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**DEMOCRACY AND THE CHALLENGES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NASARAWA STATE,
 NIGERIA, 2011-2023**

Dalhatu Musa Yusha'u

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria

Musa Yakubu

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria

Abstract

Democracy as a system of government prioritized good governance that will enhance rural transformation and improved condition of living of the rural populace. The emergence of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 was on a crippled socio-economic base bequeathed by the protracted military regimes in the country. The practice of democracy could not substantially improve the situation either. This is attributed to a lot of draw-backs and challenges in the operation of the nascent democracy. This study is an attempt to x-ray through field survey the challenges inhibiting democracy in developing rural communities of Nasarawa State since its inception and particularly from 2011 to 2023. The study which is anchored on integrated rural development approach is based on documentary sources and personal observations with specified variables of development such as infrastructure, security, education, unemployment and poverty rates. The findings revealed that there exists a nexus between democracy and rural development, and in Nasarawa state within the period under review, rural areas witnessed a boost in the areas of road construction, electricity, education among others. Again, among the major challenges still working against effective rural development is poor or abysmal improvement in infrastructural index in the country (Nasarawa State inclusive) as shown in African Infrastructural Development Index reports. Others are illiteracy, poverty, insecurity, rivalry between traditional authorities and local officials; corruption and bad governance. Although there was improvement in rural development strive in Nasarawa state under the last two democratic governments (2011 to 2023), a lot more needs to be done in order to reach the desired level. Hence, curbing the situation requires that present democratic government must ensure huge investment in infrastructure and education, robust poverty reduction programme and empowerment, transparency and good governance.

Keywords: Challenges, Democracy, Development, Rural Development

1. Introduction

The upsurge of democracy in Africa and indeed the third world in the eighties through nineties had clearly demonstrated the prime place that democracy has for decades occupied in enhancing good governance and development in western world. It is in view of the envisaged dividends of democracy in the form of guaranteeing fundamental human rights and good governance, capable of transforming the rural communities that Nigeria opted for it in 1999. According to Otive (2011), democracy is only meaningful if it delivers socio-economic development to the nation. Abdulrazaq, Rohana and Suyatno (2015) on their part added that, the political freedom which forms the bases of democracy remains insignificant

without commensurate socio-economic development that will lift out people from hunger, illiteracy, deprivations and degradations.

The shift from autocratic military regimes to democratic government in Nigeria in 1999 which invariably ushered in the Fourth Republic has not changed the poor living conditions of the vast majority of Nigerians. This coupled with the collapsed of critical infrastructural facilities made the situation more terrible in the rural communities where about seventy percent (70%) of the population resides. Put differently, local administrations under military regimes appeared to had performed better than under democratic regimes (Dalhatu, 2007, Dalhatu & Ladan, 2017). Otaki (2005) contended that it is estimated that about seventy percent

(70%) of the population of Nigeria and other underdeveloped countries are living in the rural areas. This population lacks basic social amenities and good living standards. Although there is general inadequacy of these social amenities across Nigeria, the situation in rural areas is acute that most rural communities lack these basic amenities (Ezeah, 2005). The role of democracy in addressing these problems is pivotal. It will help reduce rural unemployment, poverty, rural urban drift and improves productive capacity as well as standard of living at the rural areas.

Despite the enthronement of democracy in 1999, rural areas in Nigeria and indeed Nasarawa State are largely neglected as far as development projects and infrastructures are concerned. They are faced with paradox that the production oriented rural economy relies heavily on none productive people who are all ill-equipped with outdated tools, technical information, scientific and cultural training and whose traditional roles and access to resources pose problems for their effective incorporation into modern economic system (Adedire, 2014). Nigerian history of democratic rule in the fourth republic is full of disappointment in terms of economic transformation, security and welfare of the people. This is against the background that the return to democracy in 1999 has placed the country on an agenda of high expectations on economic sustainability and development and yet the democratic performance remains insignificant (Abdulrazak, Rohana & suyatno, 2015). Furthermore, the emergence of democratic rule in Nigeria which was premised on good and responsible governance, did not meaningfully reverse the ugly state of rural communities in Nigeria, and Nasarawa State in particular. The situation continues unabated leaving the vast population of the State in disarray.

This research focuses on the relationship between democracy and rural development and the challenges inhibiting smooth rural development in Nasarawa State in the last one decade (2011-2023) of democratic rule. Hence, the pertinent questions here are; how is the relationship between democracy and rural development in Nasarawa state from 2011-2023? What are the major challenges that inhibited the transformation of rural areas in Nasarawa state between

2011 and 2023? And, how can the challenges be addressed?

The aim of this research is to investigate the nexus between democracy and rural development and the challenges affecting the smooth development of rural communities in Nasarawa State under the current democratic dispensation, specifically, 2011-2023. Specifically is to:

- i. Examine the composite relationship between democracy and rural development in Nasarawa State from 2011-2023.
- ii. Examine the challenges inhibiting the smooth transformation of rural areas in Nasarawa State from 2011-2023.
- iii. Suggest workable ways to curb the challenges inhibiting the smooth development of rural communities in Nasarawa State.

This study therefore examines the nexus between democracy and rural development and the challenges inhibiting the smooth development of rural communities in Nasarawa State under the current democratic dispensation, specifically, between 2011 and 2023. It concludes by suggesting the way forward to enhance the prospects of democracy in rural development in the State and Nigeria in general.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of democracy

The concept of Democracy must be viewed far beyond mere elections, albeit imperfectly conducted. First, the word democracy is derived from two Greek words “**demo**” meaning people and “**cracy**” which means rule or government. Thus, democracy literarily means rule or government of the people (Oddih & Emeka, 2006). Abraham Lincoln’s often quoted definition of democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people” has remained the most popular of all definitions despite serious attempt by scholars to offer better, practical and comprehensive definition. Lincoln’s definition had actually explained the situation in ancient Greek-City state, where it was possible for the entire adult individuals to gather in a

market square to take decisions and implement same. This is therefore regarded as direct democracy.

The modern democracy is therefore, an indirect one better known as representative democracy. It is a form of government where people participate indirectly by electing those who will represent them or act on their behalf and be responsible and accountable to them in all their public dealings. Democracy is to ensure the greatest happiness for the greatest number by guaranteeing good and responsible governance. Nigerian democracy even after twenty (20) years of practice has not only failed to meet these expectations but has refused to meet the simple conditions for ideal democracy. These conditions as observed by Diamond et al (1988) in Nnoli (1994, P.4-5), involve: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups; highly inclusive level of political participation; and a high level of civic and political liberties.

2.1.2 Concept of Rural Development

Rural development is however associated with the progressive transformation of the low-income status of the rural dwellers and the improvement of the basic social services and other necessities of life in the rural society. As stated earlier, the chunk of Nigeria's population lives in rural areas. This implies that any attempt made in empowering rural people will translate into general improvement in the condition of living of the Nigerian people and hence development. Democratic government thus has a greater role to play in the transformation process of rural communities by way of increasing their participation in economic activities, reducing their level of unemployment and poverty and providing basic amenities such as water, electricity, roads, schools and health facilities. Rural development therefore connotes a steady process of change or improvement in the entire socio-economic and political conditions of the rural life and community.

Accordingly, rural development can be seen as the process of promoting as well as transforming social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the rural inhabitants through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, material and institutional resources so as to enhance

their capabilities to cope with the daily task and demand of modern times (Okoye, 1987; Mbumega, 2012).. Idris (2011) opined that rural development is a confirmed set of actions by government agencies, non-governmental organizations and rural populace to improving the living conditions of the rural people and also as a process which leads to series of changes within the confine of a given rural setting and which eventually result in the improvement of the general conditions of the rural dwellers. The most effective and pragmatic rural development strategy in Nigeria is the integrated rural development strategy. Thus, rural development is seen as the broad integrated process involving the implementation of sectorial programs and provision of social services under the surveillance and the full participation of the major relevant stake holders (Ndangra, 2005, cited in Abdurazak, Rohana & Suyatno, 2015).

The National policy on integrated rural development aptly sum up the policy objectives when it averse that integrated rural development is an activity that has to do with putting together all the elements of rural development, with clarifying and unifying the objectives and bringing together all the agencies, facilities and programs necessary to attain the set objectives of rural transformation (FRN, 2004). This study is therefore, postulated in line with the integrated rural development approach to analyze the relationship between democratic rule and rural development and its impending challenges in Nasarawa State from 2011-2023.

2.2 Theoretical Approach

There are so many theoretical explanations or approaches to the analysis of rural development. This includes Modernization, Transformation, Comprehensive, Mobilisation and Integrated rural development approaches. For this purpose however, integrated rural development approach is utilised.

2.2.1 Integrated Rural Development Approach

Meaningful development of rural people must be on a self-sustaining basis, through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad-based organization and mobilization of

the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope more effectively with the daily tasks of their lives. The National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (FRN, 2004) sees integrated rural development, with clarifying and unifying the objectives and bringing together all the agencies, facilities and programs necessary to attain the set objectives. At the national level, the policy defines integrated rural development as a process by which the development of rural areas is integrated with, support and is supported by the entire national development effort (FRN, 2004). According to Ujo (1994), integrated rural development is a multi-dimensional strategy for improving the quality of the life for rural people. It is based on this assumption that the socio-economic framework of the traditional rural system is obsolete, and consequently integrated rural development strategy are designed to change this framework and promote structural changes.

Consequently, this research adopts the Integrated Rural Development Approach as the basis of its analysis. Integrated rural development approach re-emphasises the needs for a comprehensive and all round rural development. The relevance of this approach to this study lies in the fact that it gives emphasis to the involvement of the less privilege stratum through an appropriate design of holistic development program. One of its key elements is to assure a greater participation in planning and implementation through the establishment of people's organizations and a functional decentralization of decision making (Manfred, 2008).

Integrated rural development approach is a deliberate approach to link the design, monitory, evaluation and delivery of programs across socio-economic sectors to produce all round and enduring developmental outcomes on peoples' lives. These sectors include, agriculture, water, roads, electricity, warehousing, education, employment, manpower training, extension services and mechanization which indeed, constitute the hallmark of this analysis.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative techniques anchored on documentary sources and observation to unravel the relationship between democracy and rural development

and the challenges affecting the smooth transformation of the rural communities in Nasarawa state from 2011-2023.

The focal area of this study is Nasarawa State of Nigeria. The area known as Nasarawa State today was formally under Plateau State and was referred to as Lower Plateau. During Abacha's regime in (1996), this area with ten (10) Local Government was carved out as Nasarawa State with the creation of additional three (3) Local Government areas bringing the number of the Local Governments to thirteen (13). Nasarawa State Population according to the 2006 population census result stood at about 1,869,377 and was estimated to be 2,886,00 in march, 2022 (PHC Priority Table). About 75% of this people are peasant farmers. Other economic activities in the State include mining, trading, and petty commercial activities. Because the State is situated within the Benue trope, it is blessed with several solid mineral resources such as Marbles, Barites, Sodium Chloride (Salt), Zinc, Iron, coal e.t.c thus, tagged "Home of Solid Minerals".

The state shares borders with Plateau State to the North-East, FCT to the North-West, Kaduna State to the North, Kogi State to the West, Benue and Taraba to the East. The State like all States of the federation has three (3) Senatorial Districts. They are, Nasarawa South comprising of five (5) Local Governments – Lafia, Doma, Obi, Keana and Awe; Nasarawa North is made up of three (3) Local Governments – Akwanga, Nasarawa Eggon and Wamba; and Nasarawa West on the other hand, has five (5) Local Governments which are Keffi, Kokona, Karu, Nasarawa and Toto.

The State is inhabited by several ethnic groups who have different history and background. However, majority of them are traced to Kwararafa dynasty. These ethnic groups include; Alago, Jukun, Eggon, Mada, Migili, Tiv, Kanuri, Afo, Hausa, Fulani, Gwandara, Gade, Yaskwa, Gbagi, Kantana, Rindre, Ibura, and of recent there are a large number of Igbo and Yoruba people. These people are highly diverse in language, culture, believe, tradition e.t.c. The dominant religions thus, are Islam and Christianity, though there are many adherence of traditional religion.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Nexus between Democracy and Rural Development in Nasarawa State, 2011-2023

The correlation between democracy and development exist but prove very difficult to elucidate. Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 and the political landscape was full of hope that the renewed participatory strategy under democratic regime will engineer grass-root transformation and development. During the period under review, several roads, electricity, educational and security projects were carried out in rural areas across Nasarawa state.

4.1.1 Roads Construction

Rural communities that suffered neglect in the past are now witnessing the presence of the government with the completion of Mararaban Udege road in Nasarawa LGA. Sisin Baki-Kwarra road, Wamba LGA and Gudi-Moroa road, Akwanga LGA. There is an ongoing construction of Garaku-dari road, Kokona LGA, Ribijangwa road, Awe LGA, reconstruction of Adudu-Azara road, Awe LGA, Nunku-Agyaga-Rinze road, Akwanga LGA, Alushi-Wakama road, Nasarawa Eggon LGA, Nasarawa-Ara road, Nasarawa LGA, Keana-Abuni Road, Keana LGA, among others. These road projects enable rural communities to transport their farm produce without hindrance. Additionally, over 20 urban and rural road projects are currently ongoing at different stages, which when completed, will bring meaningful development to the entire state. Below are details of other completed roads by Governor Sule, 2019-2023:

- i. Al-makura Street Road, Lafia;
- ii. Abuja Street Road, Lafia;
- iii. Sadami Street Road, Lafia;
- iv. Power Station Road Akurba, Lafia;
- v. Shendam/Government House Dual Carriage Way, Lafia;
- vi. Nasarawa State Infectious Disease Center Road, Lafia;
- vii. Shinge-Kilema Rice Mills Road, Lafia;
- viii. Antau Bridge/FMC Road, Keffi LGA;

- ix. Police Station Road Dual Carriage Way, Keffi LGA;
- x. Ahmadu Bunga Dual Carriage Way, Keffi LGA;
- xi. Kofan Goriya Road, Keffi LGA;
- xii. Keffi Modern Market Road, Keffi LGA;
- xiii. Mararaban Udege-Udege-Mbeki Road, Nasarawa LGA;
- xiv. Government College/GRA Road, Keffi LGA;
- xv. Gudi-Moroa Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xvi. Tsisin Baki-Kwarra Road, Wamba LGA;
- xvii. Ola Hospital-Wakama Road, Akun Development Area, Nas. Eggon LGA;
- xviii. VIP Guest Inn Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xix. Isolation Center Road, Shabu-Lafia;
- xx. Oriye Rindre Palace Road, Wamba LGA;
- xxi. Several Internal Roads at Lafia Airport, Kwandere Lafia;
- xxii. Internal Roads at Sani Abacha Bus Terminal, Karu LGA;
 - a. Multi-Disciplinary Research Road, Permanent Site, Federal University, Lafia;
- xxiii. Internal Roads at Yahaya Sabo Bus Terminal, Lafia;
- xxiv. Dr. Rebecca Isaac Umaru Road, Lafia;
- xxv. Behind Government House Fence Road, Lafia;
- xxvi. Presidential Lodge Road, Government House And
- xxvii. Ministry of Justice Complex Road, Lafia (Abdullahi, 2023).

Also, several road projects are currently under construction and are at different stages of completion. Some of them are listed below:

- i. Garaku-Dari Road, Kokona LGA;
- ii. Keana-Abuni Road, Keana LGA;
- iii. Nunku-Agyaga-Rinze Road, Akwanga LGA;
- iv. Central Mosque Road, Akwanga LGA;
- v. New Karu-Ado Kasa Road, Karu LGA;
- vi. Angwan Baban Aragu Road, Akwanga LGA;
- vii. Adaha-Rinzeroad, Akwanga LGA;
- viii. Masaka-Luvu-Apia Road, Karu LGA;
- ix. Alushi Medical Center Wakama Road, Nasarawa Eggon LGA;

- x. Rehabilitation of Toto-Umasha-Surface Dressing to Asphaltic Overlaying, Toto LGA;
- xi. Mararaba-Aso-Kugbaru Road/40 Meter Bridge, Karu LGA;
- xii. Upgrade/Rehabilitation of The Adudu-Azara Road Surface-Finish to Asphaltic Level, Awe LGA;
- xiii. Gudi Township Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xiv. Masaka-Koya Road, Karu LGA;
- xv. Angwan Dankanzo Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xvi. GRA-Bukan Ari Road, Lafia;
- xvii. Bayan Dutse Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xviii. Andaha-Ninghaha Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xix. Morowa-Angwan Yara Road, Akwanga LGA;
- xx. Ribbi-Jangwa Road, Awe LGA;
- xxi. Nasarawa-Ara Road, Nasarawa LGA;
- xxii. Agwade-Shupe Road, Obi LGA
- xxiii. Kanji-Abuni Road, Awe LGA, And
- xxiv. Rehabilitation Gitata-Panda Road, Karu LGA;

4.1.2 Electricity Supply

Both Governor Al-makura (2011-2019) and Governor Sule (2019-2023) invested heavily in rural electrification in the state. Below are some examples. Mararaban Udege-Loko Rural Electrification 45 KLM: The ongoing electrification of the Loko-Ushata-Usha-Kadu and Kuvo communities of Nasarawa Local Government Area is the first of its kind in the history of these communities that have existed for over a century. Work is at an advanced stage, as poles high-tension wires and transformers have been fixed and work done is over 90 percent as at March, 2023.

Toto-Umaisha Ural Electrification 48 Klm: Similarly, there is ongoing electrification of the Umaisha and Ugya communities of the Toto Local Government Area. This work will be the first in the history of these communities. The project is at an advanced stage; poles, high-tension wires, and transformers have been fixed while the installation is ongoing. Work done is over 85 percent, as at the end of February, 2023. Installation of transformers: several transformers were supplied and installed across the state to boost electricity distribution and voltage.

4.1.3 Security services

The Nasarawa-Mararaban Udege, Loko road and Nasarawa-Toto road was a death trap as all the surrounding hills were occupied by criminal elements. A week hardly passed by without the kidnapping and maiming of innocent and harmless citizens this led to a massive decline of economic activities as farming activities were put on hold and people lived in fear of being killed by unknown gunmen.

Also, the Bassa-Egbura crisis which had lingered for decades, far back to the early 1980's as a result of the struggle for political dominance, was brought to end by the administration of Governor Sule. Previous administrations tried their best but failed to end the crisis. The peace enjoyed during this administration has benefited the state enormously. As a result, there is a boost in economic activities, especially in agriculture. This has increased food production in the state.

More kingdoms were created to give voice to each ethnic group. Local Government activities were opened to other communities outside the headquarters. These were some of the steps the administration of Governor Sule took to resolve the crisis and to restore peace. Other security efforts of the administration according to Abdullahi (2023) include:

- i. Facilitating the establishment of six military super camps in Toto, Gadabuke, Ugya, Uttu, Kenyehu and Umasha, Toto LGA;
- ii. Set up an Air force base in the state capital, Lafia;
- iii. Collaborated for the establishment of the Nigeria Civil Defence Training College, Toto LGA;
- iv. Setting up Special forces in Doma, LGA;
- v. Ensure peaceful coexistence between herders/farmers in the border communities of Nasarawa/Benue States as well as in Ibira/Basa communities in Toto LGA;
- vi. Convey regular meetings with the traditional rulers, Local Government Chairmen and Stakeholders to ensure lasting peace in the State;
- vii. Signed into the law the Nasarawa State Kidnapping Act Prohibition Law

Nasarawa State is presently one of Nigeria's most peaceful states, and this could not have been possible without Governor Sule's continued proactive effort aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of the people.

4.1.4 Educational Services

On creation in 1996, Nasarawa state was rated among the least educated state in the country. However, between 1999 and 2022, a lot of educational institutions were established, cutting across primary to secondary and tertiary institutions by the government of Alh. Abdullahi Adamu, the first civilian administration. Again, between 2011 and 2019, Governor Tanko Al-makura has intervened in areas of teachers recruitment (with over 2,200 recruited), massive renovations and construction of classroom blocks with state of the art facilities across the state, construction of special education school, support to tertiary institutions including Federal University of Lafia (Dalhatu, 2019).

In the like manner, Governor Sule has invested tremendously in recruitment, promotions and payment of salaries of teachers/lecturers and non-academics at both secondary and post-secondary schools in the state. He sustained the payment of UBE counterpart funding and construction of schools. Expansion of both the state University and Polytechnic with the introduction of Medical and Engineering programmes. Free education programme for persons living with disability and students scholarship are being prioritised (Abdullahi, 2023).

4.2 Challenges to the Smooth Transformation of Rural Areas in Nasarawa State

4.2.1 Challenges of infrastructures

Rural infrastructure, therefore, implies "the basic physical and organisational structures and facilities (e.g., buildings, roads, power supplies, irrigation networks, extension services, warehouses, and storage facilities) needed for the operation of a rural society" (Memon & Bilali, 2020). Nigeria's infrastructure development in the last two decades, using the composite Africa Infrastructure Index (AIDI) from 2001 to 2020, report indicates a substantial rise in the

nation's AIDI from 8.78 in 2001 to 23.27 in 2020, though; this two-decadal increase is abysmally below the average of the top 10 countries in Africa in recent times. Out of 54 countries in Africa, Nigeria's AIDI scores fluctuate between 20.61 and 23.27, while its ranking ranged between 23rd and 24th position in recent five-year period (2016-2020). Seychelles was the topmost performer with AIDI scores ranging from 94.32 in 2018 to 96.73 in 2020 (AfDB, 2020). Nigeria's AIDI scores was never in the category of top 10 in two decades, while only countries like Ghana and Botswana and Cape Verde were the only nations in the West African sub-region that have attained top 10 ranking in recent reports (AfDB, 2018; 2020). Moreover, to critically assess the state of Nigeria's infrastructure development in two decades, we shall delve into the four main indicators of the Nigeria's AIDI score which are as follow: (i) Transport Index (ii) Electricity Index (iii) ICT Index, and (iv) Water supply and Sanitation Index.

Transport system is critical to agricultural production, especially the downstream (rural farmers) level and along its value chain. From Nigeria's transport index 2001- 2020, an abysmally low score ranging from 5.35 in 2001 to 5.66 in 2020 was recorded. In recent reports, Nigeria's transport index (AIDI 2016-2020) scores ranged from 4.89 in 2016 to 5.66 in 2020, while it was ranked 31st in 2016 and improved to 29th position in 2017 (AFDB, 2020). The indicators are measured in km per 10,000 inhabitants, as proxy for access to the paved road network in Nigeria and by total road network (per square kilometre (km²) of exploitable land area). The deplorable state of most of our rural roads has resulted in spike in prices of agricultural produce, reduced income of the farmers and non-commercialisation status, while increasing food insecurity of some smallholder farmers in the rural settings of the country.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the recent Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018 indicated that 59.0 per cent of household population in Nigeria had access to **electricity**, of which 83.0 per cent of urban households had access, while only 39.0 per cent of the rural households had access to electricity

(NPC & ICF, 2019). Moreover, Africa's Electricity index revealed that Nigeria's electricity index score fluctuated between 1.95 in 2003 to 2.72 in 2020, indicating serious challenge of accessibility of Nigerians to the country's energy sector. Many of the rural areas in Nigeria have not even been connected to the national grid and were left with no hope of having access to electricity (Nigerian Energy Support Programme-NESP, 2015). Energy is pivotal to the farmers' increased production and processing of the agricultural produce and other business activities, especially in the rural areas. From the recent Nigeria's electricity index scores (2016-2020), the country's rank ranged from 28th to 29th position out of 54 countries in the continent (AfDB 2018; 2020).

Similarly, to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2018) cited in (NPC & ICF, 2019), 31.0 per cent of urban women and 55.0 per cent men are more likely to have access or have used the internet, while only 6.0 per cent of rural women and 25.0 per cent rural men have used or have access to the **internet** in Nigeria (NPC & ICF, 2019). Moreover, Africa's ICT index revealed that Nigeria's ICT index score ranged from 0.09 in 2001 to 17.88 in 2020. From the AIDI recent report, Nigeria's ranking fell from 12th in 2016 to 22nd position in 2020 (AfDB, 2018; 2020). There are many rural settings in Nigeria without internet connectivity, which is one of the limiting factors of smallholder farmers' commercialisation and rural access to important information in many sectors of the economy. Access to improved **water and sanitation** is crucial to the nutrition and health status of members of households both in rural and urban settings in Nigeria. According to recent Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2018) cited in (NPC & ICF, 2019), 74.0 per cent of households in urban areas had access to improved source of drinking water, while 58.0 per cent of the rural households in Nigeria had access to improved source of drinking water (NPC & ICF, 2019). Also, the report equally indicated that 56.0 per cent of Nigerian households used improved toilet facilities; 74.0 per cent in urban areas and 39.0 per cent in rural areas (NPC & ICF, 2019). Meanwhile, Africa's water supply and sanitation index (WSS) revealed that

Nigeria's WSS index score ranged from 36.43 in 2001 to 65.62 in 2020.

4.2.2 Challenges of rivalry between traditional rulers and elected representatives

The structure of local government in Nigeria requires the existence of traditional council as an advisory body, but for some reasons the traditional institutions engage in power struggle or competition with their local government officials so as to win the support and control of their communities.

According to Dalhatu (2007), traditional rulers in the northern part of Nigeria seems not to forget the overwhelming power they had during the Native Authority system. Some of them are so powerful and are seen by their people as natural leaders; whereas, government representatives (especially elected ones) see themselves as the true and democratic representatives of their people. This brings frequent power tussle between the traditional rulers and government representatives which in turn hinders the progress of most rural areas in Nasarawa state.

4.2.3 Challenges of political instability

Frequent changes of governments at all levels, either through coup d'état, counter coup or shabby democratic processes affect the structures, compositions and functions of third tier government. Each government comes with its peculiar policy that will alter the structure, functions and importantly, performance of Local Governments as evidenced in the various Local Government Reforms. Unfortunately, even under democracy, state Governors enact laws or policies that frequently alter the operations and stability of local governments ushering in undemocratic and corrupt leaders in the name of Governors' boys. Again, most government policies taken are retrogressive, while few others are progressive to the rural communities, example is the joint account. The success in the implementation of these policies also varies with the government in power.

Finally, Local Governments at long run, suffer in the implementation of their long term plans and projects. This lack of continuity hampers the

achievement of Local Governments' objectives and specifically, rural transformation.

4.2.4 Challenges of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty

It is observed that the incidence of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty which the practice of democracy since 1999 ought to have addressed is still alarming in the Nigeria. In fact, school enrollment is abysmally low in particularly Northern Region. Abdulrazaq, Rohana & Suyatno (2015) submitted that, "school enrolment in the South gets to some 70%, while in the poverty-stricken North only some 30% go to school". Literacy Survey of six (6) States sampled across the six (6) Geo-political zones in the federation revealed that: in the Northern part, NE Bauchi has 39.5%, NW-Kebbi 52.3%, NC-Nasarawa 62.9%, whereas, in the Southern part, SW-Lagos, 95.1%, SE-Ebonyi 91.9%, 55 Bayesa, 93.8% (NBS, 2010). Nasarawa State's literacy rate is 59.21% (Adeyinka, 2024). This situation led to unemployment which was already high and grew higher in the Fourth Republic. Lack of employment, which in most cases is attributed to lack of education, normally breeds poverty amongst Nasarawa population. UNDP (2004) opined that, "the number of youths who are out of work and out of school either as graduates or drop-out are increasingly worrisome." Again, the Department for International Development (2014) observed that, "Nigeria (Nasarawa inclusive) has a quarter of Africa's extreme poor, with about 100 million of a population of 174 million living on less than £1 a day". The incidence of poverty in Nigeria is quite alarming that an average man finds it difficult eating at least three square meal a day. The Northern zone was the worst hit with the North-Central zone recording 59.5%; North-East 69%, North-West 70%, while, South-East was recording 58%, South-South 55.9% and South-West 49% (NBS, 2012). World Bank (2024) reports also estimates that Nigeria's poverty rate has increased to 46% in 2023, which is about 104 million people. This invariably indicated that Nigeria's democratic survival has serious challenge of tackling this ugly menace and developing the local communities.

4.2.5 Challenges of corruption and bad governance

The menace of systemic corruption in Nigeria has contributed no less a challenge to poor rural transformation. Corruption, especially at the level of government bureaucracy has been found to be chronic and the effect on the general psyche of the Nigerians. It has contributed to government failure and breakdown of institutions as well as critical infrastructures in Nasarawa State. This is traceable to systemic political corruption. According to Nwanaegbo and Odigbe (2013), corruption is bad not because money and other pecuniary benefits change hands, and certainly not because of the motives of participants, but because it privatizes valuable aspects of public life, by-passing processes of representation debate and choice.

4.2.6 Challenges of insecurity

As noted by the Nigeria's former military Head of State in one of his opening speeches in 2004 at the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSSS) in Jos, General Abdulsalami Abubakar alluded, and very strongly too, that, Nigeria's greatest challenge is insecurity. Abubakar (2004) cited in Okpuga, Ugwu and Eme (2012) claimed that: in addressing the challenge to the survival of democracy in Nigeria, it is pertinent to consider security issues and problems that have affected the attitude, confidence and cooperation of all groups and segments that make up the Nigerian federation. Oyobode (2011) concurring with Abubakar's position on the imperative of national peace and security. He however warned that security should go beyond law and order and therefore encompassing meaningful existence for the generality of the populace. Insecurity in Nasarawa state like many part of the country is a serious hindrance socio-economic development. The rate of kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes and communal conflicts in the State is alarming within the period under study (2011-2023). These include the Bassa-Egbura crisis, the Ombatse ethnic militia, the Tiv-Fulani (farmer-herder) crisis and the increasing spade of kidnapping are working against effective transformation of rural areas by successive administrations in the State.

4.3 Curbing the Impediments to the Smooth Transformation of Rural Areas in Nasarawa State

In order to have a virile Local Government Administration in the near future, the following issues must be addressed by Nigerians, Nigerian and Nasarawa State governments.

4.3.1 Accountability and transparency

Corruption and mismanagement which have retarded the progress of local government should be eradicated or at least reduced to a minimal level. Governments officials involve in this menace should be re-oriented against it. The danger of corruption cannot be underestimated. 'We must kill it or it kills us'. The Government staff should learn how to use public resources for public benefit at all times. Vandalism and careless attitude towards public property should be stopped. Disciplinary actions should henceforth be taken without sentiment on staff who refuses to adhere to the code of conduct. Anti-graft agencies should rise up to this challenge at all levels of government.

4.3.2 Cordial relationship between the local government management and the traditional rulers

The 1976 reforms fixed the traditional rulers into Traditional Council, but reduced their role to advisory rather than chief administrators which they were hitherto used to. This therefore, induced the tussle between the traditional council and the local administrators in some areas. However, there are still some confusions about their roles. The traditional rulers/council should be given a clear-cut role in the constitution which is different from the one devolved to the Local and State governments in terms of rural development. This role should go beyond advisory, given the fact that most of the present chiefs are educated with several years of working experiences. The two parties should also realize that their fruitful cooperation is a necessary ingredient for the progress of their communities as a whole.

4.3.3 Political stability

Effective rural administration requires relative political stability. Local Government political terrain should be made very stable by allowing truly elected representatives with specified term of office to handle development activities at that level. This political stability should be the reflection of national polity which will also afford the people the opportunity to assess the performance of the Local Government administration in power.

4.3.4 Good governance

The Federal, State and Local Governments should promote pro-poor planning and budgeting at the national and local levels. This should be in the areas of developing the necessary infrastructure and encouraging rural population data collection, synthesis and analysis, to enhance the understanding of the contribution of farming households towards poverty and food insecurity reduction, as well as income generation; encourage the involvement of vulnerable segments, including women, youth and indigenous peoples and rural communities, in the design of local and national planning of rural development; and human capital development by way of strengthening rural health-care facilities and capacities; Creating and developing educational programmes for rural communities aimed at disease prevention; Reviving adult literacy programmes for the rural communities, as well as provision of vocational and entrepreneurship training in particular for youth, young girls, women and indigenous people; Promoting rural communities' empowerment and rural leadership to stimulate participation of the community representation in policy development meetings and decision-making; Promoting programmes that support and promote farm production technologies consistent with the socio-economic situation of the rural dwellers, should be prioritised by both the State and Federal government of Nigeria. This should be pursued with vigour.

4.3.5 Infrastructural development

Federal, State and Local Governments should increase collaborations and public-private investments in rural infrastructure. These should include: Provision of broad-based infrastructural facilities such as good roads, waterways and transport systems, storage and market facilities; Enhance access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation; build capacities and improve access to information and communications technologies; and Improve storage infrastructure capacity, quality and practices to reduce post-harvest losses.

4.3.6 Deliberate and effective educational reforms

In addressing these issues or challenges, it is important for Nasarawa stakeholders to first and foremost, fight illiteracy and spare no energy in the battle to rid the education sector of all the vestiges of authoritarianism, vandalism, senseless violence, anarchism, rackets and racketeers, cults and cultists e.t.c. The strategy should go beyond superficial campaign to include the creation of open, transparent and legitimate avenues for exercising rights and expressing bottled up tensions. They should ensure and support policies that will increase school enrolments and quality of learning in the state as well as those that will guarantee self-reliance and creativity. Technical skills, teachers training as well as scholarship must be prioritized.

4.3.7 Robust employment and poverty alleviation programmes

Rural dwellers should be consulted in the design and implementation of employment and poverty alleviation programmes such as the social investment, agricultural, NDE and NAPEP programmes among others. This shall genuinely boost employment and reduce poverty facing

rural communities. Special fund should be set aside at all levels of government to take care of these programmes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigerians are largely rural dwellers and agrarians in nature. Therefore, any meaningful effort at development must give priority to rural areas. Many scholars such as Abdurazak, Rohana & Suyatno (2015) have come to conclusion that there is strong relationship between democracy and rural development programmes, and hence successive democratic governments in Nigeria (Nasarawa inclusive) have actually given attention to rural transformation programmes. These programmes which in Nasarawa State cut across rural infrastructures, poverty reduction and empowerment, education, agriculture, security e.t.c rarely yield expected results due to some challenges militating against the success of the efforts. These challenges uncovered by this research include, poor state of critical infrastructure such as roads, electricity, ICT, water and sanitation in rural areas, illiteracy, political instability, rivalry between tradition rulers and local officials, corruption and bad governance.

Though, the efforts made by the last two democratic governments of Umaru Tanko Al-makura (2011-2019) and Abdullahi A. Sule (2019-2023) is quite encouraging, but the pace needs to be improved. It is on this note that the study suggests more proactive measures in general infrastructural development by way of massive investment through positive collaborations and public-private partnership, education reforms, poverty alleviation programmes, fighting corruption, maintaining peace and order, encouraging community participation and good governance. This shall surely facilitate robust and effective transformation of rural areas in Nasarawa State under this democracy.

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