

Local Government and Rural Development in Nigeria: A Survey Study of Ezeagu in Enugu State

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Abstract: *In a generic sense, local government is a viable structure for rural transformation across regions, nation-states and nationalities. However, observations and studies in developing economies showed that this lofty ideal has not been realized. From this indication, this study examines critically the roles and challenges of Nigeria local government system in rural development with reference to Ezeagu local authority in Enugu state, Nigeria. The discourse is designed in descriptive methodology that explored the importance of interview, non-participant observation, journal articles and text books as secondary sources of data collection. Again, Almond structural-functionalism framework was applied to underscore the imperatives of constituted authorities with structures to perform exclusive roles in rural development. Subsequently, the study discovered that Ezeagu rural communities were immersed in challenges of infrastructures and service as the local government grapple with institutional and systemic failures. In credence to these findings, the study recommends election of credible persons to manage local government affairs, synergy between local government and community development unions among other measures.*

Keywords: Local government, rural development, Ezeagu and communities.

1.1. Introduction

Basically, the criticality of rural development is anchored on exigencies and vulnerabilities of the rural people. This reality inextricably underscored the need for a mechanism to initiate and drive the process of development of the community areas. And such mechanism reflects in the structure and process of local government. In this sense, Anderson (2001) remarked that the concept of local governance is as old as the history of humanity. It has in few decades elicited the attention of academics and practitioners on plausible ways to make it a viable tier for development of community areas in cognizance of the fact that western globalization acknowledges the essence of local governance as the bedrock for industrialization and growth of rural economy

Similarly, it is argued that rural development is a component of national development. In developing countries, rural development index becomes pivotal to measure process, level and significance of national development. In other words, rural development is encapsulated as important aspect of national development in effort towards modernization (Ojiude and Gaurba, 2018: 78). Although, a cursory review of paradigms of Western, Marxian and Neo-Marxian scholarship in the concept of development obviously showed gap in concept, sequence and imperatives of rural development. Hence, these literatures emphasized on fundamental indicators of economy and development in isolation of expedient ideals of rural development and, what should be process and measures towards realization of its targets. Accordingly, Bello (2017) stressed that rural development remains a recurring theme in the development lexicon of LCDs. This is because the developing economies are passionate for advancement but the nightmare is observed in the implementation of broad rural programmes for development. Indeed, Bello's assertion obviously indicates the underlying cause of the crises of development may rural development in African most populous nation-state, Nigeria.

Interestingly, a rural development phenomenon in Nigeria is a concept of historical antiquity. Its relevance predates the advent of colonial imperialism. The conglomeration of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria today existed in pre-colonial times as independent empires, kingdoms, confederation and republics. And, social and political structures of these pre-colonial societies were designed in a manner that drive process of development at the community level of relations and interactions. Subsequently, the British imperialist policies facilitated system of decentralization which trumpeted the euphoria for regionalism and multi-local governance structures (in 40's and 50's) in response to the exigencies of administrative connivances. However, the need to democratize and make local governance viable and responsive to the expectations of the rural populace was watershed in 1976 local government reform which resonate a lot of optimism for transformation of the community. Today, Nigeria is a federation of 36 states and 774 local government councils which implied that governance and administration are adequately decentralized to ensure that over 300 ethnic nationalities feel the impacts of government through policies and programmes.

Four decades after the unprecedented reform in Nigeria local government system, what is the current situation of rural development? This study therefore assess critically the roles of Ezeagu local government in Enugu state in meeting with the expectations of the

rural communities. This paper is organized in this introduction, statement of problem, research questions, objectives, review of related literature, theoretical framework, methodology, data presentation and analysis, conclusion and recommendations.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Basically, conditions of rural poverty in Nigeria were endemic before political independence in 1960. Since then, there has been increasing concern in the development of rural sector of the economy. Hence, improvement in the quality of standard of living of rural dwellers over the decades continue to reflect as policy priority of every level of government (Atigi, 2018:45). In effort to mitigate these challenges, Agidu (2017) recalled that for instance, in 1977, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria turned a notch in resolving the crisis of rural poverty through the implementation of the 1976 local government reform blueprint. This initiative was followed by the establishment of the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructural Development (DFRRD), introduction of the Operation Feed the Nation policy as well as the River Basin and Rural Development (RBRD), the Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women which were among other rural development programmes adopted by successive governments to improve living conditions of rural areas of the federation. Sadly, these laudable policy programmes of government at the level of national, state and local authorities however have not ameliorated misery and agony of Nigerians residing in rural communities across the states of the federation. In spite of the fact that 70 percent of Nigerian population live in rural areas and 90 percent of liquid and solid minerals were seen and located in rural areas. However, these rich agrarian communities remained in poverty and misery (Onni, 2016, as cited in Azunna, *e tal*, 2019:65).

South East Nigeria for over six decades provided a popularized rural development initiative termed, “community development unions” which adopts the programme of self-help initiative to identify and execute development projects in credence to the plights and expectations of rural population. However, Azunna, *e tal* (2019) stressed that these community self-help development initiatives have not really transformed rural areas of Eastern region despite obvious achievements and popular commendation. Azunna’s assertion may perhaps illuminate the realities as observed in Ezeagu local government area of Enugu state. Ezeagu local government was created in 1976 from old Udi Division during the Ukpabasi Asika administration of the then Eastern Central State of Nigeria. The Ezeagu division as was known then emerged to bring development to the door steps of the rural dwellers and communities. Decades after its creation, the fundamental question is what have been the efforts of the local government to accelerate rural development of Ezeagu communities in Enugu state?

From the indications of the foregoing analysis, curiosity is raised as regards the roles of successive administrations in Ezeagu local government in advancing the process of rural development. Hence, what are the issues, how severe were these challenges? And the way forward.

1.3. Research Questions

In other words, the following research questions are asked:

- i. What are the efforts of the local government towards rural development in communities of Ezeagu?
- ii. What are the constraints of the local government towards rural development in communities of Ezeagu?
- iii. What are the ways to mitigate these challenges and ensure development of rural communities in Ezeagu?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective is the role of Ezeagu local government in rural development. Thus, the specific objectives are articulated below

- i. To identify the efforts of the local government in rural development of communities in Ezeagu.
- ii. To illuminate constraints of the local government towards rural development in communities of Ezeagu.
- iii. To recommend measures to mitigate challenges and ensure development of rural communities in Ezeagu.

1.4. Review of Related Literature

Basically, local government as a concept elicits plethora of definitions among scholars of political science. Accordingly, Ogunna (1996) defined local government as a form of devolution of political power of the state. It is the government of grassroots which is designed as an instrument or administrative mechanism for rural governance and development. Also, United Nations Office for Public Administration defined local government as the political sub-division of a nation or (in a federal system) a state which is constituted by law with substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes and exert labour for prescribed purposes (Ogunna 1996:1). It therefore implied that local government is established by law and entrusted with the role to steer the process of governance and administration in rural area. Similarly, Ugwu (1998) further described local government as the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulations, the communities who live in a defined geographical area with common social and political tiers are subject. From Ugwu’s view, the attribute of legality, structure of governance and homogeneity character reflects as fundamentals of rural governance and areas. Subsequently, Ajayi (2015) believes that the emergence of local government is justified by:

- i. The need for decentralization for reasons of largeness of many countries in terms of geographical area and large population.
- ii. The need for grassroots accelerated development. As the closest government to Nigerians, it will easily know the problems of its people because of their closeness, small population and geographically area to cope with, and respond quickly to their development aspirations than the other higher levels of government (state and Federal governments).
- iii. Training of future leaders. Local government is seen as a training school for future national leaders. It is the belief that entering into political leadership right from the local level either as chairman or councilor will confer the necessary leadership training that will enable them to lead at the state, regional and federal levels.

Furthermore, it has become necessary to include the local government as viable unit of government. Local Government as a unit of government placed it in a position where it perform those specific functions and duties which the other two-tiers of government would not have been able to perform with efficiency and effectiveness. The local government as the first-stop is created to meet the peculiar needs of the people at the grassroots, this is very vital because every community has its peculiar characteristics, needs and value system, that differentiate it from another community. As a unit of government, it is also a channel through which local interest are aggregated and transmitted to the other two-tiers of government. The local government as a unit of government is set out to define the scope and limits of the powers, functions and responsibilities of the different arms and functionaries of government at the local level (Okotie, 2010:2).

Succinctly, local government on premise of its constitutional relevance and, statutory functions is established to carry out essential services in rural communities of its jurisdiction. In this vein, Ekong (1988), defined a rural community as an aggregation of families within the same geographical confine having similar beliefs and influences one another socio-culturally. However, the ever increasing rural-urban migration has indeed placed a premium on the needs of the community development. Hence, it is argued that accelerated rural transformation will reduce the increasing rural-urban migration.

The concept of rural community development has attracted so much attention in recent government circle and among scholars and students of Development Studies over the years. This is due to the realization that the prospects for a meaningful and sustainable national development in the country lies in the transformation of rural economy. Not less than 80% Nigerians are rural dwellers (Ataha, 2015:2). To conceptualize rural development, Okwu (2011) indicates that rural development is a comprehensive programme made up of social and economic transformation which involves all segments of the population. Rural development is often equated with changes in social, economic and structural institutional relationship and processes of rural area. Similarly, Aliyu (2019) conceived rural development as integrated processes in the development of rural dwellers. It is an integrated process that touches on the lives of the rural dwellers and accelerate growth of the rural economy.

In explicit sense, Ugwuozor (2020) noted that rural development is about improving the quality of life for rural people,....reduction of poverty, increasing productivity, providing basic services like health, education, drinking water, sanitation, expanding infrastructure, redressing inequality, exploitation and deprivation. It means improving the living standard for well being of these people, providing them security and basic needs like food, shelter, employment etc. In a similar sense, Rogers and Whiting (1997) argued that rural development refers to not only providing jobs and increased incomes to rural people but also improving the quality of rural living through increased and improved community services. In other words, rural development is a process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increases in rural resource productivity with the overall objectives of enhancing rural incomes and increasing employment opportunities in rural communities (Olayide *e tal.*1979:246 cited in Ugwu, 2000: 135).

Invariably the rationale for rural development is premised under the following:

- a. No country is completely urban.
- b. Rural area form the most important sector. This is because; they supply materials for industries, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings.
- c. Urban population is serviced by the rural population as they replenish urban population.
- d. Lack of development activities characterizing the rural area has led to sharp development difference existing between urban and rural areas and has contributed to youth exodus from rural to urban centers. Rural development can reduce this exodus.
- e. Lack of development of secondary and tertiary infrastructures entail concentration of manpower in the urban centers. In order to reverse this trend, rural infrastructural development becomes imperative.
- f. There is humanitarian reason why policy-makers should give attention to rural areas. This is because population in the rural settings deserves good things of life, having contributed so much to the entire system.
- g. Economic development is a process which requires the growth and modernization of both the rural and urban sectors (Okwu, 2011:2).

Most importantly, local government therefore serves as necessary administrative mechanism to accelerate and steer socio-economic development of rural areas. There has been an upsurge in the literature of local government and rural development in Nigeria. However, not much has been written on Ezeagu local government and rural development process. It is therefore imperative to critically review some scholarly submissions as related to nexus between local government and rural development. In instructive sense, Ugwu (2000), highlighted the role of local government in rural development as obvious in:

i.Reducing the level of rural poverty and rural unemployment.

ii. Integration of rural dwellers into the nation's socio-political and economic processes through enhanced political awareness and consciousness, and recognition of rural residents first and foremost as individual citizens, like his urban counterparts to all good things of life.

iii.Improve incomes of rural people who are engaged in agriculture and rural non-farm activities such as agro-based industries, petty trading, rural transport etc.

iv. Enhancing equity in the distribution of wealth and personal incomes.

v.Increase in rural value added products.

vi. Improving the quality of life by provision of portable water, electricity and other basic amenities, etc. Thus, the importance of local government to rural and national development cannot be over-emphasized. This is because, local government is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural development and for delivery of social services to the people. It is believed that this third tier of government is strategically placed perform its constitutional and statutory responsibilities because of its proximity to the rural people which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people (Ugwu, 2000:137).

However, as earlier indicated, these ideals unfortunately does not reflect realities as, Adekunle (2006) observed that Nigerian government neglected the rural sector. Nigeria rural sector is not only economically backward, but the gap between it and the urban sector has been widening in recent years. It is also that the perpetuation of colonial development policies by Nigerians with mantle of leadership from the colonial administration makes it virtually impossible for the rural dwellers to be affected in development. It is further argued that, even after many decades of development by both colonial and post colonial administrations that rural conditions has not improved significantly. It is therefore suggested that as a key to rural welfare in Nigeria, there should be rural diversification occasioned with the development of appropriate technology, provision of social amenities, and integrated approach to rural development. In a similar perspective, Williams (2012) contends that the rural sector as a whole has lagged behind the rest of the economy. Hence, the low prices paid by urban buyers from farm produce has a marked effect on agricultural development which is the mainstay of our rural areas. He adds that the heart of development in our country is the question of how the economy of the towns and rural sectors can grow in harmony.

In attempt to illustrate the underlying cause of deplorable conditions of rural areas in the country, Ijere, (2015) accused successive Nigerian government of being preoccupied with drumming into the ear and heads of the rural dwellers, the failure of previous regimes, rather than developing the rural areas. Many strategies such as "authoritarian handout" from the administration which prescribed the 'facilities' suitable for the rural areas, and too, the so-called development from examples in the concept of community development, have been tried in the past in an attempt to solve rural poverty problem in Nigeria. These strategies have however, not proved successful, as Nigerians continue to witness dysfunctional rural development programmes, problems of infrastructure, problems of irrelevant rural education, etc. It is therefore suggested that solutions to these problems include a clear understanding of the concept of rural development, an integrated development program, provision of infrastructure relevant to the rural development and education to the peculiar needs and aspiration of the rural dwellers. As regards the reasons for failure of rural development through the instrumentality of local government, Odenigwe (2016) maintained that whatever approach is adopted, the most important factor is the understanding of the community. It is necessary to understand the institutions and organization of the people, and these may include their customs, religion; social structures, kingship system, source of power, leadership and authority and the nature of co-operation among them for purpose of development. In a different perspective to the politicization of rural development, Olowu (2016), described government approach to rural development as a mere sham. Government have succeeded in imposing development programmes on the rural masses, such programmes only benefited a few rich and powerful. Rural development which should ideally involve the genuine participation of the rural dwellers, and relatively independent of centralized urban-oriented bureaucratic machines and politicians. In a similar view, Ekigwu (2014) argues that government imposition of rural development programmes on the communities have been a cog in the wheels of rural development. Hence, government have often set community development priorities without the participation of the target or relevant communities. And, such community development effort without autonomy and popular participation of the people are doomed. It is therefore suggested that since grassroots communities are the engine of growth, government should play down its excessive control in setting out development goals and priorities for local communities.

Subsequently, it is also argued that the failure of state rural development agencies have prompted communities to take the responsibility of rural development. Hence, there were no functional rural electrification while rural water scheme was a luxury while the interior of the country remained inaccessible despite existence of many rural development agencies. In concrete terms, there is nothing to show for it on the ground in the rural area (Ezendu, *e tal*, 2016:123).

Conclusively, the rationale for establishing local government is to accelerate socio-economic development of the rural people. However, these expectations has not been fully realized within rural areas across states of our federation.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts theory of structural functionalism to analyze and generalize the roles of local government in rural development with reference to Ezeagu communities in Enugu State. Accordingly, Gauba (2003) documents that the approach was developed by Gabriel Almond and G.B Powell (1996) in *Comparative Politics: A Development Approach*. Almond and his associates argued that all political systems, regardless of their types, must perform a specific set of tasks if they are to remain in existence as system in working order, or in equilibrium i.e. as “ongoing system”. These are the functional requirements of the system. With these assumptions, they sought to modify David Easton’s model of the political system, suggesting that “input and “output” recognized by Easton can best be understood as ‘functions’ or “functional requisites” of political system.

Furthermore, the structural functional analysis is aimed to redefine the concepts of inputs and outputs with a deeper understanding of political process and proceeded to identify various structures corresponding to these functions, in order to evolve a “structural-functional framework”. It is therefore conceded that in various political systems, these functions may be performed by different kinds of political structures and sometime, even by structures which are not overtly recognized as being primarily “political” (Gauba 2003:96). Accordingly, the following are the input and output functions of the political system:

The input functions are:

- 1) Political socialization and recruitment
- 2) Interest articulation
- 3) Interest aggregation and
- 4) Political communication

The output functions are:

- 5) Rule: Making
- 6) Rule-application and
- 7) Rule adjudication (Almond, *e tal*,1996: ibid)

Output functions correspond to conventional governmental functions, which are performed by formal governmental organs, viz legislature/councilors (rule-making), executive (rule-application) and judiciary (rule- adjudication) and input functions which are performed by non-governmental structures or institutions. Although, these structures are multi functional, yet some structures are suited for specific functions (Bauer, 2013; 457).

To apply the assumptions of the structural-functional theory in the analysis of local governance and rural development, it is argued that the Ezeagu local government conventionally consist of out-put structures which perform the roles of rule-making, rule application and rule-adjudication for security and development of the communities within its jurisdiction. In other words, these output structures can articulate legislations, initiate policies and executive programmes that reflect plights and expectations of the rural populace of Ezeagu. On the other hand, the input structures such as interest groups for interest articulation and the media for political socialization and partisan mobilization convey expectations of these communities for consideration and policy responses.

The structural functional framework of political analysis is useful in this study because it defines the structural and functional imperatives of the local government area in response to the expectations of rural development. Hence, rural development is anchored on the framework of structures and roles as exemplified in the Ezeagu local government area in Enugu state.

1.6. Methodology

The research design of this study is a descriptive design. It is appropriate and suitable for this study particularly with reference to the efforts of Ezeagu local government in rural development.

Furthermore, the area of study is Ezeagu local government area of Enugu state. It is located in the Western part of Enugu State. The local government is bound in the North by Uzo-Uwani local government area, South by Oji River local government area, East by Udi local government area and in the West by Anambra State. Again, Ezeagu local government area occupies a landmass of 621,870 sq.km with an estimate of 181 persons per sq;km. Topographical description indicates that 20% of the Ezeagu landmass is occupied by water/wetlands while 10% is highlands and 70% plains (LEEDS Report, 2006:21).

Subsequently, Ezeagu local government area is made up of autonomous communities numerically distributed into four administrative units or divisions. Okafor (2006) remarked that Ezeagu has 32 autonomous communities with four main political/administrative divisions – a LGA Headquarter at Aguobu-Owa. Thus the four administrative along with its communities are:

- a. Ezeagu North has seven (7) autonomous communities comprising Akama-Oghe, Amankwo-Oghe, Neke-Oghe, Oyofoghe, Amansiodo, Okpogho and Iwollo.

- b. Ezeagu North East has seven (7) autonomous communities comprising Imezi Olo, Ezema Olo, Ibite-Adaka, Amandim, Amagu-Umulokpa, Awha Imezi and Awha-Ndiagu.
- c. Ezeagu Central has nine (9) autonomous communities comprising Imezi-Owa, Ogwofia, Umaji, Umuagba Owa, Ezema Owa, Eziowa Aguobu, Ozom Aguobu, Ozom Mgbagbu-Owa and Eziowa Mgbagbu-Owa.
- d. Ezeagu South is a tripod and is usually referred to as Mba N'ito namely Umuana, Umumba and Obinofia. It has a nine (9) autonomous communities Obeleagu-Umana, Umana-Ndiuno, Umana-Ndiagu, Agba-Umana, Umumba-Ndiuno, Aguobu-Umumba, Umumba-Ndiagu, Obinofia-Ndiuno and Obinofia-Ndiagu.

It is very important to note that these communities live and share the same cultural values and belief.

In reference to the population size, the 2006 Census report showed that Ezeagu had a population of 170,603. However, there has been increased demographic attributes of the local government after 2006 census. Furthermore, the population density is 181 persons per sq.km. However, the researcher is more interested in the respondent population.

The method of data collection is facilitated through interview, non-participant observational process and secondary sources such as text books, journal articles, etc. Again, the data gathered were content-analyzed .

1.7.Data Presentation and Analysis

Appraisal of Efforts and Challenges Towards Rural Development in Ezeagu Local Government Area.

In reference to *first research question*, there were obvious efforts from successive council governments to improve the quality of life of rural people in communities in Ezeagu. Hence, there were efforts in infrastructural development such as rehabilitation of roads such as Oyofe-oghe asphalt road, Neke-Afor Oghe road, Imama Neke Oghe road, Aguobu-owa-ozom Mgbagbu-owa road, Afor-oghe-nke-oyofe road, Amansiodo- Ihuonyia road, Asphalting of Akama Oghe-Awha Imezi-Aguobu owa road, Okpueze Umumba road, Ikenga- Awha Imezi road, Ihuezi Obinofia Ndiuno cave/ water fall road, Afor Oghe-Amankwo road etc. Also, there were efforts towards construction of health centers in communities of Ezeagu.

Subsequently, self-help development initiatives are significantly popular in most Ezeagu communities. It is instructive to note that Ezeagu has one of the most organized and productive town development unions in Enugu state. Almost all the communities in Ezeagu have a viable women association known as Umuada which has contributed meaningful in community development's effort. An example is the achievement recorded by Aguobu-owa women association. With the determination to drive development efforts in Aguobu-owa community, all the women in this community were contributing two hundred naira (₦200) annually as a project levy. With effective public fund management, they were able to dig and maintain a functional bore hole and ensured consistent electricity supply in the community. They had often acted as the driving force for the men in contributing to the community development projects by periodically grading the community roads. This laudable initiative was applauded and, it serves as a complementary measure to the effort of the Council government in the development of the local government.

However, there are obvious challenges militating against development process in Ezeagu communities in reference to the *second research question*. In emphatic sense, the fundamental challenges militating against rural development in Ezeagu local government are enormous. In this vein, it is argued that Ezeagu Local government like other local government areas in Nigeria is faced with constraining challenge of finance. Financial problem of local government in Nigeria are of various dimensions, each with its peculiar causes and implications. For instance, Awofeso (2000) argued that virtually all local governments in historical Nigeria at one time of the other had laid claim to financial insufficiency as a major reason, for their ineffectiveness to accomplish their primary responsibilities even when their statutory allocation from the Federal Account had been on the increase from 10% to 20%. In reference to Ezeagu local government, the indigenes are yet to see transparent and prudent management of statutory allocations and IGR to respond effectively to expectations of the people and communities.

Another constraint observed is inadequate technical manpower in Ezeagu local government area. Hence, the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of local government can also be attributed to shortage of trained manpower to primary responsibilities. From observational findings, successive executive chairmen often assign technical responsibilities to uneducated and inexperienced persons in bid to satisfy partisan interests which has adversely contributed to poor condition of service delivery. And, even educated staff of Council are not periodically exposed to workshops to improve on their career, accomplish efficiently targets of the government and meet with the expectations of rural population.

Subsequently, the credibility of Ezeagu local government and targets of rural transformation of the area are fervently challenged by the constraint of corrupt practices that fraught process of governance. Thus, the problem of corruption and misappropriation of

funds which is a common feature of most public sectors in Nigeria is enormously felt in Ezeagu local government. As Ugwu (2000) aptly identified corrupt practices which reflects in Nigeria local government system which is also peculiar to policy makers in Ezeagu local government. These sharp practices are:

- (a) Inflation of contract awards and over invoicing
- (b) Ghost worker syndrome
- (c) Undue claims and frivolous traveling allowances
- (d) Improper remittance of generated funds to the council from mass transit bases, rate, and commercial undertakings etc.

Consequently, these constraints have created deplorable conditions or challenges of social welfare service wide spreading in communities of Ezeagu. In this vein, portable water is one of the human development index and indices for improved standard of living. However, it is one of the plights of Ezeagu people in various communities. A practical example of such a community is Awha in Ezeagu North East Development Centre. This is a community that has a village located on a hill. The women are creating water paths on the ground to properly channel flood water to a central place. According to them, alum is used to make water potable for drinking and cooking. Water for household chores like dish clearing, processing of farm produce (like cassava) and bathing is unavailable. However, household water provision is seen to be a specific role for women at the community level. As startling as it may sound, this community has a borehole at the base of this hill yet this village located on top of the hill faces this kind of challenges. Water tankers are not source of hope for these villagers because of the hilly topography. During the dry season, school children were reported to spend more than six hours in search of water. It is disgusting and really frustrating!

Furthermore, poor feeder road network is another daunting infrastructural challenge of Ezeagu communities. In spite of the interventions of successive Ezeagu local administrations in the area of road rehabilitation, inaccessible feeder roads were seen to be a major development challenge that grossly denies farmers access to markets and value from their farm produce. As agrarian communities, many of the farmer's food crops end up in spoilage in the farms. The buyers experience difficulties in getting to the farms during the rainy season due to bad roads. This results to waste of manpower and loss of farm income. It promotes subsistent farming as against the much promoted commercial farming, and invariably cripples economic development in these communities. One of such communities is used to lend credence this point is Mgbagbu-Owa Community in Ezeagu Central. As a border community with Ebenebe in Anambra State, It is a swampy Island surrounded by the Anam River with very bad roads. This Community is reported to have good farm produce like cassava, yam, rice etc, but for the very bad road, lacks access to markets. As was observed, the terrain is water logged and too slippery for vehicular movement. This ugly situation is one out many other ugly developments militating against improved social welfare of Ezeagu People.

Again, the problem of inadequate electric power supply is one of the fundamental challenges facing the country nay Enugu State and Ezeagu local government inclusive.

Furthermore, there are some communities that have abandoned water schemes due to nightmare of elliptic power supply. The water schemes were left non-functional due to insufficient electric voltage to power the boreholes in most communities of Ezeagu local government. An example of such a Community is Iwollo town in Ezeagu North Development Centre. Iwollo town was said to be the most commercial active community in Ezeagu. It has the presence of almost all the basic infrastructure, yet it has similar records of poverty issues like that of Awha. According to the community members, Iwollo town has two boreholes that were sunk in 1954 serving seven villages. These boreholes are currently non-functional due to insufficient energy to power them. Reported to be a contributing factor was that the sumo pump of one of the boreholes fell into the borehole. Since Iwollo town is a semi-urban community and relatively densely populated, the existing transformer was reported to be overloaded and could hardly serve the power demands of the community let alone powering the boreholes. Consequent to this, many small and medium scale enterprises were said to have left the community in search of electric power to support their businesses. Some of the indigenes that owned salons, welding businesses and other small and medium scale enterprises were put out of job. This has contributed to the increasing unemployment and increased crime rates.

It is also pertinent to note that ten health centres are functional today while some were either still under construction or moribund in the thirty-two communities of Ezeagu. This adverse development has indeed lead to poor health condition of the rural indigenes and even death in most cases. Most of the Health centers lack health facilities, drugs and trained personnel.

In a conclusive sense, these problems discussed have persisted over the years due to the failure of successive administrations in Ezeagu Local Government Area. Invariably other problems include income poverty, low income for farmers or farming household, high mortality rates, high illiteracy rate, unemployment among skilled workers, lack of empowerment among unskilled youths etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Indeed, Ezeagu local government area is grappling in myriad of challenges. And, what is happening in this local government area is a reflection of enormous problems bedeviling Nigeria local government system. From these findings, suggestions are put forward as measures to ameliorate hardship of rural indigenes across communities in Ezeagu.

First, it is stressed that rural indigenes of Ezeagu should show enthusiasm in voting credible persons with good antecedents to manage the affairs of the local government. Efforts should be made to create advocacy among the stakeholders and indigenes to search for credible persons and entrust the responsibility to stimulate rural development.

Secondly, there is need for synergy between the local government and community development unions for rapid transformation of Ezeagu communities. Hence, the local government should complement efforts of these communities through funding and technical expertise for self-help development initiatives.

As regards to rural development initiatives, there is need to shift from infrastructural development to human development. Efforts should be channeled towards empowering productive population of Ezeagu through skill-acquisition programme, soft-loans schemes etc. It is also noted that the local government should expedite actions in partnership with relevant public and private institutions to ensure adequacy of public utilities such as water, energy, telecommunication service, etc. Again, it is important that Ezeagu local government should ensure that every part of the council area benefits from the dividends of governance. Provision of basic social services and infrastructures should be equitably distributed among the villages and towns of the local government area to reduce menace of marginalization and exclusion.

Most importantly, the council government should expedite action to tackle health challenges of the Ezeagu indigenes. The local government in collaboration with state government and private sector should equip the moribund health centers (with medical personnel, drugs, facilities, social services and infrastructures) and create additional ones in response to health challenges and expectations.

The local government council in collaboration with local government service commission should recruit graduates as staff and exposed serving personnel to periodic workshop to promote efficiency in service-delivery. It is anticipated that technical and functional manpower is expedient for the efficient realization of rural development targets.

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