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Local Government Administration and Rural Development in Rivers State: A Study of Tai Local Government Area, 2005-2015, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Grassroots development and governance are among the cardinal objectives of establishing the local government system in Nigeria. However, the attainment of these objectives has been a major challenge in Country. This has led to a lot of discourses over the relevance of the local government system in contemporary Nigeria. This study, examined the local government administration and rural development in Rivers State with focus on Tai Local Government Council, 2005-2015. The aim of the study was to interrogate the contributions of the Local Government to rural development, while the specific objectives were amongst others to assess the impact of Local Government on rural development in Tai Local Government Area. The study adopted the human needs theory as the theoretical framework and secondary data was utilized, while content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that the Council's efforts towards delivering effective rural development projects is hampered by corruption, and other institutional decays. It therefore, contends that Tai Local Government Council has contributed to the development of rural communities through the provision of services that engendered socioeconomic development, which has improved the living condition of the people. The study recommended amongst others institutional restructuring, that would include the further alteration of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) to engender greater autonomy of the Local Government Councils. This is a panacea to greater grassroots development.

Keywords: Administration, development, local government, rural, Tai

1. Introduction

The evolution of Local Government in Nigeria dates back to the native authority system which was created by the British colonial administration in 1900 (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017, p.1). Since the establishment of native authorities till date, local government administration has evolved in phases, spanning from 1900 to date, with some reforms in between. Presently, Nigeria operates a federal system of government that is composed of three tiers, namely, the Federal, State and Local Government.

"The idea of local government administration in Nigeria was conceived in order to accelerate development and create the opportunity for the people at the grassroots... (Cited in Ozohu and Chima, 2015, p.1)." The essence of the establishment of local government as the third tier of government therefore is to bring development to the grassroots. However, regrettably, this goal has not been fully achieved due to corruption and other institutional challenges, especially, the unbridled of the Local Government Councils by the State governments.

Historically, the local government administration in Nigeria had gone through major epochs namely (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, (iv) 1976 local government reforms, and (v) Babangida's administrative reforms of 1988. However, the local government reform of 1988 was a component of 1988 Civil Service Reform package in which the chairman of the local government was made the chief executive, but was not permitted to sign cheques. Organizational structure was approved for all local governments to have a maximum of six departments. They include: Personnel Management, Finance and Supplies, Education, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Works, Land and Survey, Medical and Health Departments.

Local Governments in Nigeria has gone through reforms. Commenting on the essence of Local Government Reforms in 1976, Erero states that:

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).

It is pertinent to note that the 1976 local government reform bestowed on the local government the following responsibilities: payment of all staff salaries, building and maintenance of physical infrastructure of primary health centers, stocking facilities with medicines, among others.

The 1976 and 1988 Reforms respectively provided for popular participation at the grass root level. For example, the Universal Adult Suffrage enfranchised women in the Northern Nigeria, and this development increased popular participation in the rural areas. Recognizing the relevance of political development at rural areas, the President Babangida Administration (1985-1993) maintained that:

The current reforms of the local government systems should be seen as constituting critical foundations of the on-going 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 on-going political reconstruction is anchored (Oyovbaire, 1992, p.7).

The importance of the local government as an agent of rural development and third tier of government cannot be over emphasised. The 1979 and 1999 Constitutions as amended recognizes the local government as a legitimate third tier of government with functions. For instance, Section 8, Part 1, of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution recognizes the local government council as a tier of government, and vest specific responsibility of the development and participation of the rural people in politics of the state. Section 162(6) of the same constitution establishess the State - Local Government Joint Account System from the Federation Account (Agbani & Ugwoke, 2014,p.146).

Rivers State is divided into 23 local government councils with Tai being the last in alphabetical order. The Rivers State government receives monthly allocation from the federation account and distributes accordingly to the 23 local governments in the State based on the provisions of Section 162 (6) of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended). Sadly, the state of development in these Councils is a sham compared to the monthly allocation given to the Councils. Even the little federal allocations that the state government releases to the local government every month in Rivers State are also not being judiciously utilized for rural development, but is characterized with "corruption, fiscal indiscipline, irresponsibility" (Agbo, 2010, p.20). Clear corrupt practices in the local councils such as misappropriation of funds meant for development, over-invoicing for goods procured, reckless, and unauthorized payments, etc. have affected rural development in Rivers State. Indeed, Ekawu (2007, p.18) describes the state of decay in the Local Government system as "gross mismanagement where combined effect of graft and inefficiency are proudly showcased by the officials".

Apart from the corruption in the local government council, "rural development has not been centrally guided... The crucial role of local government system as a link between government and the rural people remains unrealizable (Kamar et al, 2014, p.24)." It is worrisome to note that rural people do not participate in the "developmental activities from project selection and design through to execution and ex-post evaluation participation ... (Hall & Midley, 2004,p.25)." Over the years, the situation in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large present a hegemonic executive control over the affairs of Local Councils. The Governors of State brazenly set up Care - taker Committees to run the affairs of Local Councils with the inordinate ambition to dictate and writhingly mangle the finances of the Councils. The situation in Rivers State in the period under review is very appalling. The Governors not only dictate what goes to Councils, but what the Councils should use their funds for. This sordid situation is injurious to both the financial and administrative independence of the Local Government and has significant impact to rural development. The case of Tai Local Government is very disturbing, because, besides the amount received from the federation accounts, the issue of internally generated revenue is a mirage. Even the amount received from the federation account is starched away disdainfully and corruptly mismanaged by the Chairmen in collaboration with the top echelon of the bureaucracy, namely, the Head of Local Government Administration, the Head of Administration, Treasurer and sometimes the Director of Works. These officers divide and rule, butcher the funds of Councils and illegally appropriate same to themselves, and clean the spoils with corrupt invoices and receipt which could fail forensic examination.

2. Theoretical Framework

Theory is one of the rule that regulates the existence of an idea in research. Hence, a study of this kind has to revolve round a theoretical framework. To some extent, the framework provides a summary for the nature and challenges of local government in Rivers State especially in the area of rural development, with a study of Tai Local Government in perspectives. Therefore, human needs theory was adopted because one of the aims for which the local government was established is to develop the rural areas of the country.

Several scholars such as Burton (1990), Max-Neef (2012), Malsow (1973) and Rosenberg (2003) were cited in Alao, Osakede & Owolabi (2015) are among the proponents of human need theory. They all agreed that the reason why governmental institutions exist are to provide basic needs of the society. The theorists opined that conflict and violent conflict are triggered by unsatisfied human needs. Danielsen (2005, p.3) argued that violence occurs in the society when some individuals or group of people do not have any alternative of sustenance of livelihood or when they need attention, respect and consideration for their needs. Danielsen (2005,p.3) cites 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 self actualizations found on a fourth level, and finally on a fifth and final level are a personal fulfillment of

Maslow's pyramid hierarchy. Maslow argues that individuals at every point in time make efforts to satisfy 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 right and satisfy their various needs.

In this context, needs are viewed as something associated with weakness, and someone who is in need, is deemed weak and fragile. It implies that the citizens, especially people at the rural areas cannot provide 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. Local government system in Nigeria was created to 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, motorparks and public conveniences; construction and maintenance of roads, streets, drains; provision and maintenance of health services; and naming of streets including involvement in naming of streets, roads and to number houses.

Sadly, these expectations are hardly met in Tai Local Government in particular and most Local Governments in Nigeria. The rural people hardly feel 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 Federal Republic of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the human need theories attracted lots of criticisms for lack of unified perspective on definition on human needs especially on divergent views in respect to classification. This is because some human needs

3. Conceptual Clarification of Terms

3.1. Local Government

Arguments in favour of the existence of local government have been advanced on the basis that the local government system has always been the foundation for the promotion of political participation in governance, which has enhanced the means for decision-making. No political system is considered complete and democratic if it does not have a system where the local people can participate effectively in governance.

The local government council is created to provide certain essential services for the people at the grassroots. The word local in this context is defined as people who dwell in the rural areas, villages, even towns or a city. The government at the local level is responsible for providing local services such as maintenance of law and order, provision of basic socioeconomic infrastructure, municipal services, among others. Agboko (2004, p. 2) defined a local government as "a political administrative unit that is empowered by law to administer a specific locality." This definition is not at variant with Fatile & Adejuwon (2017, p.784) as they argued that, "local governments are local entities, with defined territories, discretionary power, functions, responsibilities and, most 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. Thus, Osakede & Ijimakinwa (2014, p.302) opined 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." To Arowolo (2008), a Local government is "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 & Ugwoke (2014 p.147) contend 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 since the same people that live in council areas inhabit states and the federation." A critique of the above definitions show that local governance entails the provision of both, the provision of local needs is at the fore of local government system. That is, local governments are created for the purpose of supporting the local people with goods and services as well as representing and involving the citizens in determining specific local public needs and how these local needs could be met.

3.2. Rural Development

The conceptualization of rural development varies from one author to another based on the school of thought. More so, the definition of rural development has evolved through ages, hence, changes in the perceived mechanisms and or goals of development have shaped the definition. A rational conceptualization of rural development would be a development that benefits local populations; where development is understood from the perspective of improved sustained of living for the residents of rural communities.

This definition of rural development, however, has to be further qualified. The assumption is that, the definition of rural development can easily be arrived at by understanding the concepts of 'rural' and 'development' separately. Rural development marries the idea of "rural community" with "development". The notion of community refers to a group of people with common traits. Rural development is synonymous with community development. Therefore, community development depends on communication between people and cooperative action, rather than individual exploits which some sociologists termed as "collective agency" (Flora and Flora, cited in Ikechukwu, Eluwa & Ukah, 2012, p.5). What probably may appear new is the mode of application in modern times and its ancestry as a union of community, organisation and economic development (Sanders cited in Hanachor, 2012). The Cambridge summary conference of

(1948) in Hanachor (2009, p.5) averred that: Community development is a programme designed to encourage improved living for the entire community with the vigorous contribution and if possible, on the creativity and if not forth coming instinctively, by the use of methods for instigating and motivating it in order to ensure its active fervent reaction to the movement. Hence, it purports trickle-down effects and efforts from the government to ensure the optimal wellbeing of the people that reside in such communities, and this is done through the collaborative efforts of both the government and the people. Ogo (in Hanachor, n.d, p.2) opined that community development is a move by the community members to provide their basic needs through their own efforts and sometimes with external ...governments in self-help efforts by the communities, reinforces local development actions. Hence, local governments should seize the opportunity to offer such external assistance or acts as facilitators for community development. Mexiro (in Hanachor, n.d, p.3) argued that community development is "a planned and organized effort to assist individuals to acquire the attitudes, skills and concepts, required for their development." In their contribution, Barikor (in Hanachor, n.d, p.3) gave a comprehensive and contemporary definition of community development. The local governments in Nigeria are responsible for ensuring basic primary education among the community dwellers as well as providing basic health care facilities but they have not lived up to the expectation of discharging these duties.

4. Local Government and Rural Development in Nigeria

Agbani & Ugwoke (2014) argued that the establishment of the State Joint Local Government Account System (SJLGAS) by Section 162 of the 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria was to enhance rural development at the grassroots via effective oversight of the distribution and proper management of resources accruing to the local government council from the federal account. However, rather than improving the local government council via the State Joint Local Government Account system, this innovation led to a situation where unnecessary deductions was made from the federal account to the coffers of the state government.

Ebiziem and Obi (2015) argued that the local governments are closer to the people at the grassroots in Nigeria, therefore, contribute immensely to national development. They maintained that granting the local government financial autonomy will boost socioeconomic development in Nigeria. The work is adopted decentralization theory of inter-governmental relation. In the finding, it was unravelled that the local government in Nigeria is yet to have full autonomy because of some limitations inherent in the constitution particularly the structure, control, composition, revenue and other administrative related matters and this has negatively impacted on the rural dwellers. They concluded that the autonomy of the local government is essential for national development. Consequently, the study recommended for more constitutional powers to boost the strength of the local government in public service delivery at the rural areas in Nigeria. They also advocated adherence to the suggested obey the 1999 Constitutional provision that states that they should contribute their 10% of internally generated revenue to boost grassroots development.

Alao, Nwogwugwu, Ibrahim & Ajike (2015) stated that one vital aspect of social change and development in Nigeria in the recent time is rural development. They maintained that no nation on earth could boast of development if majority of her inhabitants in the rural areas are living in abject poverty. They disclosed that there is slow pace of development which invariably has become one of the features of the local government in Nigeria. The authors revealed that the history of local government in Nigeria predates colonialism. The authors disclosed that the inability of the local government council in Nigeria to actualize her statutory obligation was what propelled the study especially the challenges and way forward. The authors also cited the works of Akhakpe, Fatile and Igbokwe-Ibeto, (2012) who observed that there are lots of interests shown at local government level not necessary because of its efficiency in service delivery, but just because of its failure to respond adequately to developmental challenges in Nigeria. They buttress the point that the local government as an agent of social transformation and training ground for political participation has failed in its responsibility as anticipated in the 1976 Local Government Reforms and subsequently, 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The work unravelled that there are lots of interference by the state governments in the administration of local governments in their various states, corruption and bogus expectation by their "godfathers and political gladiators, indiscipline among others constitute the basic challenges of efficient and effective management". Consequently, the authors concluded that local overnment is characterized by the institutional challenges which are attitudinal in nature but can only be addressed if there is strong political will. The paper recommended that there should be Constitutional amendment to those provisions that impede the effectiveness of the local government. They also recommended that the electoral body charged with the responsibility of conducting periodic elections for the local government council should be managed by Independent National Electoral Commission in order to curb corruption in the electoral system.

Inefficiency of the local government towards development at the rural areas has become a burning issue among scholars, technocrats, and social critists, thus, Ugoh and Ukpere (2009) maintained that rural development is a function of inner emotion and suggest that rural integration makes inhabitants visible as members of the community. The authors maintained that in Nigeria, the local governments are known for their statutory responsibilities of providing services at the rural areas such as water, roads, health facilities, education, etc., however, her inability to provide them in recent times have attracted public concern because of the soaring level of poverty among the people at the rural areas. The failure to rise above board by Local Government in service delivery has been attributed to poor budgeting and implementation of the Appropriation Bye – law. Elias, Afolayan & Babatola (2014) argued that barometer to measure the prosperity amongs nations is the degree of public service delivery. This is in consonance with the submission of Unegbu (2013), who argued that measuring the developmental level of the local government is its ability to provide adequate social infrastructure by each administration of the local government council. Agbakoba & Ogbonna, (2004) that collaborated the fact that the local government council was created to develop rural areas and enable the grassroots to participate in the governance.

Okoli (2013) averred that there is a need for revolutionary transformation, restructuring and reposition of the local government administration in Nigeria to get the desired result for the country's 20:20:20 project. The author considered decentralization as the only way to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the local government administration. Hence, decentralization theory was adopted in the study. The author further disclosed that the federal system of government was the dream of the founding fathers of the Nigerian project. Federalism was the systematic way of uniting people already linked together for a purpose and bonds of nationality. Okoli argued that decentralization allows some level of discretion to local institution because of the closeness to the people. He maintained that the area of decentralization under review is about political decentralization which involve some level of power and authority accorded to people at the grass root. Further, Okoli argued that the division in the country with respect to sharing the power of the federating units of state and the local government is an evidence of federalism. Some of the advantages of a real decentralization are to allow local opinion and difference on national issues. It also takes care of the democratic yearning of the people at the grass root and communication challenge, especially the local people. The author maintained that one disadvantage of decentralization is the danger of inadequate coordination at the various levels of government and proposed the establishment of a Fourth Tier of government, known as 'Community Council Government' in order to fast track development at the grass root level. Similarly, several other authors contributed to the discourse on local government and rural development, some of whom are Chukwuemeka, Ugwuanyi, Okolo & Onuoha (2014), Abdulhamid & Chima (2015) amongst others. Some of their arguments were based on theoretical and institutional failure. Abdulhamid and Chima for example located their argument on certain weakness in the 1999 Constitution which created an avenue for political actors from other tiers of government respectively the center and state to systematically and consciously emasculate local government to their own advantage and personal gain to the detriment of the rural dwell in Nigeria. They maintained that the local government is exposed to manipulation, especially, at the development level. Hence, the authors recommended that the local government should be allowed to operate as the status of a federal unit where all the statutory responsibilities shall bestowed to it, thus, the power and the functions as a tier of government. Also, recommended by these scholars was the eradication of the joint account which will ensure the restoration of the full financial autonomy.

5. Historical Overview of Tai Local Government Council

There are 23 local government council in River State and Tai local government is of them. Tai local government council was created in 1996 with its headquarter at Saakpenwa. Tai local government area is occupied by the Ogoni people. Tai local government area covers an area of 159km². The last 2006 Census in Nigeria shows that Tai had a population of 117,797. Economically, their primary occupation of Tai's farming and fishing to a lesser degree. The area is also blessed with the deposit of mineral resources, such as oil and gas.

Politically, Tai local government area has 10 wards. They include, Ward 1 (Botem/Gbeneo); Ward 2 (Kpitem); Ward 3 (Korokoro); Ward 4 (Koroma/Horo); Ward 5(Nanabie); Ward 6 (Kira/Borobara); Ward 7 (Gio/Kporghor/Gbam); Ward 8 (Nonwa); Ward 9(Barryira/Bara-Ale/Sime); and Ward 10 (Ban-Ogoi).

Administratively, the Council has a Legislative Council composed of ten wards represented by ten Councillors that make Bye - law for the people known as Tai Local Government a Legislative Council and an Executive Council headed by the Chairman of Council. Since the creation of the Local Government Area till date, the following persons have served as the Chairmen of Council or Care - taker - committee. They are: Chief Hon. Jacobson Mbina 2004 -2007, Hon. Ethel Ngarabara June, 2007 - October, 2007, Engr Gideon B. Deemor November, 2007-April, 2008, Hon. Barinada Mpigi April, 2008-2011, Hon. Gbenekanu Kuapie May, 2011 -May,2014, Hon. Mbakpone F. Okpe May, 2014-February, 2015 and Elder Agabe, Nlemaa Aleelo March -May, 2015

The local government chairman is conferred with the exercise of the executive power of the local government subject to the provisions of the Rivers State House of Assembly. The powers are exercised either directly by the Chairman or the Deputy Chairman or the Supervisors of the Local Government or officers by the Service by that Local Government.

6. Tai Local Government Council and Rural Developmental Projects, 2005-2015

Local governments exists to provide services to the people at the grassroots. Primary education Primary health care, Water/sanitation, Agricultural development, construction and maintenance of rural/feeder roads, are most of the functions of local government councils. This section therefore examines the contribution of Tai Local Government Council in the provision of the above mentioned services and also the challenges that confronted the Council that led to below average visibility in rural development within the period under review.

7. Achievements of Tai Local Government Council in Grassroots Development

7.1. Provision of Education

Education is often regarded as one of the instruments through which societies are transformed. 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. Access to primary and secondary schools in rural areas will make rural children functional in socio-economic development. This in turn will afford them the opportunity to acquire education or training which will enable them secure employment, thus, reduce poverty and unemployment. Between 2005 and 2015, successive administrations in Tai local government made efforts to deliver primary education to the people of the council. It embarked on the construction and renovation of classroom blocks, provision of furniture and writing

materials as well as training of teachers and payment of allowances to NYSC members on assignment in the locally. Specifically, during the period under study, the council constructed and renovated community primary schools at Kira. Additionally, the council provided furniture to 8 blocks of classrooms in Nonwa Uedume, amongst others.

7.2. Agriculture Support

Agriculture played a pivotal role in Nigeria's economic development and the world at large. Agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before oil was discovered, and less attention was given to it. However, agriculture plays key role in providing food, employment, foreign exchange and reduces poverty among the citizens. Therefore, the importance of agriculture in developing countries like Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. According to Barrios, Ouattara & Strobl (2008, p.287), "agriculture is the main engine of the economic growth and development for rural dwellers. It is the corner stone of the economy, generating the highest number of employments (more than 60% of both skilled and unskilled), ensures national food security, contributes enormously to the nation's GDP and foreign earnings and, above all, provides raw materials to the industrial sector, which is still in its infant stage." Tai local government area is endowed with a huge expanse of arable land, as well as a large, active population that can sustain a high productive agriculture. To enhance the development of the agricultural sector in Tai local government, successive administrations initiated some programmes. Among these are procurement and distribution of fertilisers to farmers, purchase and distribution of fishing nets, provision of tractors and seedlings to farmers. In addition, over 120 youths from various communities and towns within the local government were trained in poultry and fish farming as well as marketing agricultural produces. Besides, the Council also embarked on small poultry farming. At maturity, the birds were sold to the local people at a subsidized rate.

7.3. Rural Electrification Project

The availability of electricity has the potential of promoting rural industrialization, as it is an indispensable infrastructure for industrial revolution. It is much easier for rural investment to take place where electricity already exists than where the investor either must depend on a generating Plant or must bring electricity. The spillover effect of industries is the provision of employment to the local labour, hence the reduction of poverty among the citizenry. Rural electrification is a global challenge, particularly, in the developing countries. To remedy this situation, Tai local government signed a memorandum of understanding with the state government in August 2012 to purchase 30 transformers with a view to connecting the area to the national grid. Since then, electric poles and wiring have commenced pending connection to national grid. Some rural electrification projects also took place.

7.4. Use Direct Labour (Works department) Rather Than Awards of Contract

The Council used direct labour (Works department) rather than the award of contracts for most of the infrastructure projects executed. In fact, part of the success in project implementation recorded during the first tenure of Chief Jacobson Mbina was attributed to the participatory approach he adopted in citing projects. The Council approach individual communities and distributed forms which indicate the first, second, and third priority projects that the community considered to be urgent. The forms were retrieved from the Communities and the Council the project considered most appropriate from the list from each Community and implementation. However, this is not in line with contemporary fiscal regimes of Public Financial Management. To a reasonable extent, it breeds corruption.

7.5. Construction of Market

Availability of markets to the rural dwellers is an important 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 serve as source of livelihood for many rural people who are not interested in earning a living in the agricultural sector. Although there are markets in various communities in Tai local government, 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. Consequently, the construction of modern markets and the upgrading of existing ones became essential part of the plan for 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 Tai local government as the best and brightest the towns had to offer often leave them for greener pastures. Within the period under review, a modern market consisting of 43 lock-up shops, 60 stalls and 34 trade ways was constructed by the Council in Nonwa, in 2011. In addition, the weekly markets are korokoro, Bunu and other communities were upgraded to facilitate exchange of goods and services and other economic activities.

7.6. Payment of Electricity Bills

Furthermore, the study revealed that every successive administration pays electric bills of Tai people residing in the Local Government Area, and this persists till date. The essence is to stimulate local business among the people and also make their people feel the presence of the government, which was the reason for the establishment of the local government council.

It is worthy to note that beside the successes recorded, some factors challenged efficient service delivery to the grassroots. Some of these are:

8. Challenges of Tai Local Government Council in Grassroots Development

8.1. Poor Leadership Capacity

A key challenge that confronted the Tai Council within the period under review was poor leadership capacity of most of the Chairman. The negative effect of godfatherism is highly visible in Tai local government council. Apart from Chief Hon. Jacobson Mbina, no other elected local government chairman was able to carry out projects that impacted positively on the rural communities. The issues of godfatherism were pronounced by some of the anonymous respondents. They revealed that monies meant for the development were shared and squandered by the godfathers who reside in Port Harcourt and Abuja respectively. This assertion was confirmed by the incumbent Chairman. The Chairmen are stooges, especially the Caretaker Committee who are undemocratically imposed on the people. Rather than think of how to develop the rural area, they concentrate on how to appease their godfathers.

8.2. Undue Diversion of the Council's Funds

Within the period under review, part of the challenge of the inability of the Councils to develop the rural areas in Tai local government was undue diversion of fund meant for development to fund unhealthy political competition and rivalries among political actors. One of the respondent interviewed who wanted to remain anonymous confirmed this assertion. The respondent disclosed that "between 2005 till date, we have had lots of political changes such that have made it difficult for the local government to carry out new projects or sustain the existing ones on the ground. At every point in time, there is one political tussle or the other, however, in such situation, allocation of resources met to develop the rural people in Tai local government are diverted to political activities rather than concentrating or taking rural development as a priority. Furthermore, he opined that "politicians spend more of their time in thinking or making efforts to gain political advantage over the other political actors or parties. They squander the Council's resources which ought to have been expended on the provision of basic services on mobilization of supports their for party campaigns, rallies or other activities that does not have a direct positive impact on the people."

8.3. Paucity of Funds and over Dependence on Federal Allocation

Tai local government receive one of the least in terms of federal allocation. After all deductions and payment of salaries, the Council may not be able to embark on any project. For instance, during the era of economic recession, a lot of Local Government Councils that do not have Internally Generated Revenue capacity suffered setbacks and great economic shocks. Whatever affects the allocations at the centre will adversely affect the local government. Besides the revenue from the Federation Account, the Tai Local Government Council does not have a strong financial base to internally raise funds and carry out certain people's oriented projects at the rural areas.

8.4. Introduction of Care Taker Committees

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) did not provide for Caretaker government in the local government system. The Caretaker government is undemocratic and an aberration. Care taker leaders cannot be held responsible or accountable to the people, but they owe their loyalty to their godfathers or the State Governors that appointed them. For instance, the era of the caretaker government in the Tai Local Government Area Council between 2005-2015 recorded relatively low achievements by the Caretaker governments. However, it is perceived that it was a deliberate policy by the State Governors to subvert or embezzle the funds meant for the development of the grassroots. Most times, the godfather in the local government council are the ones who nominate candidates who make returns to them.

9. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study established that Tai local government embarked on some meaningful projects. Most of the projects were in the areas of primary education, healthcare, agricultural development, roads/drainages, 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. However, the provision of educational facilities and services, modern market facilities and healthcare and sanitation had greater impacts on rural development in Tai local government. Conversely, local government activities related to road construction, rural electrification and provision of agricultural inputs and equipment did not translate to rural development. Despite the successes recorded on some grounds, some tithing challenges confront the attainment of purposeful rural development in Tai Local Government were poor leadership capacity, undue Diversion of the Council's funds and paucity of funds and over dependence on Federal Allocation. The situation in Tai, is almost generic to other Councils in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large. Some of these challenges are institutional, while others are individualistic. However, these factor are debilitating to rural development. Local Government Councils in Nigeria must rise to their responsibilities as empowered by law. Institutional restructuring as recommended below is key for productivity.

10. Recommendations

Having critiqued the findings from this study, the following measured are recommended for improving rural development in Tai Local Government Area in particular and the local government system at large. They are:

- There is need for institutional restructuring of the Local Government system, to extricate State's full control of the Council. The deduction of the local government funds by the state government should stop. The Joint

Allocation Account Committee (JAAC) system created by section 162 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria should be repealed. The need for autonomy of Local Government Councils is strongly advocated. This would be achieved through the alteration of the Constitution. The autonomy when granted would make the Councils more independence and service driven.

- The State House of Assembly should enact a law that will compel all the Local Government Councils in Rivers State to ensure that a reasonable percentage of projects proposed in their annual budget are cited in the rural areas. There should be unbundling and decentralization of projects in the local areas. This would give the local people some avalanche of the presence of Government.
- The Office of the Auditor General for Local Government should be well strengthened to undertake value for money and other necessary audits that would keep the Councils well focused in financial management. Frugality in public expenditure is therefore advocated, because over the years, the Local Government system has championed corruption, which has led to the inertia of projects in the rural areas. To achieve this, there must be fiscal discipline. The anti-graft Agencies should be involved in the prosecution of public officers that are involved in the mismanagement and or dubious stealing of public funds.
- 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.
- The Councillors should have the will – power to exercise their oversight capacity as provided for by Sections 19 and 30 of the Rivers State Local Government Law, 2018 which give them power to debate, approve and amend the annual budget of the Local Government, subject to the Chairman's veto which may be set aside by $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of the Legislative Council. Also, the Councillors have right to examine and debate any statement of income and expenditure presented to it by the Local Government Chairman, as well as invite any person relevant to the matter in consideration to attend and speak on the matter, at any meeting of the Legislative Council, procure any evidence, written or oral, direct or circumstantial, as it may think necessary and examine any person as a witness whose evidence may be material or relevant to the matter; summon any person in Nigeria to give evidence at any place or produce any document, or any other thing in his possession or under his control, examine him as a witness and require him to produce any document or any other thing in his possession or under his control, subject to any exception and issue a warrant to compel the attendance of a person who, after having been summoned to attend, fails, refuses or neglects to do so and does not excuse the failure, refusal or neglect to the satisfaction of the Legislative Council or the Committee.
- The Tai Local Government Council is over staffed with lots of employees that are almost redundant. The staff strength of close to one thousand persons is relatively high and too large for small local government area like Tai. Therefore, the local government should reduce her staff strength in order to save monies for capital projects where rural dwellers will benefit effectively.

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