

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:  
AN EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
BIDA LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGER STATE TO  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT, 2015-DATE**

**By**

**Sunday Ichima**

Department of Political Science  
I B B university Lapai, Niger state, Nigeria

**And**

**Yahaya Ibrahim**

Department of Public Administration,  
Federal Polytechnic, Bida, Niger state, Nigeria

**ABSTRACT**

This study is an evaluation of the contributions of local governments to rural development in Nigeria using Bida local government of Niger state as case study. There are beliefs that proliferation of local governments would result in rural development because the local governments will embark on development projects that face-lift the rural areas . The statement of the problem therefore is whether or not these local governments do contribute meaningfully to rural development. The study used the instruments of interview and physical inspection (Observation) to gather its data. It was discovered that the local government, within the period under study had not embarked on reasonable development projects due largely to lack of funds. Part of the recommendations was for improved funding of local governments and increased community self-help development initiatives in the face of increased inability of the government to meet the development expectations of the people.

### **Introduction**

Most of the developing countries such as Nigeria consist of a few pockets of partially visible modernized towns on the one hand and large areas of rural villages on the other hand. These rural areas in particular and the semi-urban areas exhibit visible features of abject poverty. About 95% of the people living in Sub-Saharan Africa are said to live in rural areas (Lele 1975)

The rural areas have two noticeable features: increasing population of the rural areas where family planning is not a priority, and a steady migration of the youths to cities in search of better life. In the rural areas, the population working on the available land has rapidly increased above available resources that if not for the regular rural-urban drift the rural areas would have worsened in socio-economic conditions.

In the relatively poor countries such as Nigeria there are political and socio-economic conditions that constitute obstacles to development and which cannot be easily erased because of many factors including lack of 'good governance' from the Centre. Despite repeated national development plans therefore, there has been the increasing need for specific focus on the rural areas because the more the urban centers experience face-lifts in terms of provision of social amenities the worse the situation of the rural areas relatively becomes due to continued neglect of the rural areas in the provision of social

infrastructure that would have enhanced living standard there.

Official statistics such as that published in 1976 by the Food and Agriculture (FAO) of the United Nations had reported that in Nigeria, 38% of the rural dwellers were living in absolute poverty level which means that they lacked basic necessities of life, the most obvious being good food, good shelter, education and good modern medical attention. In compliance with the international practices since the Second World War, Nigeria has begun to consciously plan for and encourage development of the rural areas.

The general picture of rural poverty at individual and community level however is said to show very sympathetic and unbelievable data (Ichima: 2000). Nigeria is said to have over 80 million people (64% of its population) living below poverty line (UNO Report: 2016) According to the Report, 37% of the children under 5 years old are stunted in growth, 18% are wasted, 29% underweight and only 10% of the children aged 6-23 months are fed appropriately based on recommended infant and children feeding practices.

The report which was made public during consultative meeting on the formulation of the UN Development Assistance Framework iv (UNDAF iv) in Awka in September 2016 stated that youth unemployment which stands at 46% in 2016

is considered very high, creating poverty, helplessness, despair and easy target for crime and terrorism. Over 10 million children of school age are said to be out of school with no skills or special knowledge to survive meaningfully. The report further stated that there are 3.3 million internally displaced persons in Nigeria which is Africa's largest, ranking behind Syria and Columbia on a global scale. ([www.google.com.ng](http://www.google.com.ng) Poorest countries)

To complement the various development programmes from the state and federal governments and the efforts of the Non-Governmental Organizations to help develop the rural areas, there has been the proliferation of local government areas as a means of rapid improvement of the development efforts of the grassroots. If more local government councils are created, it was hoped the rural areas would benefit through infrastructural developments, political development of the citizens through citizen participation and resource harnessing that would lead to the development of the rural areas in particular and the nation in general.

Generally, creation of local governments is aimed at decentralizing the central government for effective governance, increasing special development, bringing developments closer to the grassroots and providing political training grounds for more citizen participation. In view of this

aim it has been the expectation that creation of local governments in Nigeria would transcend mere political exercise and be a means to rural development.

This paper therefore examines the role of the local governments in rural development in Nigeria, using the Bida local Government of Niger state as case study. The study used the interview and observation methods to collect needed data. It was discovered that though some capital projects were executed by the local government within the period under study, such projects did not make meaningful impact. Also, that in the last four years of the study there has been a deteriorating performance by the local government council as even salaries of workers were no longer regular due to financial problems. The paper recommended increased community self-help projects amongst others as means of stepping up rural development.

#### Statement of the Research Problem

The statement of the problem of this research is what role has local government councils been playing in the development of rural areas In Nigeria? Put differently, has creation of local government council areas been effective in ensuring rural development in Nigeria?

In pre-colonial administration in Nigeria it is known that rural areas engaged in community self-development through community projects. The joint construction

of pathways, village halls, bridges across streams etc were communally carried out.

During the colonial period the government used traditional rural institutions such as age-grades, titled chiefs, traditional rulers etc to assist the colonial government in mobilizing and executing rural development projects. But this method has become obsolete because the government can no longer force people to embark on community development as in colonial days.

Since independence, Nigerian successive governments have tried several agricultural programmes such as Operation Feed the nation (OFN), Green Revolution etc to improve rural development. But the results have been regrettably slower than expected. The low performance of these agricultural programmes have been attributed to reasons such as unproductive land tenure laws, unwillingness and financial incapacity of farmers to adjust to some more mechanized farming systems, inability of government to provide seedlings and fertilizers at prices affordable to farmers (Berko:2001) Over the years government agencies were set up to encourage rural development. The Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the National Orientation Agency (NOA) etc, have all tried to enlighten the rural populace on development. Not much results have been noticed except huge government expenditure that has not translated into development of the rural dwellers.

Non-Governmental Organizations sprang up to address the problem of rural poverty. The Better Life for Rural Women founded by Mrs Maryam Babangida, the Family Support Programme founded by Mrs Maryam Abacha, etc, were all directed at improving rural development. Again the rural areas have remained relatively the same because according to Gwartnen and Caleb (1985) funds meant for poverty alleviation through these Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were not used for the purpose intended, the benefits of these programmes by these NGOs sponsored from the government houses were politically manipulated to benefit those close to the corridors of power and their families.

Since the 1970s there have been the creation of local government areas as a means of tackling rural development problems. But there are still demands for creation of more local governments because people feel the aim of the local governments are yet to be achieved by the existing 774 local government councils. Alfa (2004) argued that the agitations for more local government council areas, the inadequate funding of existing local governments and the apparent stagnation of rural local government councils attest to the fact that the existing local governments have not been successful in enhancing rural development. It is therefore becoming necessary to interrogate the idea of local governments being effective means of rural development in Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to assess the impact of the Bida local government of Niger state in rural development. Specifically, the study:

1. Investigated the quality and variety of development projects executed by the Bida local government, a relatively rural area of the state.
2. Assessed the relevance of these executed projects to the needs of the rural areas
3. Found out the problems militating against their performance
4. Recommended ways of improving the present situation

### **Significance of the Study**

Bida local government is one of the oldest local governments in Niger state. It is the headquarters of the Nupe-speaking people of Nigeria. A study of the activities of such a local government is therefore significant because the area is significant in the state.

This study is significant because it will add to knowledge particularly as it will produce findings to support or counter the stand that local government plays significant role in rural development.

The topic of Local Government and rural development particularly in less developed countries is a current issue that is globally discussed and efforts made to address the issue. A study of this nature on such a current issue is therefore significant in that it

is not yet an over-researched field of study.

Development is an on-going effort and studies that try to examine aspects of development is relevant to developing countries. Other researchers and local Government Administrators will therefore benefit from this study.

### **LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF STUDY**

There was initial unwillingness of respondents to grant interviews to the Researcher for fear of undercover financial crime investigation personnel. The Researcher had to use research assistants from the locality to create the atmosphere of trust.

The scope of this research is restricted to Bida Local Government in Niger state. This is to ensure adequate concentration to obtain accurate data. The researcher concentrated on the local government activities from 2015 to date when the All Progressive Congress (APC) Party government took leadership of the local government area. This will enable the researcher determine if change in political party in government house has affected performance of the local government council.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

The central theme of this study is local government and rural development. The main concepts that feature in this study are:

1. Self-help-This is citizen participation in decision making on what is to be done in their community and how it is to be done. It includes the people living within the same area contributing resources to execute projects of common interest to them(Oni and Bello, 1987)
2. Rural-It is a term connoting human settlements of relatively low population density, low infrastructural facilities, high level of illiteracy and poverty(Seroka,1986)
3. Development-Here, the concept of development shall be used to refer to sustained improvements in the lives of the people or execution of projects that bear direct advantage to the majority of the people
4. Local Government-The U N office for public Administration as quoted in Ichima (2017) defines local government as

A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose tax or to exert Labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

### **Literature Review**

#### Development of Local Government in Nigeria

The development of modern local government started in Nigeria with the introduction of Native Authority

administration by the British colonial administration. In the coastal areas of Lagos and the Riverine areas the British instituted the direct rule system after conquering the resistant African chiefs in the coastal areas. Leaders such as King Jaja of Opobo and King Awujale of Ijebu were said to have repelled the British attack but were later defeated.

At the coastal areas, the British influence was felt and so there was more of direct British rule. But going up north and Far East of the Niger area, there were some prevailing situations that made Britain to introduce what became known as the Indirect Rule. It was a system of local administration where the British used existing traditional rulers to rule their people on behalf of the British government. Where there were no existing traditional rulers such as in most eastern part of the Niger area, the British colonial master appointed Warrant Chiefs to rule the people.

The major aim of the indirect rule was to ensure maximum peace within the territories so that Britain could assume sovereignty over the territory's political and economic activities.

With constitutional development from the 1950s, the Native Authorities headed by the traditional rulers began to experience changes and reforms. It started with the chief-in-council system when the traditional or Warrant chiefs had veto powers over Native authority decisions.

Gradually, Nigeria moved to the Chief- and -council system where the traditional rulers were no more lords over Native authorities but had only influential contributions. By the 1976 reforms of the Nigeria Local Government system, there had been serious reforms on the uniformity and administrative conduct of the local governments. As at 2014, Nigeria has 774 local government areas including the municipal council areas of Abuja.

#### **Rural/Community Development Efforts**

Not much rural development efforts were made by the colonial government except that it tried to build roads into the hinterland with a view to evacuating cash crops from the rural areas to the coast lands for shipment to feed industries in the colonial country, Britain. But with the coming of independence various rural development projects began at regional and later state levels and at federal level

Of special importance was the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme introduced by the Obasanjo military regime in 1975. It had the aim of bringing pride to farming as a profession, providing food for the expected increased Nigerian population and introduce income yielding activities in the rural areas that would keep the citizens in the villages rather than a continuous rural-urban drift.

The programme was less successful than expected because the military regime that

followed that of the Obasanjo regime did not take it as serious national policy. Also, the method of sending undergraduates to work in public farms was believed to be a use of too much of temporary staff for major public programme. When the students returned to their schools after the long vacations the farms became deserted. Even when some farm products recorded improved yields during the programme, it was observed that arrangements for the transportation and preservation of the farm yields were not properly made. Not enough silos were built. There were no processing industries to consume the farm products and so farm products particularly the perishable ones were lost.

Another major programme for rural development has been the creation and recreation of local government areas. There were a few Native Authority areas during the colonial rule but these have increased to 774 since 1999. Though the creation of local government areas had political undertone, its major aim has been to open up the rural areas for development. It was expected that as local government headquarters are created new infrastructural facilities would be provided thereby allowing for speedy rural transformation and reduction in rural--urban drift.

Good as the programme of proliferation of local government areas is, it has not succeeded in the development of rural areas. This is partly because most local

government councils have become channels for siphoning public funds into personal accounts of the politicians rather than providing rural infrastructures that would have led to rural development. Similarly scholars have argued that not enough revenue allocation is given to the local councils for development neither can most of them be able to be economically viable as to embark on sustainable development projects. To worsen the situation, the rural areas have been turned into battle grounds for political opponents trying to rig elections and this has compounded the problems of the rural areas.

The government has introduced local economic empowerment programmes ranging from Directorate of Foods and Rural Infrastructures (DFFRI) to Better Life for rural women dwellers where rural women are given loans or financial assistance to set up small scale business outfits so as to give them financial empowerment. Generally, the problem with these rural empowerment programmes has been that most times they become politicized. The beneficiaries take such gestures to be part of party largesse rather than meaningful rural development project.

### **Models for Rural Development**

There are three major models for rural development: the Management model, the Mobilization model and the Transformation model.

In the management model for rural development the public service (bureaucracy) of the country is the main instrument. In Nigeria, the bureaucracies of the three tiers of government are involved. In this model it is expected that the various specialists in the arms of bureaucracy would be mobilized to formulate and execute projects and programmes that would result in rural development

In the mobilization model the drive is to ensure active participation of the rural populace in the development efforts of the area. It aims at sensitizing and encouraging the rural populace to participate in development of their area.

The Transformation model is more of the socialist ideology which prescribes total socio-economic transformation to erase economic inequalities among the people. It relies on fair distribution of wealth, social education and increased cooperative society movements to improve the rural areas and discourage rural-urban drift.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will use the Diffusion of Innovation theory as the theoretical framework for analysis. This theory propounded by Rogers (1962) argues that development comes through gradual introduction of innovation in practice, beliefs and habits as such new ways are communicated to the people over time. The theory holds that communication channels,



innovation itself and the social system are variables relevant in the development process. This framework is ideal for this study because the local government system brings in projects and policies (innovation), communicates same to the people and have the innovation change the social system. It relies on use of the local government as the third tier of government for the development of the area. It is assumed that with the creation of more employment opportunities, infrastructural development arising from siting local government headquarter in some area, and the general revenue drive that will yield more funds, the rural areas will eventually become developed.

#### **Sources Of Data Collection**

There are two sources of data for this study. First is the secondary data which was obtained from libraries, newspapers and other acceptable documents like official circulars and publications of the Local Government. The secondary data gives us background history of the case study and other relevant information needed by the researcher to conduct the study. The second source of data collection was the primary data which was collected by the researcher from the field. Its main sources were the documentary evidence through direct inspection of completed or on-going projects and interviews with selected local government officials.

#### **Instruments of Data Collection**

The research instruments used in this study were:

- a) Interviews: There is the need for unstructured interviews with some of the workers. The researchers need to personally interview some of the workers. The aim of the interview is to clarify areas the researcher cannot personally confirm
- b) Observations/Inspections: The researcher visited project sites to ascertain the claims of respondents.

#### **Sampling Method**

The study uses judgmental sampling method to interview only those known to have adequate knowledge of the subject matter. The local government chairman, the secretary and the Director of Administration were therefore interviewed. Furthermore, fourteen of the Ward Heads were interviewed.

#### **Report of Personal Interviews**

Based on the interview with officials of the Council and Ward Heads within the local government the following were recorded:

1. In the last four years the local government has not executed any appreciable development project within the local government area
2. The payment of salaries of workers has in the last four years been difficult. For most of the time, the workers were being owed arrears of salaries.
3. No one outside the Local Government executive can categorically say if the local government actually had financial problems or it has been lack of good leadership.

4. The executive members of the council said the earnings of the local government including the statutory subventions are not able to fully pay the salaries of the local government workers and so there was no thinking of financing development projects
5. The local government has continued to encourage government institutions and wards to embark on self-help projects or community development projects.
6. Poor funding of the local governments is responsible for their not developing their rural areas.
7. Most internal road networks in Bida are no longer passable because of potholes and poor drainages\
8. Many Culverts and drainages that have been destroyed by use or rain have remained unrepaired.
9. No efforts are made to check gullies and erosion sites that are threatening to close some roads or endanger houses within Bida

Inspected Projects Executed within the Period under study

1. In Barki ward the local government provided ten no (10) sitting chairs and tables to the Sabon Gida primary school
2. Donation of five thousand naira each to thirty (30) female traders in Dokoza Ward to aid them in their business
3. Repair of a damaged drainage in Kyari wars

4. Donation of thirty sitting chairs and tables to beny primary school in Landzun ward
5. Donation of thirty sitting chairs and tables to the Umaru Sanda primary school in Nasarafu ward
6. Donation and installation of three no (3) submersible pumps to existing boreholes in Umaru magaji ward B
7. Fencing of an electrical transformer within Umaru Magaji ward A

**Summary of Findings.**

It is obvious that local governments are meant to develop their rural areas through provision of basic infrastructure, political education and introduction of economic activities that will elevate the rural areas. But most local government in Nigeria, and particularly the Bida local government has been unable to meet this requirement because of financial challenges. The expectations of the people therefore cannot be met because the local government does not have adequate financial capacity to shoulder development projects in their rural areas.

The payment of salaries of workers has in the last four years been difficult in Bida local government area. For most of the time, the workers were paid late.

No one outside the Local Government executive can categorically say if the local government actually had financial problems or it has been lack of good leadership that

slowed down development efforts. But because other local governments within the state have similar complaints of financial challenges, it is believed that it is more of inadequate finances than leadership problems or corruption.

Within the period under study, the presence of the local government in terms of project execution has been felt only in seven (7) of the fourteen (14) wards of the local government area.

The executive members of the council said the revenue of the local government including the statutory subventions are not able to fully pay the salaries of the local government workers and so there was no thinking of financing development projects

The local government has continued to encourage wards and corporate organizations to embark on self-help projects or community development projects.

### **Conclusions**

This study has looked at one of the major roles expected of the local government institution in Nigeria, using Bida local government of Niger state as case study. The study has established that there is a difference between the expected and the reality as it relates to local governments being instruments for rural transformation in Nigeria. The financial position of the local governments has made them incapable of meeting people's expectations of developing

their rural area.

The expectation that local governments would continue to have positive impact in the development of the rural areas was proved wrong as the case study did not justify the assertion.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study the following recommendations are made:

1. The financial capacity of local governments must be improved if they are to function as tools for rural development. There are much sources of internal revenue that the local government can tap for improved funding but which have been under-assessed as a result of depending on financial subventions from the higher two tiers of government.
2. The federal government should reassess the distribution of powers/functions along with financial allocation from the federation account in favour of local governments. This is because most grassroots developments cannot be achieved without the local governments. And if the local governments do not have the financial muscle to engage in development efforts, the impact of the federal government in rural development will be negligent
3. All people live within one local government or the other. Development must therefore begin from the local

- governments if everyone is to be touched by development efforts.
4. The local governments must begin to improve on their internal revenue generation rather than depend on the federal and state allocations for survival. There are many areas the local governments can improve their revenue from. Such areas as taxation of income of artisans, entrepreneurs of various categories that are yet not taxed etc can form good grounds for improving local government revenue
  5. Self-help or community development efforts should continue to be encouraged as a way of developing the rural areas. If people are educated to understand that they are the ones that benefit from development projects and not the government, they will be more willing to contribute towards community development efforts.

#### **References**

- Alfa, P(2004) Poverty Alleviation strategies and Governance', International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research,2(2)
- Berko, S (2001) Self-Help Organisations, Cooperatives and Rural Development, Enugu, Edge publishers
- Ichima S (2000) Understanding Development Administration, Minna, Jube Evans.
- Ichima, S (2017) Principles and Practice Of Local Government In Nigeria, Minna, Rock Publishers
- Lele U (1975) The Design of rural development: lessons for Africa, London, Hopkins press
- Oni S B and Bello I O (1987) Community Development, Zaria, Oluseyi press
- Rogers E (1962) Diffusion of Innovation, London, OUP
- Seroka J M (1986) Rural Public Administration, London, Hopkins press