Rural Development in Afikpo-North Local Government of Ebonyi State

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Abstract

➢ *Background*

The research work empirically examined rural development in Afikpo-North local government of Ebonyi state.

➢ *Problems*

An effective and development-focused local government administration is a problem and challenge that most local governments in Nigeria have not been able to solve.

➢ *Methods*

Primary and secondary data were employed for this research work. A survey research design was considered the most suitable approach in view of the problem being investigated. A structured close ended questions were used to collect primary data from the respondents, this relates to section B of the questionnaire where A 5-point Likert scale was adopted ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". However, the secondary data was obtained from textbooks, journals and internet. A total of three hundred and ninety-nine copies of questionnaire were distributed based on samples and random sampling technique while three hundred and seven- one copies were returned; this means 93% of samples were used for the research work. Adopting structural-functionalism as its framework of analysis, the research employed both descriptive statistical and thematic analysis in analyzing data sourced from questionnaire and interviews with the aid of SPSS computer package.

➢ *Conclusion*

The research concluded that Afikpo-North local government has not positively affected rural development in Ebonyi state. Furthermore, that rural development in Afikpo-North local government is significantly affected by loss of autonomy/other factors. Finally, that rural development in Afikpo-North local government will be significantly affected on establishment of a functional anti-corruption mechanism.The study suggests an enactment of an effective disciplinary act for the local government system to curb especially the endemic problem ofcorruption and to diversifyinternal revenue generation drive / initiate investment so as to boost theirs services.

I. INTRODUCTION

Local governments are catalysts for socio-economic and political development of the rural areas. Local governments, particularly in Nigeria are veritable instruments for achievement of rural development goals.In the opinion of the institutional theorists, government efforts to implement programmes designed to reshape the physical, human and cultural environment require the development of highly functional and progressive structures The logic here is that development does not exist in a vacuum but requires a functional machinery to make it happen. For development to be realized, there must be institutions that must translate development decisions and plans into concrete reality. Thus, the enormous task of rural development requires a permanent institutional structure with legal power to initiate, implement and sustain programmes with development consequences. More so, these institutions must be assigned some clear –cut functional roles and matched with financial allocations proportionate to their responsibilities. Consequently, rural development in Afikpo-North local government have been bedeviled with a lot of problems such as corruption which have manifested in various forms and shapes such as embezzlement and and misappropriation of council funds, fraud through award of over-inflated and /phony contracts most of which are not executed, financial kick-backs, deliberate falsification of financial records, outright stealing of council property, the employment of unqualified, incompetent and unproductive persons leading to over-staffing and very high monthly waste bill which have led to waste of funds that could have been utilized for development purposes. However, the enormous benefits that the grassroots derive from local government is far from reality even with the strength and capacity. Their autonomy is limited and they are not able to manage essential functions without assistance from state government. The state government plays a dominant role in the formulation of policies and their implementation. The local government do not have significant independent sources of revenue and their entire development expenditure is met by the Federal government. Notwithstanding the acutedearth of fund currently facing the local government could be attributed to lack of creativity on the part of the local government in seeking alternative sources to complement the allocation from the federal account(Murana, 2005). Inspite of the clear evidence of structural and organizational adequacy, the

present Afikpo-North local government has woefully failed to really generate and concretize socio-economic and political development of the local areas and their people. This is evident in rural decay, mass unemployment, lack of basic amenities, such as electricity, portable water, health care high rate of preventable diseases, illiteracy, low life expectancy of rural people and high rate of infant mortality. An effective and development –focused local government administration system in Nigeria in real terms is a problem and challenge that most local government in Nigeria have not been able to solve. Afikpo-North local government is generally believed to be non-independent, non-autonomous, forced to the people by the political elites and therefore unaccountable and inefficient in the performance of her duties. The general feeling is that an effective local government system is that one which involves the local population in decision-making and provides for public accountability and service delivery but the case is lacking in Afikpo-North local government. Based on these, the following questions were put forward

What is the character of developmental services in Afikpo-North local government?
What are the constraints to rural development in Afikpo-North local government?
What steps could be taken to enhance development in Afikpo-North local government

Consequently, the objectives of this study is as follows: to find out the character of development in Afikpo-North local government, to ascertain the reasons for poor performance in Afikpo-North local government and to identify the steps that could be taken to enhance development in Afikpo-North local government.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➢ *The Concept of Local Government*
The first difficulty in discussing local governments is definition. The working definition varies among scholars and practitioners in this field, there is no consensus on the exact definition This concept has been defined in various forms, depending on the salient considerations or personal idiosyncrasies of the scholars and practitioners.

According to the guidelines, a local government is: government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific power within definite areas. These powers should give the councils substitutive control over local affairs: as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services, and to determine and implement projects, so as to complement activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized (FRN, 19761).

The above definition implies that there are essential distinguishing characteristics of local government which are also well articulated in scholarly works of the United Nations: (1961), Whalen (1970), Mawhood (1983), Ola (1984), Olowu (1988), Ezeani (2004 and 2006), and Okoli (2009) respectively. These features are as follows:

Localized: This particular feature implies that local government is the lower tier of government; it is the government at the grassroots or local level. Consequently, local government is subordinate but subservient to the central or federal or state governments.

It is a legal existence enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria. This project is from arbitrary actions of higher authority as a legal entity. It can sue or be sued and has a perpetual succession. This implies that the life of a local government does not expire with the end of each administration.

It enjoys substantial autonomy. Although local government are subjects to state or federal government controls in certain areas, they enjoy a reasonable degree of independence in administrative and financial affairs, such as the hiring control and discipline of their own staff and financial affairs, certain upper limit, the preparation of annual estimates or budgets, and the execution of certain projects (Blair, 1977; Ozor, 2003).

It exists within a defined territory.

Local government exercises its authority over a given population. In other words, as a corporate equity, the local government is created to serve resident citizen in a known territory.

It exercises specific power and performs certain functions as enshrined in the constitution or statues (as the case in Nigeria).

It is composed of elected representatives of the local people (Ola, 1984; Olisa 1990).

Local government is usually divided into departments divisions or units which facilitates the accomplishment of its goals, objectives and functions (Ezeani 2006, p.256)

➢ *The Concept of Rural Development*
According to Ollawa (1971) rural development means the restructuring of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses and to promote individual and collective incentives to participate in the process of development. This involves a host of multi-sectoral activities including the improvement of agriculture, the promotion of rural industries, the creation of the requisite infrastructure and social overhead as well as the establishment of appropriate decentralized structures in order to allow mass participation. In other words, as noted by Ndangra (2005), rural development is an integrated activity involving the implementation of programmes of agriculture, health, education, home management, provision of infrastructure, and other community facilities under the supervision of and with full participation of government, its agencies and the local people. Development is essentially

an educational process which seeks to create opportunities for local people to satisfy their human, economic, social psychic needs.

In his contribution on the concept of rural development, Diejemaoh (1972) stated that rural development is a process of not only increasing the level of per capital income in the rural areas, but also the standard of living of the rural populations; the standard of living depending on such factor as food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security

➢ *Historical Background of Afikpo North Local Government*

The history of Afikpo people is based on the version of oral tradition and information from the works of Gabriel Mbey. According to Gabriel Mbey (2009), the first settlers in Afikpo were the Egu and Nkalu

Afikpo is one of the thirteen Local Government Areas in Ebonyi State. It is the headquarter of Afikpo- North local government Area. It is situated in the southern part of Ebonyi State and is bordered to the North by the town of Akpoha, to the south by Unwana, to the South West by Edda in Afikpo South, to the East by the Cross River and to the West by Amasiri. Afikpo spans an area approximately 164 square kilometers in size. It is located on 6 degrees' north latitude and 8 degrees' east longitude. It occupies an area of about 64 square miles (164 km^2), Afikpo today Magazine, 2007.

Climatically, Afikpo is a hilly area despite occupying a region low in altitude, which rises 350 feet above sea level. It is a transitional area between open grass land and tropical forest and has an average annual rainfall of seventy-seven inches (198 cm). The population of Afikpo is estimated at 156,611, according to the Nigeria 2006 census, Afikpo today magazine, 2007,

During the pre-colonial era, Afikpo had an egalitarian and republican arrangement, whereby every male adult had a say in the governance of the society. They had two prominent political institutions which were village Assembly (Esaa) and the (Etos) who ensured proper governance of the villages. Each village governed its people separately, unless on issues affecting the whole clan which every village would send delegates to represent them at the clan meeting.

The colonization of Nigeria by the British gave rise to the imposition of traditional rulers known as "Warrant Chiefs", who wielded uncontrollable oppressive power on the people. It was this situation that resulted to Aba women riot of 1929. It was noted that the riot was championed by Oloko Women from Ikwuano, then under Aba province against their despotic warrant chief –chief Okugo. Today western democracy has been adopted in the governance of the people.

Pertinently, Afikpo was a district under Ogoja province in 1902 for administrative convenience. The status of Afikpo increased when Abakaliki was made a province. The old division known as Afikpo comprised of the present five local governments in Ebonyi South, namely, Ohaozara, Onisha, Afikpo North, Afikpo South, Ivo and part of Abi local government in Cross River state. The boundary adjustment of 1976 pulled Erei and Itigidi out of the division and a new local government known as Afikpo local government was created. During the creation of local government in 1996 by the led Military General Ibrahim Abacha, Afikpo-North was among the few local governments that were created in Ebonyi State in accordance the 1976 local government reform.

Pertinently, Afikpo North local government was carved out from Afikpo local government area. Afikpo is the second largest town in Ebonyi state and the headquarters of Afikpo North local government Area. Twenty-two villages of various sizes make up present-day Afikpo. These include Ozizza, Ohaisu, Nkpoghoro and Itim. The old Afikpo province once covered areas in Unwana, Edda, Amasiri and Akpoha. The present Afikpo North local government has twelve wards and each ward is represented by an elected councilor. Honorable Ogbonnia Enyum is the current elected chairman of Afikpo-North local government.

Afikpo is an agrarian society, the people are predominantly farmers, but subsistence farming is the mostly practiced based on the family household which constitutes the major unit of labour for the family. The major crops produced are Rice, Yam, Cassava, Maize, Melon, Palm Oil, Cocoa-yam, and vegetables. Shifting cultivation system is mostly practiced whereby the land was usually left to stay fallow for about ten years before it is cultivated. Nowadays, the period of fallow has been reduced to six years due to persistent pressure on land as a result of population growth. Apart from farming, Afikpo people also undertook fishing and canoe building.

Afikpo people also engage in famed artists, craft making and petty trading.

➢ *Problems Militating Against Rural Development in Afikpo North Local Government*

Okereke (1999) identified those factors that hinder local governments in Nigeria from generating socio-political and economic development of their areas as corruption, lack of well informed and committed political leadership with correct understanding of the meaning and dynamics of development on the part of those heading the local government councils and lack of adequate and well qualified personnel with sufficient managerial, administrative and executive capacities and technical know-how. He summarily highlights each of these factors as, corruption, being one of the most heinous factors manifested in various forms and shapes such as embezzlement and misappropriation of council funds, fraud through the award of over-inflated and /or phony contracts most of which are not executed, financial kick-backs,

deliberate falsification of financial records, outright stealing of council property, the employment of unqualified incompetent and unproductive persons leading to over-staffing and very highly monthly waste bill which have led to waste of funds that could have been utilized for development purposes.

After a systematic examination or analysis of documents containing information about the problem under investigation, the following hypotheses were suggested as follows;

Afikpo-North local government has positively affected rural development in Ebonyi state.

Rural development in Afikpo-North local government is significantly affected by loss of autonomy/other factors.

Rural development in Afikpo-North local government will be positively affected on the establishment of functional anti-corruption mechanism.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data generated from the survey were randomly selected from three villages each from the twelve wards that make up the present day Afikpo-North local government. Secondary and Primary data collection were engaged. Secondary data was collected based on the findings and prior studies, papers, articles, books and the World wide web. The primary data collection was carried out using a self-designed questionnaire developed by the researcher based upon literature review to get the most important issues tackling rural development I Afikpo-North local government.

The sample size was arrived at bearing in mind the assertion of Nwana(19810 that the larger the sample, the more representative of the larger population it becomes. As such, Nwana suggested that if the population is of few thousands, a 10 percent sample would be appropriate. To pick our sample, the researcher adopted a statistical formula initiated by Taro Yamani as stated below:

$$N= \frac{n}{1+(Ne)^2}$$

N= sample size

Where N= Population size

e = error margin allowed

i = Constant

Source Yamani (1968, p.80)

$$n= \frac{N}{1+(Ne)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{156,111}{1+ 156,111 \times 5\% (0.05) \text{ error}}$$

$$n = \frac{156,111}{1+156,111 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n= \frac{156,111}{1+ (156,111 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{156,111}{1+ (156,111 \times 2.5 -03)}$$

$$n = \frac{156,111}{1+ 390.2775}$$

$$n = \frac{156,111}{391.2775}$$

n = 398.9777076 = 399 approximately

The instruments were scrutinized and properly validated for its face content by three experts, one from the department of statistics and two from the field of public administration and local government. The corrections and other observations made by these experts were noted and built in appropriately.

The test-retest (pilot study) reliability was adopted for the study. The questionnaires were given to respondents (political science postgraduate students) and was re-administered after two weeks' interval to the same respondents. The result scores of the two tests were then compared and correlated. The result established a high coefficient of correlation and thus we concluded that the test is reliable. The data generated in the course of the study were carefully analyzed using tables and percentages to answer the key questions of the study, while Chi square was used to test the stated hypotheses.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis One: Afikpo-North local government has positively affected rural development in Ebonyi State.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
hypothesis 1	371	16.8922	2.51143	11.00	22.00

Table 1:- Descriptive Statistics on the test of Hypothesis One

Chi-Square Test

hypothesis 1			
	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
11.00	7	30.9	-23.9
12.00	4	30.9	-26.9
13.00	20	30.9	-10.9
14.00	29	30.9	-1.9
15.00	62	30.9	31.1
16.00	41	30.9	10.1
17.00	66	30.9	35.1
18.00	47	30.9	16.1
19.00	18	30.9	-12.9
20.00	49	30.9	18.1
21.00	16	30.9	-14.9
22.00	12	30.9	-18.9
Total	371		

Table 2:- Frequencies on test of Hypothesis One

Test Statistics	
	hypothesis 1
Chi-Square	163.372[a]
Df	11
Asymp. Sig.	.205

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 30.9.

Table 3:- Test Statistics on Hypothesis One

Table 3 provides the actual result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test. We can see from the table that our test statistics is statistically significant: X^2 =163.4, p = .205. The null hypothesis is hereby accepted and the alternate rejected. We therefore, conclude that Afikpo-North local government has not positively affected rural development in Ebonyi State.

Hypothesis Two: Rural development in Afikpo-North local government is significantly affected by loss of autonomy/other factors.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
hypothesis 2	371	10.7790	2.80052	5.00	19.00

Table 4:- Descriptive Statistics on the test of Hypothesis Two

Chi-Square Test

hypothesis 2			
	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
5.00	4	26.5	-22.5
6.00	10	26.5	-16.5
7.00	25	26.5	-1.5
8.00	35	26.5	8.5
9.00	67	26.5	40.5
10.00	58	26.5	31.5
11.00	39	26.5	12.5
12.00	27	26.5	.5
13.00	36	26.5	9.5
14.00	22	26.5	-4.5
15.00	32	26.5	5.5
16.00	10	26.5	-16.5
18.00	2	26.5	-24.5
19.00	4	26.5	-22.5
Total	371		

Table 5:- Frequencies on test of Hypothesis Two

Test Statistics	
	hypothesis 2
Chi-Square	194.774[a]
Df	13
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 26.5.

Table 6:- Test Statistics on Hypothesis Two

Table 6 provides the actual result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test. We can see from the table that our test statistics is statistically significant: X^2 =194.8, p < .0005. The alternate hypothesis is hereby accepted and the null rejected. We therefore, conclude that rural development in Afikpo-North local government is significantly affected by loss of autonomy/other factors.

Hypothesis Three: Rural development in Afikpo-North local government will be positively affected by the establishment of functional anti-corruption mechanism.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
hypothesis 3	371	11.0916	3.61337	2.00	25.00

Table 7:- Descriptive Statistics on the test of Hypothesis Three

hypothesis 3			
	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
2.00	5	16.9	-11.9
3.00	3	16.9	-13.9
4.00	2	16.9	-14.9
5.00	24	16.9	7.1
6.00	5	16.9	-11.9
7.00	9	16.9	-7.9
8.00	53	16.9	36.1
9.00	6	16.9	-10.9
10.00	29	16.9	12.1
11.00	64	16.9	47.1
12.00	59	16.9	42.1
13.00	24	16.9	7.1
14.00	35	16.9	18.1
15.00	11	16.9	-5.9
16.00	17	16.9	.1
17.00	14	16.9	-2.9
18.00	3	16.9	-13.9
19.00	4	16.9	-12.9
20.00	1	16.9	-15.9
21.00	1	16.9	-15.9
22.00	1	16.9	-15.9
25.00	1	16.9	-15.9
Total	371		

Table 8:- Frequencies on test of Hypothesis Three

Test Statistics	
	hypothesis 3
Chi-Square	484.035[a]
Df	21
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 16.9.

Table 9:- Test Statistics on Hypothesis Three

Table 9 provides the actual result of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test. We can see from the table that our test statistics is statistically significant: $X^2 = 484$, $p < .0005$. The alternate hypothesis is hereby accepted and the null rejected. We therefore, conclude that rural development in Afikpo-North local government will be positively affected by the establishment of functional anti-corruption mechanism.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has important implication for public policy and for the design and implementation of programmes to develop the rural areas. Generally, the work made a modest attempt at ascertaining the relationship between rural development and Afikpo-North local government of Ebonyi state. The study found out that:

There is gross misappropriation and mismanagement of local government revenue by the staff and officials of the council and the state government.

Afikpo-North local government is not adequately funded to carry out its development programme and projects

There is no functional system of financial accountability, monitoring and evaluation (M &E) of projects in Afikpo-North local government.

The outcome of the foregoing study has shown that there is correlation between rural development and Afikpo-North local government of Ebonyi state. Evidently, Afikpo North local government as the closest government in rural area has the necessary capacity to stimulate and accelerate rural development in spite of the challenges that have prevented its development potentialities.

The recommendations that evolved from the paper are:
Enactment of an effective disciplinary Act for the local government system to curb especially the endemic problems of corruption. In addition, any erring official convicted of corruption should be sentenced to prison without option of fine in order to defer others.

Afikpo North local government should diversify their internal revenue generation drive and initiate investment so as to boost their services. Also, state local government joint account system should be abolished and full autonomy granted to Afikpo-North local government.

The introduction of effective and functional project management, monitoring and evaluation (M &E) strategies which have stringent measures to check financial and administrative responsibilities on the part of the contractors, elected and administrative officials of the local government.

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