VOL. 12 NO. 2,
MAY, 2026
E-ISSN 3027-1533
P-ISSN 3026-8648

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of African Innovation & Advanced Studies (JAIAS)

Objectives and Challenges of Rural Development in Nigeria: A Study of Okigwe LGA, Imo State, Nigeria

Felix Ugochukwu Amadi, PhD
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State
Corresponding Author: felixugochukwuamadi@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajaias.v12i2.097

Abstract

This work focused on rural development in Nigeria: objectives and challenges**.** The work was carried out to identify the major hindrances to development and the solution to the problems. The researcher used the 22 communities in Okigwe LGA Imo State. The work was anchored on structural functional theory. Survey research design was used and questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using percentages. The findings revealed that there is significant impact of neglect/ political marginalization on rural development in Imo State; inadequate community participation has contributed to poor rural development in Imo State; and there is significant relationship between lack of basic amenities and rural development in Imo State. The study concludes that the government can improve the standard of living in the rural communities through rural development. It was recommended that the rural community people should be involved in making and implementing rural development policies. Also, both federal, state and local governments should effectively implement rural development projects.

Key words: rural development, neglect/ political marginalization, inadequate community participation and lack of basic amenities

Introduction

To make people living in rural communities to enjoy comfortable live, stay in the communities, and achieve their socio-economic goals, there is need for rural development. According to Ozoemenam (2019), when there is improved rural

development, the people in rural communities will enjoy steady electric power supply, security of lives and properties, good road network, functional primary health care, qualitative primary education, and there will be improved rural development and rural communities will enjoy good standard of living. Community development is therefore the improvement in the human capital and infrastructural aspects of rural communities or villages. In this case, the major role of government at federal, states and local levels is to improve development at the rural level. The Cambridge University Conference on African Administration of 1946, cited in Nwankwo (2019) defined rural development as a movement to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forth coming by the use of technique for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement... It includes the whole range of development activities in the districts, whether these are under taken by the Government or unofficial bodies (Abugu, 2014). As a process, it is seen as "a process of education by which people of all ages and all interests in the community learn to share their thought, their ideals, their aspirations, their joy and their sorrows in a large measure to mold and shape their communal destiny for themselves". It is a process of self discovery by which the people of a community learn to identify and solve their communal problems.

However, the focus of this work is on challenges of rural development in Nigeria which include lack of national philosophical base; poor formulation and implementation of rural development policies; lack of integrated pilot demonstration; neglect/political marginalization; low participatory; inadequate community participation; lack of spatial focus in rural development; lack of industrialization; lack of housing programmes; inter/intra community conflicts; economic problem: lack of basic amenities; poverty: lack of mechanized system of agriculture; corruption; and funding is a big challenge. Based on the foregoing, rural development may be achieved effectively when the Nigeria governments promote development in the rural communities. Such rural development could be achieved when the state governments stop interfering in the political and administrative activities of the local governments; when the local government receive their money directly from the federation account and promote internally generated revenue; when the local government officials are elected directly from the people and play their functions positively; and when the local government political administrative officials and other stakeholders avoid corruption in performing their function and therefore play positive role in promoting human capital and infrastructural development at the rural community level.

Statement of the Problem

About 70 percent of Africa's poor are rural and Nigeria's population is predominantly rural with rural communities' dwellers making up 70% of the total population (Ekwonna, 2014; Nwankwo, 2019). In Nigeria, recent estimate by the World Bank (2022) as cited in Ibe (2019) indicates that over 58 percent of the country's population live below the poverty line, do not enjoy good road network, good health care system, security and many other life benefits. For that, there are major gains to be made in reducing rural underdevelopment by focusing on

development programmes. Many governments of Nigeria (and Imo State) in the past have engaged in rural development programmes, though many of them were not successful. These programmes had faulty backgrounds, no community involvement, riddled with corruption, no political will to do what is right and follow the programmes to a logical conclusion. In some cases the rural development efforts ended up enriching the political class with little or no benefit for the rural people. Based on that, this work focused on the obstacles to rural development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to evaluate the rural development in Nigeria focusing on its objectives and obstacles. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the impact of neglect/political marginalization on rural development in Imo State.
2. To identify the extent inadequate community participation has contributed to rural underdevelopment in Imo State.
3. To determine the relationship between lack of basic amenities and rural development in Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered to obtain the findings or results of the study:

1. What are the impacts of neglect/political marginalization on rural development in Imo State?
2. To what extent does inadequate community participation contribute to rural underdevelopment in Imo State?
3. What is the relationship between lack of basic amenities and rural development in Imo State?

Research Hypotheses

Based on our objectives of the study and research questions, the following research hypotheses guided the study.

Ho1: There is no significant impact of neglect/political marginalization on rural development in Imo State.

Ho2: Inadequate community participation has not contributed to rural underdevelopment in Imo State.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between lack of basic amenities and rural development in Imo State.

Rural Development

Basically, rural development is a derivation of two main concepts: rural and development. For Ndoh (2015), rural entails an undeveloped village setting. Although defined in varying ways,

rural development implies mutually related development activities and situations at the rural level. It is geared towards solving the problems of the community in order to raise their standard of living as well as promoting social welfare and development (Sanders, 1968). Rural development has also been viewed as an integrated rural development. It is a planned and determined effort of the government and other interested agencies alongside those of rural communities to cooperatively tackle rural development problems so as to improve and increase the per capita income and the welfare of the people (Alemoh, 2015). The integrated approach involves the provision of road, schools, water, electricity, etc. to encourage village youngsters to stay at home, work on the land rather than rush to cities and increase the problems of over population, robbery, slum and so on (Ubah, 2016).

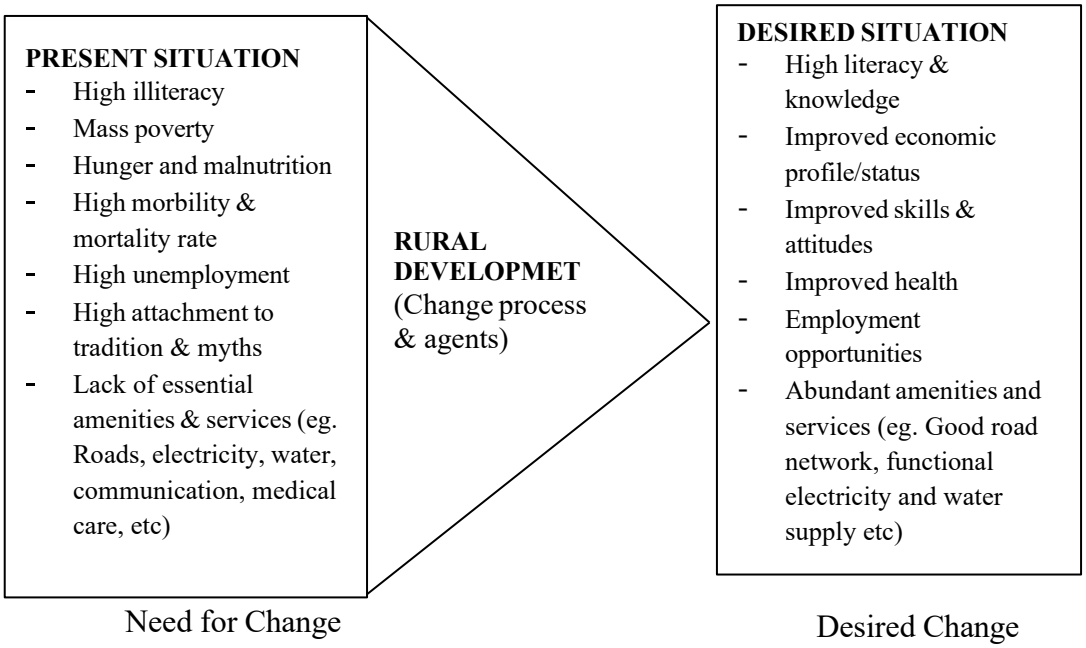
The process of rural development involves various activities from tackling of specific tasks on aspects of community welfare to multipurpose programmes aimed at the transformation of the social organization and values of the whole community. The rationale is to ginger up individuals and make them act as a group, and develop their talents in order to solve welfare problems. It is conceived as a process, a method, a programme or a movement. Actually, it is viewed as a process in the life of the community by which the people plan and act together for the satisfaction of their felt needs. In the process, individuals are assisted to acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge needed to effectively participate in programmes designed to promote their well-being (Tosin, 2012). Rural development strives to educate and motivate people for self help with a view to developing responsible local leadership among them, as well as inculcating in them a sense of citizenship and a spirit of civic consciousness (Anyanwu, 1981).

Oluseyi (2018), avers that rural development is actually focused on organized human and natural resources designed to provide solution to the perennial problems of poverty and deprivation of rural folks with a view of raising their living conditions. For rural development to work, there must be organized human and natural resources designed to provide a solution to the continuing problem of poverty and deprivation of rural people with the view to lifting them to a better state of life. For this to happen, both the human and natural resources in the rural areas have to be fully and meaningfully engaged. This is where the bottom-up and top-down approach of rural development comes in. Here, government has to be fully involved to motivate the rural people. Ibe (2019) defined rural development as the improvement of the living standard of the people of low income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining.

This means that the rural people had to be put on the path of development and then allowed to improve. Rural development here has to be self-sustaining, meaning that the people will continue where government and external supporters stopped. Rural development as summed from the above is a process that which empowers the local people for the improvement of their lives through enactment of policies, organization and application of principles, self-sustaining strategies and thorough changes in the social and economic structures, institutions, and relationship among the people. These improvements of life are in the areas of qualitative

healthcare, gainful employment, improved nutrition, good quality education, adequate security of life and property, improved income, etc. This makes rural development a participating process where the rural dwellers are involved in the decision-making process. The diagram below is a summary of the rural development process.

Fig.1: Rural Development Process



Source: Ibe, I.B (2019). Local government and rural development in Nigeria: Orlu LGA of Imo State. *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2(2):4-6.

Approaches to Rural Development

An approach is a means through which a particular goal is achieved. Rural development is not a haphazard affair and must be systematically executed through the global practices to garner the interest, support and participation of the people to achieve their overall development. Eze (2005) depicts rural development approaches as a procedure which utilizes some facilities associated with particular arrangement and management techniques to involve identifiable stakeholders in rural development. Approaches to rural development both geographical and subject matter scope, in community development projects; its application is basically because it has been developed from ideal rural environment variables and developed on basis of experience to involve indices, which could work in different ecological environment (Ibe, 2019). The approaches to rural development are as follows;

1. **Idealistic approach:** The idealistic approach is also known as activist or political approach. It focuses on mobilizing youths to participate in group social activities that would promote meaningful transformation in rural communities. The approach empowers and positions the youths for gainful participation in activities desired by

the rural people contrary to engagements in crimes. Ibe (2019) affirms that the idealistic approach had often yielded development of useful programmes that bring about psychological, emotional and attitudinal reforms of young people in rural communities thereby making rural communities truly transformed.

2. **Social development approach:** The social development approach of rural development lays much emphasis on the integration of social and economic development programmes in conjunction with mass literacy for self management and political empowerment. Unlike the idealistic approach with focuses on youth mobilization, the social development approach emphases on personal improvement as a channel for effective rural development. The approach improves personal qualities of individual members of a rural area rather than their material possessions. This connotes that emphasis is on human capacity development at individual levels with the aim to make them develop integrally on all aspects of human life.
3. **Agriculture extension approach:** This approach basically combines both educational and motivational procedures to achieve rural community development to more productive economy from its traditional state. The approach utilizes basic extension principles to sensitize the rural people on the need to develop putting in full gear, the process of decision making in rural development. Agricultural extension which is critical to successful agricultural transformation will help to educate rural people on their potentialities and the resources available and measures of contribution to rural development (Ladele, Igodan, Agunga & Fadairo, 2015). The approach tends to identify areas of agricultural research improvement and uses the information so gained to transfer basic knowledge to rural farmers in rural communities. This based on already existing structure to effect harmonization. The benefit of this approach is aimed on effecting agricultural development which is a sine qua non to food security and national development. Agricultural extension normally prepares the local leadership to encourage participation among rural people, engage meaningfully with their community development programmes. The above achievement of the agricultural development approach are made through understanding rural dynamics, involvement of social tools and cooperation with existing local leadership structure in order to motivate group participation for rural development (Eze & Igbokwe, 1997). This approach is a pragmatic approach to development programmes
4. **Community work group approach:** This approach is an emerging social work methodological approach to rural development. It shifts from original concept to social work on individual method only. Thus it emerges as a result of shift in emphasis from individual approach to provision of community social service to groups basically because the welfare of groups would make more impact than individual in rural development (Ibe, 2019). This means that groups replace individuals in the scheme of things in the rural community. One of the overriding gains of this approach is that aids and support received by the groups of this approach are utilized to achieve self-control

and improve their standard of living commonly, so the approach is almost a communal approach involving every individual in the community as a group.

5. **Technological approach:** The technological approach to rural development emphasizes the transformation of facts of rural society especially the agricultural sector. It is appalling that agricultural practices in the rural areas are purely traditional. It is appealing though that the trend had not changed even in this 21st century. This implies that there should be a shift from the use of local, farming implements to the use of semi-modern technology. This approach is completely entrusted to total orientation of the local people on the importance, need and use of modern technology in agriculture. This will go a long way to enhance acceptability and usage. The technology approach advocates improved farming practices, improved seedings, storage system, insecticides, pesticides and fertilizers. Embracing the technological approach will lead to improvement in agricultural production.

Stages of Rural Development

In the words of Eze (2005) a variable rural development programmes follows definite stages of operation. These stages which are in sequence and guide the focus of a rural development includes; need assessment, the planning stage, prioritizing objective, deterring, resources, programme design, programmme implementation and evaluation. These stages are further explained below;

1. **Need assessment or inquiry stage:** Before any action is taken in the practice of rural development, need assessment or inquiry must first be carried out. This is to identify the areas of need of the rural people and what could be done to solve that problem. This stage aims to obtain the necessary information about the areas and regarding their social and economic background, existing problems and felt needs as well as resources available within a rural community (Eze, 2005). The need assessment stage identifies the aspirations of members of the rural community, local leadership structure with their formal and informal grass root organizations. In identifying the problems, the team bears in mind that there are tangible and intangible problems prevalent among rural people. The tangible problems are the physical problems which are particularly visible e.g. poor road network, lack of electricity, poor health system, poor water supply, illiteracy, etc. while the intangible problems are the areas of marginalization in employment or sharing of national wealth, exploitation and degradation by local operating companies and many others. Identifying all these areas through tools like intentions, questionnaires, observation, focus group, photographs, interaction with rural people, recording, etc, will help chart the way for effective and progressive rural development.
2. **Planning stage:** Planning stage is very important in rural development. According to Ibegwam (2012), the manager without plan becomes victim of circumstances. Planning as solution of task or the method of organizing action. Also, Nosiri and

Nwachukwu (2018) posit that planning means to determine objectives of the organization, examination of the environment and forecasting changes and development of policies, procedures and necessary plans to help achieve the objectives in view of changing environment. It is apparent therefore judging from the above definitions that planning is needed on rural development to organize action, determine objectives, forecast changes and develop policy procedures and other plans necessary to achieve the objectives with recourse to the environmental changes. The success of planning is dependent on the information received during the inquiry or need assessment stage. Here the planning must be specified or accurate to identify the actual objectives of the rural development project. Planning takes care of all intended and unintended actions or issues which may arise during the implementation stage. It also embraces and positions all needed personnel like supervisors, monitoring team, rural change agents, representatives of rural groups and officials of other related agencies both governmental and non-governmental. Planning documents should be flexible and modifiable to accommodate important adjustments and basic changes for improvement. Finally, it should highlight the basic steps to be followed in the implementation of the project. This stage could also be referred to as objective selection stage.

3. **Prioritizing objectives:** After the planning or objective selection stage, there is the objectives prioritization stage. It makes for the careful arrangement of the selected objectives in a logical order or according to priority based on the pressing nature of a particular problem or need (Obi, 2019).
4. **Determining resources:** Rural development is done with resources. The appropriate resources for the specific work or project to be done had to be carried out. Resources could be human and material. Human resources mean the personnel which could be experts, with unique skills which is mandatory for the actualization of the rural development project. On the other hand, material resources could be money, construction materials, etc.
5. **Programme design stage:** A design is a specification of an object or procedures, referring to requirements to be met for them to solve a problem. The rural developers or officials having determined the resources needed for the programme of action. This include how the resources would be utilized, dates of particular activities to be carried out, duties and functions of professionals should be easily understood and flexible too.
6. **The implementation stage:** The implementation stage means action taking stage. It is a very critical stage in rural development. It is also called the take off stage. The success gained at the implementation stage depends on availability and adequacy of resources, personnel and cooperation of the rural people. This stage requires strict compliance to time and plan of the project. However, changes or modification could take place because of the flexibility inherent in the programme design, which must be

well communicated to the relevant groups involved in the rural development project (Ajaero, 2013).

7. **Evaluation stage:** Programme evaluation is a process of a thorough examination which the success of a rural development project is determined. It is carefully executed to ascertain how programme objectives have been carried out. Evaluation can be formative, stage by stage or summative. The formative involves the ongoing assessment of work done as the programme implementation progresses. The stage by stage evaluation is to determine work process in stage while the summative is the process where a full evaluation is done at the completion of implementation. It is also known as terminal stage, which means it is at the end of the project. The planning process or stage gives room for adjustment where faults or mistakes are found for corrections. This process is carried on until the project is totally completed.

Objectives of Rural Development

The general objective of rural development as a social activity is to improve the well-being of rural dwellers.

1. **Agricultural development:** Agricultural development is the process through which the government makes policies to enhance the growth of the agricultural sector of the economy for food security, employment and increase in foreign exchange. According to the Agricultural Council of Nigeria (2017), agricultural development is the synthesis of the framework and action plans of government design to achieve agricultural growth and development. Agricultural development goes a long way to affect domestic food, industrial value and great export potentials because they can provide food for the entire population and income for farmers as well as many economic agents involved in marketing agricultural products (Olukunle, 2013). Some of the agricultural development policies made to enhance agricultural development in Nigerian are National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Agricultural Development Project (ADP), Green Revolution (GR), Better Life Programme (BLM), *Ikuola Nkwu*, Imo Food Security Initiation (IFSI), Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) and many others. The aim of these agricultural development programmes was to create food, employment, increase the income of rural dwellers and also to generate foreign revenue. Agriculture is the major occupation of rural people and the major enduring source of food for the people and raw materials for industrial development.
2. **Job creation:** It is apparent that many rural dwellers are jobless: farming which is the main occupation in the rural areas has been left in the hand of the old people while the younger ones migrated to urban areas in search of white-collar jobs (Onyekwelu, 2018). Creating jobs or employment in the rural areas will empower rural dwellers economically and reduce to a great extent the mass exodus of youths from the rural to the urban areas.

3. **Health development:** The provision of adequate health care to citizens has become a major concern in Nigeria (Onwuyiariri, Nwachi and Nkwocha 2017). In support to the above, Ibe (2019) affirms that rural development is therefore targeted at providing the rural people with effective, reliable and affordable health service. When rural people have this access to quality healthcare, they will be healthy to carry out their daily activities and contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.
4. **Infrastructural development:** Infrastructural facilities provision helps for comfortable rural life, rural industrialization and reduction of rural- urban migration by youths (Egbe, 2014). This is because through rural infrastructural development, like portable water, electricity, good road network, effective communication facilities, rural life can be improved.
5. **Industrialization:** Rural industrialization means the location and localisation of industries in the rural areas. This will help to create jobs, acquisition of skills, services, values, improved income and products for rural dwellers.
6. **Educational opportunities:** Education is the knowledge, enlightenment, skills acquisition that make for decent living. It equips one with the information through which one could conquer the world and situations. Direction dispels ignorance, eliminates diseases and fights poverty to stand still. Providing education for the rural populace would equip them with the knowledge and skill to change and better their life and environment (Nwarieji and Ifeanyieze, 2016). Educational opportunities in the rural areas will also help to remove superstition and position the local people on the path of greatness and freedom from the belief that had held them bound for a long time.
7. **Comfortable life:** In recent times, the perspective about life in the rural areas has changed significantly. This is because people do not view life in the rural areas as life of poverty and pain, rather a normal life that one should live. Providing the necessary basic amenities, jobs, industrialization, agriculture development, quality healthcare, etc. in rural societies will help to enhance comfortable or quality life (Ajaero 2013). With the introduction of agricultural development, rural people will embark on large scale agriculture which will enhance their income and eradicate poverty with its attendant provision of food and raw materials for industries.

Challenges of Rural Development Efforts

Many rural development efforts at all levels are facing some challenges (Obi, 2019). It is obvious that a lot of money and time have been committed to rural development in Nigeria, yet the well-being of rural dwellers is yet to be improved. One would have thought that with all the amount of energy expended on rural development, that the story could have been different unfortunately, this is not so. At one time or the other, efforts to achieve rural development have proved abortive. This is because of certain factors that have remained as a cog in the wheel of rural development in Nigeria. These disturbing factors are called problems of rural development and they are discussed as follows;

1. **Lack of basic amenities:** Rural areas lack basic amenities like electricity, good road, network, pipe borne water, etc. good road network helps the rural people have access to the outside world, it enhances their interaction with people outside and also helps them to convey their agricultural produce to the urban markets (Nwarieji & Ifeanyieze, 2016). Electricity provision will help them to have access to information, attract industrialization and dissuade rural-urban migration while provision of pipe borne water will stop water borne diseases and give good healthy. Unfortunately, these are a mirage to local people as they are far from receiving these goodies. Infrastructural facilities are the facilities that help to support and make life easy and meaningful (Egbe, 2014). One could imagine where there is light, water, healthcare and communication constantly without any form of interruption, life will be highly enjoyable. But all these are lacking in most of Nigeria's rural societies. It is regrettable that up to this 21st century, some Nigerian rural society have not received electricity.
2. **Neglect/political marginalization:** The neglect of rural areas has remained from the colonial times thereby setting back rural development. Many rural areas are being threatened by erosion, acute water shortage, etc, but unfortunately, there have not been attended to, even though the cries of rural dwellers have reached the highest Heavens (Ibe, 2019). In Nigeria today, many rural areas are neglected and marginalized because they are from a particular section of the country or state e.g. South Eastern Nigeria and Emenbiam Autonomous Community in Imo State.
3. **Inadequate community participation:** Rural development in Nigeria is characterized by inadequate participation of rural people (Egbe, 2014). This is because most times, Government employs the top-bottom approach which does not give rural dwellers the opportunity to fully participate in rural development activities. In Nigeria, there has been poor participation of the people in rural areas on the nature of rural development needed (Uhegbu, 2017). This is mainly an imposition from government and other stakeholders. Advocates of rural development in recent times have maintained after various studies and attempts that rural participation is paramount to the attainment of sustainable rural development. This is because there is no real development without the involvement of its beneficiaries. In fact, it is justifiable that rural people identify their areas of felt need and be fully involved in the process of its implementation. Participatory rural development is the active involvement of communities in need assessment, determination of priorities, planning and execution of projects. It also refers to the contribution of potential beneficiaries to the realization of projects for their own development (Mansuri & Rao, 2004 cited in Nwachukwu & Eze, 2007). This incisive approach draws the attention of rural people and elicits the drive to commit themselves to the activities that would lift their lives from poverty. It is said that participation as an article of faith of rural development is a fundamental principle for any successful project or programme and the single most important key

to improving the livelihood of the world's poor (Karmar, Lawal, Babangida & Jahum, 2014). In their own contribution to the meaning of participation, Bappi, Singh and Dahiru (2018; P.54) defined participation as an active process in which the participants take initiatives and actions that are stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation over which they exert effective control. Participation could also mean that societies are allowed to have direct and final control in taking control concerning their affairs. This makes the people have full responsibility for management of their problems. In their own perspective, the United Nations (2005) observed community participation as a means of society to actively participate in the development process, to influence it and to live up to the expectations of development. Suppressed by, it is not all about the involvement of the rural dwellers in the development process but they must as a matter of necessity partake in the fruits thereof.

4. **Poor formulation and implementation of rural development policies:** Apart from the lack of national philosophical basis of rural development programmes, rural development has also suffered from poor policy formulation and implementation result from incomplete policy thought – through or ineffective implementation policy. This is because policy makers in Nigeria seem rather to be in a hurry that they do not take seriously the information process of policies. Policies also fail because of the inability of the policy makers to carry out feasibility study at the formation stage. Feasibility study entails research, while research and study must be carefully carried out by the bureaucrats or consultant firms before a policy is finally made and launched (Tumbari, 2014). Most rural societies in Nigeria lack the funds to face their challenges themselves. They lack funds to construct their roads, build their hospitals, construct classroom blocks, buy fertilizer, insecticides, seeds etc. All these hinder their productivity.
5. **Inter/intra community conflicts:** Inter/intra community conflicts are political factors that have bedeviled rural areas in Nigeria. This ugly trend has left many lives lost as many are maimed and property worth millions of naira destroyed as an outcome of inter and intra community conflicts (Ibe, 2019). Inter community conflict is a clash between one community and another, while intra community conflict is a clash among members of the same community. Inter and intra community conflicts are caused by struggles over farm lands, traditional rulership tussle, sharing of royalties from companies operating in the rural communities, secret cult supremacy, etc. many lives were lost in the intra community conflicts in Awara and Assa in Ohaji Epbema LGA of Imo State in 2018 (Obi, 2019). For the past two decades, many rural societies have witnessed series of communal conflicts. Most of these conflicts are caused by Ezeship tussles, land tussles, cult clashes over supremacy, etc. This ugly trend has slowed down the development of the rural society.
6. **Lack of national philosophical base:** Rural development in Nigeria lacked a philosophical, ideological and holistic foundation. This implies that rural dwellers are

not given time to be part of the decision that would improve their well being. All policy makers do is to sit in their cozy offices and dish out policies for rural development. Unfortunately most of these policies fail because they lacked that philosophical super structure that could make them viable and successful. Nwasiu calls it lack of institutional base (Nwasiu, 2014). A philosophical base is typified by an internal motivating and compelling force or commitment stemming from faith and love for the sapiens (human) in the rural sector and determination to work for their upliftment (Oluseyi, 2018).

7. **Lack of integrated pilot demonstration:** Commenting on the uncertainty of government effort to place rural development in its development strategies, Oluseyi (2018) argues that government had not defined rural development governance before 1976. He rather observed that what was in vogue was segmented or unco-ordianted rural development where it is assumed that new programmes in one community will have ripple effects on other communities and institutions (Oluseyi, 2018). The first Department of Rural Development at Federal level was established in 1976 to mobilize people, initiate local projects with local leadership, promote agriculture, rural development and community projects.
8. **Lack of industrialization:** The world today is in the era of industrialization and globalization. Unfortunately, Nigeria rural areas have not appropriated this modern trend as most of them have deficiency in industrial development. There are many natural resources found in the rural areas but these resources are taken to the cities for processing because there are no industries to process them in the rural areas (Ibe, 2019). Also investors both foreign and local find it difficult to invest in the rural areas because most industries are already concentrated in the urban areas. This has not helped matters but has rather encouraged rural-urban migration thereby imprisoning the rural people.
9. **Lack of housing programmes:** The problem of housing abounds in rural areas. This is one of the reasons the rural areas have remained undeveloped till date. Most people who work for Government in rural areas live in town (Uhegbu, 2017). This is because they don't find good houses to live in the rural areas. Unfortunately, most low cost schemes embarked by Government are concentrated in the cities than the rural areas that need them most. Although successive Nigeria Governments have initiated programmes for rural development but most of these programmes were poorly executed.
10. **Economic problems:** There are many economic problems that have hindered communities (Nosiri & Nwachukwu, 2018). Some of them are poverty, unemployment, half-employment, inadequate wages, land tenure system, and many more (Onyekwelu, 2018). Poverty means deprivation, many rural people are deprived of basic food intake, clothing, shelter, etc. also they are not gainfully employed and where some are employed, they are half-employed in the sense that their current

employment is not enough to take are of their daily necessities. They also face old age and sickness.

11. **Poverty:** Poverty is a state of deprivation of basic elements necessary for human survival in the society Nwarieji and Ifeanyieze (2016). the deprivation include clean water, good healthcare, quality education, quality food, good shelter, civil liberty, natural right, constant electricity, etc. The absence of all these constitute poverty.
12. **Lack of mechanized system of agriculture:** Agriculture is still bereft of improved or mechanized agriculture: Although agriculture is the predominant occupation of rural dwellers, it is appalling that it is done in a crude manner even in the 21st century. Hoes, cutlass, spades and ordinary bare hands are still used in agricultural activities. This has contributed to the failure of agriculture as an agent of rural and natural development because this way, it could not produce enough food for the mass consumption of the people and the required raw materials for industries.
13. **Corruption:** In his treatise about the menace of corruption to national development, Okonkwo (2009) posited that corruption is the biggest obstacle to the development and growth of Nigeria's rural society. Corruption is responsible for lack of development in the rural society, so that funds provided for its development are diverted to private use (Ibe, 2019). Subsequent Nigerian Governments have set up various rural development programmes but all of them failed because those in Government channeled the funds meant for such projects for their personal gains thereby leaving the rural community continually impoverished.
14. **Funding is a big challenge:** The challenge of funding has hindered rural development. The people of different rural areas do not effectively fund the development of their communities. The local and state governments do not effectively finance rural development programmes (Nnamocha, 2002:104). More so, over reliance on statutory allocations by some local governments which leads to a neglect or exploitation of the internal sources of revenue is a major challenge. This is a problem as it has made rural communities to remain where they are.

Empirical Review

This topic is not new; hence some researches have been done in related areas.

Onoh (2015) examined the role of local government in community development in Nigeria using Udi local government Area of Enugu State as the focal point (1999 – 2007). The study was carried out to examine the contribution of local government in community development. Based on that, the researcher formulated three research objectives, three research questions and two hypotheses. The researcher utilized only secondary sources of data and system theory was also employed for the study. Based on literature work consulted, it was discovered that local governments can play positive role in promoting rural infrastructure and human development at the community level; but the problem of inadequate finance, state government interferences and lack of proper orientations and corruption are problems hindering the local government from playing their functions well. He therefore concludes that the stability and

growth of Nigerian communities depends on the roles of the local government. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the state governments should allow the local governments to perform its functions well by conducting local government elections as that will lead to community development; and the local government administrations and leaders should pay attention to rural road maintenance, provision of pipe borne water and human development training.

Ozoemenam (2019) focused on the role of women in rural development using Nkwere autonomous community as the focal point. The study was carried out based on neglect of women in rural development. The objectives of the study focused on the relationship between socio-economic status of women and their contributions to rural development, impact of educational training for woman development and areas which women have contributed in rural development. Based on the above, three research questions and two hypotheses, guided the study Descriptive survey research design was used and questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. The people of Nkwere autonomous community made up the population, from where 180 persons were sampled using purposive sampling technique. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage and the hypotheses were tested using chi-square. The researcher used social responsibility theory and system theory to analyze the subject matter. Based on the data analysis, the findings revealed that there is significant relationship between socio-economic status of women and contribution to rural development, there is significant impact of educational empowerment on women contribution to rural development and that women have significantly contributed in building of health centres, town hall and training of their children. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the Nigerian government should empower women through educational and technical training to enable them contribute significantly to community development; and the Nigerian government should pragmatically implement the 35% affirmative action which will promote effective women representation in political, economic and social life in Nigeria.

Ibe (2019) analyzed local government and rural development in Nigeria using Orlu LGA of Imo State as the focal point. Based on that, the researcher formulated and used four research objectives, four research questions and two research hypotheses. The researcher therefore employed descriptive survey research design for the study and questionnaires were used as the instrument of data collection. Out of the 200 questionnaire distributed, only 194 were returned and used. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and frequencies, the hypotheses were tested using chi-square. The findings revealed that Orlu local government is playing significant role in service delivery through road maintenance, electrification and human capital development. But the problem of political interferences, low level of finance, inability of the community members to pay their taxes, inability of the state government to conduct local government election, lack of effective internally generated revenue and problem of corruption are the major challenges affecting Orlu local government area in their service delivery efforts. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that both federal and state governments should be constitutionally restrained from interfering within constitutional

powers of the local government for effective service delivery; political and administrative leaders at the Orlu local government council should be effectively trained so that they can know the strategies to be employed in enhancing electrification, road maintenance and other aspects of service delivery; and community development through Orlu L.G.A should be made more practical and functional. Here, different communities, age grades, town unions and all progressive associations should always organize meetings, discuss and identify some developmental problems of the area and look for ways to solving such problems. The people of Orlu Local Government Area should promote the four tiers of government of the state government as that will encourage infrastructure and community development in the local government area.

Nwarieji and Ifeanyieze (2016) focused on challenges associated with the implementation of unified agricultural extension services (UAES) programme in Imo State. Specific objectives were to determine the administrative, financial and logistic challenges associated with the implementation of UAES programme. Three research questions guided the study. Null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted survey (descriptive) design and was conducted in Imo State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 22,988 comprising of 22,880 farmers and 108 extension agents in the study area. Total samples of 336 were used consisting of 226 contact farmers and 108 extension agents. The instrument for data collection was Structured Questionnaire complemented by the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide. The questionnaire comprised items arranged in clusters. The instrument was face validated by five experts and the internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha method which yielded the reliability coefficients of 0.70. The instruments were administered through personal contacts with the help of six assistants. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. Information collected from the focus group discussion was qualitatively analyzed. The findings of the study revealed that administrative constraints include inadequate market for disposing farm produce, poor coordination of activities of farmers, inadequate training of extension staff; financial constraints include high cost of adoption of technology, inadequate finance; and logistics constraints include low level of education, use of traditional implements were the challenges associated with implementation of UAES programme. Based on the findings of the study, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made which include among others the need for adequate provision of agricultural inputs at a subsidized rate and training of extension agents for effective implementation of UAES programme in order to sustain agricultural production in Imo State, Nigeria.

Odalonu (2015) examined the challenges confronting local government administration in effective and efficient social service delivery for rural development at the grassroots. Secondary data formed the basis of data collection, interpretation and analysis. Data was collected through a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the subject of inquiry. The thrust of analysis was systematically prosecuted under select themes and sub-themes designed to address the salient aspects of the paper's objective. The paper identified lack of funds,

corruption, and undue political interference amongst others as major constraints to local government service delivery for rural development. The paper provided some measures to ensure efficient and effective social service delivery at the local level so as to enhance rural development. Such measures include constitutional reforms to ensure total autonomy of local government, enhanced revenue allocation, capacity and institutional building that produce the human capital that is committed to the principles of good governance at local level. The paper concludes that if the above measures are employed, local governments in Nigeria would improve in the provision of essential social services to the people at the local level.

Theoretical Framework

The relevance of theory in social science and development studies research cannot be overemphasized. That is why Ugwulebo (2003; p.38) observed that:

> …situations usually warrant the engineering of theories. Such theories are necessary in offering explanations to issues and more often than not, rationalize given situations and actions. Theories are not alien to the behavioural and social sciences and even the entire academic disciplines. There are surfeit of them. Each theory has its own postulations, ends to serve, interpretation of reality, basic components and of course, observable conclusion.

In this study, the researcher used two theories. They are the structural functional theory and Vacuum-Filling Theory.

The Structural Functional Theory

Gabriel Almond and his associate in 1954 developed the structural functional theory. Almond focused on identification of functions of the polity in modern western system and how these functions are performed in non-western systems in the process of modernization (Unanka, 2004). This theory holds that all the systems in a society have structures or institutions and these structures or institutions have functions to perform for the survival of the society. Therefore, all political systems have structures which they must perform certain task in order to achieve equilibrium. According to Ekwonna (2014) "the objective concern of structural functionalism is to identify which structures constitute which system, which structures perform which functions, and which functions impact on the system as a result of the relationship it creates with the structure and the rest of the structures in the system."
According to Varma (1975), structural functional analysis revolves around certain concepts more important of which are: functions and structures. In using structural functional analysis, three basic questions are usually asked, namely: (a) What basic functions are fulfilled in any given system, (b) By what structures and (c) Under what conditions?

The basic assumptions of this theory include:

1. All systems have structures which can be identified and these structures have certain functions to perform.

2. The broad aims and principles underlying a social structure can be identified
3. There is an interconnection between the parts of the society and tensions are resolved by the parts working together.
4. The society serves as a single interconnected system where each structure performs certain functions and interacts with each other to achieve maintenance of equilibrium (Sharma 1984 and Johari 1983 cited in Ekwonna, 2014).

The relevance of this theory to this work is to guide us to explain the activities of government as a structure in Imo State political system towards the development and maintenance of survival of the communities in Imo State. The use of structural functional theory as the framework of analysis is based on its suitability for this study. The community government council is seen as a sub structure in Imo State political system with the aim to achieve development, ensure community participation and preservation of cultural values. And the failure of government to perform its function will automatically undermine the survival of the Imo State political system. The formation of government in Imo State shows that the administration does not have the desire to bring government structure at the door step of the people, so as to perform development functions and achieve rural development objectives.

Methodology

- **Research design:** For the purpose of this study, the research design that was adopted by the researcher is descriptive survey research design.
- **Population of the study:** The population of this study is therefore made up of the entire 200 community stakeholders in 22 communities, in Okigwe local government area, Imo State. They covered the current and past president generals, women leaders, youths leaders and traditional council members, who can give information on rural development.
- **Sample size:** The sample size is Mathematically derived using the Taro Yamane's formula as thus:

$$n = \frac{n}{1+n(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

e = margin of error = 5% or 0.05

$$n = \frac{200}{1+200(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{200}{1+200(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{200}{1+0.5}$$

$$n = \frac{200}{1.5}$$

$$n = 133.33$$

:. 133 people were sampled

The simple random sampling technique was adopted from the non probability method which entails random selection of staff.

- **Instrument of data collection:** In this study, the researcher used questionnaire as the research instrument.
- **Validity/reliability:** Content validity and test retest reliability were used.
- **Methods of data analysis:** The data collected in this study were analyzed using simple percentage and Pearsons' product moment correlation coefficient.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 133 copies of the questionnaire distributed by the researcher, only 120 copies were properly filled, returned and used for this study.

Item 1: Neglect/political marginalization serves as challenge to rural development in Imo State.

Table 1: Responses on if neglect/political marginalization serve as challenge to rural development in Imo State.

Options	No of Responses	% of Responses
Strongly Agree	43	35.8
Agree	35	29.2
Disagree	32	26.7
Strongly Disagree	7	5.8
Undecided	3	2.5
Total	**120**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2026).

Table 1 indicates that 35.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that neglect/political marginalization serve as challenge to rural development in Imo State, whereas 29.2% of the respondents agreed. Also, 26.7% of the respondents disagreed while 5.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed. However, 2.5% of the respondents were undecided.

Item 2: Inadequate community participation has contributed to poor rural development in Imo State.

Table 2: Responses on if inadequate community participation has contributed to poor rural development in Imo State.

Options	No of Responses	% of Responses
Strongly Agree	39	32.5
Agree	29	24.2
Disagree	28	23.3
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3
Undecided	14	11.7
Total	**120**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2026).

Table 2 indicates that 32.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that inadequate community participation has contributed to poor rural development in Imo State whereas 24.2% of the respondents agreed. 23.3% of the respondents disagreed while 8.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Also, 11.7% of the respondents were undecided.

Item 3: Lack of basic amenities is one of the obstacles to rural development in Imo State.

Table 3: Responses on if lack of basic amenities is one of the obstacles to rural development in Imo State.

Options	No of Responses	% of Responses
Strongly Agree	44	36.7
Agree	36	30
Disagree	34	28.3
Strongly Disagree	4	3.3
Undecided	2	1.7
Total	**120**	**100**

Source: Field Survey (2026).

Table 3 shows that 36.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of basic amenities is one of the obstacles to rural development in Imo State, whereas 30% of the respondents agreed but 28.3% of the respondents disagreed while 3.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed. However, 1.7% of the respondents were undecided.

Discussion of Findings

For the hypothesis one, it was found that there is significant impact of neglect/political marginalization on rural development in Imo State. In view of Ibe (2019), government marginalization of some ethnic groups and communities has hindered development in Nigeria. For the hypothesis two, it was found that inadequate community participation has contributed to poor rural development in Imo State. According to Uhegbu (2017), the community members should be involved in community development programmes to ensure positive results.

For the hypothesis three, it was found that there is significant relationship between lack of basic amenities and rural development in Imo State. The major challenge to rural communities includes bad road system, poor or no electricity, and very poor infrastructural development (Ozoemenam, 2019).

Conclusion

Rural development has a long history in Nigeria. It dates back to pre-colonial Nigeria when rural communities initiated and implemented their own development projects with little or no external assistance. Traditional communities depended largely on self help. They initiated development projects to meet their communal felt needs. In traditional Nigeria, rural development was often known as community development. Development is a process of inclusion where people are allowed to meet their own aspirations. For that, rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of rural dwellers. In the traditional Igbo society of Nigeria, rural development was an undertaking that involved all in the society (the elderly, the women, the umuada and the youths, and the age grades). This study concludes that the government can improve the standard of living in the rural communities through rural development.

The Way Forward

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should avoid marginalization and carry all communities along in its rural development effects.
2. The rural community people should be involved in making and implementing rural development policies.
3. Infrastructural development in the rural areas like road construction, building of schools, and provision of water, building of market and parks and electrification should all be encouraged by the state and local government authorities.

References

Abdulwakeel, S. (2017). Historical timeline of Nigeria rural development programmes: with focus on its failure. Retrieved on 4th June, 2019 at https://www.researchgate.net/publi cation/230842102.

Abugu, S.O (2014). *The role and challenges of local government in community development: An insight review of public administration and management.* Vol 3, no. 6

Agricultural Council of Nigeria (2017). *Agricultural policies*. Retrieved on 10th Dec. 2019 at http://arcnigeria.org/index.php/explore/the-council/our-vision/.

Ajaero, C.K (2013). The effects of community government on rural-urban migration in Southeastern Nigeria. *International Journal of Population Research,* 1(2).

Alemoh, M. (2015). The role of local government in community development in Nigeria using Isiala Mbano LGA of Imo State as the focal point. *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, vol 1(3).

Amalu, U.C (1998). *Agricultural research and extension delivery system in sub-Saharan Africa.* Calabar: University of Calabar Press

Anyanuwu, C.N (1981). *Community development: The Nigerian perspective.* Ibadan: Educational Publishers.

Apantaku, S.O (1999). Target audience adoption of agricultural technologies: Case for a new linkage mechanism. *Journal of Extension System*, 1(5), 111-118.

Bappi, U., Singh, D. & Dahiru, K. (2018). The effect of community participation on community development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advances in Arts, Science and Engineering,* 6(13), 22-56.

Chambers, R. (2013). *Rural development, putting the last first.* New York: Routledge.

Egbe, E.J (2014). Rural and community development in Nigeria: An assessment. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Nigerian Chapter),* 2(2), 44-66.

Ekong, E.E (2003). *Rural sociology: An introduction and analysis of rural Nigeria (2nd ed.).* Uyo: Dove Educational Publishers.

Ekwonna, S.I (2014). *Contemporary political analysis: The science in the study of political phenomenon in the post scientific times.* Owerri: Great Stars Publishers.

Eze, S.O & Igbokwe, E.M (1997). *Prospects of involving grassroots organizations in agricultural extension service in Enugu State Nigeria*; In Olowu, T.A (ed). *Proceedings of the third annual national conference of the agricultural extension society of Nigeria,* 98-104.

Eze, S.O (2005). *Rural community development*. Enugu: Snap Press Ltd.

Farinda, A.J & Adisa, B.O (2005). *Roles of Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Community Associations (CAs) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria (AESON).*

Ibe, I.B (2019). Local government and rural development in Nigeria: Orlu LGA of Imo State. *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2(2):4-6.

Ibegwam, F. (2012). *Why we introduced the fourth-tier of Government in Imo State by Agbasu, Vanguard.* Retrieved on 15th November, 2019 at https://www.vanguardng. com/2012/07/why-we-introduced-the-fourth-tier-government-in-imo-by-agbasu

Iwuchukwu, J.C and Igbokwe, E.M (2012). "Lessons from agricultural policies and programmes in Nigeria". *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 5(1), 11-21.

Jibowo, G. (2005). *Essentials of rural sociology*, Abeokuta: Gbemi Sodipo Press Ltd.

Ladele, A.A., Igodan, C., Agunaga, R. and Fadairo, O. (2015). Agricultural extension in Nigeria's transformation agenda: Key recommendations based on a field study. *International Journal of Agricultural Extension,* 3(2), 89-96. Retrieved on 23rd January, 2018 at http://www.escijournals.net/IJAE.

Machethe, C, (1995). *Approaches to rural development in the third world: Lesson for South Africa.* Retrieved on 5th April 2019 at https://:www.researchgate.net/publication/ 23513180.

Mansuri, G. & Rao, V. (2004). Community based driven development: A critical review. *The World Bank Research Observer,* 19(1), 57-87.

Ndoh, C.A (2015). *An Introduction to Political Science*. Owerri: Concave Publication.

Nnamocha, P.N (2005). *Public finance for a development economy.* Owerri: Bon Publication.

Nosiri, U. and Nwachukwu, E.C (2018). The people's perception on the role of community government council in community participation and development in rural communities of Imo State. *International Journal for Equity in Health,* 15(12),

Nwachukwu, I.N & Eze, C.I (2007). Impact of selected rural development programmes on poverty alleviation in Ikwuano L.G.A, Abia State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Food Agriculture Nutrition and Development,* 7(5), 1020-1030.

Nwankwo, O. (2019). Traditional institutions and community development in Imo State: Ikeduru LGA. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 2(2).

Nwarieji, S.P and Ifeanyieze, J.O (2016). Challenges associated with the implementation of Unified Agricultural Extension Services (UAES) programme in Imo State. *OSR Journal of Agriculture and Veterinary Science (IOSR-JAVS),* 9(8), 2319-2372.

Nwasiu, R. (2014). Sustainable rural development programmes in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. *African Journal of Science and Technology,* 5(9), 62-79.

Obi, R.I (2019). *Agricultural development policies and sustainable development in Imo State.* An unpublished Ph.D seminar, presented to the department of political science, faculty of social sciences, Abia State University, Uturu.

Odalonu, H.B (2015). The challenges confronting local government administration in effective and efficient social service delivery for rural development at the grassroots. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, 1(5), 24-32.

Ofana, O.G., Efefiom, E.C and Omini, E.E (2016). "Constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria". *International Journal of Development and Economic,* 2(1), 66-91.

Okonkwo, O. (2009). SERP adrises FG on Clinton's criticis. *Sunday Sum*. August 16, 5(334), 54.

Olukunle, O.T (2013). Challenges and prospects of agriculture in Nigeria: The way forward. *Journal of Economics and Development*, 4(16), 37-45.

Oluseyi, O. (2018). Assessment of rural development strategy in Nigeria: Lessons from the past. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 1(3), 69-82.

Onoh, D. (2015). The role of local government in community development in Nigeria using Udi local government Area of Enugu State as the focal point (1999 – 2007). *Journal of Political Science*, 3(1), 67-89.

Onwujiariri, C.M., Nwachi, C.C & Nkwocha, E.E (2017). Rural healthcare service provision and implication in rural development of Imo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Latest Engineering Research and Application*, 2(9). Retrieved on 17th June, 2019 at www.ijlera.com.

Onyekwelu, R.U (2018). Community development: The CGC option. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(1):8.

Onyenacho, O.C., Amazigo, U.I, Njepuome, O., Nwaorgu, S.A and Okeibunor, J.C (2016). Perception and utilization of public health services in Southeast Nigeria: Implication for health crae in communities with different degrees of urbanization. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 15(12). Retrieved on 26th January, 2020 at www.equity healthj.biomedcentral.com

Ozoemenam, U.F (2019). The role of women in rural development: Nkwere autonomous community. *International Journal of Management Sciences,* 1(2).

Sanders, P.O (1968). *Model for and involvement of local communities in development projects and programmes of local government authorities in Nigeria*, Kamla-Raj.

Shepherd, A. (1998). *Sustainable rural development*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Tosin, U.S (2012). *Community development in Nigeria: Theory and features (3rd ed).* Lagos: Labofin and Company.

Tumbari, A.C (2014). *Public policy making and analysis: Issues, concept and applications.* Aba: Amrich Concepts

Ubah, C.N (2016). *The impact of grassroot democracy in Nigeria development*. Owerri: Bridget Consult.

Ugwulebo, E.O.O (2003). *Religious crisis in Nigeria: The vacuum – filling theory.* Owerri: Cel-Bez & Co. Publishers.

Uhegbu, A.N (2017). The impact of rural information on community development programmes in the Imo State of Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences,* 6(4)

Unanka, G.O (2004). Data analysis: Investigating the political and social world. Owerri: Nation-Wyde Printing and Publishing Ltd.

United Nations (2005). Citizen participation and pro-poor budgeting-UN public administration. New York: Pearson Publications.

Utuk, I.M (2014). The role of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in participatory and sustainable rural economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Management Review,* 4(1), 1001-1010.