

The Role of Development Centres (Development Areas) In Community and Grass Root Transformation: A Study of Amachi Development Centre

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of development centres (development areas) in economic and political development of local communities and grass root transformation. It is aimed at identifying the activities of development centres (development areas) in grass root transformation of communities in Abakaliki Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The findings of the study indicated that; incompetency on the part of staff and management authority is partly responsible for the poor state of affairs in the various communities that make up Abakaliki Local Government Area. The study used descriptive method of research on the existing literature on the subject matter and concluded that the quality and quantity of social services provided by the Development Centre has not shown any significant and commensurate relationship with the fund earmarked for developmental projects, that political interference and inadequate autonomy greatly affected developmental strides of the various communities in Abakaliki Local Government Area. It is the position of this study that incompetency, lack of political and administrative autonomy have become a cog of wheel in the social and economic transformation of our local communities. The paper therefore suggested that to ensure a governmental and democratic rule in the development areas that will bring about societal development and transformation, there should be opportunity to various constituents to nominate candidates qualified for appointive positions zoned to their constituents, financial independence of development areas, emphasis on meritocracy, attitudinal change and positive perception among the team players in politics.

Keywords: Development Centres, Grass root transformation, incompetency, Social Services and Management Autonomy. Management Committee, Coordinator, Development Areas.

Introduction

One of the major justifications for local governments in modern polity is that it promotes political participation by local communities in governmental activities as well as serving as machinery for harnessing local efforts for developmental purposes. By ensuring or facilitating participation in governmental activities at the local level, local governments also serves a bridge and channel of interactions between local populations and central authority of governance.

Maddick (2003) suggested that development engineering in developing countries requires decentralized structures and attitudes of cooperation between those at the centre and those at the rural settings. He further suggested that bridging the centre and the localities would require the establishment of administrative and governmental institutions at the local level, in which the villages and towns can be brought together to realize what they lack in the way of better mode of living within the country. What the foregoing comments seems to suggest is that local governments can play an important role in the process of harnessing human and material resources for local and national development.

Meanwhile, the needs to set up local government and development centres (development areas) as well as the purpose they serve are identical, hence Okoli (2002) summarized the purpose for establishing local government system to include;

- ❖ To fill the gap in remote areas which the national government is unable to fill,
- ❖ Complement and extend the national government closer to the people etc.

In view of these, especially with the inability of the local governments in Ebonyi State to address the challenges prompted the first civilian governor of Ebonyi state, Dr Sam Egwu to create about twenty one (21) local levels known as development centres in the governance of the rural people. It was later increased to about fifty one (51), all to bring governance further to the doorsteps of the people at the grass root. In an interview to mark his fiftieth (50th) birthday, the former governor, Dr. Sam Egwu revealed that the purpose of creating development areas was meant to give the various communities, freedom, hope, participation in democracy, local independence, and most importantly is opportunity to manage their own resources efficiently and effectively for the more accelerated and prompts development of their locality. The tempo of local development was sustained by the present administration in the state under the leadership of Chief Martin Elechi, who on assumption of office in 2007 created additional thirteen (13) local areas out of the existing thirteen (13) local governments, bringing to sixty-four (64) local areas or development areas. This was in response to the cries of marginalization by some communities during the previous exercise.

The complexity of modern national government coupled with their increasing shift of interest from domestic to international policies has indeed created a gap in the provision of the need services and development of infrastructure to local communities. The situation culminated in the deplorable state of affairs in communities development. Against this backdrop, the creation of development centres (development areas) was appreciated by the people. These development centres were created with a view to achieve accelerated grass root development by embarking on developmental projects and provision of services which would bring change in the entire social system of the people by moving them away from condition considered as unsatisfactory to ones regarded as materially acceptable and better.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted two theories relevant to the topic of discussion, the systems theory as propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and the situational theory as propounded by Fielder.A (1967).

“System Theory” – In this theory as propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) he viewed a system as a collection of parts operating interdependently to achieve a common purpose. Hornby A.S (2005) sees a system as a group of related parts working together. These inter-related parts form a whole and work together towards the maintenance of the system.

To relate this theory to the subject matter of this study, development centres (development areas) are seen as subsystems of the main local government recognized by constitution of the country. They work together with other subsystem to achieve the objectives of the state governments and the central authority government, which has to do with the development of the macro economy.

In furtherance, and with relevance to the topic of discussion, the study also adopted “Situational Theory” as propounded by Fielder.A (1967). The theory emphasizes that what managers or chief executives do in practice depends upon a given sets of circumstances or situations. This approach takes cognizance of not only a given situation or behavior pattern of an enterprise, organization or institution, but equally requires that managers take into account the realities of a given situation and the diversities of personalities (employees) in an organization when dealing with problems, issues or challenges of an organization or institution, both in private and public sector.

The Rationale for Creation of Development Centres (Development Areas) In Ebonyi State

Development Centres like local government has been regarded as the third tier of government, which aid the development of grass roots where states and central government (federal government) cannot fully cover. It was therefore designated to ensure even development of the nation from the below while filling the gap the federal government is unable to fill (Okpata, 2004).

The reason for the creation of development centres shall be reviewed here to advance our minds for the philosophy behind its creation. In the official broadcast of the pioneer Executive Governor of Ebonyi State, Dr. Sam Egwu announced the creation of development centre on 21st July 2001 thus, “it should be clear by now that this administration is firmly set on a course of participatory democracy and government by consultation. Since the assumption of office two years ago, we have repeatedly affirmed our commitment to leadership of responsibility and service to the people. Indeed, we have repeatedly demonstrated those qualities in all aspects of statecraft; we are familiar with our political history which brought about our demand for the creation of a state of our own, where our problems and interest would be better solved and protected. This is because the creation of

Ebonyi State is primarily aimed at addressing the myriads of problems created by the neglect of successive governments. Indeed, the government does not honour megaphone leadership, rather, we believe in the leadership that will stand and identify with the people in their greatest moment of need.

Thus, on assumption of office, we promised to bring development to the grass roots through the third tier of government because the state government cannot stay at the centre (state capital) to develop the rural areas without the participation of the grass roots. So far, our genuine effort to attain to elaborate development in our grassroots shall no doubt be better addressed through the third tier of government. More so, for Ebonyi State, which is considered a rural state with greater rural population. Indeed, this government from the onset has always focused on the silent majority, as it is our burning desire to touch their lives. It is therefore, our expectation that the grassroots should respond and complement government efforts by cooperating to ensure deliberate development of the areas through investment in modern amenities. It is to realize these noble ideas that the state government acted in partnership with the State House of Assembly to consider and endorse the local government bill in order to live up to the expectations of the people. Indeed, it is our believe that before the end of this administration, Ebonyi State shall cease to be rural state but compete as a modern geo-political entity with her other counterparts of the federation. As a government, this administration is conscious of the fact that leadership fell on us at a period when all advanced societies have developed their human and material resources”.

The Roles of Amachi Development Centre in Community and Grass-Root Development

Development Centres were created to bring economic, social, political and government closer to the people of the grass root. The lofty ideals for the creation of these grass root government in recent time have been appraised by many for its developmental strides, though they are some dissenting voices who have criticized its creation especially as they query that money given to them as monthly allocation, subvention or whatever names it goes with is not commensurate with the level of infrastructural facilities it claims to have provided for the rural populace at a monthly or yearly basis (Ibeogu, 2015). These critics maintained that the proliferation of development centres have not made any impact in the life of the rural areas and so should be scrapped, especially when it is not recognized by the government of the federation, but established by an act of the Ebonyi State legislative arm.

However, much as they are critics or proponents whose position is that the development centres should be scrapped on the grounds of non performance, corruption and duplication of roles, duties and responsibilities, it suffices to say that its commitment to the transformation of rural life should be appreciated as it has impacted positively on the people’s lives in the area of education, healthcare service and aggressive rural development and employment opportunities.

➤ **The Place of Education in Amachi Development Centre** – On a termly basis, the development centre distributes hundreds of thousands of textbooks, exercise books and pens to public primary and secondary schools and register WASSCE exams to senior school students, all in a bid to complement the efforts of the state government in her free education policy. For the students in the tertiary institution, the development centre pays students who are studying non professional courses, ten thousand naira (₦10, 000), Medical and health related courses, twenty thousand naira (₦20, 000), Law students, twenty thousand naira (₦ 20, 000), as bursary allowance on a yearly basis. The intelligent students who are from indigent parents are placed on scholarship of between fifty thousand naira (₦ 50, 000) to two hundred thousand naira (₦ 200, 000) annually, and this is determined (amount to be paid) based on the course of discipline, while the students who have their Bachelor of Law (B.L) and are moving to the Nigeria Law school are given four hundred thousand naira each (₦ 400, 000) by the development area, under the leadership of Chief Fidelis Nwokocha. In the healthcare, mobile health care, health centres and cottage hospitals have been provided to save the people, mother and child from the high infant mortality rate. In other areas, there is aggressive rural road construction, provision of borehole, renovation and construction of markets, stalls and repair of dilapidated primary and secondary school buildings.

➤ **Provision of Employment Opportunities** – The establishment of development centres have created enormous job opportunities for political loyalist. In the 64 development areas appoint about seven persons each as members of the management committee, i.e., Coordinator (administrator) committee members on Finance, Education, Works, Agriculture, Information officer, Personal Aid to the Coordinator. Put them together, the 64 development areas empowers about four hundred and forty – eight party loyalists without job.

Impediment to the Realization of Development Areas Goal and The Challenges That Poses Employees Contributions to Institutional Growth and Development

The orchestrated positive impacts of the development areas in Ebonyi State (Amachi Development Area) cannot be completed without an insight on its attendant challenges. Development centres or areas are the creation of the Ebonyi State government, those who preside, man or take charge of the administration of these grass root government are appointed by the governor. Therefore, the policies pursued by these rural government are only and mostly directed by the state government, (government houses), Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy matters, Local Government Service Commission, and the Ebonyi State House of Assembly (Ibeogu,2015).

Other militating factors in the realization of the philosophy behind the creation include:

- I. Indigenous workforce often sees other workforces that are not indigenous to their area as a threat to their career progression. This attitude most often affects the smooth running of the centres by the coordinators (administrators). There have been several instances whereby a particular treasurer, Head of Personnel (HPM), Auditor, and Cashier who is not from the development area neither relate well with the subordinate staff or coordinator (Administrator). In such a situation, the coordinator of the development centre moves to the Local Government Service Commission and influence the posting of such principal officer.
- II. Some principal officers of the development areas (Coordinator, HPM, Treasurer, Auditor, and cashier) are not adequately trained to handle human diversities in an organization in a way that will bring unity in diversity in such organization. This is most likely in situations whereby the chief executive or heads of the organization are not proficient in the art of administration.
- III. Environment within which employee operate are ever dynamic and poses a great challenge to organizational management and growth.
- IV. Lack of well co-ordinated labour management relations threatens optimal industrial relations.

Conclusion

With adequate management, development centre could and have served as a effective planks through which the local communities attain meaningful developments. It was envisaged that with the establishment of development centres, the state government concentrated on other issues such as infrastructural development of the state, Ebonyi.

Furthermore, it has been argued, that the creation of these development areas have had positive impacts, most remarkable, reduced the agitations of marginalization in the state by some sections of the populace. Finally, much as one may conclude that the development areas are appendages of the state government where policies and programmes of the development areas, are dictated, influenced and master-minded by the super ordinate (state) governemet. However, not minding the obvious criticisms about it's creation, it has contributed immensely to the development of grass roots in Ebonyi State through people oriented programme geared towards effective education, rural roads maintenance and rehabilitation, primary healthcare services, rural electrification, youth empowerment, provision of employment opportunities etc.

Recommendations;

From the fore –going, the following recommendations are suggested;

- I. The state (government) should appoint coordinators (administrators) and management committee members on the basis of merit and competence, rather than political patronage;
- II. Since development centres serves as fulcrum upon which the development of grass root is anchored, there should be management autonomy to operate without interference from the parent government. Development policies and programmes should be allowed to come from the people of the grass roots;

- III. The success or failure of development centre may sometimes depends on the financial resource available to them and it's utilization. Therefore, since finance is the life wire of organization in terms of goal achievement, it is suggested that the government should increase the fund given to development areas as monthly allocation;
- IV. The government should increase the number of persons appointed as management committees, this should be devoid of political patronage so that the educated elites could be accommodated, and it will invariably bring about youth and human development;
- V. Finally, attention should be given to human capacity development so as to produce the needed manpower to galvanize the development process of the rural areas.

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