

Rural Transformation as Catalyst to Community Development in Nigeria: Wukari Local Government in Perspective; 2019-2023

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how rural transformation served as catalyst to development in Wukari Local Government of Nigeria from 2019 to 2023. To accomplish this noble objective, research questions were used to carry out the investigation through the use of primary and secondary sources of data. The researcher used simple percentage as presented in the table with descriptive analysis as a method of data analysis. From the study, it was clearly understood that inadequate financial support from both the state and federal governments served as hindrance to effective implementation of government policies towards rural transformation in Wukari Local Government. It is therefore recommended that financial support be increased to a reasonable percentage to enable local governments embark upon rural transformation in the state and Wukari Local Government in particular. Also, revenue allocation from the federation account should come directly to the Local Governments account for effective transformation.

KEY WORDS: Rural Development, Local Administration, Rural Transformation, Accountability, Local Government.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of development and its potential has taken on various dimensions, with differing perspectives on its definition and significance. Development has also been analyzed through diverse theoretical frameworks and approaches to practical application. At its core, development refers to the process aimed at enhancing the overall quality of human living conditions. It also concerns the capacity of people to effectively transform the national resources of their environments into goods and services through the imaginative and practical application of their

creative talents and productive power. The word rural connotes a place with agricultural orientation, houses, farm houses, barns and other structures of similar purposes. Rural areas usually lack the good things of life like good roads, medical and health facilities, portable water, electricity, markets and other social facilities (Olisa, 1992). Rural Development is therefore a determined and conscious effort concentrated on the overall improvement of man's living conditions in the rural areas. Rural areas are key sectors in every national economy and their rapid transformation and modernization has gained the attention of policy makers and governments all over the world. Rural areas in developing countries to which Nigeria belongs are deprived of basic needs of life. Rural dwellers have been found to engage in primary economic activities that form the foundation for the country's economic development.

The concept of rural development can be viewed as a holistic concept which recognises the complexity and inter-relatedness of many variables which influence the quality of life in rural areas (Aziz, 1999). Rural development is a complex process which involves the interaction of economic, social, cultural, technological and other situational factors. For proper actualisation of this concept, the aforementioned factors have to be integrated with the objectives of improving the quality of life of the people. The Local Government system with which this research is concerned is inclusive and better placed in accelerating transformation especially at the grassroots and in providing infrastructural facilities in the rural areas.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The study of the development of local government as a tier of government in Nigeria will not be meaningful, if it is not preceded by an examination of the philosophical consideration underlying the local government system (Alex, 1987). The structure, composition and functions of local government are influenced by the political beliefs of those who have the authority and responsibility for determining the main features of the local government system. This relationship between values or political beliefs and structure for the distribution of powers in society has been argued by Hoffmann (1959) as he wrote that any preference for a certain scheme of area division of powers presupposes a decision on the ends for which power is to be exercised – a decision on the values power should serve and on the ways in which these values will be served.

Regardless of nomenclature, local government is a creation of British colonial rule in Nigeria. It has overtime experienced change in name, structure and composition. Between the

1930s and 1940s for instance, local government was known as chief-in-council and chief-and-council, where traditional rulers were given the pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, election was introduced according to the British model in the western and eastern parts of the country with some measure of autonomy in personnel, financial and general administration (Nwabueze, 1982). It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the local governments in these areas was based. During this period, heterogeneity was the hallmark of local government as there was no uniformity in the system and the level of development was also remarkably different.

The introduction of 1976 reforms by military administration of General Obasanjo brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of the system. The reforms introduced a multi-purpose single tier local government system (Ajayi, 2000). The reforms also introduced population criterion under which a local government could be created. Consequently, a population of within 150,000 to 800,000 was considered feasible for a local government. This was done to avoid the creation of non-viable local councils and for easy accessibility. There was provision for elective positions having the chairman as executive head of local government with supervisory councillors constituting the cabinet. This was complemented by the bureaucrats and professionals, such as doctors, engineers, etc, who were charged with the responsibility of implementing policies (1976 Guidelines). In 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of local governments from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local councils that we have today and the administrative structure also underwent some changes (Ajayi, 2000). In summary, it can be said that no public institution in Nigeria has been so subjected to frequent reforms than local government.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The key problem facing most local governments is lack of adequate finance to implement various developmental programmes. It would be recalled that since early 1990s, there have been tremendous increase in the total amount of funds available to local governments in Nigeria. The reasons for the lack of adequate finance can be attributed to the fact that local government allocations are being hijacked by state governors, used for electioneering campaigns and shared among political God-fathers and members of state assemblies. Also, state governors have used the

joint Account to siphon local government allocations from the federation account. Akhabue (2011) pointed out that the last criminal fad was that state governors redistributed allocations to local government from the federation account and gave less than N20million to each council to pay salaries, and take care of their overhead costs. All these corruptive activities had added in no small measure to the problem of inadequate finance which has made effective services delivery at the rural areas to be impossible. This paper therefore examines why rural transformation has not been witnessed or experienced as expected despite the amount of monies involved.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Wukari Local Government was under Gongola state until 27th August 1991 when Taraba state was created out of Gongola State. Wuakri Local Government is one the sixteen (16) Local Governments created under Taraba state, and located in the southern part of the state. Its headquarters (Wukari) is linked through high way with many road networks to parts of the country through Ukum, Zaki-Biam, Katsina-Ala, down to the eastern part of the country. Wukari Local Government is further subdivided into ten (10) political wards namely; Kente, Avyi, Puje, Rafinkada, Tskundi, Jibu, Bantaje, Hospital, Akwana and Chonku. The local government is inhabited by mainly Jukuns, Hausas, Tivs and other minor tribes surrounding the community. The local government has an estimated population of 238,283 people based on 2006 estimated census. The local government has the presence of both federal and state government institutions such as Federal University, Kwararafa Community University, and General Hospital, Magistrate court, National Open University, Federal Government College, Correctional Centre, many public and private secondary schools including primary schools. Also the local government has the largest yam market in the state. The economic activities of the inhabitants include farming, fishing and trading which the Jukun are known for.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, an attempt has been made to define three basic concepts like local government, development and rural development. The concept of local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997). It is defined as “government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place (Appadorai, 1975).

Local government can also be defined as that tier of government closest to the people, “which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain” (Lawal, 2000:60). Akpan (1982) defined local government as the breaking down of a country into smaller units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned play a direct and full role through their elected representatives who exercise power and undertake functions under the general authority of the national or state government. Barber (1969) defined Local government as authority to determine and execute matters within a restricted area. It becomes clear from the above that the purpose of establishing a local government is to ensure appropriate services and development activities responsible to local wishes and initiatives. Local government operates at the lowest level of society.

Bandhu (1967) defined local government as representative of local inhabitants, more or less autonomous in character instituted under state legislation, in a village, a district, a city or in urban areas to administer services as distinguished from state and central services. The jurisdiction of a local government is limited to a specific area, a village or a city, and its functions related to the provision of civic amenities to the population living within that area. Clarke (1948) maintains that a local government appears to be that part of the government of a nation or state which deals mainly with such matters as concern the inhabitants of particular district or place.

According to Rao (1965), local government is that part of the government which deals mainly with local affairs, administered by authorities subordinate to the state government, but elected independently of the state authority by the qualified residents. Robson (1949), in a lengthy definition, says that local government may be said to involve the conception of territorial, non-

sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. This in turn pre-supposes the existence of a local authority with power to act independently of external control as well as the participation of the local community in the administration of its own affairs. Gokhale (1972) definition of local government is very simple. He says that local self-government is the government of a specified locality by the local people through the representatives elected by them. Venkatarangaiya and Pattabhiram (1969) defined local government as the administration of a locality, a village, a town, a city or any other area smaller than the state by a body representing local inhabitants, possessing a fairly large amount of authority, raising at least a part of its revenue through local taxation and spending its income on services which are regarded as local and, therefore, as distinct from state and central services.

A local government is expected to play the role of promoting the democratic ideals of a society and coordinating development programmes at the local level. It is also expected to serve as the basis of socio-economic development in the locality. An analysis of the above definitions reveals certain essential characteristics of local governments. These are: **Local Area:** A local government has to operate in a geographical area. **Statutory Status:** The local government enjoys statutory status i.e. it is created by a specific law or statute.

Autonomous Status: Autonomy of the local governments is the natural consequence of their statutory status. Since the local governments are created by an act of the legislature, that Act lays down their powers, functions and relationship with central or state government.

Local Participation: Participation of the local people in decision making and administration of the local authority is important that is what gives it the character of self – government.

Local Accountability: Since local government provides services of local nature called civil amenities like sanitation, education, transport etc. to the people of the area, it is appropriate that it is accountable to the local people.

Local Finances: Local governments have two main sources of finances: (1) grants-in-aid given by the central or state government and (2) taxes and levies imposed by the local governments themselves.

Social Services for the Local People: The main objective of the local government is to provide certain civic amenities to the people of its area at their door – step. The provision of these services ensures healthy living of local community.

Development: In order to have a clearer picture of rural development, we need to understand the concept of development. Hornby (2000) defines development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc, the process of producing or creating something new. This definition implies that development involves a gradual movement or advancement through progressive changes. Umehali (2006) sees the changes to be multi-dimensional involving changes in structures, attitude and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. He asserts that development involves economic growth component, equality or social justice component, and socio-economic transformational component which are all on a self-sustaining basis. Viewing the concept differently, Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) in both quantitative terms.

Rural Development: The concept of rural development lacks a unified definition as different scholars tend to view it from varying perspective. Some scholars look at rural development from the aspect of educational training like Haddad (1990), and Hinzen (2000). Obinne (1991) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for individuals to realize full potential through education and share in decision and action which affect their lives. Others like Olayide, Ogunfowora, Essang and Idachaba (1981) view rural development as means for the provision of basic amenities, infrastructure, improved agriculture productivity and extension services and employment generation for rural dwellers.

Olatunbosun (1976), Williams (1978), Lele (1979), Idachaba (1980) and Ogunfidity (2000) viewed rural development from various perspectives. However, there is a consensus among them about the need for improvement in rural living conditions and standard of living of the rural populace. Olatunbosun (1976) stated that rural development is based on the need to balance the pattern and direction of government for the benefit of both the urban and rural sectors and provide technical requirements for speeding up economic growth in the development.

Adelemo (1987) sees the concept of rural development to include resettling displaced communities or adopting new types of housing unit. He continues that rural development should include alongside land-use development, economic factors such as land carrying capacity for each area of farmland, irrigation improved farming method and finance.

The objective of the National Policy on Rural development as outlined by Ogbazi (1992) encapsulates an ideal situation of an acceptable level of development in the rural area. These

objectives can be paraphrased to include: promotion of the social, cultural, educational and economic wellbeing of the rural population, promotion of sustained and orderly development of the vast resources in the rural areas.

Attempts at Rural Development: The various policies of the Nigerian government on rural development are to improve the living condition in the rural areas with a view to curbing rural - urban migration. These policies show the zeal of different governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOS) which has led to the proliferation of development agencies. Despite the countless numbers of rural development policies introduced at different times by successive governments coupled with the huge financial and material resources employed, little or nothing is felt at the rural level as each policy has often died with the government that initiated it before it starts to yield dividends for the rural dwellers. Onuorah (2006) supports this claim when he states that not minding the lofty objectives (policies and government initiatives). Such efforts endured beyond the government that initiated the schemes. It has been discovered that rural-urban drift which make majority of the youths roam the cities in search of jobs that are not available could be tamed if agriculture is made attractive and the rural areas equipped with basic infrastructures like electricity and good roads among others. Local farmers are not able to go into mechanized farming as a result of paucity of funds occasioned by lack of access to rural credit and loans. They struggle to survive on the little they could do manually, most times to feed their families and very little to sell. Investigations indicated that even those who produce enough to sell run into losses due to lack of storage facilities and bad roads to move the produces to the market.

Stock (2005) laments that as a result of the neglect of agriculture and the rural areas, Nigeria now imports farm products to feed its people with untold hardship on the rural people Umebali and Akuibilo (2006) note that oil exploration and agricultural activities are carried out in rural areas and both yield the highest revenue for the nation. Interestingly, as revealed by Umebali (2004), literature shows that greater percentage of the total population live in rural areas and most of them are engaged in agriculture. If we must make the rural areas attractive to live, then meaningful effort geared towards sustainable rural development must be aggressively and vigorously pursued as this will alter the certainty of poor quality of life in the rural areas which Adalemo (1987) sees as the main phobia that has often pushed migrants to the perceived opportunities in the urban centres.

THE ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In Nigeria, past centralized development efforts embarked upon had resulted into failure to benefit the rural people. It has therefore been realized that rural development must constitute a major part of a development strategy if a large segment of those in greatest need are to benefit since most programmes *Local Government and the Challenges of Rural Development in Nigeria (1999 to date)* embarked upon by the central and state governments have failed in this areas; then local government becomes the next agent to fall on for development. The roles of local government in rural development are:

Education: Local governments through their local education districts have been responsible for the construction, maintenance and staffing of primary schools in their respective areas. Also, it is responsible for the payment of salaries for teaching and non – teaching staff in primary schools.

Transportation: The provision of transportation has gone a long way to enhance the status of Nigerian local governments. These local governments have set up diverse mass urban transit scheme to help to transport their staff and also act as a source of revenue generation for local governments.

Public Toilet: Local governments are not left out in the maintenance of good hygienic culture. They embark on the construction of public toilets for their people.

Water Supply: Local governments embark on digging of bore holes in the rural areas; this has greatly improved the hygiene nature of the people in these rural communities

Medical and Health: These include the provision, maintenance and administration of dispensaries, maternity and health centres. The increase in the revenue allocation to local governments has been helping in the maintenance of these medical and health services.

Law Enforcement: Customary courts of Grades A, B and C and setup in different local government areas. These courts deal with civil cases such as divorce, defaulters and issuing of certificate of marriage Nehru (1996) emphasized the role of local government as the basis of any true system of democracy. According to him, the role of local government includes the following; Grass-root democracy: Local government provides scope for democracy at the grass – root level. If direct democracy can still be practicable, it is only at this level, otherwise democracy at the state or national level has become only indirect type. Serves as a training School: Local government is an excellent ground for creating and training future leaders. The participation of people at the local level in the management of their own affairs, gives them necessary experience to handle bigger

affairs later at the state or national level, Encourages participation of the people in public affairs: Local government affords opportunity to the people to participate in public affairs. It has become impracticable for common people to participate in public affairs at the state or national level reduces the burden of the central government: Local government in a way acts supplementary to the central government.

Historically, the local government is prior to the state or national government, but with the passage of time many important functions got transferred to the central government. Serves as a channel of communication: The local government serves as two-way channel of communication between itself and the central government .Desires and aspirations of the local community are articulated and carried upward to the state government, and plans and programmes of the state and the central governments flow in the reverse direction. Vital for national progress: Local government promotes diversity of experience and creative activity through democratic action. Thus, it contributes to national progress through resilience, strength and richness of democracy.

Challenges of Rural Development: The issue of funding is a big challenge. Some of the rural development programmes are so bogus without a clearly defined source of funding. The cases of the Housing for ALL, Universal Basic Education (UBE) and so on are clear examples. They are often initiated before sourcing for funds from philanthropists and international donors which may never come. Another challenge is the armed conflicts ranging from ethnic, religious and communal issues which do not provide enabling environment for the implementation of sustainable development programmes in such areas. For instance, a situation where foreigners and government workers in some coastal rural areas are targets of kidnappers demanding ransom is obviously not conducive for development work.

Also, corruption poses a very big threat to rural development. There is lack of integrity, accountability and transparency on the part of people who are supposed to implement development projects in the rural areas. Nwakoby (2007) laments that public funds (made for rural projects) are stashed away in bank vaults in Europe and America, while an overwhelming proportion of the population live in abject poverty. Another challenge is the lack of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of the intended beneficiaries of the programmes hence according to Chiloikwu (2006), most of them died with the government that initiated them. For example, development programmes like Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Free

and Compulsory Primary Education, Low Cost Housing Schemes which impact positively on the rural dwellers could not be sustained.

Onibokun (1987) sees rural development to be faced with the paradox that the production oriented rural economy relies heavily on non-productive people whereas the consumption oriented urban economy is flooded with people many of who are either unemployed or unemployable or marginally employed or underemployed in the urban centres where they choose to live. As a result of this mass exodus, the rural areas have been qualitatively depopulated and are progressively less attractive for social and economic investments while the urban areas are becoming physically congested, socially unhealthy and generally uneconomic to maintain. In addition, rural development is faced with challenges which have made the effect of government's efforts at different levels, NGOs, private initiatives and international involvement not felt by the intended beneficiaries.

Umebali and Akubulo (2006) list such challenges like: Vicious cycle of poverty, poor infrastructure, high population density, high level of illiteracy, low social interaction and local politics and rural - urban migration. Rural dwellers have been considered as the thermometer through which one determines the impact of rural development. A lot of rigours, bottlenecks and unnecessary bureaucracy are often attached to rural development process. This is evident in the history of most of the rural development programmes which are often saddled with disappointments. Another challenge is the issue of proliferation of development programmes. Some are so superficially implemented that the average targeted population (rural dwellers) doubt the sincerity of the initiators. Such proliferation can easily be noticed from the many number of such that died with successive government that initiated them. The problem of implementation is another glaring challenge.

Obot (1989) justified this claim when he writes that the development policies geared towards the improvement of the rural dwellers remained almost a house - hold word without corresponding success especially at the implementation states. To this end, some of them are haphazardly implemented as a result of poor supervision. Perhaps this is why water taps abound in so many rural communities but without water since their installation. Local governments being small may not be able to attract competent and efficient persons to perform the services they render to the public. Since the area of their jurisdiction is small and their capacity to pay is limited by their limited resources, they may find it difficult to hire specialists. Since governments are concerned

with their respective local communities, they may degenerate into myopic, narrow – minded, selfish and ignorant institutions. They cannot provide services of a uniform standard. Local governments are bound to differ in resources, efficiency, etc. They are to work and survive in the face of centralizing tendencies.

Modern technological revolution has led to speedy communications, industrialization, urbanization etc. “Local initiative and the independence of action have been undermined by the ease and quickness with which the state government and the town government may talk over the telephone and settle the matter (Maheshwari, 1999). Local governments may especially be prone to corruption and malfeasance, much more than the central government.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach adopted for this paper is democratic-participatory school of thought due to the fact that it is essential to a democratic regime or for practical administrative purposes like responsiveness, accountability and control. The concept of democracy is central to the democratic-participatory school of thought. This school of thought believes that democracy is a way of life that demands that one another’s point of view and one another’s interest be mutually appreciated (Panter- Brick, 1970). It is expected that real democratic governance would be good governance. Good governance amongst other things involves the enthronement of due process, constitutionalism, rule of law, transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs, the absence of good governance and its by-products, automatically leads to two negative outcomes like massive corruption and political instability. None of these outcomes is conducive to development (Muo, 2007).

The general consensus among Nigerians is that corruption appears to have been institutionalized in the local government. Selection instead of election – a serious trait of anti-democratic governance among other things might have accounted for the scenario. The democratic-participatory school of thought exists solely for the purpose of bringing about democracy and Mill (1975) justified local government on three main grounds. The first was that there are certain concerns or interests which only a section of the community has in common and it is convenient as well as advisable that only those who share this community of interests should administer them. As Mill (1975) put it: The very object of having a local representation is in order that those who have any interest in common, which they do not share with the general body of

their countrymen, may manage that joint interest by themselves. The second reason was that local government is one of the free institutions which provide political education. According to Mill: I have dwelt in strong language – hardly any language is strong enough to express the strength of my conviction – on the importance of that portion of the operation of free institutions, which may be called the public education of the citizens. Now, of this operation, the local administrative institutions are the chief instrument.

The third reason was that of accountability, as Mill expressed it: not only are separate executive officers required for purely local duties but the popular control over those officers can only be advantageously exerted through a separate organ. Their original appointment, the function of watching and checking them, the duty of providing, or the discretion of withholding, the supplies necessary for their operation, should rest with the people of the locality. The arguments of Mill have been refined by elaboration. Mill modern adherent, Keith (1954) argued the pedagogic value of local government, asserting that participation in local administration teaches the participant the art of weighing and choosing between competing claims and justifying the choice as a just one that is, being accountable. He further stressed that the capacity to make rational choices and the art of winning consent are as much necessary in local government as in central government, and, that capacity is acquired and enhanced by participation in local government.

Another adherent is Wilson (1984) who argued that the higher ultimate purposes that local government serves are political. One of these is political education which participation in local government affords. That political education is in the first place, an education in the possible and the expedient; in the second place, it is an education in the use of power and authority and in the risks of power, in the third place, it is education in practical ingenuity and versatility. Mackenzie (1961) regarded local government as a training ground for national politicians. In addition, local government has the advantage that local knowledge, interested and intimate, first-hand knowledge which makes administration concrete and relevant to a locality can be more easily and perhaps cheaply made available to the local and central authorities. There is no doubt that the essence of local government fits into this framework in view of the federal system of government adopted and the quest for development at the grassroots level. Local government cannot meet the needs of the people without adequate participation of the local dwellers.

In summary, local government, it is claimed, enables services of local importance only to be locally administered, provides education in citizenship, provides training in political leadership,

makes available to the central government information about localities which is essential for adequately meeting their needs efficiently, and minimizes concentration of political power by diffusing it.

THE WAY FORWARD

One of the major challenges of local government is lack of adequate finance to implement its programmes at the grassroots level. Therefore, for local government to bring development to the rural areas there is the need for local councils to have strong economic base. In this connection, it is suggested that statutory allocations to local councils be reviewed upward from 52.68%, 26.72% and 20.6% to 52.1%, 25.9% and 22.0% at the federal, state and local governments respectively. In addition to this, councils shares of the federation account to be released to them directly to avoid lateness in the payment of salaries and arbitrary deductions by state government. Local government should have representation in the Revenue Allocation and Fiscal Commission which determines and shares the federated revenue to the beneficiaries.

It is not enough to have an upward review of councils allocations, but also advisable for local councils to look inwards for improved Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). This will make them financially self-reliant. Besides, some local council should look for ways of attracting industries to their areas as this will propel economic development and increase their revenue base. In order to reduce the incidence of corruption in local government, there must be better welfare package for local government staff. Adequate motivation and welfare package will prepare the workers for the task of service delivery. Also, the electorates should be educated and enlightened on who to elect as their political representative.

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