

ENHANCING RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE PROLIFERATION OF AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES: THE IMO STATE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between population size rank order of LGAs and the level of development (based on the number of items of infrastructure) in the LGAs of Imo State. The issue is if the proliferation of autonomous communities which by implication are smaller in geographical size and population will lead to enhanced development in the rural areas of Imo State. Secondary data for the study were obtained from journals, Imo state gazettes and internet while the primary data were gathered using oral interview technique, focus group discussion (FGD) and field observation. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting the rural areas. Data were analysed using percentage ratio and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient model. The hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between population size rank and the development rank order of LGAs in Imo State using the number of items of infrastructure as indices for the exercise. The test of the hypothesis established that population size rank correlates significantly with development rank order among the LGAs studied. Also, findings show that the pattern and rate of fragmentation of autonomous communities in Imo State today cannot enhance the much-needed sustainable development; rather they will bring a lot of setback on the development of these LGAs. The study recommends that Imo State government should stop creating new autonomous communities from existing ones as larger communities with higher population attract more development facilities.

Keywords: Autonomous Communities, Infrastructure, Population Size, Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

The development of rural areas of Nigeria is being stressed by the federal, state and local government of the country because of the realization that the previous 'from above', urban-biased, development strategies adopted in Nigeria has proved counterproductive. According to Okoye (1992), the urban and rural areas are in systematic symbiotic relationship and any meaningful development strategy must take full cognizance of the fact that the unwholesome phenomenon of rural-urban dichotomy in the national landscape connotes underdevelopment. Moreover, it is no longer argued that many of the problems of the urban areas are traceable to the inadequacies in the rural areas.

Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the people in the rural areas. The main concern in rural development is supposed to be the modernization of rural society through a transition from isolation to integration with a national economy for equitable and balanced development of the nation. Idike (1992) adds that the major objective of rural development encompasses improved production, increased employment and thus, high income for groups, as well as improved qualities in the basic needs of life which include food, shelter, job opportunities, health service, education, roads and so on.

Nwaru (1997) sees rural development as an integrated process involving several components which include agricultural development, industrialization and improvement in social and physical infrastructure in sectors such as health, education, water, transportation, and electricity. This implies, that social infrastructure is a critical variable in rural development. Furthermore, Nkasiobi (2011) and Enwereuzor (2016) observed that in many parts of rural Nigeria, including Imo State, infrastructural facilities and services which form the central catalyst that induce population agglomeration and growth, are poorly developed and distributed.

The inadequate provision of such services as portable water, electricity, schools, roads, health facilities, among others, militates against the prospect for better living conditions, employment opportunities and other forms of economic activities. Rural development is the most pragmatic means of bringing government facilities and services to the door steps of Nigeria's teeming population in the rural areas (Idike, 1992). This can be achieved through the creation of autonomous communities. Supporting this view, Uzoigwe (2009) emphasized that there has always been a strong belief that autonomous communities lead to more effective and better development at the grassroots' level.

Imo state government law of 1981, defined autonomous community as a group of people inhabiting an identifiable geographical area, comprising one or more communities and bound by a common historical heritage and recognized and approved as an autonomous community by the government. Lemchi (2010) in Onyemal *et al.*, (2018) sees autonomous community as a group of people living together and sharing common values with measures of independent and self-government. It depends on contributions by town unions, social clubs and other association for its sustenance. In Imo State, the autonomous community can be seen as the fourth tier of government. The creation of an autonomous community is a process that is guided by customs and traditions of the people in a constituted geographical area.

The Imo State law of 2006 stipulates that the House of Assembly shall have powers to create new autonomous communities or merge existing ones as the law provides. The law further states that any community or group of communities seeking autonomy shall have a common tradition, identity and be heterogeneous with at least a total population of 5000 people of notable adults. Such communities shall have a secondary school recognized by government and/or a common parish centre. In addition, the community shall indicate in writing preparedness to contribute to its Eze.

The most important reason for the creation of autonomous community is to decentralize government functions and for socio-political and economic development at the grassroots. Therefore, preoccupied with the need for development, goal achievements and modernization, every succeeding government in Imo state creates new autonomous communities. The number of autonomous communities has risen from 303 in 1999 to 752 as contained in the gazette of Imo State 2015 (Uzoigwe, 2009; Lemchi, 2010 & Onyema, 2016).

The proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state has generated a debate about whether the carving out of new autonomous communities, which by implication are smaller in

size and population, will lead to enhanced development. The pro-proliferation school of thought argues that autonomous communities would bring development closer to the people. The anti-proliferation school of thought is of the view that small autonomous communities may not generate the much-needed resources for self-help development which Imo indigenes are known for (Enwereuzor, 2016; The Nation, 2017; Onyema, et al., 2018). The issue is which school of thought is on the right track. In other words, there is the need to establish if any relationship exists between population size ranking and the ranking of development among the communities in the study area. The objective of this research is to ascertain the relationship between population size rank of the LGAs and rank order of the level of development based on the number of items of infrastructure in the Local Government Area. The hypothesis put forward to guide the research states that there is no significant relationship between population size rank and the development rank order of local government areas in Imo State (using the number of items of infrastructure as indices for exercise). Infrastructure is used as a base since they are major catalysts for rural development.

The Study Area

Imo State lies within latitude $4^{\circ} 4' N$, $7^{\circ} 15' N$ and longitude $6^{\circ} 50' E$, $7^{\circ} 25' E$ in southeastern Nigeria and has a total land area of 5100km^2 . It consists of 27 local government areas (LGAs) grouped into three senatorial zones namely; Okigwe, Owerri and Orlu. Owerri is the state capital. The autonomous communities in the state are about 752 as contained in the gazette of Imo State 2015 (Onyema *et al.*, 2018). See figure 1 for the study area.

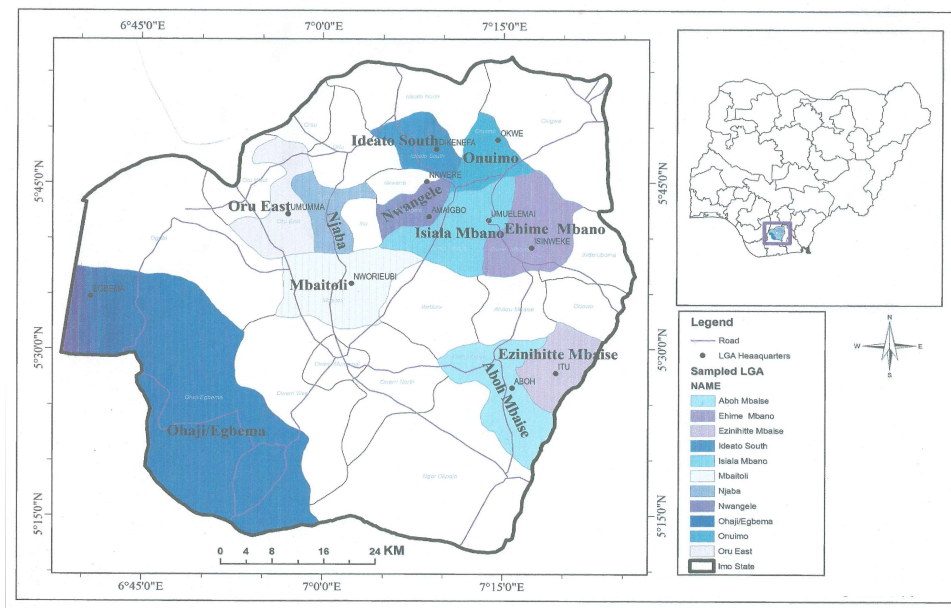


Figure 1: Map of Imo State Showing Study Area

Source: (Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban Planning Owerri, 2013)

METHODOLOGY

The analytical survey method was used in this study to examine the relationship between population size rank of the LGAs and the rank order of the level of development (based on the

number of items of infrastructure) in the Local Government Areas of Imo State. Data for the study was mainly from secondary sources supported with information from field observation, questionnaire and oral interview. The sampling procedure used was the multi-stage sampling technique. It involves three stages, firstly, selection of LGAs, Secondly, Selection of communities and thirdly, selection of respondents/households. Data on autonomous communities were sourced from Imo State official gazette, journals and internet.

Since this is a rural study, urban LGAs were excluded from the 27 LGAs because they were highly developed in terms of infrastructure. Those expunged were Okigwe, Orlu, Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West LGAs leaving 22 LGAs. Finally, 11 LGAs were selected from the 22 LGAs by selecting the ones that fell under odd numbers in alphabetical order of their names. The LGAs selected were Ehiime-Mbano, Isiala-Mbano and Onuimo in Okigwe Zone, Ideato south, Njaba, Nwangele, Ohaji/Egbema and Oru east in Orlu zone and Aboh-mbaise, Ezinihitte-Mbaise and Mbaitoli in Owerri zone (See Table 1).

Table 1: List of Rural LGAs, List of Sampled Rural LGAs and Sampled Communities

S/N	LIST OF RURAL L.G.As. BY ZONE	NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES	LIST OF SAMPLED L.G.As	NO. OF COMMUNITIES IN SAMPLE L.G.A
	OKIGWE ZONE			
1.	EHIME MBANO	12	EHIME MBANO	12
2.	IHITE UBOMA	15	-	-
3.	ISIALA MBANO	16	ISIALA MBANO	16
4.	OBOWO	11	-	-
5.	ONUIMO	4	ONUIMO	4
	ORLU ZONE			
6.	IDEATO NORTH	13	-	-
7.	IDEATO SOUTH	15	IDEATO SOUTH	15
8.	ISU	5	-	-
9.	NJABA	7	NJABA	7
10.	NKWERE	6	-	-
11.	NWANGELE	6	NWANGELE	6
12.	OGUTA	16	-	-
13.	OHAJI/EBBEMA	9	OHAJI/EBBEMA	9
14.	ORSU	9	-	-
15.	ORU EAST	9	ORU EAST	9
16.	ORU WEST	10	-	-
	OWERRI ZONE			
17.	ABOH MBAISE	11	ABOH MBAISE	11
18.	AHIAZU MBAISE	17	-	-
19.	EZINIHITE	15	EZINIHITE	15
20.	IKEDURU	14	-	-
21.	MBAITOLI	13	MBAITOLI	13
22.	NGOR OKPALA	17	-	-
Total	22	250	11	117

Source: (National Population Commission, 2006)

The communities were selected by a random sampling technique called ‘hat and draw’ method. The names of all the communities in the sample LGAs were written on pieces of paper, rolled

into balls and shuffled thoroughly in a black polythene bag. Four communities were drawn from each of the sampled LGAs and these yielded 44 communities from 117 in the eleven sampled LGAs (see table 2). The population of the 44 communities in the 11 sampled LGA based on the 1991 census figure projected to 2013 at 3 % annual growth rate is the target population and is 925,135. By applying Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967) to the data for this study with decision level α , as 0.04, sample size of 627 was arrived at.

Table 2: Sampled LGAs, no. of communities, and their sample sizes

S/N	LIST OF SAMPLED RURAL L.G.As.	NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES	NUMBER OF SAMPLED COMMUNITIES	NO. OF COPIES OF QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTED (SAMPLE SIZE)
A	OKIGWE ZONE			
1.	EHIME MBANO	12	4	29
2.	ISIALA MBANO	16	4	66
3.	ONUIMO	4	4	71
B	ORLU ZONE			
4.	IDEATO SOUTH	15	4	51
5.	NJABA	7	4	30
6.	NWANGELE	6	4	85
7.	OHAJI/EGBEMA	9	4	64
8.	ORU EAST	9	4	72
C	OWERRI ZONE			
9.	ABOH MBAISE	11	4	75
10.	EZINIHITE	15	4	23
11.	MBAITOLI	13	4	61
Total	11	117	44	627

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The information from the 44 communities covered in this study has been collated according to their respective LGAs. The number of items of Infrastructure was used to assess the level of development in these LGAs because literature on development studies reveals that infrastructural facilities and services are the basic footing on which development activities stand.

The infrastructural facilities considered to be relevant in inducing development in this study were many and each contains its own minor variables. They include; Educational facilities, health facilities, electricity supply, water supply infrastructure, road infrastructure, market, industrial facilities, security, recreational facilities and postal services. This infrastructure and its variables were collated item by item (See appendix 1). A synthesis of the data in the Appendix is shown in the summary table labelled Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Imo State Local Government Areas' Ranks in each Infrastructure

	L.G.A'S	Position of Local Government Areas on each infrastructure (development variables)										Score		Rank
		Education	Health	Roads	Industry	Recreation	Water	Electricity	Market	Communication	Security	Total Ranking Score	Development Rank Index	Development Rank Order
1.	Aboh Mbaise	5 th	1 st	6 th	4 th	1 st	5 th	7 th	2 nd	1 st	1 st	33	3.3	2 nd
2	Ehime Mbano	2 nd	6 th	1 st	9 th	5 th	6 th	4 th	8 th	6 th	1 st	48	4.8	7 th
3	Ezinihitte Mbaise	6 th	3 rd	6 th	9 th	9 th	6 th	1 st	4 th	1 st	1 st	46	4.6	6 th
4	Ideato South	7 th	11 th	6 th	11 th	5 th	10 th	10 th	7 th	6 th	1 st	74	7.4	10 th
5	Isiala Mbano	3 rd	2 nd	4 th	5 th	3 rd	8 th	4 th	3 rd	1 st	1 st	34	3.4	4 th
6	Mbaitoli	1 st	3 rd	10 th	2 nd	2 nd	2 nd	1 st	1 st	6 th	1 st	29	2.9	1 st
7	Njaba	10 th	10 th	11 th	6 th	10 th	8 th	1 st	10 th	1 st	1 st	68	6.8	9 th
8	Nwangele	9 th	9 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	3 rd	7 th	11 th	1 st	1 st	62	6.2	8 th
9	Ohaji/Egbema	4 th	5 th	1 st	1 st	5 th	1 st	4 th	5 th	6 th	1 st	33	3.3	2 nd
10	Onuimo	10 th	8 th	5 th	8 th	10 th	11 th	10 th	8 th	6 th	1 st	77	7.7	11 th
11	Oru East	8 th	7 th	1 st	3 rd	3 rd	3 rd	7 th	5 th	6 th	1 st	44	4.4	5 th

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The data in Table 3 are derived by assembling the number of items for each infrastructure (variable) for all the Local Government Areas, thereafter, ranking the Local government Areas based only on that infrastructure (see appendix). The process was repeated until the position (rank) of every Local Government Area for each infrastructure was ascertained. The next step was to sum up the positions scored by every Local Government Area in all variables and dividing same by the number of variables (infrastructure) used in the survey.

Simply put, Development Rank Index (DRI) is defined by;

$$DRI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n r_i}{n}$$

Where,

- DR1 = LGA overall development rank in all variables.
- r_i = LGA development rank in i th variable
- n = number of variables
- Σ = Summation symbol

Development Rank Index for every Local Government Area in all variables can be redefined as,

$$DR1 = \frac{r_1 + r_2 + r_3 + \dots + r_{10}}{10}$$

In Table 3, the variables were categorized to ten infrastructural facilities thereby explaining why 10 was the denominator. For instance, the Development Rank Index for Aboh Mbaise was computed by adding its positions in Table 3 among the 11 Local Government Areas in the 10 infrastructure and dividing the sum by 10. Thus, the DR1 for Aboh Mbaise is

$$\frac{5+1+6+4+1+5+7+2+1+1}{10} = \frac{33}{10} = 3.3$$

This Development Rank Index of 3.3 places Aboh Mbaise in the second position in the hierarchy of development among its contemporaries used for the analysis. The development rank index is in column 14 while the rank order (position) is in column 15 of Table 1. The ranking order shows that Mbaitoli Local Government Area ranks first with a DRI of 2.9. Onuimo Local Government Area is in the 11th (last) position with an index of 7.7. It is pertinent to note that, the lower the development rank index, the higher the level of development. The beauty of the ranking exercise in Table 3 is better appreciated when one studies the contents of Figure 2.

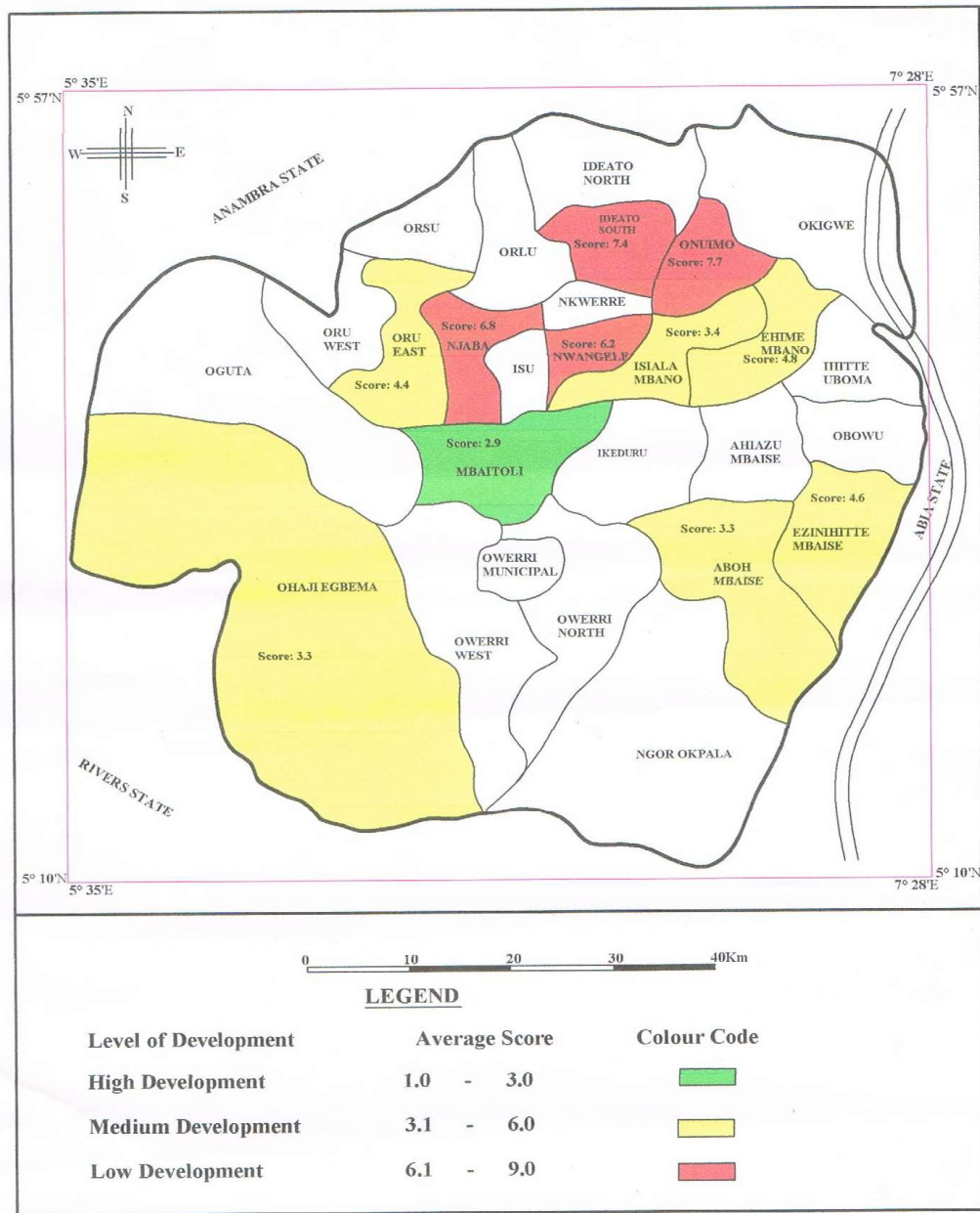


Figure 2: Map of Imo State Showing the Level of Development of Sampled Local Government Areas

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

A study of the map (Figure 2) shows that only Mbaitoli Local Government Area is in the high development category. Local Government Areas in the medium cadre with development rank indices between 3.1 to 6.0, are Aboh Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbaise, Ehime Mbano, Isiala Mbano, Oru East and Ohaji/Egbema. Low development, with development rank indices above 6.0 were recorded in Onuimo, Ideato South, Nwangele and Njaba Local Government Areas.

Population Size and their Percentage Ratio

Table 4 shows the population size of the LGAs and their percentage ratio (to the total population)

Table 4: Population Size and Percentage ratio of Sampled Local Government Areas

S/N	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE RATIO
1.	Ezinihitte Mbaise	165,593	9.6
2.	Ehime Mbano	130,931	7.6
3.	Njaba	115,110	6.7
4.	Ideato South	159,879	9.3
5.	Mbaitoli	237,555	13.8
6.	Ohaji/Egbema	182,538	10.6
7.	Isiala Mbano	198,736	11.5
8.	Onuimo	99,247	5.6
9.	Oru east	111,822	6.5
10.	Aboh Mbaise	195,652	11.3
11.	Nwangele	128,472	7.5
	Total	1,725,535	100

Source: National Population Commission, 2006

Categorical Regression Analysis tool was used to rank the population of the LGAs using their percentage ratio. The names of the LGAs, their percentage ratios (relative population size), development rank indices and positions are shown in table 5.

In Table 5, the relationship between the positions held by Local Government Areas in population size ranks and development rank indices are very close. For instance, the four largest populous Local Government Areas are also the most developed as they took the first four positions in the DR1. Again, the 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th Local Government Areas by the population size rank maintained the same positions in the development rank index. The revelation here is that population size plays important role in influencing the degree of rural development. This is easy to conjecture, especially when one recalls that it is the people who levy themselves to raise the funds which they use to develop their communities. Thus, the larger the population size, the more the probability of higher funds and so the higher the development. From another perspective, as observed during fieldwork, large rural communities have more infrastructure than the smaller communities.

Table 5: Local Government Areas, their population size ranks, their development rank indices and their ranked positions (hierarchy)

S/N	Local Government Area	% Ratio Pop. Size	Position	DRI	Position
1.	Onuimo	5.6	11 th	7.7	11 th
2.	Oru east	6.5	10 th	4.4	5 th
3.	Njaba	6.7	9 th	6.8	9 th
4.	Nwangele	7.5	8 th	6.2	8 th
5.	Ehime Mbanu	7.6	7 th	4.8	7 th
6.	Ideato South	9.3	6 th	7.4	10 th
7.	Ezinihitte Mbaise	9.6	5 th	4.6	6 th
8.	Ohaji/Egbema	10.6	4 th	3.3	2 nd
9.	Aboh Mbaise	11.3	3 rd	3.3	2 nd
10.	Isiala Mbanu	11.5	2 nd	3.4	4 th
11.	Mbaitoli	13.8	1 st	2.9	1 st

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Testing the Hypothesis

To test the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between population size rank and the development rank order of the Local Government Areas in Imo State (using the number of items of infrastructure as indices for the exercise); Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis tool was used. The Data Theory Scaling System Group (DTSS) processed output is shown in Table 6

Table 6: DTSS Processed Output of Pearson's R

MODEL SUMMARY

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
.823	.677	.641

Dependent Variable: POPULATION SIZE _ RANK
Predictors: LGA _ LEVEL _ OF _ DEVELOPMENT _ RANK

From Table 6, Pearson's R is 0.823. This signifies a high positive relationship between population size rank and Local Government Level of development rank. The inference is that large population induces or stimulates a corresponding level of development. The t-test statistical tool was used to test the reliability of the result. Substituting r with 0.823, n with 11, and r^2 with 0.677 at 9 degrees of freedom ($n-2$), the resultant computation gave the t-statistic as 4.345, Testing at $\alpha = 0.05, 0.01$ and 0.001 confidence limits at 9 degrees of freedom, the corresponding critical values at these levels of significance are 1.833, 2.821 and 4.297 respectively. Since the t-statistic is greater than the equivalent critical values, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between population size rank and the development ranking index among the Local Government Areas of Imo State was rejected. The alternative hypothesis that states that there is a significant relationship between Local Government Area population size rank and development rank index was accepted and therefore affirmed. Pearson's R^2 is the coefficient of determination. In this analysis, it has a value of 0.677. This means that population size accounts for 67.7 percent of the variance explained by the association, leaving a residual of 32.3 percent.

All these statistics point to the fact that rural communities in their Local Government Areas require large population size to develop and improve their rating, DRI, among other Local Government Areas. The implication is that the current balkanization of former autonomous communities leading to proliferation of autonomous communities could be counterproductive, as the much-needed population size required for meaningful self-help development efforts may be drastically depleted. As of now, in Imo State, only traditional rulers are benefiting from the proliferation while development in the new small autonomous communities suffers. This finding is in line with the work of Onyema *et al.*, (2018) which shows that the proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo State cannot set the pace for sustainable governance and development; instead it will continue to create great burden for communities and other tiers of government.

RECOMMENDATION

Both field observation and statistical analysis of this study show that population size plays important role in influencing the degree of rural development in Imo State. Thus, the larger the population size, the more the probability of higher funds and so the higher the development. Therefore, Government should stop creating new autonomous communities from existing ones as larger communities with higher population attract more development facilities. Furthermore, rural Local Government Areas should be constituted into planning units and funds should be made available and monitored by federal and state government for effective development of the rural areas.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on enhancing rural development through proliferation of autonomous communities, the Imo State experience. The study shows that rural communities in Imo State do not depend on government for their development. They use their self-help efforts. It is established that rural communities in their Local Government Areas require large population size to develop and improve their rating (Development rank index) among other Local Government Areas. The implication is that the current balkanization of former autonomous communities leading to proliferation of autonomous communities could be counterproductive, as the much-needed population size required for meaningful self-help development efforts may be drastically depleted. As of now in Imo State, only the traditional rulers are benefiting from the proliferation while development in the new small autonomous communities suffers.

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APPENDIX 1

	Infrastructure	L.G.A Ranking										
		Aboh 1	Ehime 2	Ezinihite 3	Ideato South 4	Isiala mbano 5	Mbaitoli 6	Njaba 7	Nwangele 8	Ohaji Egbema 9	Onuimo 10	Oru East 11
1	Primary Education	58(4)	58(4)	52(7)	44(8)	64(2)	79(1)	33(10)	28(11)	59(3)	34(9)	53(6)
2	Secondary Education	12(5)	19(2)	16(4)	8(7)	18(3)	20(1)	6(9)	5(10)	11(6)	5(10)	8(7)
3	Tertiary Educ.	0(4)	1(1)	0(4)	0(4)	0(4)	0(4)	0(4)	1(1)	1(1)	0(4)	0(4)
4	State Hospital	3(1)	1(5)	2(2)	0(8)	1(5)	2(2)	0(8)	0(8)	2(2)	0(8)	1(5)
5	Mission Hospital	2(1)	1(2)	0(7)	1(2)	0(7)	0(7)	0(7)	1(2)	1(2)	1(2)	0(7)
6	Joint Hospital	0(3)	0(3)	0(3)	0(3)	1(1)	0(3)	0(3)	1(1)	0(3)	0(3)	0(3)
7	Community Hospital	2(2)	1(4)	1(4)	1(4)	4(1)	2(2)	1(4)	1(4)	1(4)	1(4)	1(4)
8	Private Hospital	19(1)	7(7)	10(5)	1(10)	13(4)	18(2)	3(9)	4(8)	9(6)	1(10)	15(3)
9	Federal Road	1(3)	1(3)	1(3)	1(3)	2(1)	2(1)	1(3)	1(3)	1(3)	1(3)	1(3)
10	State Road	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)
11	Local Road	2(6)	5(1)	2(6)	2(6)	3(4)	1(10)	1(10)	2(6)	5(1)	3(4)	5(1)
12	Small and Medium Enterprises	90(4)	10(11)	16(9)	11(10)	58(5)	165(3)	55(6)	28(7)	747(1)	25(8)	242(2)
13	Heavy Industries	0(4)	1(2)	0(4)	0(4)	0(4)	1(2)	0(4)	0(4)	2(1)	0(4)	0(4)
14	Hotel	6(1)	3(4)	1(7)	1(7)	4(3)	5(2)	1(7)	2(6)	3(4)	1(7)	1(7)
15	Tourism	2(2)	1(5)	1(5)	2(2)	1(5)	2(2)	0(10)	1(5)	1(5)	0(10)	3(1)
16	Water (borehole)	6(5)	5(6)	5(6)	2(10)	4(8)	15(2)	4(8)	11(3)	30(1)	1(11)	(11)3
17	Electric Transformer	2(7)	3(4)	5(1)	1(10)	3(4)	5(1)	5(1)	2(7)	3(4)	1(10)	2(7)
18	Market	29(2)	17(8)	22(4)	19(7)	25(3)	33(1)	14(10)	11(11)	20(5)	17(8)	20(5)
19	Communication (P & T)	1(1)	0(6)	1(1)	1(6)	1(1)	0(6)	1(1)	1(1)	0(6)	0(6)	0(6)
20	Police Post	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)
21	Vigilante Services	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)

Note: The ranks are in parenthesis.