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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROLE PERFORMANCE AS CORRELATE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NJIKOKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of local government in rural development with a focus on Njikoka local government area of Anambra state. Four specific purposes, four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. Correlational design was adopted for the study. The population of the study is 30 comprising one transition chairman of the local government, one vice chairman, one secretary of the local government, one head of service of the local government, 18 councillors of the 18 wards in the local government and 8 traditional kings (Igwe) of all the 8 towns in the local government. The entire population was used for the study; hence the census technique was adopted for the study. Structured rating scale "Role of Local Government Rating Scale (RLGRS) and Rural Development Rating Scale (RDRS)" were used for data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts in Faculty of Education. Average internal consistency co-efficient of 0.87and 0.79 was obtained for RLGRS and RDRS respectively using Cronbach Alpha statistical method. The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of four research assistants. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The p-value was used to determine the significance of relationship at a significance level of 0.05 (5%). The findings revealed that there is positive relationship between the roles of local government (infrastructural development role, community engagement roles, social service delivery role and environmental management role) and rural development in Njikoka LGA in Anambra State. From the results of the hypotheses, significant relationship was established in all the variables of the study. The study concluded that discharging infrastructural development, community engagement, social service delivery and environmental management roles promote high quality of life and well-being, social inclusion and community cohesion as well as rural development. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that the local government should ensure availability of needed infrastructures to support agriculture, education, health and so on to facilitate rural development.

Keywords: Local government; Rural; Rural development; Role; Government.

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Introduction

Societies need to be administered effectively for the smooth running of activities within the vicinity. In order to facilitate efficiency, effectiveness and good governance, there is need for decentralized administration. Decentralized administration means the distribution of power, authority as well as decision-making responsibilities away from a central authority to lower levels of administration like the communities, districts or local governments (Ahmed & Rao, 2020). This approach aims to bring governance closer to the people (Baskaran, 2019), increase participation (Raj & Kumar 2020), efficiency and effectiveness (World Bank, 2020). These services brought to the grass root are delivered via a structure. In Nigeria, the structure is called local government. Local government is a system of governance and administration at the subnational level responsible for managing and providing public services, implementing policies and making decisions related to a particular geographical area like a town, county or district (Ezeamama & Ofozoba, 2023). It serves as a bridge between the central government and the populace. A local government has a council made up of elected members and acts as a means by which the residents of a local community can together accomplish what neither the national or state government nor the individual residents can accomplish as adeptly alone (Okoli et al, 2020). This means that through the local governments, the local can solve their needs as a people by themselves and for themselves. Tadele (2020) opined that local government is an essential instrument of national or state government which unites the people of a particular area in a common organization whose functions are essentially complementary to those of the central government and in interests of the local residents since they satisfy common community needs. This is to say that the local government works with the national government to achieve her goals in the grass root. They have certain roles to discharge. A role is a set of responsibilities, duties and expectations associated with a particular position or function within an organization, community or society. The Nigerian government continues to make efforts to bring about meaningful and sustainable development in Nigeria through the initiation of several policies and initiatives like Directorate of Food, Roads and Infrastructure (DFRRI), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) and State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), among others. These policies and programmes aim to achieve development in Nigeria. The local government as complementary to the national government works to bring development to the grass roots and rural areas. This is what Hamza and Yahaya (2019) as well as Ezeamama and Ofozoba, (2023) meant in the submission that local governments which is the third tier of government in Nigeria arises from the need to facilities rural development.

Rural development is a crucial aspect of national development, and local governments play a vital role in achieving

this goal (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). A rural area is a geographical area that is located outside of urbanized areas with low population densities, limited access to services and infrastructure and a strong reliance on natural resources and agriculture (Hoggart & Paniagua, 2017). Rural development is one of the concepts of development administration that focuses attention on how to develop rural communities through the participation of private individuals, organisations and public sector. Rural development involves the restructuring of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses, and to promote individual and collective incentives to participate in the process of development (Hussaini & Ibrahim, 2023). Its aim is to improve the living standard of the rural masses with a view to participate in the transformation of the rural area. The major aspect of Nigeria's political development since 1960 has been the creation of new states and local government areas (Ezeamama & Ofozoba, 2023). The reason for this as the central government often explain when carrying out such exercises is that, it is intended to foster grassroots development and provide a wider spectrum for people's participation in public policy formulation and implementation (Okoli et al, 2020). Perhaps, this form the basis and motivational factor among Nigerians who over the years have severally yearned and demanded for new local government areas or even a state. This desire is seen as a positive strategy aimed at confronting the crisis of rural development and grassroots participation. Rural development entails the improvement of the living standards of the low-income people living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It requires that rural dwellers reorganizes and mobilizes themselves to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the change's consequent upon this. According to Ahmed and Rao (2020), rural development refers to a continuous series of actions by the government organizations, nongovernmental organization and the rural people in improving the rural conditions of the rural people and a process which leads to series of change within a given rural setting which ultimately result in the improvement in the general living conditions of the rural dwellers. Tadele (2020) succinctly posited that for Nigeria to have any measurable growth, initiatives for rural areas must be developed. This means that rural development is critical to the overall of Nigeria in general. According to Ezeamama and Ofozoba, (2023) cited the local government as an instrument for the foundation for the economic development of the rural areas. All rural development efforts must be derived from the needs and aspirations of the rural population and not essentially in response to the needs of the urban political economy. This is to say that all developmental initiatives by the local government must be tailored according to the needs of the local community.

In Nigeria, local governments are responsible for providing basic services and infrastructure to rural communities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Hamza and Yahaya (2019) explained that local government spurs rural development through infrastructural development and service delivery. Section 7 (i) of 1999 constitution empowered local government to construct and main rural roads, street lights, water and drains and other public highways or such public facilities. This means that they have a role in ensuring rural infrastructural development. Infrastructural development is crucial for rural development as it provides the necessary facilities and services to support economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability in rural areas. It enables access to markets by providing roads, bridges, and transportation infrastructure that help farmers to transport their products to markets, increasing their income and access to economic opportunities (World Bank, 2019). This also supports agricultural development which is critical for rural development. Infrastructural development also ensures clean water supply systems that support agricultural production and improve public health through Irrigation infrastructure (UNICEF, 2018). Electrification infrastructure provides power for homes, businesses, and industries, enhancing productivity and quality of life enabling energy access International Energy Agency (IEA). (2020). Telecommunication infrastructure connects rural communities to the global economy, facilitating information exchange and access to services (Ahmed & Rao, 2020). By investing in infrastructural development, rural areas can overcome the constraints that limit their economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability, ultimately achieving rural development goals. Other roles of the local government towards rural development as: planning and zoning role (Slavin, 2020); economic development role (e.g., business support, tourism promotion) (Roberts & Lubenko, 2019); social service delivery role (e.g., healthcare, education) (Yilmaz & Cicek, 2020) and community engagement and participation role (Mubarak & Khan, 2020)

Community engagement and participation in rural development according to Mubarak and Khan (2020) ensures that rural development initiatives are responsive to local needs, culturally appropriate, and sustainable. It is the role of the local government to engage community members and make them participate in matters concerning them. The concept of community engagement and participation is concerned with the process of ensuring that the intended beneficiaries of development projects and programmes are themselves involved in the planning and execution of those projects and programmes. This is considered important as it empowers the recipients of development projects to influence and manage their own development, thereby removing any culture of dependency (Hussaini & Ibrahim, 2023). An effective participation for grassroots development would only be realised where

the grassroots have the freedom to make their own decisions and set their own development priorities, draw their own plans; implement and ensure a fair share of the fruits of their work. Participatory grassroots development is an alternative approach for equitable rural development. Participation of the grassroots is seen as a process whereby the marginalised groups in a community take the initiatives to shape their own future and better their lives by taking full responsibility for their needs (Tadele, 2020). It is a collective venture through which the grassroots discover their identity in the wider society. The process is marked by the development of new knowledge and skills by their people including their appropriation through adaptation and control of technology and extension services so that it serves them in response to their development priorities and in the context of their life experiences. Ross et al. (2022) submitted that it entails: involving local residents in decision-making processes; encouraging community input and feedback; building partnerships between local government, organizations, and residents; empowering communities to take ownership of development initiatives; fostering social cohesion and collective action and promoting transparency and accountability in development projects.

Planning and zoning in rural development according to Millman (2024) serve to manage land use in a way that supports agriculture; conserve natural resources; maintain the rural character of the landscape; dictate the permissible scope of development; ensure a balance between growth and the preservation of the rural environment; determine the types of buildings allowed; set standards for agricultural practices and protect natural features. Rural zoning regulations can greatly influence where and what you can build, and can even impose strict requirements for managing rainwater runoff and protecting local flora and fauna.

Social service delivery is a critical component of rural development, as it addresses the basic needs of rural communities and promotes social justice and equity (Yilmaz & Cicek, 2020). It refers to the provision of essential services and amenities that improve the quality of life and well-being of rural communities. In discharging this role, the local government ensures that essential services are provided in the locality. Mwanga and Matongo, (2022) explained that social service delivery in rural development entails: providing essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare programs to rural communities; addressing social and economic disparities in rural areas; improving access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, and energy; supporting vulnerable populations like children, women, and the elderly and promoting social inclusion and community cohesion. Effective social service delivery is crucial for rural development as it: improves quality of life and well-being; enhances human capital and productivity; supports economic growth and development and reduces poverty and inequality. However, Agba et

al, (2017) noted that undue political interference, corruption and poor work attitude of local government workers have incapacitated local government from effective functioning on one hand, and alienated grassroots people from enjoying social service delivery expected of local governments in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the local government is charged with environmental management role. According to Chen et al, (2022), environmental management role of the local government entails the local government protecting and conserving natural resources in the locality as well as promoting sustainable environmental practices in the locality. Environmental management practices like organic farming, permaculture, and agro forestry promote sustainable agriculture, reducing pollution and improving soil health (Kumar et al, 2020). Also, effective waste management systems in rural areas reduce pollution, protect public health, and promote a clean environment. Similarly, conservation of natural resources like water, soil, and forests ensure their long-term availability and reduce degradation. In discharging this role, the local government adopts practices like flood control, landslide mitigation, and drought management which reduce the risk of natural disasters in rural areas. Sustainable development can be achieved through environmental management. Rai and Kumar (2020) found that rural environmental management is essential for achieving sustainable development goals. They suggested that environmental conservation practices should be adopted in rural areas to ensure sustainable development. Also, environmental management leads to improved livelihoods and ensures the protection of the environment for future generations. This assures the development of local governments.

Njikoka Local Government Area (LGA) in Anambra State is a rural area with significant development challenges. The LGA faces inadequate infrastructure, poverty, environmental degradation, and limited access to basic services (Anambra State Government, 2020). Despite the efforts of the local government, the area remains underdeveloped, and the quality of life of some of the rural dwellers is seemed to be poor. One doubts the relevance of local government given the fact that they appear not to contribute significantly to rural development. It is therefore the thrust of this study to investigate the role of local government to rural development: A case of Njikoka LGA, Anambra state.

Statement of the Problem

The local government acts as a form of political and administrative structure facilitating decentralization, a sense of belonging at the grass root, efficiency in governance and national integration. Ideally, it is the root of development, in that it is closest to the people and deals with the people which democracy anchors on. It is therefore a co-agent of rural development. However, the rural community of Njikoka Local Government Area (LGA) in Anambra

State appears to face a myriad of challenges that hinder its development and probably perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The infrastructures in Njikoka LGA appear to be inadequate, which probably makes it difficult for residents to access basic services. There seem to be poor road network, making transportation a nightmare and limiting access to markets, healthcare, and education, hindering economic activities and livelihoods. Also, the environment in Njikoka LGA appears to have poorly managed waste disposal leading to pollution and health hazards. The widespread clearing of forests for agriculture and logging probably has led to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem disruption. Intensive farming and deforestation appear to have caused soil degradation and erosion threatening agricultural productivity and infrastructure. Again, there appear to be a lack of engagement with rural communities, neglecting their needs and priorities, and insufficient access to resources and expertise.

The cumulative effect of these challenges is a stagnated rural economy, poor living standards, and limited access to basic services and amenities. Poverty, inequality, and social unrest are likely to be on the rise, and the community is in dire need of a comprehensive approach to address these problems and unlock the potential for sustainable rural development. Given that the local government is the closet the people, one wonders if there are roles they need to perform to facilitate rural development, hence the study on the role of local government to rural development: A case of Njikoka LGA, Anambra state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate local government role performance as a correlate of rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate the relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
2. Examine the relationship between the community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
3. Determine the relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
4. Explore the relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?
2. What is the relationship between the Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

3. What is the relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?
4. What is the relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
2. There is no significant relationship between the Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
3. There is no significant relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.
4. There is no significant relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Research Method

The study adopted the correlational research design. According to Devi et al, (2023), correlational design investigates statistical relationship that exists between two or more variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. It seeks to establish the statistical relationship that exists between two or more variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of the variables. The design was used to collect data and information from the participants with a view of assessing the relationship between the roles of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state. Justification for the choice of correlational research design is that; this design will enable the researchers to undergo a field study in order to collect data from a sample of large population of teachers and thereafter, identify the relationship the variables, measuring them as they exist in the natural environment. This design will help to reflect the strength as well as the direction of the relationship between the role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA. Bryman (2016) submitted that correlational studies aim to identify relationship between two or more variables. The study was carried out in Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria using Njikoka LGA. The population of the study is 30 comprising of one transition chairman of the local government, one vice chairman, one secretary of the local government, one head of service of the local government, 18 councillors of the 18 wards in the local government and 8 traditional kings (Igwe) of all the 8 towns in the local government. These people were used because they are majorly involved in activities of the local government and so can give informed responses on the problem of the study. The entire population of the study was used due

to the relatively manageable size; hence, the study adopted census technique. Structured rating scale "Role of Local Government Rating Scale (RLGRS) and Rural Development Rating Scale (RDRS)"were used for data collection. The first instrument – RLGRS contains two sections, A and B. Section A sought background data of the respondents. Section B contains 40 items designated across four clusters (I-IV) to elicit data on roles of the local government. Cluster I contains 10 items on infrastructural development role; Cluster II contains 10 items on community engagement role, Cluster III contains 10 items on social service delivery role and Cluster IV contains 10 items on environmental management role. The instrument was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD); and the range of the scale weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively. The second instrument – RDRS contains 20 items that were designed to measure rural development in Njikoka LGA. RDRS was structured on a 4-point response rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively. The instrument was face validated by three experts in Faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The corrections and modifications made by these experts were incorporated in the instrument before the final draft of the instrument. This was done in order to determine the face and content validity that aided the instrument to collect the requisite information (data) for the study. These experts were requested to validate the items in the questionnaire in terms of their face value, content relevance, items clarity and sentence construction. The rating scales were trial tested using 1 transition chairman, 4 traditional kings and 5 councillors in Idemili, North LGA. Idemili North LGA shares boundries with Njikoka LGA and shares similar terrain as well as cultural heritage and traditions. However, they were not part of the study. Average internal consistencies co-efficient of 0.87 and 0.79 were obtained for RLGRS and RDRS respectively using Cronbach Alpha statistical method. This was to establish the reliability of the instruments. The researchers administered the instruments to the respondents with the help of four research assistants. The 30 copies distributed were retrieved and were duly completed. They were used for data analysis. This gave a return rate of 100%. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer the research questions. The (r) was used to determine the nature of the relationship between the variables. The magnitude of the relationship was determined using Nworgu (2015) guidelines, thus: Very Low - 0.00 - 0.20; Low - 0.20 - 0.40, Moderate - 0.40 - 0.60; High - 0.60 - 0.80 and Very High - 0.80 - 1.00. Likewise, the all hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a significance level of 0.05 (5%).The p-value was used to determine the significance of the relationship for all hypotheses. The decision rule was: a null hypothesis was not upheld where the calculated p-value was less than the stipulated level of significance (p-value <.05). The reverse was the case where

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.12 (2), May-August, 2024 https://ajemates.org

the calculated p-value was greater than the stipulated level of significance (p-value >.05). All analyses were carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25.

Results and Findings

Research Question One: What is the relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

Table 1: Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Infrastructural devt	Rural devt.	Decision
Infrastructural devt	30	1.00	.805**	Very high positive relationship
Rural devt.	30	.805**	1.00	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 1 show the relationship between relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA. The computed Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) value is 0.805, indicating a very high positive relationship. This means that there is a very high positive relationship between the infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Research Question Two:
What is the relationship between the Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between the Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Community engagement	Rural devt.	Decision
Community engagement	30	1.00	.816**	Very high positive relationship
Rural devt.	30	.816**	1.00	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.12 (2), May-August, 2024 https://ajemates.org

The summary of data analysis on the relationship between Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA presented in Table 2 reveals that the computed Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) value is 0.816, suggesting a very high positive relationship between community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA. However, there is a very high positive relationship between community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

Table 3: Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Negotiation	Personnel administration	Decision
social services delivery	30	1.00	.789**	High positive relationship
Rural devt.	30	.789**	1.00	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation results on the relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA. The results show that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) value on social services delivery role of local government and rural development is 0.789. The results indicate that there is a high positive relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA?

Table 4: Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Negotiation	Personnel administration	Decision
Environmental management	30	1.00	.802**	High positive relationship
Rural devt.	30	.802**	1.00	

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.12 (2), May-August, 2024 https://ajemates.org

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation results on the relationship between environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA. The results show that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) value on environmental management role and rural development is 0.802. The results indicate that there is a high positive relationship between environmental management role and rural development.

Test of Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses;

Hypothesis One: H_0: There is no significant relationship between infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

H_1: There is significant relationship between infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Table 5: Pearson correlation summary analysis of infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Infrastructural devt	Rural devt	P-value	(α)	Decision
Infrastructural devt	30	1.00	.805**			
Rural devt	30	.805**	1.00	.000	.05	Significant

The results of the test of hypothesis one reveal that the r-value is 0.805 and the p-value (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) As a result of this, the null hypothesis was not upheld while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. Thus, there is significant relationship between infrastructural development role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Hypothesis Two: H_0: There is no significant relationship between the Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

H_1: There is significant relationship between Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.12 (2), May-August, 2024 https://ajemates.org

Table 6: Pearson correlation summary analysis of Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	Community engagement	Rural devt,	P-value	(α)	Decision
Community engagement	30	1.00	.816**			
Rural devt.	30	.816**	1.00	.000	.05	Significant

The results of the test of hypothesis two indicate that the Pearson r-value is 0.816 and the p-value (0.001) was less than 0.05. On this point, the null hypothesis was not upheld while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. Therefore, there is significant relationship between Community engagement role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Hypothesis Three: H_0: There is no significant relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

H_1: There is significant relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

Table 7: Pearson correlation summary analysis of the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	social services delivery	Rural devt	P-value	(α)	Decision
social services delivery	30	1.00	.789**			
Rural devt.	30	.789**	1.00	.000	.05	Significant

The results of the test of hypothesis three reveal that the Pearson r-value is 0.789 and the p-value (0.000) was less than 0.05. On this point, the null hypothesis was not upheld while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. Therefore, there is significant relationship between the social services delivery role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Hypothesis Four: H_0: There is no significant relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

H_1: There is significant relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA.

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.12 (2), May-August, 2024 https://ajemates.org

Table 8: Pearson correlation summary analysis of the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Variables	N	social services delivery	Rural devt	P-value	(α)	Decision
environmental management	30	1.00	.802**			
Rural devt.	30	.802**	1.00	.000	.05	Significant

The results of the test of hypothesis four reveal that the Pearson r-value is 0.802 and the p-value (0.000) was less than 0.05. On this point, the null hypothesis was not upheld while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. Therefore, there is significant relationship between the environmental management role of local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA

Discussion of Findings

Generally, the roles of the local government were found to be positively related with rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state. The infrastructural development role, community engagement role, social service delivery role as well as environmental management role of the local government was found to be positively related to rural development. This shows that, the local government can spur rural development by performing its roles effectively. Findings of the study have been further discussed under the following subheadings:

Infrastructural development role of local government and rural development

The results of research question one and test of hypothesis one show that r-value is 0.805 and the p-value is 0.000. This implies that the p(0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a very high positive and significant relationship between infrastructural development role and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra State. The implication is that discharging the role of infrastructural development for rural development involves constructing and maintaining rural roads, street lights, water and drains and other public highways or such public facilities. It entails providing roads, bridges, and other transportation infrastructures which guarantees access to markets and fosters agricultural productivity and development. This role ensures the availability and accessibility of clean water; power for homes, businesses, and industries; telecommunication infrastructures that connects the community to the global economy and facilitates information exchange and access to services. In support of these findings, Ramesh and Murugesan (2018) finding reveals that availability of

adequate and efficient infrastructural set up not only promotes rapid industrialization but also improves the quality of life of the people. They explained that infrastructure encompasses the whole spectrum of vital services such as roads, railways, civil aviation, shipping, power generation transmission, telecommunications, and postal facilities and are an absolute necessity for rapid achievement of sustainable economic growth. Also, the finding aligns with the finding of the study of Okoli et al (2020) on rural infrastructure and sustainable development in Nigeria that found out that rural electrification, and road network have a positive impact on sustainable development in Nigeria. This means that if the local government performs the infrastructural development role effectively by increasing rural electrification and road networks, it will improve and increase rural development in the area. When the local government begins development activities to built infrastructures in the rural areas, certainly it changes the images of the rural areas from underdeveloped nature to prosperous, vibrant, smart and successful economic areas, which results in positive changes and dramatically increases in the living standard of rural people. The result of the hypothesis one testing revealed that there is a significant relationship between infrastructural development role and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state and so the null hypothesis was not upheld. This significant relationship implies that the local government can achieve rural development through its role of infrastructural development.

Community engagement role of local government and rural development

More so, the results of research question two and test of hypothesis two showed that r-value is 0.816 and the p-value is 0.000. This shows that the p(0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance. This connotes that there is a very high positive and significant relationship between infrastructural development role of the local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state. This means that community engagement as a role of the local government is critical for rural development. This approach helps ensure that rural development initiatives are responsive to local needs, culturally appropriate, and sustainable. Additionally, community engagement is contributes to rural development as they enable communities to identify their own needs and priorities, and to develop solutions that are tailored to their unique contexts. By taking cognizance of the people's peculiar needs, community participation helps build an atmosphere of togetherness among community members, fostering a willingness to collaborate as team players for the overall benefit of the community. In agreement with these findings, Ross et al., (2022) findings agreed that effective community engagement can lead to more sustainable and equitable rural development outcomes, as well as increased community empowerment and social capital. The authors held that the approach nurtures an environment of togetherness and

cooperation, ensuring the smooth operation of the community by encouraging parties to give up certain preferences for the greater good. The finding also aligned with the submission of Hussaini and Ibrahim (2023) that the concept of community participation is concerned with the process of ensuring that the intended beneficiaries of development projects and programmes are themselves involved in the planning and execution of those projects and programmes. The authors further explained that it is considered important as it empowers the recipients of development projects to influence and manage their own development, thereby removing any culture of dependency. This spurs rural development.

Social services delivery role of local government and rural development

Furthermore, the results of research question three and test of hypothesis three showed that r-value is 0.789 and the p-value is 0.000. This reveals that the p(0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a high positive and significant relationship between social service delivery role of the local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra State. The results indicated that discharging social service role by the local government, ensures that there is social inclusion and community cohesion within the locality. It improves the quality of life and well-being of community members, reduces poverty and inequality and supports rural economic growth and development. In affirmation to these findings, Yilmaz and Cicek (2020) found that social service delivery is a critical component of rural development, as it addresses the basic needs of rural communities and promotes social justice and equity. The scholars maintained that social services delivery role allows for the provision of social protection services like cash transfers, food assistance, and housing support to vulnerable households, reducing poverty and inequality.

Environmental management role of local government and rural development

The results of research question four and test of hypothesis four showed that r-value is 0.802 and the p-value is 0.000. This shows that the p(0.000) is less than 0.05 level of significance. This denotes that there is a very high positive and significant relationship between environmental management role of the local government and rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra state. This means that environmental management as a role of the local government is critical for rural development. This involves managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and promoting sustainable practices. In Njikoka, the local government ought to implement waste management and sanitation programmes to prevent environmental pollution, protect natural resources such as forests, water bodies, and wildlife reserves, and promote sustainable agricultural practices and climate change mitigation. This approach ensures the practice of organic farming, permaculture, and agroforestry which promote sustainable agriculture and reduces pollution and

improves soil health. It also promotes renewable energy, energy efficiency, and carbon sequestration which help to mitigate climate change impacts. The environmental management role also entails environmental management practices like flood control, landslide mitigation, and drought management which reduce the risk of natural disasters in rural areas. It also promotes the protection and preservation of biodiversity in rural areas to maintain ecosystem services and promote ecological balance. These measures all work together to achieve rural development. This finding is in line with the finding of Rai and Kumar (2020) that rural environmental management is essential for achieving sustainable development goals. The authors suggested that environmental conservation practices should be adopted in rural areas to ensure sustainable development.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was established that the local government performs certain roles to achieve rural development in Njikoka LGA, Anambra State which includes: infrastructural development, community engagement, social service delivery and environmental management and that there is positive and significant relationship between the role of local government for rural development in Njikoka LGA in Anambra State. Hence, it is concluded that the local government need to keep discharging these roles effectively in order to overcome the constraints that limit their economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability, ultimately achieving rural development goals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The local government should be proactive in discharging its infrastructural development roles. This is to ensure availability of needed infrastructures to support agriculture, education, health and so on to facilitate rural development.
2. The local government, traditional rulers, councillors and other stakeholder should strive to engage community members in taking decisions about issues concerning them. This will help leverage resources and expertise for rural development.
3. Since social service delivery role is critical for rural development, the local government should ensure it discharges this function effectively to ensure rural development. They should provide essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare programs to rural communities.
4. The local government, traditional rulers, councillors and other stakeholder should practice flood control, landslide mitigation, drought management, organic farming, permaculture, and agroforestry to ensure environmental sustainability which is critical for rural development.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study on role of local government to rural development: A case of Njikoka LGA, Anambra state has contributed to knowledge in several ways. The study has exposed to local government authorities, traditional rulers councilors among others the various role of the local government such as infrastructural development roles, community engagement roles, social service delivery roles and environmental management roles which contribute to rural development. These roles of the local government which are valid and result oriented as reaffirmed in the present study will definitely assist community members to solve their problems and achieve rural development. The overall implication of this study therefore, is that, it has reaffirmed the significance of most of these roles of the local government such as infrastructural development roles, community engagement roles, social service delivery roles and environmental management roles and its importance in the actualization of rural development.

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