

Local Government Administration and Rural Development in Rivers State, Nigeria. A study of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, 2011 – 2020

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of local government administration on rural development and its impediments in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council, Rivers State. The essence of the establishment of the third tier is to bring development to the grassroots in every state of the federation. However, the purpose has not been completely achieved because of the way local government functions were undermined by the state government. Given the above, the local government is viewed as an appendage of the state government. The study relied on both primary and secondary data. To elicit the primary data, 60 copies of questionnaires titled 'Local Government Administration and Rural Development in Rivers State. A study of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, 2011 – 2020 was administered at various communities in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, Rivers State. A purposive sampling technique was adopted as a sampling technique. The study adopted the Human Needs Theory as its theoretical construct. The study unravelled that various impactful projects were carried out by successive administration in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, Rivers State, 2011 – 2020. The study recommends that the oversight function of the councillors should be strengthened by amending the laws that empowered them to checkmate the budget implementation before the next budget is passed.

Keywords: local government, ONLGA, project, Rivers State, rural development,

1. Introduction

The local government administration is not a recent system of government in Nigeria. The native authorities metamorphosed into what is referred to as the Local Government System in Nigeria. It was first experimented with in Northern Nigeria in the 1890s by Sir Frederick Lugard. Lugard maintained that the purpose of establishing the indirect rule was not the “desire to impose on the (Nigerians) people any theoretically suitable form of government, but rather to evolve from their old institutions, based on their habits of thought, prestige and

custom, the form of the rule best suited to them and adapted to meet the new conditions” (Lugard, 1922, p.219).

Since the establishment of native authorities to date, local government administration has evolved in phases to the extent of a well established modern system of local government administration in Nigeria. At present, Nigeria operates a federal system of government that is made up of three tiers. The federal at the centre, the state occupies the middle and the local government at the bottom of the ladder. There are 36 States, plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 774 local government council in Nigeria.

The “essence of the establishment of the local government council is to oversee and facilitate rural development in the grassroots (Ogele, Sarki, Solomon, and Kaka, 2020) of every state of the federation. However, the purpose has not completely achieved because of the way local government functions were undermined by the state governments, especially since the inception Fourth Republic in Nigeria. The local government is viewed as an appendage of the state governments.

The ineffectiveness and inefficiencies of the local government councils were what led to the 1976 local government reforms. It is imperative to note that, the then Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters, Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar’Adua declared during the Guidelines for Local Government Reforms (1976) that:

The defects of previous local government systems are too well-known to deserve further elaboration here. Local Governments have over the years, suffered from the continuous whittling down of their powers... The Federal Military Government has therefore decided to recognize local government as the third tier of government activity in the nation. Local Government should do precisely what the word government implies in governing the grassroots or local level”(Erero, 1995,p.132).

Consequently, the innovations emanating from the 1976 reforms led to the following responsibilities to the local government. They include payment of all staff salaries, building and maintenance of the physical infrastructure of primary health centres, stocking facilities with medicines, among others. In other words, “the idea of local government administration in Nigeria was conceived to accelerate development and as well create the opportunity for the people at the local level to participate and hold those in power accountable for the roles they play in the government”(Abutudu, M., 2011, cited in Ozohu and Chima,2015,p.1).

Historically, the local government administration in Nigeria had gone through four major epochs such as (i) imperialist rule via the traditional administrative system, 1903-1950s (ii) liberal and participatory approach introduced in the 1950s; (iii) Military regime introduced a grassroots participatory democratic approach, and (iv) 1976 local government reforms, and (v) Babangida administration reforms of 1988. In essence, the local government reform of 1988 was a component of the 1988 Civil Service Reform package. Parts of the 1988 reforms are that the chairman of the local government is the chief executive but he is not permitted to sign cheques. An organizational structure was approved for all local governments, which each local government was allowed to possess a maximum of six departments. They are administration, personnel management, finance and supplies, planning research and statistics, education, agriculture and natural resources, works, land and survey, Medical and Health Departments. The 1976 and 1988 Reforms respectively provided for popular participation at the grass-root level. For example, the Universal Adult Suffrage enfranchised women in Northern Nigeria, and this development increased political participation in the rural areas. Recognizing the relevance of political development in rural areas, the former President Babangida’s administration (1985-1993) maintained that:

The current reforms of the local government systems should be seen as constituting critical foundations of the ongoing programme of transition of

democracy... As the critical hub of the transition programme, the local government experiment typifies the learning process or “learning -through-experience” upon which the entire gamut of the ongoing political reconstruction is anchored. As the Political Bureau aptly observed, the essence of the transition programme is a systematic and graduated process in which “democratic government can proceed with political learning, institutional adjustment and a reorientation of political culture at sequential level politics and governance beginning with the local government and ending at the federal levels (Oyovbaire, 1992,p.7)

The importance of the local government cannot be eroded as the third tier in Constitutional development in Nigeria. The 1979 and 1999 Constitutions recognized the local government as a

legitimate third tier of government with functions. For instance, Section 8, Part 1, of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution recognize local government council as a tier of government vested with specific responsibility for the development and participation of the rural people in politics of the state; while Section 162(6) of 1999 established that the State Joint Local Government Account System “into which shall be paid all allocations to the Local Government Councils of the State from Federation Account and Revenue from the State Grant (Agbani and Ugwoke, 2014,p.146).

Rivers State is divided into 23 local government councils. Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni is one of the local government councils in Rivers State. The Rivers State government receives a large allocation every month from the federal government and distribute it to the local government based on the 1999 Constitutional provision of Section 162(6). Sadly, most local government councils do not comply by distributing what is accrued due to the overbearing influence of the state government. Despite the challenge of extortion tendencies of the state government, the local government do not judiciously utilize for rural development but is characterized with “corruption, fiscal indiscipline, irresponsibility”(Agbo, 2010, p.20) and as well as “crass mismanagement where the combined effect of graft and inefficiency are proudly showcased by the officials”(Ekawu, 2007, p.18). Clear corrupt practices in the local council such as misappropriation of funds meant for development, over-invoicing of goods, reckless, and unauthorized payments, among others have affected rural development in Rivers State.

Apart from the corruption in the local government council, the “rural development has not been centrally guided... The crucial role of local government system as a link between government and the rural people remains unreliable” (Kamar, Lawal, Babangida and Jahun, 2014,p.24). It is even worse than the rural people do not participate in the “developmental activities from project selection and design through to execution and ex-post evaluation participation involves improvement of the poor so that they may exert their influence independently of government direction on decision making and related activities of development projects” (Hall & Midley, 2004,p.25). Against this background, the study interrogates the impacts of projects on rural inhabitants and factors that inhibit Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council from carrying out her statutory responsibility of grassroots development.

2. Conceptual Review

Local Government

Local government has been defined by various scholars, however, it is generally viewed as a branch of public administration, which exists as the lowest tier of a government system that is designed via Constitution to provide the needs of people at the grassroots (Chukwuemeka, Ikechuckwu, Onouha, and Ndubuisi, 2014 cited in Egbo, 2018). Olisa (1990) cited in Egbo

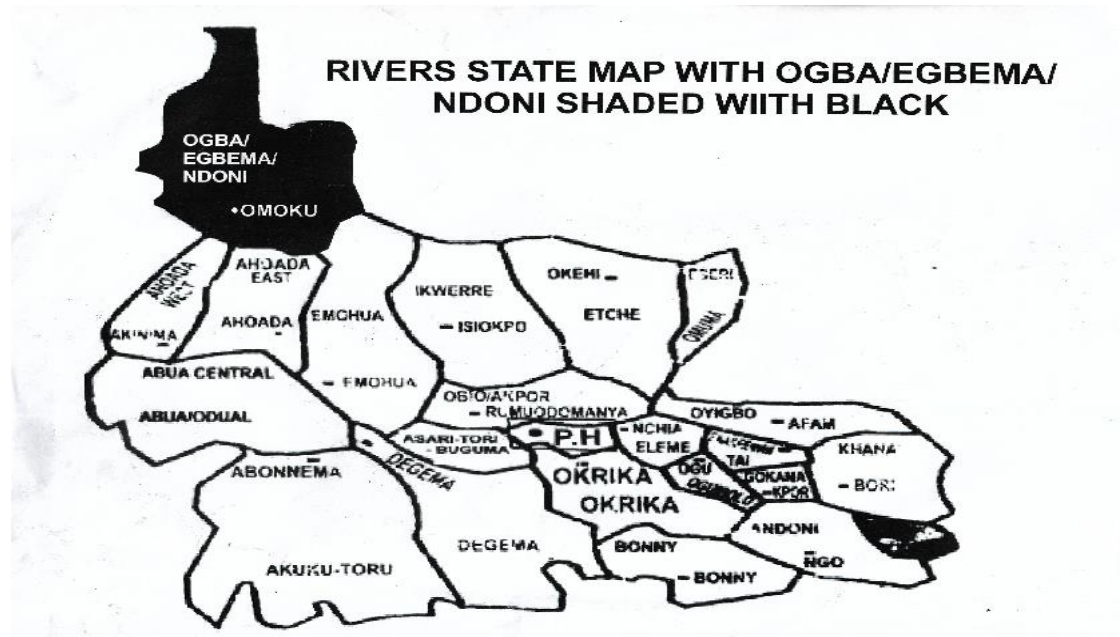
(2018) viewed the local government as the smallest unit of government below the central regional or state levels introduced by the Act to exercise political authority via the representative council within a defined geographical entity. In the same vein, the 1976 local government reform in Nigeria viewed local government as a government that control powers at the local level via representative council introduced by the Act of National Assembly, Nigeria. Ogogo (2004) argued that local government exists at the grassroots level and within a defined geographical entity or area unit in both the Unitary and Federal system of government as practised in Ghana and Nigeria respectively. Hence, Agboko (2004) buttressed that local government is “a political administrative unit that is empowered by law to administer a specific locality.” Fatile and Adejuwon (2017) argued that “local governments are local entities, with defined territories, discretionary power, functions, responsibilities and, more importantly, autonomy. In principle, local governments are created with the expectation that its administrative and political officers will exert influence and control the decision-making process at the grass root level without interruptions from higher tiers of government.” Osakede and Ijimakinwa (2014) maintained that local government “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.” Arowolo (2008) viewed Local government as “the involvement of grassroots people in the provision of social and economic amenities to the local areas. It is based on the principle that local problems and needs can be understood by the people of the locality better than by Central or State government.” Agbani and Ugwoke (2014) disclosed that “the local government is a tier of government with assigned legislative and executive powers to execute and make policies covering a particular local government area. This implies the existence of a relationship between this and other tiers of government from the same people that live in council areas inhabit states and the federation.”

Rural Development

Rural development as a concept varies from one author to another based on the school of thought. The assumption is that the definition of rural development can easily be arrived at by understanding the concepts of rural and development separately. The phrase rural means a non-urban style of life, social organization, occupational structure, and settlement pattern. Rural is mainly associated with agricultural vocation, its settlement system consists of homesteads or villages; socially, they practice greater interdependence among the inhabitants, usually rooted community life and enjoys life built around nature and natural phenomenon; And their vocation is largely dependent on crop farming, tree cropping, animal enterprises and related activities. Development means a qualitative change. The change means when it is seen against a particular event at a given period. The concept of change is subjective and only gives the development a positive sense. Hence, rural development is viewed as a broad perspective. Rural development is the same as community development. Consequently, Flora and Flora, cited in Ikechukwu, Eluwa and Ukah (2012) argued that community development is anchored on communication between a group of people and cooperative actions among them, instead of individual exploit. Hanachor (2012) revealed that what probably is viewed as new is the approach to the application of rural development in modern times, its ancestry as a union of community, economic and organizational development. Hanachor (2009) buttressed that community development is a designed programme to enhance, encourage, and improved the living standard of the entire community via contribution and in addition, creativity through the use of methods for instigating and motivating in a bid to facilitate the active fervent reaction of the movement. Therefore, rural development means visible changes in the grassroots, particularly political, social and economic aspect of their livelihood. By implication, it means positive change both qualitative as well as the quantitative growth of the rural communities.

3. A synoptic review of the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, Rivers State

There are 23 local government council in River State and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area is one of them. Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area was carved out of the former Ahoada Local Government Area in September 1991 with headquarter at Omoku. The local government occupies a total of 626 sq mi (1,621km). The Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area is situated between latitude 5-5, 25N and longitude 60, 40-60, 50E. The local government is named after three groups of inhabitants who reside in a geographical entity. These three distinct ethnic groups that constitute the local government council have different culture, languages, and behaviour. The assertion of different cultural heritage is empirical in their different colourful festivals with masquerades, new yam festival, and kingship. Politically, the LGA has 17 political wards comprising about 96 communities. Their inhabitants are hospitable and entertain their visitors with different social gathering such as wrestling, traditional dancing, among others. The local government area enjoys a friendly climate, vegetation and arable land, fertile soil and river which propelled the inhabitant to vocations such as fishing, farming, hunting of animals and craft making. The 2006 population census revealed that the local government is made up of 283,294 people (NPC, 2006). There are many oil wells and gas plants in the LGA, which is laced with pipelines, with most of the oil installations being operated by Shell Nigeria. The local government map is shown below:



Source: Redesigned by the author, 2021.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Human Needs Theory as its theoretical construct. The human need theory was propounded by Abraham Maslow in 1973. Other proponents of human needs theory include Burton (1990), Max-Neef (2012), Rosenberg (2003) who were cited in Alao, Osakede and Owolabi (2015), among others. They all agreed that the reason why governmental institutions exist is to provide the basic needs of the society, and her inability to achieve them will amount to resentment and disconnect between the governed and their leaders. The theorists opined that conflict and violent conflict are triggered off by unsatisfied human needs. Danielsen (2005,p.3) argues that violence occurs in society when some individuals or group of people do not alternative livelihood sustenance or when they need

attention, respect and consideration for their needs. Danielsen (2005,p.3) quoted Abraham Maslow's ideas on the pyramid of human needs. He disclosed that Abraham Maslow laid so much emphasis on the hierarchy of needs. Furthermore, he maintained that some are more urgent than others, such as the basic needs - food, water, and shelter. Maslow also pointed out another category of human needs which involves the "need for safety and security, followed by belonging or love. The human needs are found on a fourth level, and finally on a fifth and final level are a personal fulfilment of Maslow's pyramid hierarchy. Maslow argued that individuals at every point in time make efforts to satisfy a certain level of needs, and it is only when the needs at the lower level are met that individuals will move to the other level in the pyramid.

Burton (1993) in Conflict Resolution as a Political Philosophy has been trying to expand the human needs theory to include the current socio-political conflicts. In his work, he took a critical view on social conflicts, especially on how universal human needs are usually neglected, thereby propelling discontented groups or individuals to claim their rights and satisfy their various needs. Consequently, part of the reason for the devolution of power (centre, middle and local) in Nigeria is to facilitate rural development which will subsequently meet the needs of the people at the grass root. In this context, needs are viewed as something associated with weakness, and someone who needs is also deemed weak and fragile. It implies that the citizens, especially the people in the rural areas cannot provide for all their needs. Hence, the local government councils were created to close these gaps. The functions of the local government council in Nigeria, especially after the 1976 local government reforms are basically to address the needs of people at the rural level. The local government system in Nigeria should meet the basic needs of the rural populace such as provision and maintenance of primary education; development of agriculture and natural resources; establishment and maintenance of cemeteries; establishment and maintenance of markets, motor parks and public conveniences; construction and maintenance of roads, streets, drains; provision and maintenance of health services; and naming of streets including roads and numbering houses.

Linking the human needs theory is anchored on the fact that the expectations of the rural people are hardly met, and the rural people have not relatively felt the impact of government at the local level, thereby defeating the purpose for which the third tier government was established and enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the human need theories attracted lots of criticisms for lack of unified perspective on the definition of human needs, especially on the divergent views in respect to classification. This is because some human needs could be culturally bound and may not be generally acceptable by others.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population of this study includes local government staff, local government elected officers, rural people and stakeholders in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, Rivers State. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to draw a total sample of sixty (60) respondents for the study. The respondents were picked based on pre-determined criteria, mainly, custodians of information on the operations of rural dwellers, former and present councillors, and local government staff. The questionnaires were self-administered to ensure that the study cuts across different sexes and age groups. The questionnaire contains the perspective of peoples' opinion on the impact of LGA projects and the challenges that retard the statutory obligation of rural development by the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, 2011 – 2020. The study adopted a descriptive method of data analysis.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis

The study examined the data derived from the questionnaire. The analysis was in two phases. The first was the bio-data (demographic) of the respondents were analyzed; second, the data under investigation were analyzed in the tabless. The results of the tests for the reliability are presented as follows:

Table 1: indicates the number of questionnaires distributed and retrieved.

| No | Respondents | Copies of Questionnaire Distributed | Used Copies | Copies not Retrieved |
|----|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Council staff | 10 | 10 | - |
| 2 | Elected members | 10 | 9 | 1 |
| 3 | Supervisors | 6 | 6 | - |
| 4 | Stakeholders | 16 | 15 | 1 |
| 5 | Others | 16 | 15 | 1 |
| | Total | 60 | 57 | 3 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4.1 above indicated that a total of 60 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, out of which a total of 57 copies were retrieved. Three (3) copies were not retrieved because the respondents who had these copies were too busy to fill them. One copy was discarded due to wrong filling. 56 copies were then usable for analysis. Moreover, the high response rate recorded was as a result of frequent visits and phone calls made by the researcher.

Table 2 : indicates the sex of the respondents

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Male | 32 | 57.1 | 57.1 | 57.1 |
| Valid Female | 24 | 42.9 | 42.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 56 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As clearly indicated in table 4.2 in addition to fig. 4.1 above, out of the total 56 respondents, 57.1%, representing 32 respondents were males, while 42.9% representing 24 respondents were females.

Table 3: indicates the age of the respondents

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Below 30 | 9 | 16.1 | 16.1 | 16.1 |
| Valid 32 – 40 | 13 | 23.2 | 23.2 | 39.3 |
| Valid 41 – 50 | 18 | 32.1 | 32.1 | 71.4 |

| | | | | |
|------------|----|------|-------|-------|
| 50 & above | 16 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 56 | 100 | 100.0 | |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As obviously indicated in table 4.3 in addition to bar chart above, which specified the age bracket of the respondents that completed the filling of the questionnaire. Out of the total number of respondents, 13.9%, representing 9 respondents were within 30 years and below. 23.2% of the total respondents were between the ages of 32 to 40 years, 32.1% were between 41 to 50 years of age. While 28.6%, representing 16 respondents was 50 years and above.

Table 5: indicates the academic qualification of the respondents

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| FSLC | 7 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| SSCE | 9 | 16.1 | 16.1 | 28.6 |
| Diploma | 11 | 19.6 | 19.6 | 48.2 |
| Valid Degree/HND | 16 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 76.8 |
| Others | 13 | 23.2 | 23.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 56 | 100 | 100 | |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As undoubtedly expressed in academic qualification table 4.6 in addition to figure 4.5 above, according to it. 12.5% of the respondent have FSLC, 16.1% of the respondent have SSCE. 19.6 of them have a diploma. 28.6% of them have HND. While 23.2% of the respondents have another degree.

Table 6: indicates the rural developmental projects executed in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, 2011-2020
Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| The provision of educational facilities by ONELGA engendered in rural development in the area | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.7500 | .91949 |
| The provision of educational facilities by ONELGA engendered in rural development in the area | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1964 | .88255 |
| Distribution of farm inputs and materials by ONELGA increased rural development | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.6964 | .95193 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|------|------|--------|---------|
| Rural electrification efforts of ensured rural development in the area | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.9464 | 1.13490 |
| The construction of modern market facilities improved the living condition of rural dwellers | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8036 | 1.11876 |
| The provision of health facilities by the local government and well being of the people | 56 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.2321 | .87368 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 56 | | | | |

Source: Survey data, 2021

As vividly expressed in the frequency statistics table 4.8 above, which specify the rural developmental projects executed in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, Rivers State, 2011-2020. The table indicated 56 cases with no missing cases in all items. The mean scores which signify the measure of central tendency were recognized at the table.

The data in the above table signifies the response procedure to the statement poses to the respondents. The first statement on rural developmental projects executed in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, Rivers State, 2011-2020 scaled on a 5-point Likert scale signify that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.750. Meaning that, the provision of educational facilities by ONELGA engendered in rural development in the area. The second statement, scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the low mean score of 2.196. Meaning that, the provision of educational facilities by ONELGA engendered in rural development in the area.

The third statement scaled on a 5-point Likert scale exposed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.696. Implying that, distribution of farm inputs and materials by ONELGA increased rural development. The fourth statement, scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.946. Signifying that, rural electrification efforts ensured rural development in the area.

The fifth statement scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.804. Implying that, the construction of modern market facilities improved the living condition of rural dwellers. The sixth statement, scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the low mean score of 2.232. Signifying that, the provision of health facilities by the local government facilitate the well being of the people.

Table 7: indicates the challenges that undermine the ONELGA’s effort to engender rural development.

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Over dependence on external sources of revenue and insufficient fund impede government’s ability to provide social amenities for rural development in the council area | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1964 | .88255 |
| State interference, joint accountand corruption erode ability to enhance the living condition of the people | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.6964 | .95193 |
| The imposition of caretaker committee reduces the capacity of local government to deliver services to local people | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.9464 | 1.13490 |
| Constitutional ambiguity and godfatherism negatively affect the efforts of local government in rural development | 56 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.7500 | .91949 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 56 | | | | |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As plainly indicated in the frequency statistics table 4.9 above, which specify challenges that undermine ONELGA’s effort to engender rural development. The table indicated 56 cases with no missing cases in all the four items. The mean scores which signify the measure of central tendency were recognized at the table.

The data in the above table signifies the response procedure to the statement poses to the respondents. The first statement on challenges that undermine ONELGA’s effort to engender rural development measured on a four item structured questionnaire and scaled on a 5-point Likert scale exposed that respondents agreed to that statement as a result of the low mean score of 2.196. Meaning that, over dependence on external sources of revenue and insufficient fund impede government’s ability to provide social amenities for rural development in the council area. The second statement, which was measured on a four item structured questionnaire and scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that

statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.696. Meaning that, state interference, joint accountand corruption erode ability to enhance the living condition of the people.

The third statement measured on a four item structured questionnaire and scaled on a 5-point Likert scale exposed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.946. Implying that, the imposition of a caretaker committee reduces the capacity of the local government to deliver services to local people. The fourth statement, which was measured on a four item structured questionnaire and scaled on a 5-point Likert scale revealed that respondents agreed with that statement as a result of the moderate mean score of 2.750. Signifying that, constitutional ambiguity as well as godfathers negatively affects the efforts of local government in rural development.

7. Discussion of Findings

Based on the analyses previously done certain findings were made which form the basis for our discussions in line with existing literature. It showcased how the local government council significantly impacts rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. The findings indicate that there is a positive and high correlation between the two variable. These findings support the assumption that the local government council is linked to rural development. The reason for the establishment of the local council administration was to bring development closer to the grassroots. To achieve this, the government established local government councils which are vested by law to carry certain responsibilities that empower the local areas. Collaborating the reasons for the creation of the local government, Adebayo (2014, p. 98) asserted that “the creation of the local government in many countries stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots. The importance of local government among others is a function of its ability to generate a sense of belongingness, safety and satisfaction among its populace. In Nigeria socio-political context, with a multiplicity of culture, diversity of languages and differentiated needs and means, the importance of local government in ensuring unity and preserving peculiar diversities cannot be underestimated.” Most times the local inhabitants are included in the planning of these rural projects before they are executed. Hence, Okafor (1982) argued that the advantage in including the local communities’ inhabitants is the beacon of good governance in the local government administration, which is a point of contact between the local government and the grassroots. One of the respondents disclosed that:

The creation of local government councils has increased the degree of rural development projects in our various wards in ONELGA. The government is close to our people and we can assess information through some of our people that work in the council. At present, we have a lot of projects carried out by the local government council. In the retrospect, we have no modern market, we use thatch houses made with palm trees in the markets, however, after the creation of ONELGA, the local government started building modern markets.

Our findings revealed that there were visible projects executed by Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council, 2011-2020. Adebayo (2014) buttressed that:

Local governments through their local education districts have been responsible for the construction, maintenance and staffing of primary schools in their respective areas. ... 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... Local governments are not left out in the maintenance of good hygienic culture. They embark on the construction of public toilet for their people... Local governments embark on the digging of boreholes in the rural areas, this has

greatly improved the hygienic nature of the people in these rural communities...
Provision, maintenance and administration of dispensaries, maternity and health centres (p.6)

Our investigation revealed that several physical projects were carried out by the local government council within the period under review. They include Aggah women development centre; Okposi Health Centre builds Two storey building at the Council Secretariat; ONELGA link transport bus; Six classrooms at Mgbede built; Borehole built at Akabuka; Borehole built at Obohia; Borehole built at Elieta; Bole hole in the Okprukpali Usomini Zone; Coppers lodge at Ndoni; Construction of 2nd block of market stalls and 20 stalls per block at Obukegi, Erema, and Ikiri; Modern stores at Omoku main Motor Park; and Modern stores at Omoku main Market.

Impact of the project executed in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA

The findings revealed that the projects executed have a direct impact on rural dwellers in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council. The findings are in line with our assertion that local governments exist to provide services to the people at the grassroots. They include agricultural development, construction of rural/feeder roads, roads/drainages, primary education and health care, water and sanitation as well as construction to ascertain the impact of projects executed on the dwellers of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA between 2011 and 2020.

The local government has contributed immensely to the development of education at the primary levels in ONELGA. The local government council carried out several developmental projects to facilitate or improve the quality of education in ONELGA through the provision of furniture and writing materials. Several classroom blocks were built by the council to increase literacy. That also includes the Corpers lodge that was built to accommodate corp members deployed to ONELGA for their primary assignment. Aminu (2008) cited in Boyi (2013,p.147) revealed that “the greatest investment a nation can make for the development of its economic, sociological and human resources is that of education. Education according to him provides us with people possessing the necessary knowledge and skills to win a nation state and to even export brains.” Access to primary and secondary schools in rural areas will make rural children functional in socio-economic development. This, in turn, allow them the opportunity to acquire education or training which will enable them to secure employment, and thus reduces poverty and unemployment. Thus, between 2005 and 2015, successive administrations in ONELGA made efforts to deliver primary education to the people of the council.

From our findings, the local government council constructed several ultra-modern shops in Omoku and other communities. Availability of markets is a vital component of rural development. It does not only provide the opportunity to sell local produce but also access to goods that are not readily available in the community. In addition, the existence of markets also serves as a source of livelihood for many rural dwellers who are not interested in earning a living in the agricultural sector. Although there are markets in various communities in ONELGA, they often consist of stalls that cannot shelter traders from the rain and the heat of the sun. More so, the stalls lack security as they cannot be locked. Therefore, the construction of modern markets and the upgrading of existing ones became an essential part of the plan successive administration at the local government to enhance economic activities, attract more people to the communities and reduce rural-urban migration. Urban migration has been at the forefront of the challenges of rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government as the best and brightest the towns had to offer often leave them for greener pastures.

From our findings, another area where the local government has impacted the rural areas is in better health delivery. The local government, among others, received a Health Centre

building by the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in Okposi community. There are also other Health Centres built by the local government from our finding. This has improved health care delivery in ONELGA. This was in recognition of this importance that societies place great emphasis on the development of their health care system to promote the health and well being of the citizens. Therefore, to improve health care delivery, the health centre was built in most of the communities Obirikum, Omoku. The health centre was equipped with maternity facilities to improve reproductive health in the area.

From our findings, the local government embarked on the construction of a borehole in various communities to deliver portable water to the rural inhabitants. Emphasizing the importance of water to the rural communities, Wagner and Lanoix (1959, p.13) argued that, “men built most of their early communities near the watercourses which served their economic, social, and physiological requirements. As technology developed, it became possible to transport water for physiological needs and to exploit more profitably other resources and features, such as topography, for improved community location. Men have used water since the dawn of history; but the realization of its importance and, in some instances, of its danger, to health is a relatively recent development.” The local government did not relent in providing portable water to reduce water borne diseases, typhoid fever, among others, as was experienced in the past.

Another area the local government projects have positively impacted on the lives of ONELGA rural inhabitants is in the transport sector. The local government established ONELGA Transport Company popularly called ONELGA Link facilitates the movement of people from the rural areas to urban cities. The transport fare is hugely superseded by the local government council. The transport company has eased the movement of people from the rural areas.

Factors impeding rural development by the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council

Our findings revealed that factors impeding rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, of Rivers State. These factors include ineffective utilization of funds, corruption, and the use of the caretaker committee to administer the council.

From our findings, there have been scholarly arguments concerning the effective utilization of funds in developing rural areas by the local government council in Nigeria. Many argued that the local government does not receive enough to carry out development projects in the rural areas. While some of the view that the local government have done nothing to the funds they have received from the federal government and Internally Generated Revenue. The respondent’s opinion sufficiency of funds to carry out rural development collaborated Human Right Watch (HRW) (2007) report that:

Rivers State’s 23 LGCs have been allocated more than \$636 million (N82.7 billion) 65 through the Federation Account since 1999, and their average monthly allocations have increased more than fourfold over that same period. Rivers’ LGCs received just under \$115 million (N15 billion) in federal allocations during the first eight months of 2006, as against some \$31.7 million (N4 billion) during the whole of the year 2000. These trends largely reflected the improved financial situation of LGCs throughout Nigeria due to increased federal government revenues (p.27).

Another challenge is the degree of corruption at the local government level. The consequence of corruption in the local government administration is severe. It weakens economic performance and impacts rural development negatively. The non-governmental organization Transparency International (2002) defined corruption as “the abuse of public office for

private gain.” The World Bank (1997), described corruption in a circumstance when “public officials accept, solicit, or extort bribes; and when private actors offer bribes to subvert or circumvent public policies for competitive advantage and profit.” Corruption can also happen in the absence of bribes. For instance, the World Bank considers “patronage or nepotism by government officials, theft of state assets, or the illegal diversion of state revenues as corruption” (The World Bank,1997, p.8). Furthermore, President Olusegun Obasanjo views corruption as “the greatest bane of our society today, will be tackled head on... No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full blown cancer it has become” (Akanbi,2005,p.126). In the same vein, Nwabueze (2002) argued that:

Corruption in Nigerian is endemic and anomic, somewhat systemic. In terms of dimensions’ corruption is moral-cum-ethical, on the one hand, and structural on the other. And its explanation and attempts to find a solution must address these two sources. It manifests as political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial and even moral corruption. For example, when an official, as a result of undue bribe or promise in any of these spheres, abuses his or another person’s office by putting aside due process and compromising fairness and equity in [the] distribution of scarce resources within his jurisdiction or authority to allocate, this is corruption. In Nigeria, ethnicity (nepotism) lust for power, poverty and personal monetary gains are also major factors in corruption in public office (pp. 133,134),

Corruption in the local government administration has become almost a lifestyle. “It has been identified as one of the problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria, also non-adherence to [the] provisions of the financial memorandum (FM), conspicuous consumption of the part of the local officials, lifestyles that are not commensurate with official sources of income, imposition of [the] leaders on the local government through a corrupted political process and low wages of local government officials” (Ali, 2008 cited Adeyemi, 2012,p.191). Similarly, the former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) boss, Farida Waziri in Onwuemenyi (2008) bewailed that:

Waste of government resources at the council level had reached monumental proportions. The local government council in the country could not explain the mismanagement of over N3.313 trillion allocated to them in the last eight years. ...a whopping sum of N3, 313,554,856,541.79 was allocated to local government across the country. Unfortunately, local government officials have not left their hand unsoiled in this regard. It is with regret that I am forced to observe that the local governments of the good old days have become a mere memory of times gone by. The paralysis (corruption) that pervades local governments today is widespread. Local government, have become so far removed from the lives of the people to a point where some Chief Executives of the local council no longer reside in the domains they were elected to administer. They drive to the council headquarters in their jeeps from the state capitals or the Federal Capital Territory, pay salaries and share other monies and disappear until it is time to share the next subvention.

The ONELGA is not exempted from the corruption that has persistently bedevilled local government administration in Nigeria. Apart from the federal allocation, the internally generated revenues are a source of political patronage, including the staff of the local administration. Most of the money realized from internally generated revenue is diverted for personal use.

The corruption of ‘*Making Returns*’ to political godfathers in the ONELGA was noticeable in the past. Making of return is a jargon used in the political office holder who regularly

reward's his godfather in cash or contracts as a reward for installing him in that position. This prevalent in Nigeria political development. It has become a political culture in Nigeria. Inability to make returns to the godfathers has led to the removal and replacement of office holders in Nigeria. The HRW (2007) revealed that:

Many states- and local-level politicians throughout Nigeria are bound up in complex relationships that mirror such arrangements, with sponsors popularly known as political "godfathers." These are powerful and wealthy individuals who help arrange for their protégées to be placed in office through their political connections, through financing their campaigns and through their ability to mobilize both violence and corruption to subvert the democratic process. In return, they claim the right to influence government policy and also lay claim to a substantial share of local government revenues for their enrichment (p. 34).

In Rivers State, several local government chairmen are products of godfathers that require paying homage to them regularly. Most local government chairmen are entangled in this relationship, including prominent members of the House of Assembly who lay claim to revenue that ought to be used for the development of the rural areas.

Another challenge that has impeded the development of rural areas is the use of Caretaker chairmen in the Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni local government council's administration. A Caretaker Committee is an unelected group of individuals appointed by state governors to conduct the affairs of local government in the absence of elected officials. According to Iwuamadi (2013) in situations where "the local governments are controlled by the opposition party, local councils are dissolved and caretaker committees often made up of sympathizers of the ruling party are appointed to run the affairs of the local government. Caretaker committees are appointed to fill the vacuum of leadership in local governments pending the election of substantive officers."

The Act establishing local government did not provide for Caretaker Government in the local government system. The Caretaker government is undemocratic and cannot be held responsible or accountable to the people except for their godfathers or the State Governors that appointed them. The Caretaker Committee is used to siphon funds meant for the development of the grassroots. This assertion collaborated Ogele (2020) view that "corruption is a major challenge in Nigeria's socio-economic and political development." For instance, the era of the caretaker government in the ONELGA between 2011-2020 recorded relatively low achievements by the Caretaker governments. It is perceived as a deliberate policy by the State Governors to subvert or embezzle the funds meant for the development of the grassroots.

Another area that impedes development or a way of siphoning the local government funds is through security votes. The law requires every local government in Rivers State to produce a budget each year. The local government council's legislative arm debates and approves or rejects the budget sent to them by the Chairman as required bye-law annually. The budget is an estimate of annual income and expenditure. The actual income is largely dependent on the size allocation received from the federal allocation which is anchored on the price of oil in the global markets.

From our findings, the ONELGA budget is divided into two categories of spending: Recurrent Expenditure and Capital Expenditure. The recurrent expenditure includes the payments of salaries, staff training, maintenance, provision of basic materials, and other functional needs. The capital expenditure of the local government council includes the constructions of roads, school, markets, town hall, and the purchase of items such as

automobiles, generators set, among others. In addition, the “security votes” of the Chairman is usually huge. This problem is not limited to the ONELGA alone but other local government in Rivers State and Nigeria at large. According to the Human Right Watch (2007, p. 15), “the actual amount received by local government is made uncertain by the procedure of federal government sending allocations to joint allocation accounts controlled by the state governments instead of directly to the LGCs. Many state governments appropriate a portion of those funds for their use without any legal justification before passing the funds on to the LGCs. Some observers estimate that some states siphon off a huge proportion of local governments' incomes each year”. This impedes budget implementation of the ONELGA, especially the projects meant for rural development.

8. Concluding Remark

Based on our findings, the study established that there is a correlation between the local government and rural development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area. This was demonstrated in the number of projects carried out by successive administrations. Besides, the statutory mandate of the local government is to develop the grassroots in all parts of the state. That showcased in several impactful projects executed by the successive chairmen in the local government. They include the provision of primary education, healthcare, markets and related services to ensure the availability of social amenities, improve the living condition of the rural dwellers and ensure the wellbeing of the people within the jurisdiction of the council. The impact of these projects on the lives of the rural people. The schools built by the local government have also increased the literacy level and conducive atmosphere for the pupils. Materials and equipment for learning were also made available. The health centre also increased the availability of modern medical facilities that were not closer to the people in the past. Movements of persons from the rural areas have been eased up by the availability of the modern transportation system referred to as ONELGA Link. The transport fare is subsidized. However, several challenges impede rural development at the local government council level. The constant state interference, setting up caretaker committees, the existence of godfathers, among others, have retard the development stride in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government areas, Rivers State.

9. Recommendations

- a. The State House of Assembly should enact a law that will compel all the local government in Rivers State to ensure that a reasonable percentage of their annual projects are sited in the rural areas.
- b. The anti-graft agencies should be involved in the management of local government spending. This can be achieved by a regular audit of the account of the local government areas in Rivers states.
- c. The use of the caretaker committee to administer the local government is illegal and unconstitutional. Therefore, the National Assembly should enact a law prohibiting the use of caretaker committee by the state government to administer the local government.
- d. The oversight function of the councillors should be strengthened by amending the laws that empowered them to checkmate the budget implementation before the next budget is passed.
- e. The Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government council is overstaffed with lots of employees that are not doing anything at the council. Therefore, the local government should reduce her staff strength to save monies for capital projects where rural dwellers will benefit.

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