is no quiet anywhere anymore, all one hears these days is families feuding in court over properties, relocation, buying out. I think it is worse in this, our community, than the rest of the LGA; the headquarters is here and we are the border community between the old Owerri and the New Owerri (Fieldwork respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

The apprehension in the tone of the respondent over his community's loss of inter-relational cohesion is very obvious from his excerpt above. Intrusion from government and business development interests disrupted the cordiality of 'ugwu' in the formerly serene community. Cases of family and kindred disputes over land heightened. Many of the local farmers left the farming occupation which had sustained them for generations, sold their lands for quick money and adapted to the new trade of construction labour. The level of desperation and betrayal rose among the community members because some families suddenly became rich after sales, while

some had nothing and could neither farm on their former lands nor work for others for money. Domestic conflicts among neighbours and home burglaries increased due to joblessness and survival anxiety. Interpersonal and collective trust as epitomized in ‘ugwu onye’ and shared ‘ugwu anyi’ plummeted in the community. Due to this situation, the few community members who still depend on farming for sustenance have to travel miles into the distant farmlands of the community forest areas in order to cultivate their crops. A non-cooperative community member respondent expressed the feeling this way:

*Imagine being over-run to suddenly be living like a tenant in your community home where you once used to depend so much on the land as a livelihood source. Some areas that were taken over by the government are yet to be compensated as promised. Our idea of farming is now limited to only a few options basically in-house, else one would have to travel all the way far into the neighboring forest lands (non-cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

Many people in the community now take up livestock farming like poultry farming, fisheries, piggeries, snail farming and vegetable gardening which need minimal land. Such are the sort of farmers that make up the troubled UMG PGM smallholder cooperative society membership as discussed in chapter six. The encroaching urbanization altered a lot of things in the lives of the Umuguma community dwellers. However, there still exist in the community other gender groups and age grades that have a broader membership base and run more comprehensive solution-driven programmes for community development. I will now introduce the three local government areas of Owerri in Imo State where my observations and case studies were drawn from - Owerri West and Owerri North and their neighbouring city.

### **Owerri municipal area:**

Owerri Municipal Area is the city centre. It is the capital of Imo State and is set in the heart of the Igbo land. As at study time, it had a population of about 231,789 comprised mainly of the Igbo ethnic group and is approximately 10,360 square kilometres in area. The Owerri slogan is ‘Igbo Heartland’ because it used to be the capital of the Republic of Biafra in 1969 during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war (1967-1970). During the war, the secessionist Biafra state was constantly moving their capital as Nigerian troops captured the older capitals. The other Biafran

capitals before Owerri were Enugu, Aba, and Umuahia all in the South east. Although the Owerri municipal communities are predominantly Igbos, a few persons of the other ethnic groups could be found sparsely scattered in little clusters, especially in the central city areas such as the Ama Hausa (meaning Hausa ethnic cluster area) where northern Hausa merchants have their produce market and the Yoruba camp at the Shell Camp quarters within the Government House premises. Life in these communities of Owerri is a continuous struggle against the numerous hardships that are faced in daily Nigerian lives. However, people from the two Local Government Areas interact with each other in different capacities such as intermarriage, cultural ceremonies, trade/markets and religious/faith affiliations. The only noteworthy difference is on the line of political demarcation between the two regional constituencies.

Local government administration under the Nigerian federal political structure is such that each local government stands independently of the other, but under their own state's political power jurisdiction. Owerri West and Owerri North, as this study emphasises, are separate from each other in this aspect of power relationship. The two Local Government offices report and receive directives from the state, along with the other 24 local government regions that make up the 27 Local Government Areas of Imo State. Political power flows from the federal government to the states and is dispersed for implementation through the local governments. However, Owerri West, North and the municipal area, (before the 1996 split of the regions by the military government of late Gen. Sani Abacha) used to be under the old Owerri Capital province. Therefore, with the creation of the three different zones, Owerri Municipal and North by proximity retained most of the old political structures, experience and institutional advantage of the region but now operate under new names. Politically, each zone is independent but culturally, socially, religiously and economically they share similarities, as the same Igbo people of one ancestry. Owerri Municipality doubles as both a separate council and the state capital where the governor resides. It holds the state's political and administrative institutions [civil service] and it is classified in this research as urban.

**Owerri West:**

The Owerri West Local Government Area in Imo State of Nigeria was created by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1996. The local government Area has 14 village communities with its headquarters at Umuguma. Owerri West is the largest of the three Local Government Areas with a land area of about 34,970 square kilometres and a population of approximately 142,000. Local farmers are scattered at a density of about 1,500 persons per square kilometre across a network of community villages. The uninhabited acres of land in-between the villages are utilized for subsistence farming (see appendix maps five & six). With the recent expansion of the New Owerri metropolis annex, some of these farmlands, especially those at the city edge, are being bought by government and property developers; hence pushing the rural dwellers to the interior and creating unnecessary anxiety over property/land disputes in the community (see chapter six). Owerri West has four communities that could be described as suburbs namely Irette, Umuguma, Avu and Nekede because they are located close to the motorways from Owerri city to the neighbouring states. These communities are categorised as suburban because they have a few vestiges of non-functional or rather outdated basic amenities, rusted water pipe-lines, unpowered electric poles and wires and impassable pot-holed roads. These only serve as an ugly reminder of the dysfunctional political system.

**Owerri North:**

Owerri North Local Government Area with 12 village communities was created by the military dictatorial regime of General Sanni Abacha in 1996. This was an outcome of the request made by the local community chiefs (Eze) for the creation of Uratta (L.G.A) with headquarters at Ori Uratta. Owerri North is smaller than Owerri West in size, covering a land area of about 32,050 square kilometres and a population of approximately 180,000. The area carries a higher density of people, a combination of rural farmers, civil servants and business people. Most civil servants who work at the government ministries and commissions in urban Owerri live in this Local Government Area because of its cheap accommodation and proximity to the city centre. Some of the local government's suburb communities at the peripheral border to the Owerri Municipal



Area are Orji Uratta, Egbu, Akwakuma and Awaka. These areas, as in Owerri West are no different in the condition of their infrastructures; they have the same archaic reminders of essential amenities like dead power lines, dry water pipes and impassable roads.

### **1.6. Group type clarification:**

Smallholder farmers' cooperative societies in Imo State are independent organizations that cater to the welfare of their members and sometimes the larger community. There are no elaborate mechanized farm groups or large industrial cooperatives in the study area. Smallholder cooperative societies in the state are registered with the government mainly for census purposes and as partners in the rural development process. The registration with the State Cooperative Board is done under two defined categories viz Agricultural and Non-agricultural (see chapter two). On registration, a certificate of recognition is issued to a group acknowledging its functions as a smallholder cooperative in addition to its adoption of the seven cooperative principles. However, while some registered cooperatives genuinely prosper, many others fail; these later groups are discussed in this study as the 'nominal' cooperative groups. The active cooperative societies in consideration of their members' socio-economic statuses endeavour to explore and utilize every possibly available support source. The government certification process is a standard practice in the study area that provides a comprehensive way of keeping tabs on cooperative formation and sustenance in the area. It is the cumulative list that helped this research distinguish between the operative smallholder cooperative societies and the disintegrated or struggling nominal cooperatives. This research is therefore focused on the operative smallholder agricultural cooperatives in the area adopting modern farming and administrative practices. However, I also looked at the other form of local farm organisation that uses traditional methods. I referred to them in this study as Traditional Non-extension Farmer Groups.

There were many other community based organizations (CBOs) such as development unions, age grades, diaspora groups and welfare groups that I categorized as external support groups because of their deliberate support to these studied groups (see chapter four pp. 118-121). These

other CBO support groups maintain a network of their group branches and caucuses at different locations (home and abroad) wherever their natal members are found (see chapter three). They are not to be confused with these three main focus group types as discussed below.

**Modern smallholder cooperative society:** This is made up farmers in the rural communities who adapted their cultural associative activities to form groups under the jurisdiction of the Cooperative Federation of Nigeria (CFN) operating under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture (see chapter two). The ministry serves as an arm of the government Cooperative Board that coordinates credit and agricultural input assistance from local and foreign donors to grass roots smallholder cooperatives (Lawal, 2006; Epetimehin, 2006; Ishola & Williamson, 1995 in Oladejo, 2011). Modern day smallholder cooperative societies in Nigeria usually evolve from the old traditional primary group types. Adeoye (1996), commenting on this evolutionary process of cooperatives, observed that “modern cooperative societies grew along the traditional lines of occupation and pattern of trade maintaining still the valuable essence of their root cultures” (Adeoye, 1996 in Lafia and Obaka, 2009). This is not to say that a modern type of smallholder cooperative society could not be formed from scratch, as is the case with most of the urban community cooperatives. The modernized types of smallholder cooperatives adopt enhanced practices which go beyond the pooling of financial resources or labour services and into greater collective business ventures. The transformed cooperative goes through a series of formal paper registrations under the government’s cooperative association business act from which it is supposedly legitimized to apply for government’s grants, trust funds, and other financial assistances whenever available, and moreover, does not pay taxes. Successful modern smallholder cooperative societies can become large enterprises that could modify their operations to include subscription of share capital, deposit-taking, and financial lending. This represents a leap from the old to the new and requires a lot of change in its processes. This modern cooperative model incorporates a lot of practices such as banking, accounting, trainings, extension services for the agricultural cooperatives, etc. Through such improved activities and many more, as Epetimehin (2006:20) observes, “The societies are able to task themselves into creating productive employment, overcoming poverty, and achieving better social integration”.

**Traditional non-extension farmer group:** This is the indigenous form of group association that has existed since the pre-colonial era. They are usually farmers' self-help groups formed in various communities. Members of this group model in recent years are usually the elderly who show little interest in switching to modern cooperative practices e.g the agricultural extension provisions. The most notable example of the traditional farmer group model is the Esusu group (Onyeiwu, 1997; Siebel, 2007). Esusu is a derivative of the Akan language "susu" which means "Small small" and can be taken to represent the buildup of money from numerous small collection sources to get a larger sum. This practice has flourished in West Africa for generations and is still widely practiced today. The incentive of participating in Esusu is the obligatory savings that it encourages; putting aside money today to benefit from a lump sum payment in the future. Ekpo and Umoh, (2009:2) add that "Some of the Esusu groups operate on written laws while others don't but rather take the oath of allegiance and run on mutual trust". The general practice in these Esusu groups is that members contribute a fixed amount periodically and give all or part of the accumulated funds to one or more member(s) in rotation until all members have benefited from the pool. Members are always informed about project plans and when it is their turn to benefit. Most of the cooperative societies that this research focuses on started off as informal community based groups, faith-based and traditional gender groups, and then grew into the modernized pattern. These informal groupings are sometimes referred in multiple names as pre-cooperatives, primary groups and quasi-cooperatives.

**The nominal cooperative societies:** These are the societies that are discussed in this study as 'name only cooperative societies' or nominal cooperatives. Many of such societies at the time of this study were disintegrated or struggling; thus the former member participants of the defunct societies were identified as non-cooperative members or ex-coop members during the field interview (see chapter four. p 118). The formation of these cooperative societies are not properly thought over by their adherents. Many are composed of only a membership list that is used for the purposes of gaining registration with the government's cooperative board in the state. Nominal cooperatives are usually spearheaded by one or two self-interested persons who run the affairs of these pseudo-societies. Accordingly, Nweze (2001), Onuoha (2001) and Agbo (2009) classified such societies as 'ad-hoc' cooperatives, they exist for the narrow objectives of their

initiators who most of the time have connections to the inner powers in the government. Hence they are viewed in the area as channels of embezzlement by the rural development power brokers (Smith 2010).

### **1.7. Research gap:**

The emerging consensus of global development institutions to address rural poverty problems through the cooperative pathway has not yielded the projected dividends. Some researchers have already identified misuses of the cooperative ideal among local community residents partly due to the non-proper integration of the people's cultural values –ugwu- into the adopted cooperative practice. . Although the communitarian life style of the Igbos is similar to the attributes espoused in formal cooperatives, there is still a research need for a standardized articulation and incorporation of the people's cultural essence in the practice of formal cooperative association in the area and Africa at large.

On discussing some of the issues that impede cooperative development in the area, Nweze (2001), Onuoha (2001) and Agbo (2009) in separate research studies decried state governments' overreach beyond their registration role to instigating the people to form cooperative societies, hence influencing cooperative business. They submitted that such acts lead to the proliferation of cooperative societies referred to as "emergency or ad-hoc cooperative societies" in the communities. These 'nominal ad-hoc societies' crowd-out the genuine smallholder cooperative societies and distracts focus from progressive areas within the authentic cooperative societies. It should be noted here that although the government is not expected to initiate cooperative group formation but to partner with established genuine societies in the communities to pursue rural development goals. Deliberating further on the problems that arise from government interference in cooperative functions Poulton, Dorward, and Kydd (2010), argue that it leads to 'opportunism' whereby some members try to cheat or take advantage of the others in the group. Ekeh's (1975) theoretical framework of the 'two publics' argues such opportunistic behaviour patterns as a post-colonial social construct in Africa and opens up the window for future investigations into this attitude such as this research explores.

Meagher's (2006) study on social capital and network processes in Africa similarly notes that:

*Despite a long history of economic networks, and a dramatic increase over the past two decades of credit societies, social clubs, trading networks, and informal social welfare arrangements, the expansion of social networks (capital) in African societies has been associated more with parochialism, criminality and communal violence than with economic development (p.3).*

Knowing that some cooperatives are successful, this research therefore questions how the association of the social network notion with positive social capital and development in Africa works. This study addresses why this might be so through field experience in Owerri, hoping that specific local strategies for success can be revealed. It investigates the nature of the bond that coheres collective actions within the operative smallholder cooperatives and their networks and the problems of the failed nominal cooperative groups. It also calls for a reassessment of the socio-political factors that produce the social environment which encourages the formation of these groups in the rural areas. Additionally, the study reviews the social values and attributes that constitute social capital as 'ugwu' within the smallholder cooperatives, in order to distinguish the operative genuine groups from the nominal ones in the study area. Hence it becomes necessary that studies of this nature be undertaken for enhanced policy directives, developed based on realistic understanding of what contributes to successful smallholder cooperative group formation that advances group/individual self-help initiatives for the rural public.

### **1.8. Why I studied smallholder cooperatives**

I chose to study the operative smallholder cooperative societies in Owerri because of their fundamental role in aiding poverty alleviation in the lives of their members and the larger rural community. The non-functional and struggling nominal cooperatives were also discussed to provide context in the study. Through the collective dedication of members in the functional cooperative societies the cooperatives reassure hope to both their members and immediate local community. They present a unique form of support front in the rural areas.

Furthermore, their contribution in the general rural development process is formally recognized by government and incorporated under the state's development policies (see chapter two). This attention from government distinguishes the genuine cooperative societies as more interesting organizations than the nominal cooperative groups and other CB groups (such as age grades, masquerade groups, unions and traditional gender groups). The smallholder cooperative society model also possesses all the group/individual member experiences and network characteristics that I sought in my study and helps me to respond to my research questions. Finally due to their transitional nature from primordial to modern registration (certification) with the government, many of the subsisting smallholder cooperatives possess a long history of experience which serves as resourceful compendium of the people's cultural knowledge.

### **1.9. Background to my choice of the research problem**

Observed trends in the study communities sparked my research interest in smallholder farmer cooperatives and their efforts to achieve self-sustenance and rural community development. An initial perception of the study area's group dynamics may lead one into thinking that cooperative groups in the area are formed specifically as self-help alternatives in the face of persistent poverty and the government's inadequacy. However, the scenarios that this study discusses depict a much more varied picture with only some groups following the familiar norms of cooperative behaviours.

During my previous job as a rural development worker in the study communities, I noticed the unusual frequency at which the locals form and register groups as cooperative societies and the rate at which these groups disintegrate after a short period. Interestingly too, in the same area, there are some smallholder farmer cooperative groups that have sustained in their businesses for several decades. Hence I was intrigued to know why this disparity in the cooperative groups' lifespan. How come despite possessing the same registration certificate, in the same area some groups survive and remain obviously active in their cooperative commitments while others fizzle away as soon as they are formed. My curiosity over this situation led me to explore what it is that the succeeding operative groups do differently and if their internal cohesion and networking

gives them endurance over the short-lived ones. I wished to understand what the destructive trends in these disintegrated and struggling groups are, that should be avoided, changed or discouraged, in order to achieve stability and best practices for future success. Hence, my inquest is pitched at understanding the state of such indicative factors as trust and reciprocity in the operations of smallholder cooperatives in rural areas. It fascinated me also to juxtapose the Igbo African perception of the social capital ideal and how it is being performed in these societies. I further gathered opinions from members of the struggling and disintegrated cooperative groups for comparison purpose.

Additionally, I noticed the enthusiasm of some of these active smallholder farmer cooperatives to reach out, lead or participate in their community's development events despite their lean resources and a noticeably weak relationship with the government. I therefore inquired further to know more about the bridging linkage with external parties and what could be done to improve the situation. In keeping a simple focus on these identified issues, I summed them up under two major perspectives as internal and external problems of smallholder cooperative societies in the area and discussed same in the light of their impacts on the area's cooperative performance. The proposed research questions are as follows.

### **1.10.1. Research questions**

#### **Internal problems:**

1. What stimulates the people in the study area to form smallholder cooperative societies?
2. How are trust and reciprocity operated in the rural smallholder cooperative societies?
3. Why do some registered cooperatives sustain in their operations while others collapse?
4. How is social capital conceptualised in the Igbo African worldview (ugwu)?
5. What differentiates the Igbo African idea of social capital from the western perspective?

#### **External problems**

6. What is the nature of the relationship between government and the area's cooperatives?

7. How could government and external network relationships be made more productive?
8. Can external support incentives be conducted through the traditional governance structure?

### **1.10.2. Significance of study**

It is hoped that the study will contribute to practical and academic knowledge in some of these ways listed below:

1. Strengthen Agricultural cooperative and Traditional farmer groups.
2. Curb the misuse and proliferation of cooperative agendas.
3. Foster cultural cooperative education, leadership and awareness in the area.
4. Enhance rural empowerment opportunities (Capacity building).
5. Refocusing of gender issues within the study groups and community.
6. Assist with policy decisions, implementation and rebuilding bridging connections with government.

### **1.10.3. Practical significance**

#### **Strengthen agricultural cooperative and traditional farmer groups**

This study will contribute to ideas on ways of strengthening the efforts of the subsisting smallholder cooperatives and traditional farmer groups with regards to their membership support and dedicated outreach to their immediate communities. Uphoff (2006:2) argues that for rural development to happen, it is important to consider the capacity of local institutions as complement to central institutions. Therefore, through this study's recommendations, the smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups in the area would be better enlightened about their valuable position and role as the meeting point of rural development between the communities, their diaspora groups, community development support unions, and the government.

#### **Curb the misuse and proliferation of cooperative agenda**



This study hopes to identify new strategies for coordinating smallholder cooperative administration between the government and the locals. It recommends ways for the government cooperative agencies and external developers to identify authentic groups in the community in order to work with them and reduce resources depletion through helping doubtful groups. This perspective ties in to the counsel of Galtung, O'Brien, and Preiswerk (1980:25) for community development to be resourced first by exploring how to utilize the available human and material potentials of a place. In the long run associational order is restored and genuine groups are differentiated from the phony ones and focused on for progressive objectives. This dissuades malefactors from taking advantage of the cooperative pathways for their narrow selfish purposes and in turn saves resource wastage.

**Foster cultural cooperative education, leadership and awareness in the area:**

The study hopes to educate functional smallholder cooperatives on the immense benefits of consolidating their groups' capabilities through adherence to cultural values and laudable cooperative practices in their communities (Mudi-Okorodudu, 2007). These initiatives help to distinguish them from the spurious groups; and determine the level and type of support-response that cooperatives receive from external support networks. The research targets positive awareness and teaches smallholder cooperators about the gains that accrue from dedicated participation, such as the ability of members to borrow money from the groups' common credit stock, the applying for and the receiving of soft loans or other collectively owned material resources, and the ability to have ready helping hands for assistance in times of need, like the local rotational farm assistance programme (see Chapter four). Also, the smallholder cooperatives could suggest to the government the specific modes of assistance they need for success in their development targets, such as, equal shares of resources like fertilizers and equipment, among other things.

### **Enhance rural empowerment opportunities (Capacity Building)**

In accordance with the research's hope of helping to enhance rural empowerment, Willis (2005:99) advocates, that "local people should have a greater say in what activities are carried out, and that their participation in such activities creates an environment where empowerment is more likely". It is anticipated therefore that through this study, the focus smallholder cooperatives, the farmer group members and the larger rural populace in the study communities would be more informed about making relevant self-help development decisions, knowing that their choices go a long way in determining their development status in the self-empowering process. This is hoped to stimulate more positive cooperative attitude and discourage the forlornness of dud group proliferation in the area.

### **Refocusing on the gender issue within the study groups and community:**

Gender is an integral part of smallholder cooperative functions and development study especially in the rural areas. This study is expected to be instrumental in refocusing discussion attention on gender issues in the study area. The study addresses disparities where they exist among men and women and their interactions in the studied cooperative societies and farmer groups, and then proffers advice on the best practices in the cooperatives and within the community. The study draws on these disparities to teach both sexes that opportunities, knowledge, and self-improvement abilities are not, and should not be, dependent upon sex, but rather on necessity, zeal, and hard work.

### **Assisting policy decisions, implementation and rebuilding bridging connections with government and diaspora:**

The research study is hoped to be an invaluable resource tool in guiding government's development of cooperative and rural development policies in the state. The study through its findings is expected to provide a platform for improvements in the implementation of the developed cooperative policies, especially concerning government relationships with smallholder cooperatives and the diaspora in the study area and state-wide. It is also hoped that the study will

bring to bear the impact of rural/urban development policies for proper consideration before implementation. Importantly, the study will be an essential guide for the Agricultural Development Project (ADP) scheme and for other rural development workers in understanding the operations of cooperatives in the rural communities.

#### **1.10.4. Academic significance: (study contributions):**

Contrary to the espoused position that thick bonding social capital crowds out dissimilar bridging connections in societies (Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 2002), my field study explores good cooperative social capital bonds as an antecedent to a broad bridging social capital support comprising of diaspora networks and acquaintances. My study uses cooperatives to introduce a new dimension to the debate about how social capital and network interaction works in rural communities. It found out that ‘ugwu’ as one of the major grids that connect rural cooperative members to their extended support networks (diaspora) in distant regions (see *ugwu anyi* in chapter three). The research further found the reliability of this form of support as helping to enhance members’ internal bonds within their cooperative societies and bringing development to these areas in the face of government’s inadequacies. These discoveries challenge the obtainable status quo whereby the exclusive attributes of bonding social capital particularly in the rural communities, has been misrepresented as a burden on community development (Granovetter 1973; Portes, 2000; Fukuyama, 2002).

The study therefore proposes that ‘ugwu’ could be formally incorporated into the development of regional curriculum of cooperative education to reflect the people’s values in cooperative practices. The achievement of this objective would help positively address the concern raised by Ekeh (1975) in his theory on the two publics’ disparity. Since the primordial public according Ekeh (1975) already has the ‘ugwu’ structures in place and abides by its tenets, the civic public (government) rather than dismiss this paradigm as unimportant can therefore follow the local people’s trusted ‘ugwu’ channels to reach them. As Landell-Mills (1992) noted, such an approach would be a welcome bottom-up model that carries the people’s concerns along to a

new level of governance solution and most importantly bridges the elusive social capital gap between the rural people and their state government.

#### **1.10.5. Chapter overview**

My research investigates the reasons for smallholder cooperative formation and the sustenance challenges associated with its operations in the rural communities among the Igbos of Owerri in Imo State Nigeria. It seeks to determine the factors that conditions membership interest to join these groups and how these commitments are managed for beneficial purposes to the members and the larger community. Chapter 1 has introduced the study, stating the problems, and outlining the research questions. The practical and academic significance of the study has also been discussed.

**Chapter 2** introduces cooperative societies as the epitome of rural development and self-help/reliance practice. The chapter traces the British historical roots of cooperatives to the pre-colonial, and later colonial, introductions of the practice among Nigerian farmers in 1935. It also outlaid the organisational structure and internal management/administrative operations of cooperatives according to the three tier structure in Nigeria, viz. National, state and local government levels. Additionally, the chapter discusses corruption and the government policies as they impact the operations of cooperatives in the rural areas. However, since many of the participating cooperatives and their members are women, I devoted the final section to discuss women cooperative roles and empowerment in Igboland.

**Chapter 3** discusses the theoretical frameworks of social capital as a guide for the research. It reviews the various literatures on the concept, distinguishing between its different forms and applications based on three main researchers' works, viz. Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Furthermore, the chapter juxtaposes the western Putnamian (2000) conception of the term 'social capital' with African Igbo scholars' socio-cultural perspectives, to arrive at the unique form of 'ugwu' a central bond that regulates associational life among the Igbos of the study area. It also reviewed Ekeh's (1974) theory of the two publics and power-governance relationships in reference to the observed socio-political situation in the study area.

**Chapter 4** deals mainly with the research methods and techniques that were adopted in operationalizing the fieldwork. In this chapter, I reflect on my experience in the field, as well as on my use of the information gathered during this process. Generally the chapter is an attempt to present my fieldwork encounters in Nigeria in a comprehensive manner.

**Chapter 5** concentrates on the analysis of the data using the SPSS software according to the grouped response categories designed after the Likert scaling pattern. The adopted mixed-method analysis necessitates simultaneous discussion of the summed cross-tabulated [quantitative] results with the [qualitative] excerpts from the field. The analysis in this chapter focused on addressing the two sets of research questions in the thesis.

**Chapter 6** continues the analysis by discussing some of the themes that emerged from the field narratives. Using case by case analysis, it opens up discussions on subjects such as gender roles, cooperative leadership, community support relations and urban rural encroachment. These are issues that shape the smallholder cooperative experience in the study communities. Additionally, the chapter addresses the question of group proliferation in the area with reactions from member and non-member respondents of both stable and unstable societies in the area.

**Chapter 7** sums up the final phase of the entire research. It draws together the threads on all the chapters to establish a comprehensive insight for the research conclusion. Thereafter crucial recommendations were made on how social capital relations within the study groups, their host communities and with the area's government could be improved for best response to the people's needs.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **COOPERATIVE AND GOVERNMENT POLICY IMPLICATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT**

#### **2.0. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the cooperative association to understand its historical origin, especially in Nigeria. It is on record that cooperative activities in Nigeria, prior to the 1935 Strickland report, evolved from the traditional Isusu thrift-groups and the clusters of local produce-farmers in the rural communities. However, the modern cooperative ideal practiced in today's Nigeria follows the federal structure that runs through the states to the local government areas where the primary farmer groups and clusters are located. In Owerri Imo State among the Igbos, as this research investigates, cooperative activities are dependent on deep socio-cultural factors that stimulate cooperation and cohesive behaviour among the people. Some of these behavioral norms, using western theory, are conceptualised as social capital (Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000). However, from the African Igbo worldview, they translate as the cultural or ethical ethos of *ugwu* (see chapter three) that determines the worth of people's interactional life in their community. It is that stock of goodwill that enriches and connects the bearer to broad relational opportunities (Iroegbu, 1997). Hence, poor rural community dwellers, through their associational life, are able to access support for tangible economic benefits in the long run.

The chapter overviews the role of smallholder cooperative societies in supporting their members in their rural community areas where most purported government development programmes seldom reach<sup>6</sup> due to the peculiarities of corruption. The cooperatives and other CBOs, through their activities, foster social cohesion and cooperation among members upon which valuable and beneficial social capital bonds are advanced. Members are able to give and receive financial and non-financial support from their groups in order to improve their situations and those of their communities. Most cooperative societies in this study area are built around socio-cultural and religious values but, on registration with the government, they adopt the formalized patterns of modern business practices, using banking, accounting, communication, and improved

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<sup>6</sup> Development programmes aimed at the dwellers in rural communities in Nigeria are seldom delivered as promised and corruption is largely to blame. This problem is extensively addressed in chapter three.

agricultural extension services in the performance of their trades. The synergy of the indigenous traditional traits such as kindness, integrity, trust and respect for the elderly, and other customary values, along with the incorporation of modern day business practices, make the cooperative functions in the study area unique.

The chapter also discusses some of the government policies that relate to cooperative development and other anti-poverty programmes that have been adopted as off-shoots of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria. This includes the effects of these policies and programmes on the lives of the citizens, particularly in the rural areas. However, through collaboration between cooperatives, community authorities and other development conscious groups (CBOs) in the community, the self-help/reliance agenda is pursued with augmented support from the community's diaspora network groups. Since many of the participating cooperative members the research worked with are women, the final section of the chapter was devoted to discussing women cooperative participation and empowerment in Igboland. Cooperative activities in Nigeria have gone through a series of developmental and structural growth periods, and are still braving the enormous challenges of corruption that has infested the Nigerian polity to this day.

### **2.1. Smallholder cooperative: concept and principles**

The word cooperative is a term which refers to the creation of a non-profit enterprise for the benefit of those individuals using its services. The concept can be applied to many different types of group formations, but in this research, it refers to the collective formal business and social activities of select operative smallholder groups in the study communities. In accordance with the guiding principle of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the Nigerian Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery team defined a cooperative as:

*an association of persons who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common end through the formation of a democratically controlled organisation, making equitable contribution to the capital required and accepting a fair share of the risk and benefit of the undertaking in which members actively participate. (MAMSER, 1989:19).*

From a different perspective, the Nigerian researcher Egbue (1985:11) discusses the cooperative concept by identifying what a cooperative is not. For him, a cooperative is an “antonym of competition which involves communal groups of dependent individuals who work together for a specific purpose or activity and share certain rules, customs and so on”. Unintentionally, the functional smallholder cooperators being discussed in this research, while keeping to their Igbo cultural ethics that guide interpersonal and group relationships, indirectly uphold the Rochdale founders’ ethical ideals as stipulated in the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) values and principles handbook. Hence even without formal education or training, most of the groups live out these values in their communities.

## **2.2. Principles of cooperatives**

Cooperative principles are discussed here as the culturally adapted guidelines or procedures by which the smallholder cooperatives practice their values. The principles can be divided into three categories viz, ownership, decision making, and special practices, and they are as follows:

**Ownership: voluntary and open membership:** Smallholder cooperatives in Igboland operate as community voluntary organizations; open to all persons who are able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership (ICA, 2013). All the smallholder cooperatives studied in this research are voluntarily owned and run by their members. Each has their own distinct story of a humble beginning from shared problems that they set out to address as a group within their community (Nwachukwu, Fieldwork record, 2011).

**Members’ economic participation:** In accordance with the egalitarian culture of the Igbo society, smallholder cooperative members in the area contribute equitably towards the management of their group’s capital in a democratic manner. Part of their contributed capital is



usually set aside for the procurement of capital goods or common property for the cooperative. Members receive dividends back on their contributed share of capital. Some groups allocate surpluses for the development of their group's set goals. The societies set up reserves, part of which at least is indivisible. They benefit their members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative and for supporting other approved group activities (ICA, 2013).

**Decision making: democratic member control:** All members of a smallholder cooperative are equal co-owners in the cooperative business. In conformity with the 'onu okwu' tradition (right of expression) in Igbo family and community gatherings, each member of the group has equal voting and decision-making power in the governance of the business on the basis of one vote per member regardless of the level of investment in the cooperative. In contrast, owners of more corporate business organizations have one vote per share (so that the number of votes stockholders have depends on the amount of money they have invested). Smallholder cooperatives offer a more democratically-based system. At most agricultural and food cooperatives in the rural areas, members consist of individuals, neighbours, and kin from similar households (NOUN, 2009; ICA, 2013).

**Autonomy and independence:** As the ICA puts it "Cooperatives are independent, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations (such as government agencies) or raise money from outside sources (such as corporate institutions and diaspora support), they do so only on terms that ensure independence and democratic control by their members". The application of this principle in the study scenario protects the smallholder cooperatives from being controlled by government or development support agencies however well-intentioned or otherwise the association may be<sup>7</sup>. Being regarded as channels for rural development and poverty alleviation, the societies are open to partnership with the government and support groups whenever possible, but are not dependent or controlled by these external agencies (Nwachukwu, Fieldwork record, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> Most genuine cooperative societies consider their integrity in deciding who or which sources to accept support from. They distance themselves from politically motivated philanthropic sources that have ulterior motives.

**Special practices: surplus earnings share:** smallholder cooperative members share from the surplus (profit) according to their individual inputs based on the amount contributed or services rendered to the society or on the amount and extent of patronage to the society. This principle means that, although each member has only one vote and the management of the organization does not depend on member's shares, any saving or surplus generated is shared out to the members according to their contributions. This is meant to encourage members who have the ability to contribute more in terms of shares to do so. However, at some of the societies that I studied, their by-laws have clauses which state that when a member cannot afford the financial part of the membership commitment, he or she can make-up for it in time or labor input to the progress of the society's business. Hence, an initial non-financial member<sup>8</sup> can put more time into the workings of the cooperative business. Through such arrangements, the EBD farmers' multi-purpose cooperative in Owerri West has been able to almost complete their ultra-modern skill-acquisition center, a complex they showed me through during my fieldwork (Nwachukwu, Fieldwork record, 2011).

**Training and information:** The role of a smallholder cooperator is quite different from the role of a customer in a conventional business outfit. A smallholder cooperator is simultaneously the cooperative's customer, owner, and decision-maker. Educating members and leaders about the basic principles, practices, and structure of the smallholder cooperative business is vital. There can be no cooperation without the members, and cooperators need to know how to use and lead their smallholder cooperatives effectively.

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<sup>8</sup> Such initial non-financial members pledge to commit more work time on the cooperative farm, in the cottage mills or at the outlet shops. They are not vilified as poor. Poverty in the African Igbo culture or belief system is assessed differently; not from the usual perspective of econometric measurements or standards, but rather by the number of associations, linkages and networks that persons have or are a part of. Hence, to stand alone without relationships with others, even if one has bags full of money is, in the Igbo worldview, the real poverty. The Igbo proverb succinctly captures this idea: "na nchi na nchi ka ede ji amuba"-which means "the coco-yam shoot multiplies by proximity to each other" or "Onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego" means "one who has people connections is richer than one with bags of money". Every cooperator is accepted into the group with or without money, but has to show zeal or the willingness to work for his/her individual goals through the path-ways set by the group's collective course or goal. The only obstacles to a member's admission into the group is when he/she has anti-social or has communal behaviors which are deemed as a 'turn-off' or liability as discussed as part of the ugwu onye thesis. There are no material considerations for membership.

**Concern for community:** Every smallholder cooperative operates in a community that extends beyond its own sphere of operation in which its members live; the smallholder cooperative's actions affect that larger community. While member needs are their primary concern, cooperatives also work for the sustainable development of their communities in positive ways. When the cultivation of green vegetables was a problem in Owerri North because of the seasonal harsh dry weather conditions, the CJK farmer cooperative of Emekuku stepped in to improve the situation with the introduction of the stream and river-bank vegetable farming project. Much-needed inexpensive produce became readily available to the communities within the environs and beyond. The same goes with the GTD farmers' cooperative which through its cooperative piggery provides surplus pork - a source of whole protein to their community in Ezeakiri Naze in Owerri North (Nwachukwu, Fieldwork record, 2011). Smallholder cooperatives have an obligation to contribute to strong and sustainable economic solutions for community needs.

**Cooperation among cooperatives:** This principle reiterates the significance of bridging/linking social capital in the working together of different group in an area for a united purpose (see chapter three). Smallholder cooperatives recognize the vital importance of working together with each other locally and regionally. Through these efforts, smallholder cooperatives try to help each other strengthen their economic positions and thereby contribute to the big cooperative movement. This principle of "cooperation among cooperatives" extends the idea of working together at the organizational level. When smallholder cooperatives work together, either regionally (such as when all southeast-area smallholder cooperatives promote the Coop-Month) or within a community (such as when all food producing smallholder cooperatives work towards standardizing price on products), they can often accomplish more for the benefit of their members and the communities at large.

### **2.3. Smallholder cooperative: an overview**

Although cooperative practice in Nigeria was inherited from the British model, its practice in the study communities is expressed in cultural terms that the local people identify with. The focus smallholder cooperatives originate as primordial groups in their rural communities and collate at

the local government level for registration and certification by the government. They observe the values and principles of the formal cooperative society such as self-help, autonomy, democracy, equality and solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. The societies uphold their autonomy, but do accommodate support outreach from the government and other development network agencies. Technically, they function in a bifurcate pattern, serving as both a cultural front for their members/community and as a recognised modern group front accredited with the government cooperative board. As a legitimized cooperative society in the area, they are considered as players in the government's poverty alleviation scheme and development policies. Hence they express discontentment when their expectations for inclusiveness, support and collaboration from the government are not granted as they hoped. Nevertheless, in spite of these disappointing experiences, the members of these operative smallholder groups are not deterred in their aspiration, rather they draw strength from their group's resilient spirit of shared values and self-help ideals to forge on (Odigbo, 1998).

Establishing community-based smallholder cooperative societies are examples of self-help development strategies adopted by the people in the South-eastern region. Odigbo (1998:213) notes that, "it is the gap created by government and other institution's poor performance that leads to the formation of cooperative organizations as means of achieving goals of common interests". In the same light, Ijere (1992) and Deji (2005), stressing this collective determination of the rural people in two separate researches on cooperative farmers and rural development in Osun state, Nigeria, note that people come together in cooperative societies to pool their resources together so as to meet individual needs that could not be resolved by individual limited financial capacity. Need is a central factor in the performance of cooperative acts while trust and reciprocity are the underlining attributes on which such acts are arguably based, especially in rural areas similar to the one that this study focuses on. Trust and reciprocity are important social capital elements that knit society members together, producing common norms of identity and solidarity on the one hand, and strong economic ties on the other (Mauss, 1990; Coleman, 1994; Gunnar & Svendsen, 2006). Several of the functional smallholder societies that this research worked with showcase an abundance of these traditional bonding attributes (trust and reciprocity) but practiced within the purview of the modern cooperative style. Hence they adopt

such modern organizational practices as banking, accounting, book keeping, social media and small business administrative lessons to enhance their operations.

A society's possession of internal social capital bond is argued to be able to attract or to lead to the development of bridging social capital bonds with external support agencies, such as the government, for development purposes (Ferguson & Dickens 1999; Saegert, Thompson & Warren, 2001; Larsen, Harlan, Bolin, Hackett, Hope, Kirby, & Wolf, 2004). However, such scenarios arguably happen in societies such as the west where government and its organs are functionally efficient with less corruption. Conversely, the situation in this study, pans out differently because within the Nigerian Igbo African communities of this research, people's internal bonds within their groups and community do not necessarily lead to effective bridging relationship with the government. The situation is partly blamed on the corruption and unreliability of the area's government and its agencies and on some of the people who take advantage of these weak relationships (Agbo, 2009).

It is the collective sentiment for community support and development that links the efforts of the active smallholder cooperative societies with their rural community's development ideal. In support of these ideals, the diaspora networks partner with some of the tertiary institutions in the areas and other community development-conscious CBOs' to organise workshops where groups and individual participants learn small-business management skills, and acquire new vocational capabilities for collective and individual self-help venture efforts. Cooperatives after such training sometimes give out soft loans from their common purses, augmented occasionally by the diaspora support-funds<sup>9</sup>, to some deserving members and member-relatives who wish to start a business. The beneficiaries set up businesses, such as cultivating improved crop and livestock farms, or establishing commercial shop outlets and small-cottage industries, where they make a range of small products like chalk, candles, shoe-polish, furniture, craft items, biscuits, ice cream, and tie-dyed clothes material. These self-help cottage products are sold for income to the

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<sup>9</sup> In the research area, community diaspora groups set up funds with which they support their home community development initiatives. Such funds are sometimes accessed by groups as loans to support their member's aspiration on 'zero default' tolerance because the consequences of such an act affect the entire group's reputation (see chapters three and six). The titled elders (Nze, Eze or Ozo's) of each community are usually placed in charge of the disbursement of the funds to the groups as interest free loans for later pay back on strict customary regulations.

cooperative proprietors. Others in the agricultural and livestock businesses, harvest and market some of their produce in the community market, such as local staple food crops like yam, cassava, palm oil, melon, okra, tomatoes, maize, and animals such as goats, fish, dogs, and chickens etc. All these positive activities encourage the people of the study areas to adopt the smallholder cooperative lifestyle regardless of the challenges. Let us now address some of historical dynamics that shape the smallholder cooperative structure of today's Nigeria.

#### **2.4. Cooperatives in Nigeria: Historical background**

**Pre-colonial phase:** The earliest evidence of cooperative-like associations on record in Nigeria was in the form of an informal communal financial group in 16th century Nigeria; Esusu was a rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) operating among the ethnic groups. As a form of financial self-help group, Esusu (Yoruba) Osusu or Isusu (Igbo) or Adashi, (Hausa) was transported during the slave trade to the Caribbean Islands (Bascom, 1952:69 in Seibel 2007), where both the institution and the term still exist today. Seibel<sup>10</sup> (2007:2) notes that “Its origin came from rotational work associations, in which labour, as a scarce commodity, was accumulated and allocated to one member at a time; however, with the spreading of commercialism, this practice was replaced by money transactions, using cowries, pounds, and Naira”.

Discussing the relevant social features of the age-old Isusu (Esusu) groupings and acts among the people from Nigeria, Ijere (1992:117) illustrates that it contains those aspects that deal with the people's attitudes to life, their modes of behaviour, their relationships with one another, as well as their customs. These issues are typified by such norms as honesty, fairness, equity, democracy, and mutual empathy for fellow members. Arguing in support to Ijere's position, the researchers Ofuoku, Uzokwe, & Ideh, (2009:97) postulated that “Neither socialism nor

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capitalism nor a mixed economy enshrines or espouses the above standards or virtues as does the Isusu (Esusu) cooperative practice”. The major characteristics of these traditional types of smallholder cooperative groupings, viz. (Isusu, Esusu or Adashi clubs, age grades) are founded on these norms which form the bedrock of cooperative principles and the core of the growth of social capital as described in chapter three.

**British colonial phase:** The British colonial era ushered in formal cooperative movements in Nigeria which concentrated on the development of the agricultural produce sector for export purpose. Nkom (1984 in Emefesi, Hamidu, & Haruna 2004:27) notes that “The colonial masters invited a cooperative expert in 1934, Mr. C.F. Strickland who had served in India, to advise on the prospects and desirability of forming cooperatives in Nigeria”. Having the satisfaction of the colonial export interest as his prime motive, Mr. Strickland recommended the formation of Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives from the existing clusters of farmer groups in the different regions of the country purposely for the growing of major cash crops such as cocoa, cotton, and palm produce for colonial export (Ekpere, 1980). During this period, the cocoa farmers in the Western region, the palm produce farmers in the East, and the groundnut farmers in the North already had marketing societies with the sole aim of checking the middlemen and ensuring the marketing of pure and unadulterated produce. Their initiatives were therefore boosted after the encouraging observations in the Strickland report but not without the clause granting the government’s continued control of newly restructured cooperatives. Strickland’s report brought optimism about the future of cooperative functions in the land and led to the enactment of the cooperative legislation in 1935. The period between 1935-1940 saw these newly incorporated farmer groups, now cooperatives, go through a series of transformations in their business/trade, produce and operational structures (Ekpere, 1980: 45). Major E.F.G Haig was appointed the first registrar of cooperative societies for Nigeria in 1939 and among his first assignments was the re-organisation of the structure of local farmer’s societies (Ibadan union); the introduction of market reforms; the establishment of a sound credit system; the encouragement of saving deposits by members, and the fostering of cooperative spirit among members.

One of the major structural distinctions Major E.F.G Haig made was between two forms of cooperative societies viz. agricultural and non-agricultural cooperatives. This was to simplify the problem of administration and to enable correct identification of each cooperative society prior to the regionalization period.

**Independence and regionalisation phase:** In the years preceding the 1960 independence of Nigeria, cooperative activities in the country, as Ekpere (1980) observes, experienced a lot of structural changes and fragmentations. The political tension in the land necessitated the adoption of regional management of cooperative affairs. With the establishment of the 1951 regionalisation policy, each of the three regions (North, West and South) enacted its own cooperative societies' law by adapting the original 1935 law. In addition, cooperative matters became the exclusive responsibility of the regions with each region appointing its own cooperative registrar (Osaghae, 1991; Rotimi, 1996). Though there was some uniformity among the regional cooperative movements, each region emphasised different aspects of the cooperative organisation. For example, the Eastern Regional Government sought to develop these organisations into full-fledged self-supporting movements in the areas of thrift and credit, agriculture, farming, and banking. The Northern Nigerian Cooperative Law was enacted in 1956; it placed emphasis on the development of multi-purpose cooperatives combining agricultural marketing and credit. The Western Nigerian Cooperative Law was enacted in 1953 with a focus on farming, marketing, thrift and credit cooperative types. The Cooperative Bank was established in 1953 with a Marketing Board grant. Just as the 1951 regionalization affected the cooperative movement, so also did the subsequent fragmentation of Nigeria into states. The creation of the Midwest Region in 1963 added another cooperative movement to the existing three. In the same way, the creation of 12 states in 1967 led to 12 cooperative movements, while the number rose to 19 following the 19 states created in 1987.

**The civil war and post-civil war phase:** The political tensions of the pre and post-independence era deepened further the ethnic divisions of the Nigerian polity, leading to the



1967 Nigeria-Biafran war<sup>11</sup>. Cooperative and other organisational activities in the seceding south-eastern Biafran region came to a halt during the war while normal life activities continued in the west and the northern regions of Nigeria. The three-year war ended in 1970 leaving behind it poverty and devastation lingering in the Igbo south-eastern region. The Igbos, being anxious about their continued survival, unwillingly re-connected back into the Nigerian Federation. Between 1970 and 79, during the post-war period, a Cooperative Development Act was passed by the government; the Federal Ministry of Cooperative Development and Supply was established to help reconnect the south-eastern cooperatives and mitigate against spiralling inflammatory threats (NBS-National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). This brought about relative peace for cooperative interactions among the regions in the federation. Cooperative and other group activities in Igboland gradually took off again with various communities challenging themselves through their self-help efforts towards re-building their group lives and communal infrastructures. It is now necessary to discuss the different tier structures that the organisation of cooperative activities in Nigeria takes.

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<sup>11</sup> “The Nigerian-Biafran War, also known as Nigerian Civil War, (1967-1970), was a political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the South-eastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria” (Nwadike, 2011:25).

## 2.5. Two cooperative tier structures in Nigeria

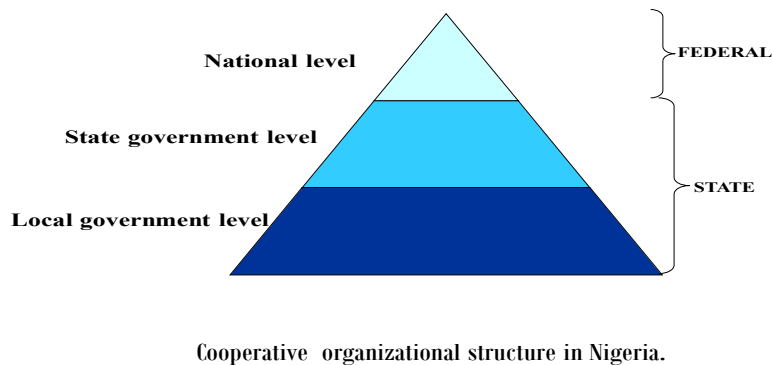


Figure 1. Cooperative tiers in Nigeria

**National /Federal level:** The office of the Department of Cooperatives situated in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture is the custodian of all the cooperatives in the country. This is the highest level of cooperative officialdom in Nigeria. There are no field cooperative functions going on at this level relating to human and resource capital co-ordination. Political administrative and governance decisions that affect the activities of the primary rural smallholder cooperative populace are carried out at this level. In Nigeria it is termed the ‘first Apex’. It is the top level in the pyramidal tree structure; it runs through the directorate of the cooperative affairs and rural development in each state (Nwachukwu, 2001). A director sits at the helm of the official affairs in this federal cooperative office. He liaises with the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the federal ministries in affairs concerning the country’s cooperative welfare and development. It is the federation of the different types of cooperatives according to their business types such as agricultural and non-agricultural through to more detailed splits into business specialties e.g. credit, agricultural extension, consumer cooperatives etc.

**State Level:** At this level the states take the responsibility of monitoring the activities of the cooperative society groups located within their geo-political territory. Cooperative societies that have been already organised at the local government level are then forwarded to the state government ministry to be duly registered under their umbrella bodies. This is the second official step of formal recognition. Here the chief registrar is in charge of the different cooperative offices (agricultural and non-agricultural) in the chosen ministry for each state (Nwachukwu, 2001). In Imo State, the office of the cooperatives is located under the Public Utilities and Rural Development Ministry, sharing functions with the Ministry of Industries and Commerce at the Block eight (8) secretariat building at New Owerri. Only two forms of cooperative society groupings exist at this stage as well agricultural and non-agricultural. There are still no real physical cooperative activities going on at this level just as with the national level. They also carry out official and political apex directives. All the workers might be cooperative members in some cases, but they are first and foremost employed civil servants and paid by the government. In the state's internal pyramidal structure, this level is classified as a major apex as well with tiers that run down into the local governments as depicted in the diagram above (Nwachukwu, 2001)<sup>12</sup>.

**Local government level:** This is the level where the real cooperative functions that this research is concerned with, happen. The activities here are sewn into the state apex functions as indicated above. At the local government level, there is a single process of coalition. Here, the small village-based individual members cluster in unions for registration with the local government cooperative database. These primary clusters are registered if they have up to ten members but if there are not enough members, they are aligned with similar quasi-groups to form a substantial society of at least ten members as the cooperative bylaw stipulates. The primary clusters are grouped according to their defined affiliations, line-of-business interests, abilities, sexes, age groups, etc and then they are made to formally file an application which will be supervised by the 'Supervisory Coordinators' at the local government headquarters (see Adeoye,

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<sup>12</sup> I write from the vantage point of an insider because of my previous job experience with Crojip Nig. Ltd., where I worked in close liaison with cooperative societies in the communities of Owerri and with the Imo State Government commissions for rural development as a research coordinator in rural development affairs.

1996 in Lafia and Obaka, 2009). In Owerri Imo State, these primary community based groups come under the umbrella name of Divisional Cooperative Clusters (DCC) or secondary group. The registration to function as cooperative is done under two well-defined forms viz. agricultural and non-agricultural cooperatives (Nwachukwu, 2001).

This distinction of the registered cooperative types exists only on paper and is invoked in formal associations with the government such as loan and agricultural inputs application. In operation, all the cooperatives in the area run a multi-purpose mixed business front that comprises agricultural and non-agricultural interests. The Traditional Non-extension Farmer Groups stick only to their orthodox farming measures without elaborate goals. The cooperative office at this level is run by the local government supervisory coordinator. There could be more than one appointed coordinator for the job. These officials are civil servants under the local government payroll and do have considerable impact in the shaping of the relationship between the government and the area's smallholder cooperative societies. Werlin (1999) argues that governments have a constitutional obligation to aid in the development of their rural communities through supporting local groups such as smallholder cooperatives within their region for broader benefits to the people. Unfortunately, this sort of commitment towards cooperative care and community development, as implied in Werlin's (1999) position is not reflective of the observed government-community relationship in the study area. Existing interactions between the community cooperative groups and their governments is said to be tarnished by accumulated records of failed promises, distrust, disappointment, resentment and apathy. Corruption, and the dysfunctional state of political administration, render state-controlled institutions and agencies weak, causing undue hardship for the people, especially among the local dwellers in the rural areas. The thesis at this point will discuss some of the government's rural development policies and the challenges of corruption and abuse as they relate to the formation and operations of smallholder cooperative societies in the study area.

## **2.6. Corruption and cooperative formation**

Most of the works done on corruption in academic circles have been devoted primarily to the study of underdevelopment in the Third World particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Rose-Ackerman, Edewor, 2002). The concept of corruption has been defined in many ways, Werlin (1973:73) sees it as the “diversion of public resources to non-public purposes.” This implies the illegal appropriation of public resources for private use or for the use of relatives and acquaintances (Agbibo, 2012). Balogun (2003:129) states that corruption happens when “approved codes or rules have been ignored to attain personal ends or manipulated to frustrate public intentions.” Wilson (1968:55) adds that “corruption occurs whenever a person in exchange for some private advantage, acts other than as his duty requires.” Stark (1997:108) asserts corruption as involving “private gain from public office.” Whatever the definition is, there is usually some aspect of transaction for personal gain, ignoring of community trust, misuse of authority and responsibility to the social system, and or sacrifice of group for private gain (Hamer, 1981). All of these involve a loss of commitment to affiliative obligations in favor of self-interest. It is, therefore, the intention of this thesis to stick to this description of corruption, as the perversion of common interest for the sake of special interests.

Various reasons have been adduced for the persistence of widespread corruption in the socio-political polity of Nigeria. Among the reasons is the country’s paltry level of wages, poverty and defective cultural norms. Civil servants for instance as Mbaku (2000: 50) noted are made to wait for months before being paid the little sum that they receive as wages, prompting many to suffer untold hardships that entice them towards corrupt means for survival. Far too often, even the most ethical public servants in Nigeria readily mortgage their consciences and succumb to the temptation to do whatever it takes to avoid the almost certain life of misery that they face. In the study area, many of the public servants (the civil public in Ekeh’s theory - see chapter three) live within the rural areas from where they commute daily to the city for work, so through their offices’ insider knowledge, they learn about the loans and benefits opportunities that are available through the government. According to Smith (2010), these (public servants who are local community residents cum farmers) readily connive with government elites (executives) put

in charge of programme fund disbursement to register phony groups through which the fraudulent acts are executed as he notes:

*Increasingly, as wealthy Western countries have adopted neoliberal strategies for development, emphasising civil society and privatization over government-controlled social welfare programmes, greater amounts of donor resources have been channeled to NGOs. Nigerian elites have responded by creating a plethora of NGOs designed to tap and control these resources. Politicians and other elites manipulate the promises of development, claiming to assist the most desperate and marginal in Nigeria's large impoverished population, even as they funnel a disproportionate share of development aid into their own pockets and their overseas bank accounts (Smith 2010:255).*

Unfortunately the ideals promoted in most development rhetorics are often contradicted by the numerous means by which development projects are being used as vehicles for corruption and mechanisms for the reproduction of inequality. The culture of corruption in government bureaucracies makes possible the perpetration of this deceitful act at the expense of unsuspecting genuine groups in the long run.

Furthermore, the existence of defective cultural norms is another plausible explanation argued as a factor for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa (Agbiboa, 2012). This is because cultural norms are held in high and unquestionable esteem in these communities and so, crucially, a defective cultural norm is believed to impact negatively on an area's healthy cultural body and deface it. According to this view, corruption is a cost that each African society anticipating political and economic modernization must bear (Alam, 1989, Bayley, 1966). In many traditional African societies like the Igbos of this study for instance, the rights of the individual are usually subordinated to those of the ethnic group or extended family (see Njaka, 1974, Iroegbu, 1997, 2008). Mbaku, (2000:50) reiterates that, "the family and loyalty to it are considered more important than individual rights or personal accountability<sup>13</sup>". The African

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<sup>13</sup> In Nigeria, loyalty to one's ethnic group is celebrated and is often far more important than civic rules in shaping behaviours. Consequently, the obligation to an ethnic group often overrides obligations of public office, causing civil servants to deviate from established rules proscribing corruption. Big men are therefore expected to use their power to help their kith and kin. The cultural pull on public officials to deviate from accepted norms of civil service is well captured by Madunagu (1982:22) "In the African culture everyone has obligations towards his community. The higher one ascends the social ladder, the more one is expected to do for one's people. A highly placed

(Nigerian), public servant, therefore, may become engaged in corrupt activities such as identified in this research, in an effort to generate additional resources that are needed to meet obligations to members of immediate and extended family (Alam, 1989 : 445-446). But unfortunately, the outcome of these actions and other irregularities devastate the concerted efforts of the genuine societies that are crowded out in the whole process. Let us now review cooperative and agricultural development policy in Nigeria as it pertains to the societies in the area(s) of this research study.

## **2.7. Smallholder cooperatives and agricultural-development policy in Nigeria**

The issue of corruption in Nigeria has undermined many good policy initiatives of the government leading to the collapse in the core fabric of key sectors and institutions of the economy like agriculture, the police, education and the civil service. Despite being village based smallholder groups, the cooperative societies that this research discusses are still susceptible to governance interactions from political authorities such as their immediate local government, state, federal and the international government agencies (Onuoha, 2001; Agbo, 2009). Discussing best practice in rural community governance, Davison (2005:16) suggested that policies relating to the people's livelihood in communities should be premised on an assumption that they can actually effect sustainable positive change when put into practice. The Nigerian government despite laudable paper proposals and objectives lumps together cooperative and agricultural development affairs under the same banner as 'agricultural policy'. The belief is that in taking care of agricultural development, which is the primary occupation of most rural dwellers, cooperative societies concerns would also be addressed. This blanket usage of 'agricultural policy' is intended to cover all types of cooperative societies in the nation particularly in rural areas where the development attention is supposedly concentrated (Onuoha 2001; Agbo, 2009). There has not been a specifically tailored cooperative policy in the history of Nigeria's policy making. As at this study time the main national primary policy objectives for agricultural cooperatives implemented in the nation are summarized as follows: (1) to provide a

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government official or politician is constantly under pressure from his people for gifts of money, for jobs and for securing the provision of amenities for his area.”

conducive environment that would facilitate cooperative practice and its effective use in agriculture for social and economic development of the rural communities in Nigeria; (2) to promote the development of an effective, efficient and economic agricultural cooperative and use it as a machinery for rural transformation and development.

## **2.8. Policy achievement strategies and reviews**

In an effort to achieve these objectives, the strategies below are pursued by each of the state governments through their local government council secondary unions, and primary village base societies (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD, 2010).

**1. *Conducive environment for cooperatives:*** This policy can be understood in the sense of support mechanisms, services and other logistics created by the government to help the development of all cooperative societies in the nation, particularly in the rural areas. An important point to note in this consideration is that, cooperative groups particularly in the rural areas cannot sustain their purposes on resources generated from internal social capital bonds alone. Hence they need some sort of external support to help them achieve their set goals. Cooperative autonomy as interpreted in these discussed smallholder emergent group types does not mean operation in isolation of support agencies or the rejection of useful deliberate help when available. For instance, rural smallholder farmer cooperatives need assistances such as fertilizer, paved roads, electricity, water, loan incentives, equipment and security services to function properly. Whether referred to as incentives or enabling environment as worded in the policy; the clear fact is that these are necessary support means that the societies deliberately accommodate whenever they are available but do not depend on them. Such assists can only come through resourceful dissimilar connections with such bodies as the government, NGO's or concerned community network groups. These useful linkages do not entail control or manipulation of the receiving groups but a necessity for addressing the group's identified needs. However, ensuring that support provision reach the various cooperative societies that need them, and at the right times, has remained an uphill task in the country of Nigeria due to the challenges of corruption. Since for instance, many of the Nigerian farmers depend on the rain-fed seasonal



cultivation, efforts should be made to reach them on time. Many farmers complain of non-receipt of inputs, while some others receive them long after the planting season is over. But government, through the Agricultural Development Project<sup>14</sup>, could assume a little more responsibility in making sure that the inputs and other incentives reach those that need them the most and that they receive them on time.

**2. Intensification of cooperative education and training:** This policy is aimed at increasing participation and involvement of smallholder farmers and other rural people in cooperative activities through education (see chapter five and seven). Through cooperative education, available from local tertiary education institutions, members are able to understand better the tenets of cooperative formation such as equality, democracy, inclusiveness and trust, all of which conform to the cultural foundation of their traditional cooperative ethics. Comprehending this connection between what a cooperative's activities brings and what they have already enables them to appreciate better their internal relationship and re-evaluate new contacts and aspirations, such as with the diaspora and the government. It is hoped that such involvement would enhance the contribution of the rural people in the decision making process over issues that affect and improve their general welfare. But achieving this policy goal to an efficient practical level has been a difficult task to the present day. The idea of the government involving or partnering with the people's trusted channels such as the traditional authorities, diaspora, teachers and community development unions might help in the process of achieving the goals of this policy, but presently it still remains an idea to be explored.

**3. Macro-economic purpose:** This policy is aimed at using agricultural cooperatives to achieve the macro-economic objectives of increased domestic production of food and cash crops, industrial raw materials, equitable distribution of inputs and production of farm products and other commodities for the nation. This helps to diversify export earnings and generation of employment. The smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups that this research worked

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<sup>14</sup> The Agricultural Development Project in Nigeria, is a World Bank/National government partnered project that aims to reduce rural poverty by improving and increasing agricultural production through a community-based approach in designing and implementing components which directly impact the lives of the poor in the participating provinces and districts

with still cultivate at the subsistence level, and their activities remain informal within the scope of their rural communities and state. However, it is hoped that with the right government support and people's attitude as is articulated in this work, their functions could be well coordinated and would amount to substantial macro-economic worth in the future.

**4. *To promote democratic development:*** The democratic base in the local communities could be politically widened through cooperative participation in the formulation and implementation of rural development programmes. Smallholder cooperative societies in the rural communities are veritable forums for the development of grassroot democratic ideals for the broad state political development. But unfortunately this ideal is not genuinely pursued by politicians in the areas of study. Field experiences show that politicians exhibit the least concern for cooperative welfare or consideration excepting where familial patronage is involved. During elections they (politicians) cavort around cooperative groups in order to win their votes. The aspect of political alertness that I discovered in the cooperatives during my fieldwork and 'job experience' was their ability to collaborate between their different groups and form pressure groups through which they place demands from government on inputs such as fertilizers, seeds and other necessary amenities

Implementing some of these government paper policies in the corrupt Nigerian environment has always remained a daunting task for the people concerned. The government in accordance with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) policy dictates have maintained the role of a passive observer, without any firm commitment towards achieving noticeable changes in the nation's cooperative policy. Unfortunately the set objectives in the policy have continued to fail in the nation while quick fix (SAP) motivated anti-poverty strategies are adopted.

## **2.9. Structural adjustment programme era**

The era from the beginning of the 1980s witnessed the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) to the developing world by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The aim was to integrate developing countries into the world economic system. The governments of the applying countries are made to sign to the given stringent loan condition

agreements<sup>15</sup>. Only when this is done, does the IMF agree to arrange a restructuring of a country's debt that includes a provision for a new loan package (Geo-Jaja & Mangum, 2001, 2003).

In Nigeria, the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP) unleashed a severe economic crisis that worsened the quality of life of the ordinary citizens particularly in the rural areas where the majority of the smallholder cooperatives are found. Consequently, realizing the austere effects of the programme on the masses in the adopting countries, the instituting bodies (WB/IMF) launched additional crisis control measures which were tagged "Poverty Alleviation Programmes" (PAP) (Okolie, 2003). Most of these programmes were arguably operated as political boondoggles for the selfish motives of the governing elites (Smith, 2010). The impoverished masses and their groups especially in the rural areas, were used as façades to promote these programmes, nevertheless, there were isolated small impacts recorded at different regions in the nation (Garuba, 2006). A summary of some of these anti-poverty programmes which the government of Nigeria adopted since 1986 is presented in the table below and some of them shall be discussed as concerning their impact on cooperative development in the rural areas:

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the conditions for the SAP integration were that these adjusting countries must export more and governments must cut back on social sector programs, reducing financial regulations, and keeping their exchange rates favorable to the North (Geo-Jaja & Mangum, 2001, 2003). These policies encouraged the aggressive opening of countries for unbalanced trade, accompanied by excessive deregulation and the removal of subsidies which served as the social safety net for the citizens, especially the rural poor. The policies also set the conditions for downsizing public enterprises, reducing civil service staffing, intensifying their work loads, and creating intra-system competition between state institutions

Table 1. Anti-Poverty programmes in Nigeria

Programme	Year establ	Target Group	Sponsors/Donors	Nature of Intervention
Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures, (DFRRI)	1986	Rural Areas	World Bank/IMF	Feeder Roads, rural water supply and rural electrification
National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	1986	Unemployed youths	World Bank/IMF	Training, finance and guidance
Better Life Programme (BLP)	1987	Rural women	World Bank/IMF	Self-help and rural, development, programmes, skill, acquisition and health care.
People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	Underprivileged in rural and urban areas	World Bank/IMF	Encouraging savings, and credit facilities
Community Banks (CB)	1990	Rural residents,	World Bank/IMF	Micro enterprises in urban areas Banking facilities
Family Support Programme (FSP)	1994	Health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, etc.	World Bank/IMF	Families in rural areas
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	1997	Rural areas	World Bank/IMF	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.
National Poverty Eradication Programme, (NAPEP)	2001	Urban and rural dwellers	World Bank/IMF	Cooperation, Empowerment , Education, Skill acquisition (Self-help) and rural Development  Changing the way the Government works in Nigeria
Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP)	2006			
National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Nigeria's version of the IMF and World Bank -Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) 7 point agenda, National Special Program for Food Security (NSPFS);	2007			
2nd National Fadama Programme;	2007/8	Urban / rural poor group.	World Bank/IMF	General Rural /Urban development and poverty Alleviation. Human capacity building. Extension and Training; Production; Capacity Building; Post-Harvest; Marketing
Commercial Agricultural Development Project (CADP); Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP)	2009-2014	Urban / rural poor group.	World Bank/IMF	General Rural /Urban development and poverty Alleviation. Human capacity building. Extension and Training; Production; Capacity Building; Post-Harvest; Marketing
3rd National Fadama Programme	2009-2014			

### 2.10.0. Smallholder cooperatives in the structural adjustment era

The unpopular implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria brought about the near total withdrawal of the state from economic and development functions,

and the sudden liberalization of state-controlled cooperatives (Olukoshi, 1991, 1995). The policy, as Garuba (2006:20) argued, discouraged rural smallholder cooperative farmers through the removal of subsidies on such agricultural inputs as fertilizers, seeds, stems roots and tubers that supported the production of the people's traditional staple foods, including cassava, maize, yam, millet and cocoyam in place of subsidised support for the cultivation of much needed cash crops like cocoa, cotton, coffee beans, rubber, leathers and skins.

The food-producing agricultural farmer cooperatives were branded as obsolete models and categorised under the Poverty Alleviation Programmes scheme. They were replaced with cash crop cooperative models, which were bankrolled with government funds and assisted agricultural-inputs. The collapse of many state-assisted (food-focused) farmer cooperatives in the 1990s confirms this observation. Furthermore as Bryceson, (2002) observes, the Adjustment (SAP) policies primarily mandated the government to abolish marketing boards and parastatals that had serviced local smallholder farmer cooperative's agricultural-input requirements, enforced produce standards, and provided single-channel marketing facilities and controlled prices. In their place private traders were designated to seek out and transact businesses with local farmer groups in accordance with the 'free trade agreement' paradigm. Most of those replacing private traders were business personnel working in unison with the Trans National Corporations (TNC) who have no patience to learn the rudimentary concerns of the local ways. The government delegated the duties of the Ministry of Agriculture that traditionally cared for smallholder farmer cooperatives to the newly created Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) (Okolie, 1995, 2003) which were charged with the duty of developing such rural infrastructures as roads, water supplies and electrification, rather than giving full attention to food production. Yet the infrastructures, despite all the media propaganda, remain undeveloped. In the situation "Smallholder farmers were faced with a more uncertain market environment, producer prices were subjected to wide fluctuations, input prices sky-rocketed and supply became tenuous as most private traders did not have the rural outreach of the parastatals they replaced" (Bryceson, 2002:728).

The private traders literally avoided smallholder farmers located in the rural hinterland areas because of transport costs and they allegedly disregarded the enforcement of adequate quality control checks on the produce. As Raikes and Gibbon, (2000: 56) note, “African export crops lost out on market share, as importers perceived African produce to be of low quality, giving Asia’s modernized plantations an edge in exporting traditional African crops, such as cocoa and palm oil”. The austere conditions that ensued with the SAP policies, coupled with the other haphazard ad-hoc poverty alleviation strategies, made many local farmers/groups adopt short term strategies of survival instead of their usual long term plans.

Such factors as increased market uncertainty, reduced smallholder farmer’s access to land, farm portion consolidation, mechanization policy and removal of agricultural-inputs subsidy caused farmers to switch their interest to the cultivation of crops with quick or regular year-round returns. Crops such as vegetables (tomatoes, green leaves, potatoes) and fruits like bananas, plantain and papaya with lesser fertilizer consumption were preferred even though they are not the staple food (Yunusa, 1999, 2002; Ponte, 2002). Others, out of frustration, sold or rented out their individual family and collective land to the bigger farmers and either took up waged labour on these newly consolidated larger farm holdings or left their rural communities for the urban centres (Iliya, 1999). Many abandoned their genuine but dwindling agricultural trades and joined forces with other people to form transient groups, in the hope of qualifying to benefit from some of the promoted government poverty alleviation loan packages as listed in the table above. Many of these poverty alleviation programmes that were introduced failed to achieve better outcomes for rural smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups in the country. The 2001 (NAPEP) programme, for instance, imported tricycles (popularly referred by Nigerians as “KEKE NAPEP<sup>16</sup>”) from overseas and sold them on a ‘hire-purchase’ basis, to be used in commercial transportation businesses. The initial batch beneficiaries of this incentive soon complained bitterly, as they became burdened by a huge debt, due to national inflation and accumulated interest that doubled or quadrupled the debt value of the tricycles.

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<sup>16</sup> The **KEKE-NAPEP** project was a tricycle transportation business launched in 2001 as model poverty eradication strategy by former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. It was aimed at assuaging the pains and displacements of joblessness caused by the structural adjustment programme policy. The name ‘keke’ in Yoruba language, means small and ‘Napep’ as a ‘tag on’ to the project acronym.

On the opposite side, most low income urban civil servants who were retrenched because of the downsizing and reduction policy of the public service, returned to their rural village communities rather than living jobless in the city. The pain unleashed on the citizenry in Nigeria and other adopting countries by the adjustment policies was catastrophic to say the least. However, serious economic hardship compelled people to look inwards and renew their interest in some of their customary survivalist options, such as the traditional ethos of communitarianism, self-help/reliance and cooperation. Mohammed Yunusa (2002), discussing one such scenario in a Nigerian community puts it thus:

*The harsh conditions created by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) prompted individual and collective groups to build webs of alliances among themselves to support each other in their various communities (p.4).*

Among the most formidable alliances formed during this crunch period as Garuba (2006) notes were the Christian faith based religious groups popularly referred to as ‘Born Again’ churches, and the renaissance of traditional cooperative schemes. The hardship of the era also diminished generalised trust, especially between the people and the government, and spilt over to society’s intra/interactions as most people adopted desperate measures to survive. These included scams, forgeries and deceits (Onyeiwu, 1997; Smith, 2010). These faith and cultural-based societies demonstrated allegiance both to the transcendental powers of the Christian God and cultural ethos, and re-created a more grounded malleable form of social trust and bonding among adherents (Garuba, 2006: 21-22). Their sacrosanct status instigated bonds of loyalty and re-enacted their adherence to virtuous behaviours in interpersonal relationships; however, abuses still abound.

Members of groups like the Born Again church shared the succour and hope provided in the biblical teachings and performed minor acts of support to each other. Many of these societies registered and operated cooperative-like outfits undertaking various collective farm and trade businesses for income benefits to members. While belonging to a Born Again church was by choice, adhering to the values of one’s cultural ethos was non-negotiable. For instance, the ethos of respect for the elders is an African cultural custom observed by all and sundry irrespective of tribe, faith or belief affiliation. The associative enthusiasm propelled by the emergence of these

unique groups marked in part the beginning of the third generation of cooperative societies in Nigeria and in most SAP adoptee nations of Africa (Garuba, 2006:22). It invigorated the people's cooperative spirit, using the failed government and overseas development assistance as its springboard. Members of groups were charged to look inward for help rather than total dependence on government support and if in doing their own local things government help happens; then they can choose to either accommodate such outreach or reject it.

Eventually the message resonated and more authentic self-help/reliance smallholder cooperative societies and organizations began budding from the grassroots in their communities, and with a modernized approach to cooperative business. They sought out and maintained links with allied regional development groups and natal diaspora associations abroad for a broader support network connection. Group members and the larger community adopted different self-help measures to ameliorate the painful shock of their newly found poverty status. Most of these smallholder cooperative establishments are still in operation today, defying the ever unfolding hardship situations of the present day Nigeria while many other have collapsed. I will now address some of the self-reliance/self-help strategies and the role of the diaspora network groups in supporting cooperatives and the community at large in achieving the benchmarks of members support and rural development.

### **2.10.1. Self-help, traditional community governance and the diaspora**

The failures and frustrations of the Structural Adjustment era and other government propagated development programmes necessitated a renewed look at the options of self-reliance/self-help as support strategies to enhance cooperative activities, especially in the rural areas (Gooneratne & Mbilinyi, 1992). The related concepts of self-reliance, self-help, indigenous-help and mutual-help are used interchangeably and are central to the discourse of rural cooperative development in the study communities. I intend to alternate the usage of these terms, especially the first two - 'self-reliance and self-help'- in the rest of the discussion. Fonchingong and Fonjong <sup>17</sup>(2003) observe that collectively, the concepts advocate the need for people to collaborate at improving

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<sup>17</sup> Acknowledgement to insights gained from the works of Charles Fonchingong and Canute Ngwa of the University of Buea, Cameroon.



their condition using local initiatives and resources in their own ways. The conceptualization of these terms presupposes a disposition to cooperate in a group pattern. As Anyanwu (1992:40) argues: “community development in most African countries depended significantly on ‘voluntary cooperative’ efforts. This cooperative approach of collective participation is a traditional trait that clearly underscores its virtue as a push factor in the process of community development”. The emphasis here is to involve local groups in the programme plans to which they contribute their knowledge and opinions, and also gain new skills that will enable them to cope more successfully with the problems of their everyday lives (Fonchingong & Fonjong, 2003). For Jibowo (2000) this form of cooperated development entails the restructuring of the national economy to bring about improvement to the lives of the people in the rural area. It means that the rural dwellers develop collective incentives to participate in development processes in their communities.

In the Igbo village-communities under study, events that concern the community are organised by the locals themselves in a cooperative manner. Adult members of different groups in each community are required to contribute their quota towards the development of their respective community’s needed infrastructures and social services. Historically, the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria are known to operate an acephalous system of community administration. As Uchendu (1965:35) notes, the Igbos are “a highly egalitarian society that arrives at socio-political binding decisions through an open consensus of group representation”. This ardor for non-hierarchical equality and general participation is sustained in present day social life in most Igbo communities but not without some of the challenging factors of social change (see chapter five and six). Generally, Igbo societies are organised into different community based groups of small network formations such as youth age grades, women’s gender groups, men’s cultural clubs, maiden leagues, masquerade groups, development unions, skill and trade groups, commercial persons groups (of different wares) and diaspora groups (Afigbo, 1972; Kalu, 1993; Nwachukwu, 2001). Although some of these customary observances in a few of the communities that I studied have been affected by the urban-rural encroachment pressure (as discussed in chapters one and six); many of the other more rural village communities still adhere to their cultural rules of governance alongside the civic administration from the state and local councils.

In these regions, before a decision concerning any issue that affects everyone in the community is taken, meetings are summoned by the elders of the village for each group to delegate a representative to voice their group's opinion. After a series of 'back and forth' dialogues, a draft consensus is reached; then a final day of open community meeting is convened for the ratification of the draft consensus through peoples' contributions at the open village square. However, divergent views are also accommodated during these meetings with each party allowed to freely state their case(s) for consideration. Community and family feuds are settled within the bounds of each community's customary court provisions. Many of the Igbo ethnic communities with the exception of the densely theocratic regions such as Oguta, Osamiri, Aboh and Onitsha practice the decentralized structure of local governance based purely on traditional democracy (Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 1972; Ifemesia, 1981). The British imperial powers, in their bid to establish a British-styled central authority to coerce taxation for the crown from these colonies, disbanded the customary college of wise elders, and in its place forced the warrant/paramount chiefs on the Igbos (Isichei, 1978). This, socio-political obstruction led to the Igbo women's revolution in the 1929 'Aba women's riot' against British forces in defense of their community's right to self-administration based on customs and traditional values of the land. Although remnants of post-colonial 'ezeship' title holders still abound in some Igboland communities, they retain no other power than regulative authority, and act as the community's ceremonial heads at social events (Kalu, 1993; Ukpokolo, 2010:117).

Invoking this general participative spirit for community development through self-help in the contemporary era, Anyanwu (1992:28) contends that "the habit of self-help is a prerequisite for survival in the modern world". Through my local insider knowledge and from work experience within the Igbo study communities, when collective needs such as potable water, electrification, road construction, health center, school and market are identified, solutions are sought under the joint leadership of each community's college of elders (red cap-chief<sup>18</sup>). Disputing a

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<sup>18</sup> The **Igbo Red Cap** symbolizes wisdom and tradition of the Igbo people. It signifies the institution of Igbo chieftaincy, and leadership authority. Red Capped chiefs are elders chosen as representatives of their different villages to work in council as the Eze's cabinet. A Red Capped chief can be nominated as an Eze (king) of his community by the cabinet or college of elders. The respect that the Eze of a community receives is to some extent dependent on the sagacity of his cabinet of Red Capped chiefs who can also overturn his reign. These colleges of

community's need for public utilities and amenities is frowned at in meetings and such opposing views are perceived as being anti-supportive to the community's needs and development aspirations. Unlike the government initiated projects that Ekeh, (1975) and Osaghae, (2006) argue are prone to sabotage by the people because of their association of the government with colonialism; the community governed projects are binding on all members of the community and are executed in a strict thoughtful manner.

Under this Igbo traditional governance system, the elders send out calls for action to all the people in the village-communities. Usually the venue for such meeting is the community's central hall or town hall (as popularly known), or the 'obi' (the little hut in the center of the compound of the eldest chief in the college of elders). Ukpokolo (2010) notes that during such meeting sessions, the problems of the community are discussed and strategies mapped out to address them. These outlined strategies are then conveyed to all the adult sons and daughters of the community at home and in far distant lands (the diaspora groups) using modern channels such as telephones, physical letters, and emails or by word of mouth through emissaries. Every adult male and female member of the community is expected to pay the agreed sum (levy) as contribution towards the focus project(s). The levies are shared individually on adult head count based on families and collectively through the respective groups to which the members belong. Those who belong to more than one group often pay more because groups use their common funds to pay such levies. With the local community sector settled, the diaspora groups are therefore enjoined to collectively launch the project(s) at their separate bases, inviting friends and well-wishers to donate towards the ear-marked project in their natal homelands. This done, they then add their own separate individual and collective quota to the fund raised at the launching to send home. In most cases the village-community front also launches such project(s) amidst pomp and displays with cultural dances. All these events provide more chances for people

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Red Capped chiefs wield more authority collectively than the single Eze in the Igbo traditional representative democracy. They are the mouth-piece of their various village-communities. This is why it (Red Cap) is used as a logo in anything that portrays the Igbos. However due to proliferations and abuses, persons of wealth these days tend to buy their way to this honour lately in some Igbo communities (Fieldwork experience).

to interact with each other and amongst groups, hence reinforcing the necessity of their social capital bonds.

Another strategy that most Igbo communities adopt in raising funds for self-help/reliance community projects is by imposing a sanction on the harvest of their major cash-produce palm oil<sup>19</sup>. Palm trees grow arbitrarily in the forests of the south eastern Igbo region of Nigeria. Fallow and cultivable farm lands are filled with palm oil trees that individuals claim ownership of because the trees germinate within their farm lands. But the ultimate control over the utility of the trees lies with the collective authority of the village-community elders. Therefore at such times when communities need to raise funds for certain development projects, a ban is placed on individual harvesting of ripe palm-heads until an agreed set time frame. When the ban is lifted, everyone races<sup>20</sup> into the open forest to freely harvest the produce from wherever they could be found irrespective of who owns the farm land. All the cut produce are later displayed in heaps at the village square by the harvesters for trading to commence. The village elders put price tags on the different gathered heaps, so the owners have to pay the tagged price (usually very low) to redeem their produce. Their payment of the low price tag serves as their statutory family contribution towards the planned community project, after which they still have to pay their individual (man/woman adult) and group contributions. Some people, after redeeming their produce, display them for immediate resale at a higher price; some take the raw produce home to process and sell the finished product at an even higher price, and so the transaction continues. Through this exercise, everybody regardless of personal farm ownership is given equal opportunity to access the community's cash-crop resource. The raised funds are channeled to the proposed projects, to be augmented by the other funding sources.

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<sup>19</sup> Palm oil tree-nkwu (*Elaeis guineensis*)-(not to be confused with the *Raphia* palm species-ngwo). The Palm tree is an economic tree in the culture of the Igbos. All its parts are useful, as an important source of oils for cooking, confectionary, bakery, etc. The remains of the fruit are used as livestock food, palm wood, raffia wood etc. Palm wine in Igboland comes from two sources: nkwu -*Elaeis guineensis*-(palm tree) - the source of the palm wine known as Mmanya nkwu, and ngwo (raffia palm tree) - the source of the palm wine, known as Mmanya ngwo. Each of the palm wine categories is regarded differently. Each has different functions on different occasions, depending how that particular area or village regards it.

<sup>20</sup> The researcher as a little boy growing up in his rural village enjoyed this special 'palm rush' day. The day is usually a happy special day of free enjoyable competition for the naturally endowed fruits of the forest. So as youngsters we spend long hours prospecting the forest, marking all the locations of the ripe trees and reporting to our parents. We stay awake the night before waiting for the early morning ban to be lifted with the sound of the gong... then we dash out with our hired Palm tree climbers.

Quotas and donations from overseas diaspora sources (because of foreign exchange rate differentials to the local (Naira) currency) usually constitute the largest portion of the contribution towards set projects. Diaspora groups tend to play major roles in the infrastructural design and management of earmarked community projects. Though skeptical about the government, they try to accommodate liaison with them (government), mainly for the purpose of operation and sustenance of the projects when completed. For instance, the building of a health center needs to be complimented by health workers such as doctors and nurses, schools by teachers, electric poles and transformers by state power agency workers, and water pipes by the public utilities board. These services and personnel can best be assured by the government (Werlin, 1999). Unfortunately these ideals don't happen as expected; the communities do their bit but the government still falters. Hence, in many of the communities there are completed but non-functional infrastructural carcasses strewn all over the place and embedded in dirt. As a result, therefore, independent families that could afford the amenities go out of their way to procure these facilities for themselves. People sink water bore-holes at their homes or buy power generating sets for their personal/family use. Some share with their neighbours, like setting up water faucet outlets outside their fences where people could go to fetch water, or share their electric power lines with their neighbors by allowing them access to the voltage capacity of their power generating set. Cooperative societies and other similar progressive CBO groups in the community also initiate the change process on their own accord. Besides partaking in the general community project proposals, they freely invite and involve other non-member community locals to their functions. Responses to such invitations are dependent on the extent of the people trust the genuineness and intention of the inviting cooperative group. If a cooperative society's intention is doubtful, it would be hard to convince the people (locals) to support their event propositions. However, well-intentioned (genuine) cooperative proposals usually receive rousing support from familial connections and larger village community networks. For instance, parents make up the cooperative societies, so at such occasions, family members, friends and well-wishers feel obliged to respond to the invitation in support of the family or relative cooperator members. Invitations to sons and daughters abroad follow the same pattern of familial bonds of reciprocity. In fact, the rural village communities are actually hubs for groups and community progressive events, especially towards the end of the year. Cooperative societies endeavour to

maintain a good synergy with the diaspora and other CBOs (such as the home development union). This is because these network sources, besides monetarily supporting their collective self-reliance aspiration, also put in place capacity building structure to assist them in some of the requisite low skill professions, for better living income and survival in the rural areas.

Farmer cooperative societies receive workshop training organised and taught by community diaspora 'son and daughter agricultural professionals' or friendly university instructor alliances. In addition open annual seminars are organised for skill acquisition and self-help development purposes for youths in different life sustaining trades such as carpentry, small business management, food making, house hold food and product making. The diaspora groups monitor the progress of their initiated support schemes in their various communities by sending a member home from their various bases e.g. United States of America, United Kingdom, Europe, Asia and the nation's city centers, to gather progress reports and feedback from the people. They also serve as a formidable pressure group upon the government, charging them to take more seriously the responsibility of caring for the family members and relatives they left behind in these village communities.

### **2.10.2. Cooperative and rural women's empowerment in Nigeria**

The discussion about rural smallholder cooperatives and empowerment would be incomplete without a mention of the prominent position occupied by Igbo women and the role they play in the entire community development process of Igboland. Although their positions and contributions have always been undermined by some researchers, the distortions in their story, however does not deter them from forging on strong alliances among themselves (Ezeigbo, 1990). Umehau, (2008) confirms that most communities in the Igbo culture accord women an enviable position of power and they are always involved in one rural development programme or another. Besides largely belonging to mixed gender community groups, Igbo women always form their own special women's interest groups through which they address issues of maternal concerns such as marriage, family feuds, widowhood practices and cultural education.

Additionally they are also deeply involved in various other empowering activities like agriculture, business, trade, or religious and political engagement.

Through this thesis therefore, I reach out to the reader as a local insider that grew up in the study's focus communities and was privileged to hold employment in the same region working with local groups and societies within the communities. I am in the position to tell the story of the people of my study area and identify misrepresentations of facts where they occur in reports on the area. As a man and a local indigene of the area studying the women, it was a little uncomfortable for me at the beginning, but on realizing how welcoming the women were of my study interest, it helped me interact with them more freely than I initially expected. They (women) invited me to their meetings and other activities and participated in the investigations appreciating my local awareness of the necessity of gender respect and role division in the Igbo traditional structure (see chapter four). Though it was a little uneasy for the group members to discuss some of the sensitive and divisive issues such as gender violence and family feuds where they occur<sup>21</sup>, they (women) were passionate in their condemnation of such acts and gleefully discussed their deterrent strategies against such behaviours from the opposite sex. I listened with rapt attention as I reflected on the orderliness and essence of the Igbo cultural divisions of gender roles and power structure in the community which, like the colonizers, many subsequent researchers have still failed to understand but continue to gloss over its surface.

### **Women's institutions and empowerment in Igboland**

*Women's empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own 'socio-political' subordination (Keller & Mbwewe 1991:45).*

Before the arrival of the colonial power to Igboland, Igbo women had a significant role in their community's traditional political life and participated in every aspect of village activities with

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<sup>21</sup> This is because marital feuds are considered as very private matters and couples are expected to sort out their differences by themselves with minimal intrusion of a third party. But where a report of the abuse is made by the woman to her group or noticed by the group themselves, then the assailant husband or culprit stands to face the wrath of the women groups in the community.

men. The Igbos practiced a dual-sex political system described as a system of organisation in which political and social representation is based on sex, with both genders having their complementary positions, titles and offices<sup>22</sup> (Okonjo, 1975). In contrast the British colonialist practiced a single-sex political system. Van Allen (1972:165) argued that “the real political power of Igbo women was based on their solidarity, as expressed in their own political institutions such as their “meetings” (mikiri or mitiri), market networks, kinship groups, and their right to use strikes, boycotts and force to effect their decisions”. Okonjo (1975) clarified the comparison between these two structures stating that:

*The dual sex organisation (in Igboland) contrast with the single sex system that obtains in most of the western worlds, where political status bearing roles are predominantly the preserve of the men. In single sex systems, women can only achieve recognition and distinction only by taking on the roles of the men in public life and performing them well (p.45)*

The pervading British colonial administration failed to recognize this dual-sex structure of political governance in Igboland and so forced the British single-sex political model on the Igbos. The British colonials projected their 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian gender bias on the locals and completely overlooked the Igbo women’s political roles and decision making powers (Okonjo, 1975, Carwile, 2007). In the process therefore, women’s traditional autonomy and power was weakened or destroyed in some cases without providing any modern forms of autonomy or power in replacement (Van Allen, 1972; Ezeigbo, 1990). Some African feminist researchers such as Nwakaeze-Ogugua (2006) and Ilika (2005) have argued the subordination of women in Igboland as a consequence of culture, but such positions have also been criticised as bereft of in-depth comprehension of the cultural roles and power structure of the Igbos leading to the

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<sup>22</sup> “Among the Igbos of the Midwestern Nigeria for example, the villages and the rural towns are ruled jointly by the elderly college heads led by an appointed *obi* (the male village head) and the *omu* (the female counterpart head). The *omu* is not the wife of the *obi*, and is in no way related to him. The rules for succeeding to the positions of the *obi* and the *omu* are different. In the case of the *obi*, succession is hereditary and lies with the eldest male child. A regent is appointed if the child is not yet of age. For the *omu*, succession is not hereditary, and the *omu*’s eldest daughter has no claim to her mother’s position. The *omu* is appointed from certain lineages; and in some of these lineages she is selected by the *umuaka* (all adult daughters of the lineage). The *omu* is appointed by her kith and kin and she is always a woman past child bearing age.

The *omu* rules in conjunction with the *obi*, a clear division of functions exists between their college of elders and neither is considered inferior to the other. The *obi* and his college of elders rule over the men and *omu* as well rules the women’s affairs” (Okonjo, 1975:45-46).



misrepresentation of historical facts (Van Allen, 1972, Okonjo, 1975, Ezeigbo, 1990, Okome, 2000, Carwile, 2007). The recognizable feminist position in Igboland which my field study experience concurs with argues of women “as custodian and transmitters of the Igbo culture along with the men, ensuring that there is no radical break with the past and that the process of change is gradual” (Okonjo, 1975:45). Igbo women in some contemporary feminist studies are represented as persons of power and respect with the capabilities to make or destroy a community (see chapter one). Hence men in the village communities accord them (women) their traditional special place of respect in everything they are involved with. To disrespect a woman in Igboland is believed as disrespect to ‘motherhood’ which attracts a curse and other dire consequences upon the individual and his family (Carwile, 2007).

The effects of colonization however, did not completely decimate the face of the Igbo cultural system, certain aspects of the women’s traditional forces still remain and many of their positions of power have re-emerged in Igboland since Nigeria’s independence in 1960. Igbo women in this modern era have re-enacted their different forms of traditional solidarity to emphasise their empowerment drive in their communities. Cooperative group formation as experienced in the study area serves in particular as one of the avenues through which Igbo women unite to exercise their collective traditional authority in order to support each other against gender targeted chauvinistic tendencies in their communities. Understanding feminine forms of power in Nigeria not only provides us with a more inspiring image of the African woman but also forces us to be cautious about how we view power and its relationship to gender. As Carwile (2007:4) notes “Feminine power in Nigeria is often elusive and contradictory. In many cases, the very roles that provide women with access to power in some social arenas may at the same time, limit her in others”. Unpopular discriminatory acts such as domestic violence, maternal partner subjection and social disenfranchisement are frowned at by these women. Through group solidarity they are able to put forwards a strong united front in support of mistreated members in their various communities. It is not out of place in Igboland to hear about women’s boycott of routine domestic chores or sexual intercourse with their husbands in grievance for the ill treatment of one of their own or targeted for all the women in an area (Carwile, 2007).

In an instance that happened in 2005 in Emekuku village in Owerri North, all the market women of the ten villages that make up the community boycotted commercial activities at their local central market in reaction to the local government's move to forcefully relocate the market venue to a distant location against their will. Negotiations with the government failed because the women felt that their interest was not well represented as most of the negotiators were male. Another example of such women's collective agitation was against domestic violence, when women cooperative groups in Awaka, a nearby village to Emekuku in Owerri North, liaised with other women's gender societies in the area to protest violation (beating) of one of their members by her husband (Nwachukwu, 2010). Adopting strategies similar to the 1929 women's war in the old Owerri province, the women gathered at the assailant husband's home chanting aggrieved songs until the husband apologised and agreed to appease the agitated women by doing what they requested and so was able to win back his wife but this time with gifts and a promise of not setting a finger on her ever again. These approaches indicate avenues through which Igbo women of the study area enforce their socio-political power and authority in their communities as against the western fostered ideal through colonialism that alienated them in favour of the men. Researchers such as Van Allen (1972), Ezeigbo (1990) and Carwile (2007) have discussed other ways that women showcase power and express their grievance in Igboland such as sexual intercourse strikes and naked demonstrations. These are core interest and need areas that the women know impact directly on the men and so they utilise them accordingly as an empowerment tool (Carwile, 2007).

The strategic position of women in the rural empowerment debate for the achievement of self-reliance/self-help can never be over emphasised. Bhasin (1996 in Ugbomeh, 2001:289) opines that "the on-going discussions and dynamics surrounding the women's empowerment debate embrace women's ability to change those structures and ideologies which keep them in subordinate positions". The empowering process, he continues, involves a means that "assists women to gain more access to resources and decision-making, in order to gain more control over their lives generally, and gain more independence and self-reliance" (p.293). Such a process, therefore accords the women self-respect and dignity, which in turn improves their self and social images (Ugbomeh, 2001:294). Worded differently, the United Nations Development Fund

for Women (UNIFEM) succinctly describes empowerment as “gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power, developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes, and the right to control one’s life” (UNIFEM, 2000:1). Hence it presupposes that empowerment in this sense requires association such as is provided by cooperatives to happen. The achievement of a collective empowering structure is the central goal of a great number of women’s cooperatives and microfinance associations in Igboland, Nigeria and around the world. Discussions about empowerment highlight the concepts of change, choice, and power. These three phenomena interweave in Mayoux’s (1995:18) description of the concepts as “a process of change by which individuals or groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives”. Mayoux continued that “the structures of power, who has it, what its sources are, and how it is exercised as directly affecting the choices that women are able to make in their lives” (Mayoux 1995:18, in Cheston and Kuhn, 2009). So such rural economic development programmes as microfinance and cooperative associations can have tremendous impact on the empowering process if their products and services take these emphasised needs into proper account.

Granted, that the continent of Africa and most of the developing world still grapples with issues of women’s gender equality in their societies, but some of these issues as discussed above and illustrated in the works of Ilika (2005) and Nwakaeze-Ogugua (2007) exist in negligible proportion in this research’s location. Women in the research area as discussed liaise to create group solidarity with one another to challenge and fend off chauvinistic mistreatment (also see chapter six). The women of the Owerri Igboland axis in south eastern Nigeria are known for their diligence and feistiness; hence historically they were able to stand up in defiance to the injunctions of colonial powers in the 1929 ‘women’s riot’, the first ever recorded revolt against the colonial authorities in the history of Nigeria (Ezeigbo,1990, Orij, 1997, Rubenstein, 2004). Nevertheless, the dynamic nature of the area’s Igbo culture has evolved to accommodate many western cultural traits in such areas as education, Christianity, cooperative formation and the equal advancement of women’s opportunities alongside their male counterparts. Igbo families of today cater equally to the needs of their children regardless of their sex; they place emphasis on

their successful attainment of positions in life through education or the acquisition of life's sustaining skills.

Collectively women are able to challenge the fostered patriarchal status quo that dominates the social system in their communities. However women in the new era tend to apply their 'new power status' cautiously in order not to disrupt the fabric of the social, religious and cultural harmony on which their community life depends. For instance, a woman does not revolt or start a battle with her husband because of her new income earning, or openly ridicule or flaunt agreed procedures with her husband or family in order to show off her power<sup>23</sup>. Longwe (1997:12) submits that "When women are given equal opportunity with men, they will be able to contribute to the overall development of their communities". Women need well-packaged empowerment programmes to enable them to participate fully in economic activities. Ocholi, (1999:270) notes that certain cultural norms, along with inadequate government policies for women's betterment are among the numerous hindrances to women's empowerment and effective participation in the rural development in communities in Nigeria. We shall elucidate on some of these in the subsequent fieldwork data discussions.

### **2.10.3. Conclusion**

The discussions in this chapter have demonstrated how traditional values and network practices blend and mutate with the modern style cooperative ideal inherited from the British and practiced in the present day Nigeria particularly in the south-eastern region. It attempted to understand the nature of the relationship between government development policy statements and the activities of the cooperative societies in the region. The chapter unveils the issue of corruption and the abuse of the cooperative pathway in the area and progresses into discussing Ekeh's theory of the two publics and colonialism in the next chapter. The policy discussions led into the exploration of the implications of the Structural Adjustment policies on cooperative activities especially in the rural areas. These governance discussions as continued in the next (theory) chapter helped

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<sup>23</sup> In religious regions like the Islamic areas of the north, 'power' to them should not mean contravening their prescribed religious observances, but the ability to have a good debate and an agreement reached on possible areas of change, compromise or evolution to fairly accommodate the goals of both genders.

the thesis develop an understanding to address the question of how government policies shape the present day cooperative experience in the study area. The final section of the chapter discussed the experience of self-help/reliance in the research communities and a brief recap on women's cooperatives and the empowerment issue as contributory factors in the comprehension and sustenance of smallholder cooperative functions in the area.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

It is the people's unwavering strive to survive through the poverty conditions in the study area that enthralls this research. Poverty, according to Narayan-Parker, (2000) is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a holistic consideration to comprehend. My approach, therefore, draws on perspectives from the fields of sociology, political science (governance) and development studies. Social capital (network) was employed as the probable driving theory, instrumental to understanding cooperative/group behaviors and was discussed from the perspectives of both western and African scholars. As stipulated in the research question, I reviewed these perspectives by distinguishing between the various forms of social capital in the two cultures and the relationship that exists between them on application within the study societies and village communities.

In order to understand and compare the operations of functional smallholder groups and the non-functional (struggling) group, I deliberated on Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics and power-governance relationships in reference to the observed socio-political situation in the study area. The conceptualisation and practice of the term social capital is examined within the context of the Igbo African worldview as 'ugwu'. The research looked at how trust and reciprocity, as two essential attributes of social capital, are being played out in shaping individuals' social relations among the Igbo community under study. I discussed further the relationships between cooperative social capital bonds and the benefits that accrue to members including the implications for economic enhancement through group-support and self-help /reliance ventures.

#### **3.1. Social capital: origin and nature**

The idea that produced the social capital scholarship of today is believed to have been introduced first by the rural schools' supervisor Lyda Judson Hanifan (1916) in his published discussions on the importance of participation in the support of community schools within West Virginia.

However, the recent increase in focus on the concept of social capital<sup>24</sup> in social science research circles is accredited to the works of three main researchers viz, Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, alongside contributions from many other authors. The discourse of social capital as a new social analytical construct is argued to have been popularized with the 1990 World Bank research by James Coleman. Social capital has been adopted as a way of understanding and potentially addressing such diverse social problems as poverty, social exclusion, economic underdevelopment, social stratification, and governance problems (Boix & Posner 1998; Mclean, Schultz, & Steger, 2002; Smith 2009). Das (2004:27) similarly notes that “Social capital offers an umbrella under which a variety of social practices can be brought together, such as reciprocity, associational life, and trust”. Portes (2000) on the other hand, argues social capital as unique in the sense that it possesses the relational and sharable attributes necessary for interactive coordination (participation) between people especially for support and developmental purposes. He contends that:

*Whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is these others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage (p.48).*

Social capital is argued as a feature of the social structure in which a person belongs; it is not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it (Coleman, 1994). “It exists only when it is shared and has public-good characteristic” (Narayan, 1997:6). Adding to the views shared by these researchers, Das (2004) concludes that the strength of social capital is most experienced within its exploratory rather than its intellectual value. It is in this exploratory view my research sought to investigate social capital relations among Igbo smallholder cooperative communities in Owerri, Nigeria.

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<sup>24</sup> “Social capital is linked to other social historical authors such as Tocqueville, J.S. Mill, Toennies, Rousseau, Durkheim, Simmel, Marx, and Weber and to such concepts as civil society, social contract, social network, interconnectedness, social exchange theory, and psychological contract theory” (Watson and Papamarcos, 2002:137).

### 3.2. Social capital and social network

The thought of the social capital concept presupposes the existence of social network. As a form of social good, it is arguably produced in the course of social interactions developed over time. Such relationships provide a basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action. Bourdieu (1997) espoused this position by locating the source of social capital in the social linkages (inter-connectedness) between people rather than in their independent structures as individuals. He defined social capital as:

*The aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or, in other words, membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital (p.248).*

Portes (2000: 45) describes Bourdieu's reference to the concept of social capital as distinctive, centering on the benefits to holders of the stock and the "deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource". Similarly, James Coleman identifies the concept as a type of resource possessed by a person(s) within a relational social network for which its benefit to the possessor is dependent on the nature of the structure within which it is applied. In his book the *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman (1994) writes:

*Social capital is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors who are within the structure. Whether the society is better off as a result depends entirely on the individual/collective uses to which it is put (p.302).*

Coleman's view broadens the concept of social capital to include its operational modes (as either in vertical or horizontal) structures of associations, and the behaviour of actors within these structures. Fukuyama, (2002: 26) discusses it as the "existence of certain sets of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that promotes cooperation among them" or put differently "the norms that permits individuals to band together to defend their interests and organize to support collective needs" (p.27). Regardless of the relative conceptual differences in



all these definitions; the central theme ‘cooperation’ remains a common consensus in the discourse, comprising basically the ability of a people to work together for a common purpose in groups within the radius of a defined set of values shared in the association (Fukuyama, 1995; Field, 2003: 13).

From a development stance, the World Bank (WB) is considered to be the prime cheerleader of the social capital chorus, given the opportunities it creates within the development discourse. Impressed by the research findings on social capital’s cohesive attributes and ability to create tangible economic prosperity from meagre resources, the World Bank adopted the social capital policy as a development idea to replace its neoliberal policies for which it was criticized as harsh and insensitive to the needs of the poor masses in Africa and the developing nations. The World Bank (WB) describes social capital as:

*The institution, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interaction. It is not only the sum of the institutions that underpin a society; rather it is the glue that holds them together. (World Bank, 2012:1).*

This discovery of social capital marked an era of policy shift in the anti-poverty and development discourse, whereby more emphasis is now placed on the involvement and participation of the people in development programmes. The concept of social capital advocates a people-oriented “bottom-up approach” to development against the earlier orchestrated (WB) top down model which allowed a few ‘unaffected elites’ to make decisions concerning the well-being of the ‘affected many’. Importantly, social capital is argued to possess the ability to soothe to the needs of the people from within their community and is alleged to be cost effective in operation (Fafchamps & Minten, 2002).

Both the individual and collective perceptions of the twin concepts (social capital and social network) are relevant to this thesis and will be employed throughout. This is because individuals interact as friends or acquaintances to form cooperative groups, and in turn, support each other’s growth to branch out into various self-reliance ventures. Margi O’Connell Hood’s (2002)

definition of social capital in relation to cooperative societies sums up the review above, and captures my research focus in a nutshell. She describes social capital as:

*The intangible wealth (stock) that comes with good social networks, extended families, clubs and societies, and a healthy community life. It is the wealth generated by participation. Hence cooperative members contribute to the creation of this common stock through participation in the group's functions for which they (members) are tangibly rewarded. (p.137).*

O'Connell Hood's perspective spells out clearly the contributive roles (participation) of the various individuals that produce the common good of social capital and the benefits that accrue to the participating members of the group. Hence, these benefits tie into the common attribute of social capital as that which, unlike other forms of capital, does not depreciate by usage (participation), but in fact depleted by non-use "use it or lose it" (Putnam, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nemanick, 2007). Therefore any member, at the end of each fiscal period, can envisage with confidence what his or her expected return will be, depending on his/her input capacity.

### **3.3. Social capital distinctions, relationships and application**

This section offers a critical engagement with the different types of social capital discussed in this research namely bonding, bridging, and linking social capital and their relationships with each other and application in the study communities. Woolcock (2001), of the World Bank and Harvard University, differentiated each as thus:

***Bonding social capital:*** denotes ties between people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours

***Bridging social capital:*** which encompasses more distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships, workmates, associates and colleagues.

***Linking social capital:*** which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community. (Pp.13-4).

Among all the various distinctions of social capital by researchers, Robert Putnam's (2000) categories stand out. His distinction contends that bridging social capital is inclusive and tends to

unite people across diverse social cleavages, while bonding social capital is introspective and reinforces exclusive groupings among homogeneous identities (Putnam, 2000). He argues that:

*Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. While bridging networks, by contrast are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion...Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological super-glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40 (an American lubricant brand). Putnam (pp.21-23)*

Putnam continued that, social capital like all other forms of capital is like as a double edged sword that could be used for either positive or negative (antisocial) purposes (Putnam, 2000: 22). He exemplified negative bonding social capital with activities of criminal gangs like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and positive social capital bonds with those of groups such as community associations, choirs, cooperative groups, and bowling clubs that create links with people of different backgrounds.

While we discuss the relevance of the positive bonding social capital to this thesis, it is also important that we identify along the negative social capital traits in the various misuse cases of the cooperative pathway in the study area. The Putnamian positive bonds are viewed here as the dense type of networks that provide crucial social and psychological support to close affiliates and group members in a (social) relational setup. In cognizance of the misuse challenges as in all human societies, this research however, argues that such Putnamian bonds do exist among the smallholder cooperative groups of the study area. The practice of this form of social organisation constitutes a model of cultural governance that aid to regulate activities within these Igbo communities. Its structure emanates from the Igbo peoples' cultural ethos of 'ugwu' which inspires cooperative and reciprocal acts that in turn enables cooperative members to work together at addressing common needs. Osaghae, (1999) analysing Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics describes this model as a parallel or shadow state that provides the public goods and services (such as schools, dispensaries, scholarships, and micro credit) that the state have failed to provide, through self-help efforts and resources that are (sometimes expropriated from the state).

From a different angle, Narayan (1999) and many other social ethnographers discussed the benefits of rural social capital and solidarity networking especially in the opening up of economic and employment opportunities within ethnic groups in communities, leading to poverty reduction, and increased equality and general community well-being (Jiobu, 1988; O'Connor, 1990; Zhou, 1992; Waldinger, 1995; Blackwood, 1997; Narayan, 1999; Portes, 2000). But on the other hand, some researchers have presented a denigrated picture of this sort of social capital bond. They associate it with spontaneous instinctual reactions as often observed in rescue missions and recovery supports from natural disaster and conflict situations rather than the enabling sustenance position that it is known for in the local communities (Pelling & High, 2005; Murphy, 2007; Mathbor, 2007). Having said that, therefore this research enquires to know how social capital bonding is operated within the Igbo communities of this study

Among the Igbos in their village-communities, bonding social capital attributes, (norms ,values and beliefs), are lived out daily through various group activities among smallholder cooperative members and in the interpersonal relationships of other community based organisation (CBOs) such as age grades, family leagues, kins, gender groups. These generate the collective stock of support that not only help the participating locals to 'get by' their daily life's challenges but also supports them to 'get ahead' and 'along' in certain ways (Woolcock, 2004: 227, 232-3). The idea of what 'getting ahead' stands for is relative; like the concept of development, it would mean different things to different people in different communities. For Xavier de Souza Briggs, it implies "accessing bridging or linking networks to external assets (such as the government, market and other development agencies) for information diffusion and broader opportunities" (Souza Briggs cited in Putnam, 2000, 21). Mark Granovetter (1973) termed such linkages weak ties "because they constitute the powerful connections to distant dissimilar acquaintances that move in different circles than the strong ties that link relatives and intimate friends who share the same sociological niche" (Granovetter, 1973:1-13).

In this study area's circumstance, bridging and linking ties with government and these other broad development agencies are considered generally weak. As Rose (2000:45) notes, "The absence of such effective formal institutions may lead to greater reliance on informal networks,

as in the ‘hourglass’ societies of developing countries”. Development essentials for these communities are compromised in corrupt practices through the collusion of state officials with some conniving locals. State regulatory institutions like the police, judiciary, ministries, commissions and agencies that are supposed to protect and provide services to the people, fall short in their duties (Odigbo, 1998; Smith, 2010). Challenged by these gaping inadequacies, the people resort to their group bonds of social capital in order to advance their common community and individual needs. Therefore, in place of the weak macro-bridging or linking social capital bonds with government and other external development agencies, there exists what I argue as a dilated or elastic micro social capital bond. It is dilated/elastic in the sense that, it goes beyond the argued ordinariness of instantaneity, narrowness, and naivety to portray broader flexibility; thus comprising within its bond, the other two forms of social capital viz. bridging and linking. This dilated or elastic social capital bond originates from the thick ties of the micro bonding link, and interweaves with the powerful but weak ties of the meso-(in-between) and macro-bridging (linking) networks. Since the conventional government bridging and linking social capital bonds with the people in the area is apparently weak, the dilated or elastic bond conveniently fits into the lagging structure with its unique forms of diverse linkage. This is further addressed in the subsequent sub-heading on the Igbo social capital conception. In Smith’s (2010) research among the Ubakala village communities in Igboland, he notes:

*When at home in the community, cleavages along the lines of village, hamlet, or lineage tend to be more pronounced. Away from home, when two Ubakala natives meet in Lagos, for example, the sense of kinship is very strong, even if they are not closely related... (p.350).*

An Igbo son or daughter resident in the urban city for instance, would naturally seek out to join the nearest home development or diaspora group from his/her natal village community in his/her area of abode. If there are no such indigenous, diaspora groups within the region, he/she would search and join another nearby similar Igbo group in his/her area. But if there are still none, then he/she liaises directly with his/her natal home community through family relatives at his/her country home (Onyeiwu, 1997, 2003; Nwagbara, 2007:105;). The form of bond expressed in these connections is so culturally strong that Igbo indigenes proudly identify and assess the value of their personalities by the solidarity of their interpersonal network.

In this research, I termed this linkage of diaspora group with their natal home community society meso dilated social capital bond; it is comparable to the bridging or inter-connectivity of different groups and associates. The bond graduates to mega when diaspora groups' social status and achievements attract development connections to the base groups in their home communities. At such times, the immediate diaspora groups usually rally their joint support around the 'prime' connector in the delivery of solidarity to their local home community bases. It is interesting that prominent sons and daughters of Igbo origin have attracted development to their various home communities through this model of social capital network structure. Dr Okonja Iweala, an Igbo daughter and a former managing director at the World Bank, Emeka Anyaoku, the former secretary of the Common wealth, eminent Igbo sons and daughters who are athletes in competitive sports in Europe and America, and professionals all over the world, have attracted colleagues and friends to local fund-raising events in their various communities for projects such as a school, hospital, library building, and road construction. Such self-help projects record more resounding success than most development promises made by the political governments and NGO development partners.

Several other researchers approach the social capital distinction question from a completely different dimension. Uphoff and Wijayaratra (2000) developed the dual perception of social capital as either structural or cognitive. They see structural social capital as referring to established social structures, such as networks, associations, and institutions guided by rules, procedures and precedents that facilitate mutually beneficial collective action. Whereas, cognitive social capital is said to comprise the more subjective and intangible elements such as shared norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs, that prompt people to act in mutually collaborative manner (Uphoff, 1999; Krishna & Uphoff, 2002; Hitt, Ho-Uk & Yucel, 2002). In other words, cognitive and structural forms of social capital<sup>25</sup> are commonly connected and mutually reinforcing. Both forms of social capital play out in the leadership formation and progression of

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<sup>25</sup> For example, if strong leadership is the reason that a collectively-managed rural project works well in a community, this indicates that a key source (s) of efficient leadership in the group or community management and so points to the availability of 'structural social capital' background. On the contrary, if the reason for the good result is due to heightened consciousness towards the shared norms, reciprocities and commitment of the group members/community dwellers, then "cognitive social capital" background should be considered.

some of the smallholder cooperative societies that this study investigates. I will now discuss the practice of social capital and cooperation within the African cultural identity context as preached and propagated by the early pan-African socialist leaders of the post-independence era.

### **3.4. Social capital, cooperation and identity in Africa**

Reviewing the literature on the African perspective of the social capital concept among groups and rural community members for the pursuit of self and group empowering goals is a daunting task. This is so, not only because of the paucity of research in this area but also because of the conceptual mismatches among the African writers and between their views and the western perspectives. Moreover, many of the African authors and commentators including the researcher are of the western educational tutelage which tilts their viewpoints, thus creating further discrepancies in the understanding. Social capital is seen as a new buzz-word across many research disciplines, and one which has been adopted in the analysis of different societies that have similarities with the initial Italian study by Putnam. However, it has not resonated in such dissimilar societies as Africa. What are seen in most of the western community-based research as precedents or indicators of individual and community social capital are, on the contrary, basic cultural norms and traditional observances in most of the African community settings (Adjargo, 2012). This is because the African exists and operates in a different worldview of customs, cultures, and traditional values that define his/her African ontology which thereby condition his/her actions. Therefore, understanding this social reality of the African person and his/her identity is critical to the study of community in Africa. The one size fits all theoretical approach of social capital research creates more confusions than it proffers solutions. What is new to the African discourse is the semantic coinage of social capital as an academic term, but the paradigm in itself is an age-old part of human co-existence in African communities.

### **3.5. The African self/community identity: (Pan-African socialism)**

The African conceives the individual and self to be almost entirely dependent on and subordinate to social entities and cultural processes. Many researchers on the cultures of Africa have remarked on these features as not only outstanding but the defining characteristics of the

culture. The Kenyan philosopher, Mbiti (1969, 1992) argues that the individual has little autonomy for self-determination outside the context of the traditional African family and community. He writes:

*Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man (Mbiti, 1969:109).*

Dickson furthered this traditional African community thesis, arguing that such awareness characterises social relations among individuals and group members in various localities resulting to shared bonds based on cultural homogeneity. He noted that “This sense of community and association is a characteristic of African life which attention has been drawn to again and again by both African and non-African writers on Africa. Indeed, to many, this characteristic defines Africanness” (Dickson, 1977: 4). It was this view of Africanness that the early political African leaders adopted in their bid to shape the post-independent civil society of Africa. Leopold Senghor (1964) wrote that:

*Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individuals, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society. (pp. 93-94).*

The comradeship that comes with membership to a group, and recognition of one's acceptability to one's community, resonates communion in an African cultural setting and so undergirds the spirit and practice of giving what one has for the benefit of others, and of receiving what others give in mutual reciprocation and cooperation. In a wholesome community as Iroegbu<sup>26</sup> (1997, 2008) presents, the members make the lives and activities of one another possible and able to flourish. The community according to him is a conceptual model from which the life of its

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<sup>26</sup> Prof. P. O. Iroegbu's treatise on community in Igboland introduced the concept of “Ohacracy”- “a community-centered socio-political and ethical theory. Etymologically, “Ohacracy” according to Iroegbu is a compound word derived from two words ‘Oha’ (Igbo) and ‘cracy’ (Greek). From their different etymologies, ‘Oha’ (Igbo word) means -community, society, an assembly or gathering of people; while ‘cracy’ (from Greek word kratos) literally means ‘the rule of’. Thus, [Ohacracy] can conveniently be defined as the rule by the people or community over themselves for their integral existential welfare” (Iroegbu, 1997:3).



members originates. Hence beginning with “the parents at the micro-level who gives birth to each child through a union, and at the macro-level where the community is the cradle that welcomes and creates the existential space for the new-born to grow and flourish” (Iroegbu, 1997; 2008). Jomo Kenyatta (1965), discussing this genealogy of traditional life in Kenyan communities, made the following observation:

*According to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost he is several people's relative and several people's contemporary; Individualism and self-seeking were ruled out. (p. 297).*

The individual in Africa evolves from the socio-cultural matrix of his/her community. The language, culture, tradition, religion, habits, and even thinking attitudes and other traits that he/she possesses are those of the community. None of these is his/hers by individual ingenuity or by personal hard work. Indeed, the Igbo culture as Njaka (1974) noted, is predicated on self-regulation with regard to communal interest. “The individual derives his or her strength and freedom from the community, to which everyone owes loyalty. Whatever he/she judges as his/her values are those received from his community” (Njaka, 1974: 56). Suffice it to say therefore as Gyekye (1992:102) observes, “In the traditional African community, the personal pronoun ‘I’ was very rarely used in public assemblies”. This figurative expression should not be taken literally as depicting the traditional African person as one that does not undertake individual entrepreneurship or consideration of personal prosperity ventures; rather, it should be understood in the sense of its explanation of the communitarian characteristics of the traditional African person. Uchendu (1965) clarifies this in his ethnographic study of the prowess of the African Igbo person in consonance with his/her community as he notes:

*The Igbo life in community lays a great emphasis on individual achievement and initiative. There are no restraints, human, cultural, or supernatural, which cannot, theoretically, be overcome. The individual's 'bargain' for his status goal begins with 'ebibi' (Igbo personal totem of success) and continues through reincarnation... (p.103).*

However, this African cultural worldview shared commonly by both the Igbos and many other Africans ethnicities, was misrepresented by the post-colonial renaissance movement leaders

championed by the early Pan-African political elites such as Senghor, Kenyatta, Nyerere, and Nkrumah. Landell-Mills (1992) depicted the confusion that ensued thus:

*After independence, both donors and many western-educated African leaders acted as though they were convinced that development could be achieved by the systematic application of rational 'modern' techniques and concepts, using state institutions based on Weberian bureaucratic principles that were not compatible with the beliefs and practices of African society. Little serious attention was given to the possible enhanced role of indigenous cultural institutions in the communities. (p.543).*

Most of the views propagated by these leaders were motivated by the ideological choice of 'African Socialism' transported from the foreign Socialist and Neo-socialist ideas in which most of them were schooled in the days preceding the struggle for independence. Hence, in their anxiety to find support for their ideological frame from traditional African ideas about society, they argued that "socialism was foreshadowed in the African traditional worldview and communalism (communitarianism)" as its practice (Gyekye, 1992; 102). Thus, Nkrumah of Ghana observed that "If one seeks the socio-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism for in socialism; the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances" (Nkrumah, 1964 in Blake, 2005). And Senghor also opines that "Negro-African society is collectivist or, more exactly communal, because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals." (Senghor, 1964:93). Granted, despite the communalism of African traditional societies, these societies were unprepared for the political socialist agendas that were pushed by these western-trained early political leaders at the dawn of the independence era. There were structural flaws in the governance and application of the ideologies among the various communities of the newly independent nations (Ayittey, 1990). Theoretically, the political outreach from these Pan African leaders towards the masses in the rural communities would pass as a form of 'bridging social capital'; but that was the vertically coerced type as mentioned by Coleman in the discussion of social capital attributes, rather than the needed horizontal support type for community cooperative growth.

These leaders overrated the communitarian ardour of their various African national constituencies such as the Ujamaa of Nyerere in Tanzania, and the Harambee of Kenyatta in

Kenya that were criticised for coercing the rural people into forced village groupings (Dibua & Ibhawoh, 2003). The African person, though traditionally communitarian, appreciates the freedom to decide how and where (which group) to pledge his/her interactive allegiance. Cooperative formations are necessitated by needs and the search for solutions to certain commonly felt problems in the communities. Hence the grassroots-up approach to rural development becomes significant because it allows the free use of the indigenous practices of the people in the articulation of common needs thereby preparing the locals to meet the government half way in the search for solutions. Sadly, that wasn't the case in Africa as Landell-Mills (1992) observes:

*The 'participation' of ordinary people in development was conceived as a uni-directional top-down process: the leaders led and the people were supposed to follow. The Pan Africanist enforced their ideas in similar pattern like the exiting colonial masters and expected massive followership from the African people, but they were disappointed by the level of response and rejection received instead (p. 543).*

However, the post-colonial (independence) era brought about a shift from some of the old traditional and coercive Pan Africanist movement ideas to a more liberalised pattern of group formation. In the present era, traditional groups align themselves so as to be registered as smallholder cooperatives with the adoption of modern cooperative practices (see chapter two). These newly transformed groups (now cooperatives) however retain the old traditional values while operating with a twist of modernity regarding their practices in the regions. The new groups still held cultural traits like integrity, age, respect and trust in high esteem as unique social benchmarks for membership into the societies. Social capital, as perceived and practiced within the Igbo African cultural community in South-eastern Nigeria, will now be discussed.

### **3.6. Social capital in the Igbo African cooperative context**

Although the term social capital appears foreign and elusive within the African literature, its fundamental attributes such as 'trust' and 'mutual reciprocity' are vividly practised in the day-to-day associational life of people in the wide African communities (Adjargo, 2012). Among the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria, social capital translates as *ugwu* which refers to "the right or

worthiness of goodwill that inheres in an individual or a group” (Afigbo, 1982:18). Ugwu, as the key word in the Igbo language, reads as a synonym for respect, trust, reciprocity, mutuality, dependability, and character. In other words, a person of high or commendable ugwu is comparable to the western individual who possesses high social capital stock. A man or woman in this position in Igbo culture is normally well connected because he/she is seen as trust worthy, of good personality with large network relations. His/her network radius is limitless; he/she has a trust-worthy character, and gives to and receives goodwill from people in his/her interactions. An Igbo proverb that encapsulates social capital puts it this way “Ugwu wu nkwanye nkwanye, nwanyi jiri muo ibe ya” which literarily translates to “respect is reciprocal; hence a woman could beget another” (Igbo cultural adage). In the Igbo worldview, this adage is understood and applied as the multiplication of goodwill (ugwu). The rule of reciprocity, trust, and carry-over of goodwill guards the relational workings of ugwu and necessitates its replicability.

From historical times till the present, Igbos and most African households are known to live in a culturally interactive web of relationships that closely knit families, kin, and communities together; thus providing a natural ground for the development of this conceptual bonding type of social capital assets. Onyeiwu (1997), in discussing the cooperation, altruism, and economic development among the Igbos of the South-eastern Nigeria observes:

*For generation[s]... the Igbo cooperated in many aspects of their economic and social activities in ways that defied standard neoclassical assumptions of self-interest and utility maximization. For expositional convenience, cooperative behaviour among the peasant Igbo can be classified as follows: labour reciprocity, trust, support for the unfortunate, non-material reward for cooperative behaviour, and amicable resolution of conflicts (pp. 409-410).*

These identified cooperative behaviours of the Igbos in their communities as acknowledged by Onyeiwu are corroborated in western research studies as social capital, which the researchers, Larsen (2004), Thompson and Saegert (2001), and Ferguson and Dickens (1999) attributed as the necessary antecedents that spur the development of the more powerful form of bridging social capital. **Iri ugwu** among the Igbos is the closest conceptualisation of social capital in the African Igbo context and it presupposes a life of interaction between individuals and collectives who belong to defined social units (kins) or local institutions such as smallholder cooperatives, age

grades, gender groups, trade and occupational groups in the village-communities. Researches in comparative studies of social capital utility in the emergent societies of Africa, Asia and the Latin Americas point to similarities in its uniting attributes as a type of social glue or lubricating agent that holds people together in association with other resources in community groups (Ijere, 1992; Serageldin & Grootaert, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 2001; Zuwarimwe & Kirsten, 2010; Ofoku & Urang, 2012; World Bank, 2013). In other words, a group that enjoys a strong bonding *ugwu* clearly send out a message of unity and the ability of being able to coordinate themselves and their planned events. As a result, their orderliness earns them a greater *ugwu* from observers and external support sources.

Juxtaposing the concepts of *ugwu* in the Igbo-African parlance and social capital in conventional western literatures; it is argued that both are inherent in the structure of the group's relationships. Portes (2000: 24) observes that "to possess social capital/*ugwu*, a person must be related to others, and it is these others who are the actual source of his or her advantage". In this sense, social capital is seen as an end that accrues only with interactions or association. Comparatively, for the African Igbos, *ugwu* is a personally earned possession that blossoms and multiplies best when joined with others. It is that common stock of goodwill that is shared between individuals and collectives in groups or societies for the good of the community. The benefits that accrue to members by virtue of belonging to the groups or other social structures, enhance and sustain membership loyalties towards the group's mission. Just as social capital is increased by utility and depleted by non-use (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nemanick, 2007), so is the concept of *ugwu* enacted in the culture of the Igbos. In other words *ugwu* is increased by use and depleted by non-use, but never disappears. For instance, a community member who belongs to more social groups will certainly have a greater *ugwu* in terms of the greater number of helping hands expected to support him/her in times of need, more sources to borrow money from, more shoulders to lean on and ears to listen in times of need than simply those who belong to only one group or none.

Furthermore, the concept of social capital has been criticised in western literatures as being parochial and unnecessarily time-wasting (Brink, Lind & Svendsen, 2013), as has the *ugwu* concept. The down side of *ugwu*, as with every human social phenomenon, is that belonging to

more social groups requires more resource commitments such as time, finance-dues, physical and psychic energy from its members (Ezeanyika & Adi, 2009). The member with broader relationships would certainly have a higher density of ugwu because it is that which enables his/her acceptance into the various networks that he/she belongs to and which in turn provides the resources that sustain his/her membership in the associated networks. Ugwu is distinguishable in three forms:

***UGWU ONYE [micro social capital bond]:*** (individual or personal social capital): This is the social attribute(s) held by an individual with charisma, contacts or linguistic skill that offers opportunities in social dealings. It is seen as the aura or radiance that attracts goodwill from others towards a person (likeability). It makes one an acceptable character within one's society; without it no other form of ugwu (social capital bond) could be developed because one would be deemed as repulsive. Ugwu onye is relatable to Coleman's (1994) human capital thesis but has a broader socio-cultural radius in the Igbo worldview.

***UGWU ANYI [meso social capital bond]:*** (community or group-level social capital): This is seen as the set of inter-connective social resources possessed by a group or community that increases the collective welfare as well as the chances that the group/community is likely to receive assistance from external support sources (Glaeser, 2001:5-8; Bayat, 2005:4; Ezeanyika & Adi 2009). This form of 'ugwu' should not be confused with the parochial political patronage as exemplified in the EBD case in Owerri West (see chapter six). Organised societies with functional membership commitments make authentic efforts towards achieving progress for themselves and their larger communities. The ugwu which these Igbo groups achieve by dint of their collective hard work and determination for success earns them trust and support from regional associates or comrades. The negative externalities or perverse social capital/ugwu that a bad behaved group suffers is the opposite of this (Rubio, 1997; Fukuyama, 2001).

***UGWU MBA [mega social capital bond]:*** (the national or peoples-level social capital): This is the broadest and most powerful form of social capital in the Igbo worldview. It is very sophisticated, cutting through the three forms of the ugwu discussed. It extends from the modest

base of cultural rurality to advanced connectivities. It functions and thrives on the root successes of the **micro ugwu onye** and the **meso ugwu anyi** below it. In the long run, it partly sustains itself, but not entirely, because the two component parts of its functionality and sustenance are deeply entrenched in its root-structure. For instance, an eminent Igbo son or daughter that does something of remarkable distinction for his/her community is recognised with a cultural title. It doesn't matter whether they are from the diaspora group abroad or within the country; the emphasis is on the majesty of the goodwill deed for the community. The title signifies appreciation and recognition, as well as representing encouragement for others to follow in their suit. It is the **ugwu mba-mega social capital bond**, this research argues, that puts the shine on the progressive efforts of smallholder cooperative societies and the broad communities at large. Self-help efforts and cooperative collective aspirations are given the deserved lift through this **mega** network bond of the extensive alliances of the successful natal sons and daughters of the community.

The three forms of ugwu are categorically connected in the associational-life in community of the Igbo person; **ugwu onye** (micro) begets **ugwu anyi** (meso) and cumulates ultimately in the powerful **ugwu mba** (mega). The individual person in Igboland-Africa benefits from these three levels of social capital within his/her micro-field of social network interaction. First, an individual is an accepted and worthy member (**ugwu onye**) of a designate smallholder community group, contributing his/her due in the form of resources like finance, skills, labour, and time to the progress and achievement of the group's common goal (**ugwu anyi**). Then utilizes the returns from his/her share of the group's reciprocal proceeds (sometimes enhanced by external support means (**ugwu mba**), to pursue his/her own individual goals without compromising his/her community group's position and obligation. The social capital reciprocity formation here functions in two ways: from the individual 'worthy' member status to the group's general goal, then back to the member in a mutual circle of reciprocity. Benefits for an individual member or group rights that accrue from such relationships are utterly dependent on the level of ugwu (trust, reciprocity, and respect) within the group and largely with the outside or external support-network groups. However support for group members can cut across other responsibilities. The next sub topic discusses Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics in line with

some of the probable circumstances that exacerbate the negative cooperative responses from within the community.

### **3.7. The theory of the two publics**

In the theory of the two publics Ekeh (1975:92) argues that the “experiences of colonialism in Africa led to the emergence of a unique historical formation in modern post-colonial Africa: the existence of two publics instead of one public, as in the west”. Colonialism according to Ekeh (1975) created a disconnection between state and the local society or the public realm and private realm. He explained that many of Africa’s socio-political problems are shaped by the relationships between these two publics.

On one end is the civic public, which is “historically associated with the colonial administration and has become identified with popular politics in post-colonial Africa” (Ekeh, 1975:92). He notes that this civic public is synonymous with the state within which state agencies, policies and civil structures such as the civil service, police, military and the judiciary are based. He links this formation to the colonial governance “whose alien origins, military-authoritarian character, and role in furthering the interests of the colonizers rather than the colonized, disconnected it from the ‘natives’ and civil society” (Osaghae, 2006:239). In contrast there is the primordial public that “is closely identified with the people’s grassroot groupings, sentiments and activities which nevertheless impinges on public interest, to the extent that the groupings, ties, and sentiments influence and determine the individual’s public behaviour” (Osaghae, 2006:239). This public, whose major constituents are ethnic, communal CBO’s (such as the hometown development associations) are generally enthused in their self-help striving because of the alienating experiences of the colonial/post-colonial state and its failure to provide the basic welfare and developmental needs of masses of ordinary peoples (Ekeh, 1975). Hence some of the people despair and fall into adopting opportunistic measures to compromise government provisions when available and circumvent detection by the law.

Ekeh (1975:94) noted that while the primordial public is distinguished by its members’ strong sense of ownership and identity, the same cannot be said of the civic public. In fact, the



primordial public is characterised by its moral rectitude, operating on the same moral plenitude as the private realm in which social exchanges are based on the mutual reciprocity between rights and duties. The civic public on the other end, suffers from an endemic crisis of ownership and amoral standard. It “lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public.” (p.94). The feeling of non-ownership and amorality sets the stage for the opportunistic, lawless, prebendalist, corrupt, and plundering tendencies that have come to characterize behaviour in the public sector. Thus, Osaghae<sup>27</sup> (2006) observes that individuals feel no moral urge to reciprocate the benefits they receive, and behaviour that would be regarded as morally reprehensible in the primordial public, such as embezzlement of public funds, is permissible to the extent that the larger group directly or indirectly benefits from the loot. As Ekeh points out, a plunderer of funds in the civic public “would not be a good man were he to channel all his lucky gains to his private purse. He will only continue to be a good man if he channels part of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public...” (Ekeh, 1975:108).

Similarly, Chabal and Daloz, discussing governance and corruption in Africa concisely captured the significance of such parochialism by citing what they labelled as an African proverb that says “whoever does not rob the state robs his kith and kin” (Chabal & Daloz, 1999:107). Ekeh’s thesis on the theory of the two publics was well received and cited for its profound insights especially in the analysis of the socio-political problems of post-colonial African states. However, it has also been criticised as negatively overstressing the issue of tribalism<sup>28</sup> and exaggerating the relationship between the two publics (Nnoli, 1998; Isumonah, 2003, Osaghae, 2006). The African author Joseph (1987:184) questions Ekeh’s assumption on the two publics, arguing that the two publics actually overlap. Contrary to Joseph’s view, Osaghae (2006: 8) defends that “Ekeh does not deny that the two publics overlap, not the least because the same actors operate

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<sup>27</sup> I acknowledge the insights from the works of Dr. Eghosa E. Osaghae, a professor of comparative politics and Vice Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Okada, Nigeria. He was the leader of the Ford Foundation-funded programme on ethnic and federal studies in Nigeria and director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Ibadan Nigeria.

<sup>28</sup> Tribalism is not always about negativities associated with the discrimination of dissimilar persons to a group, but an umbrella concept that highlights the conformity, similarity or homogeneity of a people based upon certain variable combinations such as kinship, reciprocal exchange, loyalty, care and community spirit such that connects the rural locals to their natal diaspora support groups in Igboland for development benefits.

in the two publics. Instead, his point is to emphasize the dialectical nature of the relations between the two and the unwholesome consequences they have for politics.”

Personally, I do not agree in entirety to the tribal pessimisms depicted in Ekeh’s two public theory dialectics. It could be argued that the two publics overlap and not all government workers with roots in the primordial public are necessarily mired in corruption. There are many native sons and daughters of the primordial study communities that have achieved remarkable distinctions in their professional careers in public service, corporate and private lives without compromising their integrity, yet are steadily supporting their community’s development goals from their successes. On the other hand, it is also good to note that, as a result of corruption in the polity, the realms of kinship and the state affairs (and kinship and civil society) are usually mixed up in a political economy that is organised around patron-clientism, in which people rely on kin, on people of the same community of origin, and on other hierarchically organised social ties of affection and obligation for opportunities and assistance (Smith, 2010). However, the theory of the two publics offers insights into the analysis of government-cooperative relationship, power dominance, political patronage and abuse cases of the smallholder cooperative pathway as experienced in the study area.

### **3.8. Power and governance in cooperative development**

The application of power in governance is central to the discussion of smallholder cooperative development, especially in the rural areas where the impact is easily noticed. Power can be understood as operating in different ways and so its conceptualisation varies from one context to another. It could be argued that one’s subjective perception of the concept of power is dependent on one’s position in a particular power framework. However power is generally defined as the “ability to do or act; the capability of effectively accomplishing something” (Webster Dictionary, 2012: 350). The coordination and internal governance of the activities of development-conscious CBO groups such as the smallholder cooperatives, gender groups, age grades, thrift and credit associations constitute a form of traditional power block in the rural communities. Their organised collaboration with the local authorities and other community external support agents

such as the diaspora groups, the churches, and the nearby Tertiary institutions/Universities, all helps to bring about much needed development change to the local regions. In the traditional, social and political sense of the concept, power according to Lukes (2005:25) is used interchangeably with authority to denote “the ability to influence the behaviour of people with or without resistance”. Some conniving government executives as depicted in Ekeh’s (1975) work and mentioned in the corruption section earlier (see chapter two), abuse their official charge positions over the coordination of rural development incentives and thus lure desperate locals into engaging in fraudulent cooperative conducts. It takes the power of a corrupt government official(s) to influence, connive with, and actualize deceitful plans through willing locals. Power also entails the capability of leadership to coordinate events for progressive purposes (discussed in chapter six). The dual notions of power and governance were extensively expounded by the French social theorist Michel Foucault in his governmentality treatise. He observes power as “a set of actions that act on other possible actions; it functions in the field of the possible or inscribes itself in the behaviour of actors by inciting, inducing, seducing, facilitating or hindering, expanding or limiting” (Foucault, 1991:61). Governance, on the other hand, is used to refer to the co-ordination of various forms of public and private interactions (Pierre, 2000). In other words, Foucault’s model of power involves recognising the existence of multiple presences and sources of power relations.

In contrast Max Weber (1967: 152) distinguished between power and authority describing power as “the ability to impose one’s will on another, regardless of the other’s wishes, and any resistance he/she may put forward. In this sense, authority is seen as power accepted as legitimate by those subjected to it” (Weber cited in Henry, 2007). Power therefore implies the vertical top down or structural domination by one person or group over the others who submit to the dominant authority. The Weberian model as Henry argues assumes that one person will acquiesce, co-operate with or consent to, the domination of the other. She however submitted that “this position cannot be true of all relationships, for the act of issuing a command does not presuppose obedience” (Henry, 2007:4). On a positive note, the traditional power and governance structure in the study village communities is based on the coordinated horizontal

model<sup>29</sup> where authorities are divested from particular individuals and invested in groups and associations. As Weber argues power could be exercised in three ways: through direct physical power, by reward and punishment or by the influence of opinion (Presser and Sen, 2000:38-39). Although most political governance cases mix up these three forms of application, the last tactic of ‘opinion influence’ is the most subtle and manipulative of all. Such a Weberian vertical model as Townsend, Zapata, Rowlands, Alberti, and Mercado (1999:130) note is usually the strategy adopted by the developed worlds and their agencies in socio-political and development interactions with the historically colonised developing worlds such as Africa. In his thesis on the three dimensions of power, Lukes (2005) categorised this form of power as ideological control, arguing that:

*It is the most effective and insidious use of power in governance; it prevails by shaping people’s perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial (pp.23-24).*

This sort of power suppresses originality in the subjects and diminishes their creative ability, leaving them as passive receptors of orders without any willpower or contributive opinion of their own but to accept the image and ideas with which their dominator describes them. The model is constantly in conflict with the coordinated horizontal power structure, which on the

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<sup>29</sup> Cooperative business, as a socio-economic system, is based on ‘coordinated horizontal cooperation’ rather than ‘subordinated cooperation’ for the attainment of maximum equilibrium in the execution of its group objective (Sakar, 1989:27). The subordinated cooperation is the vertical (top-down) model that occurs when members of a group are subjected to a central source of hierarchical power and authority (refer chapter two and three); while coordinated cooperation is the contrasting horizontal model which occurs between free persons of equal rights and mutual respect. The former (subordinated cooperation) strategy, according to Coleman (1994: 598). impacts negatively on the buildup of social capital when applied in parallel groups such as cooperatives and voluntary organizations, while the later (coordinated cooperation) fosters social capital growth and group cohesion. In discussing further this ideal form of social group relationships, Sakar (1989) observes that only a few of the world’s present socio-economic systems are based on coordinated cooperation (viz cooperative societies), but many are based on subordinated cooperation, and that this results in the degeneration of society’s moral fabric. Administrative positions in the groups are determined by each group’s official needs; candidates are democratically elected for the different open positions except for the exclusive roles of the president and the treasurer that require unique qualities such as age, experience, and deep cultural knowledge (see chapter six). Elected executives in the ‘coordinated cooperation’ approach hold similar and equal privileges like all other cooperators. In both models of agricultural and non-agricultural cooperatives, there are three basic cadres of management units comprising the ordinary cooperative members, elected executives, and the chairpersons or (presidents).

contrary, is the soul of the life and activities in African Igbo primordial communities (Ekeh, 1975), where everybody is regarded and respected for their capabilities and various group affinities. In fact, decisions on events are coordinated through inputs from members of the community and participation is required from everybody as members of various groups and families which make every occasion an opportunity to enhance bonding relations and social cohesion. In contrast to horizontal power relations, the vertical model of the civic public creates heads and subordinates; it destroys the people's collective zeal to actively coordinate their affairs by splitting their bonds to create demi-authorities from within, delegated with the power to suppress and dominate the others (Ekeh, 1975). This model of vertical governance in Nigeria, epitomized by the state's political authorities (government), has struggled in the research areas and in Africa as a whole because it goes against the people's traditional/horizontal model. Accordingly, the position of postcolonial Africa remains dire in the circle of global civic power-play and governance relations. Locally, among most of the colonised developing countries, political authorities and governance take the form of brash dictatorship and oppressive militarism (Akingbe, 2010; Garuba, 2006). The authorities and powers of political office holders in these regions are usually misconstrued as absolute. On the other hand, Foucault (1984) questioned this position of constructed absolutism in government or state as a sovereign power, describing it as "an organised, calculated entity that becomes increasingly powerful through intervention in people's social life in the community". Against this model of power/control, Foucault has argued for the people "to maintain resistance, where authorities contest fixed identities and relations in ways which may be subtle and seen as an inevitable companion of power" (Foucault, 1984:61).

Foucault's idea of government refers to all programmes, types of thought and action that seek to guide the conduct of others (Foucault, 1991:10). He termed those as technologies of government, which according to O'Malley (1996:205) can be described as "any set of social practices that is aimed at manipulating the social or physical world according to identifiable routines". In light of this Foucault questions whether it is possible to understand the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them (Foucault, 1991:20). Applying this Foucauldian view to this research context, it follows therefore, that to understand the policies

that affect the activities of even the remotest agricultural smallholder cooperative societies and communities, efforts should be made at discerning the rationality that controls the formulation of such policies (Okolie, 2003). For instance, most past and present-day agricultural, health and educational development policies in Nigeria that shape local activities are partly shaped by global development designs, such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) initiated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Basic Education (UBE) by the United Nations (UNICEF and UNESCO), the Roll Back Malaria campaign by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the HIV/AIDS enlightenment campaigns by (USAID and WHO). The FADAMA agricultural development fund sponsored by the World Bank as referenced in (chapters one and six) is a recent case in point.

Debates on power and governance in development circles are usually contentious exercises since power is multi-dimensional in nature and could either be used for positive or negative purposes. Similarly, the social capital concept has been argued to possess the ability to help or hurt its bearer (Brink, Lind, & Svendsen, 2013). In light of this, it could be argued that both social capital and power are interchangeable phenomena in the sense that social capital can be qualified as a form of power amongst the other four classifications of the livelihood asset i.e. natural, physical, human and financial (Wanyama, Develtere & Pollet, 2008). The enhancement of an individual's social capital through association in a group opens up avenues for the member to access power opportunities. Interestingly, Rowlands (1995) and Mayoux (2003) for instance qualify this form of relational or interactionary power as 'power to and power within', because it gives the smallholder cooperative member the enabling power through group support to take decisions or to solve once stressful problems. Additionally this bolsters the member's 'power within' which grows one's self-esteem, respect, confidence and general acceptability (Nwanesi, 2006). On the other hand, the possession of power can be viewed as a form of social capital asset in itself which could be used for group benefit. This perspective illustrates the form of thick bonding cooperation existing among the Igbos of the study area (see chapter two). Situations abound where eminent sons and daughters of Igbo origin living in diaspora attract development initiatives to their rural natal communities through their self-achieved connections and resources. Indeed, both concepts, 'power' and 'social capital' are deemed relevant to this research.

Furthermore, Deleuze, in discussing Foucault's power relations, notes that "the relation to oneself will be understood in terms of power relations and relations of knowledge" (Deleuze, 1988: 103). This perspective suggests that the more a person sees the milieu of his/her power relations as something to take advantage of instead of simply domination threat, the better the chances he/she stands to craft positive ways of utilizing the available knowledge/power base. Interestingly, Ilon says that the secret of the Asian Tiger nation's development success was partly shaped by this Deleuzian power/knowledge relation, despite the severity of the Structural Adjustment Programme (Ilon, 1994). Like social capital that multiplies on use and depletes on non-use, the more a new knowledge is put to use in exploring new boundaries (research), the better the users become. It could also be applied to augmenting the indigenous traditional knowledge base, thus opening ways for increased proceeds (income, food, better standards of living). For instance, local farmers in their smallholder cooperatives would be able to accept training sessions with agricultural-extension teachers, in order to learn new ways of improving their traditional staple food crop species and farming skills. Likewise, Rural Micro-Credit cooperators learn to adopt modern banking methods of saving their pooled resources from the traditional Isusu thrift pool. Local smallholder cooperative societies adopt modern communication like cell-phones, email, or social networking as a means to reach out to a broader audience for support. In other words, the traditional and the new patterns interweave into each other providing a working sustainable hybrid model that serves the purpose of rural dwellers. Next, I will review the economic benefits as a new source of power that accrues to practitioners in the circling bonds of group and community social capital.

### **3.9. Cooperative social capital as economic power to members**

Addressing the presence of social capital in rural cooperative societies offers a way to link sociological and economic perspectives together in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the economic development concept suitable for development in the rural areas (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000: 18; Ezeanyika & Adi, 2009, Fukuyama, 2002). The researchers Woolcock and Narayan maintained that "One important way social capital does this is by showing how social interactions between members, their immediate communities and support institutions shape

economic performance in their rural localities” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000: 18). Gibson notes that the building and promoting of community spirit, identity, and social cohesion heralds the development and sustenance of an economically resourceful cooperative society that functions as a collective whole (Gibson, 2005). According to Hansena, Morrow & Batistac, (2002) the satisfaction of economic goals or the desire to become financially better off is among the basic motives for which people join cooperative societies. Deji (2005) in a rural research in Osun state, Nigeria confirmed this assertion noting that:

*Membership of cooperative societies provides people with better and reliable access to facilities and opportunities. People come together in cooperative societies to pool their resources together so as to meet individual needs that could not be resolved by individuals due to limited financial capacity (p.2).*

In development research studies in Africa, growing attention is being devoted to the exploration of this relationship, especially for the purpose of developing policy and rural project designs. For example, in a World Bank joint study of Burkina Faso, Indonesia, and some other south East Asian locations, Grootaert (2001) outlined the effect that social capital relationships have on household economic welfare. He maintained that the promotion of social interaction through the formation of groups like smallholder cooperatives among rural (poor) farmers may need to complement the provision of agro-inputs such as seeds, stems, tubers, and fertilizer for the full benefits to be realised.

The unavailability of either the physical resources or the actual people capacity in the associational process reduces the realization of the full benefit. However, while in the field, I noted a slightly different perspective confirmed by Agbo (2006) and Onuoha (2001) and corroborated by Smith (2010), that where expected external benefits are the motivating factor for the formation of cooperatives groups, most of such ad-hoc groups usually disappear on reception of the expected goods, precisely because they were not real cooperative groups in the first place. The perpetuation of this negative trend suggests corruption and governance dysfunctionality in the country’s political system as this study explores. The study by Stringfellow, Coulter, Lucey, McKone, and Hussain (1997), have shown that such government-instigated cooperative groups lack commitment and so do not last. However, where the government and development workers



resolve to put in the time to research and work with the local source at sifting out the fake groups, as well as confirming the genuine groups that tender for support loans the benefits accrue and even multiply, because the resources will have been put to the expected use.

Furthermore, social capital connections, as Granovetter (2005:33) opines, “can be positively harnessed in the flow and utility of very important development information for economic benefit”. In the rural communities for instance, the people and groups that have better access to information from different external sources stand a better chance of gaining an advantage over the others. Case references in this study include the OGH EBD, PNR and IDT smallholder farmer’s cooperative societies in Owerri North and Owerri West respectively. These leaders utilize their informal network connections with government personnel in the ministries and local councils to access information about promoted loans and development support opportunities with the government. Cooperatives can also share information about local growth opportunities like recycling, preservation methods, and trade prospects within their groups and between group bodies, for better economic benefits (see chapter seven).

However, when genuine rural cooperative societies are given the required bridging/linking social capital support from institutions, like the United Nations, World Bank, DFID, and OXFAM, the results are usually remarkable, such as in the cases of Ghana and Botswana rural communities in Africa (Porter & Fergus, 2006). The World Bank highlights the concept of social capital as the solution that aid social cohesion and economic development in the rural areas. Attesting to this new paradigm, the World Bank advances that:

*Increasing evidence has shown that social cohesion (social capital) through collective community activities such as cooperatives is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable (The World Bank 2012:1).*

The FADAMA<sup>30</sup> project phases and the Micro-credit<sup>31</sup> scheme in Nigeria are among the World Bank-assisted programmes that take a different approach of support to the people in the rural

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<sup>30</sup> “FADAMA is a World Bank assisted project in Nigeria that covers the thirty-six states of the country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The project is targeted at subsistent farmers, the rural poor, pastoralists, fisher folks, processors, hunters, gatherers, and other economic interest groups in the Agricultural Value Chain. The

areas. These programmes are aimed at enhancing social cohesion in the rural communities through the disbursement of incentives such as soft loans and agricultural inputs to enlisted local smallholder farmer cooperative societies. Such loans and aid are channelled through the state and local government agencies who are commissioned with the duty to collate applicants into groups in order to assess their qualities with the set application criteria. This approach, as reasoned by the Bank, is intended to encourage smallholder agricultural cooperation among the rural farmers and other dwellers in the villages, and to forestall fund abuses. Unfortunately, the expected results are still inadequate as there are feedbacks of bureaucratic frustrations such as with the counterpart funding clause, and repayment lapses from the farmers. Some farmers, as in the PGM UMG case, complains of association by compulsion because of the ten-man-member joint application condition

Smallholder cooperative societies in the study area generally focus on improving the living and working conditions of members and their community at large. Dogarawa, (2005: 8) observes that “As cooperatives cater to the economic needs of their group, they increase the bargaining power of their members, providing them with, among other benefits, higher income and social protection”. In this instance, cooperatives are able to “collectively accord members opportunity, protection, and empowerment which are the practical and essential elements in uplifting them from degradation and poverty” (Somavia, 2002 in Dogarawa, 2005: 8). This is a significant example of tangible benefits that accrue from shared social capital in a cooperative society setting. Whether referred to as ‘benefits, common good, growth, resources, economic development or prosperity’, cooperative social capital holds out the promise of concrete positive change in the lives of its member beneficiaries. Fukuyama (1995), in acknowledgement of this fact, outlines some economic manifestations of group social capital which include “norms and

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beneficiaries are encouraged to organize themselves into economic interest groups called Fadama User Groups (FUGs) and to further form Fadama Community Associations (FCAs) roughly within areas of political wards. The objective of the Project is to sustainably increase the income of land and water users” (Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Cross River State, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> “The CBN defines micro-credit as the provision of credit services to those who are not traditionally served by the conventional financial institutions. It could thus be defined as the provision of small loans that are repaid within short periods of time to those that lack collateral. The major purpose of micro credit is to build up capacities for wealth creation among enterprising poor and to provide sustainable sources of livelihood to rural dwellers” (Fasoranti, 2010:4).

values which facilitate exchange with lower transaction costs, reduction to the cost of information, permission to trade in the absence of contracts, encouragement for responsible citizenship, and encouragement for the collective management of resources”. Confirming some of these indicators, the researchers Fafchamps and Minten (2001) carried out an economic social capital assessment study in a rural African community to explain how social capital improves the functioning of the market. They found that

*Agricultural traders in Madagascar rank the importance of trusted relationships for success in business higher than input prices, output prices, and access to credit or equipment. The authors show that social capital enables traders to reduce search and information costs, and substitute for weak market institutions (118-119).*

Additionally, in another study in 2002, the researchers show that in Benin, Malawi, and Madagascar those individual traders who have more trusted contacts have higher output (Fafchamps and Minten (2002). Similarly, Jones’s (2005) research study in Gambia on social capital and the development of a community-based ecotourism venture, shows that high levels of community social capital are instrumental in the formation of eco-tourist camps for sustainable development. These eco-camps are managed to become sources of revenue to their immediate host communities and to Gambia at large. In another social capital /sustainable development assessment study among the rural community dwellers in Ijebu-ode in Western Nigeria, Mabogunje and Kates (2004:9) of Harvard University, observed ‘bonding social capital’ specifically as the major tie that sustains the development relationship between the trusted scientists, the technologist and the rural community in a network of beneficial interaction. They noted that the relationships were smooth and brought developmental advantages to the community mostly because these technocrats were diaspora sons and daughter who felt uniquely committed to the bond with their community. Krishna and Uphoff (2002: 85-88) illustrate how farmer groups in the Indian state of Rajasthan use local structural and cognitive social capital to build consensus on the use of watershed land, resulting in more productive use of these lands, as well as improved broader development outcomes for the local farmers in the community.

Nevertheless the homogeneity attribute of social capital can also be used as a tool to thwart a positive system as to be discussed in the data chapters. When a handful of persons join together to circumvent the system for their selfish motives; their actions bring suspicion and deface the relationship between both parties (the authentic cooperative groups and the government). Hence the general cooperative aspiration in the community suffers the negative consequences of the so-called bad eggs. In the following section, I will critically review the literature on 'trust' and 'reciprocity' as both constitute key elements that shape the relationships between smallholder cooperative members and their associations with government and community.

### **3.10 Trust and reciprocity in cooperative societies**

Social science researchers and development practitioners associate the idea of trust relationship (such as those performed among genuine smallholder cooperative groups) with a series of synonyms such as goodwill, openness, honesty, benevolence, respect, and competence, all of which are ethical benchmarks (Vangen & Huxham, 2003, 1998). In general, people tend to frame the dynamics of their daily social relationships and interactions in terms of trust. Cooperative societies usually rely on trusted relationships among their members for the achievement of their common set goals (Deji, 2005; Ijere, 1992). Similarly, collective trust, and the norms of reciprocity, directly imparts a sense of character and responsibility to the individual member actors as well as to the general group (Hardin, 2001).

Indeed, trust and reciprocity, as social capital essentials, are epitomized in such smallholder cooperative and farmer groups' practices as borrowing and lending which underscore the value of integrity and confidence within groups. An individual member must show enough commitment to the cooperative or group's collective course before he/she can earn the group's collective trust and support (Hansena, Morrow & Batistac, 2002: 42). On the other hand, the cooperative or group body must remain dedicated in striving to address the needs of its members because that is their prime motive for joining. This trusting relation tends in turn to reassure the confidence which the members hold in their groups (see chapter six). Community life in rural Igboland, as opened up in this research, is characterized by a series of mutually interrelated

social groupings, networks of acquaintances, and kinship alliances. In separate studies, Ofuoku, Enaikele and Nnodim (2008, 16-21) and Ijere (1992) identify the centrality of trust in such webs of co-relationship, arguing that trust is the fundamental ingredient that stimulates cooperation in these rural communities. Similarly, Field (2003) observes that:

*In order for people to cooperate to achieve their goals, they need not only know one another, but also to trust each other so that they will not exploit or cheat in their relationships (p.6).*

In general terms, trust is often considered to be of two kinds: that which is shared among individuals we know and individuals we do not know (UK, office of national statistics, 2001:10). In Putnam's (2000: 23) terms, these two variations are represented as 'thick' and 'thin' trust<sup>32</sup>. As Anheier and Kendall (2002) have aptly put it:

*Thick trust is embedded in highly personal relations that usually form the densest part of an extended network of family, kin, and friendship ties. By contrast, thin trust, social trust, or generalized trust is based on everyday contacts, professional and acquaintance networks, and involves a much greater number of ties that form less dense relations, such as those that facilitate inter-group collaborations (p.350).*

However, in recognition of the ethical essence of trust and reciprocity to cooperation, Tilly and Humphrey in two distinct studies discuss it as either an attitude or a relationship which includes the acceptance of one's vulnerability because it is based upon the positive expectations that the

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<sup>32</sup> Putnam (2000) argued on that, it is on the bases of thin trust or trustworthiness that the notion of the generalized other exist and to the debate, Rahn and Transue, (1998, 543) added the "risk of giving the benefit of the doubt to most people even those not known from direct experience". It could be argued further that thick trust characterizes the stock of trust relationships that build primary smallholder cooperatives at the rural community level, while thin trust connects similar and dissimilar cooperative groups together for coordinated actions. In light of this, cooperative groups tend to "help bring about the conditions under which the 'generalized other' can develop, simply by giving members more opportunities for positive experiences with others under the controlled circumstances of their shared interest" (Anheier & Kendall, 2002: 350). Furthermore, Fukuyama (2001: 4) similar to Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics, approached this distinction from a moral perspective, as the "radius of trust"-a circle of people among whom cooperative norms operate". He exemplifies this by using relationships within Latin American societies, "where a narrow radius of trust produces a two-tier moral system, with good behaviour reserved for family and personal friends, and a lower standard of behaviour in the public sphere". He argues further that this "sort of negative bonding social capital crowds out positive bridging efforts and serves as a cultural foundation for corruption" (Fukuyama, 2001:4). Applying Fukuyama's observation to the Nigerian governmental relationships with its rural communities, it could be argued that the narrow radius of trust exists among the political governing elites who operate a cabal-pattern of corrupt governance that crowds out and undermines the cooperative development outreach to the rural communities in the wider sphere (Ekeh, 1975, Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Smith, 2010: 246).

other will not exploit this vulnerability (Tilly, 2005: 4; Humphrey, 1998: 216). Similarly, Six, Nooteboom and Hoogendoorn (2010:289-290), describe trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability to the actions of another party based upon the expectation that the other will perform a particular action that is important to you.” Accordingly, trust in both views has to do with faith, the willingness to expose oneself, based on one’s optimistic estimation of the other. From another angle, Sako (1998:88) and Humphrey (1998:214) opined that trust can be usefully separated into "competence trust" and "goodwill trust". In the cooperative setting, competence trust would, in their opinion, refer to trusting that the other cooperator or group body has the capability to control risk by meeting their part of the commitments, such as paying dues, whereas goodwill has an emotional acceptance of the moral commitment not to exploit the vulnerable position of the other party. There is no clear separating line between the applications of these two types of trust in organisational interactions as observed by these researchers.

Reciprocity, on the other hand, is seen as an attribute of trust that predicates cooperation. As the researcher Newton (2010: 203) argued “it’s rather included as one of the constellation of synonyms through which the significance of trust could be captured”; hence, it is associated with words such as mutuality, empathy, civility, respect, solidarity, toleration, and fraternity. Furthermore, Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr (2005) offer more in-depth discussion of the concept of reciprocity. They note:

*Reciprocity is a propensity to cooperate and share with others similarly disposed, even at personal cost, and a willingness to punish those who violate cooperative regulation and other social norms, even when punishing is personally costly and cannot be expected to entail net personal gains in the future (p.206).*

Reciprocity, like trust, in Gintis et al’s, (2005) opinion, bestows on participants in a cooperative relationship the mutual obligation to act in co-responsive ways to whatever they receive from the cooperative group and failure to do so warrants punishment from the group. This supports adherence to accepted norms within groups where some of these norms require dedicated work towards common ends in which benefits are shared among the contributing group members (Gintis et al, 2005). Reaffirming this point in another way, the authors van den Brink & Chavas

(1997) and van Bastelaer (2000), add that in settings where certain behaviour is expected from individuals for the benefit of the group, social pressures and the fear of exclusion can induce these individuals to provide the expected behaviour. They cite an example where rural farmers have resorted to their networks and exerted concerted pressure to prevent the individual diversion of irrigation water. In rotating savings and credit associations, “the costs of default include social mechanisms that extend beyond the domain of the association into community-wide sanctions such as peer pressure and social ostracism, which affect every aspect of that individual’s social and economic life” (van Bastelaer 2000:6). For the rest of the discussion on this sub-topic, I will be looking at socio-political trust as pertaining to smallholder cooperative group interaction with the government and administrative heads.

### **3.10.1 Socio-political trust**

While social trust is seen as the desirable horizontal trust between equals in groups such as cooperatives, political trust is the vertical trust between the citizens and the political authorities of the state. Newton<sup>33</sup> (2002) notes that:

*Political trust has the same theoretical relationship to political capital, as social trust has to social capital. The relationship is confused by the fact that, just as there are many synonyms for social trust, so there are many for political trust such as civic-mindedness, participation, citizenship, political interest, and involvement, including tolerance, the ability to compromise, and confidence in political institutions (p.205).*

However, Newton indicated further that as social trust is acknowledged as a necessary factor for honest social life in communities, so is political trust for stable civic and political life (Newton, 2010). Political trust is argued as a reflection or an evaluation of the political outlook of an area; hence a high trust scores indicates that the political system of an area is performing well while a low trust score suggests the contrary (Newton, 2001). In accordance to Ekeh’s two publics

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<sup>33</sup> I acknowledge the insights from the works of Kenneth Newton, a social science professor at the International Foundation for Adult Education (IFAE). Professor Newton is an avid blogger and contributor to the institution’s weblog and to the European Social Survey Education Net (ESS Edu Net) website. Some of his works can be accessed on <http://essedunet.nsd.uib.no/cms/topics/2/>.

theory, Kuenzi (2008) traces this relationship between social trust and political trust in an Afrobarometer research, noting that:

*Political institutions determine the framework in which individuals interact in communities, the quality of institutional acts (policies) will largely determine the extent to which social trust is likely to flourish in a particular context. (Pp.2-5).*

In Nigeria for example, the corrupt and dysfunctional state of government institutions such as the military, police force<sup>34</sup>, and the civil service ministries has eroded public trust (bridging social capital) in their functions. Rothstein (2000:44) argues that “people’s perceptions of the fairness and efficacy of governance institutions are critical determinants of interpersonal trust in communities and the state at large”. Similarly, Levi (1996:46) advanced that “if the citizens believe that their government institutions are fair and effective in punishing dishonest, exploitative behaviour, they are more likely to trust others”. The reason behind this connection as Rothstein (2000:44) argues is that “fair and effective government institutions create a disincentive to engage in dishonest, unlawful behaviour because individuals engaging in such behaviour are likely to be punished”. Thus, Kuenzi (2008:3) submitted that “people have good reason to expect that others (most people) in the society will behave honestly in their dealings with each other because the state institutions support such behaviour. Several other studies carried out especially in the United States and Japan found support to this notion that the political institutional environment affects social trust and cooperation in the communities (Yamagishi, 1988; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005).

However, the emergent scenarios from the rural communities in Igboland that this research is focussed on, are dissimilar to all those identified above. In those developed societies, the government and its institutions are efficient; hence they deliver the socio-political goods of governance to their people and earn their trust and loyalty in return. Their citizens are less apprehensive because they trust their government’s commitment to provide them with Maslow’s

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<sup>34</sup> The Nigerian Police Force is a major government institution charged with the responsibilities of preventing crime, protecting life and property, enforcing law and order, and maintaining peace and other regulatory activities among the citizenry. Unfortunately, these responsibilities, in reality, are now denuded by corrupt motives and activities. This, in effect, has increased physical insecurity in Nigeria, endangering the lives and property of citizens, and implicitly affecting the entirety of the social fabric in Nigeria (Oluwaniyi, 2011: 68).



three basic safety-net needs (food, shelter and clothing) to which I would add 'security'. With these major basic needs provided, the citizen can then concentrate more on establishing new, or improving their old bonds to better standards than paying heed to petty deceitful temptations. This gives the government the conducive and friendly environment to do more, as long as they (the government) remain honest and dedicated to their supportive role, thus reinforcing the synergy of the bonding and bridging relationship between the people and their government. Unfortunately, the discussed scenario above plays out differently among the people of my research focus. Beleaguered by a dysfunctional people-government relationship, the people anticipate little or no support at all from their government. Political trust between the people and their government is relegated to the background. As Garuba asserts: "in culturally cohesive communities, even though political or generalised trust with the government institutions is low, interpersonal specific trust remains high among the community dwellers" (Garuba 2006: 17). In accordance with this observation, the weakness of the state institutions and the failures of the government, rather than discouraging the rural populace, strengthens their survivalist resolve to bond together in forging ahead through invented alternative means. Some follow the honourable path of genuine smallholder cooperative formation and sustenance where self-supporting ventures are practiced while others deviate to crafting out means to exploit the pathway.

### **3.10.2 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the thesis's theoretical foundation of social capital from the research perspectives of both western scholars and African sources, in order to provide a balanced academic groundwork in addressing my research questions. I discussed the social capital concept as 'ugwu' along with its cooperative and social network processes in a rural community environment while drawing on my practical field experience and several secondary sources as guide points. The indispensability of the concept of power was also considered particularly its ascription to issues of economic relevance in the groups. Group resources such as pooled finance, harvested crops and cottage mill businesses are seen as valuable power assets to the groups because they guarantee income that enables the groups to pursue commonly set goals and helps alleviate members' immediate cash worries. Additionally, I discussed Ekeh's (1975)

theory of the two publics in relation to the nuances of power and its governance in the research area. This helped in providing a better grasp of the socio-political scenario that led to the development of the study's questions and observed cases that would be further elaborated on in later chapters. Since trust and reciprocity are considered the key attributes of the social capital theory and argued to be the driving force in cooperative sustenance, I decided to undertake a critical examination of how these two significant factors are being played out in shaping as much as regulating membership relations in cooperative groups.

However, researches about social capital and cooperative formations in rural communities are usually set against the backdrop of addressing conditions of poverty and development needs in the designated communities. The identified needs are addressed through coordinated tangible supports that translate into simple economic empowering benefits for the rural community participants. I therefore, discussed the essence of cooperative social capital in the light of this economic benefit. The research evidence of all these theoretical analysis will be fully invoked later in the fieldwork data discussions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

This chapter of the thesis overviews my fieldwork which evaluates the functions and internal operations of smallholder cooperative societies in Owerri North/West Local Government Areas, as they strive to achieve collective and individual progress. In the course of this exercise I observed closely certain attributes that have sustained the acts of interpersonal and group cooperation in the area. I also investigated the people's response to the idea of formal cooperative formation vis-à-vis their 'ugwu' cultural communitarian lifestyle through formal interviews and questionnaires. During the interviews, respondents were enjoined to discuss freely some of the challenges that they experience in the course of their cooperative involvement and benefits therein.

Undertaking a research as germane as this in Nigeria and Africa in general, calls for the adoption of combined methods. The odds against research success in Nigeria include scarcity of print-data, social phenomena like gender sensitive issues and certain cultural/traditional constraints, all of which raise the stakes for this research study. A researcher must understand the terrain of the study, and a local perspective may be important to this strategy. As Franz Fanon recommends "African development will only take shape around the struggle of its people; that struggle is also expressed by and lived through the daily experience of its people" (Fanon cited in Nwanesi, 2006:110). For the participants the research was a welcome development as it afforded them the opportunity to express their opinions and tell their stories of subsistence against the odds of Nigerian economic hardship and corruption. All the oral data were transcribed and used in developing the discussions that are elaborated in the following chapters.

The first section of this chapter discusses the research design, scope of the thesis, methods and the nature of the population being studied. The second section details data collection techniques, and describes the reasons for adopting the 'mixed pattern technique' and subsequent transcription of the qualitative field data. Finally the last section discusses my role in relation to

my insider and outsider position as a researcher. It then describes specifics of the data distribution and classification, a respondent's taxonomy and the analysis strategy. I also discuss how my personal networks supported the fieldwork, as well as the limitations of my research.

#### **4.1. Research design**

Research design is the researcher's plan of enquiry that puts interpretive paradigms into motion so that a phenomenon can be understood in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 22, Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002: 426). In order to investigate the phenomena of trust and reciprocity (social capital - *ugwu*) as practiced in rural community groups among the Igbos of this research area, I chose to study smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups out of the many CBO groups, because of their popularity in supporting their members' economic ambitions and commitment towards their community's development goals. Also, because the government considers smallholder cooperatives as rural development agencies in policy decisions they are (unlike other groups), officially acknowledged. As a local from the research area, I have insider knowledge about the cultural observances and collective mannerisms of the people; I also worked in the area as a researcher, which inspired my interest in the workings of the '*ugwu*' dictum as a cooperative social capital practice within the communities. To understand the reasons for this form of cohesion, sustenance and membership support within the groups, I framed my research questions around these issues. These are addressed through qualitative and quantitative mixed-method questionnaires, in-depth interviews and direct participatory methods. I also sought insights into why the cooperative pathway is often abused in the area and actively partook in some of the functional groups' events especially meetings and farm activities. I utilized my interpersonal networks and connections with persons in the community groups, universities in the state and government offices in order to expedite the research process. In some instances I sought direct referrals to persons and groups that I needed to contact for some specific purposes which I will discuss later.

## **4.2. Scope of study:**

Goertz and Mahoney (2009:307) explained that delimiting the scope in a study helps to put restrictions on generalization and maintains stability in the definition and measurement of the core conceptual entities. Theoretically, my investigation bordered around the performance of ‘ugwu’ as social capital within smallholder cooperatives including concepts such as self-help, gender, empowerment, civic and traditional governance/leadership that make up the rural development debate. I selected samples from the 26 communities in Owerri North and Owerri West. These two regions qualify as rural but with impacts from urban development and rural-urban migration.

## **4.3. Research methods**

As Hammersley (1998:75) argued, “Selected research methods should be based on the goals and circumstances of the research being pursued”. Therefore, due to the intricate nature of my research, I employed mixed methods<sup>35</sup> which provides more comprehensive, insightful and logical results than either paradigm could obtain alone (Greene, Benjamin & Goodyear, 2001:317). Both survey and in-depth interview strategies complemented my secondary sources. Additionally I utilized these methods to produce case studies<sup>36</sup> (individuals and groups) and was influenced by participatory action research.

Before I started my PhD, I assisted cooperatives with building motivation and knowledge to help them address their daily problems. I worked for Crojip Nig Ltd, a private rural development research organisation located in Owerri which has since ceased to operate because of the death of the director. Crojip was involved in research liaison coordination between the government, the locals and sometimes with international development organisations (through the government).

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<sup>35</sup> “Mixed methods research is the form of study that mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study or sequentially in two or more studies” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17). The quantitative element did not address all the subtle aspects of the cooperative function and successes introduced in discussion with participants.

<sup>36</sup> Case study, as Yin (2009) and Gilham (2000) observe, investigates contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts in order to answer specific research questions while action research according to Dick (1993) pursues both action (change) and research (understanding). Sometimes called participatory action research; Burns (2007:20) notes that “it involves the process of actively participating in organizing change whilst conducting research”.

They scheduled logistics for government ministries which deal with rural development such as agricultural, health and educational programmes. I was involved in most of the small scale researches amongst the locals in the rural communities for the implementation of projects such as the 1998 initial phase of the ‘Roll Back Malaria and Immunization’<sup>37</sup> project in Imo State. Crojip was contracted by the Imo State arm of the Federal Ministry of Health to organise liaison with the rural locals for the execution of the health programme. So I, along with my colleagues, put out Radio/TV messages and organised visits and awareness events/shows at the different grassroots levels in the communities. With this consistent communication and our availability, the people came out en-mass to join in the programme events. We first identified leadership caucuses based on the various groups within the communities, and challenged them to coordinate inter-group participation for the programme’s related events such as community road/market sweeping, garbage removal and recycling, bush clearance, (stagnant water drainage) and yard fumigation exercises to control mosquito breeding<sup>38</sup>. The follow-up vaccination exercise was executed in this same way. Carrying out exercises such as this gave me practical insights into rural community organisation and the state of livelihood in these communities; to the locals, it projected me as a ‘development worker’ and researcher but one from within whom they could trust for honest support. I adopted similar strategies at interacting with my research participants as I elaborated under sections 4.9 and 4.10.3.

#### **4.4. Quantitative tool and implementation**

Prior to the field exercise, one of my key worries was how to identify the most appropriate tool(s) that could capture the concerns of the rural respondents that customarily communicate in cultural Igbo idioms and proverbs and convey their thought to my academic audience without losing the meanings in translation. Hence I felt the burden of my role as a researcher and intermediary between the worldview of the local insiders and the expectations of the outside

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<sup>37</sup> **Roll Back Malaria** is a World Health Organization sponsored programme that was launched in Nigeria in 1998. The WHO ran the programme in partnership with the UNICEF, the UN Development Programme and the World Bank. The promoted target of the programme was to halve the global burden of malaria by 2010.

<sup>38</sup> “Mosquitoes can live in almost any environment, with the exception of extreme cold weather. Many permanent water mosquitoes can also breed in containers that collect and hold water, such as wading pools, buckets or toys left outside” ( <http://www.mosquitoworld.net/mosquitohabitats.php#ixzz2eMXGE25F>)

scholarly audience. I also needed the chosen tool to possess the flexibility to allow my respondents free expressions as they wish and at the same time minimize the risks of unintended bias in the interaction.

I therefore chose to structure my questionnaires after the Social Capital Implementation Framework (SCIF) developed by the World Bank Social Capital Thematic Group (2005) for studying social capital in rural development cases in local communities. The framework offers a double tool for operationalizing social capital in fieldwork research, viz. The Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) and Social Capital Integrated Questionnaire (SOCAP IQ)<sup>39</sup>. While (SOCAT) is a multifaceted integrated tool, designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at different levels of household, community and groups, the (SOCAP IQ) tool aims to generate quantitative data on various dimensions of qualitative social capital data (World Bank, 2013). The tools offer probable scenarios and questions on the subject of interest in order to draw responses/reactions from participants. The SOCAP IQ tool was first tested in rural Albania and Nigeria in 2002. The pilot test reports found the tools to be useful in the sense of capturing the participants' inner feelings such as trust, integrity, reliability, vulnerability and collective commitment values that would usually be overlooked. However the tool was criticised for being too elaborate. Considering the in-depth nature of the social cohesion and communitarian support traits practiced within the pilot study groups/areas, I adapted aspects of the two frameworks in creating my own version of questionnaire.

Both the (SOCAT) and (SOCAP IQ) tools present lists of categories from which the questions are developed. Instead of adopting the five listed categories (Groups and networks, Trust and Solidarity, Collective Action and Cooperation, Social Cohesion and Inclusion, and Information and Communication) that the SCIF breaks social capital field study into, I designed my study to follow three adapted dimensions including: membership motives and group trust, government outreach and network support, cultural values (ugwu) and cooperative struggles. These tabs were marked in the questionnaire as internal and external problems; they take into perspective the

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<sup>39</sup> I am quite aware of the difference in the size of the World Bank research and the resources available to me. Hence I adopted only a few dimensions of the Social Capital Integrated Questionnaire (SOCAP IQ) in my fieldwork questionnaires, which met the limits and scope of my enquiry.

background factors that necessitate the study. The first section of the questionnaire enquires about membership motives and the choices members make in their individual and group associative processes within the societies. It also seeks to understand the extent of members' allegiance to their groups and how trust acts are practiced within the groups and in the community. The second section questions the nature of the relationship that exists between the smallholder cooperative, their government and the community support networks. It also provides insight into the support mechanisms available to the smallholder cooperative societies. The last section of the questionnaire dealt with the crucial issue of cultural values that identify 'ugwu' as a cultural synonym of the social capital theory in Igboland. It investigates its adoption and application in the studied smallholder cooperative groups.

The two key social capital attributes (trust and reciprocity) were highlighted in all the questions as the most relevant parameters that influenced most of the experienced field outcomes. The questionnaires used Likert scale patterned questions as Rubin and Babbie (1995 in Gray & Kraenzle, 1998:2) suggest "to ascertain the degrees (in percentage) of the belief in specific thoughts, ideas, and/or attitudes". There were follow-up open ended questions asking respondents to specify their positions if their responses didn't fit into the given closed categories. These choices of response-type suited the educational level of most of the rural respondents, who are minimally literate. Furthermore, considering the ever-busy schedule of these rural respondents, I framed the questions in such a way that they could tick boxes to select their responses in a few minutes. There were also the interviews (with probes) for those that had the time and wished to add some more information. The researcher and his team were ready with pens and paper for note taking and a tape recorder for whoever felt he/she had an important message to give orally. These additional interview responses constituted the overlaps recorded in the interview responses as to be discussed under sub 4.10.1 (see interview table 8).

#### **4.5. Research team and personal network in Nigeria**

With limited financial resources, I carried out the fieldwork with assistance from a research team comprised of three former colleagues from my past job at Crojip Nig Ltd. These former co-



workers who are university graduates of economics and sociology respectively willingly cooperated with me, helping to make the fieldwork a success. They did not ask for any financial reward and all their assistance was based on reciprocal norms of goodwill. There were no personal conflicts of interest or interference with their job schedules as they were duly permitted by the office to help me carry out this work based on the support of my former employer, the owner of the business who would have granted me an interview for my thesis if he hadn't died. (That was an instance of social capital usage in its most practical sense). I provided the required work materials like paper, note pads, pens and pencils, cassette recorder, tapes and other needed logistics like transportation and snack breaks.

Besides the contact which I have with these former colleagues (two males and one female), I also have a cordial but formal relationship with at least two university professors and two senior lecturers at my alma mater Imo State University in Owerri and I interviewed them. Furthermore, from contacts developed during my employment at Crojip, I established formal links with some smallholder cooperative workers at state, local government council and village group levels in addition to the other contacts made (see qualitative respondent section 4.10.1, table 8.). All these people, especially at the local government (supervisory coordinators) and the village primary levels (executives and ordinary members) were very helpful in the data collection process.

#### **4.6. Primary and secondary data bank**

While doing fieldwork at Owerri, both primary and secondary data were collected. My foremost preoccupation was to visit and interact with the smallholder cooperative societies at their different locations. For the secondary data, I liaised with the office of the Cooperative Department under the Ministry Of Public Utility And Rural Development Owerri in the New Owerri secretariat, in order to access data on the smallholder cooperative societies in such categories as location, group types, operations, registration, membership populations, sex and each group's administrative officials. I later grouped these smallholder cooperatives and their focus data into tables according to their business types and models, such as agricultural (extension farmers) and non-agricultural cooperative (multi-purpose cooperatives.) Secondary

data were procured at the cooperative offices at both state and local government council levels with the assistance of key informants and former colleagues. Further copies of print-data were also gathered from the following Imo State government wings of these federal government ministries, including the 2007 census data list from the two Local Government Areas being studied. The ministries are:

- The Ministry Of Women Affairs & Social Development Owerri.
- The Cooperative Department Office (CDO) (state and local government).
- The National Population Commission (NPC) office in Owerri.

#### **4.7. Sampling**

Sampling consists of selecting a subset of the population to represent the entire population in a study. According to De Vaus (2002:70) the goal of sampling is to “mirror the population it is designed to represent”. With the data of 70 cooperative societies from the two Local Government Areas, I employed a mixture of probability and non-probability sampling methods following these stages:

**Stage one:** From the list of 70 general cooperatives, I purposely<sup>40</sup> (non-probability sampling) separated 26 operative groups (13 per Local Government Area) from the many dormant groups in the register; then I wrote the names of these functional cooperatives societies on paper strip-balls and placed them in two bowls representing the two Local Government Areas, as my prime goal was to investigate the operation of social capital and networking within functional smallholder cooperatives. I also did sample opinions from non-cooperative members (from defunct nominal cooperative groups) as detailed in the qualitative interview section in order to achieve balance in the perspective.

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<sup>40</sup> “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Merriam, 1998: 61).

**Stage two:** With the paper balls ready, I used the ‘ball pick’ method of simple random sampling to pull out seven samples for each area from the two bowls. I picked seven even though I only had the resources to study five or four apiece so that I had two or three ‘standbys’ in cases where the sampled group was not reflective of the target characteristics. The important thing was that the characteristics of the randomly selected samples were consistent with the characteristics of target population. This enabled me to make an informed analysis based on the sample. The research intended that each of the respondents would be able to address the issues as presented in the questionnaires and other follow-up discussions. I also checked to make sure the villages of the chosen cooperatives were representative of the different village-communities in the two Local Government Areas being studied.

**Stage three:** I approached five sample groups from Owerri North and four from Owerri West and requested the respondents to freely give me referrals to any group they felt was needed to complete my study. I had two referrals to contact CNZ (ED ladies) smallholder cooperative in Owerri North and another to contact EBD smallholder cooperative group in Owerri West; these referrals were already represented in my chosen sample. The independent or traditional non-extension farmer groups were chosen for convenience out of the 6-10 in the study area. Generally due to time and meagre resource factors, my group member participants could be described as a small self-selected group of respondents but representative of the parent population of smallholder cooperatives in the target location.

#### 4.8. Nature of the population

Table 2 Cooperative society/Farmer groups

<i>Cooperative/Group type</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Registered Agricultural cooperative (modern)</i>	5	4	9
<i>Traditional Non-extension Farmer Groups</i>	1	1	2
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>

The research studied 11 groups in total; (nine smallholder cooperative societies run by farmers and two Traditional Non-extension farmers groups) from the two Local Government Areas. Despite being registered as agricultural smallholder cooperatives, cooperative societies in the study area do not stick only to the business of agricultural enterprise. Instead they choose to run more flexible operations while still fulfilling their agricultural and food production obligations. The cooperative societies additionally undertake other businesses such as lock-up groceries shops, home and vocational skill training like bead making, clothes making, welding, crafts, gardening etc, small scale production factories and rental businesses. The same pattern goes for the non-agricultural smallholder societies (even more broadly). The group's nomenclature and classification mostly comes into active play in their relationship with the host government, as when they are seeking funding or receiving assistance like basic agriculture training registration, supplies, improved seeds or agricultural extension education from the government.

#### 4.9. Response rate

Table 3. Questionnaire distribution and return

<i>QUESTIONNAIRES</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>TOTAL NO</i>	<i>Missing/diff</i>
<i>1. Ques. Distributed</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>2. Ques. Returned</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>3. Ques. Responded</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>4</i>

In order to approach the target, smallholder cooperatives, my team and I joined the fortnightly cooperative meetings at the local government headquarters and their various home and farm locations. Unfortunately, my field research took place within the period the different community's cooperative groups were facing-off with their local government authorities over the venues for their fortnightly meetings. The groups complained of the distance in commuting to and fro the headquarters and the stress of forgoing their day's business each time they were to attend the meetings. They requested the Local Government Area's cooperative coordinators to move the meeting venues closer to their homes and farm locations; but the coordinators on the other hand had their own grudges with the government over unpaid salaries and transportation allowances. Hence the fortnightly meetings venues were still being held at the same places

during my research period but with fewer cooperative members in attendance because of the noted complaints with the government. I therefore was able to distribute fifty questionnaires at two meeting periods and followed up with interview appointments at the participants' homes and farms. Out of the 50 questionnaires, only 34 were returned and four of these questionnaires were returned without any response. Sixteen questionnaires were discovered to have been lost in transit and I had insufficient time and resources to re-contact these people in their home villages. The returns and misses were understandable as it was a very difficult and tense period for cooperative affairs in the area. The population of the questionnaires filled out was small but are consistent with the target population of the study as confirmed by my previous work experience and that of my colleagues.

The unreturned questionnaires were treated as if consent to participate in the research had been declined. During the follow-up meetings the bearers of the four unanswered questionnaires explained some of the reasons for their failure to respond. The reasons included bad eyesight/needling glasses, poor night lighting, resentment at the government, too tired after work and literate children not at home. Others were just too busy to consider questionnaires, but they willingly granted me/us interviews instead (three from Owerri North and one from Owerri West) as will be discussed under the qualitative method section.

#### **4.10.0. Characteristics of respondents/participants**

Out of all the listed respondent characteristics in the questionnaire, I considered three as the most essential in the analysis because of their importance to the smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups' membership and their relevance to the research study. The three are as follows: location viz. Owerri North and Owerri West, member's status viz. single, married, widowed and separated/divorced and member's sex viz. male or female. The following table shows the characteristics of the cooperatives studied and the relevant questionnaires.

Table 4. Smallholder cooperatives/ Farmer groups' locations.

<i>NO</i>	<i>Cooperative/group name</i>	<i>Group population</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>total</i>
1	<i>CNZ EDL COOP.</i>	55	4	0	4
2	<i>CJK FARMER'S COOP.</i>	120	5	0	5
3	<i>PNR VTR FRM'S.COOP.</i>	25	2	0	2
4	<i>GTD FARMER'S COOP</i>	35	2	0	2
5	<i>IDT FARMER'S COOP</i>	15	2	0	2
6	<i>OGH EBD FARMER'S COOP</i>	110	0	3	3
7	<i>UGM PGM FARMER'S COOP</i>	10	0	2	2
8	<b><i>EYM OLK FARMER'S GROUP</i></b>	22	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
9	<b><i>NDM CME FARMER'S GROUP</i></b>	32	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
10	<i>BGT W/WS FARMER'S COOP</i>	18	0	3	3
11	<i>PTG IGT FARMER'S COOP.</i>	12	0	3	3
<b><i>Total</i></b>		<b>454</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>

(The **bold faced groups** are the independent farmer group participants)

Although there are many similarities in the comparison of the two Local Government Areas some very distinctive differences that separate the regions are general population and land mass (see chapter one). Owerri North had a longer interaction with the colonial forces, resulting in the area having more schools, churches, and eminent personnel in government and private businesses than Owerri West. Of the 30 respondents from 11 participating groups, 17 were from Owerri North and 13 from Owerri West as illustrated in the table above. The next table shows the status of the respondents.

Table 5. Respondents' marital status

<i>Member status</i>	<i>Coop/Group type</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>single</i>	<i>Farmer's Multipurpose Coop (Mixed)</i>	1	0	1
<i>married</i>	<i>Farmer's Multipurpose Coop (Mixed)</i>	12	9	21
<i>widowed</i>	<i>Farmer's Multipurpose .Coop (Mixed)</i>	2	2	4
	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26</b>
<b><i>Net Total</i></b>	(Including the 4 Indpdnt. Farmers)	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>

(Note: The independent or traditional farmer groups were excluded from the marital cross tabulation for identity protection reasons and because they are few in the study area)

As could be seen from the frequency table five above, 21 cooperator participants out of sampled 26 excluding the four Independent participants (two each from both LGA's) were married at the time of this research. Four were identified as widowed and only one as single. Separated/divorced recorded no response because divorce cases are quite uncommon in Igboland and prolonged spinsterhood or bachelorhood is viewed with scorn in the culture of the Igbos (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994:242). Most smallholder cooperative societies in the studied areas put being married as a condition for membership in the society, excepting for rare cases. A young prospective candidate has to be 'vouched for' by his family group member(s) and supported by his strength of character proven by his serious decision to settle<sup>41</sup> into married life. Among the Igbos of both sexes, marriage equates to maturity (in many ways), character and the ability to shoulder responsibility, and these are some of the criteria on which societies base membership qualification.

Table 6. Respondents' sex cross-tabulation

<i>Cooperative/Group location</i>	<i>Cooperative/Group type</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>FM Mixed Coop</i>	6	9	15
	<i>Ind. FM s Group</i>	0	2	2
	<i>Total</i>	6	11	17
<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>FM Mixed Coop</i>	5	6	11
	<i>Ind. FM s Group</i>	0	2	2
	<i>Total</i>	5	8	13
<i>Total</i>	<i>FM Mixed Coop</i>	11	15	26
	<i>Ind. FM s Group</i>	0	4	4
<b><i>Total</i></b>		<b>11</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>

The table above indicates that more women than men filled out the questionnaires. Owerri North, however, having a bigger sample population, recorded more participants of both sexes than Owerri West. There were no male independent farmer group respondents sampled at either local government areas. This was because there weren't many active male members in the group

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<sup>41</sup> If a young man has not decided yet to settle down to a married life, it would be hard to get anyone even the family members (parents) to vouch for his admission into the group. The scenario is different with the girls because they marry and leave their homes. But if they don't they will still be considered under the same conditions as the young men. However, I haven't noticed any such cases yet of a spinster joining the same cooperative group as her parents. If an accepted young man is found later to be unwilling to settle into a married life, he is expelled to join an age grade or club instead because these are usually more flexible 'integrity wise' than smallholder cooperative societies.

category. Most are retired, unfit or just not interested, dismissing the practice as a ‘women thing’ (see chapter six). Hence I was able to interact only with a few elderly women members.

Table 7 Family characteristics and membership averages

<i>Local Government Area</i>	<i>Membership Duration</i>	<i>Membership of other Groups</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>Age of eldest child</i>	<i>Status</i>
<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>15 yrs. plus</i>	<i>2 groups</i>	<i>6 children</i>	<i>22 years</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>13 yrs. plus</i>	<i>2 groups</i>	<i>3 children</i>	<i>19 years</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>AVERAGE</i>	<i>14 yrs. plus</i>	<i>2 groups</i>	<i>4 children</i>	<i>20 years</i>	<i>Married</i>

Respondents were discovered to have spent at least an average of 14 years or more in cooperative and farmer group functions. The longest membership observed was occasioned mainly by the independent farmer groups (traditional) and some of the transitioned traditional gender group-cooperative societies which have been in existence for as long as the village-communities can remember. Members belonged to no less than two groups and had on average 4 children, with the eldest child of 20 years of age or more. There weren’t many differences in these attributes related to Local Government Area as can be seen from the table above.

#### **4.10.1. Qualitative method and implementation**

Qualitative technique affords the researcher and the respondent the platform to interact in a free conversational manner. I prepared sets of open-ended questions which served as probes or guides in the one-on-one conversation. The responses were taken down as notes or recorded on tape for later transcription. Scheyvens and Storey (2003:38) acknowledged that “qualitative methods are used to explore the meanings of people’s worlds, the myriad of personal impacts on impersonal social structures, and the nature and causes of individual behaviour”. The method gave my respondents the freedom to tell their stories at their own paces and in their own fashion. There were several issues<sup>42</sup> in this thesis that cannot be analysed quantitatively, including the

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<sup>42</sup> Some of these unquantifiable issues border around the group’s bonding-trust characteristics such as participative zeal, goodwill care, integrity, reliability, vulnerability, collective commitment, reciprocity, membership, inclusion, feeling of security, confidence, and solidarity. These trust attributes can be better identified in practical acts or narrated as experienced by the respondent.



respondent’s views on problems facing smallholder cooperatives and community cultural values. The table below details the distribution of the interviews; there were overlaps from smallholder cooperative members who filled in both the questionnaire and granted interviews. Some who could not respond to their questionnaires because of some of the stated personal problems like bad vision were happy to be interviewed. These extra interviews consolidated my observations and enriched my data. For ease of identification, I classified my qualitative respondents into six different groups.

Table 8 Qualitative respondents (interviews)

	<i>Research Participants</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>total</i>
1.	<i>NON COOPERATIVE MEMBERS</i>	15	12	27
2.	<i>NETWORK SUPPORT e.g [DIASPORA]</i>	2	2	4
3.a.	<i>GOVT-COOP ADMINSTRATORS</i>	2	2	4
4.	<i>COOP- MEMBER LEADERS</i>	5	2	7
5.e.	<i>INDP. FARMER GROUP LEADERS</i>	1	1	2
6.	<i>ORDINARY COOP MEMBERS</i>	14	10	24
	<b><i>TOTAL RESPONDENTS</i></b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>68+3</b>
3.b.	<i>UNI/TERTIARY INSTRUCTORS</i>	3		71

The research was based on **30 Questionnaires** and **71 Qualitative interviews**, shared between the two respective Local Government Areas. From the 30 questionnaire respondents, 24 persons as shown in the table granted me/us qualitative interviews in addition to the four that had agreed to do questionnaires but failed, then later agreed to give interviews instead. Next I will discuss the first three key types of participants that were interviewed (a, b, and c1 and c2) as represented in the table above.

#### **4.10.2. Qualitative respondents**

##### **1. Non-cooperative community members**

I interviewed 27 persons that I categorised as non-cooperative members in the research. This group were adult community members who were either former members of defunct nominal smallholder cooperative groups or belonged to various other CB groups and network associations other than the smallholder cooperative groups that I was working with. Some participants without mincing words agreed to have partaken in the ad-hoc proliferation of smallholder cooperatives in the past. The participants were selected purposely from the communities of the participating cooperatives in the two local governments of Owerri North and Owerri West. The criterion was to ensure that the respondents were informed members of the research communities, old enough to respond and give relevant information about the smallholder cooperatives and any other issues that could be required of them regarding smallholder cooperative operations in the area (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 695-728). The interview questions or probes were *unstructured and open ended*, so the respondents freely expressed their opinions. The 27 respondents were met at different locations as I observed markets, shops, bars, play grounds, churches, farms and river sites and I arranged for interviews at their convenience. These respondents provided the outsiders' view for a balanced perception in the research, and they gave much in-depth information about smallholder cooperatives which might otherwise have eluded the researcher.

##### **2. Network support groups**

A total of four participants were interviewed in this category which comprised members of the other CB groups in the communities, such as home development groups, diaspora groups, age grades, religious groups, philanthropists and donors groups. These groups are the different external resource groups that assist the progress of smallholder cooperative societies and their various communities (as mentioned earlier in chapters two and three). Nwagbara (2007)

described this supportive attribute among the Agbaja-Igbos of old Aba province as the community spirit and sentiment of helping the town “to get up<sup>43</sup>” (p.150).

Igbos maintain very strong affinity to their natal community, directly and indirectly through membership of community development oriented groups and associations in their country homes as Nwagbara (2007) noted. Membership of one of these groups is a form of ‘ugwu’ - social capital that benefits the participating members, so people endeavour to belong to more than one group, depending on how much resources and time that they have to commit to their chosen group(s). I interviewed two members, each from the first two groups below viz. (home development group<sup>44</sup> and a diaspora group) in the two Local Government Areas. Some of the interviews were done on face- to-face contact while others were done by phone and internet chats. I was able to sit one-on-one with a diaspora respondent from Owerri North while on a visit to New York at his home; while another from Owerri West granted me an interview on Skype from his base in London. The two participant network support groups are as follows:

**Hometown development groups:** These are non-cooperative development groups operating in the communities; resident in either the village communities or the urban areas. Usually they operate as home development or progressive clubs. In the area of study, they are called unions, not to be confused with groups such as trade unions, but like a local Rotary or Lions club. They are usually community members with successful careers and professional backgrounds, such as businessmen/women, tradesmen and government civil servants from the community. They champion a lot of self-help development projects for their various home communities.

**Diaspora groups:** This group is formed by the communities’ sons and daughters who are non-resident in their home communities, but assist their natal village communities in championing development causes. They operate from foreign countries as the case might be. These groups are

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<sup>43</sup> ‘To get up’ here means to develop.

<sup>44</sup> Multi-membership in community groups is practiced in Igboland. People belong to more than one group of overlapping definition. For instance, a diaspora member may also be a member of his or her age grade and belong to his/her community’s home development group. The researcher, besides being a diaspora member in his community also belongs to two other groups in his home community. Such is usually the nature of membership commitment to community development affairs, and a general sense of identity and belongingness among the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria.

found all over the cities and overseas countries wherever a few native sons and daughters of the communities are found (Onyebueke & Ezeadichie, 2011). They maintain strong links with other like-minded groups from their community, spread across the globe. Fadipe (1970) and Uchendu (1965) both described the rich associational lives of Yoruba and Igbo separate ethnic communities in Nigerian towns and cities, and reported that many of the organizations had judicial, convivial, and mutual-help functions. They have since become even more numerous and effective, often financing an array of public works and services, such as roads, clinics, schools, utilities, and the like. In some areas they have emerged as the legitimate 'apex' groups of the community's associational life.

**Age grades:** These are groups of people born on the same year or within an age range bracket. They are very popular in the research region and in Africa at large; they are numerous and active in virtually everything. Groupings could be found from ages as low as elementary school age graders to octogenarians. There are sometimes separate gender age groups. The researcher is also an active member of his own age grade group back home in his community (Nwachukwu, 2001).

**Philanthropists and donors:** These are the good spirited individuals who have the welfare of the communities at heart and feel moved to assist in any possible way when prompted. They can be friends, colleagues or acquaintances of eminent community sons and daughters (the **mega** social capital **ugwu anyi** as discussed in chapter three), from within or outside of the country. They form a major support block for community development in Owerri as in all Igbo land. I categorised both local and foreign Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)'s with an internal linkage under this group.

**Religious groups:** These are the faith-based groups found in different churches such as Catholics, Anglicans, and Evangelicals etc. In the study area the Catholics and Evangelicals are in the majority. Members of this category reside in their home communities and worship at their separate chosen churches, contributing their quota towards the development of their communities as requested of them by the local community authorities. Such appeals are usually announced at

the churches at the end of Sunday services and depending on the nature of the appeal members are expected to respond individually or collectively.

### **3. a. Government-cooperative administrators**

I have termed this respondent group *cooperative administrative group* because it contains the employed workers at the local government council and state secretariat. Most are government workers and tertiary school teachers who may or may not be smallholder cooperative members themselves in their home communities, but because of their job descriptions it is expected they have useful insights into the functions of cooperative societies (see chapter two). I was able to hold interviews with four participants in this category viz, (two government cooperative office employees from each Local Government Area). The four persons interviewed were cooperative supervisory coordinators<sup>45</sup>.

**3.b. University instructors (Professors):** they are the teachers and professionals who assist in the enhancement of cooperative development works in the rural communities. They are usually incorporated by the government into planning cooperative development programmes or contacted directly by the rural groups themselves. I interviewed three persons in this category as cooperative administrators.

### **4.10.3 Conducting interviews**

As the fieldwork developed, in-depth interviews proved to be the main technique for collecting oral data from participants. This is because in-depth interviews are particularly useful for gathering different points of view, interpretations and finding the story behind participants' experiences. They offer participants the opportunity to express themselves in a way ordinary life rarely affords them. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:49), describe in-depth interviews as “interactional episodes that transform the interviewer and respondent into coequals who carry on conversations

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<sup>45</sup> A coordinator may or may not be a cooperative member but he/she oversees cooperative administrative functions in the local government and liaises between the village, the local government council and the state. The coordinator has no power of making or altering decisions as these are handed down from the federal office to the state and down to him/her at the local level.

about mutually relevant, often critical, issues". The adoption of in-depth oral interviews in operationalizing my fieldwork opened up unique avenues to understanding the locals better and provided a chance for the respondents to partake in the shaping of their history, as Korieh (2006) noted during his fieldwork among his own towns-men in Igbo land:

*It (in-depth interviews) most importantly, gave peasants an opportunity to participate in the production of knowledge about themselves and their communities, and provided a view into their lived experience and survival strategies (p.239)*

This observation of Korieh tied with my own community focus as I studied and recorded the dynamics of the people's communitarian support system. One-on-one discussion with a respondent opened up a world of in-depth heart-felt stories better than any survey, observation or other quantitative tools could have done. It assisted me to understand better the true conditions of their everyday struggles to survive and sustain economic activities in the present day Nigerian Igbo village community setting.

### **Interview locations**

In order to maximize the interview opportunity, I made sure that the respondents chose their preferred relaxed atmosphere for the interviews. Besides the few who were interviewed at the Local Government Areas headquarters, the rest were at different sites and times as they chose; homes, offices, business places and farms etc. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992:73) recommended, they felt completely comfortable about paying attention to the interview questions and responding to each one of them appropriately. I had to drive through the erosion-dilapidated roads into remote farm households in the villages to keep appointments. Sometimes, where the roads are not motorable, I walked or paid a motorcyclist (Okada<sup>46</sup>) to commute to the remote locations. Weekday appointments at the farms, lock-up shops and small cottage mills were scheduled between midday till 3.30pm, because during this hour, activities at the cooperative shops and cottage mills are slow or simply halted, while the farm activities pause briefly due to

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<sup>46</sup> An **okada** (also: **achaba**, **going**, **inaga**) is a nickname given to motorcycle used for commercial transportation or hire in Nigeria. The name *okada* was borrowed from Okada Air, a Nigerian local airline that is now defunct.

the high temperature and humidity from the African sun. This break provides an avenue for lunch, gossip, or resting from the morning toils. Usually, interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes of steady talking with intermittent jokes and laughs<sup>47</sup> over issues and topics. These jokes and laughter, as (Nwanesi, 2006) observes, “Lightened up the situation when respondents seemed lost or hesitant to respond to questions”. The weekend appointments were scheduled between 4-5.30 pm. Generally I made sure to avoid being outside on the road at night because of the safety situation. It gets very dark in the villages at night because there is no electricity. By visiting the villages, this time with the researcher mindset, I was able to gain a better understanding of certain activities that occur in the villages, and which I previously never noticed, for instance the dry season river-bank vegetable farming exercise. When I was a little boy, growing up in my village in the 80’s, I remember following my mother to the farm several times to work at her portion, so now the entire exercise makes more sense to me as I reflect while listening to the cooperators’ stories. Following the action research/participant observation precepts I undertook farm walks with the cooperators in their farms. The experience was very reminiscent for me especially as I had grown up in the area as a child and was used to the rural farm life-style. At other times I visited some of the local cooperative cottage mills and industries where farm produce, such as palm heads, melon, and cassava produce are processed, and finished products are sold. I toured the fish farms, goats and pigsties, and on one of our visits I decided to join in the chore of helping to feed the animals. Such interaction provided me with the opportunity of participating directly and understanding better the routine life-style of a local smallholder cooperative member. At most times, in keeping with the local norm of hospitality, the farmers gave us some of their produce as gifts, so we always had our car trunk stuffed with different food gifts even live chicken.

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<sup>47</sup> In an African setting, humour may be particularly appropriate. Jokes and laughter have been so much a part of African culture that they are indispensable in any activity. The more desperate the problem or situation is, the more Nigerians for example make a joke of it. But that is not to say they are not serious people but sometimes people’s predicaments had been so sad, so tragic, that the only way to keep from crying was to laugh. Thus, my use of this phenomenon in my data collection was not to exploit my respondents but to follow a pattern of interaction in Nigerian society. Failing to do so, we might have been accused of humorlessness, or worse, of taking ourselves too seriously, unable to make others associated with us or around us comfortable. A popular Nigerian musician ‘Fela Kuti’ described it as “SS”–Suffering and Smiling.

Furthermore, I maintained minimal control over the conversation allowing the respondents to lead the way, but nevertheless encouraging them (interviewees) to relate their story experiences and perspectives that are relevant to the problems of interest in the research (Burgess, 1982; Fife, 2005). While this process was in progress, respondents' reactions and body language, such as gesturing and facial expression, were calmly and respectfully observed. At some points in the discussion I noticed some respondents get aggravated, especially when explaining the frustrations felt in their relationship with the government (as referenced in chapter three). These gestures communicated the unspoken details that the respondents could not completely divulge or control (Nwanesi, 2006:120). However, I ensured that the conversation was steered back to calmness and all information given was properly recorded and written down through the entire exercise.

### **The insider and outsider positions**

One of the issues that I had to grapple with in the course of my fieldwork research was the polemic question of 'insider and outsider' positioning. Collet (2008:2) opines that the problem regarding the insider-outsider debate in social research is most accentuated by the notion of groups. This creates the situation where insiders are differentiated from outsiders based on their group affiliation, wherein anyone outside the group in question is deemed to be an outsider and anyone inside, an insider. The consideration of these two categorical positions of the researcher as an active participator is necessary for the successful completion of any field research exercise.

The sociologist Robert Merton (1972:15) in discussing the insider in research, personified the position as "an Insider, one endowed with special insight into matters necessarily obscure to others, thus possessed of penetrating discernment". Hence my position as a native son from the same local government area of my research bestows on me this privileged status of an 'insider-insighter' with a proper understanding of the customs and worldviews of the groups focused on. Victor Uchendu (1965:9), an Igbo anthropologist whose work has been very influential in understanding Igbo society, argues that "the 'native' point of view presented by a sympathetic foreign ethnologist who knows the natives is not the same as the view presented by a native (son



of the soil)". While both views are legitimate, Uchendu advocates that "living a culture demands more than knowledge of its events, system, and institutions; it requires a connection with these events and with an emotional attachment to cultural values and norms only an insider can possess" (Uchendu, 1965:9). Kim Choong Soon (1990) elucidates that "fieldwork in one's own culture allows the researcher to develop more insight into the culture because of familiarity with it and to arrive at abstractions from the native's point of view". Soon (1990: 196-201) explains further that "one does not have to learn another language or understand a different way of life, and one may have little difficulty in developing rapport". Similarly, in his study of the Ewe people of modern Ghana, Godwin Nukunya (1969) postulates that his connection with the Ewe opened doors which might be closed to outsiders. He explained: "because I was one of them and not a 'foreign intruder,' the fear and suspicion, which always lurk in the minds of subjects and informants during social research in general, were almost absent." (Nukunya, 1969:19). The experiences I had while at my former job and lately in my research fieldwork back in Nigeria could be likened to the approaches advocated above by these three ethnographers. Therefore, as the discussion progresses, I will be juxtaposing the above conception along with the understanding and application of the local custom or norms of the Igbos in order to reach the goals of this research. Subsequently, the nature of my research as one entrusted with the role of documenting an aspect of mutual support among my peoples doubled me as both an Insider and an Outsider as Eppley<sup>48</sup> (2006) argued:

*Insider/outsider positions are socially constructed and entail a high level of fluidity that further impacts a research situation. A researcher, by nature, has to have some level of "outside-ness" in order to conduct research. This does not mean that the inside perspective is surrendered; both exist simultaneously (p.16)*

In this perspective therefore, I endeavored to maintain both positions constructively to achieve my purpose rather than keeping a rigid stance following Hammersley's (1998:75) recommendations. Thus, being an insider not only availed me deeper insights into the issues investigated but also exposed my observation to prejudices which my 'outside-ness' as a

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<sup>48</sup> "There is 'othering' in the very act of studying, a necessary stepping back or distancing in varying degrees. There can be no interpreting without some degree of 'othering'. Researchers, then, can be neither Insider nor Outsider; they are instead temporarily and precariously positioned within a continuum" (Eppley 2006).

researcher checked (Bridges 2001:371). As an insider conversant with the practice of Igbo cultural norms of trust and reciprocity (social capital traits), I could quickly pick out these expected indicators from a participant/s story before ever he/she could finish. But then as a researcher, I would have to shelve that inside knowledge and allow the respondent to exhaust his/her story in case there were new developments such as personal experiences and other unknown variations/views that his/her story could be bringing to my study. Thus, I was faced with the task of maintaining what Obioma Nnaemeka (1997:2) called “a balanced distance between alienation and over-identification”.

On the other hand from the perspective of an outsider position, I noticed some smallholder cooperative respondents especially those that weren't familiar with me or my research team's past work records with cooperatives, were hesitant at giving us full cooperation in the investigation process. We had to re-assure them of our identities and research purpose aided by the cooperative supervisory coordinator's reassurance at the headquarters before they agreed and invited us over. We later realized their apathy towards us was because they thought we were from the government. Also, certain information was hard to probe as an outsider unfamiliar with particular respondent situations especially the women participants; such questions bordering on marital status and number of children<sup>49</sup> are a case in point. Questions on these two issues are most

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<sup>49</sup> According to Basden (1966) **Ilu nwunye** (marriage) “has a foremost place in Igbo society. It looms upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled”. Since the Igbo are a patriarchal people, marriage is deemed an indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. Children occupy the central point in Igbo marriage. The first and foremost consideration is the fertility of the couple. Parents long for this and the father of the family requests this every morning in his kolanut prayer. The mother begs for it while making prayers to her *chi* especially during the annual festival. In other words, if you ask the ordinary Igbo man or woman why he desires to marry, the spontaneous answer will be: “I want to marry in order to beget my own children, to get a family like my parents”. This love for having children is manifested in Igbo names such as the researcher's *Nwachukwu* – a child is of/from God or God's child, *Nwabu-uwa* - a child is the entire world to me. *Nwakasi*, a child is priceless, most precious; *Nwaka-aku* or *Nwakego*, a child out-values all money, all wealth; *Nwadi-aguu*, a child is desirable.

Basden further supports this view with this remark: “men and women are mocked if they remained unmarried. A childless woman is regarded as a monstrosity”. This idea is still present in the Igbo society today. A childless marriage is universally recognized as *chi ojoo*. On this Basden again comments: “A childless marriage is a source of serious disappointment and sooner or later, leads to serious trouble between man and wife”. The position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes really secure after the birth of a male child. At this stage she is specially welcomed as a responsible housewife in her husband's extended family and *Umunna*. In fact the birth of the child gives her the title of wife; before this time she may be said to be a wife only in anticipation. The fate of a sterile woman is a very hard one indeed. Not uncommonly she is made the object of conversation and ridicule by some of her female neighbours. If an occasion for a quarrel arises, she gets the

sensitive and could lead to hurtful feelings if proper clarity of the respondent's state is not ascertained before approach. So I was most careful in dealing with that.

Furthermore, as an Insider it was easy for me to choose patterns and interrelations that an outsider would not contemplate or would even consider unnecessary. For example, having grown up in the custom and culture of my community, I am aware of the importance of simple norms such as greetings and how these greetings<sup>50</sup> could be harnessed to achieve results especially in close community environments as theirs where almost everyone knows everyone. Consequently, my insider status reduced most of the interactionary frictions I would have experienced if I were completely foreign to the research area. For instance, I/we joined in freely to participate in most of their meetings sessions and some groups even made uniforms for us as a mark of acceptance, pride and identity (documented in the pictures). We occasionally received food/produce gifts like corn, yams, cassava and fruits as souvenirs from farm visits. Basically, during the course of my data collection, I made a point of interacting with as many of my potential contributors as possible. I randomly initiated conversation with people within any slight opportunity I had with anybody that I knew who knew the study communities without giving away my purpose. Of course some discussants (non-cooperative participants) know me but had no idea of my present academic research. So I did not disclose my research identity and purpose but kept the conversation as informal as we would ordinarily be in a playground setting. Generally people willingly told and shared their stories of success and disappointments from group affiliations and these helped to shape formal interviews.

Information tapped from this source was rich and vital, revealing the actual reactions and feelings of the discussants who know the communities at first hand. The discussants acted and conversed freely without any form of nervousness, shyness or hesitation. They assumed I faced a similar situation as a fellow local. The insights from these encounters acted to confirm the understandings gained from the taped interviews and suggested issues to follow up in formal

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most painful telling off. Her women rivals would call her *Mgbaliga, Nwanyi-iga* (lit. the sterile woman, the barren one) sterile monster who has her maternal organs for mere decoration".

<sup>50</sup> According to Umeasiegbu (1969: 35), tradition has a very strong hold on the average Igbo: and one of the important traditions is that people should greet elders.

interviews. Ultimately, no ethical standard was breached, as participants were not unfairly coerced into participating. In fact, each participant was capable of making an informed decision regarding participation in the conversation. Participation was purely voluntary. In this environment (that is like the soccer playground, river side), the discussants weren't bothered about breaches of trust conditions, because it was a temporary setting and an entirely public environment. Nothing was said which could not have been said to anyone in a public setting like a market, bar, playground etc. The possibility of such conversation resulting in persecution or any form of damaging consequence(s) was completely unfeasible.

Asking for consent to research participation in this setting (without the type of preliminaries used for interviews) would have made people wary, cautious and uncomfortable as they might expect repercussions from the government. Nonetheless, no direct participants' identification have been given in the thesis from these informal discussions. In addition, it is necessary also to point out that this research would not have proceeded without the approval of the University of Canterbury's Ethics Committee (Ref: HEC 2010/02). The adherence to the guidelines is non-negotiable. According to these guidelines, "researchers whose work involves human participants will conduct their work with appropriate regard for ethical principles and indigenous cultural values, and in accordance with the Treaty of Waitangi<sup>51</sup>". Some of these principles and values include: justice, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect. In undertaking this study, each of these principles has been observed to the letter.

#### **4.10.4. Arrival and pilot test**

Before leaving New Zealand on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, I sent out electronic copies of the questionnaires to my colleagues to translate into the Igbo vernacular language and print them out. They are experienced researchers and we stayed in touch on Skype all through the translation. Next, reminder notices were sent out to all the known active consenting smallholder cooperative societies, university personnel and cooperative administrative workers at the state

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<sup>51</sup> A Treaty signed in 1840 between the New Zealand Maori people and the British Crown to honour the rights and privileges of both parties. The treaty has been controversial and is purported to be the immediate basis of the British annexation of New Zealand.

and local government including the supervisory coordinators. So with everything set, I arrived and spent one week gathering secondary print data from university libraries, government and non-government parastatals such as, Ministry of Public Utilities and Rural Development, the state and local government cooperative offices, National Population Commission office, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Owerri, Imo State. On the 21<sup>st</sup> June (Monday), we gathered<sup>52</sup> at the Crojip office and reviewed and photocopied the required number of questionnaires before setting out to the field to conduct the pilot tests in the communities of the sample cooperative participants. At least one respondent each was chosen from the participant groups (cooperative and farmer group members, network support group and cooperative administrators).

Normally, for Crojip field-research, the questionnaires were collected back immediately after a scheduled visit or meeting with the pilot respondent, but in this case we had a one week gap before the return visit because we envisaged situations of delays and unsuccessful first appointments. On our return a week later, we collected the questionnaires and held brief face-to-face interviews and discussions on their opinions of the research procedure. When this pilot test data was gathered, it was analyzed and the tools checked for accuracy, clarity, purposefulness, grammar and relevance to the subject of study. Through their comments a better face value and content validity was established (Nworgu 1991; Ovie 1997). For instance it was noted that due to the translational language difference, some of the issues noted in English meant different things in the Igbo language, so in such a situation I had to adopt synonyms or words that are nearest in meaning to explain to the participants. Another interesting point is the ability of Igbos to use figurative expressions, idioms and proverbs in describing issues. As Chinua Achebe (1958) writes in the famous Igbo novel *Things Fall Apart*, “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”. It is common for Igbos to express themselves using proverbs. My respondents especially the elderly ones expressed their opinions in a very few words of idioms and proverbs, leaving me to deduce the meaning; hence it is very necessary to have insider knowledge. This art

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<sup>52</sup> The owner of Crojip Company was a friend of my in-law; he was actively involved in the initial contingent plans and so arranged to excuse the three colleagues from their normal official schedules pending my arrival. Unfortunately he died before my arrival, but the management went ahead and granted his request for the colleague’s assistance before the business discontinued.

of communication is synonymous with the Igbo traditional belief in wisdom and knowledge and it is representative of most African ethnic societies (Van Allen, 1972). Culturally, in Igboland, adults in a conversation do not ask each other to explain the meaning of the ‘idioms or proverbs’ used in expressing opinions. An Igbo proverb sarcastically has it that “*onye aturua ilu kowara ya, ego ejiri luo nne ya furu okporo* - *literarily meaning - “whichever adult a proverb is told to and later explained for, that his/her mother’s dowry is a waste of resources”* (adults in the Igbo culture are expected to be smart at grasping issues expressed in the idioms of the culture). For an Igbo adult to partake efficiently in a conversation, he/she has to be proverb-smart and minimize asking questions that would be deemed foolish or risk taunting his/her mother’s reputation. The entire fieldwork took about 8-10 weeks to be completed.

#### **4.10.5. Data analysis:**

As noted above, this research adopted the mixed methods approach. Describing criteria for data analysis in mixed research Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2010:4) note that “qualitative and quantitative analyses can be conducted in chronological, sequential or concurrent order (or mixed analysis)”. I started off my analysis by separately classifying the transcribed qualitative data into themes and attributes in accordance with my research objectives/questions. Identifying these themes and attributes helped me in organizing the quotations that were instrumental to the development of my case studies. I also noted all the new emergent themes and kept them aside for further discussion.

Since the quantitative data constitute a lesser portion of the returned data in my thesis, I used the descriptive method from the SPSS<sup>53</sup> software in carrying out the first part of the analyses. To ensure effective utilization of this software I coded the quantitative data from the questionnaires into numerical values. Then cross-tabulated the questions and their response categories according to their specific relevance to the themes in the analysis. The responses are presented as simple numerical summation and percentage scores with the intent of representing key processes

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<sup>53</sup> SPSS software is among the most widely used programmes for statistical analysis in social sciences offering extensive data-handling capabilities and numerous statistical analysis routines including those that can analyse small sets.

happening in the two Local Government Areas studied. As I explained earlier in the sampling section, due to lack of resources, my study could not accommodate a broader scope of the state's rural locations for a wider generalization. Therefore consequent to this limitation and the purposive aspect of the sampling process statistical analysis was not carried out. However cross-tabulations of answers by location, group types, member status, sex (gender), group names, and duration of membership were completed to look for unusual patterns. Only some of the variable tables in which the answers differed by the respondent's location (LGA), group type, and gender were reported. From these tables I was able to launch the analysis by first discussing their general patterns, similarities and dissimilarities and then I followed a process of integrating the quotes from the larger qualitative data analysis with the tables to elaborate on the important points raised.

Descriptive analysis describes the personal characteristics of members as well as the groups' structure, conduct, and activities. Agbonlahor, Enilolobo, Sodiaya and Akerele (2012:119) note that, "in descriptive analysis, quantitative outcomes are used to guide the discussion and address the research questions". So I followed this process in chapter five discussions of the data on membership motives and the practice of bonding social capital within the smallholder cooperatives. The process is further adopted in discussing governance and the state of bridging/linking social capital relationship with the government. Using the descriptive approach in mixed methods analysis requires that both data types (quantitative and qualitative) be reconciled constructively in ways that the consequent theme(s) that emerge connect logically to the discussions emerging from the data.

Furthermore, in chapter six, I revisited the transcribed data to expand on important themes in my analysis. I fleshed out the discussions in this section to include an analysis of the relevant field narratives from groups and individual case experiences bearing in mind that sometimes qualitative responses interweave across different topics. Many participants shared their personal and group stories which necessitated my partial adoption of the narrative method of analysis in the process. According to Riessman (1993:28), "Narratives communicate one's experiences in ways that another person can make sense of". I therefore presented the stories in such manner

that the respondent's experiences were intact and reflected their intended messages in accordance with the research mission. Finally, the adoption of mixed data (quantitative and qualitative) though tasking was considered pertinent to the execution of my research as it enabled me to access and use both types of data at the simultaneously in analysis. No other method of analysis could have been more 'ad rem' to the effective management of my data type than this mixed method of case narratives and thematic descriptive analysis.

#### **4.10.6. Limitations of study**

*The productivity of African social scientists is impeded by the shortage of current publications, few publishing outlets, a repressive and hostile intellectual climate, and patriarchal institutional cultures (Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi & Osirim 2004; see also Bennett, 2000; Imam and Mama, 1994; Prah, 2002).*

No academic research is completed without experiencing some bottlenecks in the process. In the course of the study I encountered such shortcomings as:

**Secondary data shortage:** There weren't many printed and published works in the area of research interest in Nigeria, or Africa in general. Although cooperative activities have been going on in the continent for a long while, not much had been written in the specific interest area of my research. Those that are available are usually repetitive. The subject of social capital was almost non-existent in past or present African development publications and necessary statistical data were unavailable at the offices that should rightly hold them.

**Poor statistical records:** I was unable to obtain concrete statistical figures for relevant topics of interest in the research because such documentations do not exist, are misplaced or have been destroyed in corrupt racketeering. Information on government loans disbursement and purpose for the disbursement are 'no go areas' of investigation. The merging of offices and the scrapping of old ones with new replacements adds to this confusion. Even population census figures are politicized and held in bureaucracies. As at the time of research Nigeria was still working with figure estimates from the 1991 and 2004 census data.



**Political inconsistencies:** All through the research period, participants complained of the instability in political/administrative governance in Nigeria. As we have seen in the work (especially in chapter three), politics in Nigeria since independence is marked by incessant political/administrative interruptions, ranging from fraudulent elections, military coups, counter coups, war and chaos. These phases brought about a succession of dictators ordering the affairs of the country with an orchestra of policies and uncertain development programmes until 1999 when the nation transitioned to democracy. The citizenry learnt to be apathetic to everything concerning government unless for immediate benefit and this has affected the trust relationship. This mindset stalled some of my research process especially among those that mistook me/us for the government workers; their agreement to participate was still half-hearted.

**Bias and the tasks of community/family hope:** Being a local son from the communities of research was both an advantage and a disadvantage as I have discussed under the insider and outsider section. I had to deal with bias at every encounter and experience but managed to maintain some level of detachment from what I knew already. At other times my local knowledge helped me understand better certain events like the proverbs used commonly in every communication which an outsider would have misconstrued. Moreso I multi-tasked at coordinating my family responsibilities in New York and Nigeria from New Zealand while at the same time working on my thesis. The obligations of being a community's scholar put me and my family in the community spotlight. I had to deal with this consistent mounting pressure from all angles (the university, my community and family) to finish within the allotted resource time.

**Shortage of funds:** On a personal level, I had problems with the shortage of research funds because my field study was self-sponsored. I had a three-year part-tuition scholarship sponsored by my community, with all the other expenses paid from my personal resources. Considering the huge difference in the currency exchange rate between Nigeria (Naira) and New Zealand (Dollar), this study mission was indeed an up-hill task. However personal savings and family support saw me through. The university financed my fieldwork trip back and forth to Nigeria on a hardship

basis. During the fieldwork, I lived and operated from my family home in the Owerri municipal centre at no cost.

**Poor facilities and infrastructures:** In addition to the bad roads and intermittent electric power supply Nigeria's mobile phone services were unreliable and expensive. Most of my contact schedulings were dependent on the usage of the mobile phone especially to the remote areas. Despite the poor service coverage to these areas I still continued to keep my communication frequent with my participants. I consistently bought the 'pay-as you go' recharge cards for every call and called repeatedly until one of my trials got through; another major expense was fueling the car.

#### **4.10.7. Conclusion**

This chapter was a conscientious attempt at describing the main methodological framework and processes adopted in this research. I made it a point of importance to adopt practical methods that could effectively provide a better comprehension of the issues discussed by the research, alongside the advocated theoretical ideals. Though the task has been challenging the outcome is encouraging, as I was able to gather the necessary data required to respond to my research questions. The strategies that I adopted for the fieldwork were guided by my set research objectives and a curiosity to gather and document the smallholder cooperative life style of the research communities which happen to be my home community too. In the build-up to this chapter; I have tactfully shown an understanding of the various research focus groups/participants in Owerri, Imo State and a suitable method that ensured plausible outcomes from the interactions with these participants. Such methods provided in-depth information on the strategies and measures suitable for addressing the identified problems and uncovering unidentified hidden discrepancies. This enabled me to address my research questions and later make informed assertions on my study group's way of life.

Furthermore, the adoption of mixed methods in the research provided my respondents with the opportunity to fully express themselves in responding to my interview questions. Though the quantitative questionnaires were presented, some of the respondents decided to willingly give

more narrative details than the questionnaires asked, thus necessitating the parallel employment of the qualitative interview pattern alongside the surveys. Morse, (2003) and Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2010:5) observe that both qualitative and quantitative strands can have equal priority (i.e. equal status) with respect to addressing the research question(s), or one analytical strand can have a higher priority than the other strand (i.e., dominant status). So I gave more attention to the qualitative data strand since it carried more information when compared to the surveys, as is demonstrated in the subsequent analysis chapters. Mixed methods afford researchers the flexibility to collect data and at the same time give the privilege to encourage informants to grant their own different experiences without being strained by the sensitive nature of the information (Fife, 2005; Nwanesi, 2006). I found both methods to be complementary with each other and their usage invaluable as the chapters that follow demonstrate.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SMALLHOLDER COOPERATIVES IN OWERRI: MOTIVES AND OPERATIONS**

#### **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter commences the analysis of data returned from the fieldwork. I began the analysis with the data collected on the questionnaire subjects to determine the respondents' motives for joining their various smallholder cooperative societies. The motive of members for joining or forming a group is usually indicative of the nature of the social capital bond or 'ugwu' that would exist within the group. Both gathered data (quantitative and qualitative) types were simultaneously discussed in this analysis following the research objectives (questions) (see chapter one). As Ritchie and Lewis (2003:141) noted, they are necessary to capture the respondent's view and, significant in helping to supply the needed wealth of information for the research.

With the quantitative data constituting a smaller portion of the returned data, I started by cross-tabulating the data to give meaning to the numerical outcomes in percentage scores. Since resource insufficiency and other already stated factors limited my research from studying a broad representation of the general cooperatives population in south-east Igboland, I narrowed my concentration to pointing out how embedded the participating smallholder cooperatives are in their communities within the two local government areas of interest. I discussed how the societies manage to sustain their cooperative tenets and aspirations through membership commitment and support connection to other groups; and the challenges they face in the process especially with the problem of cooperative proliferation as exemplified with the UMG PGM group. It was necessary also that I interview non-cooperative members and cooperative administrators in order to achieve balanced perspectives on my research questions particularly on the disparity in the areas' smallholder cooperative lifespan and other issues under study. Since cooperatives set out to support members in their set economic aspirations, I undertook a brief assessment of some of their available empowering self-help ventures operated collectively and individually by members and the group bodies. I also introduced the case narrative of Akor as a unique youth member of his smallholder cooperative group that has benefitted from his group's

collective stock of social capital. Finally, the assessment included engaging the respondents in a candid appraisal of the availability of such basic government rural development essentials as electric power, sealed roads, running potable water and health centers. I took proper note of any topic of interest that emerged during the entire interview discussions, which I address in the next chapter.

### 5.1. Smallholder cooperative members' motivation

The motivation that is created by need is central in the smallholder cooperative society formation, the possession or lack of which determines the success and failure of any group. Community dwellers from the two local government areas of study may possess different reasons for wanting to join or form smallholder cooperative societies or farmer groups in their village communities at some point in their lives. The reasons sometimes are multi-dimensional, progressive or completely different from the believed exigencies about cooperative formation.

Table 9. Motivation for membership interest

<i>What best motivates your interest &amp; commitment to your cooperative's functions?</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Fame and name(popularity)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3%</i>
<i>Mutual reciprocity</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>27%</i>
<i>Honour and respect</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3%</i>
<i>Self-support and solidarity</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>31%</i>
<i>Community development</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>13%</i>
<i>Access to Govt provisions</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>23%</i>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>30</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>

The above question was therefore designed to investigate some of these possible reason(s) or need(s) that might stimulate membership interest into smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups in the area. Participants were free to select more than one choice from the options or discuss this in an interview. The given options mean different things especially when translated to the local Igbo language. Mutual reciprocity as an aspect of 'ugwu' for instance is

used in the study to represent material and non-material give-and-take sharing/exchange, while solidarity is understood in the sense of group support/unity, involving rights and privileges accorded to a member who needs backup at certain critical moments, such as bereavement, wedding ceremonies and festivities.

Out of the six possible motives postulated in the questionnaire, self-support and solidarity need registered the highest - 31% in total. Discussing this option of self-support and solidarity a participant shared with me how the backing of her smallholder cooperative group helped her keep sane after a devastating death in her family. She said:

*No matter how you look at it, if it were not for my cooperative group, maybe we wouldn't have been here today having this discussion. After the untimely death of my husband in a road accident in 2005, I was left with four kids to take care of, no money after an elaborate burial rite and pressure from predatory in-law family... thank God for my cooperative support. Just thank God... (She paused, I figured she was getting a little emotional and so stopped the interview) (Cooperative respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

The sort of safety nets that this accorded 'ugwu' - 'social capital' bond provide in such dire rural community scenarios as the one above is not easily fathomed by western research and debate. Ordinarily this widow in the west would have filed for social security claims from government, life insurance claims on behalf of the late husband, Medicare, Medicaid and Study Loans and Financial Aid for her children's education, even accommodation. In the Igbo Africa, none of these services is available and so she needs the bond of support from her close relational social capital network. This response underscores and reinforces the interview responses where members were asked to pick from a list of group(s) they belonged to that hold the best hope for their socio-economic progress. This widow in this case was assisted to start a small food vending business with which she supports her family. Smallholder cooperatives and farmer group societies serve members for other social, economic and even spiritual purposes, like holding

church prayer meetings and worship sessions<sup>54</sup> for their members and all interested persons in the community.

The second highest recorded option was mutual reciprocity which is the operational vehicle through which smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups achieve their goals of addressing identified common and individual needs. It scored a combined 27% distributed evenly between Owerri North and Owerri West. The option of access to government provisions netted 23% response from the participants indicating the expectation of many of the area's societies for government engagement with them as partners in the rural development obligation. However it is in this government process of meeting the rural development support needs of these areas that most provided incentives are misappropriated in corrupt collusion between some desperate locals and persons in government.

In contrast to the hopeful opinions received from members of the functional smallholder cooperatives, the non-member respondents painted a pessimistic picture about their outlook on cooperative activities in their area. Through discussions with some of the participants in this category, I realized that many of them were former members of defunct nominal smallholder cooperative groups in their communities. One central point of this respondent group's complaints was their non-comprehension of the meaning and purpose of smallholder cooperative especially in their rural village setting. I found out that many of them lacked the basic cohesive 'ugwu anyi' and wanted to reap instant benefit from their defunct groups at no cost or barest effort. To these ex-nominal coop members, rather than work hard together to build up their groups or maintain a positive constructive effort in supporting their waning groups, they gave-in and their groups collapsed. Analysing these members behaviour from Ekeh's (1975) two publics theoretical perspective, the government agencies in their views are regarded as amoral legacy institutions of

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<sup>54</sup> The church groups and faith-based organisations in south eastern Igboland, combine spiritual roles with socio-economic obligations towards the society. They assist in providing needed guidance and inspirational directives that so many people depend on for forging ahead in their daily lives. Sometimes in extreme cases of indigence or mishap they render support to the victims for a temporary re-start. Churches in the area run charity outfits like orphanages for homeless and destitute children, skill, trade and learning centers and even banks. It would be good to note here that some cooperatives like the CNZ took shoot from minor informal gatherings at the church. The women in post-colonial Igboland are more akin to faith and religious practices than their male counterparts (Rubenstein, 2004; Garuba, 2006).

colonialism to be taken advantage of in order to satiate the interests in the private primordial public considered as moral. In this denial state therefore, their corrupt acts are repeatedly recreated in the system as the cycle continues with the actors feeling no sense of guilt for their actions. For such defunct group members, cooperative business is an opportunity to effortlessly meet their needs through hope on government provision which unfortunately does not happen as expected. The common characteristic of most non-cooperative respondents from the nominal societies is their lofty expectations of government support and provisions. Hence one wonders less why they fail to cope with the demands of forging a genuine cooperative association/performance. It is common knowledge in the country that building expectations based on the promises of the Nigerian government is a sure way to reap failure and disappointment. Interestingly, accessing government promised incentives and provisions were their main motivation for joining and forming their collapsed cooperative groups without which they would not have thought twice about any cooperative idea. Some in the interviewees attested to having high official connections to persons in governance that in turn gave them promises and readily used them for their fictitious group formation ploys. While the study village communities in Owerri have some determined functional smallholder cooperative societies, they also have a litany of these failed and struggling nominal cooperative groups from which most of my non-cooperative respondents were randomly approached. The UMG smallholder cooperative in Owerri West as to be discussed in detail in the next chapter is a typical case in point on this issue of misapplied motivation/intention in cooperative formation and membership.

The rest of the quantitative responses were cross-tabulated based on the participants' marital status because marriage is one of the main criteria of proof of responsibility on which membership assessment for admission into the groups is based. The table below clearly shows the distribution of the responses with the married group out-numbering in all option categories for both local government areas. A single unmarried youth respondent from Owerri North ticked self-support and solidarity as his best motivation in the cooperative. He said:

*It is a good feeling to know that you are being looked after in the same way that you look after others in the performance of your cooperative obligation. Yes! The wider society in our land (Igbo-Nigeria) might be suffering the effects*



*of bad politics but our little values though affected are still preserved in our hearts and practiced at such group occasions of shared care (Coop respondent Owerri North, 2010).*

Table 10. Membership motives and marital status

<i>What best motivates your commitments to your cooperative's functions?</i>	<i>single</i>	<i>married</i>	<i>widowed</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Fame and respect</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Mutual reciprocity</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Self-support &amp; solidarity</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Community development</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Access govt. provisions</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7</i>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>	<b><i>25</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>	<b><i>30</i></b>

The reason/s for joining to participate in smallholder cooperative or farmer group activities could be said to be multi-dimensional, connecting through all the six suggested options and can be developmental, progressively building on new phases of experience and service. Self-support, solidarity and mutual reciprocity were fundamental to the participants especially the widowed members. I took cognizance of the developmental nature of some members' intentions as I let them lead the way in the sharing of their stories. One of the Owerri West respondents unequivocally told me that having achieved five of the six options that she's now in the cooperative to consolidate respect and honour as a leader in her group. She said:

*You know, my son...being a 'child of the cooperative' if I may say so, because I was born into a cooperative family, both of my parents were staunch cooperative members. I attended a cooperative school and married along the same line to an agriculturist. Now I have always been the president of our cooperative group here in this community and a politician as well. So I think I deserve some recognition and respect (Coop respondent Owerri West, 2010).*

This respondent, though still an active member in one of the most successful smallholder cooperative societies in the study area, was conscious of her position, her rights and what she has been working for all the previous years. Her motive as it stands in the smallholder cooperative at the time is more of recognition seeking and she's getting that deserved respect. This underscores

the unique motives in the list of other various reasons for which smallholder cooperative membership and commitment could be based and sustained. The next table discusses operation of trust and reciprocity in the cooperative life of members using acts of ‘money borrowing’ as benchmarks to signal in which of the groups the members belonged and placed their socio-economic allegiance.

## 5.2. Trust and reciprocity operations in smallholder cooperative societies

In this question, I set out to understand how the smallholder cooperative societies perform acts of trust and reciprocity within their various groups and review how these acts are relatable to the theoretical frames espoused in this research. I structured my questions around the target subjects of trust and reciprocity in order to gather reactions from respondents’ different perspectives. From the data therefore, I synthesized out two crucial responses tables that I deemed as most relatable to the question of trust and reciprocity in the groups. The responses are as follows on viz. Borrowing and lending and vulnerability and reliability (trust).

Table 11. Local opinions on borrowing and lending

<i>Which of these groups would you approach first to borrow money from when in need?</i>	<i>Owerri</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>West</i>	
<i>Church group</i>	<i>1 6%</i>	<i>1 8%</i>	<i>2 7%</i>
<i>Gender group</i>	<i>2 12%</i>	<i>1 8%</i>	<i>3 10%</i>
<i>Political group</i>	<i>0 0%</i>	<i>1 8%</i>	<i>1 3%</i>
<i>Cooperative/ Farmer group</i>	<i>8 47%</i>	<i>6 46%</i>	<i>14 47%</i>
<i>Age grade</i>	<i>6 35%</i>	<i>4 31%</i>	<i>10 33%</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>17 100%</i>	<i>13 100%</i>	<i>30 100%</i>

Traditional institutions and faith based groups such as community churches play significant roles in shaping the character and choices of the local residents in the research area. They are instrumental to the nurturing of the ‘ugwu’ interactional ethos in the Igbo culture. Since

respondents in both Local Government Areas hold membership of at least two CB groups and cooperatives in their communities (see chapter four), it therefore becomes necessary that the research identify which of the groups they find most reliable in possible socio-economic support need such as borrowing and lending money. The similarities in the responses are shaped by the sameness of the region's socio-cultural ethos and practices as Igbos. Both village-community areas intermarry, sustaining the familial and relational linkages between the two. Both belong to the same dominant provincial faith groups such as Catholic and Anglican dioceses but with different regional parishes. However the region's community based organisations such as market groups, gender groups, craft groups, community churches and diaspora groups operate distinctively under their different Local Government Area's banners.

The significance of the 'ugwu' as performed in cooperative reciprocity is most epitomized in the acts of borrowing and lending which underscores integrity and confidence in both parties (the individual member and the lending group). These two acts (borrowing and lending) are constantly corroborated in the compassionate teachings of the local community's churches whose congregation come from the village cooperatives and CB groups members. Although the churches and faith institutions in the area are overtly not considered as places of economic exchange, but covertly they initiate such ideas by helping to foster closer ties between members within a community. This according to McCleary and Barro (2006) instils in people the propensity to act honestly or altruistically as motivated by the religious beliefs.

Despite the government/corporate land encroachment occurrences in some sections of the study areas; community life in the unaffected regions is still typically characterized by series of mutually interrelated social groupings, networks and kinship alliances (see chapter three). People still join smallholder cooperative and farmer group organisations for the support that these societies provide them in times of need (Ijere, 1992; Deji, 2005). From my assessment of the participants' responses regarding the borrowing and lending question in all the groups to which they belonged, cooperative and farmer groups garnered the most support, 47% of the total sampled population. Respondents from the two Local Government Areas showed a similar preference, because of the socio-economic importance they place on cooperative association in

their area. Cooperative association in the areas despite surviving a long history of weak relationship with government is still appreciated in the communities as a socio-cultural forum and economic safety net for members. Borrowing and lending in Igbo culture is a sensitive issue because it exposes one borrower's vulnerability to another. For an Igbo to ask for monetary assistance from a non-family member or a group he or she belongs to means he or she has exhausted every other personal and familial option for addressing his or her situation. The person or group approached must be one that could be trusted not to take advantage of the knowledge of the person's 'needy' or indigent status (Okonjo, 1978:71; Olomola, 2002). The Owerri West respondents' strong affirmation to this question resulted mainly from the success of OGB EBD<sup>55</sup> farmer's cooperative society that made up most of the respondents. In Owerri North the two largely church-driven cooperatives viz CNZ and CJK account for the positive response. Judging the gathered responses from Ekeh's (1975) 'two publics theory' standpoint, the behaviours would be ascribed to the moral rectitude compliance in the primordial public where interpersonal interactions are regulated by cultural norms and values with dire consequences for defaulters (see Van Bastelaer, 2000 in chapter three). People in their primordial communities tend to be more cautious of what they do and how they relate with each other in transactions than in the civic public. To default on paying back what is borrowed would attract retributions for the individual and his/her family lineage. Hence people make effort to gain and sustain an untainted image in their communities unlike the distrust and amoral allegiance with the civic public (Smith 2010:8).

Age grade was the next source of loan that the respondents opted for. Both Owerri North 35% and Owerri West 31% indicate a liking or inclination for age grade activities in the area. The other groups' options particularly the church received a few response ticks on this question because some of the participating groups already are offshoots of the church. Age grades in the area operate a comparable support structure to the smallholder cooperatives. Sometimes they are more formidable in some areas than smallholder cooperatives and weak in others. I probed the reasons for the observed dearth of trust and reciprocity in the struggling UMG PGM smallholder cooperative in Owerri West. In response, a member of the group blamed the group's dissonance

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<sup>55</sup> The OGB EBD cooperative society has its incumbent president from the same family as the local government chairman of the area. So the members enjoy some provisions from this patronage connection to government power.

on the convener's adoption of the urban-styled 'high-handedness' and 'instrumental approach'<sup>56</sup> to the business of the cooperative group in the rural area. According to him, the strategy did not go down well with the members, who rejected it, and instead turned to lukewarm allegiance to everything about the group:

*Whether you call it cooperative or farmers association, I don't know what they have told you (referring to the cooperative office at the Owerri secretariat), for the few of us in this, it is like a disposable 'pass' with which to join in waiting for the loan hope from the government. We all belong to our different age-grades and other associations that are more serious and have no business with the government 'shakara'<sup>57</sup> ... (Coop respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

As observed in the field and illustrated in the excerpt above the group's members hold alternate affiliations to other better unified groups in their community. Hence their relegated cooperative group suffers haphazard attention. As Munkner (1995:5) argues, members may compel themselves to remain in cooperatives because they don't have better or comparable alternatives to the group, and once such alternatives are available, they tend to choose them as substitutes. This assertion is more probable when applied to smallholder cooperative society scenarios found in the urban centers than in the rural areas. In other research on cooperatives conducted in the city of Lagos, by Mudi-Okorodudu (2007), a cooperative manager said this:

*We know that members are here to meet their needs, and if they get another way of meeting their needs that is cheaper they will leave the cooperative. And also if they don't have need again they will leave the cooperative... (p.45).*

What exists in such city cooperatives is 'instrumental trust' whereby members see their cooperative affiliation as only a business venture detached from any other socio-cultural connection. Trust is not an issue in these societies and unfortunately they often fade away as soon as they are formed. But in the rural areas the case is different because of the homogeneity and familiarity among the members. Bonding trust is the most essential of all the attributes that galvanize cooperation in the groups in the rural settings. Members are therefore deemed

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<sup>56</sup> See detailed discussion in chapter six.

<sup>57</sup> '**Shakara**' is a Yoruba word that literally means "show off", but it was popularized by 'Fela Kuti' the Afrobeat music legend and it became a household word applied in various Nigerian scenarios and discussions to imply 'unseriousness or mischievous shenanigans'.

trustworthy enough to participate in their community's cooperative activities, to be loaned money (soft loans) from the common stock of the cooperative/farmer group, even without collateral, hence defying the risks of a member defaulting on confidence which comes at a high price to both parties (Okonjo, 1978:67-69).

Table 12. Vulnerability and reliability (trust)

<i>If you suddenly have to go away, would you leave your children or very valuable goods under which of the group member friend's care?</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Church group</i>	3 18%	1 8%	4 13%
<i>Gender group</i>	3 18%	3 23%	6 20%
<i>Cooperative/farmer group</i>	9 53%	5 39%	14 47%
<i>Age grade</i>	2 12%	3 23%	5 17%
<i>Social club</i>	0 0%	1 8%	1 3%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>17 100%</b>	<b>13 100%</b>	<b>30 100%</b>

Trust as an aspect of 'ugwu' - social capital is essential to vulnerability (see chapter three). The acceptance of vulnerability by the trustor presupposes an expected level of reliability upon the available background knowledge of the trustee and his/her competence to deliver what is expected of him/her (Fukuyama, 1995). The participating smallholder cooperative societies and other genuine similar groups in the study communities operate in this model of trust dynamics. Smallholder coop-members are well-acquainted members of their community who could be reliably vouched for by their fellow members in circumstances of integrity.

Vulnerability and reliability as characteristics of trust cannot be quantitatively measured but can be identified in an act; thus I probed on the extent that my respondents trust other member friends from the different groups to which they belonged with their appreciated valuables. The responses gave me a sense of which group they hold most importantly close to heart in conditions of imminent vulnerability. Among the Igbos of the study area, to be considered untrustworthy by one's acquaintances (kinsmen, relatives and the large community) is a

shameful dent on one's character; the negative effect goes beyond the person and damages the reputation of his/her entire family. But with the current poverty and hardship situation in the nation, exacerbated by such stress factors as government's rural land encroachment and parochial political patronage as elicited in Ekeh (1975); many people have deviated to immoral ways of livelihood in their effort to survive.

This development affects public trust in interpersonal relationships in the concerned communities as people learnt to take extra measures to protect themselves. It was no longer enough to trust someone based on open community acquaintance or similarity instead close-knit conditions were required as bases to earn each other's trust such as belonging to the same smallholder cooperative or farmer group, church and gender groups. However, the perpetrators of these deviant acts keep their deeds as discrete as possible from public eye particularly in the village communities.

To the question above therefore, about half (47%) of the total sampled population agreed that they would willingly leave their children and valued goods in the care of fellow smallholder cooperative and farmer group members, indicating the possibility of mutual trust among members in the societies/groups. In the Local Government Areas, Owerri North respondents recorded 53% while Owerri West had 39% of the responses (see table twelve). The difference is so because most respondents in Owerri West grew skeptical of smallholder cooperative association because of the such abuse instances as the UMG PGM leader's rational self-interest behaviour and the perceived parochial patronage from political quarters to the EBD group in this area at the expense of other groups. However, this question opened a wave of interesting reactions from the respondents with some nostalgic memories. A respondent contemplatively said:

*Leaving my family and other material valuables would be a tough decision for me to make. I doubt if the situation would ever arise, but if it ever does happen, my husband and bigger children will be there. But in the worst case scenario... then I would surely be asking a blood relative to take care and if that's not available, then a very close friend that I trust and share things of value with would be my choice. From around me now, I think I could narrow down on*

*such a person from my present cooperative society (Coop respondent in Owerri North, 2010).*

Another elderly participant put it this way:

*Whatever you do in this community you carry your family and immaterial valuables with you always (respect). The cooperative or other groups that accept your membership accept your family and these other valued intangibles; so when an unexpected condition suddenly takes your attention away, be assured that many others whom you would have given attention in the past through your group involvement, would be watching over them for you (Farmer group respondent, Owerri West, 2010) .*

The two excerpts above, although from two different women participants, a middle-aged cooperator from Owerri North and an elderly farmer group member from Owerri West, both share a similar outlook. The elderly participant response captured ‘in a nutshell’ what my investigation was all about. It sums up the Igbo cultural worldview of life in the community (discussed in detail in chapter three). Social capital saves the cost of transaction or cuts down on the expense of seeking the services of regular professionals to play roles that could be informally taken care of by one’s acquaintances (Schmid & Robison, 1995; 59). Similarly in the Igbo community setting, a villager, by forging ‘ugwu anyi’- trust ties with reliable partners and parties or groups, reduces the onerous stress of his/her vulnerability when emergency occasions arise by leveraging from his/her bank of reciprocity. He/she would conveniently leave his/her family and other valuables in trusted hands without having to bother about professional security agents or watch-dog fees. That singular alliance of trust removes a lot of psychological stress and financial expense. Hence the local Igbo cooperator/group member could channel his/her little saved resources to other more pressing needs.

The second most preferred choice from the option list was the gender group. As mentioned earlier, such groups transform into smallholder cooperatives in some communities while still maintaining the gender element as an exclusive women’s wing. Owerri North and Owerri West registered three responses, each totaling approximately 20% on the whole. Pooling resources and mutual reciprocity are baseline features of all the groups and these attributes stream from the communitarian culture of the Igbo people. A respondent used a proverb in the course of our



discussion, pointing out the mutual symbiosis and inter-dependability of life in the Igbo community. She said, “When an animal itches, it goes to rub its body against the bark of the tree trunk, but when a human being itches, he or she reaches out to a fellow human being to help him/her scratch the spot”. This directly implies that we as human beings need each other to soothe and support ourselves at various moments of our lifetime. Finally, age grades totaled 17% and the church group 13%. However social clubs like Rotary, Lions, Omega and Alpha registered the least response (3%) because they were unpopular among the participants in this research who were predominantly rural dwellers. Such clubs have been found to exist in the urban centers and at university campuses located in the state.

Table 13. Reciprocity and group contribution

<i>At each monetary contribution that you make to a cooperative agreed activity, which of these is or near your thought?</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>That it is lost money</i>	0 0%	2 15%	2 7%
<i>An investment like in business</i>	4 24%	3 23%	7 23%
<i>Renewing reciprocity and confidence in group</i>	6 35%	4 31%	10 33%
<i>Giving charity for the needy</i>	3 18%	2 15%	5 17%
<i>Supporting Community development agenda</i>	4 24%	2 15%	6 20%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>17 100%</b>	<b>13 100%</b>	<b>30 100%</b>

The question in (table five) is in consonance with the previous tables on the issues of motivation and the operation of trust and reciprocity within smallholder cooperatives. It specifically inquires about the cooperators’ position on monetary contributions towards the society’s/group’s activities. Cooperators contribute money in forms of levies, dues, registration fees and share capital (equity) towards their group’s set goals. These monies are utilized in propagating the business of the smallholder cooperative to profit the participating members. Beside profit sharing from business proceeds among cooperators and farmer group members, the groups do generally have common propositions set aside to be addressed whenever the financial resources are

available. Such monies usually come in handy after sales from harvested farm produce, where an agreed amount is put aside along with the other projected expenses like bills, wages and goods to be purchased. The remaining dividends are shared in a measure proportionate to each member's share contribution. Often, funds for charitable works are voluntarily solicited during cooperative meetings and members would agree to contribute a certain percentage of their share to such a purpose or pull out the necessary money directly from their personal purses. Food-stuffs, clothing and other essential materials are also gathered from willing donors for planned visitation to charity homes like orphanages. In this way the CNZ (ED LD) smallholder cooperative in Owerri North for instance, is able to sustain the charity wing of their cooperative society. Capital intensive community projects initiated by the cooperative/farmer group or the general community head take a longer period of savings from the group's common purse. This is done in network with other development-oriented groups within and outside the village community such as the diaspora groups.

In response to my enquiry about monetary contribution, 33% of the entire sampled respondents agreed to have the renewal of reciprocity and confidence when making their financial contribution. Reciprocity practice is broad and differs from one group to another. For instance in bereavement or child-birth, the group members contribute a certain amount of money to support the bereaved or celebrating family. This act of support and solidarity 'ugwu' is usually accorded to all members in time of need. A cooperator told me an Igbo proverb to buttress this view of money (wealth) and inter-mutual cooperation saying:

*Onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego - one with dependable human connection i.e. social capital 'ugwu' is preferred to one with bags of money. (People can make money but money cannot replace people). Money is more pleasurable when it is used to touch and change the lives of those around you than isolating oneself in self-indulgences (Coop respondent Owerri North, 2010).*

The perspective of money and its utility will be elaborated in some of the cooperative society cases (chapter six). The respondents saw money as a resource that could be used in the pursuit of bigger shared and individual goals. It is understood better as a means to attain an end than the ultimate end in itself. The Igbo culture like the rest of the African culture abhors individualism

and embraces communitarianism and cooperation but not without its share of challenges as is being explored in this research. Conversely the west extols individualism and capitalism and could be argued to promote extreme profit maximization for a few from the shared effort of many while the latter encourages togetherness and cooperation of everyone for common benefit<sup>58</sup>. For instance in Igbo culture the measure of a person's wealth and respect 'ugwu onye' in his/her community is determined by the number of persons that he/she has helped to establish in either business, school or skill training (Nwagbara, 2007). Hence Igbos confer such titles as "*Ochiri ozuo - one who gathers and raises others or Okpata ozuru oha - one who supports others with his wealth*" on their eminent sons and daughters who have shared their success with others (Nworah, 2007:4). This Igbo culture of support, networking and accommodation of others' needs in the community has been criticized as exacerbating the tendencies for persons in positions of power to engage in corrupt practices and amass wealth in order to fulfill the expectations bestowed on them (see chapter two).

Nonetheless, a handful of the sampled respondents 23% saw their monetary contribution to the cooperative/farmer group business as an investment. This view was similar in the two areas. It is undeniable that a cooperative is a business outfit, but as the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) adds, it is "business with a soul". Community development constitutes a major part of every cooperative's development proposition. It is perceived by the Igbos as a form of socio-cultural responsibility; an opportunity to show identification with the development aspirations of one's rural community (Chukwuezi, 2001:61). Hence in the question analysis it netted a total of 20% of responses, with respondents from Owerri North choosing this option more often than those in Owerri West<sup>59</sup>. Rural community projects such as churches, potable water, roads, health centers and markets are built through such collective efforts involving all homes and adult sons and daughters of the community who are based abroad. A smaller number (17%) of respondents agreed to thinking of charity for all their monetary commitments in cooperative affairs, while

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<sup>58</sup> As referenced in chapter two, this dissimilarity does not imply that the Igbos (African) do not undertake sole entrepreneurial ventures, for they do, but with a different socio-cultural mindset that always considers the root community.

<sup>59</sup> Owerri North has more prominent sons and daughters than Owerri West and so community development proposals receive more support in the region than in Owerri West.

only 15% of the respondents from Owerri West waved the idea of contribution aside as lost money. Having exhausted discussion on the operations of trust and reciprocity in the societies and groups, I took up the next question in the investigation that sought to know why some registered cooperatives in the area sustain in their operations while others collapse, despite the similarity in opportunities.

### **5.3. Sustaining smallholder cooperative operation in the study area**

Registering a group or association with the state Cooperative Department through the local government as discussed in chapter two does not guarantee the survival or sustenance of the new group. It takes collective work and commitment from the members to forge a lasting common cooperative front. Having observed the continued trend of many collapsed and struggling smallholder cooperatives in the study communities, I interviewed both current participating members and random ex-members of different cooperative societies in order to comprehend the reason for the problem in cooperative sustenance and development in the area. The key question was why some registered cooperatives sustain in their operations while others collapse? I recorded several divergent reactions to this question. Most of the blames were directed at the government and the manner that cooperative administration is structured in the state. A respondent in Owerri North reacted thus:

*Inasmuch as the government's only yardstick for ascertaining a group as a cooperative society is through paper registration, there will always be a problem. It is not enough because as you and I know with the current system in Nigeria anybody or group of persons can walk in to the office and apply to get the paper registration proof; of course we all know corruption is a factor in all of this mess. (Non-Coop respondent in Owerri North, 2010).*

The respondent went on to lament that because of the depravity in the group accreditation process, people who don't have positive common purpose or intention for running a cooperative outfit see the registration leeway as an opportunity to achieve legitimacy and position themselves to access government development grants whenever available. Such persons allegedly work in connivance with persons in government particularly those placed in charge of the disbursement of the funds. They circumvent the due processes in order to please their direct interest groups

with the public resource (Stark, 1997, Balogun 2003, Smith 2010). When they finally get the grants, they disappear into thin air to emerge again with their banner name whenever there is any sign of another impending government directed loans or grants. Those of such groups that decide to push their impromptu interest further by attempting the real cooperative society pathway, usually struggle in the process because they lack a clearly planned goal. Some other respondents blamed poverty and the socio-economic state of the Nigerian nation as a major reason that has imbued people with desperation to invent ways of surviving the stressful condition including defrauding government channeled development resources wherever possible. Discussion with such respondents indicated their belief that the government owes them some form of care and support. For such persons, since the satisfaction of the expectations have failed, they therefore see the cooperative pathway as a channel to take advantage of for the provision of needed life sustaining goods. They therefore wangle attainment of registration as cooperative societies but not for any work or growth purpose but as hand-outs. One of such respondent in Owerri West said:

*To not form or join a cooperative group is to be left out or lose out completely. Which other way can any person gain access to provisions from an uncaring and corrupt government like we have in Nigeria if not to do this (referring to belonging to a group). The government owes us as the citizens of this nation some support and care but they don't even budge whether we are alive or dead, so why should I not access the resources if I could? (Non-Coop respondent in Owerri West, 2010).*

Smallholder cooperative societies that are founded on such belief as illustrated above have little chance of surviving because their cooperation is based on falsehood and desperation. Neither the government nor the cooperative institution should be regarded as a Santa Claus project that gives away free handouts to people without a determination to work and grow with what has been provided. The cooperative aspiration comes from within the members to use their available resources to address commonly felt needs and so improve their chances of attaining their individual aspiration. They forge on in this determined goal of theirs with or without external support resources. In addition, it is expected that the government also ought to seek out such groups, and partner with them in order to encourage them in their effort. Many other reasons were adduced by the respondents as to why many smallholder cooperative societies in the area

fail in their operations, such as values and priority misplacement, unseriousness of members, poor planning and articulations of purpose, leadership problems and selfishness in the management of cooperative affairs. By contrast, the few successful cooperatives that this research has worked with in the area put in concerted effort at making sure they get these priorities right or at least to a practicable standard. Most important of the needed qualities are members' basic education and information management.

### **Smallholder cooperative education, leadership and Tertiary support**

The modern day smallholder cooperative society in the rural area requires fundamental leadership training, information and membership education to thrive. The International Cooperative Alliance acknowledged this ideal by including member education, training, and information as one of the seven cooperative principles. Cooperatives in the area generally adopt this principle, but apply them in different manners depending on the cooperative type. It would be ideal if all the members in a smallholder cooperative could be educated at least to the basic literacy level, but where that is not possible, then the executives should at least be guaranteed of better leadership and management of information flow in/for the group. The CNZ smallholder cooperative society for instance, is made up of literate professional women and men members. The society has a membership of people from all walks of life, such as school teachers, civil servants, registered nurses, lawyers, and business men and women, who collectively agree to adhere to their culturally adapted regulations as sculptured from the ICA cooperative principle (Nwachukwu fieldwork, 2010). Efforts that smallholder cooperatives adopt to improve members' information and educational abilities range from long term formal tertiary enrolment at nearby schools to short term informal upgrades (e.g. sending executives to short training workshops, seminars and cooperative educative sessions). Zeuli and Cropp<sup>60</sup>, (2004) note that:

*Besides stipulated meeting periods; cooperative education, among other benefits, is a formidable way of indoctrinating new cooperative members into*

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<sup>60</sup> I wish to acknowledge the insights from the work of Kimberly A. Zeuli, an assistant professor, and Robert Cropp; a professor emeritus of Agriculture and Applied economics, at the College of Agriculture and Life sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-extension, (the co-operative extension), in the United States of America.

*understanding the value of the cooperative society, why it was formed, what it has accomplished and its future goals” (p.55).*

They further argue that members are usually better cooperators when they understand clearly their group’s objectives, policies, and actions. They are more likely to patronize the cooperative business better and stay committed with the cooperative through difficult times; have fewer complaints and offer more constructive criticism and suggestions especially at difficult moments.

Highlighting further the importance of cooperative education and its relationship to cooperative growth, Akinpelu (2008: 36) argues from the poverty and illiteracy perspective, positing that “it seems more credible to say that people are illiterate because they are poor than to say that they are poor because they are illiterate”. To him, both conditions are so intricately interwoven that addressing one without the other would frustrate the process and lead to no success. Illiteracy therefore, rather than being the cause of poverty is the consequence or product of it. He notes further that “To fight poverty among rural illiterate cooperators (societies) requires helping them become, not only literate, but functionally literate, which means combining cooperative literacy skills with social, technical, and occupational training” (Ihejirika, 2012:28). Since rural community dwellers in the different smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups have similar occupations, the educational support partnership of the diaspora, university instructors, and government ADP extension staff, can work with the locals to integrate the terminologies or registers of their occupation into creating a locally-bred literacy program that is easily assimilated by the people (Escobar, 1995; Ihejirika, 2012). The researcher Imhabekhai (2009) in this vein observes:

*The desire and ability to read, write and compute materials in the vocation will motivate the learners for better participation; and the utility of the skills brings about functionality and progress in the vocation or occupation, thereby fosters permanent literacy (p.29).*

Such knowledge, when assembled, will be a local resource that is self-sustainably grounded in the culture and daily life routines of the people as indigenous farmers. Ihejirika, (2012:28) notes further that “once illiterate adults become literate, a new vista is opened in their lives which enable them to plan better, to do their work better than before, to use information from a variety

of sources for a variety of personal, economic, and communal development purposes”. Literacy skills can embolden former illiterate cooperators and adults to think critically about their poor status and seek out ways of ameliorating the poverty effect on their individual and collective livelihood (Ihejirika, 2012). I was able to observe the performance of this educational support partnership during my fieldwork in the study communities. The EBD farmer’s cooperative for instance liaises with the professors of the agric-economic department from the nearby Federal University of Technology for advice and knowledge upgrades. The private collaboration between the smallholder cooperatives and the university enables the university departments to sometimes utilize the farmers’ fields for crop research and their students’ field projects. This relationship combats the pervading illiteracy to build and multiply knowledge for both the cooperative society and the community at large. One of the professors from the supporting university has this to say:

*Presently in our programme we are focusing on educating the cooperator farmers on how to cultivate and manage some of the improved yield species like maize, cassava, vegetables etc. Although the process is slow with minimal progress we are quite hopeful. It needs patience because it’s like starting from scratch to educate someone who has no basic literacy capability but very knowledgeable in the cultural ways and experience. Their ways of doing things are different from the ‘conventional (western) literacy way’ but it’s interesting. (University Professor, 2010)*

The partnership discussed above works well in this university community because of the smallholder cooperative’s inter-personal relationship with the instructing university department. I was uncertain if the local government had any hand in it but considering that the university is a federal institution it is beyond the local government jurisdiction, so that would be unlikely. However, the government ADP agency still works with the cooperative group in other areas of support. The next section of questionnaire analysis focuses on the smallholder cooperative relationship with their regional political and cultural government.



#### **5.4. Smallholder cooperative and bridging links with the government**

Because smallholder cooperative societies are acknowledged as agents of rural development (Birchall, 2004; 2013), they could be expected then to partner support<sup>61</sup> with the government in the provision of opportunities and development needs to the rural areas (see chapter two & three). This being the case, smallholder cooperatives in Nigeria, particularly in my study area, complain of inadequate support linkage with the government. Their complaints, as Okpi (2013) notes, broadly range from distrust of government programmes, agro-input sabotage, financial misappropriation and exclusion from affairs that concern smallholder cooperatives. In fact, agricultural and rural development policies implemented at the local government level where this research concentrates are handed down from the federal offices through the state ministries which control local government functions<sup>62</sup> (see chapter two).

In the bid to understand the nature of the relationship that exists between both parties and the reasons why the complaints have persisted in the region, I interviewed respondents from both parties and gathered resources that would help me analyse and suggest avenues for best practice.

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<sup>61</sup> See chapter two

<sup>62</sup> The federal administrative structure is not always adhered to, but rather is politicized. Sometimes the state governor (mayor) captures designated resource flow for the local government or blocks it from Abuja when (s) he is out of favour with the local government chairperson. This usually happens when both are from opposing political parties.

Table 14. Facilitating Government-cooperative interaction interest

<i>What do you think can facilitate assistance from government and other support network</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Group internal trust</i>	6 35%	4 31%	10 33%
<i>Good record performance(economic achievement)</i>	7 41%	5 39%	12 40%
<i>Prominent members</i>	2 12%	1 8%	3 10%
<i>Nothing works (no relationship)</i>	2 12%	3 23%	5 10%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>17 100%</b>	<b>13 100%</b>	<b>30 100%</b>

The categories<sup>63</sup> in the table above show the respondents' opinions on the sort of internal group attributes smallholder cooperators expect to facilitate links to bridging assistance from their government. Group togetherness (bond) is evaluated by state government supervisors who come annually for a 'cohesiveness check' through the cooperative's record book. This contains the membership registration list, plus meeting and training session attendance records. This culminates in the general performance<sup>64</sup> rating of each particular smallholder cooperative society. Members are usually reluctant over these state government supervisory visits because they don't trust them to be dedicated to the purpose of developing cooperative functions (Field work observation, 2010). This behaviour from the locals frustrates the opening up of further cooperation with the government in the communities and so poses the question of what could be done differently to expedite this needed relationship.

<sup>63</sup> The studied societies and groups anticipate that possessing the first two categories of group internal trust and good record performance should brighten their chances of receiving attention and support from their government. So they work hard at achieving and sustaining the two benchmarks. However these two should be understood from the bonding perspective.

<sup>64</sup> The government's state cooperative supervisors visit annually to evaluate the performance of the cooperatives. As detested as they are by the people, they still give performance feedbacks, which they expect that the government should use. The performing cooperatives are observably the functional ones that are surviving against the odds of Nigerian economic hardship, while other non-performing cooperatives have disintegrated. It is therefore normal for the cooperatives to expect some sort of support after the rigors of supervision and promises of feedback.

In rural communities of Africa, the routine bonding-bridging dynamics of one (bonding) anteceding the other (bridging) as argued in western debates and literatures, does not work, due to weak and complex socio-political structures<sup>65</sup> of Nigeria (Narayan, 1999; Woolcock, 2001; Larsen et al, 2004 and Smith, 2010). Using smallholder cooperatives and farmer group's intra and inter-personal/group relationships among the Igbos, I argue that what really works for the locals is the bonding social capital (ugwu) instead of the bridging/linking social capital bond with the government (see chapter three). Therefore conceptualising bridging without the element of the internal bonding structure doesn't work in such 'thick familial' and politically problematic societies like Nigeria. Unlike in the west, where bridging/linking has particular rules, regulations, structures and surveillance put in place to monitor it, in Africa it is a different scenario. Hence I proposed the emboldened form of 'ugwu'- social capital bond in Igboland, which I termed **dilated or elastic bonding social capital**; this comprises the three forms of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking), advanced mainly by such internal network support sources such as the diaspora (see chapter three). The practice of this form of social capital among the group members in their local communities constitutes a working model of governance in Igboland locally.

Smallholder cooperative associations in Nigeria are massively rural - evolving from traditional-based groups. On registration they are held as autonomous but are also expected to operate within the legislative framework provided by the government as first established by the 1935 Strickland report<sup>66</sup> (see chapter two). In Nigerian rural communities, especially among the Igbos, administrative functions are organised and implemented along traditional lines, thickly guided by norms and customary regulations. There are many traditional governance structures in Igboland such as the 'umunna and umuada' courts, 'ofor and ogu' rights (ethos), 'ama ala elders' college that ensures community equity and within which cooperative association thrives in these rural communities. These traditional structures contrast with the civic government's single vertical structure that oversees the duties of the state's cooperative agencies.

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<sup>65</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>66</sup> The Strickland report in 1935 recommended for government control of the cooperative activities in the colony because according to its British author, the locals would be incapable of running a modern day cooperative society (Arua, 2004; Agbo, 2006, 2009)

However, with the challenges of government corruption in these study areas, the people's trust in their civic government structure is eroded, thereby reinforcing the 'traditional model' as a reliable alternative. Nevertheless the state government still retains its constitutional regulatory powers over every sector of its regional polity, including the jurisdictions that hold the smallholder cooperative societies. Hence, years after independence, various state governments in Nigeria still uphold the recommendations of the Strickland Report but apply them in such a haphazard manner that it distorts cooperative development (Okonkwo, 1989). One wonders why there are so many irregularities in the interaction with a sector that supposedly should have been the prime promoter of cooperative development.

In my inquiry into the facilitating factors for local and state government assistance, I noticed the two options of group internal trust and good record performance registering the highest number of positive responses out of the options listed in the questionnaire (see table six). Forty percent of the participants agreed that a good performance status by a smallholder cooperative society or farmer group usually earned by strict 'ugwu anyi' observance should facilitate assistance and support from the state and local government and network support groups. The option that rated second in the respondents' choice of what would likely facilitate external support was 'group internal trust'. A total of 33% of the respondents agreed to that. This option (group internal trust) upholds the good record performance. A respondent from Owerri West in one of the robust cooperatives (OGH EDB) shared how their group's standing attracts goodwill from external sources towards their group; she says:

*When a cooperative puts in effort to hold their acts together then they can be trusted. It's simple. I think we have put in some strict continuous efforts in this direction and I can tell you, it's paying off. We receive support from our sons and daughters overseas, home development unions and the government as well (Coop respondent Owerri West, 2010).*

Ironically the perspective expressed by this cooperator does not tell the whole story of cooperative/farmer group external support interactions in the region. Many others have tales of contrary experience. The big question then becomes, why is there so much disparity in the reports in the same region? This smallholder cooperative society as one member puts it "receives

local government support and benevolence through the direct facilitation of one of their member's son's connections in the area's council government" (Coop respondent, 2010). This confirms Smith's (2010) observation of corrupt patronage practices that selectively attend to some groups and persons' needs at the expense of others:

*In Nigeria it is a custom that the elite contribute handsomely to each other's private and public project interests through events like launching ceremonies and donations. Most of the donors are usually businessmen who had been awarded or sought major state contracts; or political appointees who owed their own patronage positions to other elites like the governor, chairpersons or aspiring politicians anxious to gain favour (Smith, 2010:252).*

Other cooperatives have less kind words for their relationship with their local and state government for they do not receive nearly the amount of support going to this other cooperative. Most smallholder cooperatives get visits from the agricultural extension staff of the Agriculture Development Programme (ADP). In addition, supposed subsidised inputs and fertilizers are bought from the state government after much effort depending on a group's luck and connections. As one cooperator in Owerri North puts it:

*As you can see for yourself here we do our little best at getting things done our way. We have a very hardworking member followership and most of our outlet projects are in top form. We do all these by ourselves without any dependable government input or support. The ADP does visit but seldomly... on many occasions the government people have even used our group as a front to receive federal loans without giving us anything. But we have learnt our lessons... (Coop respondent Owerri North, 2010).*

Following the federal government's promoted 'agricultural development policy'<sup>67</sup> as elaborated in chapter two, smallholder cooperatives hope that their internal 'ugwu' effort at maintaining a cohesive cooperative group would expedite acknowledgement and attract supportive 'ugwu mba' partnership from the local and state government; however in practice, this has not been the case. Unfortunately the policies have not translated to either improved care or better bridging

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<sup>67</sup> (1) to provide a conducive environment that facilitates cooperative practice and its effective use in agriculture for social and economic development of the rural communities in Nigeria; (2) to promote the development of an effective, efficient and economic agricultural cooperative and use it as a machinery for rural transformation and development.

relationships between cooperative societies and their government. My respondents from within the smallholder cooperatives attributed this to such reasons as corruption, distrust and the discrepancy between governance (administrative) models and the actual situation. The post-colonial Nigerian government, as Smith noted, is fashioned after the top-down federal structure of administration which is susceptible to corruption and incessant abuse of public office holders due to weak and unstable regulatory state institutions (Smith, 2010). By contrast, the traditional model by its cultural tenets such as the 'ugwu' concept is more acceptable and supported by people in the communities than that of the civic government. Hence there is lingering frustration because the traditional structure (though appreciated) is still expected to submit to the civic rules despite its unpopularity among the people. As this respondent puts it:

*If some of these issues that they (government) are dragging and playing around with were to be in our hands, under the control of our traditional management, I am sure the results would have been better. No individual or group from among us can take what belongs to the community without qualms of consequence for such an act... if only they can include us more in our affairs (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

The stalemate caused by this noted discrepancy in governance models has continuously hampered development efforts, especially in rural African communities, as hinted in this study. However, the show of parochialism and patron-clientism in favour of one group over the others discourages positive participation from existing and prospective cooperative members (Ekeh, 1975; Joseph, 1987; Smith<sup>68</sup>2010). On the other hand, the option of having prominent members as cooperators to facilitate relations with the government only received 10% of ticks as few members have high social status and wealth. Care should be taken not to mix up this form of patron-clientism /parochialism mentioned in the group above with the genuine selfless support of other successful sons and daughters of the community towards the development of their home groups and communities. However, the lack of prominent personalities with connections to persons in political positions does not discourage the progress of some smallholder cooperatives

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and village communities. Receiving such assistance whenever available is accepted but people place their hope for progress and support more on themselves, their inter-group connectivity and circling bonds of reciprocity with their natal diaspora networks.

Table 15. On Government trust relationship with locals

<i>Does your coop trust government promises and relationships?</i>	<i>Owerri North</i>	<i>Owerri West</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Wholly trust worthy</i>	<i>1 6%</i>	<i>2 15%</i>	<i>3 10%</i>
<i>Never reliable</i>	<i>2 12%</i>	<i>2 15%</i>	<i>4 13%</i>
<i>Unstable in trust</i>	<i>13 77%</i>	<i>9 69%</i>	<i>22 73%</i>
<i>Depends on / specify</i>	<i>1 6%</i>	<i>0 0%</i>	<i>1 3%</i>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>17 100%</i></b>	<b><i>13 100%</i></b>	<b><i>30 100%</i></b>

This question was intended to directly represent the feelings of the smallholder cooperative members towards their relationship with the government. Participants chose from the given options of wholly trustworthy, never reliable, unstable in trust or depends on (with specification) in depicting their positions. More opinions were gathered verbally from willing people who wished to comment further. A disappointingly high proportion of respondents (73%) divided between the two local government's adjudged trust in relationship with the government and its promises as 'unstable'. That is a huge proportion of disapproval of the government from the cooperatives. The position is quite understandable judging from the history of political manipulations and interferences from government that has left the country's cooperative development in disarray. Agbo (2009:170) argues that government meddling is demonstrated in its policy insistence that "the only way farmers can benefit from government promoted agricultural development programmes is for them to join cooperatives". He referenced past Structural Adjustments (SAP) in agricultural development programmes, such as the Operation Feed The Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution (GR), the Directorate For Food Roads And Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Better Life Programme (BLP), the Family Support Programme

(FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) as detailed in chapter two; these programmes required farmers to join government initiated cooperatives in order to be able to access services. The situation gave rise to the establishment of “ad-hoc cooperative societies” which disrupted the existing cooperative perception in the area<sup>69</sup> (Nweze, 2001; Onuoha, 2001:15). The case of UMG PGM farmer’s smallholder cooperative for instance is a perfect characterization of an ad hoc organisation or nominal cooperative society.

The incursion of military dictatorship into the political affairs of Nigeria, before, during and after the structural adjustment era, left an unprecedented damaging effect on the psyche of the citizens about political governance. Corruption was enthroned, and trust as (discussed in chapter three) plummeted to its lowest ebb. The then political soldiers and their civilian cronies in government debased most of the trusted channels of honest survival for ordinary citizens, such as smallholder cooperative and other voluntary group formations. They recklessly floated patron-client NGOs, cooperative societies and support programmes under the national rural development facade, as conduits for siphoning public money for individualistic ends (Smith, 2010). In my discussion with a cooperator in Owerri North on this topic, he rhetorically asked me:

*Are you asking about trusting the government? That is really a bizarre situation to think about. How can one trust a system that says one thing today and does another tomorrow, or even wouldn't do any at all. It is a hard task indeed. I'd rather keep my fate with my coop society than hoping against hope with those crooks (referring to the government) (Coop respondent, Owerri North 2010).*

Another respondent puts it thus “unfortunately in this case (trust) we have forgotten that there is a government because if they do exist, it’s only in pages of the newspapers and in radios” (Coop respondent, 2010). The option that garnered the second highest response to my question on trust and government was “never reliable”. It scored a total of 13% out of the whole (30) sampled population, 12% from Owerri North, and 15% from Owerri West Local Government Areas. It is actually a very disturbing situation that so many respondents in this research see their host government authorities as very unreliable. This position exudes stronger skepticism than the

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<sup>69</sup> See chapter three for full discussion.



former option of “unstable in trust”; this opinion is shared by even the traditional farmer group societies as shown in the table below. One of the sampled elders of the group added thus:

*Even though we are not cooperative groups, but we have stayed long enough in this land to understand that things are not going the way they should around us here and in the country at large. Everything! I mean everything in the land is going backwards... please tell them to at least see us as human beings if ‘equals’ is too much to ask for. (Farmer group respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

Below is the cross tabulation of the quantitative response to this question on smallholder cooperative trust relationship with the government. This time, the responses were cross tabulated based on the two distinct forms of groups being studied viz. Farmers’ Smallholder Cooperatives and the Traditional Farmers Groups.

Table 16. Group type cross tabulation on government trust

<i>Does your coop trust government promises and relationships?</i>	<i>Farmers’ Smallholder Cooperative</i>	<i>Traditional Farmers Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>wholly trust worthy</i>	3 15%	0 0%	3 10%
<i>Never reliable</i>	2 8%	2 50%	4 13%
<i>Unstable in trust</i>	20 77%	2 50%	22 73%
<i>Depends on / specify</i>	1 4%	0 0%	1 3%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>26</b> <b>100%</b>	<b>4</b> <b>100%</b>	<b>30</b> <b>100%</b>

The apathy towards government in the area causes the locals to loathe introduced programmes as ‘those government programmes’ that should not be taken seriously (Onuoha, 2001). The conditional response option only got one tick from an Owerri North participant. On a further probe about specifics of the condition he explained that for him personally trusting the government depends on the profitability of whatever scheme is on the ground. But trustworthiness is completely out of the question for him in relationship with the government. However, it is, generally believed, as Agbo (2009, 2012b) suggests, that the way out is to start a

process of re-orientation and re-education of the citizenry (government inclusive) about the true values of cooperative practice, with an objective of emphasizing respect for honesty in the relationships between the government and the cooperative societies. Also ensuring that smallholder cooperatives are educated on the prospects and benefits of operating as sole independent business organizations owned and controlled by the owner-members with minimal dependency on the government (Agbo, 2009:170). However, the only government form of help (bridging) that was accessible to the groups in the research area during the reckoning time was the ADP extension services; there were no other known sources of government support or international development organization's<sup>70</sup> support to the groups in the communities.

My interview continued with the cooperative administrators at the state government cooperative office on the issue of cooperative-government relationships, during which, I noticed a shift of blame for support failures. Considering the sensitivity of the issue I carefully probed and was told weak cooperative education, cooperative inability to provide their counterpart funding which enables the release of the loans, lack of clarity on the purpose for the loan application, previous loan re-payment failures, including stubbornness and lack of seriousness by the co-operators, all led to lack of government partnership and support. One of the administrators at the state secretariat Cooperative Office shared this with me:

*Imagine a situation where a group of people come up with a sketchy purpose for a loan, they want the government to release funds to them in that shabby state and they want it immediately...we have records of previous defaulters, what do you expect the government to do in this situation? When we organize cooperative seminars to educate them, they won't attend (Coop administrator, Owerri, 2010).*

The situation of the relationship between cooperative societies and the government in the state is more complicated than meets the eyes. With both sides blaming each other, a comprehensive evaluation of the problem is needed so that best practices could be adopted. The power to initiate

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<sup>70</sup> The researcher did not notice any presence of an international development organisation like Oxfam, World Vision, USAID or ongoing government sponsored development programme during the fieldwork. What existed was only the Agricultural Ministry extension services by the ADP. The World Bank's FADAMA loan and programme that some of the groups were expecting, when available, was still operated through the government ministry /ADP extension services, but wasn't in operation in the study area during the study. It is this federal structure of channeling developing aid through the government that compromises the benefits and end results.

this reconciliatory move resides primarily with the government. More of these problems and suggested solutions will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. Meanwhile, the research at this point will address the achievements of the case study cooperatives.

### **5.5. Empowering deeds, provisions and need assessment**

Cooperatives as argued in chapter one and two possess the ability of empowering the disadvantaged especially in the rural areas, positioning them to pursue their interests and providing them the security to convert individual risks into collective risks for a common solution (Wanyama, Develtere, & Pollet, 2008). With minimal support resources, smallholder cooperatives in the area initiate small self-help businesses through which individuals or groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their personal, family and community lives at large.

I enquired about the scope of cooperative owned businesses operative in the areas and some of the avenues that cooperatives use to support member's individual aspirations. I also challenged the coop-respondents to an estimate of the beneficiaries from some of the cooperative piloted skills and vocational training programmes in the area for the past five years. Finally, I discussed infrastructural amenities for the communities in their struggle toward achieving improved living conditions. I counted some of the operative cooperative businesses and cooperative-supported self-help achievements of the members and the larger community in the study area.

Table 17. Functional cooperative/Farmer group owned business outfits

<i>Cooperative/group name</i>	<i>Local government</i>	<i>food processing plant</i>	<i>skill/trade centers</i>	<i>Agro/live-stock extn. &amp; ord. farming</i>	<i>Grocery shop outlets</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>PNR VTR FRMS.COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>GTD FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>IDT FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>OGH EBD FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>UGM PGM FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>
<b><i>EYM OLK FARMERS GROUP<sup>71</sup></i></b>	<b><i>West</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>NDM CME FARMERS GROUP</i></b>	<b><i>North</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<i>BGT W/WS FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>PTG IGT FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>CNZ EDL COOP.</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>CJK FARMERS COOP.</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>14</i>

The table above is self-explanatory. Cooperatives in the area although registered as farmer (extension) smallholder cooperatives, undertake various multi-purpose businesses (see chapter two). The categories in the table represent some of the most prominent business cluster areas that the cooperatives collectively venture into. In the food processing category, the cooperatives run small cottage mills or industries where they undertake commercial food processing such as palm oil-press referred locally as ‘*okirida*’, palm kernel cracking, melon seed processing, drying and shelling and grinding and garri (cassava) processing. These cottage industries are jointly run by the cooperatives in service to members and the larger community. Sometimes wholesalers of these Igbo traditional food products place orders for supplies, which they ship to other markets in Nigeria, and some to overseas. From the table above, the CJK cooperative society in Owerri North and the OGH EBD cooperative society in Owerri West have the highest functioning cooperative businesses in the research area (see table seventeen). Collectively on a regional basis, Owerri West has five food processing mills in total while Owerri North has nine, as observed during the fieldwork and shown in the table above. Under the skill and trade category cooperative and farmer groups run business and domestic training for members, their families and interested community members. Some of the smallholder cooperatives receive training support from their diaspora professional sons and daughters annually (see chapters two & three).

<sup>71</sup> The two groups in bold-face fonts are the traditional farmer groups in the sample, they are not cooperative societies.

Occasionally the ADP supports their effort and they (cooperatives) sometimes liaise with the state tertiary institutions for group training. Vocational skills such as carpentry, welding, dress making, hair dressing, small business management, soap, butter, candles, polish, mats, fruit drinks, custard, candles, chocolate drink, cleaning fluid, chicken feed making, bar soap, mushroom farming, ice cream, petroleum jelly, clothes, cakes, and other confectionery skills are taught.

The OGH EBD<sup>72</sup> farmer cooperative still has the highest number of sole-group skill centers in the study areas. Collectively Owerri North has seven centers while Owerri West has five, as shown in the table above. There is no special building or complex dedicated to this purpose in Owerri North as exists in the Owerri West OGH EBD case. The OGH complex in the region serves as a center for the other nearby cooperatives and community groups in the area beside the Local Government and the Apex centers which are both far apart. Participants in Owerri North, however, go to the Local government center or to their Apex office, regarding which they complain about the distance. The participants expressed difficulty in abandoning their business to go to the local government headquarters to attend training sessions. They expressed optimism with the change in strategy in the recent years when the ADP extension staff began to visit them at their business address and farm locations. Education sessions are lately organised at convenient nearby locations; usually at either the Apex office at Acharaubo, a members' home or the community open square. An Owerri North cooperative executive noted how people from various groups in the community take advantage of the knowledge dissemination opportunity that the cooperatives provide. Hear her:

*Our classes are usually open sessions for the people in our community except for some areas; we do not restrict people from joining in because they are not members of the cooperative society. The more people that we reach with the knowledge the better for our community on the whole. The knowledge acquired comes in handy in their everyday lives and trades (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

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<sup>72</sup> The OGH EBD is the cooperative society in Owerri West that has the new multi-purpose skill acquisition complex under construction and enjoyed support from the area government.

The remaining two cooperative business clusters of Agriculture/live-stock extension (farm) and grocery shop outlets are households in the study area. With or without the ADP support the people embark on a continuous agricultural and livestock farming business. They liaise training support and inputs, purchase privately from professionals at the institutions and agriculture business personnel where the ADP is unstable. For instance in Owerri West, agriculture and agric-extension department instructors at the Federal University of Technology are contacted by the community cooperatives for training support and collaboration in agricultural and livestock farming. Through such an arrangement students and their instructors perform fieldwork/practicals with the cooperative groups at their farms by arrangement between the university and the community cooperatives. Those in Owerri North, where the Imo State University is situated, receive similar support from individual instructors in the institution. All these contacts and out-reaches are informally arranged between the receiving groups and the professors at the institutions rather than following a formal government policy development programme. Cooperative farmers are encouraged to learn and adopt the cultivation of new species of their familiar crops, such as maize, cassava, yam and cocoyam; they are taught new techniques of improving crop germination with home-made organic fertilizers and the cautious use of inorganic or chemical fertilizers. Those in the live-stock business learn how to care for their animals better in such trades as piggery, poultry, fishery, honey bee, snail farming, rabbit farming even animal cross breeding and dog rearing. For the grocery shop outlet clusters, cooperators are taught basic accounting, banking and small business management strategies to enable them run these shops more wisely. Note should be taken that all these support measures are privately arranged between the instructing personnel or institutions and the receiving cooperative groups. It is not a government bridging design; rather it stems from the internal bonding arrangement. Note that only the ADP outreach is from the government.

Table 18. Functional individual member owned small businesses

<i>Cooperative/group name</i>	<i>Local govt.</i>	<i>Group populatn</i>	<i>Comm-ercial trading</i>	<i>Cottage industry</i>	<i>Skill and craft shops</i>	<i>Rental business outfits</i>	<i>Improved agro-allied &amp; ord. farming</i>	<i>total</i>
<i>CJK FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>PNR VTR FRMS.COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>GTD FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>IDT FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>OGH EBD FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>UGM PGM FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>
<b><i>EYM OLK FARMERS GROUP</i></b>	<b><i>West</i></b>	<b><i>22</i></b>	<b><i>8</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>	<b><i>15</i></b>
<b><i>NDM CME FARMERS GROUP</i></b>	<b><i>North</i></b>	<b><i>32</i></b>	<b><i>20</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>	<b><i>10</i></b>	<b><i>31</i></b>
<i>BGT W/WS FARMERS COOP</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>PTG IGT FARMERS COOP.</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>CNZ EDL COOP.</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>33</i>
<b><i>Total</i></b>		<b><i>454</i></b>	<b><i>138</i></b>	<b><i>20</i></b>	<b><i>25</i></b>	<b><i>45</i></b>	<b><i>121</i></b>	<b><i>349</i></b>

The table above shows the types of small-scale businesses which smallholder cooperatives in the area help members start, or augment through soft loans. Cooperative societies in the area raise finance through internal and external sources, such as shared capital dividends, sales profits, diaspora donations, fees, dues, fines and loan interest. They recycle these towards supporting member's self-help efforts. The table represents the distribution of operative small scale businesses supported through cooperatives' soft loans in the study area, observed during the fieldwork period. The Owerri West OGH EBD and the Owerri North CJK farmers cooperatives held the highest (99 and 97) number of beneficiaries at the time of reckoning. The activities in this table differ from the first table because these are individual cooperators' private self-help business ventures, the former were cooperative collectively run businesses. The research has always maintained a difference between the cooperative's collective interest and the individual member's interest. Members, while participating in the collective business of their cooperatives, qualify to receive soft loan support from their groups to enable them to start or support already existing businesses. In similarity to the Micro-credit scheme as mentioned in chapter two, members join cooperatives mainly because they wish to access support to enable them venture into businesses which otherwise they could not achieve alone (Ijere, 1992; Deji, 2005). The soft loan could range from 100 to 500 New Zealand dollars (12,000-60,000 Naira at 120 Naira for

1NZD). With 50 NZD-6,000 Naira, a person can start a small food vending, grocery store or food ware commercial trading business and grow from there.

As the table above shows, there is a predominance of agricultural-allied related business/trade in the study area. The open market commercial traders, trade in agricultural produce such as garri (cassava grate), melon seed, leafy vegetables, tomatoes, yam, cocoyam and fish. From the acquired skills and trainings members are able to individually take up their chosen type of small scale business after receiving some capital support from any of their accessible social capital linkage e.g. group, family and friends. When the necessary support from the government doesn't come as anticipated, individuals source inputs such as seeds, stems, tubers, fertilizers and animals feeds from the black-market<sup>73</sup> or the open agro-market. A respondent shared this view with me in the probe saying:

*Rather than waiting in vain on a hope for government provisions that drag, we go out of our way and source the supplies, though that comes at a price, but we do it anyway. The dirty business they play is common knowledge but too bad it's their conscience. We farmers live by season and can't wait forever (coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

I also examined member/non-member beneficiaries from the cooperative organized skills acquisition/vocational training sessions in the last five years in the area. The highest estimate number received for the bracket year (2005-2010) from non-members stood at approximately 100-150 persons respectively from the both zones while members at the period (2010) of study stood at 355 from both cooperative and farmer groups in the two (LGA)'s. Note should be taken that the traditional farmer groups in **bold-face** in the tables are not government registered cooperative societies but they are part of my study's participating groups.

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<sup>73</sup> Government agro supplies like fertilizers, improved seeds, tubers, stems, stock and animal feeds meant for distribution to the rural farmers end up in the black markets or in the hands of Agro-business merchants, who corruptly buy out the supplies from the government employee black-legs for resale to the farmers at horrendous prices.



Table 19. Other community need assessment and provisions

<i>Other community needs assessment and provisions.</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>Actual</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>North</i>	<i>West</i>		
<i>Electric power, sealed road and tap water are available?</i>	6/17	2/13	30	8
<i>Rural infrastructure state is satisfactory?</i>	3/17	2/13	30	5
<i>Any coop aided academic scholarship</i>	12/17	7/13	30	19
<i>Gov't holds job hope for community youths?</i>	6/17	1/13	30	7

The final part of this section deals with a general assessment of community needs and government provisions. I specifically asked about the availability and state of such basic amenities like tap (potable) water, electric power and sealed roads. The responses as represented in the above table are direct count of ‘Yes and No’ answers to the availability of these physical amenities in the area. A ‘yes’ response directly implies a ‘No’ to the other on contrast and vice versa, I did not use the percentage cross tabulation pattern in this assessment as the questions and expected answers are obvious. Both (LGA) responses to these questions were unimpressive; Owerri North was slightly better off in the general assessment as could be seen in the table above. The situation in the communities as discussed in chapter one is such that, even though most of these amenities are available, they are non-functional, so the people would rather categorize them as unavailable. The water pipes are all dried up, the electric power lines are dead, schools dilapidated, hospital and clinics empty even when many are sick, and the roads impassable. All these are indicators of a failed government’s service system to the people in these rural communities. As a cooperative member puts it:

*Our communities have been so denied that we don’t even remember what it is like to feel we belong or have some of these infrastructures. We can only do the little bit within our power. Our small businesses are powered with private generators at the present high cost of fuel (gasoline), thus jerking up the cost of production... but we are still here (he chuckled) (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Despite the general feeling of apathy towards government in these study communities, the Igbos of the areas still strive hard collectively and independently to acquire education or receive some sort of self-development training. Hence Igbos in Owerri zone of Imo State record the highest score in yearly national statistics of pupils and student admission into primary, post primary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Smallholder cooperative societies and other community based organisations do support this trend of education. To my question in this regard, Owerri North demonstrated strong favourability to supporting academic effort through small scholarships to which Owerri West also concurred in more than half of the gathered response on the question. These scholarships or academic aids are selectively awarded to members' children at different academic levels, based on certain specified terms<sup>74</sup>, such as candidate's grade distinction, unfortunate family situations (compassion) or identified need. The entire act is intended to serve as an inspiration to the young children to 'think home'<sup>75</sup> always.

I further enquired to know if the government held any form of employment hope for the myriads of trained youthful manpower churned out yearly from the institutions around. The answer was still a high negative, 'no' response from the participants at both local governments. After graduation a majority of the youths leave the rural areas for the urban centers in search of the few white and blue collar jobs. Survival through cooperative business is still not very popular among Igbo youths in the area and it is viewed as a non-trendy venture for the ambitious youths who are eager to join the quick-paced capital job market. Ironically the youths remain oblivious of this cooperative fact even when it is clear that most of the resources used to support their education/school days were raised through their parents' cooperative dedication. In the follow-up section below, I will discuss the unusual case of Akor as an instance of a youth who braved the odds to join a cooperative society in his community.

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<sup>74</sup> In these communities cooperatives join with other groups in the community to contributively rotate the scholarship award to winning candidates (children) of cooperative members and families from the village-community. The lotto-like allocations range from kindergarten to university level of education. From full tuition to part-tuition, all in the bid to provide incentives to the children to work hard, they are held once in every three years.

<sup>75</sup> 'Think Home' is the development ideology espoused by the former governor of Anambra state in south-eastern Nigeria to inspire Igbo sons and daughters everywhere in the globe to remember their 'homelands' whenever they think about investment. In Anambra state, the philosophy is believed to be the motto that has transformed the once rural community of 'Nnewi' to an urban industrial hub in the state (Chukwuezi, 2001).

## 5.6. Group support and youth transition

Rural community based research reports in Nigeria have shown that “The continuous migration of youths from the rural areas into the urban centers in Nigeria leaves behind a rapid deterioration of the rural economy, leading to poverty and food insecurity problems” (Nnadi, Chikaire, Atoma, Egwuonwu, & Echetama, 2012:4). Since farming is the main occupation in these locations, Min-Harris, (2010) argues that the loss of able bodied men from these rural sites results in reduction of the value and variety of the farm produce turned out. Therefore it becomes necessary that activities that stimulate the rural economy, like cooperatives, are encouraged as a way to check this rapid loss of potentials from the rural areas. The cooperatives that this research studies collaborate with their various local diaspora affiliates to discourage the village youths from leaving their rural home communities (see chapter two & seven). They encourage them (youths) to join in and participate in the continuously provided opportunities, such as craft-skill and vocational training, extension of farming skills, livestock breeding and care, small business training and other kinds of self-help improvement education. Such knowledge transmission to the youths not only keeps and sustains their livelihood in their communities, but ensures the transition of generational cooperative values from the older generation to the younger ones. I depicted this instance of cooperative transition and membership economic support with the Akor case in the GTD farmer’s cooperative group.

### **Akor’s effort and the GTD society:**

Akor<sup>76</sup> was a young man in his late twenties and one of the few youth<sup>77</sup> members of the GTD farmer’s cooperative society in EZK village of Owerri North. Although smallholder cooperatives business is erroneously perceived in the research area as women’s ventures, Akor’s story in the

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<sup>76</sup> Akor is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the original person in the case.

<sup>77</sup> Among the Igbos of the south-east and most of the other African ethnic community groups, youth-hood age spans from adolescence (13 yrs.) until mid and late thirties (the marriage age). In some Igbo communities an unmarried adult male known as ‘*okokporo*’ is a perpetual youth and is always derogatorily welcomed in the youth league. For the girls the age bracket is different, they are expected to marry between their early 20’s and 30’s; otherwise they risk being similarly categorized as their male counterpart as ‘*otonaka*’ a perpetual youth-spinster. But for some of the Yoruba Muslims in the West and Hausa-Fulani’s in the North, marriage age for the girls is much earlier, even before their adolescence.

GTD farmer's cooperative society is one of the few males who defied the odds of stereotype by their determination to succeed through cooperative effort. I chose his case because of its rarity in the region; a young man's resolve to join a rural cooperative society in an area where youths rush to the cities in the hope securing white/blue collar jobs. Akor instead agreed to persuasions to stay behind in order to pursue self-help/reliance ventures through group 'ugwu anyi' - social capital support.

The GTD cooperative society, formed in 1995 and registered in 1996, was among the prominent functional cooperatives in Owerri North. On my visit to the leader's house- which doubles as the cooperative office- the retired high school principal in his mid-60's was excited and viewed my visit to their group as a sign of distinctive recognition from LGA quarters on their effort. Akor was at the office and so was formally introduced to me by the leader as my tour guide through their farms and other cooperative businesses. I finished my interview with the leader and then continued outside with Akor. Being a young man, he was very engaging to talk to. With my tape still rolling I asked him to grant me an interview and he excitedly agreed.

### **GTD group formation and growth**

Akor was too young to be involved when the formation of the cooperative society was conceived. He was 29 years old when this research was conducted. With Akor, one of my research assistants and myself, the elderly leader recounted to us the story of the days of food abundance in Nigeria, comparing those years with the pain of poverty and hunger in the Nigerian nation today. He narrated how the present day's need for adequate food provision, better nutrition, and establishing avenues for basic income - yielding business motivated him, with three other member-friends, into forming the GTD cooperative society in 1995. The GTD idea was a pet-project to beat the boredom of joblessness in their slow-paced rural village-community by developing a pig farm<sup>78</sup>. He said:

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<sup>78</sup> Animal rearing/husbandry as discussed in chapter six is perceived more as a masculine business; hence the men were more comfortable delving into it irrespective of the social conception of cooperative as effeminate. However registration was later an additional step that brought about the 'cooperative form'. In non-gender highlighted groups

*Pig farming was an idea that the three of us remotely shared but never really got ourselves to act about it. I guess because all of us were doing our separate things, me particularly because I was still actively teaching (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

He continued that with the small plot of fallow land next to his house, they cleared it and erected a small wooden shack to serve as a sty for the yet-to-be procured pigs. Next they purchased the male and female pigs and the rest followed naturally as the pigs bred and multiplied rapidly, putting the three friends into some good livestock business. Only the retired principal had some education, while the other two were barely literate. However each of the friends had their families help out with the chores at their new farm. None of them had any formal agriculture or livestock training, but they were poised to emulate<sup>79</sup> the successes of some major livestock farmers in the area. Their choice to start off with the pig rearing business was because it bred more rapidly than the other livestock. From two parent pigs, they increased to another two with each parent pair bearing at least 20 piglets a piece per conception<sup>80</sup>. With the multiplication of the pigs came the need for expansion to build larger pens for the little piglets and to acquire more parent pigs. Gradually the little community started noticing what these friends were doing as people came over to order the dung to use as manure in their farms. That created a new avenue for income from what would have been a waste. Increasingly meager profits started accruing from sales which were still ploughed back into the business and later diversified into new areas of livestock, such as poultry, goat rearing, vegetable and crop cultivation. Business changed and started looking up for these few beginners, which allowed for more members.

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like the GTD, the nature of business speaks more of the group than the member's gender make-up. In the GTD group, with expansion, came balance in the genders and the nature of the produce cultivated.

<sup>79</sup> Skills for animal husbandry in the rural study communities come from a traditional pattern rather than elaborate tertiary education. People rear animals beside their family homes within their yards. While the ADP staff still visit to teach modern skills, farmers prefer to stick to their more familiar practices for some of the reasons that will be discussed in this chapter.

<sup>80</sup> A piglet reaches adult maturity in about 4 weeks after birth; pregnancy lasts between 6-7 weeks so a mature female pig can conceive up to 5 times in a year. But this is not advisable as the mother pigs are usually given time to recuperate, so their piglets are separated from them after two weeks of birth and put in different pens according to their sexes.

### **More membership admission**

Gradually the business continued to progress, more friends and customers from the community noticed the growth and indicated interest in joining the three-man team in advancing the business further. These interests were a welcome development at the time because the group's business expansion needed more hands, finance and time commitment. So five more people (four women and a man) were welcomed to join in by making a financial contribution and sharing the labour of running the farms. Members pooled their lands together and more acres were leased from lessors in the community. Membership steadily grew larger, along with the size of the livestock and more farms were acquired over the years. They sought registration as a cooperative society in 1995 and got that a year later, after many evaluative visits by the cooperative department at both the state and local government levels. Since then the modest group has been functioning as a smallholder cooperative society, formally registered and supervised by the state government cooperative department.

### **Akor's membership and the GTD society at present**

The former small group of three friends has now grown to a relatively large society of more than thirty-five (35) members, comprising 13 men, 17 women and 5 youths (between the ages of 25 and 30) who actively rotate chores to maintain the farm business. Unlike the women-only and the traditionally transformed cooperative societies that restrict membership to married persons only, the GTD cooperative accepts membership from youths and adult unmarried persons on satisfaction of strict behavior conditions (ref chapter six). Akor is among these five youth members, who joined the society in 2005 when he was 25 years of age through the persuasion of his uncle, who was also a member of the society. From Akor's story, after he finished his secondary education 1999 he hoped to further his education to the university level, but was stopped short of this dream because of finance as he recounts:

*I knew my parents are poor but I didn't want to give up, I hoped on some of my uncles in the city to at least sponsor me because they promised. So I passed the university matriculation test to study bio-chemistry but when it was time to pay*

*the fees, my uncles failed me, I was disappointed and so I dropped out (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010)*

Akor's case and experience is a typical Nigerian situation where parents are expected to shoulder all the educational expenses of their children (which usually are more than four) from their lean resources. The government, since after the 1980's introduction of the SAP policies, withdrew from all forms of academic subsidy; thus formal education provision in the country became expensive (Jauch, 2009). Disappointed, Akor left the village for the city of Lagos to live with his uncle in the hope of some help. Yet after spending five years in Lagos without any prospect of acquiring any tangible skill or vocational training he returned back to his village in 2004 for the Christmas holidays. During that end of the year period, the GTD farmer's cooperative held a launching/fund raising event for one of their newly built meat shops in the village-community market. Akor and his member uncle attended the event and that was Akor's first real experience of a cooperative event. After the event, his uncle approached him with the idea of staying back to join in the cooperative business in the village. Akor retorted thus:

*How do you expect a 'guy' like me to remain here in this rural community without any basic amenity (electric power, bad roads, running water), what would I be doing?-cooperative- with who? These old people? (Cooperative respondent Akor, Owerri North, 2010).*

But the uncle insisted and persuaded him further with the pros and cons of joining the group as against his wasteful and unproductive years in the city. So he accepted and took the decision not to return back to city after the holiday but to stay in the village for good. The next year January 2005, he applied to join the GTD cooperative and was accepted as the first youth member of the group. With an uncle to learn the ropes from and a willing cooperative membership, Akor settled in to his new preoccupation with the cooperative group. He joined in the meetings and in-house inceptions for new members on their roles especially with the chore schedule at the farms. All the members live in the host community and are either farmers or traders running different small-scale businesses in the community market, so they have time to put towards the group's farm needs and don't need to commute from far, since all their homes and the farm sites are located within the community. All the original pioneer members are still actively involved in the running of the cooperative farm business.

## **Akor and the GTD operative skills**

The first few months were tough especially after all the Christmas returnees had left the village back to the city. Akor confirmed feeling dejected and wasn't really sure if his decision to remain back in the village was right, but he managed to gradually adjust to the reality of his new status as a village cooperator. These were his thoughts:

*This is an SOS mission; you have nothing to lose but everything to gain and learn. This is my home community. Stay put at least you have something to work on and build from. Do the sacrifice, work hard then you can compare between the years spent in the city and here. If I cannot be a city challenger, at least I can be a village champion (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Akor constantly reassured himself about his goal to make a living for himself in the community through the cooperative channel and decided to totally adapt his mindset to the GTD cooperative business. With the vigour of youth and determination of his goals, Akor quickly learnt the group's chores and business ropes. He knew about the different breeding cycles of the animals, he could single handedly clean the stys, feed and tend to the animals and the birds. His resourcefulness in the business and regular availability as a youth without family commitment endeared him to all the members. Akor was entrusted with more sensitive responsibilities that exposed him to handling money. He took truck-loads of live animals to the abattoir in the city and back to the cooperative meat shop to sell and rendered correct accounts<sup>81</sup> afterwards. For all these the cooperative society only pays him the basic daily stipend for hired labourers but he was getting most of his food supplies from the coop's left-over stock as is the routine of the cooperative group. Akor continued doing the cooperative chores as a learning process and paying his dues to consolidate his share capital base in the group business.

The cooperative shares dividends from the profits of farm produce between the group's investment purpose and the members' private needs according to each member's contribution quota. In a similar study, as Omotosho and Odigbo note, some members choose to re-invest their shares into the group's business for better future yields (Odigbo, 1998; Omotosho, 2007). Akor

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<sup>81</sup> Eftpos or credit cards are not used in the study village-community so market transactions are done with physical cash.



waited for two years before he put in his application for a soft loan support to help him start his own personal meat shop business.

### **Akor's application for soft loan and the GTD's response**

People join cooperative and farmer group organisations for the support, which they are able to access through these societies in times of need (Ijere, 1992; Deji, 2005). Cooperatives use their common investment and pooled resources to support member's aspirations through group-backed soft loans to enhance their private trades and small businesses for an agreed limited period of payback without interest. The society also receives some external support from their community and diaspora sons and daughter groups living in the other Nigerian urban centers and overseas. Appeals are sent out to these groups for financial support during the launching of a new business project like the new produce shop or the root and seed processing mills; when these funds are received, the society channels them to defined ends like soft loan provision to members, collective business augmentation and provision of capital goods. Akor applied for a soft loan in August 2007 after a two- year period of membership and he received response from the group the following year in January 2008. He was granted a soft loan of 24,000 Naira (NZD 200) and two basins of pork meat valued at almost Naira 12,000 (NZD 100) were stored for him in the cold storage<sup>82</sup> house in the city. This was the cooperative bonus to him for his astuteness and dedication to the group. Akor immediately set out for the village free open market square and secured a stand for his nascent meat business. He combines personal work hours with his scheduled hours at the cooperative business. He is actually a very busy man now and when he isn't working at his market stand he is at the cooperative produce shops or farm with his siblings or with a family member keeping his business at his stand. He says:

*When I cannot make it to my own market stand, I ask for the assistance of one of my younger siblings or any family relative to assist me. I have introduced*

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<sup>82</sup> Due to the problem of electricity, individuals are not able to store cold perishable food in their home refrigerators. For commercial purposes, some people run cold storage businesses in the city powered by generating sets. In the Owerri city area there are at least three commercial cold room storage places which serve the entire community regions of Owerri. There are also state licensed abattoirs where commercial livestock are inspected and slaughtered for statewide distribution and consumption. So these are the places that Akor frequents for the business of the cooperative as well as his own business.

*some of them to my source buyers in the city so they can go on my behalf to buy the meat from the big abattoir in the city and store them in the fridge house. This helps me to still focus on the cooperative business and on other things (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Akor's demeanor during the interaction gave no sign of his many past disappointments and uncertainty. During all our discussions, he remained optimistic about the future and satisfied with his cooperative group. Cooperative groups in the community assist to ease members' stress over such formerly challenging tasks, like basic food provision, finding finance for their small businesses and support for putting their children through school. Some of their children have already completed the secondary level and are in tertiary institutions because education is taken seriously in the community (Mgbeafulu, 2003 in Ojukwu, 2009). Working to improve their common cooperative concern is regarded as a deep obligation to all the members because it reciprocally benefits each of them, and also the community at large. Every member's daily activities are connected to the cooperative functions. The traders and self-employed members, who get the bulk of their support loans from the cooperative society, work hard to make sure they do not default in paying back. I asked Akor if he was planning to get married any time soon or whether he had begun the cultural marriage rites<sup>83</sup>. He answered:

*Yes I have a fiancée and by God's grace we are undertaking the marriage rites by piece-meal (referring to the phases). It's lengthy in Igboland you know, but I am equal to the task (he beamed). I am most grateful to my coop group for giving me this chance and hope to be and act like a man, get married and raise a family someday (Coop respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Akor is happy and can talk with more certainty and clarity than he could before joining the cooperative because of the bonding social capital support *ugwu* that he has been given through his group and from the external diaspora groups. The synergy of this support link is amazing and most interesting in the sense of the effect of its mutual multipliers on the individual (s) and the society. With Akor's general future looking more prosperous there is a high probability that he will be in the position to support someone else in the near short term, to start a business or even

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<sup>83</sup> Marriage rites in Igboland are elaborate and come in phases, so the suitors have to do a lot of pre-visitations to the in-laws to plan on how to undertake the phases of the rites, depending on their income

to achieve an education. As his business grows, he will be needing more hands, and so it continues.

The other studied cooperatives have similar stories of youth's and other individual's successes that have resulted from their groups' collective support. From their vegetable and many other businesses, the CJK farmers support their members into small retail businesses of all kinds. Hence the people are dissuaded from wasteful or deviant preoccupations as the Akor case being discussed demonstrates. The CNZ and EBD farmers groups at both study areas also have similar stories that they shared. These cooperative groups sometimes hire laborers from the community, who are paid and supervised by designated members to work at either their animal or their crop farm expansion sites, where produce like cassava, corn, yam and melon are cultivated. On weekends members do go to these farms to do some work themselves. Harvesting and processing of the farm produce follows the same mixed pattern of member's pooled hands and hired labour. The society undertakes the marketing of their farm produce themselves through their outlet shops. Harvested cassava tubers, corn and plantain, are either sold to members to take home and process themselves or processed by the society and sold as finished ready-to-cook food products. I was able to observe the numerous pigs in the farm being fed and cleaned by the hired laborers as the president confirmed.

### **5.7. Conclusion:**

In this chapter I have discussed the data that I gathered during my fieldwork. Using descriptive cross-tabulations, I analysed all the data and calculated percentage scores according to the different variables (mainly location, sex, status, group name and group type) to show the level of cooperative assimilation in the study communities. Owerri North and Owerri West are home to the same Igbo people with mutual cultural roots, but with different colonial experiences. The data gathered from the two Local Government Areas resulted from questions that discussed the regular lives of smallholder cooperative and farmer group members regarding their routine participation in their different society/group functions. The chapter addressed membership motivations and ways the two key social capital attributes of 'trust' and 'reciprocity' are performed in the different groups in order to sustain cohesion and interest in the groups. Both

group types were found to have many similarities in their patterns of operations. The analytical discussions in the chapter found that members show commitment because overwhelmingly they see their groups as their key source of livelihood and support provision. Thus membership participation in the groups' activities were not based on 'instrumental ratifications or contracts', but on a holistic consideration of the community's belief systems and cultural values. Besides the two group types of focus (smallholder cooperative and farmer groups), members valued their affiliation to other groups, such as church and age grades, because of their significance in their identities and general consideration of wellbeing.

On the general assessment, 'trust and reciprocity' were discovered to be the underlining factors that stimulate the 'collective action' in some of the functional groups in the study area, particularly those who are committed to seeking solutions to their mutual and individual problems. Contrastingly, desperation, misrepresentation, individualism and greed were indicated as among the major challenges that scuttled the life of the defunct and some of the struggling groups particularly in the communities most affected by rural-urban encroachment pressure. However the chapter discussed some of the collective and individual self-help empowering businesses run and supported by smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups in the area. Agricultural and related farm businesses as depicted in Akor's case were discovered to be instrumental in everything that the cooperatives do or achieve in the area. His story epitomizes the smallholder cooperative hope of attracting the youths to set and pursue positive goals for their future. In this way cooperative culture and fundamentals are preserved and transitioned to the younger generation. Since most agricultural produce mills and service businesses within the rural areas depend on the provision of such infrastructural amenities as electric power, potable water, motorable roads and markets, I looked at their availability to establish their state and efficacy towards the progress of these groups. However, despite the drag in the provision of some of these essentials, the groups still march on in their aspirations. Participants in these communities, in the long run, hold their cooperative societies and farmer groups as their most dependable 'safety nets' for livelihood in these rural communities, and they proudly defend their collective and individual causes against all odds.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **GENDER ROLES, COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT RELATIONS**

#### **6.0. Introduction**

This chapter continues the analysis by examining the stories of different smallholder cooperative groups and some individual cases in terms of their bridging/bonding social capital performance in the area. The chapter opens up extensive descriptive accounts from resident smallholder cooperative groups and members within the study communities. Since many of the cooperative members I studied are women and their roles are contributory to the sustenance of their various smallholder groups, I invited them to share with me their experiences of running a cooperative society in a gendered culture such as in Igboland. Regardless of the constraints, these women through hard work, determination and group solidarity, excel as influential leaders in their groups and in their broad communities' obligations.

The chapter also discusses some occurrences within such unstable groups as the UMG PGM smallholder cooperatives that challenge the often assumed existence of bonding social capital in rural cooperative societies particularly those that bear registration with the government as in this study's case. Through engaging in discussions, I investigated the nature of the bond and patronage that exist within such groups and why they struggle to put forth a united front despite being in the same locality with other similar groups of more cohesive demeanor. Additionally, respondents reacted to the question of group proliferation in the area and how functional groups establish and sustain their inter-connectivity with external support sources especially the diaspora groups.

The research questions guided the development of these stories from the interviews, with an attention for the respondents' accounts of the relational acts of trust, patronage connections and mutual reciprocity within their groups. The discussions profile member's responsibilities, group participation, and how leadership supports individual member's aspirations. Furthermore, the stories discuss the background circumstances that inspired the groups' actualization process, their previous formative struggles and the present state of the societies in their various

communities. The problems that each of these smallholder societies set out to examine are discussed in the context of the social capital conception within the Igbo socio-cultural sense of 'ugwu'.

### **6.1. Gender as a social construct in cooperatives**

Although gender was not a major theoretical interest or research question in my study, its consideration in cooperative functions was among the themes that I frequently had to deal with. Gender as a concept is used in social sciences to define "the roles and activities of men and women in social groups. These roles are socially defined by the traditions and beliefs of a particular culture. Gender is therefore not synonymous with sexual difference which is based only on biological characteristics" (Odebode, 2008:146). The gender constructions are culture specific and assign different identities and roles to men and women (Olawoye, Odebode, Akinbile, Oladeji, Oyesola & Olujide, 2002).

In the field, I noticed gender discrepancies at play in the operations of the smallholder cooperative societies that I worked with in both study areas. There were mixed gender smallholder cooperative societies and women-only cooperatives but no men-only cooperatives. I observed that while most of the women-only initiated cooperatives were willing to accept and accommodate their husbands as male counterparts; the male-initiated groups (now transformed mixed cooperatives) were not specific in their membership rules (regarding their wives/women acceptance). It is rather assumed that since both parties are from the same family, that the wives automatically belonged to their husbands groups. The men generally were not keen on joining their wives in their groups or actively participating in smallholder cooperative functions. They would rather join the age grades or some of the other men's associations or clubs in the community. In my discussion with a male informant at one of the popular smallholder cooperative group in Owerri West he said this:

*Our people especially in this part of Igboland tend to believe that the cooperative society assemblage is a 'women thing'. Naturally women have better organizational abilities and forums to interact with each other than the men. Women are always together at the church, they farm together, they*

*belong to minor community groups and faith sodalities...we men are always dispersed in search of the greener pastures (Coop respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

Most of the men leave home for the cities and urban centers in search of blue and white collar jobs, but the question is: what about those that are residing in the village communities with their wives as participating cooperative members? Why do they still choose to ‘sit on the fence’ about joining cooperatives? Occasionally though, some of the men who agree to join their spouses at the same cooperative function do so as a sign of affection or loyalty to their wives’ wishes, rather than out of their own conviction to participate (because they wouldn’t want their wives to feel differentiated from others who might have their partners in attendance). Hence they tag along reluctantly but only to certain gender-specific roles in the society. Once they have performed these masculine roles they withdraw to their more traditional comfort groups. Also, during ceremonies such as project launchings, end of the year parties, member’s private parties, Christmases and New Yam festivals, couples are expected to attend in their festive uniforms. An informant asked me this question during the interview:

*Why would a man and his wife both limit themselves to the single business of a cooperative society? It’s not the best of plans (he retorted). Sometimes the cooperative business registers losses, so at such times, does it mean my family will starve because coop business was bad? Let the women do their business and we support them when needed while we go out and do other things so that chances will be diversified (male respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

This respondent didn’t see cooperative membership from a gender-differing perspective, but from the angle of maximizing opportunity, which sounds quite plausible. In his perspective, men still show their support to the business of cooperatives, but indirectly through their wives who represent as the active members while they do other things. In support of this ‘gender theme’ in rural community development groups, Olawoye, et al (1994:5) argue that each society or group decides which tasks, as well as which opportunities should be assigned to males and females, young and old. In the mixed smallholder cooperatives that I studied while in the field (like the GTD, CNZ and OGH farmer’s cooperatives), the men undertook most of the physically laborious jobs like the fallow farm prospecting and negotiations, clearing and tilling, movement of farm produce and wares, while the women did the farm weeding, mulching, tending the crops,

harvesting, marketing, accounting, and stock taking (including all the commercial aspects of the cooperative business).

Women in Igboland organise themselves in order to achieve goals that they set their minds on. Growing up in Igboland, I watched my mother always busy attending or coordinating a series of women's social, religious and market group meetings in my community. Women's events always enjoyed a huge followership due to their number and organizational ability. Their cassava 'akpu' and 'unu' cultivation for instance overtook men's yam cultivation and replaced it as the staple affordable food for many in Igboland (Korieh, 2007). Living through these experiences as an Igbo in the local communities, it was easy to lose sight of the exceptional qualities possessed by these Igbo women due to the prevalence of the colonial Victorian male-chauvinism that has endured into the post-colonial era of Igboland (see chapter two). Such trends promote a narrow gendered perception of certain practices that were formerly considered more broadly. Women, for instance, were excluded from their rights to negotiate for and own land properties in Igboland while such rights are treated as a preserve for the men folks based on kinship heritage and women's marriage argument<sup>84</sup>. Hence women's groups despite their agricultural willingness, have to wait on their husbands or a male relative to facilitate the land acquisition process before they can move to work on the land. To me this particular observance in Igboland is obsolete and so should be discontinued because it frustrates general progress and undermines women's rights and position in the area.

Having lived away from home in agriculturally developed nations such as New Zealand and the United States of America, I have seen the transformative benefits of practicing an all gender inclusive agricultural strategy. In these countries, everyone irrespective of gender is allowed to negotiate for and work unrestrictedly at either their family inherited portions or acquired farm lands. In my opinion the Igbos ought to reenact their dual-sex cultural practice that grants complementary rights to both women and men in property possession and addressing of

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<sup>84</sup> The key argument was that women in Igboland are expected to marry and leave their home communities to reside in their husband's home. So whatever acquisitions they have as unmarried women are recognised as their parents' own which is then ceded to their brothers or male relatives at their marriage when the parents are deceased. The unmarried ones leave their home because of the stigma associated with non-marriage (discussed in chapter five) (see Basden, 1966).



community needs. Although Igbo women in this contemporary era freely pursue their dreams in all professional fields; more still needs to be done to expand their cultural right of access to land properties and family inheritance<sup>85</sup>, particularly in the rural areas where this privilege or power is everything. This move of inclusion would particularly support and enhance the agricultural prowess of women's smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups in the rural areas.

Whilst in the field, I further discovered why the Igbos classify certain cultivable crops and agricultural farm business according to gender. The Igbo person responds to the cooperative society and farmer group according to the type<sup>86</sup> of agricultural produce that each group cultivates. The paternalistic aspect of the Igbo culture associates certain crops with the role and masculinity of the male family heads in Igboland. The cultivation of such crops as yam, palm oil, palm wine and livestock husbandry (viz. goat herding, cows and pig farming) are agricultural interest areas ascribed to men, while the women cultivate crops such as cocoyam, cassava, groundnuts, maize, vegetables, plaintains, melons, and such livestock as birds (poultry), snails, fish etc (Korieh 2007; Fieldwork observation, 2010). Of all the crops cultivated by men in Igboland, the yam<sup>87</sup> was uniquely distinguished as the Igbo icon of manliness, achievement, and

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<sup>85</sup> When a form of observance constitutes an inhibition to some persons or to the achievement of a crucial common need, it then becomes problematic and so needs reconsidering. If women were allowed to freely access the lands through direct acquisition or family inheritance, they would have more spaces to cultivate and deal less with time wasting indirect negotiations with middlemen; so such energy and resources could be channeled to the improvement of their farm business.

<sup>86</sup> The cultural perspective on the type of business and crop cultivated by a cooperative or a farmer group does go a long way to determining their membership interests. Even where a wife's membership automatically qualifies the husband some of the men still feel some hesitance in physical participation because they would not want to be seen as being effeminate. A male cooperator responded to me in an interview on this situation saying: "Imagine you as a man or your father at home, having to carry the cooperative basket of melon seeds, cassava, groundnuts or any other produce to the market and sit there in the open market among all the women... (paused to think), how proud would your wife be of you as her husband or your children, playing this role" (Coop respondent, Owerri. West, 2010). Generally most men in the area undervalue cooperative businesses run by women. They stereotype the businesses as 'domestic ventures' preferring to seek better paying blue and white collar jobs in the cities. However, since most of the vibrant cooperatives in the study area are predominantly populated by women, they undertake mostly feminine oriented businesses and cultivate similar gendered crops that are less labour intensive.

<sup>87</sup> Yam (genus *Dioscorea*-family of *Dioscoreaceae*) or '*ji*' in Igbo language is a form of edible tuber. Yams are a primary agricultural and culturally important commodity among the Igbos of Nigeria West Africa, where over 95 percent of the world's yam crop is harvested. Yams are still important for survival in these regions. Some varieties of these tubers can be stored up to six months without refrigeration, which makes them a valuable resource for the yearly period of food scarcity at the beginning of the wet season. Yam cultivars are also cropped in other humid tropical countries.

identity. Traditionally, the Igbo local political, social, and economic life was woven around a man's success as a yam farmer in many parts of Igboland. Korieh (2007) observed thus:

*The accumulation of yams and the size of a man's barn defined his status in many Igbo communities. Success in yam production acted as the ladder for social mobility. In most parts of Igboland, men who distinguished themselves as yam farmers were also recognised and rewarded by their communities with the title of Ezeji or "yam king." Aspirants to the powerful ennoblement had to meet the rigorous criteria of cultivating a certain number of yams in addition to feasting a large number of people. To take the title of Ezeji in some parts of Igboland, the farmer was expected to have several thousand tubers in his barn. Wives of Ezeji were recognised as "lobo" (p. 224).*

Women, on the other hand, pursue their interests and agricultural goals collectively as a group, and individually, as wives in their respective families with their husbands in the supportive role. Through their groups they rally solidarity against gender suppressive elements in their communities and flex their authorities in defense of their own (see chapter two). A man's agricultural achievement directly bestows honour on his wife and does not stop her from working towards her own achievements so long as she has the support of her husband or a kinsman. Although Igbo culture is paternalistic, it still accommodates women's development, authority and achievements alongside their men counterparts (see chapter two). Korieh (2007) corroborating Okonjo's (1975) position on this gender complementarity in Igbo culture observed that:

*Women could also take the 'Eze-edede or ikwa edede' title if they become very successful in cocoyam farming. This prevailing ideology reinforced gender hierarchy and division of crops among the Igbo. Yam-based status was perhaps the most valued of common male identity linked pursuits up until recent times (p.225).*

The disappearing culture of yam cultivation in Igboland created by the famine and the ravaging effects of the Nigerian-Biafran war thereafter brought about the shift in concentration towards the types of crops once labeled as the 'feminine crops' (Ohadike, 1994; Korieh 2007). Men farmers swallowed their pride and adjusted to broadly incorporating crops such as cassava, cocoyams and melons to support their dwindling farm production. In denial of the reality of their eroding egos and the harsh shift to the new cassava crop, the men silently removed to the

backstage, promoting their wives as the owners of the crops in the farms and themselves as supporters. Hence the present muted reception that the cultivation of cassava receives among the Igbo, despite its wide appreciation and acknowledgement by the people. To the men in Igboland, the replacement of their celebrated yam crop by the cassava crop that was once regarded as effeminate was humiliating, but a situation that was beyond their control. The cassava crop substitute had all the qualities of the yam and some advantages in certain ways. Both crops are roots/tubers, starchy, and prepared in a similar way, but with small variations in some cases. While the yam's value and maturation period is longer (nine months), requiring laborious work input and a lengthy time for an uncertain harvest, the cassava's time frame for maturation is shorter (six months), it is easier to cultivate and able to withstand the harsh tropical weather better as well as yielding a more reliable harvest. This development gradually shifted the socio-economic power of most families in Igboland to the women, and as Korieh (2007)<sup>88</sup> notes (citing a male informant during his fieldwork in Mbaise a community in Imo State), "These days we are not ashamed anymore to say that we depend on our wives' cassava farms for food" (fieldwork informant in Mbaise Imo State). He continued:

*Many women were eager to admit that their role in household subsistence had increased significantly in recent times. This transformation in some cases brought out negative responses from the men who now see themselves as wielding less authority in their household. I encountered men who were visibly saddened by their dependency on their wives for subsistence (p.228).*

Because of this development, some men totally abandoned the business of farming for a new trade, while some left their rural communities for the city in search of other forms of paid employment. The spectrum of women's crop options spans across a broader produce base than the men's, but has less labour intensity and capital value; while the few crops for the men are more strenuous to cultivate and harvest but are of higher capital value, at least due to their scarcity (Korieh 2007; Odebode, 2008,). Hence, a prospective member's choice to join a particular farmer's cooperative is partly dependent on the gender and the type of produce cultivated or traded in by the cooperative. In the same way the form of social capital that

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<sup>88</sup> Dr. Chima Korieh is an African scholar who has written extensively on African issues and development studies in the Third world. He is a product of public education and a first class history graduate from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His insights helped in the writing of this section.

develops from such smallholder cooperative associations follows the leaning of the group's business interest area. Men are more attracted to such cooperatives as the GTD and PNR in Owerri North that have mixed activities, but are inclined more towards livestock farming and crop cultivation businesses like palm oil and yam growing. Others like CNZ, EBD and IDT have more of the female population and incline more towards the female types of agricultural produce and activities; this tends to alienate men's interest or risk them being concerned that they appear effeminate. The CJK society is a woman-only cooperative society.

## **6.2. Gender and leadership**

The vibrancy of the women folk in Igboland is portrayed in the roles they play in the studied smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups that directly impacts positively on their groups and the general development of the rural communities. Typical of the African Igbo women's 'strong bread winner image', as depicted in gender literatures; the Igbo women in this particular study area were observed to hold formidable positions and representations within their community societies and in the government as well. Out of the eleven studied associations in this research, seven has female presidents while only four of the leaders are males. The two traditional farmer groups are women-only and all the male-led cooperatives are mixed-gendered in demography and operation, with women in active executive positions as well.

At the government level, the importance of the women's position is further highlighted by the creation of the Ministry of Women and Social Development, dedicated solely to the development of women's affairs. Under the ministry, additional commissions are set up for catering to the different needs of women in the various sectors of the polity, such as the Women Farmers' Advancement Network (WOFAN) which was initially designed in the 1990's to concentrate on only the states in the north. This was later changed by subsequent administrations and extended to all the 36 states in Nigeria under a new name Women in Agriculture (WIA) (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009:25). The key policy aim of WIA which is to enhance the contribution of women farmers (especially in the rural areas) towards the improvement of agricultural production is operated through the ADP extension activities.

Besides having an upper hand in the smallholder cooperative and farmer group activities in the rural communities, women are also well represented in both local and state government cooperative administrations. Political positions, such as ‘the local government chairperson/councilor’, are openly contested for on a political party basis and winners emerge after the elections. Candidatures for political offices are not restricted to any gender; both Local Government Area chairpersons at the time of the research were men, but the cooperative coordinators or liaison persons were male and female. From my observations there were more women than men employed at both cooperative offices of the local government headquarters and the state government secretariat. Women are more likely to be hired at those types of civil service jobs, like clerks, secretaries, book keepers or messengers which government offices offer, than the men. I worked with more women than men at the government offices that I visited during my fieldwork. More men than women aim towards better paying jobs with corporate firms and institutions because they are traditionally expected to cater for their families and extended relatives as an obligation.

However I observed a broad representation of women in formal employment, leadership and executive positions in the government, as well as in the studied rural community cooperative groups. Besides the land access right already discussed, I did not observe any form of administrative gender discrimination against women in the societies and government offices that I worked with during the fieldwork. Both genders were respectful of each other’s differences and formal in the execution of their delegated duties at all sites in the state. The deputy governor of Imo State at the time of the research was a woman, along with other female executive government functionaries like the commissioners for women and social development, education and health. However despite this apparent gender representation in governance and decision making processes there still remain the debilitating effect of corruption that impedes implementation and the general realization of set policy objectives.

### **6.3. Leadership formation**

Leadership concern is one of the issues that always surfaced in the groups and individual discussions. According to Clark (2013:1), the concept of leadership “is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent”. It is a dynamic process that stimulates purposefulness in a group (Nakpodia, 2012: 95; Northouse, 2012:3). Different organisations operate different forms of leadership formation and as Jago argues, “leadership is performed through the application of such attributes as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills” (Jago, 1982:315). The leadership formation observed in the smallholder cooperative cases being discussed in this research is spearheaded by a few determined persons who work in collaboration with the societies’ administrative teams in order to achieve the group’s set goals. Through direct participant observation and interview interactions, I understood that the smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups tend to unanimously return some persons to certain leadership positions by consensus, while other executive positions are routinely replaced in bi-annual elections. Some of such leadership roles - like the president position - are usually reserved for the most experienced person(s) who always happen to be the most elderly and culturally seasoned members of the group. The candidate(s) are expected to possess many qualities such as grounded knowledge of the cooperative/group’s history and recent happenings, integrity, respectable personality, age and literacy if possible. The candidate(s) with their ‘gray hair of wisdom’<sup>89</sup>, as said in Igbo axiom, enjoy the Igbo cultural norm of respect for the elders and unwavering trust and loyalty from members because of their wisdom in proffering solutions to commonly felt needs in the group and the community at large.

#### **Age and experience in leadership (gerontocracy):**

The concept of ‘gerontocracy’ is mostly conceived as a political phenomenon that denotes a form of oligarchical rule by a small group of elderly individuals (Adegbindin, 2011). In African as Dei (1994: 13) puts it, gerontocracy is “the traditional African respect for the authority of elderly

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<sup>89</sup> Gray hair in the culture of the Igbos is seen as a sign of maturity to be respected for experience in life and wisdom all come with age.

persons for their wisdom, knowledge of community affairs, and ‘closeness’ to the ancestors”. My field experience among the Igbos of Nigeria Africa, attests to this practice as, smallholder cooperative and farmer group members hold age and experience as important qualities that ought to be possessed by their prospective leaders. An Igbo proverb underscores this cultural significance and belief of the Igbos stating: “what an elder sees sitting down, a youngster cannot see even when he or she has climbed into a tree” (Igbo proverb fieldwork report 2010); the commonly used illustration puts it thus “new brooms sweep well but old brooms know the corners” (Idiom fieldwork report 2010). The sayings highlight the pre-eminence of elderly attributes in all the group cases that this research discusses. The aged president (leader) of one of the independent farmer groups that I worked with in Owerri North had this to say on why the association emphasizes these attributes of gerontocracy (age, record and experience); she started off with a proverb:

*In Igboland, our cultural saying holds that ‘agbara nwata ji isi ya anaghi arahu egbu mmadu’ meaning ‘the deity that chooses a child as its chief-priest and mediator commits costly blunders’ this is because the child by his nature is usually clumsy and will not be able to handle properly the sensitivities and subtleties associated with the role of such prime office as chief-priest and mediator, hence the grave errors (Independent farmer group respondent, Owerri North, 2010)*

In practical terms, the respondent’s group, NDM CME of Azaraegbelu community in Owerri North, being an elderly farmer’s non-cooperative group of 32 members, chooses only the eldest and most experienced member/s to leadership roles. In the joint interview with the two octogenarian respondent women, neither could exactly recall when the group started but they knew it had been there before they were married into the community some 30/50 years ago. The NDM CME is a traditional ‘Isusu’ thrift and credit farmers group. They combine pooled rotational savings benefits to members with labour support as we have discussed earlier (see chapter two). They hold meetings on particular Igbo market calendar days and observe the traditional Igbo four day-week ‘Izu<sup>90</sup>’ instead of the seven day-week western calendar. The

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<sup>90</sup> Izu: is the Igbo word for week; in the traditional Igbo calendar the week is counted and named after the four known market days in Igbo culture -**Eke, Ori, Afor** and **Nkwo**. Each community has centers or squares dedicated to these days for extensive commercial trading and social activities. Different communities pick certain days in the

groups do not set out to pursue elaborate goals like those of the cooperative societies; instead they stick closely to their traditional patterns of operation. They neither apply for loans nor hope for the visit of the ADP extension staff. Formal banking is seldom considered as they usually prefer to save their pooled money at home or invest it into some type of business like stocking farm produce for commercial re-sale at scarce periods. One of the women shared the following insight saying:

*Your generation (referring to the researcher) is too quick and in a hurry to achieve everything but without really giving importance to the values that matter. We don't bank because banks fail a lot these days in Nigeria. Yes, robbers can also break in to steal the money from the house but I won't tell you here how we safe-keep and manage our little savings. We do everything ourselves because we know ourselves very well. Some of our members through their young daughter in-laws access certain novelties like improved inputs for their farms. But those are not from us, not that we are against such but we are just not ready for government complications...too many issues (Farmer group respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

From my observation of the group, they seemed to have all they wanted to function within their needed capacity and fashion. They are satisfied with their leaders and are not aiming at grandiose goals. However the diaspora groups appreciate and support these women in everything they do. They are the mothers, grandmothers and the affectionate hearts of the village communities. Their sons and daughters are perceived as the successful cream of the community that makes up the diaspora groups in the urban centers and overseas. So they will volunteer their help without being asked. With the NDM CME group, the diaspora group set-up a basic health insurance scheme for them with the hospital at the Emekuku community center; a gesture which they highly appreciate.

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calendar to mark various special events based on their mythological belief but some days and rules are generally observed by the entire Igbo communities. For instance marriage ceremonies in all Igboland are never held on the 'Eke' market day. The belief is that, Eke days are special days for the gods and so should be a day of rest for the humans in order to give attention to their gods, similar to the Christian Sundays. The custom is so intense that even diaspora sons and daughters of Igbo stock in distant lands observe the tradition.



#### **6.4. Forms of cooperative leadership and UMG cases**

The dynamics of leadership and its effect on group members' participation (judging from the field work antecedents observed on some group operations) leaves one questioning about the disparity in the leadership forms. While the functional smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups were found to practice a democratic and coordinated structure of leadership, the 'nominal cooperatives' rather were more emphatic and authoritarian in their leadership pattern .. In fact, cooperative leadership thrives better on the combination of these strategies, which involves coordinated cooperation rather than the authoritarian style that is based on subordinated cooperation (see Sakar, 1989). Most of the groups in the area have their leadership organs functionally in place while a few others still struggle with coordinating a workable leadership front. The leadership variations observed in the eleven studied smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups point strongly to a fine mixture of structural (leadership roles, rules, procedures and precedents) and cognitive (norms, values, attitudes and beliefs) forms of social capital attributes (Krishna & Uphoff, 2002; Uphoff, 1999). Most of the farmer's cooperative societies discussed have skillfully dedicated leadership personnel, who play key roles in imparting efficient leadership in their societies. Their individual skills and abilities in crafting and enforcing the group's rules and sustaining membership from value-conscious group members are phenomenal. These interwoven qualities in Igbo semantics are characterized as **ugwu onye**, which leads to **ugwu anyi** (see chapter three) and inspires loyalty from the members to work towards their agreed cooperative goals. As Peretomode puts it, "effective leadership binds a group together and motivates them towards the achievement of set collective goals" (Peretomode, 2012: 32).

Indeed, as observed among the cooperatives, skillful leadership works towards the achievement of set group goals and the satisfaction of their group members' needs; it takes determination and sacrifices from leaders to achieve these feats. The CJK, CNZ, GTD, PGM and EBD leaders go the extra mile in working for the success of their groups. For instance, the female leader of the CNZ and other founding members applied their personal trade skills in running the group's vocational center at no cost. Also the three male friends at GTD undertook the initial labour of

setting up the group's piggery aided by their family members at no charge to the group. Likewise, the PGM and EBD utilized their personal education, work experiences and social connections to enhance the welfare of their group. These different forms of sacrifices distinguish the leadership patterns of the groups. As one of the respondents puts it:

*Everybody cannot be a leader, a cooperative society or group where everyone struggles to become a leader at the same time will not make any progress because nobody will be willing to listen to or follow instructions. We have a reliable leadership team I can say and we acknowledge the sacrifices they make, it's not easy you know... our president is a very humble and knowledgeable person (Cooperative respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

However the general attitude of response from the group members (cognitive) is not disconnected from the cultural worldview of the Igbos, where norms such as trust and mutual reciprocity guard community social relationships. The mixture of these two forms of social capital (structural and cognitive) yields results in the long run. The relationship between the two forms of social capital is such that one reinforces the other. The base cognitive commitment of followership from the members inspires a determination in the leaders to work hard towards their group's set collective goals. In turn the leaders' zeal and capabilities (as adjudged through their sustained re-elections) encourage membership cohesion and trust within the group. By contrast, other studied groups that were struggling with their leadership structure and articulation of a common cooperative agenda, did certain things differently from the other more cohesive cooperative groups. For instance, while some of the more functional groups like the CJK, CNZ, GTD, PGM and EBD were initiated from commonly felt needs by associates or transformed from formerly traditional gender groups, others like the UMG PGM only existed in the mental construct of the leader for certain self-interest benefits and enjoy little recognition from their community. As one of the respondents observed:

*Sometimes it's hard to draw the line about how things operate in and for the group. There's no described sense of 'us' in the group to look forward to. Everyone knows how the certification came about in the first place and for what purpose. So it's in fact more of a personal business than what you are expecting to hear (Cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

The individual instrumental approach that the group's leadership took in the operation of the group's affairs did not turn out well for the group's progress as was observed during the field interaction. Members of this particular group were hesitant at doing anything as a collective. Although the base community/neighbourly acquaintance existed, yet the cohesion to advance a common cooperative front was absent. A member of the group recounted how they endlessly waited for their prime targeted goal, the FADAMA loan from the government, which they have never obtained to the present day. He narrated the usual distrustful doubt<sup>91</sup> among members that the group's initiator could have gone to access the fund for himself without informing any of them. However, the overall comments nevertheless go to show the extent of their skepticism regarding their group's leadership. The Igbos, though cooperatively democratic in their communities, uphold duly delegated or elected persons to leadership positions with the hope that their collective interest and voices will be heard through them. But when leaders become self-assuming rather than people-oriented they are usually deserted by their followers (Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 1972; Ifemesia, 1979). The instrumental pattern of relationship is viewed as a contradiction to the cohesive values of the Igbo worldview and life-style, especially in the rural communities. Interaction in the rural communities goes beyond the banality of business transactions as in the city and people go the extra-mile in village-community affairs.

### **Rational self-interest in leadership: the UMG PGM case**

The above conditions of smallholder cooperative indifference and elements of rational self-interest were found most strongly in the UMG PGM case. The rarity of cooperation and cohesion experienced among the UMG farmer's cooperative members and their leadership leaves much to speculation about their form of association. However it is not the duty of this research to enunciate judgments about any group's approach to the business of cooperatives in their area but to report the observed pattern adopted by each group and the reaction of the members to it. Nevertheless, I would like to reiterate that the leadership and associative experience of the UMG PGM group as recorded in this section of the thesis is not entirely representative of the rural

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<sup>91</sup> Although I doubted the idea, because collective loans are usually disbursed non-discretely but with the nation's challenge of corruption such pervasive suspicions are commonplace.

lifestyle of the Owerri Igbos of the area under study. I chose this group's case as an instance of the aberration of the cooperative pathway in a pressured community from government urban encroachment in Owerri West local government. Besides the external circumstances that contributed to the frustration in the group, the leader's personal idiosyncrasies were another major problem that scuttled the group's progress.

### **Brief background history of UMG PGM society:**

Unlike the devout spirituality and compassionate dedication that motivated the formation of groups like the CNZ (ED LD) smallholder cooperative society; the UMG PGM farmer's cooperative society was convened in anticipation of accessing finance and agricultural inputs from the government. In an interview, the group's president relayed to the researcher how unavailability of needed finance obstructed his business growth as a lone farmer. His inability to individually access certain government agriculture credit and provisions because of the policy of favouring a minimum of ten members, led him to persuade nine people to join him to target the funding scheme (viz. FADAMA Project scheme fund.)

### **Forming the UMG PGM smallholder cooperative society**

The founder of the UMG PGM farmer's smallholder cooperative society in the Umuguma community of Owerri West is still the incumbent president of the society. He was a retired civil servant and a shrewd businessman who acquired some wealth especially in capital goods such as cultivable lands, rental accommodation houses, and commercial lock-up shops. On retirement from active government civil service in the early 1990's, he took to agriculture as a means of supporting himself, his family and keeping busy. He grows yams and cassava crops and runs livestock farms such as poultries, piggeries and fisheries. Missing out on the two initial phases of the FADAMA funding scheme, he was determined to catch-up with the third phase of the project and other similar funding schemes being promoted by the government. He therefore sought the conditions that qualify an applicant. One of the criteria was the gathering of at least 10 members under an umbrella group or cooperative society. He searched in his immediate community for another nine people with some farming and livestock-related small business interest and so the

PGM cooperative society was born and immediately sought registration in 2000. That secured, the president/initiator willingly made a room in one of his properties in the market square available to be used as the local government's cooperative office for Owerri West, serving both the interest of his society and that of other similar groups with the hope of rental income. Unfortunately in the long run, neither the expected rent from the local government council nor the FADAMA fund materialized. Instead, normative excuses were given by the government for delays, like non-availability of the fund, non-release of the fund from the donors, counterpart funding hitches, unpreparedness, and other bureaucratic bottlenecks. The PGM farmer's cooperative society, besides the expected funding and agricultural inputs like fertilizers and improved seedlings from the government, has no other articulated common agenda to serve as further motivation for effective group continuity. Although the UMG form of administration is individualistic, it could be likened to the unpopular state vertical pattern of political governance in contrast to the people's appreciated horizontal pattern (see chapter three).

The lack of a common need-agenda among the society members and the strings of disappointments on expected funding and agricultural inputs from the government exacerbate the drag on the operations of the smallholder cooperative society. An informant member of the group expressed to me the resultant apathy the members have to deal with in the cooperative, she said:

*If this is all what it means to belong to a cooperative society I had better describe myself as a non-cooperative member. What sort of cooperative society never holds a meeting, no common purse, no constitution, no plans what so ever. We operate on impromptu summons whenever there is a glimpse of news about loan or fertilizer distribution from the government. I am really fed up and just waiting for this planting season to end before I quit (Cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

The frustration expressed above by the respondent illustrates the failure of leadership in the group. It is the role of leadership to stimulate purposefulness in a group and coordinate efforts towards its achievement (Nakpodia, 2012:95; Northouse, 2012:3). Unfortunately this has not been seen operative in the group. What exists instead has been a non-facilitative vertical head type of leadership. The group leader and the members are all separately running their different

small businesses, without any predisposition to forge a collaborative front to function as a cooperative society. The leadership of the group as shared by an informant member refuses to accommodate alternate ideas from other members on ways of moving forward. Axiomatically put “he sees himself as the only cock (rooster) that crows in the neighborhood” (meaning that -he feels invincible) (Cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010). The leader’s personality as alleged discourages rather than encourage cooperation in the group. However, from the group’s general tepidity, one of the members expressed to me their desire to do things differently. He wished they had a real cooperative set-up like those obtained in the neighbouring communities, where member’s interests and contributions are practically represented. In his words:

*A cooperative society from my understanding is one that everybody contributes and knows what the group is planning. We all have to be on the same page so that we can collectively articulate a focus. Not everyone waiting on one person’s decision which still doesn’t produce any result. The cooperative that we have now... is not a cooperative group at all (Cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

These nine other members (four women and five men) that make up the society, though living in close proximity in the same village community, seldom hold any cooperative purpose meeting except when there is glimpse of news from the government regarding their target expectation. Sometimes the Agricultural Development Programme extension staff (ADP) from the state Ministry of Agriculture pay the cooperative members visits for supervision and individual support at their respective farms as the leader confirms in an interview, saying:

*The technical assistance is generally available because there are ADP workers who come along once in a while to give new ideas or improve on the one that a farmer already has. But on the financial aspect which is mainly why we went into cooperative grouping, there is still nothing received yet... but we are still hopeful that someday something good might happen. However this government policy of ten people arrangement for financial assistance is annoying (Coop respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

Members contribute to buy inputs like fertilizer, improved cassava stems, yam seedlings and chicken feed, at supposed subsidized rates from the Ministry of Agriculture whenever they are available. These are not given to farmers as individuals, which is another reason they felt

compelled to join together. On purchase, the goods are shared among the members to apply to their separate farm businesses. This cooperative society does not own or run any collective business or community focus project whatsoever.

In fact achieving a coherent group consensus is difficult especially where there exists an obvious suspicion over the intention of the leader or the administrative arm of the group. From all observable indications as deduced from the field interviews, there was an air of doubt in the minds of the cooperative members over the motives of their group convener. As one of the informants puts it he is “onyia akpa eli ozu”-“one who has many baggages of unknown contents for his/her group” or “a person of many hidden agendas” (Coop respondent, July, 2010). Hence every action and non-action of his is construed by the other members as having personal ulterior motives. Smallholder cooperative societies, especially in the rural communities, thrive on the advancement of trust and reciprocity and when these attributes are doubted, the society/group suffers (Ofuoku & Urang, 2012, 3-4). Trust and reciprocity, as indicators of an internal bonding relationship in the group, are observed to be at low ebb, as summed up in the words of the president when asked about trust and reciprocity:

*One might term it compelled ‘trust’ so to say, because since each one of us has this basic financial need and we cannot get that alone, then we are coerced into forming a group even if we might not have wanted to do so individually. However we are still hoping and waiting that someday, the long awaited good news of the loan will happen (Coop respondent, Owerri West, 2010)*

The absence of group reciprocal trust that guides cooperation in such rural groups elicits the suspicion of rational self-interest or individualism in members against their leadership and amongst themselves. Members in this cloud of suspicion tend to think that they are being used by their leader or the administrative arm of the group, to satisfy their selfish goal(s). As one of the respondents put it:

*If there is anything here about ‘us’ as a cooperative society, I think we should have been discussing it long ago or even gotten better than what we have today, but unfortunately there isn’t. What exists is just ‘one source, one authority’ which you know quite well. He does all the talking and walking and*

*informs or invites us over to agree or disagree (Coop respondent, Owerri West, 2010)*

The adoption of the rational self-interest approach in the management of a cooperative in itself can be productive when applied in an instrumental or detached form of social relations. This appears more common in the cities where people may only wish to stick to the business purpose of their interaction. By contrast, this is not obtainable in rural homogenous groups like the Igbo communities that this study discusses where an instrumental relationship would be counter-productive because a fellow co-operator is a friend, a neighbour, a relative, a customer and everything rolled into one. Treating him or her in an instrumental manner would result in quarrels and mis-interpretations, leading to dis-association or isolation of the member or individual. Therefore the UMG PGM farmers' smallholder cooperative society continues to struggle and its members are lukewarm about even identifying themselves as bona-fide members of the group. In the same vein of frustration experience, I will now discuss two instances of government encroachment on local farm lands for sundry projects in both local government areas and the adverse effect on people's livelihood in the rural areas.

## **6.5. Infringement on rural life: The University cases**

### **Owerri West: Eziobodo**

The Eziobodo village community in Owerri West is a sparsely populated and relaxed rural community of about 5-7,000 locals, who are predominantly farmers. Because of the rural nature of Eziobodo that separates it from the distractions of urban life and the availability of abundant acres of level land, the Nigerian federal government decided to site the building of a Federal University of Technology in the community. Hence, the once quiet community now teems with a youthful student population. Investors followed suit, acquiring lands and building hostel accommodation for the students and other businesses such as convenient stores and shops. The siting of the University in the Eziobodo community was a welcome development for the people as it created an opportunity for the government to give some attention to their needs, at least for the sake of the university. The community now enjoys motorable sealed roads, water and



electricity that lead to the university area. The presence of the university also opened up lots of opportunities for locals in the immediate vicinity to make some quick money from land sales, and some started off small service businesses like food stands, grocery shops, laundry shops, copy and phone centers etc. But like all good things, there is always a down side; the Eziobodo community still battles with the problems of food insecurity, poverty and joblessness of the youths and other local adults. A member of one of the cooperative societies participating in my study paints this picture:

*The positioning of this University in our community has brought us mixed results. I said mixed because on the positive note we have some of the basic amenities like water and electricity around the university area, but I think it has also caused our people to become unstable in their life goal pursuits. Everyone is now running after what to gain from the hub of activities. When the students vacate, the community becomes like a ghost-town. Most of our cultural observances as a community are threatened. For instance our communal market and river path clearing usually championed by the youths have lapsed (Cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010.)*

The hype that the presence of the university brought to the community compounded some of these problems, as some community youths who originally would have focused on acquiring life sustaining trades/skills when university education was unaffordable, became less interested. The urban-life youth-culture and multiplicity of attitudes imported by the convergence of myriads of students from all corners of the country filtered into the original way of life of the once quiet Eziobodo community. Loud music is heard everywhere, the community is busy 24 hours a day, human traffic on the roads and there has been a sudden hike in prices of goods and services in the area. Relaying the community concern over the pervasion of such quick-income business measures as roadside grocery hawking, cell-phone recharge card retails, property prospecting and negotiating, created by the bustle, a respondent questioned:

*How can a young man/woman think he/she could possibly survive by selling cell phone recharge cards or sachet food and water? What annoys me most is that most of these people who are suddenly hawking goods are boys and girls who are in the elementary or secondary schools. How can they concentrate on their studies since they now feel there is quick money out there to be made on the street? This is troubling I tell you! (Non-cooperative respondent, Owerri West, 2010).*

People's ambitions have been derailed as sons and daughters in families rather than working towards a career aimed only at either running an immediate small business or just to appear to have identified as a university student, even when in reality they can't read and write. The Eziobodo community felt the same impact as the Orji community in Owerri north.

### **Owerri North: Orji**

Orji in Owerri North is the village community where the CNZ farmer's cooperative society is located. It is a densely populated suburban community of about 10-11,000 people, made up of mainly local migrants from neighbouring Owerri North communities and other local government areas who prefer to live there because of its proximity to the Owerri city municipal center. As always is the case with suburban communities with migrant influx, Orji struggles with urban encroachment and other social community problems relating to poverty issues such as joblessness, youth misdemeanours, crimes, hunger, substance abuse and theft. Hunger and joblessness are among the biggest of worries in the community. During the field interviews a resident cooperative member observed that:

*The Orji community is a rural community bordering on the Owerri urban centre and so its farm areas are gradually being encroached into by the city expansion. What we least expected was the burst that resulted from the university siting in the 80's that has since continued. The influx and departure of students have decimated the face and values of the community (Cooperative respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

The students' hostels and residential accommodation for the Imo State University students in Owerri North are located in Orji, like the Federal University of Technology (FUTO) case in Eziobodo community. They brought along a teeming population of youthful students that overran the entire small community; raising living costs and creating social and security concerns in the community. As a quick means of making money most of the village-community youths decided to cash-in on this bustle provided by the student population. They (youths) took to doing everything from petty trading, street hawking, menial jobs like laundry services and food vending rather than putting time into a more permanent career. They became disinterested and impatient in learning any life- sustaining skill; some quickly partitioned available spaces in their

parent's family houses into small rooms for rent to the many accommodation-seeking students. Young girls under the overwhelming influence of youth culture adopted urban behaviours and unwanted youth pregnancies increased. To ameliorate some of these worries and confusions for the parents in the two communities (Eziobodo and Orji), the smallholder cooperative societies stepped in to assist in addressing some of these disturbing issues. In Eziobodo the OGH EBD utilize their vocational and skill acquisition centers to attract their fledging youth population to some positive directives. The CNZ group, being a society that has a Christian orientation and regard for moral values, tries speaking to the young girls mainly on sex education and the boys on more stable meaningful pathways to succeed in life. On the whole the task remains an onerous one.

## **6.6. Diaspora support and patron-clientism**

In Nigeria, self-help community development is often seen as a direct reaction of many rural communities to lack of government presence (governance), a phrase that usually denotes pervasive poverty, shortage of employment, food insecurity and inadequacy or absence of basic infrastructure (Onyebueke & Ezeadichie, 2012:5). This informs the tendency of most, if not all CBOs comprising (diaspora and hometown /community development associations) to push for the socio-economic development of their respective communities as the overriding goal (Akinsorotan & Olujide, 2006; Chukwuezi, 2001). Substantiating this observation Gugler and Flanagan (1978) further noted:

*Many of the urban residents of West Africa maintain strong ties with the rural areas that they consider to be their home. They participate in the urban economy while returning to a rural community; they operate in geographically separate but culturally and economically integrated systems (p.64).*

Diaspora and hometown support groups as we have discussed in chapters two, three and confirmed in the field data analysis in chapter five constitute a major force in the livelihood support systems of the rural communities. They are the sons and daughters of the communities resident in the urban centers and overseas who help their natal communities. The other form of support is the 'patron-clientism' which I discussed in this work as being of three forms viz.

‘political parochialism’; a general pattern of accessing social and economic resources through networks of elite patronage (politics), grounded in ties of kinship and community (Smith, 2010). The rational self-interest patronage in which an individual takes advantage of the group name for his/her selfish purposes such as in the UMG PGM farmer cooperative society case. Lastly is the public/private partnership patronage or diaspora support network, which is the collaboration between the communities’ natal sons and daughters abroad with government and locals for development purposes. It is the most reliable of all. While the diaspora patronage is commonplace and well structured, the ‘patron-clientism’ is clandestine and personal. Sometimes it is hard to actually draw the line between the two sources in the communities because most ‘patron-client’ personalities do join the diaspora group as elites of their communities. A society or group might be fortunate to receive support from both sources at the same time in a particular community while another is unable to access either. We shall address these support sources with two group cases from the two local governments.

### **CJK Farmers’ Cooperative case**

The CJK group formation initiative was not propelled by any one individual, but collectively, by the traditional women’s group in the Umuakuru community. The present members could not clearly ascertain when the group was initiated, because it has always been there as a traditional meeting forum for the women who married into the community. With the democratic nature of socio-politics in Igbo culture (see Uchendu, 1965, Afigbo 1972 and further discussion in chapter three), leadership positions in this group are filled by a representative of members from all the village hamlets that have been elected democratically by the group. This group has survived through years of evolutionary experience from the old traditional Isusu model to a modern day registered cooperative pattern.

In an interview with the group’s incumbent president and leader on how they have managed to fare through to their present state, she recounted how the need for nutrition especially for their children moved the women in the community to seek a solution. Her account is in accordance with the basic motivations behind the formation of most rural smallholder cooperatives and

similar groups in rural Africa (Maghsoudi, 2010 cited in Agbo, 2012). According to her, the idea of the cooperative approach in their group was informed by the drought experienced during one of the 1980's harmattan<sup>92</sup> seasons. During this period people could hardly grow their staple vegetable<sup>93</sup> foods at their various home gardens due to the harsh dryness. She observed that:

*The 'uguru' or harmattan season in Igboland is a very tough period of 'unwu' (a season marked with scarcity of food), it is such a challenging season of the year that we as parents worry about. It's our obligation to put food on the table for our children irrespective of the season or period (Cooperative respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

As she related, this period affects the quality of nutrition in most of the family meals as basic vegetables became scarce and expensive. The women of the village discussed this in their meetings and embarked on dry season collective vegetable farming at the community's fertile river bank. This singular project turned out to be so successful and the entire community during that season of that year had more than enough vegetables for themselves, selling their excess to the markets in the Owerri urban areas for income. They then decided to take up the project as an annual event and diversified into other areas of business, such as cassava, yam, palm oil, melon seed, poultry, fishery and pig farming, with the cooperative formation.

### **CJK members' inter-dependence, formation and growth**

As CJK was formerly a traditional women's association, I observed that most of the members live in proximity in the same homogeneous community buying and selling at the same market, worshipping at the same church, with their children attending the same school, going to the same playground and cultivating the same farmland area. So virtually every woman member and her family knew each other and so worked together. Thus coordination was easy. Problems were

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<sup>92</sup> The **Harmattan** season is a cold, dry and dusty West African trade wind that blows south from the Sahara into the Gulf of Guinea between the end of November and the middle of March. It usually carries large amounts of dust, which it transports hundreds of kilometers out over the Atlantic Ocean; the dust and dryness often leaves the farm lands parched.

<sup>93</sup> Some of the Igbo's staple vegetable foods are; uziza leaves, water leaf (*Talilum triangulare*), utazi leaves (*Crongromena ratifolia*), okra (lady fingers), groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*), (garden egg leaves) *Solanum manocarpum*, (garden eggs (*Solanum melongena*), egusi (*Cirullus colocynthis*), melon seeds, afang / ukazi leaves (*Gnetum africanus*), bitterleaf (vernonia), ugu (pumpkin leaves) *Telfairi occidentalis* etc

relatively felt equally; some of the affluent members of the community reside in the cities but still belong to the home groups for sociability and status recognition purposes. They pay their dues and remain committed to their group's causes because disassociating from one's community group spells isolation, especially whenever the need for kinship<sup>94</sup> support arises, such as in the eventuality of bereavement (see chapters three and six). The cooperative idea became more welcomed after the initial success was recorded with the dry season vegetable farming in the mid 1980's. The annual success of the exercise and achievement attracted the attention of the state Ministry of Agriculture who stepped in to support the efforts of the women with fertilizer incentives through the services of the ADP extension staff under the World Bank sponsored FADAMA phase one project (Ajayi, & Nwalieji, 2010).

However the group could not be given any loans or apply for one because they weren't a registered smallholder cooperative society yet. In the following years the group started the application process and was finally registered as a standard functional smallholder cooperative society in 1992. This achievement brought about new membership, swelling the already large membership base to more than 100 registered women members. The group maintained their membership base to strictly 'women only'; even the women's husbands were not allowed to join the new smallholder cooperative society. A woman intending to apply for membership has to possess the group's criteria, such as having been proven as trust-worthy, staying married and being recognizably well behaved in the community, as these basic virtues are viewed with utmost importance in the culture of the Igbos in their community life (see marriage in chapter five). Because Umuakuru in Emekuku is a small community, it's easy to tell when people are of questionable character. However the success and government support for the newly transformed CJK cooperative society was short-lived as the sudden military government changes of the Gen Sani Abacha regime affected their functions. In addition the post Structural Adjustment (SAP) policies saw their support resources dry up, thus frustrating their new enthusiasm for growth. Nevertheless the cooperative still maintained their original mission, aided by their extensive familial bonds, including links with the diaspora groups.

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<sup>94</sup> The Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria believe that one's respect lies within the extent of one's recognition by his or her kinsmen. Hence there are popular sayings like '*umunna wu ike*' (kinsmen are one's pride/strength) among the Igbos.

### **Smallholder cooperative and diaspora solution approach to problems**

Despite the nearness of Umuakuru village in Emekuku to the Owerri urban center, the entire village community remains rural with the attendant poverty trajectories of a typical rural Nigerian community, including food insecurity, youth joblessness, lack of basic health and scarcity of base capital for small business. The CJK smallholder cooperative society work in collaboration with the diaspora and home development groups through the regional Apex office and local community authorities to address some of these identified community problems (mainly food insecurity, youth joblessness, and scarcity of funds). Their approach is that a lot of the rural poverty problems can be addressed when people are well fed and able to engage in daily productive ventures. To do this, cooperators utilize both their collective and individual farmlands for the purpose of crop cultivation. The president of the CJK society noted thus:

*We are a community-conscious group. Of course we are the cooperative members and we are also the community so whatever we do here, we do to and for ourselves. We understand our needs and how best to approach them. Our supporters, especially the 'abroad groups', are wonderful too (Cooperative respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Though Emekuku does not possess the farmlands of places like Eziobodo<sup>95</sup> smallholder cooperative community in Owerri West, their available areas are enough because many people in the area are no longer involved in large-scale rural farming; instead they go for waged jobs and businesses. However in cases where more spaces are needed, the cooperatives cross over into the neighbouring local government community of Mbaitolu and Ikeduru (which have more unutilized lands), to lease farmlands for their long term crop cultivation, such as cassava farming (see appendix map five & six).

Community lands in Igboland are owned by kinship groups who live in clans and kindreds<sup>96</sup>. Ownership claims to such lands are passed down from the ancestors to their present generation.

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<sup>95</sup> Eziobodo is the community that plays host to the OGH EBD farmer's cooperative society in Owerri west as we shall be discussing later.

<sup>96</sup> Kindred are groups of related persons of the same ancestry or family. In Igboland, there are thousands of autonomous communities or towns made up of kindreds. Each of these village kindreds is further segmented into smaller groups known as 'umunna' (patrilineage or literally meaning children of the same father). The umunna is the central and the most influential and basic socio-political unit of the Igbo indigenous society. It

When there are no collective intentions for the land use, portions are shared amongst different family members (who might be cooperative members), for each to farm on during the farming season. Most relatives belong to similar cooperatives in particular areas and thus it's easier to pool farmlands together. Labour for clearing the fallows and tilling the land is collectively sought from all the males in the family. Working on these farmlands is the collective responsibility of all the cooperative group members who live mainly within the village boundaries. The exception is a few people working in blue and white collar jobs in the city centers. The men assist in this clearing process even though they are not members, as in the CJK women-only case, but they should have a close female relative such as a wife or mother in the group.

On a daily basis during the cultivation or harvesting season, the cooperatives in this region hire labourers for the clearing of rented lands from other communities, from the Apex office at Acharaubo Center<sup>97</sup> and neighboring communities.

However, in order to save cost, cooperatives rotate their chores and do a lot of the work themselves with extra help from family members. The president of CJK smallholder cooperative shared with the researcher an instance where her group hired a cassava grating machine from its owner and put it to commercial use in the community. They provided the manpower and time in using the machine to run the grating business, serving the community until they were able to save up enough money to buy their own machine from the marginal profit they made after payback and interest. Now they have more than two commercial food processing cottage mills processing a large quantity of food grating, nut cracking and seed shelling for people in the community and beyond.

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comprises the descendants in the male line of the founder ancestor by whose name the patrilineage is sometimes known (Isichei, 1978).

<sup>97</sup> Acharaubo Agricultural Center located in Ubowalla is the Owerri North regional office of the State Ministry of Agriculture. It is where the cooperative Apex office for the region is located. On a daily basis jobless people and handy-work persons go there to wait for people seeking unskilled labour. A day's job pays about 15-16 NZD-2000 Naira.



## **Diaspora support partnership and financing**

Specifically for the purpose of educating the smallholder cooperatives and dissuading youths and local adults from leaving their communities for city life without survival skills, the regional apex office in a multilateral partnership (public-private-partnership) with the diaspora, home development groups, and cooperatives organize free open sessions for skill acquisition and vocational training workshops. As a diaspora member confirmed:

*We are concerned about the welfare of our people back in our home communities; unfortunately it is sad knowing that we live well in the foreign lands having the basic conveniences and life's opportunities like good education, vocational training, power, water, motorable roads, health care etc, while our family members and relatives are denied these basic amenities in our home communities for fault not of theirs. So we do the little we can to help the situation (Diaspora respondent, UK, 2011)*

Under the scheme, cooperators and young people from the communities are instructed in different possible small business ventures and vocational trades to later utilize their acquired skills in setting up livestock farming, welding, plumbing, sewing, taxi cab driving, motor cycling or food catering businesses. This form of public-private-partnership (PPP) patronage to rural development is popularly known in most Igbo village communities as 'home support' or 'August meeting' and attracts a lot of interest from community natives abroad. It is different from the self-interest patronage type of the UMG leadership and the parochial patronage from political linkages in the EBD case. In the study area, it is organised to take place twice a year (between July-August and December-January). Under this arrangement professional sons and daughters' groups of the communities and from different fields of expertise, such as health, agriculture, business and environment return home to instruct people in self-help/reliance strategies. They also sometimes liaise with the university professors and teachers in the relevant department at the nearby local universities to consolidate the education effort. During an interview session with a diaspora member in New York, he said this:

*I am a pharmacist by profession here in the U.S and I understand the health needs of the people in my community; so after our annual diaspora convention here, we choose who and who that should visit home and for what purpose. Within my*

*professional capacity when it's my turn, I render to the community the basic health services like blood pressure checks, simple diagnosis, pills, tests etc at the community health center. What more can we do? These are our family relatives and we owe them this duty (Diaspora respondent, Owerri North, 2012).*

This partnership is only with the regional or autonomous Local Government office and tertiary institutions. It does not involve the state or national government. The diaspora chooses this form of regional collaboration because of the close contacts or trust relationship that the locals have with these regional apex officers who are not government employee/officers but mostly retirees assisting in coordinating local events. However the government accommodates the idea and plays the regulatory role as the political custodian of the areas. The regional coordinator at the office in Owerri North, an elderly retiree, and the president of the PNR farmer's cooperative shared this with me:

*Here in our community, everybody looks forward to the events of the diaspora group, which happens twice a year. This year our instructors shall be from the Euro-based diaspora branch. They will be helping us with seasonal water usage technology and conservation [bore-hole drilling] and we have been preparing for the day to come. Additionally, we want our roads graded for easier accessibility (he laughed) (Respondent, Owerri North, 2010).*

Each diaspora branch group knows the professional abilities of its members, so the different branches liaise with the apex office (which is the regional umbrella group of the smallholder cooperative societies in the area) and the village authorities (chiefs) who coordinate the non-cooperative groups in the community. With a workable time frame agreed upon between the community and the branch, the branch then supports their instructors with the necessary logistics (finance and needed inputs as the case might be). Money<sup>98</sup> from the diaspora and home development groups is coordinated by the local village community authority (chief or Eze), to be disbursed to the requisite cooperatives and groups accordingly. The cooperatives then issue this as soft loans to deserving members, explaining their sources clearly to the recipients. Repayment defaults and abuse are almost non-existent because the consequence of such an act is dire (see

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<sup>98</sup> The village community authorities declined giving me access to any of their income accounts particularly from the diaspora and home development groups. They reasoned that these finances are treated as confidential respecting the intentions of the donors and for security purposes. My efforts to make them reconsider the stand considering that I only needed the data for research purpose did not sway their opinion.

chapter three). This form of support is rotated amongst the different diaspora and home development/professional groups of the community. The open sessions are held for everyone at designated centers, usually at the community hall, apex office, cooperative locations or homes. But some cooperative sessions are restricted to cooperative members only, and are held at a particular location, or rotated round from one cooperative society location to another. The CJK cooperative society runs an extension of members own gender specific in-house sessions where they teach mothers, widows and young girls some essential domestic and business trade skills. Participants learn how to make products like soap, butter, candles, polish, mats, clothes, cakes, and other confectioneries. Other lessons such as improved home crop and livestock farming skills, food preservation in the absence of electric power, and animal cross breeding are also taught. Prepared with these minor skills, members and other community attendees are able to venture into small businesses with minor soft loans from readily available social capital safety nets, such as their smallholder cooperative group, family relatives, friends, acquaintances or even personal savings. This alleviates the level of poverty in the community to some extent.

#### **6.7. Patron-clientism: The OGH EBD cooperative case**

Similar to the CJK farmer cooperative society, the OGH EBD farmer's cooperative society in Owerri West metamorphosed from a community traditional group to a cooperative society. The incumbent president Mrs. X, a 65yr old vibrant retired teacher, community leader and organizer, recounted to me how she and her siblings were raised by their cooperative parents, having plenty to eat and share especially at festive periods. Then on marriage into Eziobodo to a professional agriculturist, she decided to join the community's traditional credit association or Isusu where they had a separate women's and men's wing. Later on she proceeded to acquire professional cooperative education at the cooperative college in Umuahia Abia State with her husband's support. Then returning in 1993 she coordinated with fellow group members from the women's Isusu wing while her husband persuaded the men to form a cooperative society. Her husband's job and knowledge as a professional agriculturist working with the state's Ministry of Agriculture then helped in articulating comprehensive ways of championing the cooperative's cause better.

### **Forming the OGH EBD farmers' cooperative society:**

The development of the newly transformed Isusu group into a smallholder cooperative-like operation began humbly with the group's vision, led by the couple's determination to first tackle the problem of food insecurity being experienced in the immediate Eziobodo community. Mrs. X, as the women's group leader in Eziobodo, liaised with the other women in produce and market groups and they agreed on coming together for a cooperative action. With a beginning membership of over 55 women (now twice that), carrying out various women's community functions, it was easy to transform the group into a smallholder cooperative society. Blessed with a cooperative-educated and politically versatile leader, Eziobodo farmer's smallholder cooperative society was positioned for success. Although most of the men's initial reaction was that cooperative business is a women's group affair. However, with the obvious transformation and expanding business opportunities, the gendered impression toned down but was not completely changed; instead, the men fostered their interest through their wives. The benefits continued to materialize in the transformed OGH EBD group as anticipated, and both gender interests were represented as will be discussed later under the gender theme.

The president and her husband's household, besides being influential in their Eziobodo community, are loved and respected by many in the village. The Owerri West Local Government Council chairman at the time of research was from their family and the new cooperative society had all the necessary attributes to prosper according to the obtainable measures in Nigeria. They had a wide representation of the community's population, male and female, young and old. They also had the farm land resources, individually and communally owned, and a knowledgeable leadership which was well connected to the government corridors of power. Therefore in 1993 the new group became formally registered as a smallholder cooperative society with the government and issued with a certificate to resume operations. Two years later in 1995, the OGH EBD smallholder farmer's cooperative society was formally launched in the community with a huge celebration and various guests from home and abroad in attendance.

## **OGH EBD growth and patronage link**

The OGH EBD smallholder farmer's cooperative society, like the CJK society in Emekuku, has a very large membership registration of more than 110 persons, comprising single, widowed and married women and their husbands. The huge membership prompted the creation of another cooperative society out of this main group, in order to diversify production and ease administration problems. It also opened up a dual channel for the cooperative groups to access government assistance when available. As in the CNZ case at Orji in Owerri North, some of the husbands are still not interested while some are non-resident in the community due to their job locations; however, they keep up their financial obligations to the society through their wives. The community youth, if included, are not regarded as members, but are direct beneficiaries of their parent's or family member's membership commitments. Hence they can join in the skill acquisition and vocational training sessions on subsidized registration rates. The unmarried adult youth of both sexes can still join to receive training on the basis of a family coop-member or directly for themselves; but they cannot belong to the cooperative society because of the marriage criterion for membership. All the original pioneer members remain actively involved in the running of the smallholder cooperative. The cooperative society has diversified its income means, to range from sources such as dues, levies, fees, sales profits and donations. In addition to these confirmed internal support sources, the group also enjoys external supports from special sources such as the community diaspora and patronage support from one of their son's political elite contacts. A member of the society puts it thus:

*I don't know if I may say we are lucky or privileged because our group has been progressively pushing on through most of our set goals. We have a huge membership body compared to other cooperative groups in the area; we receive some sort of assistance (financial and inputs) from the government; thanks to one of our sons in government, and generally I can say we are not doing badly... look at our ultra-modern skill/vocational training complex (she gestured towards to the building) (Cooperative member, Owerri West, 2010)*

During my field interactions with the OGH EBD farmer's cooperative members I observed a wealth of cooperative knowledge and similar willingness to work in the membership. Cognizant of the fact that their leader was a cooperative institute graduate, I noticed a versatility in the

coordination of their income sources which was absent in some of the other groups. No doubt familial patronage helps to accentuate their effort in so many ways but there's no denying the fact that the management of the cooperative does certain things differently. They are the only cooperative that showed me a database of all their diaspora connections with up to date phone contacts and addresses both in Nigeria and overseas. They consistently organise end-of-the-year launching and fund raising events for one project or another. Like the CNZ group they too have uniforms and well-choreographed functions to excite and entertain their visitors during their launching events. In fact, they were just colorful. The president shared:

*We do all these because we believe in the saying that 'as you make your bed so you lie on it' we do receive responses when we call out for help... if we don't get the response we don't stop calling, we insist until an answer is given. Maybe that is one thing I think we do differently. I love politics, as a politician I know how to get things going at least within this, our areas/community constituency (Cooperative leader, Owerri West, 2010).*

The patronage outreach in this case is parochial and similar to that argued by Chabal & Daloz (1999) that a person, "will only continue to be a good man if he channels part of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public" (p.108). While the support is instrumental to the success of the OGH EBD group but not without their accompanying hard work and organisation which consolidates the support received. The same fate cannot be said of the other groups in the same local government region that struggle twice as much to achieve anything. The complexity of political bureaucracy in Nigeria exacerbates corruption as illustrated in Ekeh's (1975) two publics theory. Resulting to people adopting undue measures such as the ("I.M or long leg syndrome"<sup>99</sup>) as it is popularly known in the study area to circumvent the 'due process' way of doing things in order to satisfy the needs of the few who are connected to the source of power.

The corruption in a patron-client system has long served as a cushion against the state's unreliability by providing access to resources through familiar (and familial) mechanisms of reciprocity. As unfortunate as it may be, the system is widely understood by ordinary Nigerians

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<sup>99</sup> The long leg syndrome or the I.M-(ima mmadu in Igbo language - to know someone who knows someone) is a colloquial term used in Nigeria to describe the perverse or clandestine form of social capital through which a person or people access undue support informally because of their underground contacts to persons in positions of authority.

to have given way to a much more individualistic pursuit of wealth and power as depicted in the UMG PGM case and the other defunct group cases. However, the structure benefits only those people who know people in the corridors of power or have the means of pushing for what they need which I reckon the OGH EBD does possess better than the other groups. It is not the duty of this research to morally judge the act but to open it up for discussion as an observed fact from the research field. Corruption, however, continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing development effort in Nigeria (Smith 2010).

## **6.8. Conclusion**

This chapter sums up the data discussion segment of this research that was started in chapter five. I have discussed all the gathered data related to bridging and bonding observances from my fieldwork experience in working with local farmer cooperators and traditional farmer groups in the study areas of Owerri in Imo State.

In the bid to responding the question of why some registered cooperatives sustain in their operations and other don't, the research identified women/gender contributory role as a key facilitator to the subsistence of many groups in the study area. Smallholder cooperative operations in the area were therefore discussed in the light of the Igbo cultural gender perception. Collective activities within the studied groups, families and the communities at large were found to be more gender stratified than the researcher ever presupposed while growing up in his Igbo village community. It was interesting to note how women use their 'gender' as a power tool to negotiate the socio-cultural world which they live with their male counterparts. Cooperative business types and the cultivated crops were found to bear gender significances that determine the interest of prospective cooperative members (Korieh, 2007). The female oriented business cooperatives attracted more women while the male groups and clubs attracted more males and in-between were the mixed cooperatives which held the balance for both sexes in the communities. This balance is effected in the Igbo cultural mixed cultivation of different crops on the same farmland; a cropping pattern which assuages the recognition needs of both sexes,

ensuring harmony in the interaction and coexistence of both sexes in the community (Korieh, 2007).

Leadership formation and pattern was signaled as an essential aspect that determines the direction and outlook of each of the smallholder cooperative and farmer groups. The leader's personal (internal) attributes and the community (external) cultural factors interactively form the characteristics of each group. As established in a similar study by Onyebueke and Ezeadichie (2011) cooperative societies and farmer groups were found in this chapter to accumulate the necessary social capital support within their groups and externally from their community's home development organisations particularly the networks of diaspora relations (Chukwuezi, 2001).

The field research identified three forms of patronage in the studied cases that shaped each of the group's courses. The rational self-interest form of patronage was identified in such groups as the UMG PGM farmer cooperative society in Owerri West that qualifies as a cooperative group only because of its paper certification with the government. The leadership discussion under this theme scrutinized the challenges of cooperative formation as exemplified in the society and the impact of such formation on the group's outlook and cohesion. I endeavored to illustrate the society's administrative disaffection with its membership on practical grounds evidenced from my fieldwork's discussions and interactions with the members and leader of the estranged cooperative society. Rational self-interest as a business model adopts urban individualistic tendencies as against the associative lifestyle that cooperative societies promote in the rural areas. It alienates people from the groups rather than bond them together under a shared social capital stock. Hence its practice is problematic in the rural UMG community of Owerri West that is already experiencing frustrations from loss of their farm land space resulting from government rural/urban encroachment. I therefore discussed some of the farm displacement cases using instances from two communities (Eziobodo and Orji) of the two local government areas of study. The next is the public-private partnership patronage that most of other groups hold with their community support networks, such as the home development and diaspora groups. It was found to be the most reliable boost to the development of smallholder cooperative functions and general rural development goals in the area. Finally, political patronage was observed as a



parochial support granted to only one privileged groups at the expense of others as was exemplified in the case of the OGH EBD group in Owerri West. This last patronage form was discussed from the theoretical perspective of Ekeh's (1975) thesis on the 'two publics' described as seminal by Smith (2010) and Chabal and Daloz (1999) which argue that, in post-colonial Africa a civil servant's relevance among his/her primordial kins is dependent on the extent that he/she is able to channel part of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public (1974: 108). Hence the discussion detailed the trajectories of the impact of corruption on the social polity of Nigeria. Naturally social science fieldwork raises themes that open up new questions. For this research, I have made an effort at addressing some of these relevant themes and will continue the discussion into the next chapter that deals with the summary, conclusion and my final recommendations.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.0. Introduction:**

This research has been concerned with investigating how social capital and network interaction works in rural Igbo communities. It questions the motives and challenges associated with the operations of cooperative social capital in the area. It draws attention to the performance of ‘ugwu’, an Igbo cultural ethos that regulates group and inter personal interactions within the research communities of Owerri, Nigeria. This chapter discusses the summary of the research findings according to the outlined objectives (questions) of the study. Thereafter, conclusions are drawn based on these findings followed by a list of recommendations that detail the researcher’s opinion on best practices and possible way forward.

#### **7.1. Summary of research findings by the objectives of the study**

In the process of investigating the eight research objectives which I categorized as internal and external problems of smallholder cooperatives in the area, I made the following findings:

##### **Internal problems:**

**1. To find out what motivates the people in the study area to join and form smallholder cooperative societies.** (a) In response to this objective, I found out that the satisfaction of various personal and collective evolving need(s), soft business loans, mutual reciprocity, solidarity and acceptance, food and money are some of the fundamental motives behind people’s membership of smallholder cooperative societies and the formation of new cooperatives. Other intentions such as access to government provisions and participation in community development needs were also indicated in the responses (see chapter five, pp137-140).

(b) That there are smallholder cooperative members with genuine intentions who show commitment and integrity to their associations’ positive collective effort as well as many others

mostly from the disintegrated/struggling nominal cooperatives who by contrast try to take advantage of the cooperative pathway for their selfish and narrow ends (see chapter five, p.139).

**2. To comprehend how trust and reciprocity operate in the rural smallholder cooperative societies.**

(a) Using the borrowing of money and vulnerability scenario as discussed in chapter five (pp.146-149), I was able to fathom one of the ways that ‘ugwu’ as trust and reciprocity is practiced among cooperative society members in their communities. I found that members approach only their most trusted groups or friends in response to sensitive matters of vulnerability such as borrowing of money and taking care of much valued relatives and belongings in emergencies. At such moments the supportive resources are sourced from within those groups or societies where their internal bonds -‘ugwu anyi’ are strongest which in this case for committed members are the cooperative societies (pp.146-149).

(b) I also found out that the ‘ugwu anyi’ bonds held by members of the functional cooperative groups stimulate hope for economic progress as long as the member remains committed to the group’s common objective as exemplified with the Akor case (chapter five. pp. 175-183).

**3. To understand why some registered cooperatives sustain in their operations while others collapse.**

In seeking out the reasons why registered cooperative activities in the study area rise and fall in their operations; I found out that my respondents, who included many ex-cooperative members from the nominal (defunct and struggling) cooperative societies, lacked the basic ‘ugwu anyi’ attribute needed to forge a sustainable cooperative front in Igboland. They blamed the simplicity of the government’s paper based registration, accreditation and certification process for the proliferation of the cooperative ideal in the area with little review and evaluation of ongoing success and needs of cooperatives. Some individuals who were in unsuccessful cooperatives maintained relationships with other groups. Others attributed membership unseriousness, laziness and a hand-out mentality to the reasons for the failure of the defunct nominal cooperatives. The successful functioning smallholder cooperative societies by contrast were found to adopt a more determined approach in the implementation of the cooperative ideal. The active cooperative societies leveraged from their collective robust stock of ‘ugwu anyi’-social capital bank to answer to members’ needs on such issues as soft business loans. This

success is unlike the rent seeking attitudes of these other nominal (disintegrated and struggling) cooperatives that have no focused collective agenda. (chapter five. pp. 139-140).

**4. To demonstrate how social capital is conceptualised in the Igbo African worldview (ugwu).** In addressing this objective, my research found out that among the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria, social capital translates as ‘ugwu’ which refers to “the right or worthiness of goodwill that inheres in an individual or a group” (Afigbo, 1982:18). Ugwu, as the key word in the Igbo language, reads as a synonym for respect, trust, reciprocity, mutuality, dependability, and character. In other words, a person of high or commendable ugwu is comparable to the western individual who possesses high social capital stock or as Coleman would put it ‘the human capital’ (pp.2, 79-82).

However, ‘ugwu’ was also found in the field study (chapter one, Pp.9-11), to have come under intense pressure especially at those areas grappling with urban encroachment, migration, global youth culture and poverty (see pp 202, 207-214). The pervasive cordiality of ‘ugwu’ in those areas was upset causing families, kindred kins and group members to feud. Due to the state government’s land annexation policies and dwindling youth manpower and agricultural resources, many of the local farmers abandoned their farming occupation which had sustained them for generations, sold their lands for quick money and adapted to the new trade of construction labour. The level of desperation and betrayal rose among these community members because some families suddenly became rich after sales, while some had nothing and could neither farm on their former lands nor work for others for money. The operations of cultural ‘ugwu’-social capital in these communities collapsed because the locals were unprepared for the sudden influence that the change brought into their cultural life pattern. Hence many of the cooperative societies that could not adapt to the new ways in these communities are left in disarray.

**5. To clarify what differentiates the Igbo African idea of social capital from the western perspective.** (a) To this objective, my research found out that both perspectives agreed on the interpersonal mechanisms that produce social capital viz. the collective networks of relationships within which reciprocity, trust, and other social norms are readily practiced (Portes, 2000: 24).

(b) The opinions diverged at the points where some western scholars discuss social capital as a new social analytical construct that was discovered or popularized at a particular period of time, as some argued, particularly the 1990 World Bank research by James Coleman and follow up work (chapter three p.67).

(c) African commentators of Igbo stock on the other hand see ‘social capital’ -‘ugwu’ as a timeless way of life that has regulated interactions and cooperation, especially in the rural communities for centuries (Uchendu, 1965; Mbiti, 1969; Iroegbu, 1997). So to them the concept of social capital is not a newly discovered paradigm; instead, it is the essence that injects value into human relationship in the communities (chapter three p.71).

(d) Moreso, some western scholars looking at the impact of social capital in response to crisis attribute instrumental values such as relief response, instantaneity, narrowness, naivety, short-sightedness, parochialism and backwardness to the bonds of social capital (Pelling & High, 2005; Murphy, 2007)(see chapter three p.72).

(e) By contrast, in the Igbo African cultural sense, social capital as ‘ugwu’ transcends all such issues to capture and regulate the essential values of shared livelihood in the rural community on a daily basis (see chapters three & five). A person’s ‘ugwu’ carries him/her through in all circumstances irrespective of the variabilities in his/her environment (disaster or no disaster) (pp.79-82).

### **External problems**

**6. To understand the nature of the relationship between government and the area’s cooperatives.** My findings on this objective show that: (a) bridging social capital between the state and local government and the cooperative societies in the study area was at a low ebb and that occasional extension service of the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) was the only form of government support available to the rural cooperative farmers (chapter five pp.167-168). The people approach government’s ADP outreach to them with ‘a grain of salt’; they do

not trust them because of previous experiences of failed promises, hence their indifference towards anything government initiates as Ekeh (1975) opined.

(b) Many of the smallholder cooperative societies hoped that their 'ugwu anyi' earned internal cohesion and record performances would translate to a better 'ugwu mba' attention from the local and state government and a resolve from them (government) to seriously reconsider supporting them, but that wasn't the case yet (p.162-164).

The federated government of Nigeria runs on three levels of power structure viz. federal, state and local and cooperative organisation follows the same structure but represented under two tiers of statutory operation -federal and state - (see Pp. 40-42). Functional smallholder cooperative operations happen most at the local civic government levels which falls under the state jurisdiction. The rural community cooperative societies that this research discusses are located within the Owerri local government areas of Imo State in Nigeria.

Smallholder cooperative societies in the Owerri study area of Nigeria are independent organisations but are regarded by government as partners in the Poverty Alleviation programme and rural development policies. The government acknowledges and treats these cooperative societies as rural development delivery channels. Hence the societies express discontentment when their expectations for the partnership inclusiveness, support and collaboration from the state/local government are not granted as they hoped. The participating societies are required to go through a registration process for record purposes and that qualifies them to apply for government's support such as loans and agricultural incentives whenever available. Although this standard is criticised in Nigeria as the governments' antics for controlling cooperative societies, the practice is still in effect. Therefore going by the established national rural development policies, the smallholder cooperatives especially the agricultural types, despite being independent organizations, have the constitutional rights to expect partnership support from their state and local government. But the prospects of meeting that challenge has been daunting particularly in south-eastern Nigeria as this study explores.

(c) Besides the overtly trusted diaspora patronage, parochial patronage from political quarters was covertly noticed as a support factor in one of the smallholder cooperatives studied (pp.161-162).

**7. To ascertain how government, local institutions and external network relationships could be made more productive.**

(a) From the study, churches, traditional community authorities and norms were proven to be strong beacons of hope and encouragement within the village communities. These institutions nurture growth of 'ugwu'- social capital in the area by providing common forums for the people to congregate in prayer worship, services and fellowships over issues that concern them (Woolcock, 2004:228).

(b) Going by the level of allegiances that most members hold to these faith-based and traditional institutions, the government and other development agencies could liaise with these institutions in order to understand and reach the local populace better. Important information could be disseminated through good partnership with church leaders and the traditional rulers in each target community.

Since church and traditional leaders double as both socio-political and spiritual leaders, they act as custodians of community morals; conveying important development information/plans through them would accentuate the importance of the message and be taken seriously by the people. The government and external developers working with them to identify genuine groups in the community would reduce resources depletion by channeling services away from nominal groups. In the long run, associational order is restored and a clearer focus on progressive objectives could be pursued. This would dissuade malefactors from taking advantage of the cooperative pathways for their narrow self-seeking purposes.

**8. To find out if external support incentives could be conducted through the traditional governance structures.**

(a) My research, in the light of the previous (#.7) finding, therefore submitted that development incentives could be conducted through traditional governance structures as already stipulated earlier in (Chapter 2 Pp. 54-59).

The Igbo traditional governance structure broadly refers to the cultural mechanisms, processes and relations by which communities in Igboland are organized and administered. The structure identifies the distribution of power, rights and responsibilities among the different administrative divisions and local groups that exist within a particular village community. Many Igbo communities in the south eastern region especially the rural areas such as where this study was conducted still observe their traditional governance structures alongside their civic state and local government. Smallholder cooperative societies as part of their communities' local group belong to this structure; hence they comply with their areas' stipulated cultural rules and values in daily community interaction. Against the civic government's inadequacy in the provision of needed life amenities, smallholder cooperatives lead and participate in their area's rural development projects such as electric power, sealed roads, running potable water and health centers provision. In return they receive respect, acknowledgement and support from their communities and diaspora network to augment their own resources in order to pursue their internal set goals. This circling process of mutual reciprocity, hope and goodwill support is made possible by the regulatory presence of the cultural 'ugwu' ethos, without which the cooperation would be difficult in the rural areas.

A better sustained bridging progress is achievable if the government would seriously consider partnering with these local governance institutions as done in some other African countries such as Ghana, Botswana and South Africa (Lyon, 2003, 86-7). Currently with the new Imo State governor's strategy of 'community governance outreach' there is hope that finally his administration might be the long awaited panacea to restore the dissipated bridging social capital relationship between the rural communities and their government. It is too early to evaluate any of the new government's proposals yet; but it is crucial that proper cooperative education is emphasized in the plans and pursued adequately.

(b) Through such coalition of cultural/religious institutions with the state's civic government, group proliferation and other cooperative abuses would be minimized and the positive utility of the resources and benefits therein guaranteed. This is because these verified churches and cultural authorities would not risk their bridging integrity or compromise their hard earned



authenticity and cultural values for ephemeral material gains (Ekeh, 1975, Osaghae, 2006). Notably, religion and culture are the two most crucial tenets that influence and drive the activities and decisions of the people of the study region, so why not use them as channels to achieve positive socio-cultural and economic development goals.

Having addressed the eight prime objectives, my study was further narrowed down to a cumulative assessment of groups collective and individual members' self-help accomplishments in the area. The results indicate that; (a) the cooperative groups ran various business ventures of their own, such as food processing plants, skill, trade and vocational training centres, agricultural crop and live-stock farming and grocery shop outlets; (b) because of government inadequacies the societies accessed instructional support through in-house arrangements with teachers from nearby universities and the diaspora support groups. They accessed needed inputs from black market sources rather than waiting on promised resources from government; (c) the cooperative societies were also found to encourage member's individual self-help aspirations through soft loans from group's collective purse and augmented by diaspora support. Finally I conducted an estimate of the small scale businesses from some of the cooperative skills and vocational training programmes held in the area in the last five years.

Since most rural self-help ventures depend on the certainty of support amenities like electric power, running water, sealed roads and market, I enquired from the respondents their thoughts on the status of these infrastructures and other necessary provisions. I found out that; (a) the cooperative societies functions in the areas have recorded at least 355 direct receivers of soft loan support in the last five years from 2005-2012. (b) That there is a need for the provision of basic amenities like electric power, sealed roads, running water, health centres and markets in the rural areas as these facilitate the business of the cooperatives in these locations.

The entire process of the fieldwork provided an opportunity for me to better understand the Igbo cultural terrain and its implications for the lives of the locals particularly in the harsh economic conditions of the Nigerian nation. Working with my research team, we were able to re-evaluate closely some of the cultural practices that were initially taken for granted in the light of research discourses, such as group leadership issues and gender disparity in the classification of staple

farm produce. Approaching the issues as an insider with local knowledge allowed me to access and evaluate some intricate information that would have been impossible for an outsider. At the same time I retained my outsider position as a researcher and maintained a cautious consideration of the participants' values in my assessment of the information given. I endeavoured to maintain a professional and constructive approach over opinions. However doing this research plays out to me as a continuation of my job responsibilities while at Crojip, but one with a higher level of tact and academic savviness. Hence the demands to meet the expectation has been exciting albeit that this is an area that I have worked in for many years. Doing this research also invigorates my drive to commit myself more into the cause of making a difference particularly in the lives of the local people in the rural areas. It is disturbing to realize the level of political decadence and resource wastage in the midst of need and deprivation in the region. I believe there are enough potential opportunities in the rural areas to cater to the self-subsisting needs of the region; all that is lacking is dedicated planning, coordination and the form of support that grows positive development initiative in people.

I observed a phenomenal sense of group identity and cultural pride in the various societies that I worked with. Each of the active groups had their uniform that distinguished them from the others and they were all happy to showcase them and even made one for me. I found the act to be really intriguing as it resonates with their message of unity and passion for their collective integrity. There were some necessary interruptions on the way to establishing rapport before our discussions. It was difficult to get some of the participants to discuss the issues seriously without deviations to unrelated matters because they knew me and my family. Hence I felt obliged to engage with pleasantries and other digressions which meant a closer trusting relationship.

## **7.2. Conclusion**

Based on the research question and findings, the study confirms the prime importance of the notion of 'ugwu' in the entire study that explores the cooperative life style of the Igbos in Owerri, Imo state. The studied active smallholder cooperatives and elderly traditional groups were found to be functionally cohesive, indicating the presence of 'ugwu' as epitomized in trust

and mutually reciprocal acts. These were among the most emphasized elements that galvanize membership interest and cooperation in each of the groups. The *ugwu* factor was also identified as instrumental to the lifespan of the functional cooperative societies especially in their network support relationship with the diaspora groups.

By contrast, in the nominal cooperative societies, the notion of '*ugwu*' was found deficient, hence the societies struggled or were totally defunct. This situation is so because '*ugwu*' in Igbo culture is the unexplored but fundamental attribute needed to forge a sustainable cooperative front. It therefore becomes very important that researches such as this are carried out to understand sustainable ways to formalize and improve on the inclusion of the '*ugwu*' cultural elements into cooperative education and development. The achievement of this objective would undoubtedly help to improve the organisation and activities of smallholder cooperative societies and farmer groups in the rural areas. It would re-package the cooperative ideal in an understandable manner that reflects the culture of the local cooperative adherents in Igboland.

Since it is the state government's responsibility to develop educational curriculum in their area, having them engage with the locals in this cooperative '*ugwu*' ideal reformation would create a crucial opportunity for both state and local government to regain the local people's trust. Moreso, they (state and federal government) would have the chance to understand the local people's way of life better in order to know the best ways of engaging with them in the solution process. This interactionary outreach will help bridge the sort of distrust gap that created the two publics scenarios articulated by Ekeh (1975) in his theory of the two publics. The collaboration will enable a diversified debate on ways of maximizing the benefits of the '*ugwu*' philosophy in Igbo culture particularly to help curb the abuse of the cooperative pathway in the area. These efforts would in the long run, intensify cooperative societies' '*ugwu anyi*' membership bonds as well as reinforce the bridging - '*ugwu mba*' social capital bonds with the government and diaspora support network for a viable community progress.

### **7.3. The research insights and recommendations**

Having devoted much concentration on discussing smallholder cooperatives and farmer groups' operations, prospects and challenges in the rural communities, the research at this juncture makes the following recommendations as to how sustainable cooperative 'ugwu' principles could be pursued through laudable smallholder cooperative practice:

#### **1. Emphasis on proper Cooperative motivations:**

My research found out that some people in the study area tend to mix-up the practice of cooperative ideals with their own varied interpretations leading to a loose application of the concept. It is therefore recommended that a proper cooperative education is pursued collectively by all the existing cooperative societies and intending members in the area. Informative workshops and seminars could be organised by the government or the genuine functional cooperative societies in their communities. Through this process cooperative members and the larger village communities will be informed of the appropriate roles, operations and limits of a cooperative society to enable them set their membership goals, priorities and expectations right. Hence the problem of undue membership hopes and motivations would be curbed.

#### **2. Strengthening ugwu (trust) in local institutions against abuse and proliferation:**

Since the study attests to members holding the most 'ugwu anyi' as trust in their cooperative societies and other local community institutions such as their elderly authorities, churches, worship and fellowship centers; it is recommended therefore that state civic governments meet to partner with the local people in these areas of their 'ugwu anyi' - trust - allegiance. Doing this will directly support the members' growth aspirations and reassure them of their government's interest in their wellbeing. It will also deter the proliferation of nominal groups as perpetrators would fear that their deceptive antics would be faulted in the local identification process. Caution should be taken in doing this to prevent a few players dominating these relationships and some people being more invisible than ever, especially young people.

Another suggested idea that could strengthen government-community partnership for development progress is for the government to allow the international development organisations to freely choose their local trustee agencies and institutions to work with or operate through. In this manner the needed resources will be made available to the people's trusted end user societies that would utilize them properly following their trusted cultural method of *ugwu* governance.

### **3. Government restructuring cooperative registration process for sustenance:**

With many of the research participants especially from the nominal (defunct and struggling) groups blaming the simplicity of the government's accreditation process on cooperative failures in the area; I therefore recommend a change to the cooperative accreditation process. Application for cooperative registration should only be approved for groups that have been properly vetted and confirmed by designated local authorities to be in active operation. Involving the community institution and local authorities in this confirmation process would be productive as they are in the position to distinguish the functional groups with record '*ugwu anyi*' prowess from the nominal or deceptive ones in their community. They are also in the best position to dissuade their community members from abusing the lifeline opportunity offered by the cooperative pathway.

### **4. Incorporating cultural values in cooperative education and leadership:**

My study found the cultural trait of '*ugwu*' - social capital to be pervasive in all the functional cooperative societies and traditional groups run by the elderly in the area. By contrast, this feature was found lacking in the nominal dysfunctional groups, hence many disintegrated. It is therefore recommended that cooperative education in the region be expanded to include more emphasis on the development of these Igbo positive cultural traits/values than on the foreign knowledge alone. Leadership education in the smallholder cooperative should be consistently improved upon to reflect both the cultural and foreign knowledge contributions. Many members in some of the studied smallholder cooperative societies lack the basic knowledge of formal cooperative procedures for collective and personal advancement. Education unlocks the interactional potentials in the members and enables them to better understand and appreciate

the essence of their membership in the cooperative society. It also sharpens the group leaders' skills.

Through cooperative education, members are able to understand better the tenets of cooperative formation, such as equality, democracy, inclusiveness and trust, all of which conform to the cultural foundation espoused in the 'ugwu' concept. Comprehending this connection between the novelties that formal cooperative brings and what they already have in the 'ugwu' cultural tenet enables members to appreciate better their internal relationship. Hence members are able to reevaluate new contacts and aspirations, such as with the diaspora and the government. Cooperative education fosters a better approach to the business of cooperative formation; it promotes the development of an informed leadership team and membership body who understand the necessity of working together to build profitable dynamic relationships at all levels. Such group relationships do not see cooperative formation as an opportunistic (ad-hoc or emergency) venture quickly put together to cash in on government promoted loans; instead they see their coalition as a coordinated approach by likeminded persons to proffer solutions to commonly felt problems (cooperative administrator, 2010, Agbo, 2012a).

##### **5. Government's resolve to rebuild bridging trust with the locals**

Since 'ugwu mba' - bridging trust with the government is low in the study area; it is therefore recommended that the government employ strategies aimed at improving the people's lives in order to gradually regain their (people's) confidence. Ekeh (1975) discusses low pay for civil servants as an instance of an obstacle that requires change. Addressing such would help to alleviate the suffering of civil servants who mostly live in the nearby rural areas and suburbs that make up cooperative populations. This approach would help endear the state and local government to the people.

The local cooperators in their respective functional cooperative societies have their collective 'ugwu anyi' operative and sustaining them; it therefore behooves on the government to meet these societies half way. The bottom-up governance strategy should be employed by the government to enable them learn anew the ways and positive interests of the locals.

Development plans should be inclusive of the people's cultural models such as 'ugwu' that has been working for them for centuries and unobstructive to new methods. The occasional extension service outreach of the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) as was noted in the area during the research is not enough proof of government's support. As a key figure in the delivery of rural development goals there is a need for a renewed dedication towards achieving set development goals with the locals in mind. Every registered and functional cooperative society in the study deserves to be treated as important in the collective effort of rural development. The situation where some groups receive special parochial patronage from political quarters at the expense of the others should be eschewed because such nepotism exacerbates government distrust. Transparency and goodwill should be the watchword in all government's dealings with the people to ensure that the path of integrity is restored and maintained.

## **6. Enhance rural governance and opportunities against urban migration:**

Through reinforced cultural 'ugwu' governance, the rural community cooperative societies can be supported to create self-help economic opportunities for members and the larger community by improving their use of available resources. As was demonstrated in Akor's case (in chapter six), smallholder cooperatives could encourage the youths in their communities to participate in small self-help economic activities as an alternative to leaving home. Hodgson (1998) notes that social interactions facilitate learning and the creation of collective knowledge in communities. With the directives of such teachers and custodians of the 'ugwu culture' as the elderly cooperators and traditional authorities, community youths could be advised to take their participation in the local open house training sessions seriously. Through these sessions they are able to learn life sustaining skills<sup>100</sup> and vocational trades provided in the instructional programmes.

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<sup>100</sup> Local youths could utilize the interactive bridging opportunities offered by the learning/meeting sessions to brainstorm with their instructors on ways of coordinating and recycling waste resources from their farms for useful purposes. Such acts reinforce groups' internal bridging social capital (ugwu anyi), open up new income avenues and accentuate the practice of environmentally sustainable life style. For instance, palm kernel shells from home chores are usually thrown away or spread on morass yards; but a modern sustainable use of the shells by the entire

It is recommended therefore that cooperatives liaise with the local authorities, community churches, diaspora, government's Agricultural Development Project (ADP) staff and university instructors to pursue this local knowledge development drive. Through such grassroots governance, they will be able to develop practical strategies on how to guide the people to unravel and maximize resourceful opportunities<sup>101</sup> within their local surroundings. Such projects would save both the government and locals scarce financial resources and would be reasonably sustainable for the environment. The process of collective effort and organisation would invariably progress the development of 'ugwu anyi'- social capital bonds among particular cooperative societies, elderly farmer groups and other groups in the wider community.

### **More recommendations**

#### **7. Gender harmony focus:**

The national gender policy emphasizes the institution of a gendered culture that brings about cooperative interaction of women and men, recognizing equality rights and a culture that respects women's and men's interests and capabilities and entails cooperation and interdependence (National Gender Policy strategic Framework, 2013). In recognition of this gender-cohesive policy, the mixed smallholder cooperative societies use the practice of mixed crop cultivation<sup>102</sup> to reconcile gender disparities in their choice of crop cultivation and

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community is possible; they can pool their cracked kernel shells to use as chippings to mend eroded yards and roads. Building bricks and blocks could also be made from these shells for local house construction. Furthermore the spongy-chaff from the processed palm residue could also be used in the making of local medicinal soap popularly called 'dudu osun' or black soap used by the people as a beauty treatment product and for treating skin infections. With good guidance, youths and adult cooperators could explore the latent opportunities that lie within these resources. These work collaborations build social capital and solve members' individual and community's problems in the long run.

<sup>101</sup> Without fertilizers for instance, cooperative members could recycle manures from animal dung and organic compost residues. Without electricity, they could be taught more ways of adopting natural preservative methods. They could use shells from cracked palm kernel for several construction purposes in place of concrete or chippings, clay and mud for cement. They could also be taught how to make diverse products from some of their staple food crops like cassava, yam and cocoyam to inject variety into consumption. For example instead of the staple 'fufu' and 'garri' product from cassava, other variations of food like 'abacha', flour, pancakes and porridge could also be introduced in the menu.

<sup>102</sup> The Igbo agricultural practice of mixed crop cultivation for instance, addresses the issue where 'masculine' crops such as yams are cultivated first on the land and followed up with other 'feminine' crops such as cassava, maize,



business orientation. Thus they make both genders feel satisfied as their interests are taken care of and respected in the traditional spirit of cooperative equality, as implied in the policy.

It is recommended therefore that government and the cooperative development agencies consider 'gender disparity' as an important factor in their plan and outreach implementation for smallholder cooperatives in the rural communities. Since some cooperatives' operations are performed on gender lines, it would be reasonable to deal with them as such. The Ministry of Agriculture for instance could ensure that there is 'gender-balance' in the training of ADP extension staff so that there are both male and female extension staff to cater to the needs of the rural farmers, especially in areas of gender sensitive need. As noticed in the field, there are few female extension staff in Imo State at the moment. Female extension staff working with a women-only smallholder cooperative would give the female members greater confidence to express themselves and their concerns about their gender sensitive needs. In two of the mixed cooperatives that I worked with while in the field, I noticed the cooperatives cultivated the gender neutral yam-like type of tuber crops called **una or unu**<sup>103</sup> in Igbo language. **Una** is like a mediating crop between both genders in Igbo culture. It is consumed equally and liked by all but without any cultural significance attached to its cultivation, unlike the yam (Korieh, 2007). Both sexes cultivated **unu/una** and its yield or harvest is as fast and plentiful as the cassava tubers, ensuring productive cooperation between the parties.

## **8. Government reconsideration of rural/urban development policy**

Since urbanization is as important as the preservation of the rural lifestyle, government rural development policies ought to be considerate at accommodating the needs of the rural

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melon or okra. The local traditional knowledge understands that each of these crops impact the land differently [soil nutrients] and can germinate symbiotically at the same time. Crops like maize, okra and melons are usually the quickest to be harvested followed by the cassava, with the longest and most demanding being the yam (Okolie, 2003; Korieh, 2007). On harvest of these early crops, their foliage can be composted for the longer lasting crops i.e. the yam. In this way cooperative societies, farmer groups and family farm holders are less worried about gender-based mono-cultivation of crops on different farm lands which is more labour intensive and financially demanding (Chukwuka & Omotayo, 2008, Sridhar & Adeoye, 2003).

<sup>103</sup> '**Una or Unu**' as referred in most Igbo dialects is a special tuber crop popularly grown by Igbo in South Eastern Nigeria. It has the distinctive taste of sweet potato but the tubers possess the spherical shape of taro.

community dwellers. The locals should be involved in the process of crafting the policies particularly because they are the direct owners and inhabitants of the lands on which the development projects<sup>104</sup> are being planned. They are also the direct sufferers of the displacement consequences but not necessarily the beneficiaries of the new project being sited in their area. Any plan of compensation should involve the transformation of the area's rural economy to reposition the displaced locals in a new means of livelihood (Aderonmu, 2010). A sustainable development strategy that carries everybody's needs along should be the target instead of displacement or replacement approach.

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<sup>104</sup> Any effort aimed at alleviating it (poverty) should be focused first on addressing the root causes of the problem at the rural community level. The government and investors need to stimulate the rural economy by making and supporting honest policies that help create employment opportunities in the rural areas, reducing regional income disparities and stemming premature rural-urban migration. Cooperative societies, small scale businesses and other voluntary farmer associations that operate from the rural communities are veritable links that serve as agents or channels through which rural development policies could be achieved and the poor assisted (Onuoha, 2001:17; Agbo, 2009:169).

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

- ADP:** Agricultural Development Project
- AVC:** Agricultural Value Chain
- BLP:** Better Life Programme
- CADP:** Commercial Agricultural Development Project
- CB:** Community Banks
- CBN:** Central Bank of Nigeria
- CBO:** Community Based Organisations
- CDO:** Cooperative Department Office
- CFN:** Cooperative Federation of Nigeria
- CIA:** Central Intelligence Agency
- DCC:** Divisional Cooperative Clusters
- DFID:** Directorate for International Development
- DFRRI:** Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure
- EU:** European Union
- FUG:** Fadama User Groups
- FCA:** Fadama Community Associations
- FCC:** Federal Character commission
- FCT:** Federal Capital Territory
- FEAP:** Family Economic Advancement Programme
- FSP:** Family Support Programmes
- GR:** Green Revolution
- HDI:** Human Development Index
- ICA/ILO:** International Cooperative Alliance /International Labour Organisation
- IFAD:** International Fund for Agricultural Development
- ILO:** International Labour Organisation
- INGO:** International Non-Governmental Organisations
- IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**KKK:** Ku Klux Klan  
**LGA:** Local Government Area  
**MAMSER:** Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery  
**NACRDB:** Nigeria Agricultural Cooperative Rural Development Bank  
**NAFPP:** National Accelerated Food Production Programme  
**NAPEP:** National Poverty Eradication Programme, (NAPEP)  
**NBS:** National Bureau of Statistics  
**NDE:** National Directorate of Employment  
**NEEDS:** National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy  
**NPC:** National Population Commission  
**NOUN:** National Open University of Nigeria  
**NSPFS:** National Special Program for Food Security  
**NGOs:** Non-Governmental Organisations  
**OBLP:** Operation Back to Land Programme  
**OFN:** Operation Feed the Nation  
**OXFAM:** Oxford Committee for Famine Relief  
**PAP:** Poverty Alleviation Programmes  
**PBN:** Peoples Bank of Nigeria  
**PRSP:** Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers  
**RAMP:** Rural Access and Mobility Project  
**REPS:** Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society  
**ROSCA:** Rotating Savings and Credit Association  
**SAP:** Structural Adjustment Programmes  
**SCIF:** Social Capital Implementation Framework  
**SCTG:** Social Capital Thematic Group  
**SOCAT:** Social Capital Assessment Tool  
**SOCAP IQ:** Social Capital Integrated Questionnaire  
**SPSS:** Statistical Package for the Social Sciences  
**TCCS:** Thrifts and Credit Cooperatives  
**UBE:** United Basic Education

**UKONS:** United Kingdom Office of National Statics

**UN:** United Nations

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

**UNICEF:** United Nations International Children's Educational Fund

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNIFEM:** United Nations Development Fund for Women

**UPE:** Free Universal Primary Education Programme

**USAID:** United States Agency for International Development

**WB:** World Bank

**WD-40** (an American lubricant brand)

**WHO:** World Health Organisation

**WIA:** Women in Agriculture

**WOFAN:** Women Farmers' Advancement Network

**WID:** Women in Development

## Appendix-Maps

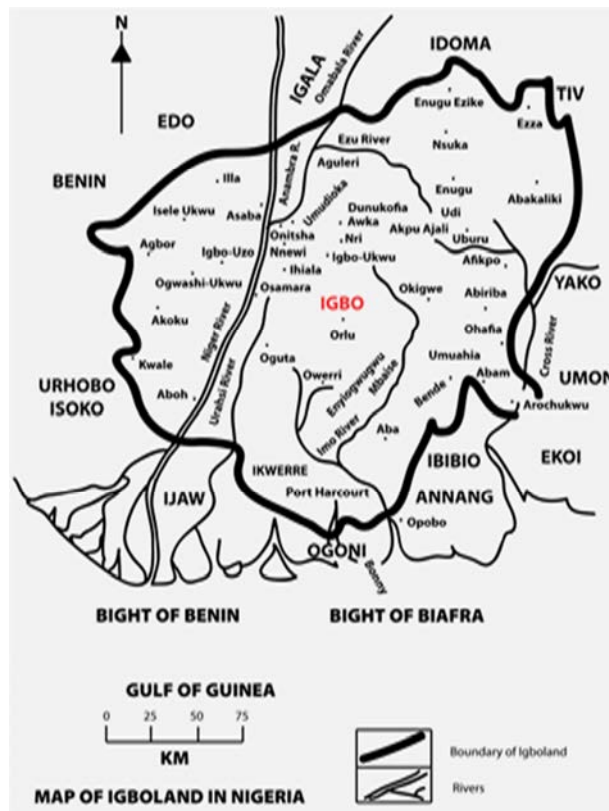
1. Map of Africa showing the location of Nigeria in green.



2. Map of Nigeria showing Imo State



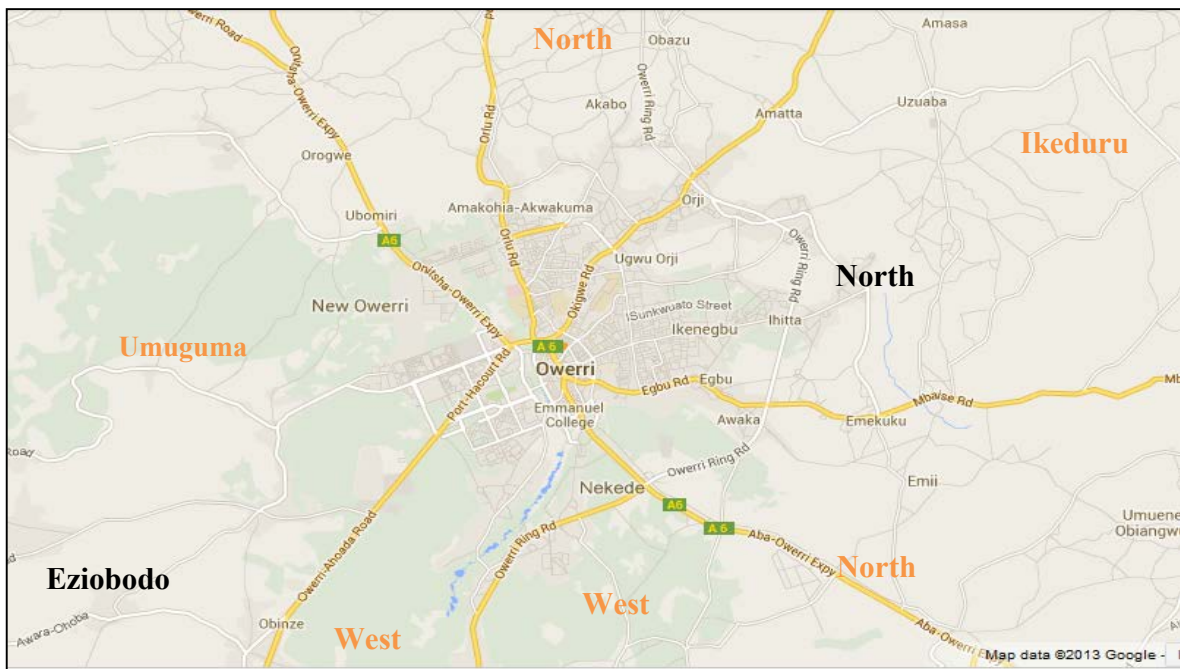
3. Map of south-east showing the location of Igbos ethnic groups in Nigeria



4. Map showing the location of Owerri West and North in Imo State Nigeria

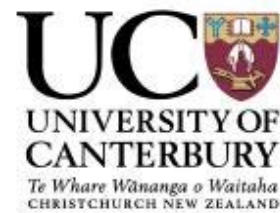


5. Owerri Google Earth map showing the major road division of the LGA's.



6. Owerri Google Earth map showing the major road and green farm/bush lands.





## QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent.

This questionnaire presented to you is requested for an ongoing academic research exercise on 'Social capital, Empowerment, and Development Needs' using some chosen smallholder cooperatives in the council areas of Owerri Imo State, Nigeria as case study. The aim of the project is determine the essence of social capital in the running of an efficient modern day cooperative society. The project is being carried out as a requirement for a PhD in Sociology at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand by Simon Chima under the supervision of Dr. Alison Loveridge (principal supervisor) and Dr. Nabila Jaber (co-supervisor), who can be contacted at +64 3 364 2899. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. Do freely tick to your choice responses from the provided options below and add your comments to the spaces as it pleases you. Your right to anonymity is respected. You may withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided, until your questionnaire has been added to the others collected. Because it is anonymous, it cannot be retrieved after that.

### SECTION I

1. Tick to the reason/s that is nearest to explaining why you as an individual join and participate in cooperative activities.

- a. *For fame and name (popularity) e.g titles*
- b. *For mutual benefits e.g. routine give and take support*
- c. *For honour and respect e.g. recognition/notice*
- d. *For self-support and solidarity e.g. Self-Venture assistance.*
- e. *For community development e.g loves for the comm.*
- f. *Access to Govt provisions e.g. as a means*
- g. *Others specify*

2. Without any government or external support in view, would you still consider joining cooperative society functions in your area?

- a. *Always would join*
- b. *Never would consider*
- c. *Probably depending on.*
- d. *Undecided*
- e. *Others specify*

3. At each monetary contribution that you make to an agreed cooperative activity, which of these motives is nearest to your thought?

- a. *That it is lost money*
- b. *Investing like in a bank*
- c. *Renewing reciprocity confidence*
- d. *Doing Charity*
- e. *Community development agenda.*
- f. *Others specify*



6. If you have need to borrow some money, which of these membership groups would you first approach for the purpose.

- a. *Church group*
- b. *Gender group*
- c. *Political group*
- d. *Cooperative group*
- e. *Age grade group*
- f. *Social clubs*

7. If you suddenly have to go away for a day or two would you leave your children or very valuable goods under which of the group member friend's care?

- a. *Church group*
- b. *Gender group*
- c. *Political group*
- d. *Cooperative group*
- e. *Age grade group*
- f. *Social clubs*

8. If requested, would you volunteer to help other groups in community service participation even if it doesn't immediately benefit you?

- a. *Always ready*
- b. *Never would*
- c. *Sometimes maybe*
- d. *Undecided*
- e. *Depends on*

## **SECTION II**

9. As government partners in rural poverty alleviation, what do you think expedites government's interest and assistance towards the activities of a rural smallholder cooperative group?

- a. *Group's internal orderliness*
- b. *Group's good record performance*
- c. *Group's prominent members*
- d. *Not applicable (in government matters)*
- e. *None of the above*

10. In your opinion, do you think smallholder cooperative members and the community appreciate external support inputs from the diaspora in certain development need areas?

- a. *Yes they always do*
- b. *No, they don't (avoids them)*
- c. *Sometimes (depends on the agenda)*
- d. *Rarely happens.*
- e. *Never happens.*

11. Do you think your smallholder cooperative society do reliably trust government's development promises and relationship?

- a. *Wholly trust worthy*
- b. *Never reliable.*
- c. *Unstable in trust*
- d. *No relationship at all*
- e. *Depends (specify)*

12. Which of this/these external sources of financing does your smallholder cooperative society consider as most reliable?

- a. *Government sources (e.g loans and grants)*
- b. *Diaspora link groups*
- c. *NGOs and Foreign donors*
- d. *Philanthropist*
- e. *Corporate bodies.*

13. How inclusive is your smallholder cooperative society in its link up network with other development conscious CBOs' within and outside of your community

- a. *Little regard for them*
- b. *Avoids collaborating with them*
- c. *Liaises with them at some community activities*
- d. *Never needed.*

14. Which of these aid options from the government in your opinion would motivate the performance of smallholder cooperative societies in your area the most.

- a. *Monetary incentives (trusts and loans)*
- b. *Agro-allied farm extension assistance*
- c. *More cooperative education.*
- d. *Routine Checks and supervision of cooperative performance.*
- e. *All of the above*
- f. *Others specify*

### **SECTION III**

16. How would you qualify your smallholder cooperative society's adoption/application of Igbo cultural values such as 'ugwu'?

- a. *Very committed to it.*
- b. *Unserious about it.*
- c. *Conditional adoption (depends on issue)*
- d. *Never regarded*

17. How would you rate the general performance of your cooperative society at assisting individual coop member's self-help economic aspirations?

- a. *Very good*
- b. *Good*
- c. *Indifferent*
- d. *Poor*
- e. *Very poor*

18. *What is your opinion about the adopting traditional governance methods in the organisation and running of smallholder cooperatives affairs in your area?*

19. *What do you think are the reason/s why some registered smallholder cooperative groups in the study area struggle?*

20. *In your opinion, what could be done to improve the relationship between the smallholder cooperatives societies, their government and other external support networks?*

Thank you.

**Simon Chima**

**Field work Photos**



**Stressing a point at a cooperative Seminar/meeting**



**Cooperative group Photo  
With some admin officers**



**Accepted by the CNZ  
Cooperative  
Society in Owerri North.**



**In an after meeting Coop  
Prayer session with the  
visitors.**



**A group photo after coop Seminar in Owerri.**



**A section of the EBD coop society at an event.**



**A wing of the CJK women coop society at a community event.**



**A cross section of women skill acquisition graduates on passing out ceremony**



**Cooperative poultry farm  
Owerri West**



**Cooperative piglet farm  
Owerri North**



showing the banner of the coop. Apex Union in Emekuku Owerri North.



Showing me the group's Oil palm Mill - [PNR ,Okirida]





**Touring the skill acquisition  
complex  
Under construction**



**With the president of the EBD  
Coop society at the site.**



**In a chat with some members of  
IDT coop in Owerri North**



**Listening to a CNZ coop member**



**Filling in the questionnaires**

