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Local Government and Rural Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of Nkanu East Local Government Area (2008 – 2015)

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Abstract:

The major concern of this research work is to examine the role of local government in rural development, in Nigeria. Nkanu East local government council in Enugu state was selected for a case study. The study used both primary and secondary data. It also used quantitative methods for data presentation and interpretation and then content analysis for discussion of research questions. Systems theory was adopted to explain how local government as a system, functions as one of an interdependent system, and how dysfunction in a part affects the other parts. Three research questions were presented for investigation. The summary of research findings are that, (i) local government system is strategic in rural development programmes in Nigeria; (ii) Nkanu East local government did not substantially implement rural development programmes in the area during the study period, and (iii) bad leadership posed hindrance to implementation of rural development projects in the area. In addition, problems confronting local government were identified. They are interwoven, and consist of lack of autonomy, mismanagement of scarce funds, poor supervision, and discomfiting legal framework put in place by the state to control the system. The results are bad leadership, corruption and high level of profligacy experienced across every tier of government in Nigeria. In consonance, the study made some useful recommendations, aimed at eradicating these problems and then, repositioning the system.

Keywords: Local Government, Rural Development, Nigeria and Nkanu East

1. Introduction

Local government administration and rural development are two focal areas of concern in most developing countries. The concern results from the distinguishable context under which it operates and performs its statutory functions in Nigeria compared to other countries and governmental arrangement. The distinction, essentially contradicts the commonly shared view among scholars from different countries and political system that local government entails,

- A political subdivision of a Nation-State (if unitary like Britain and France or federal like USA and Nigeria) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or exert labour for prescribed purposes with its governing body usually elected or otherwise locally selected (Imoode, 2005).

Nigeria operates a federal system of government consisting of three tiers – federal, state and local government. Local Government system is nonetheless, a third tier level of government in Nigeria. It acquired the status from the Local Government Reforms of 1976 which for the first time recommended the practice of presidential system at that level of governance. Its legal authority is embedded in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and further replicated in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution that provides for the functions of local government administration in rural development. It is the government nearest to the grassroots and vested with powers to drive the development aspirations of the rural areas. The main purpose was to address the basic development needs of the rural areas. It involves inclusive government where the rural populace are mobilized to participate both in governance and development efforts of the government. In order to ensure that there is rural participation in governance and inclusiveness in policy formulation and implementation, the 1999 Constitution in Section 7(1) provides for a system of local government by democratically elected local councils (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

The essence was to facilitate sustainable flow of political education, electoral mobilization, and political participation which are quintessential for joint stake in the administration and implementation of rural development projects. However, the assessment of local government in the performance of this constitutional function in Nigeria has been a subject of controversy, engendering differing arguments both in justification or condemnation; and in extreme cases, calling for scrapping of the system for its inability to perform the constitutionally defined roles. This is more so, as some Nigerian public continues to deny the efficacy of local government in rural development. It is a problem for both policy makers and the academia and has not been deeply explored from the perspective of general system decomposition in Nigeria's governance structure. This is what this study sets out to investigate.

Nkanu East local government was created in 1996 and is one of the seven hundred and seventy four (774) local government areas listed in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). The local government is in Enugu state, which is currently made up of 17 local government areas and 57 Administrative Development Centers. The council's headquarter is at Amagunze and has land mass of 795km² (307 sq mi) and a total population of one hundred and forty eight thousand seven hundred and seventy four (148,774) (National Population Census, 2006). It is made up of 38 autonomous communities; grouped into 14 political wards and sub-divided into 4 Development Administrative Centers. Each ward is represented by a councillor. Nkanu East local government is used as a case study to show how local government carry out rural development programmes in Nigeria; and the extent it has fulfilled or betrayed this constitutional mandate.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

The under listed research questions are posed for investigation and they are very strategic and fundamental to this study.

1. In what ways is local government system strategic in rural development programmes in Nigeria?
2. How did Nkanu East Local Government Council implement rural development programmes between January 2008 and January 2015?
3. In what ways was the leadership a major hindrance or a booster to rural developments in Nkanu East local government?

The study applied both primary and secondary data; and is both qualitative and quantitative. For the primary source, questionnaire was administered. Content Analysis was applied for discussion of the research questions. The area population of the study is one hundred and forty eight thousand, seven hundred and seventy four (148,774), which was the 2006 census population of the local government. One percent (1%) of the population was used as the sample size, i.e.

$\frac{148,774}{10} \times \frac{1}{100} = \frac{148,774}{1000} = 148.774$, which is approximately 149. The questionnaires were distributed in almost equal ratios of 10 respondents for each of the 14 political wards and 9 for the council's headquarters. Stratified random sample technique was used to determine the actual respondents per ward and the council's headquarters. Summaries of the responses are presented in tables and interpreted, using simple percentage frequency. It provided the basis for drawing inference on each question based on the intensity of responses.

3. Literature Review

Nwankwo (2001) and Denga (2003) discussed local government in general and share the view that it is an arrangement legally put in place, at a legally recognized geographical area, to perform assigned functions for the benefit of the inhabitants of the designated area. They also note that it is,

- i. A legally constituted political sub-unit of a state within a nation expected to play its part in the larger political system
- ii. The lowest level of government (after federal and state) or third tier of government
- iii. Normally elected or democratically selected and representative
- iv. Has functions and responsibilities to perform
- v. Can sue and be sued since it is legally constituted, and
- vi. Occupied mostly by the grassroots population (except in urban areas).

As a creation of legal instruments, Takaya (2002), Johnston (1970) and Ezeani (2006) observe that local government is the third tier government, created to ensure that people at the grassroots feel the impact of government in terms of policy direction and performance. They argue that local government is generally seen as a veritable agent of development and grassroots participation in the democratic process. With particular reference to developing countries, they argue that local government is seen as a veritable instrument for rural development. Consequently, all over the world, local governments have been assigned some functions under the law". These functions embody rural development functions which essentially are the essence of local government system.

Johnston (1970) and Mabogunje (1980) examined the concept of rural development and agreed that a reasonable definition of rural development would be: development that benefits rural populations; where development is understood as the sustained improvement of the people's standards of living or welfare. Therefore, rural development is concerned with the improvement of the living standards of the low-income people living in the rural area on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources, so as to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this. In other words, Okoli and Onah (2002), Moseley (2003), Van Assche & Hornidge (2015), and Ward & Brown (2009) view rural development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. They contend that rural development is concerned with the improvement and transformation of social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the low income rural dwellers through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, natural and institutional resources aimed at enhancing their capacities to cope with the daily tasks of life and the demands of contemporary times. Local government is therefore indispensable in the performance of these duties. Oladosu (1981) corroborates the foregoing views and succinctly asserts that,

- Its effectiveness is judged through the development it generates, social amenities it provides and, to the extent that it has catered satisfactorily for the happiness and general wellbeing of the communities, it has been established to serve.

The essence of creating Nkanu East local government was to perform the functions of rural development programmes in the council area. As a result, it receives revenue allocation from the monthly federal allocations shared among the three tiers of government (federal, state and local government). These revenues are meant for rural development through deployment of available resources and

mobilization of local participation to facilitate rural transformation. The study, therefore, assesses how it implemented rural development projects during the periods under study.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted systems theory. David Easton (1957) is the chief exponent of systems theory. Other scholars who made profound contributions to the development of systems theory include Ludwig Bentanlany, J.G. Miller, Morton Kaplan, etc. Its major assumption is that political phenomena can best be analyzed by viewing them as part of a systematic whole. Their perception of political system indicates that:

- A political system implies interrelatedness;
- The attributes of the political system is reciprocity.
- The different parts depend, rely, and benefits from each other
- All the different interrelated parts usually look for a situation of equilibrium, and
- A political system usually has certain needs that must be satisfied or else such a system is bound to die.

The system consists of environment with specific boundary – it generates input in the forms of demands and supports; which are transmitted to the conversion mechanism, representing the decision-making process; it culminates in output - made up of decisions, policies, programme and finally, the feedback mechanism, which communicates the feelings from the environment back to the system. This process occurs at every level of administration including the local government.

Local government, therefore, is a sub-system created to function at the grassroots and depends on the component parts for its function. As a system with interdependent parts, which works in unanimity to achieve the set goals, local government is nonetheless a structure. As an administrative structure, it is assigned with statutory functions as expressly stated in the Fourth Schedule of 1999 constitution, in the case of Nigeria. What it does or does not do and how it is influenced by its environment can only be understood from the perspective of conversion function. The process and its outcome vary from one system to the other. The functions imply interrelated roles and forces that interact to transform policies into concrete actions through the activities of human actors. The actors are made up of executive and legislative arms; the career servants, including community leadership and civil society organizations. All these bodies cooperate and collaborate to achieve the development programmes of local government in the rural areas.

In the course of performing the function, local government is influenced and affected by the prevailing trends in the larger system. This involves style of leadership, form of funding; transparency in the management of public fund and the nature of extant rules and regulation governing the operations of the system. Combinations of these variables and their interplay would obviously affect how local government process demands from the environment, the kind of policies and decisions that emanate from it; and the corresponding feedback that follows the process. This study relies on these processes to inquire into the roles of local government in rural development.

5. Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis of Data

A total of 149 questionnaires were distributed, 140 safely returned while 9 were not returned. In that case, data from 140 questionnaires was relied upon and used for analysis in this study. However, the questions put together sought to identify:

- ❖ How local government is strategic in the implementation of rural development programmes in Nigeria;
- ❖ How Nkanu East local government implemented rural development programmes during the periods under study; and
- ❖ How the leadership was a major hindrance or a booster to rural developments in Nkanu East local government.

5.1. Question One

- How strategic is local government system in rural development programmes in Nigeria?

Decisions	Strategic	Not Strategic	Unimportant	Useless	Undecided	Total
Responses	128	8	4	0	0	140
Percentage	91.43%	5.71%	2.86%	0%	0%	100%

Table 1

Source: Research Survey

In the table, 91.43% agreed that local government system is strategic in rural development programmes in Nigeria; 5.71% did not agree and 2.86% indicated that it is unimportant. The 91.43%, therefore, affirmed the strategic importance of local government in rural development programmes. In essence, such crucial roles justify local government creation as a third tier level of government in Nigeria and most importantly, its participation in the sharing of revenues accruing to the federation.

5.2. Discussion

Local government is a very important administrative organ for mobilization of local resources for rural transformation. Since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960 to date, it has continued to play the dual roles of local administration and rural development. Essentially,

- Local government has superior capacity to understand and conduct local affairs. People in a local area are naturally most likely to understand their needs more than others who are far away, irrespective of how sympathetic the latter may be. This is so because each locality has its own peculiarities – economic, social, physical; history, tradition, customs, beliefs and taboos. It is therefore an effective weapon for channelling local pressures, articulating and aggregating local interests which may not necessarily coincide with the ideas of the central government (Ola, 1988 cited in Onah, 1995).

This accounted for several reforms (the 1976 and Dasuki reforms, etc) carried out to restructure the system and make it responsive and proactive in addressing rural development needs. In consonance, the number of local governments grew from 299 in 1976 to 774 in 1999 (Gboyega, 2003). The increase was the recurring realization that it remains a catalyst in rural development, political recruitment and leadership training. Due to the growing relevance of the system in Nigeria,

- Local government is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural development and for the delivery of social services to the people. It is believed that this third tier of government is strategically placed to fulfil the above functions because of its proximity to the rural people, which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people (Ugwu, 2001).

In Nigeria, it anchors both federal and state rural development initiatives. These were evident during the introductions of Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986; Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) in 2001 and Local Empowerment and Environment Management Projects (LEEMP) in 2001 (Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1986). The primary goals were to boost transformation of rural communities, increase their economic potentials and enhance their participatory roles in rural development and improved economic environment. Local government was considered a major operational framework for the programmes; hence the necessary condition for the realization of this objective was effective, functional, purposeful and transparent governance at the local government level (Fashola, 2008). The essence, according to Tomori (2006) is that,

- Poor community men and women can effectively organize themselves in order to identify community priorities and address local problems, by working in partnership with local governments and other supportive institutions. This requires understanding the dynamics of communities and of local administration, and their interaction with higher levels of administration.

It operates on the principles of local empowerment, participatory governance, demand responsiveness, administrative autonomy; greater downward accountability and enhanced local capacity (Tomori, 2006). Nigeria has 774 numbers of local governments. Their relevance was borne out of the vacuum created by inability of both federal and state governments to proactively respond to rural development challenges. These challenges relate to mass poverty, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, filthy environment; rampant infectious diseases and dearth of human capital. Its relevance was much so even during the colonial period that the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Creech-Jones, observes that,

- Local government is a cardinal feature of British policy in Africa. It is now recognized that the political progress of the territories is dependent on the development of responsibility in local government, that without a sound local government, a democratic political system at the centre is not possible, and that, if social services are to be built up and expanded, there must be efficient organs of local government directly representative of the people to control and operate them (Oladosu, 1981)).

In Nigeria, local government system concerns itself with functions that are specified in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Most of these functions are of rural priority and the ‘‘councils are conceived to offer effective service delivery and promote development of communities. Their closeness to the people make them more effective than any other tier of government, but they lack autonomy to carry out their constitutional functions’’ (Uwoghiren, 2016). The system is subjected to many problems, both administrative and structural. It is controlled by the state government through the House of Assembly and the Joint Allocation Accounts Committee (JAAC) that unilaterally disburses funds to the local governments from the poll of their federal allocations, thereby starving the system of enough funds to function. Also, democratic practice in the system is stifled, thus giving rise to Caretaker or Transition Committees, where the leadership merely assumes the roles of state agent. Despite the problems and challenges facing the system, the consensus is that it is best system for rural governance, and most appropriate development agent for rural transformation; and it has performed these functions since 1960 to date.

5.3. Question Two

- To what extent did Nkanu East local government implement rural development programmes between January 2008 and January 2015?

Decisions	Excellent	Average	Below Average	Poor	Undecided	Total
Responses	10	20	28	64	18	140
Percentage	7.14%	14.29%	20%	45.71%	12.86%	100%

Table 2
Source: Research Survey

From the responses, 45.71% show that Nkanu East local government performed poorly on rural development projects during the study periods while 20% show that it performed below average. Essentially, 14.29% rated its performance average; 7.14% rated it excellent; while 12.86% expressed undecided. The 45.71% formed the aggregate perception people held on the implementation of rural development projects in Nkanu East, during the periods under study.

5.4. Discussion

Two administrations spanned the periods; first under the leadership of Hon. Gerald Ejike Ani (3rd January 2008 to 4th January 2012,) and secondly, under Hon Samuel Iyigwe (4th January 2012 to 4th January 2015). During the administration of the first regime, it awarded contracts for the grading and resurfacing of some rural roads; bridges, culverts, new buildings and or renovation of primary schools and health centers. They are presented in the tables below, with their statuses.

S/No	Benefiting Community	Type of Project	Project Status
1	Amechi Idodo – Oruku	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
2	Owo - Ubahu – Amankanu	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
3	Nome – Mburubu – Nkerefi	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
4	Amafor Ugbawka	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
5	Ihuokpara	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
6	Umualor - Amankanu	Newly constructed with Lateriting	Graded without lateriting
7	Umuawalagu – Isiogbo Nara	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
8	Ezza-Akpuoga – Oruku	Newly constructed with Lateriting	Graded without lateriting
9	Nara – Nkerefi	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting
10	Isigwe Ugbawka	Grading and Lateriting of Road.	Graded without lateriting

Table 3: Roads Newly Constructed or Graded with Surface Laterite
Source: Research Survey

S/No	Benefiting Community	Type of Project	Project Status
1	Amechi Idodo	Re-panelling of Idodo hanging bridge.	Uncompleted
2	Amechi Idodo	3 Culverts.	Abandoned
3	Ugbawka – Nara Road	Re-panelling of Inyiaba hanging bridge.	Completed
4	Ugbawka – Nara Road	2 Culverts	Not Started
5	Nara – Nkerefi Road Network	Re-panelling of Inyiaba hanging bridge.	Uncompleted
6	Nara – Nkerefi Road	2 Culverts	Abandoned
7	Amafor Ugbawka Road	Re-panelling of Inyiaba hanging bridge.	Completed
8	Amafor Ugbawka Road	4 Culverts	Abandoned
9	Ihuokpara Road	2 Culverts	Completed
10	Umualor – Amankanu link Road	Uluro bridge and 4 Culverts	Abandoned
11	Umuawalagu – Isiogbo Nara Road	Re-panelling of Inyiaba hanging bridge.	Abandoned
12	Ezza-Akpuoga – Oruku link Road	4 Culverts	Completed
13	Nara – Nkerefi Road Network	2 Culverts	Not Started
14	Akpawfu – Oruku link Road	6 Culverts and Nyaba bridge	Not Started

Table 4: Bridges and Culverts Constructed
Source: Research Survey

S/No	Benefiting Community	Type of Project	Project Status
1	Amechi Idodo Health Center	Renovation	Completed
2	Eziama community primary school, Amechi Idodo	Renovation of a building	Completed
3	Uzam community primary school, Amechi Idodo	Renovation of a building	Not Started
4	Oruku Health Center	New Building	Completed
5	Oruku Community School	Renovation	Completed
6	Umuode Community School	Proposed New Building	Not Started
7	Ubahu Health Center	Renovation	Completed
8	Amankanu	Proposed Health Center	Not Started
9	Nome – Mburubu – Nkerefi	Proposed Health Center	Not Started
10	Ugbawka Health Center	Renovation	Completed
11	Ihuokpara Health Center	Renovation	Completed
12	Nara Health Center	Renovation	Uncompleted
13	Isiogbo Nara Primary School	New Building	Uncompleted
14	Nkerefi Primary School	Renovation	Uncompleted
15	Mburubu Primary School	Renovation	Completed
16	Mburubu Health Center	Renovation	Completed
17	Isigwe Ugbawka Primary School	Renovation	Uncompleted

Table 5: Construction and Renovation of Schools & Health Centers
Source: Research Survey

It also undertook the procurement of school desks in partnership with the state government; and in collaboration with the benefiting community and Local Empowerment and Environment Management Projects (LEEMP), awarded contracts for provision of rural electrification at Oruku, Umuode, Amechi Idodo, Owo and Ubahu communities. Additionally, it awarded contracts for provision of temporal offices for three Police Divisions newly created in the area. In an interim report the council submitted to the Enugu State House of Assembly Committee on Local Government in February 2009; a year into its 1st tenure in office of two years each, it notes that,

- It spent N3.4 million (N3, 354,000.00) to build a mobile police post at Amechi Idodo community; N17 million (N17,044,000.00) to build a six classroom block in Oruku community; N443 million (N442,964,754.54) to construct the Nyaba Bridge along Amagunze-Akpawfu-Oruku-Afor Ezza Road; and N20 million to grade and laterite some community roads in the council (Report, February 2009).

Though systematically articulated to show performance index of the council in rural development, the study found out that the aforementioned monies were misappropriated. The mobile police post at Amechi Idodo community was an ordinary metal container valued at about two hundred thousand naira (N200, 000); the grading and laterite of community roads was awarded to a non-existent company ‘Manifest International Limited’; and the Nyaba Bridge project was used to siphon public fund (Mba, 2009). The Nyaba River bridge project was barely started and abandoned. So also was Ezza-Akpuoga – Oruku road awarded for asphaltting; only less a kilometre was tarred inside Oruku, while the rest was abandoned. Most of the aforementioned projects previously awarded were uncompleted. The road being constructed through Umualor community in Isiuo LGA to link Amankanu community was later abandoned. The grading and laterite contract for Amechi Idodo, Owo, Nomeh, Amafor Ugbawka, and Isiogbo Nara roads with construction of some culverts in them were uncompleted. The roads were sparsely graded while the laterite and some culvert components were abandoned. In the same vein, extension of electricity to Umuode community was abandoned while the Amechi Idodo electrification project was poorly executed and uncompleted. In other words, there was not much completed and quality development projects across the political wards or communities during the period notwithstanding the huge amounts of money the council expended on projects.

The second administration led by Hon Samuel Iyiogwe (4th January 2012 to 4th January 2015) on assumption of office, inherited widespread infrastructural deficit and decay, including,

- ..., lack of access roads, lack of portable water, unavailability of electricity supply, dilapidated infrastructure and health care facilities, lack of bridges and culverts, to mention but a few (Iyiogwe, 2012).

Contracts were awarded for construction of mini-bridges and culverts, road networks, asphaltting of the dual carriage entry and exit in the local government secretariat with concrete drainages and tarring of some swampy regions inside the local government premises. It also renovated the secretariat office complexes comprising of about 4 buildings and refurbished some offices. It sunk borehole to provide water all year round at the council’s headquarters. All the above mentioned projects were executed and completed. Other projects awarded by the leadership are presented in the tables below, though the quality of work and levels of completion of the projects fluctuated.

S/No	Benefiting Community	Type of Project	Project Status
1	Umunevo Amagunze	Owor Bridge	Completed
2	Ishienu Amagunze	Atavu Bridge	Completed
3	Isigwe Ugbawka	1 Bridge & Box-Culvert	Completed
4	Amafor Ugbawka	Bridge Expansion	Completed
5	Ihuokpara	1 Mini-Bridge & 2 Culverts	Completed
6	Amankanu	1 Mini-Bridge & 4 Culverts	Completed
7	Ubahu	4 Culverts	Completed
8	Owachi Ubahu	8 Ring Culverts	Completed
9	Odobudo Ubahu	6 Ring Culverts & 2 Box-Culverts	Completed

Table 6: Bridges and Culverts Constructed

Source: Nkanu East Local Government Project Document, 2014

S/No	Road Coverage (Communities)	Distance (Km)	Type of Work Done	Project Status
1	Nara – Mburubu – Nome - Nenwe Road	17Km	Grading & laterite	Completed
2	Ugwuomu – Odobudo – Owachi – Ubahu Link Road	5.6Km	Construction & Rehabilitation	Completed
3	Ihuokpara – Akpugo Road	5Km	Grading, laterite & earthwork	Completed
4	Nkwo Ihuokpara – Obodo Nwatu Road	3Km	Grading, laterite & earthwork	Completed
5	Atavu – Ndiagu – Ishienu Amagunze Road	_____	Grading & laterite	Completed
6	Amaofia – Ogo – Owor Road	_____	Grading & laterite	Completed

Table 7: Roads Graded

Source: Nkanu East Local Government Project Document, 2014

Most of the claims in table 7 are incorrect. All the roads mentioned therein were only graded without applying any laterite on them. In addition, the administration did not complete the ‘State-Local Government Joint 23 Kilometre Asphalt Road Project’ that traversed Amechi Idodo – Owo – Ubahu to Amankanu communities. The asphalt has reached about 48% completion when the term in office elapsed. The remaining portion was abandoned, despite the fact that there was omission of concrete drainages at strategic locations on the road and the quality of work already done on the tarring relatively poor. During second term in office, the contracts awarded for grading and lateriting of roads leading to Amechi Idodo, Uzam Amagunze, Ihuokpara-Akpugo, Nomeh, Amafor Ugbawka, Isiogbo Nara, Nkerefi-Mburubu-Nomeh, and construction of many in-between concrete culverts, were merely graded while the laterite and the culvert components were abandoned. Also abandoned were twin Nyaba bridges earmarked for construction to link the 9 communities in Amankanu Development Centre (referred to as **Idodo Zone**) with their kiths and kin in the other parts of Nkanu East. Also abandoned were renovations of dilapidated school structures in Uzam Community primary school and primary schools in Amufu-Nkerefi, Uzam Amagunze, Isiagu Owo, etc. There was no work on the proposed extension of electricity to any location where it was not available in all the political wards or communities in Nkanu East. The administration mismanaged huge sums of money for private interests and engaged in all manner of corrupt practices. They included:

- i. Diversion of funds meant for the development of the local government into private accounts,
- ii. Spending funds without approval from the Nkanu East Local Government Area Legislative Council,
- iii. Non-execution of up to 30% capital project captured under 2012 – 2015 for which billions of naira were appropriated;
- iv. Withholding of worker’s salaries for several months, including leave allowance which were never paid for four years.
- v. Refurbishment of the LGA bus with N5, 000,000 (Five Million Naira) and lavishing N5, 000,000 (Five Million Naira) of bribe to some council members to cover up some of his corrupt practices.
- vi. Operation of a domiciliary account with \$30,000, etc (Yusuf Alli (2016)

In particular, the Chairman diverted N20 million for road repairs that was never carried out, and awarded another road contract for N100 million that was never constructed. He was also paying his wife N1.5 million monthly to organize monthly prayers at the local government headquarters. The same monies were invested in developing personal estates and other choice properties (Yusuf Alli, 2016). Despite the fact that the corruption charges were promptly denied (Uzodinma, 2016), these monies were meant for some of the abandoned rural development projects. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of abandoned projects in the local government system is rife. It is not altogether peculiar to Nkanu East but could be more pronounced in some cases, under some administrations. Though “*local governments got almost 100 percent of their funds and were allowed unlimited discretionary powers on fund usage, to pursue their peculiar needs and developmental challenges*” (Iyiogwe, 2012); it abandoned many significant projects already started at various locations in Nkanu East while many others were not started at all. Meanwhile, the contract sums for the abandoned projects were fully paid to non-existent companies without serious sanctions from the appropriate supervisory or law enforcement agencies, thereby promoting corruption and monumental waste in the management of public funds. This resulted in the local government not implementing or providing significant rural development project in the area during the study period.

5.5. Question Three

- What would you consider to be major obstacle to rural development projects in Nkanu East local government?

Decisions	Leadership Problems	Paucity of Funds	Corruption	Mismanagement	Undecided	Total
Responses	62	21	30	23	4	140
Percentage	44.28%	15%	21.43%	16.43%	2.86%	100%

Table 8
Source: Research Survey

The table relates most problems associated with the obstacles to rural development in Nkanu East local government to leadership. This is represented by 44.28%. This is followed by corruption, 21.43% and mismanagement, 16.43%. Paucity of funds was 15%, while 2.86% were undecided. What the above responses indicate is that leadership is the major obstacles to delivery of rural development projects by leaderships in Nkanu East. It is no doubt, the root cause of corruption and mismanagement.

6. Discussion

Local government is composed of many administrative structures. In other words, in Nigeria

- The Chairman of Local Government, Vice Chairman, Supervisors and Secretary, form the Executive Arm of the Local Government, and the Councillors form the Legislative Arm of Local Government (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2000).

The office of the Secretary coordinates the activities of the various departments and units in collaboration with the Head of Personnel Management (HPM). However, the Legislative arm (Councillors) makes laws; consult with their wards to identify their priority needs and communicate them to the appropriate authority for redress or legislation. They also scrutinize and approve local government budgets, appointments; and carry out oversight functions; including enforcing checks and balances among the organs involved in the council’s administration (Okibe, 2001). On the part of career civil servants, they assist political officeholders on the day-to-day administration of the local government by helping them articulate and implement policies geared towards achieving the set goals. They are catalysts in the chain of rural development process and service delivery.

To ensure discipline, effectiveness in service delivery and necessary commitments in the operations of the system, the Local Government Service Commission supervises the career employees; Ministry of Local Government supervises the elected and appointed political officeholders, while the State House of Assembly exercises control over the entire system. The synergy is to entrench cordial working relationship that provides each stakeholder with ample opportunities to play key roles in setting development agenda that meets the expectations of the people. Together with the community leaderships and other support groups, the task of rural development is collaborative efforts. Participatory and cooperative leadership style serves as a booster by guaranteeing inclusive governance where everybody involved in the business of service delivery and infrastructure development for the wellbeing of the rural populace is effectively mobilized to drive the agenda.

Viewed from the foregoing background, the administration of Nkanu East local government depicted a contrary picture. Of the two regimes that spanned the period under study, none fared well in general administration. The executive, though properly constituted, was the Chairman personified. Both regimes adopted similar approaches in the administration of the local government. They personalized decision making process, suppressed the office of Deputy Chairman and dominated the affairs of the local government in all ramifications. Hon. Mrs Angela Ngene who served as Deputy Chairman to Hon. Gerald Ejike Ani narrowly completed the four year term in office. Hon. Ani Chimezie who served in the same position during the first term of Hon. Samuel Iyigwe (January 2012 to December 2013) was substituted with Hon. Chigozie Ogbu during the second term. He completed the second term, from January 2014 to January 2015. Nevertheless, each had strained working relationship with the Chairman. They were skipped in key decisions making process and the displacement killed their morale and commitment to work and service.

The lack of cordial working relationship among members of the executive arm also extended to the Supervisors and other political appointees. The Chairman dominated the F & G meetings; which was the highest policy making body in executive arm. Other members were reduced to rubber stamps that forcibly yielded to the actions of the Chairman. The leadership was a sole administrator style, an imitation of the general practice at other tiers of government (State & Federal) in Nigeria, which makes chief executive the rallying point. The system relegated diverse array of ideas from subordinates and rivals alike, and shut out many stakeholders whose inputs were necessary to fast-track collaborative efforts towards achieving rural development goals of various communities. The insensitivity of the leadership degenerated into relocation of the seat of administration from the local government council secretariat at Amagunze to private houses in Enugu urban where only the "kitchen cabinet members" sat and took decisions.

Politics of power bloc rivalry experienced in power contestation resulted in recurring cases of confrontation between the executive and legislature in the local government. It led to politically motivated or instigated suspension of some opposing councillors, e.g. Hon Agah Chikezie, Hon. Chidi Mbonu, Hon. Engr Nwatu Benneth, and Hon. Mrs Clementina Ogbu, etc. The official cars, salaries and allowances of some of them were seized for months as punitive measure to woo them to the Chairman. Each leader of the legislative council (Hon. Kennedy Egbo during the regime of Hon Gerald Ejike Ani and Hon. Chukwu Peter Ndubuisi during the regime of Hon. Samuel Iyigwe), was accused of conniving with the Chairman to scuttle legislative processes, including the mandatory sitting of the councillors to perform their constitutional duties. Few pro-chairman councillors were sitting illegally under the protection of law enforcement agents or thugs, for the purpose of giving hasty approvals to executive bills without due consideration. Funds were through this means appropriated with executive fiat without due process and the opposing councillors were battered by hired thugs who obstructed their sittings. In such state of imbroglio, one Hon. Sunday Nwobodo representing Nara Ward 1 was gruesomely murdered during the tenure of Hon. Gerald Ejike Ani, and it was attributed to the raging impasse between opposition Councillors and the Executive.

The administration of the local government was characterized by executive recklessness and power drunkenness. In addition to the fact that the unmitigated bickering among the political actors made the leadership dicey; it also negatively affected the concept of teamwork in rural development and general administration. The Chairmen were not only unapproachable and disrespectful but highhanded in relation with career civil servants, traditional rulers, stakeholders and Nkanu East public. They neglected due process in governance and this resulted in few individuals exercising powers that were outside their jurisdiction. It provided the executive the opportunity to prioritize local government financial allocations and expenditure in line with its preferences. They most times connived with the Treasurer of the council and in some instances, the Head of Personnel Management (HPM) to compromise transparency and accountability in the affairs of the council. It breached civil service rules; created room for enforcement of draconian laws, promoted neglect of due process; and subjected the staff to bad working condition with accumulated arrears of salaries and allowances owed to them.

There were frequent labour agitation, lack of consultation, intimidation and relegation of every dissenting voice in the way and manner the local government was run. It affected service delivery in the grassroots, and the usual cooperation and collaboration needed for effective governance and execution of rural development projects. The consequence was mismanagement of resources and corruption. Unfortunately, none of the supervising bodies addressed the fulsome anomaly but appeared indifferent. It was alleged that they were more concerned with the paybacks from the council Chairmen than curtailing the prevalence of power abuse and maladministration. In this vein therefore, it is not in doubt that Nkanu East local government administration snowballed into autocratic system and ceased to be democratic. It attests to reign of bad leadership that altogether resulted in absence of transparency due to exclusion of many game players; thereby facilitating corruption and mismanagement of available funds that could have been properly channelled towards rural development projects. With lack of collaboration among the key players in the local government due to bad leadership, no serious efforts were committed towards rural development in Nkanu East during the period under study.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Local government system is statutorily conferred with the task of rural development. The performance of this task involves interplay of many actors. These include elected and appointed political office holders, career civil servants, non-governmental organisations and the communities. The power contestation between and among some of these principal actors (e.g. the executive and legislature, including other strata in the hierarchy) betray the necessary synergy that ensures harmonious collaboration. As a result, avoidable power tussle, bickering and crisis that in several instances jeopardize rural development efforts and the overall peace of the council area become the hallmark. The consequences manifest in bad leadership, abuse of power, mismanagement of local government finances, and corruption due to mistrust associated with the volatile nature of unilateral decision making process that compromised transparency.

Based on the identified problems facing local government system as exemplified in Nkanu East, it is appropriate that Local government should be reformed and restructured to cope with the challenges of rural development; to improve the conditions of rural environments; augment rural economic wellbeing and living standard. This will be achieved by granting it financial autonomy with immediate dissolution of State and Local Government's Joint Accounts. This will be the first step to unbundle local government system from state control. With restoration of democratic instruments in the operations of the system, it will go a milestone in wiping the tripartite devils of bad leadership, corruption and mismanagement that plague the system, by restoring checks and balances in the system. The inability of Nkanu East local government to implement substantial rural development projects during the periods under study was due to lack of transparency and accountability and it should be seriously enforced. It accounted for dwindled commitment to project execution and translated into rampancy of abandoned projects which costs are of monumental effects on the people despite huge financial allocations being collected monthly. The available statistics on rural development projects it executed did not justify such huge revenue allocations. It is appropriate that each leadership at the local government system have performance rating chart that captures its revenues and expenditure profile. The set project target should be proportional to the revenue.

For proper oversight, communities where development projects are cited should take responsibility for their prompt supervision to ensure early detection of poor quality job and possible contractors that are tending to abandon their sites. Each local government leadership should be responsible for absence of substantial rural development projects commensurate to its revenue. It is wrong to allow misappropriation of public funds at the local government system and cases relating thereto treated with kid gloves. The culture of amassing wealth from public treasury has become a common trend across every strata of Nigerian economy and it poses a great threat to responsible and accountable leadership in the system. It should be stopped to ensure optimum performance by the system. As a creation of legal instrument, all functionaries in the system should abide by the ethics, oaths or rules that regulate the activities of her leaderships. This means that they are bound by some ethical values and code of conducts. Non-compliance with these oaths results in evasive conducts that engender conflicts and crises of interests in the affairs of the council. It is therefore recommended that functions and duties of each officer in the local government should be unambiguously stated and enforced.

It is improper to allow lopsided power structure that favours the Chairman and sandwich other actors in the system; it does not guarantee harmonious work environment. Bad leadership is an all inclusive vice that is not peculiar to executive office but commonplace among other strata. Rules of engagement should override rules of confrontation. Collaboration, synergy and accommodation of all shades of opinion in policy formulation, distribution of projects and other material rewards are of utmost importance to goal driven local government system. There is no denying the fact that rural development is a very important function of local government notwithstanding that Nkanu East lagged behind due to systemic and structural problems that faced it. It remains the best system for drastic transformation of the rural communities because of its proximity to the people at the grassroots. The findings of this study could be generalized as common trend across many local government areas in Nigeria, with few exceptions, if there is any.

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