

Rethinking Best Strategies towards Developing Local Government Areas: Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State in Focus

Ndukwe Chinyere and Nwokwu Paul Monday

Department of Public Administration, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria
Email: ndukwechinyere@ymail.com, paulistrying@gmail.com;
Tel:+2348033513542

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to examine best strategies to enthrone all round development in the local government areas with Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State as a point of reference. To achieve the lofty objective of the study, data were collected from secondary source. Content analysis was adopted to analyze the data collected. The study was anchored on integrated development model propounded by World Bank (1975). After critical analysis of data in the course of this research, the following findings were made - that the local government council's investment in real sectors of the rural economy such as agriculture and quarry industry will create employment opportunities to rural populace across the council area; that the leadership of the council should allocate enough resources to education so as to empower the rural dwellers and that lack of political will on the part of the council's leadership is one of the factors envisaged to affect rural development drive of the local government area. Based on the foregoing findings, the following recommendations were proffered -that the council leadership should intensify her internal revenue drive in order to raise sufficient revenues necessary to undertake developmental programmes; that the council's leadership should partner with non-governmental as well as international organizations to address critical areas of the rural economy and that the council leadership should sustain its efforts in the construction and re-grading of feeder roads in order to open up the rural areas for robust socio-economic activities among others. It is believed that these measures are strategic in advancing rural development that could stand the test of time.

Keywords: Strategies, Development, Rural development, Local government

INTRODUCTION

Every society yearns for development to improve on the living conditions of its people. In most cases collective actions are taken which are usually directed towards that end. Issues about development are not restricted to the societies alone; they have continued to agitate the minds of scholars, policy makers, development experts. The reason is not farfetched; development is continuous and dynamic in nature. What is seen to be fashionable today might perhaps become obsolete in the nearest future. Development by way of definition is seen as a process through which man increases or maximizes his control and use of the material resources with which nature has endowed him and his environment [1]. Overtime efforts expended to advance development in Nigeria have been directed towards improving on the living conditions of urban dwellers at the expense of the army of rural dwellers. In specific terms, government policies and programmes have been initiated and implemented purposely

to change the landscape of the urban centres. This situation has been implicated in most cases to be the major push factor that induces mass exodus of able bodied youths from the rural areas to urban areas with its attendant pressure on available infrastructural facilities and other sundry social vices that have become synonymous with our urban centres. The ugly situation has however made Nigerian government to shift attention to rural development so as to arrest the anomaly. Rural development implies improvement in the standard of living of the mass of low-income population who live in the rural areas while ensuring that the process of development is self-sustainable.

In Nigeria just like every other country that practices federal system of government, the local government is often seen as an instrument to step down development to the doorsteps of rural dwellers. It is noteworthy that local government was accorded recognition as the third tier of

government in Nigeria following its provisions in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. To [2] local government is "a political authority which is purposely created by law or constitution for local communities by which they manage their local public affairs within the limits of the law/constitution". It is the government purposely established to bring development to nooks and crannies of rural areas. It is generally believed that the nearness of local government to the grassroots makes it the most suitable body to perform functions of local interests/concerns far more efficiently and in the most cost-effective manner than remote governments at the higher levels.

Ezza North Local Government Area is one of the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. It was created in 1996 following the creation of Ebonyi State in the same year. It is one of the thirteen (13) local government areas in Ebonyi State. As an institution for rural development, it has continued to grapple with the challenges of engendering enduring development across all the nooks and crannies of the council area. In addition, it has remained a vehicle for implementation of all the federally designed rural development policies and programmes whose influence cut across the federation. It has also engaged in joint state-local government projects and programmes fashioned in most cases to better the lots of rural dwellers. Apart from the local government sponsored development programmes, rural dwellers have on their own accord initiated and subsequently implemented some rural development programmes. In specific terms, rural people have engaged themselves in various forms of community self-help projects such as construction of village squares, markets, clearing of pathways, ensuring regular sanitation exercise, construction of shrines and maintenance of pathways through filling of potholes and construction of drainage on the roads. Some community based organizations have entered into partnership with the local government council to attract life-touching projects particularly from the Ebonyi State Social and Community Development Agency (EBSCDA).

Notwithstanding these measures, it is worrisome that almost all the indicators of development seem not to have shown some signs of improvement. The level of poverty among the rural dwellers has remained on

Ndukwe and Nwokwu the high side. Illiteracy has continued to rise even as rural dwellers still die from preventable diseases. Agriculture, which has remained the mainstay of the people, has since been neglected even as critical social amenities are still lacking in the rural domains thereby leading to poor standard of living of the people with its attendant mass exodus of young able bodied men from the council area to urban areas. In view of the foregoing, it became imperative to rethink best development strategies that could usher in all round development in Ezza North L.G.A.

Conceptual Analysis

Development – There are so many definitions of development as there are many scholars who have shown interest in the concept. The meaning of development has not been static; it has continued to change from time to time. It is noteworthy that development was initially seen from the restricted viewpoint; hence it was seen as the level of economic growth expressed in aggregate economic indicators such as GNP, Per capita income, ability of a nation to expand its output at a faster rate than the growth of its population, etc. It is along this perspective that [3], views development as synonymous with economic growth measured in aggregate terms. During this period, some countries witnessed high level of aggregate economic growth but with poor standard of living of vast majority of the people. This phenomenon was best described as "growth without development" [4].

However, a more broad based definition of the concept has been advanced which perceives development as a multi-dimensional process. In this perspective, development is seen as the process that involves changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty [5]. To [6], development consists of five main ingredients: increasing material wealth for the use of individuals and the nation; eliminating unemployment; eliminating poverty and want; eliminating inequality and increasing the general availability of labour-saving devices. It is perceived as qualitative improvement in all societies and in all groups of individuals within societies. From the foregoing, we could understand that development is man-centred. It is concerned with the continual improvement in all aspects of human life such as health, security, education,

employment, housing, etc. It is directed towards the attainment of both quantitative and qualitative standard of living of man in any social setting.

Rural Development -Rural development has been variously defined by scholars based on their respective disciplines, ideological orientations and social milieus [7]. [8], views rural development as a broad-based re-organization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with changes consequent upon this. To [9], rural development is a multi-dimensional process by means of which the productivity, income and welfare, relating to health, nutrition, education, transportation, employment and other features of better living conditions of rural people can be improved or transformed. For rural development efforts to be successful, it must ensure effective participation of the people beginning from the stage of initiation, planning, execution, monitoring to evaluation stage. Under this circumstance, the rural people perceive the whole process as theirs and do everything humanly possible to make the development strategies succeed. In short, rural development involves the transformation of all segments of the rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life of rural dwellers that constitute the bulk of the population.

Local Government - This is seen as the institutional framework composed mainly of elected, selected or appointed representatives who ensure that matters affecting rural dwellers are adequately attended to in order to improve on their living conditions. It is the third tier of

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were obtained through the secondary source such as articles in reputable journals, official publications, textbooks, etc. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis.

Empirical Review

[10], carried out a study titled "Rural and Community Development in Nigeria: An Assessment". The study was carried out to examine rural and community development in Nigeria with emphasis on the institutions, policies and strategies employed to bring about the much needed rural development in the country. Content analytical method was adopted as data were obtained from the secondary sources. After the careful analysis of the data, the study came up with the following findings

Ndukwe and Nwokwu government that steps down development to the nooks and crannies of rural areas. In other words, it exists to minister to the dynamic and peculiar developmental challenges of rural dwellers. The Guideline for Local Government Reforms (1976) cited in Ahmad, [9] defines local government as

Government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers in defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial power to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and responses to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The establishment of local government is predicated on the philosophy of bringing the instrument of governance closer to the communities in order to harness the interests and aspirations of the local communities as input-output analysis in governance.

among others - that effort made by the Nigerian government through several strategies like the national development plans did not bring about meaningful development; that both international organizational organizations and regional strategies have not led to any significant improvement in the living conditions of rural dwellers. It was also found that a number of issues such as corruption and mismanagement, faulty planning from above affect rural development efforts. On the basis of the foregoing, the following recommendations were proffered - that for rapid development to occur, the lopsided and urban based development process must be reversed to rural-based and bottom-up approach; that government

should continue to create conducive environment for rural development to thrive and that there should be change of attitudes and orientation by all and sundry. These measures are very critical to attainment of realistic and enduring rural development.

[11] in a study entitled "Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria and the way forward" examined the growth of local government, the challenges and the way forward. The study was a qualitative research with heavy reliance on secondary data such as textbooks, journal and official publications. The study went eclectic by using both human needs and efficiency theories to explain the work. It was found that undue interference by the state governments in the management of local government, corruption, bogus expectations for personal gains by godfathers and political gladiators, indiscipline, etc are basic challenges to effective local government administration in Nigeria. Based on the revelations above, the study recommended that Section 7(7) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be amended to forestall undue interference by the state government. Also, there should be strengthening of institutional mechanisms to curb corruption and that the Independent National Electoral Commission should conduct local government elections. [12] carried out a study titled "Enhancing Rural Development in Nigeria: Periscoping the Impediments and Exploring Imperative Measures." The study was undertaken to ascertain the factors that impede rural development as well as to explore measures to address the anomalies. Content analysis was adopted as secondary data were used for the study. The findings of the study reveal the following among others - that there is no significant emphasis on pro rural development policies; that the few formulated rural policies are not being effectively implemented; that there is ineffective political representation of the rural areas as it concerns articulating and attracting development projects and programmes. On the basis of the foregoing findings, the following recommendations were made - there is need for government to pay serious attention to developing and ensuring effective implementation of rural development projects and programmes; that the political representatives of the rural people should be involved in

articulating relevant rural development programmes and that the local government should focus on their activities towards carrying out their statutory role of initiating and executing rural development projects and programmes.

Theoretical Anchorage

This study is anchored on the Integrated Rural Development model as espoused by the [13]. This model emerged against the backdrop that all past efforts towards rural development have contributed little to enhance the quality of life of the people at the grassroots. The model emphasizes that economic base in the rural areas be widened through efforts directed towards mobilizing and better utilization of human and natural resources; creating motivation and purchasing power by means of better distribution of income and employment opportunities; establishing closer links between the agricultural, industrial and service sectors in the rural areas and improving the living standards of the people in terms of housing, potable water supply, good road networks etc through self-help [14]. It is noteworthy that integrated rural development model places much premium on mobilization and development of human resource potentials as well as achieving a more equitable access to resources and fair distribution of income.

With respect to planning, integrated rural development goes beyond agriculture to embrace all policies and programmes necessary to achieve socio-economic advancement of the rural dwellers. It also relies heavily on the concept of regional self-reliance and collective efforts. According to [15], this model recognizes that the local leaders and their people are more familiar with their local environments than experts. It went further to perceive the creative potentials, knowledge and energies of the rural people as very indispensable ingredient for self-reliant development. In view of the above, the model emphasizes the participation of both the local leaders and their people in the identification of needs, selection and location of projects, mobilization of resources and the sharing of benefits and burdens arising from these projects [16].

The relevance of the model to the study is that integrated rural development is central to achieving all round development in rural areas. This is because it facilitates the participation of rural people in the identification of their dynamic and peculiar

development needs and aspirations. The appreciation of these avalanches of needs motivates people both the political leaders and rural dwellers to demonstrate serious commitment in fashioning strategies and techniques aimed at enhancing the lots of rural dwellers in all ramifications. It is important to emphasize that any development strategy should be comprehensive and inclusive as they are critical ingredients needed to actualize all round development.

Ezza North Local Government Area at a Glance

As pointed out earlier, Ezza North Local Government Area is one of the thirteen (13) local government areas in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. It was established in 1996 sequel to the creation of Ebonyi State on 1st October 1996. It should be noted that Ezza North Local Government Area was initially part of the old Ezza Local Government Area prior to the creation of Ebonyi State. Ezza North has its headquarters situated at Ebiaji town. The local government has an area of 305km² and a population of 145,619 according to the 2006 National Population Census. It is a predominant Igbo area inhabited by Ezza people.

The local government is composed of eleven (11) communities with several villages. They include: Amuda/Amawula Community, Ekka Community, Inyere Community, Umuoghara Community, Nkomoro Community, Ogboji Community, Okposi Umuoghara Autonomous Community, Omege Umuzeokoha Community, Oriuzor Community, Oshiegbe Umuzeokoha Community and Umuzeoka Community. The local government falls under the central senatorial district of Ebonyi State otherwise known as the Ebonyi Central Senatorial District alongside Ezza South, Ikwo and Ishielu Local Government Areas.

The Ezza North local government council is charged with the function of good governance in the local government area. The council is led by a chairman who serves as the chief executive of the local government. The local government has a legislative council which makes bye-laws for peace, order and good governance of the area. The legislative council is made up of eleven (11) ward councillors representing the eleven (11) electoral wards of the local government area.

In Ezza North Local Government Area, it is worrisome that majority of the rural areas are still lacking essential amenities such as

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good road networks to link farm lands to the markets where the farm produce could be profitably disposed. In addition, storage facilities necessary to preserve some perishable farm produce are non-existent. Agricultural extension services are still not provided for the farmers so as to be abreast with current development in the field of agriculture. The local farmers solely rely on old method of farming thereby leading to low productivity. Moreso, improved farm inputs such as diseases resistant seedlings, herbicides, pesticides, etc are not usually made readily available to them even as fertilizers which are sold to them though at subsidized rate usually get to them after the farming season. It is important to stress that all the eleven communities in Ezza North Local Government Area engage in farming activities. The farmers cultivate staple food crops such as rice, yams, cassava. Among the crops aforementioned, the communities will most likely have comparative advantage in rice production over other communities in other local government areas in Ebonyi State if the council leadership muster the needed courage to make necessary investments in the sector. However, Umuoghara Community (Umuoghara and Okposi Umuoghara Autonomous Community) are blessed by nature with large supply of rocks. There is availability of igneous rock, metamorphic rock and sedimentary rock. Quarries are generally used for extracting building materials, such as dimension stones, construction aggregate, riprap, sand and gravel. Fortunately, the Ebonyi State government under the administration of then governor, Chief Martin Nwancho Elechi approved the establishment of quarry industrial cluster in the community known as 'Umuoghara Quarry Cluster' so that stone lumps gathered from other mining sites across the state are conveyed to the quarry cluster for crushing. Various crushing machines are installed and put into use as government of the state generate revenues from the quarry cluster. Unfortunately, it is still worrisome that the indigenes of the community had little or no stake in the quarry business. They always engage in menial jobs in the quarry site without protective gadgets which expose them to all sorts of industrial hazards. Both the employees and residents have been exposed to such negative effects as: pollution, various degrees of occupational accidents and other physical accidents

posed by blast stones flying in the air, physiological risks and psychological trauma [17]. The successive council leaderships have not taken advantage of the economic benefits inherent in the industrial cluster by assisting the quarry workers and indigenes of other communities in the council to form themselves into co-operative societies for purpose of getting assistance from appropriate quarters to take the driver's seat in the core quarry businesses in the industrial cluster.

Other indices of development in the local government area have not been positive. There is still widespread poverty, growing inequality, rapid population growth and rising unemployment. The pitiable conditions of the local government stem from not only low income but also illiteracy, ill-health, ignorance and various kinds of deprivations. There is still near absence of life-enhancing infrastructures like electricity, qualitative and quantitative health care facilities, etc. In short, the standard of living has remained abysmally poor. This state of development has been the core push factors that trigger the young and able bodied youths to migrate to urban areas which are adjudged to possess reasonable supply of such essential amenities. Today, the bulk of the council's youthful population with little or no education is found in major cities in Nigeria hawking some wares, ridding commercial motorcycles and tricycles, touting in parks as well as engaging in all sorts of menial jobs just to make ends meet.

Past Efforts of the Ezza North Local Government Administrations towards Rural Development: A Review

There is no doubt that local government is established purposely to bring government presence to the grassroots. It is an institution set up to bring about rural development at the door steps of rural dwellers. As we noted earlier, rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social conditions of the people at the grassroots. The concern of rural development programme is to facilitate progressive transformation of the entire sectors of the rural economy.

It is important to note that prior to the introduction of state-local government joint account, the local government council was privileged to receive her statutory allocation directly from the central

Ndukwe and Nwokwu government. In those days, Ezza North Local Government council which was under the leadership of Chief Paulinus Igwe Nwagumade some giant strides in opening up the rural areas in the local council area. This was made possible through the regime's grading/lateriting of rural roads, construction of bridges and culverts to improve accessibility for the rural dwellers as well as enhance evacuation of agricultural produce to the markets. This was followed by expansion and establishment of more primary schools to ensure that the children of school going age benefit from the free and compulsory basic education policy of the state government. The free education policy was responsible for the high enrolment recorded in both primary and secondary schools in the local government area. The major challenge of the state wide policy on education was that there was no provision for investment in school infrastructure and instructional materials to match the upsurge in the number of registered pupils/students. This undoubtedly led to poor quality teaching and learning as the classes were overpopulated with some pupils/students standing up while receiving lessons. Sometimes, teaching-learning took place under unconducive environment (under the trees). These situations made it a near impossibility for effective teaching and learning to take place.

The administration of Barr. Ikeuwa Omebe in Ezza North Local Government Area recorded some remarkable achievements such as its regular road maintenance and grading of over 400km roads. According to [18], Ogboji Community, Ekka Community, Nkomoro Community and Inyere Community in the Imoha axis had actually benefited immensely from the new roads that the administration created even as it tarred some of the roads that had remained in bad shape. He added that the regime of Barr. Ikeuwa Omebe discovered that the hand-pump boreholes that were provided in several communities needed some maintenance. The administration took the bull by the horn by rehabilitating all the damaged boreholes across all the eleven communities and put them into proper use. In addition, over 46 culverts bridges were built among which are Onunwitecha and Iyor Bridges.

The local government council equally embarked on rapid rehabilitation of the local government residential quarters that

has remained in a deplorable state. This was in line with the then state government stance that all chairmen should reside at the council headquarters. There was also procurement and installation of a 200KVA transformer in the council headquarters to boost power supply in and around the area. The chairman had intentions of embarking on rural electrification to light up all the communities that do not have power supply. The administration did not achieve much success in this regard.

In areas of agriculture, the Ikeuwa Omebe's administration provided over nine million Naira cash incentives to one thousand rural farmers. This is to encourage growth in the agricultural sector, which is one of the real sectors of the economy.

Educational sector was not left behind by the administration. It built five classroom blocks each at Odeligbo Primary School and Community Primary School Omege. The administration awarded scholarship to over 20 indigenes of Ezza North Local Government Area at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku Ozalla. Similarly, the chairman paid the sum of two hundred thousand and one hundred and fifty thousand Naira each to over twenty-eight (28) female and male students studying in the Nigerian Law School with a donation of a laptop computer to each of them to aid their learning.

In the security sector, the administration donated a Hilux van to Achiegu Divisional Police Headquarters. Over thirty motor bikes were procured for vigilante service group, Civil Defence Corps, Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Department of State Security Services (DSS) Ezza North Local Government chapter and built an ultra modern police viewing centre at Achiegu Police Headquarters coupled with other incentives to security agencies in order to boost their morale for effective and efficient service delivery within the local government council.

The regime of Engr. Jeff Ogbu equally tried its best as it concerns rural development. Some feeder roads were re-graded just as some new ones were opened up. Some other sectors of the economy received some degrees of attention from the administration. It is on record that one of the outstanding achievements of the council's leadership was its collaborative efforts with the Ezza South Local Government Council chairman in clearing the age-long refuse at the popular Eke Imeoha Market Square. The two council

chairmen relegated unnecessary bureaucracy to the background and pulled resources together in order to improve the aesthetic beauty of the ancestral market of the Ezza people.

Currently, the administration of Dr. Nora Oluchi Alo is not resting on her oars in bringing succour to door steps of rural dwellers. However, the administration's developmental efforts may be adjudged superficial as the council has concentrated its efforts on the aesthetic beautification of the local government headquarters - fencing of the council headquarters premises and planting of ornamental trees around the same area.

There has also been grading and re-grading of rural roads across the communities in the council. The council chairman in line with the directive of the state governor has erected street light covering about 15km from the council's headquarters to light up the council's major road. The local government council has attracted construction of concrete pavement road covering about 11km, which transverse Achiegu, Ebiaji and Umuoghara axis of the council. The council chairman has organized skill acquisition programmes for the youth so as to make them useful members of their respective communities and society at large.

A critical peep into the performances of the various council administrations will no doubt reveal that their efforts could be best described as a scratch on the surface of the core problems of the members of the communities in terms of development. The council leaderships appeared to have failed to realize that development is people-oriented and that people who are beneficiaries of the projects must be involved from the start to finish of such development projects. This has not been the case in the local government area. The rural dwellers have not been consulted to ascertain what their developmental needs are. As a result, the rural dwellers in Ezza North particularly in the various communities have been receiving development projects and programmes, which have not been able to significantly address their peculiar problems. The successive council leaderships had lacked the courage to take the bull by the horn by investing in the real sectors of the rural economy such as agriculture and establishment of cottage industries that are important to drive rural socio-economic development. As we pointed out earlier on,

the inhabitants of the eleven communities that make up Ezza North Local Government Area are farmers who cultivate variety of staple crops such as rice, yam and cassava. However, Umuoghara Community is endowed with large supply of rocks which are suitable for construction works. Hence, mining and quarrying activities take place in the community. Even with the location of Quarry industrial cluster by the state government in the community (Umuoghara), the employees in the industry are mainly indigenes who are untrained, illiterate and unskilled workers comprising men and women with women forming about 70 per cent of the work force in the quarry cluster [19]. The employees particularly women undergo excruciating hardship, which takes physical, economic and social undertones.

Best Strategies towards Developing Ezza

North L.G.A: An In-depth Analysis

At the onset, development strategies directed towards rural development were hinged on agriculture. The central government has experimented on so many agricultural programmes aimed at rural development but all to no avail in terms of achieving all round development. The reason may not be far-fetched. Rural dwellers are not always involved in the process of the so called 'rural development programmes'. In other words, top-down approach has been the model driving both the federal and state stance on development programmes at the grassroots.

At this point, it becomes imperative to advance best development strategy to facilitate overall rural development. This strategy is principally based on the multi-dimensional character of development. As a multi-dimensional concept, development is seen by [20] as a change or improvement in the political, economic, social and cultural institutions as well as advancement in the living standards of the people. In this kind of development, participation of rural dwellers is of high essence; they are to positively participate to effect the desired change. Development in this sense is based on the integrated rural development model.

For sustainable development to take place in Ezza North Local Government Area, the chief executive of the local government council should consider and possibly adopt the measures as itemized and discussed here under:

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Development Programmes to be pursued in the Local Government Area

The local government leadership should embark on integrated rural development programme which has the capacity to address critical areas of development needs of the rural dwellers. The development programmes should cover the following areas:

1. Employment and Income Generation

– It is important to state that the creation of employment opportunities in the rural areas is most likely to discourage intending emigrants wishing to escape to urban cities for greener pastures as well as boost the rural economy. This is so because the juicy employment which serves as bet to people in the urban areas could now be made readily available for the people in their localities. It is noteworthy that provision of employment increases potentials for income improvements through salaries. This could be achieved through making agriculture very attractive to the youths as well as the elderly people. In Ezza North Local Government Area, Amawula and Umuezeoka communities have comparative advantage in rice production. It is expected that the leadership of the council should concentrate more on modalities to add value to the agricultural produce particularly rice so as to meet best international standards. The chief executive is to partner with any international donor agencies interested in rice production such as FADAM III, IFAD etc to attract funding necessary to set up at least one modern rice mill industry with ultra modern milling machines in either of the communities. The communities will therefore serve as the sources of raw materials to the proposed industry. There should be ensured full capacity utilization of the machines in the milling, de-stoning and packaging of the rice for sale. The management of the proposed rice mill industry should then embark on the search for the market for the products through adverts in various media such as radio, television as well as social media. This will make for high patronage of

the product which in turn will create employment opportunities for our teeming youthful and elderly population. It will also enhance food sufficiency in the area and rewrite the history of the local government as the food basket of Ebonyi State. In an interview granted by Mr. Christian Nwoba, a stakeholder in the local government area, he argued that if government of the council could partner necessary agencies both local and international that have interest in the rice value chain, Ezza North Local Government Area will no doubt have its own brand of rice that can favourably compete with 'the Ebonyi Rice World' (owned and managed by the state government in partnership with private investors). Some stakeholders in the concerned communities have submitted that with appropriate investment in the rice cultivation and processing, the council will definitely take its rightful position as a major producer of rice in Ebonyi State. In addition, farm inputs should always be made readily available to farmers in the local government area. Such inputs should include improved/disease resistant seedlings, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, etc. Agricultural extension workers should be regularly deployed to the rural areas to educate rural farmers on the new trends in farming practices particularly in rice, yam and cassava production. The postgraduate students of Faculty of Agriculture of the Ebonyi State University could equally assist agricultural extension workers in moving into the hinterlands especially in Amawula and Umuezeoka Communities to educate rice farmers on new trends in that aspect of agriculture. In addition, storage facilities such as silos should be set up to store up the rice grains which could be produced in high quantity. As part of effort to ensure speedy evacuation of agricultural produce to markets, good road networks should be constructed, maintained and put into effective use. Another critical area to create employment opportunities for

Ndukwe and Nwokwu indigenes of the local government is the Umuoghara Quarry Cluster. The council leadership should see the location of the quarry cluster in the area as a good omen which must be fully exploited to the greater good of the people. It is expected that the local government council should invest in the quarry business by procuring crushing machines and other vital equipment to establish its own quarry firm in the cluster. This firm is believed to add to the source of internally generated revenue available to the council. In addition, it could employ some members of the rural communities who will oversee its day-to-day operations. As we know that the council leadership may not have the financial muscle to invest in the quarry sector, we suggest that it could approach a commercial bank with a well prepared proposal on the business to secure loan facility. This source will provide a pool of resources that could assist the council to kick start the quarry business. Apart from that, the council leadership as well as non-governmental organizations could educate the indigenes of Umuoghara Community on the need for them to form various co-operative societies, which should be registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission. These societies could serve as platforms through which they could secure micro credit facilities from either the commercial banks or micro finance banks to invest in the quarry business. This measure is capable of encouraging self-employment and reliance among members of the Umuoghara Community in particular and other indigenes of the local government council in general. In an interview granted by a stakeholder in the community, Mr. Solomon Usulor, he opined that investment of the council in the quarry business is a sure means to create employment opportunities to some members of the community. He added that formation of co-operative societies among indigenous quarry workers will go a long way to making the members of the societies self-employed as well as employers of

labour. He insisted that government should think very deeply towards that direction.

2. **Population Quality-** This implies increasing the level of efficiency in the aspects of the health, education, skill and the general standard of living of the people. Population quality is the outcome of the people's awareness of the need for and their readiness to avail themselves of those services as well as opportunities that help to enhance their quality as people. This could be achieved through attainment of some level of educational standards to acquire knowledge and skill. These are offered in schools. Therefore, the council leadership should ensure provision of educational facilities by means of expanding the already existing schools as well as establishing new ones to educate the rural dwellers. The schools should be adequately equipped and staffed with well qualified teachers to ensure quality teaching and learning in the local government area. It is our expectation that this measure will significantly stem the mass exodus of our people to urban areas in search of qualitative education.

For the council to fund those aforementioned projects in schools, it is suggested that the local government leadership should through the Local Education Authority carryout baseline study on all the existing schools in the council area. The findings of the study as it concerns the quantity and quality of school system in the area should be communicated to appropriate authorities such as Ebonyi State Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) and Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board (SEB) for necessary actions. It is believed that with follow up actions, the schools in deplorable conditions could receive face lift. The council on its own part should allocate enough votes to educational sector in its annual estimate for procurement of instructional materials and other school infrastructure.

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3. **Accessibility** - This is the ease with which people get to places, ideas and people [21]; [22]. Accessibility could be enhanced in our rural areas through the quality and intensity of transportation and communication networks within the nooks and crannies of the council area. There should be massive investment in our rural roads to link all communities and villages. The access roads should be designed in a manner to link the farmlands to markets for purpose of evacuation of bumper harvest to areas of need. To achieve this, the local government council should partner with the state government to build more access roads to enhance transportation in the council area. In areas of communication, the council's leadership should make provision for conducive environment for telecommunication giants such as MTN, Airtel, Globacom, etc to erect their masts in strategic locations to ensure total network coverage. This will definitely resolve communication issue that has become the hallmark of the rural areas in the local government.
4. **Social Amenities/Infrastructural facilities** - These add to the comfort of the inhabitants of the local government area and reduce the tendency to drift from place to place to achieve such comforts. Social amenities include the basic needs and facilities such as healthcare, food supply, potable water, education, housing and electricity. There should be provision of hospitals or health centres, markets, boreholes, good residential and public buildings. The leadership of the local government should be very frugal in the management of public resources so as to deploy available financial resources at her disposal to provision of such amenities. These amenities if adequately provided have the magic wand to reduce to the barest minimum the rate of rural-urban drift among the youths and make rural economy to be very robust.
5. **Social Interactions** - Opportunities for people to interact and cooperate or share information or ideas should

be provided for rural dwellers. This is a function of education, information field and accessibility. Fora for such fruitful interactions include - social media, markets, churches, schools, clubs, socio-economic associations, community development unions, community based associations, etc. These fora provide opportunities for exchange of information necessary to revolutionize rural areas.

6. Encouraging Community Based Organization

- Voluntary community based organizations are essential to harness local initiatives for rural development. The members of such associations or organizations should be encouraged to effectively engage in rural development through training on programme and project planning. [23], argued that such capacity building programmes will enable them expand some range of projects which will have direct bearing on the lives of rural dwellers. The chairman of Ezza North Local Government Area should ensure that this kind of training is regular in order to create room for members of the organization to be exposed to current trends in programme and project planning.

7. Mobilization of Women Group

- [24], maintained that to reach all the people, one has to reach the women. As soon as the women have been reached, children have been reached, the family would be reached and the nation would ultimately be reached. To that end, education for women both formal and non-formal should be taken seriously. This kind of education should not only aim at enlightening them but should also help to liberate them from the yoke of superstition, ignorance, inferiority complex, indifference or any other factor that makes them think that they are endowed with a lesser degree of competence than their male counterparts. Any barrier to full mobilization of the rural women should be dismantled by the Ezza North Local Government Chairman.

Challenges that Impede Rural Development Efforts in the Nigerian Local Government System

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The following challenges always work against the concerted efforts towards rural development in Ezza North Local Government Area. The challenges are as follows:

1. **Inadequate Fund** -As we noted earlier on, the local government councils in Nigeria no longer receive their statutory allocations directly from the federation account. Their federal allocations are trapped in the so called "State-Local Government Joint Account." This account has since been hijacked by some state governors to the extent that some local government councils are starved of financial resources to perform their constitutional roles at the rural areas. This singular problem is believed to hamper the Ezza North Local Government Council because the undercurrent noticeable in the operations of the Joint Account might significantly reduce the amount that it would stand to benefit. It is a well known fact that the proposed measure for overall rural development might not be effectively achieved without adequate funds at the disposal of the council leadership.
2. **Corruption** -This has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our national economy. The menace has spread like a wild fire across all the levels of governments. The local government is not immuned to its shades of manifestations. There is no doubt that the available resources such as human, material, financial, technological, etc at the disposal of the council are fraudulently embezzled, misappropriated or abused by the leadership of the council. Apart from the leadership, some staff of the council particularly revenue collection officers have been in the habit of collecting rates and other local taxes while issuing the unsuspecting tax payers with fake receipts thereby frustrating efforts directed towards giving a facelift to the council's internally generated revenues.
3. **Lack of political will by the council leadership** - One of the major problems that has continued to affect good governance at all levels

of government in Nigeria is the unwillingness of the leadership to take the bull by the horn. It is no longer news that most of our council chairmen lack the political will to stand by the people through initiation and implementation of people-oriented projects with capacity to enhance their living conditions. Most of them would rather be loyal to the state governor to the extent that what is implemented at the rural areas is perceived by the people as imposition as the people were never involved from the stage of initiation to evaluation. The projects of this nature are bound to be at variance with the yearnings and aspirations of the rural dwellers.

4. **Inadequate Community Participation** – It is unarguable that rural dwellers have lost confidence in government at all levels in Nigeria including local government. Whenever they are informed that local government desires to partner

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural development is key to national development. Therefore, governments at all levels should work together to enhance the living conditions of rural dwellers. This is because absence of development at the rural areas could trigger rural-urban drift as well as poor standard of living among the rural dwellers. It is against the foregoing revelations that the following recommendations are put forward:

The council leadership should intensify efforts in the internally generated revenue drive to make enough financial resources available for use in the local government areas. This could be achieved through the local government council's investment in modern rice mill industry and quarry business in the area. Also, the local government council should ensure that its revenue officers collect all taxes and rates due to the council and remit same to its coffers.

The local government council should seek for additional funding from both the non-governmental and international organizations who might have interest in rural development. Such donor agencies include – IFAD, FADAMA III, USAID, UNICEF,

Ndukwe and Nwokwu with them to initiate and implement rural development programmes, they usually ignore such calls with the wave of hands because they have been consistently deceived by politicians. This stereotype about deception on the part of government leadership particularly at the local level, usually make them (local experts, chiefs, community leaders, interest groups, cooperative societies) to be indifferent to efforts directed towards rural development in their respective areas.

5. **Lack of comprehensive template for rural development** –Even with the proposed development strategies, the leadership of Ezza North Local Government may not be able to formulate rural development policies. Lack or absence of this policy will definitely lead to fragment of policy statements or programmes by different regimes which of course are bound to die with the regime that adopted them [25].

UNESCO, etc. These international agencies have capacity to intervene in various sectors of the rural economy to alleviate rural people from the doldrums of poverty and deprivations.

The leadership of the council should severely punish any council revenue officers convicted of financial crimes so as to discourage others from embarking on the same misadventure. Likewise, the council chairman should sustain its effort in rural roads construction and regular maintenance through grading and in some cases tarring of some economically viable roads in the area. This will help in evacuating agricultural produce to markets for disposal.

There should be participation of rural people in the process of development so as to secure their support to ensure success in rural development programmes, all of which should be based on a master plan for the development of the council area. Moreso, the state government as well as the central government should partner with the council chairmen to bring development to the door steps of the rural dwellers.

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