

Ring Road Project and Rural Development in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State. The study posed some research questions and adopted incremental model as its framework of analysis. Unstructured interview was used to collect data from respondents, while purposive sampling technique was employed to select three (3) communities from the three (3) selected local government areas that are part of the six (6) local government areas approved for the Ring Road project execution in Rivers State. Thirty-six (36) respondents were purposively selected to participate in the study, while 30 respondents were successfully interviewed which were used for the analyses of the study. Simple percentage was used to analyse the bio-data information of the respondents and qualitative analysis was used as a method of analysis for the study. The study revealed that their various measures put in place by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. The Ring Road Project is meant to promote rural development, extend trade, and improve rural competitiveness through an efficient and affordable integrated transport system in Rivers State. The project is expected to create employment opportunities for the rural dwellers and help the rural poor earn a better living for their family in the state. While the challenges that may affect the project includes: exclusion of other local government areas in the project; involving corrupt officials in the project; poor relationship between the communities and contractors; poor monitoring and supervision; and insecurity. The study thus recommended that Rivers State Government should include other local government areas in Ring Roads Project. Inclusion of other local government areas in the project will help in connecting agricultural and non-agricultural income earners, thus enhancing rural development in the state.

KEYWORD: Road, Project, Development, Rural.

INTRODUCTION

The overall development of rural areas depends on various supportive rural infrastructural facilities (Usman et al., 2013). Efficient and effective rural transportation serves as one of the channels for the collection and exchange of goods and services, movement of people, dissemination of information and the promotion of the rural economy (Victor, 2020, p. 12). It is also clear that the development of rural infrastructure generally contributes significantly to the quality of rural life. Countries that have developed their rural infrastructure have recorded higher and better quality of rural development than those that have failed to do so (Amadi, 2023, p. 58).

The existence of an accessible, acceptable and efficient road project is a pre-condition for linking remote farm areas, located far from consumer’s centres with the agricultural production process (Emeka, 2020, p. 9). A good road system is fundamental to the economic and social development of rural areas, and significant investment is required to scale up a suitable road system in rural areas. Good accessible road is a key factor for agricultural development all over the world. It is the only means by which food produced at the farm can reach different homes as well as markets. The market for agricultural produce is created by accessible road; furthermore, accessible road increases the interaction among geographical and economic regions and opens up new areas to economic activity (Amadi, 2023, p. 58). Road transport is the most predominant mode of transportation all over the world and this is a confirmation of the crucial role road plays in rural development of a nation (Alake, 2020, p. 92).

In Nigeria, the issue of rural roads development has continued to be of national importance. For instance, most of the rural roads are in poor condition, and this has imposed significant costs on the nation’s economy especially to the agricultural activities due to increased vehicle operating costs and travel times. The Federal Government of Nigeria has embarked on various programmes like the defunct Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), at one time or the other to ensure the provision of adequate road facilities to meet the needs of the rural population, but these programmes have not been able to achieve the desired success (Amadi, 2023, p. 59).

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, many rural people in Rivers State suffered from poor access to markets, health, schooling, and high transport costs (Victor, 2020, p. 12). Inadequate rural roads make it hard for farmers to produce more and to transport any surpluses after harvest in the state. Traffic on most rural roads in Rivers State still consists mainly of pedestrians often carrying head loads (Amadi, 2023, p. 60). Poor and inadequate rural roads have been the main concern by both small producers and consumers in Rivers State. Inadequate road system is also seen as the major impediment to the growth of the rural areas as well as the state economy. The road density of Rivers State per thousand square km was 49 km which falls far behind the average road density of lower-middle income states in Nigeria which is about 0.3 km/sq.km (Anaeto, 2020, p. 82). Therefore, most places in Rivers State especially in the rural areas are still without access roads and poor connectivity to major road networks.

In Rivers State, the poor tend to live in isolated villages that can become virtually inaccessible during the rainy seasons in the state. When there is a post-harvest marketable surplus, it is not always easy to reach the markets. Limited accessibility has also cut off small-scale farmers from sources of inputs, equipment, and new technologies in the state. Crop productivity is, therefore, low because farmers lack these important inputs. In particular, inadequate access to fertilizer is a real problem in many parts of Rivers State where farmers have to cope with diminishing soil fertility (Amadi, 2023, p. 61). Consequently, efficient rural road transport infrastructure is central to raising agricultural productivity and increasing growth in Rivers State. However, evidence shows that a weak rural road transport infrastructural base has been one of the major factors militating against the attainment of rural development objectives in Rivers State.

In an attempt to address the road system gap in the state, the Rivers State Government under the administration of Governor Siminalayi Fubara introduced the Ring Road Project Policy on 24th July, 2023 with a view to ensure that every Rivers people enjoys quality road system across the state. Though Fubara Ring Road Project Policy exists, its efficiency in enhancing the rural development has not been empirically examined and documented. To surmount the research gap, the researcher will interview the rural dwellers in the state to ascertain their opinions on the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State?
2. What are the expected impacts of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State?
3. What are the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State?
4. What are the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State.
2. examine the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State.
3. investigate the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State.
4. suggest the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Conceptualising Road

The Boopen (2016, p. 39) defines a road as "a line of communication (travelled way) using a stabilized base other than rails or air strips open to public traffic, primarily for the use of road motor vehicles running on their own wheels", which includes "bridges, tunnels, supporting structures, junctions, crossings, interchanges, and toll roads, but not cycle paths". Gramlich (2014, p. 180) defines a road as the entire surface of any way or street open to public traffic. In urban areas roads may diverge through a city or village and be named as streets, serving a dual function as urban space easement and route. Modern roads are normally smoothed, paved, or otherwise prepared to allow easy travel.

Similarly, Kessides (2016, p. 18) notes that road construction requires the creation of an engineered continuous right-of-way or roadbed, overcoming geographic obstacles and having grades low enough to permit vehicle or foot travel, and may be required to meet standards set by law or official guidelines. The process is often begun with the removal of earth and rock by digging or blasting, construction of embankments, bridges and tunnels, and removal of vegetation (this may involve deforestation) and followed by the laying of pavement material. A variety of road building equipment is employed in road building.

After design, approval, planning, legal, and environmental considerations have been addressed alignment of the road is set out by a surveyor. The radii and gradient are designed and staked out to best suit the natural ground levels and minimize the amount of cut and fill. Great care is taken to preserve reference Benchmarks. Roads are designed and built for primary use by vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Storm drainage and environmental considerations are a major concern. Erosion and sediment controls are constructed to prevent detrimental effects. Drainage lines are laid with sealed joints in the road easement with runoff coefficients and characteristics adequate for the land zoning and storm water system. Drainage systems must be capable

of carrying the ultimate design flow from the upstream catchment with approval for the outfall from the appropriate authority to a watercourse, creek, river or the sea for drainage discharge (Gramlich, 2014, p. 181).

Project

A project is a set of tasks that must be completed within a defined timeline to accomplish a specific set of goals. These tasks are completed by a group of people known as the project team, which is led by a project manager, who oversees the planning, scheduling, tracking and successful completion of projects (Mansuri & Rao, 2014, p. 20). Similarly, Mwaura and Ngugi (2018, p. 61) notes that a project is a series of tasks that needs to be completed to reach a specific outcome. Schirin (2010, p. 25) define project as a set of inputs and outputs required to achieve a particular goal. Sham (2013, p. 110) note that projects can range from simple to complex and can be managed by one person or a hundred. According to Stephen in Mwaura and Ngugi (2018, p. 61), projects are often described and delegated by a manager or executive. They go over their expectations and goals, and it's up to the team to manage logistics and execute the project on time. Sometimes deadlines can be given. For good project productivity, some teams break it up into individual tasks to manage accountability and utilize team strengths.

Besides the project team, projects require resources such as labor, materials and equipment. Organizations and individuals manage projects with a wide range of objectives. These can take many forms, from constructing a building to planning an event and even completing a certain duty. Retailers, for example, may pursue projects that improve the way they track order fulfillment (Schirin, 2010, p. 26).

Public Policy

A policy can be considered as a "Statement of Intent" or a "Commitment" (Jann & Wegrich, 2017, p. 34). Similarly, Saidi (2012, p. 12) described policy as a normally theory or rule to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. The word is not generally used to denote what is actually done; this is normally referred to as either procedure or protocol. Bennett and Howlett, (2002, p. 278) sees policy as the process of making important organizational decisions, including the identification of different alternatives such as programmes or spending priorities, and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. Ambra-Green (2015, p. 21) define policy as the value or perspective that underlies action. Board policies express the board's soul, embody the board's beliefs, commitments, values, and visions, and express its wisdom.

According to Matland (2015, p. 147), a public policy is an action which employs governmental authority to commit resources in support of a preferred value. The policy may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, and individuals. Presidential, executive orders, corporate privacy policies, and parliamentary rules of order are all examples of policy. Policy differs from rules or law. While law can compel or prohibit behaviors (e.g. a law requiring the payment of taxes on income), policy merely guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome (Buyera, 2012, p. 8).

Furthermore, Egonmwan (2000, p. 30) notes that public policy passes three main stages and that include: formulation, implementation and feedback (evaluation) stages, adding that at the level of policy formulation, the first thing is that when government decides what to be done and what is to be achieved, the process involves the following;

- A. Goal formulation involving multiple groups with varying conflicting objectives.
- B. Problem identification and definition as a result of partial ignorance of problem situation.
- C. Agenda setting/setting of objectives involving attempts by individuals and groups to influence policy decisions.

- D. Seeking of policy alternatives and evaluating such policy alternatives, i.e. analysis of policy options.
- E. The policy choice.

Once a public policy choice is made and has passed through the normal process, i.e. legislative enactment, the stage of reality comes next. Implementation stage therefore is the ability of an organisation to bring together men and materials in a cohesive organisational unit and motivate them in such a way as to carry out the organisation’s stated objectives (Ali et al., 2012, p. 128). This stage Adeyeye (2011, p. 105) says involves the translation of goals and objectives of policy through various programmes. He notes that public policy implementation is often regarded as programme implementation, since policy makers have to interact with different agencies and institutions controlled by people with different political persuasions, however the difficulty of this stage is usually compounded by certain idealistic or utopian assumptions of policy formulators.

Rural Development

There is no consensus as to the definition of rural development and this constitutes its initial problems. Different schools of thought had given different definitions to rural development (Anaeto, 2020, p. 82). To grab the concept of rural development, it is more proper to demystify the concept of development. According to Ake (2001, p. 34), development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. According to Obi and Obikeze (2006, p. 12), development can equally be seen as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital income and levels of living through more modern production in methods and improved social organization. It is development when the sovereign state is able to provide for her citizens economically with all the attendant values of human existence.

Supporting the above, Todaro and Stephen (2011, p. 23) perceived development as the capacity to move the society away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better. Gboyega in Bhattacharya and Clements (2004, p. 125) opine that development as an idea embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material wellbeing of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future. Ibrahim (2013, p. 188) sees development as the progressive advancement from the traditional, primitive and underdeveloped society to an advanced, modern and industrial society characterised by high mass consumption of goods and services. He listed five procedural stages that all societies desiring development must pass through, as witnessed in the counties of America and Western Europe. Hoogevelt in Ibrahim (2013, p. 188) sees development as a process of induced economic growth, of a social change in an internally stratified world. Similarly, Almond and Powell in Ibrahim (2013, p. 188) viewed development from the super structural angle – the political - which to the authors implies the gradual metamorphosis of a political system to a more ideal state dominated by vastly advanced political culture and structure, featuring “cultural secularization” and “structural or role differentiation”. The totality of these is crucial for state/nation-building, institutional strengthening, political participation, economic efficiency and allocation of resources in an authoritative manner.

Therefore, Diejomah (2013) defined rural development as a process of increasing the level of living of rural population, measured by food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security. Adegboye (2018) defines it as the development of the rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to most effectively and efficiently utilize their intellect, technology and other resources for further development of both themselves and their resources.

Ring Road Project and Rural Development

Ring road project is seen as an important project that can enhance rural development. This is because there are various rural development benefits offered by the ring roads projects that make them equally important as national highways. In fact, the ring roads project is often considered to be a linkage between the rural and urban areas for socio-economic development. The ring roads project also play an important role in poverty alleviation in rural areas, enable transportation of men, material and goods, lead to diversification of agricultural activities and boost rural as well as overall economic growth of the country (Amadi, 2023, p. 67). Thus, ring road project form the backbone of the rural growth and development in the country. According to Victor (2020, p. 18), some of the impact of ring road project on rural development, includes:

1. **Offers better transportation facilities:** Ring roads contribute significantly by creating linkages, thus increasing the opportunities to access goods and services located in nearby villages or major towns/markets. This means that through the improved transportation services, ring roads can lead to improved access to market centres for the rural producers and ensure better availability of inputs and raw materials at reduced prices which can highly impact the income opportunities of the rural poor. Simply put, if the rural producers are able to travel to the markets to sell their produce or buy raw materials for enhancing production, then they can earn a good amount of money and this can increase their income considerably.
2. **Boosts agricultural activities and productivity:** Ring roads are essential for sustaining agricultural development also. A good network of ring roads can provide a boost to the agricultural activities by making water, seeds and other raw materials needed for farming reach in time to the farmer. This can have a huge impact on the quality of agricultural produce and if that is good, then farmers can earn better by selling such a good produce in the market. This can result in increased earnings. Improvement in agricultural productivity can not only reduce rural poverty directly by increasing income of poor households but it can also cause decline in poverty indirectly by raising agricultural wages and lowering food prices.
3. **Ensures diversification of agricultural activities:** Ring road project can also favour growth of cash crops and commercialisation of agricultural activities. By this, it means that rural people can employ latest methods of farming and increase their production for selling them in the market.
4. **Improves mobility and saves time:** Presence of ring roads in rural areas increase the mobility of labour and materials, thus increasing the domain of rural livelihood beyond the rural production boundary. Typically, ring roads can ensure shorter travel time and the time saved this way can help the rural poor to be more productive and generate increased incomes. The time saved can be used for doing other off-farm jobs as well where farmers can earn some extra income. Thus, in rural areas, ring roads give a blending of non-farm economic activities along with farm activities and such diversification positively impacts the living conditions of the rural mass.
5. **Makes way for more livelihood opportunities:** Ring roads can also lead to changes in income sources as they can enhance non-agriculture income opportunities. Simply put, better connectivity through better roads in the rural areas can enhance off-farm employment opportunities too as masses can move freely from one place to another. Particularly, women, labourers and small contractors can benefit from the improved mobility and move out of the villages to the nearest employment centres and earn a better income.
6. **Gives access to education:** Improved road connectivity can also enhance access of rural masses to education services. They can travel to nearest towns and cities and get better and higher education which

can open better employment opportunities for them. Through this way, rural poor can earn a better living for their family.

Model Framework

Incremental Model

This study adopted incremental model as the model framework. The model was first suggested as a way of bringing about large changes in public policy in the late 1950s by political scientist Charles E. Lindblom. Lindblom’s radical new approach of incrementalism represented the antithesis of the "rational-comprehensive" method of problem solving that had long been considered the best, if not only way, to develop major public policy. According to him, incremental model of decision making is a process used to make decisions in a step-by-step manner. He further notes that this type of decision making is often used when there is a large amount of information that needs to be assimilated, compiled, or assessed. It’s also good for when the decision needs to be made in a short amount of time because it’s efficient (Hambrick & William, 2013, p. 17).

The incremental model posits that decision makers use previous activities, programmes, and policies as the basis for their decisions and focus their efforts on incrementally increasing, decreasing, or modifying past activities, programmes, and policies (Dye in Abdulrahman, 2016, p. 46). This method of decision-making contrasts sharply with the rational model of decision making which involves conducting a thorough analysis of all possible options and their consequences and then evaluating their advantages and disadvantages (Lindblom in Abdulrahman, 2016, p. 46). Instead, they rely on “successive limited comparisons” to simplify decision making (Lindblom in Abdulrahman, 2016, p. 46). Successive limited comparisons consist of comparing a limited number of options that are not too different from the current solution or practice and differ only marginally from each other (Abdulrahman, 2016, p. 47).

According to Dahida and Maidoki (2013, p. 93), incrementalism attempts to correct the imperfections of the rational model and to illustrate how policy decision makers actually behave. Incrementalism emphasizes the plurality of actors involved in the policy-making process and predicts that policy makers will build on past policies, focusing on incremental rather than wholesale changes. They further opines that decision makers only consider limited values , limited goals , limited alternatives and only realistic solution to the desired goal. It involves successive and limited comparisons. The goal is not-the-one-time, radical, bold and major solution to societal problems but marginal changes.

Sambo in Dahida and Maidoki (2013, p. 93) noted that new decisions are variants of past decisions. Decision makers accept existing decisions as satisficing and legitimate, and only make small, incremental, marginal adjustments in their current behaviour. Lindblom in Dahida and Maidoki (2013, p. 93), noted that incremental model of policy making proceeds in chronological series, made and remade endlessly, a succession of incremental changes, building out the current situations, step-by-step and in small degree. Braimah et al (2014, p. 66) argued that decision makers do not annually review all existing and proposed policies; instead they take an incremental approach in which there is slow evolution of policies by cautious incremental changes. In other words, decision makers do not review the whole range of societal values and problems and the spectrum of policy alternatives and their consequences nor calculate, cost and weigh each set of values and alternatives.

This model is relevant to this study because it is the duty of Rivers State Government to provide quality roads to all Rivers people. This has led to various enactments of road policies by successful leadership based on the immediate road needs of Rivers people. However, due to linking roads gap between the urban and rural dwellers, the Rivers State Government has to adjust the previous policies on roads by introducing Ring Road Project. Ring Road Project is expected to connect urban and rural dwellers in order to enhance rural

development in the state. The project is expected to be completed in 36 months (3 years), and the project is also expected to cut across six local government areas of the state. During the three years span of Ring Road Project, the Rivers State Government is expected to make adjustment on the construction of the road based on the immediate needs of the Rivers people. Adjustment of Ring Road Project must pass through accurate evaluation and analyses of existing road policies execution in Rivers State which is the fundamental trust of incremental model.

Methodology

Research Design: Research design is the structuring of investigation aimed at identifying variables and their relationship with one another (Kabir & Karim, 2005, p. 4). Monday (2012, p. 6) noted that research design is an outline or scheme that serves as a useful guide to a researcher in his/her efforts to generate data for the study. However, the study adopted descriptive survey design because the design provides an opportunity to interview the respondents on the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State.

Population of the Study: A population is the total of all the individuals who have certain characteristics and are of interest to a researcher (Kabir & Karim, 2005, p. 5). The total population of Rivers State is 5,198,716 people, while there are twenty-three (23) local government areas in three senatorial districts in Rivers State (National Population Census Projection, 2022).

Sample and Sampling Technique: The study adopted purposive sampling technique in selecting three (3) communities from the three (3) selected local government areas (Obio Akpor, Etche, Eleme) that are part of the six (6) Government approved local government areas for the Ring Road project execution in Rivers State. These include: Rumuolumeni community in Obio Akpor Local Government Area; Chokocho community in Etche Local Government Area; and Alesa community in Eleme Local Government Area. The reason for the selection of these three communities for the interview is because they have more number of people living in these communities in Rivers State. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select thirty-six (36) respondents to be interviewed. These include: Farmers/Fishermen, Chiefs, Youths, House/Shop Owners, Businessmen/women, Transporters and Politicians. The selected local government areas, communities and targeted respondents were shown below:

Table 1: Showing the Local Government Areas, Communities and Targeted Respondents in Rivers State

S/N	Local Government Area	Community	Targeted Respondents							Grand Total
			Farmers/Fishermen	Chiefs	Youths	House/Shop Owners	Businessmen/women	Transporters	Politicians	
1	Obio Akpor	Rumuolumeni	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	15
2	Etche	Chokocho	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	12
3	Eleme	Alesa	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	9
	Total		8	4	5	7	4	4	3	36

Source: Compiled by the Researcher, 2023

Method of Data Collection: The researcher used interview as method of data collection. The interview questions were generated from the variables identified on the research questions. The interview was carried out in clusters or groups through face to face contact. The researcher also made use of unstructured questions for the respondents to answer.

Method of Data Analysis: In this study the data collected from the quantitative research interview from the respondents were processed and qualitatively analysed backed with documented evidence. Conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study.

Research Setting

The History of Rivers State

Rivers State, also known simply as Rivers, is a state in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Formed in 1967, when it split from the former Eastern Region, Rivers State borders Imo, Abia and Anambra States to the north, Akwa Ibom State to the east, and Bayelsa and Delta states to the west. The state capital, Port Harcourt, is a metropolis that is considered the commercial center of the Nigerian oil industry. With a population of 5,198,716 as of the 2006 census, Rivers State is the 6th most populous state in the country. Rivers State is a diverse state that is home to many ethnic groups, including the Ikwerre, Ogba, Ijaw, and Ogoni peoples. The state is particularly noted for its linguistic diversity, with 28 indigenous languages being said to be spoken in Rivers State. The 26th largest state by area, Rivers States's geography is dominated by the numerous rivers that flow through it, including the Bonny River (Monday, 2011, p. 19).

Rivers State is a predominantly low-lying pluvial state in southern Nigeria, located in the eastern part of the Niger Delta on the oceanward extension of the Benue Trough. The inland part of the state consists of tropical rainforest, and towards the coast, the typical Niger Delta environment features many mangrove swamps. Rivers State has a total area of 11,077 km² (4,277 sq mi), making it the 26th largest state in Nigeria. Surrounding states are Imo, Abia and Anambra to the north, Akwa Ibom to the east and Bayelsa, Delta to the west. On the south, it is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean. Its topography ranges from flat plains, with a network of rivers to tributaries (Amadi, 2015, p. 45).

The economy of Rivers State is dominated by the state's booming petroleum industry. Though the rise of the oil industry has led to increased revenue for the state government, mismanagement and corruption have prevented the state from meaningfully tackling rampant poverty. Energy and especially electricity is also a key factor for economic growth. Rivers State has one of the nation's highest per capita energy consumption rates. As of 2012, it had a power generation capacity of 400 megawatts, a significant improvement over a meagre 30 megawatts during the late nineties. Its energy sector is protected by the government through legislation and funding. It is overseen by the ministries of Power, Energy and Natural Resources. The state's oil-refining capacity is the biggest in the country, with more than 340,000 barrels of crude oil per day (Amadi, 2015, p. 45).

Prior to the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in 1951, Agriculture was the primary occupation of the people of Rivers State. Around the 19th century when the industrial revolution reached its peak in England, the area was then referred to as Oil Rivers Protectorate, this was due to its abundant palm oil and kernel which basically constituted the main revenue source of the country. In a sample survey carried out by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, about 40% of the rural inhabitants were committed to farming in 1983. Rivers State is one of the leading states in the production of yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, rice and beans. About 39% (760,000 hectares) of the state's total land mass, particularly in the upland area, is suitable for cultivation. Major cash crops produced are oil palm products, rubber, coconut, raffia palm and jute. Other crops grown for food include vegetables, melon, pineapples, mango, pepper, banana and plantain. The fishing industry is an important sector in Rivers State. Besides being lucrative, fishing is also a favourite past time activity. There are approximately 270 species of fish existing; with many artisanal fishermen in the riverine areas. The state provides valuable seafood such as crabs, oysters, shrimps and sea snails among others. Vertebrates like birds, mammals and reptiles are also found in the region (Monday, 2011, p. 22).

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1: Respondents Successfully Interview

Number of Respondents to be Interview	Number of Respondents Successful Interview	Number Not Interview Questionnaires	Total (%)
36	30	6	36
Percentage	83%	17%	100%

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2023

The above table shows that a total number of thirty-six respondents were expected to be interviewed. However, thirty (30) respondents were successfully interviewed from the field. Thus, 83% represented the number of respondent successful interviewed, while 17% represented the number of respondents not interviewed.

Table 2: Respondents Successful Interviewed from the Two Border Area

Local Government Area	Community	Number of Respondents to be Interview	Successful Number of Respondents Interview	Number of Respondents Not Interviewed
Obio Akpor	Rumuolumeni	15	13	2
Etche	Chokocho	12	10	2
Eleme	Alesa	9	7	2
Grand Total		36	30	6

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2023

The table above shows that 15 respondents were expected to be interviewed from Rumuolumeni community in Obio Akpor Local Government Area but 13 respondents were successful interviewed. Also, 12 respondents were expected to be interviewed from Chokocho community in Etche Local Government Area but 10 respondents were successful interviewed. While 9 respondents were expected to be interviewed from Alesa community in Eleme Local Government Area but 7 respondents were successful interviewed.

Table 3: The Socio-Demographic Data of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	60%
Female	12	40%
Total	30	100%
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	8	27%
Married	16	53.3%
Widow	4	13.3%
Divorced	2	7%
Total	30	100%
Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE	4	13.3%
OND/NCE	8	27%
HND/B.SC	15	50%
Postgraduate	3	10%
	30	100%

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-30yrs	10	33.3%
31-40	15	50%
41-50	3	10%
51-60	1	3.3%
Above 60	1	3.3%
	30	100%

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2023

In table 3, item 2: shows that male are 18(60%) and the female are 12(40%) in number. This is because during the distribution of the questionnaire male are more available than the female in the study area. Item 2: shows that singles are 8(27%) in number, married are 16(53%) in number, widow are 4(13.3%) in number and divorced are 2(7%) in number. The married men/women are more in number because they are more experienced and unbiased on the impact of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State unlike others. Item 3: shows that 4(13.3%) are SSCE holders, 8(27%) are OND/NCE holders, 15(50%) are HND/B.Sc holders, and finally, 3(10%) had Postgraduate degrees. This implies that those with HND/B.SC are more in number and they are important to this study. Item 4: show that 10(33.3%) belong to the age group of 20 to 30 years, 15(50%) belong to the age group of 31 to 40 years, 3(10%) belong to the age group of 41 to 50 years, 1(3.3%) belong to the age group of 51 to 60 years, and 1(3.3%) belong to the age group of 60 years above. The age bracket of 31 to 40 years is more in number and they are more knowledgeable than other age brackets, which is important for the study.

Data Analysis

The measures put in place by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State.

To find out the measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State, a question was asked to know whether they are aware of Ring Road Project by Rivers State Government: Responding to the above question, the entire respondents interviewed both agreed that they are aware of Ring Road Project by Rivers State Government. Another question was also asked by the researcher to know when the Ring Road Project was flag-off? According to them, the Ring Road Project was flag-off on 24th of July 2023 by the immediate past Governor of Rivers State in Port Harcourt. They also agreed that the construction of a 500 kilometers Ring Road Project are meant to cut across six local government areas (Ikwerre, Obio Akpor, Etche, Port Harcourt, Oyigbo, Eleme) of Rivers State.

A question was also asked to know the measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. Responding to the question, the entire chiefs and house/shop owners, interviewed both agreed that meeting with the beneficiaries’ communities and individuals whose houses/shops are marked for demolition due to the expansion of the road are measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. According to them:

On 12th of May 2023, Excellency Siminalayi Fubara, the executive Governor of Rivers State met with Local Government Chairmen and Traditional Rulers in Government House. During his meeting with them the Governor charged traditional rulers and youths to own the project that will traverse their various communities and not to disrupt its progress so as to avoid being suspended or prosecuted. He also assured them of adequate compensation for those whose houses and shops are marked for demolition.

They further note that over twelve thousand houses and shops along the approved roads in the six selected local government areas of Rivers State have been marked for demolition. According to them, demolition of

houses and shops have started around town, Mile One, Mile Two, Mile Three and many other selected communities and local government areas in Rivers State.

Similarly, the entire politicians and youths interviewed both agreed that providing adequate funds for the Ring Road Project are the measures or steps taken by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. They both agreed that the Rivers State Government have approved the sum of 145 billion naira for a start out 195.3 billion naira earmarked for the Ring Road Project in the state. They further notes that the construction of the Ring Road Project is expected to last for a period of 3 years.

In the same vein, the entire transporters and businessmen/women interviewed both agreed that the government has approved phase to phase construction of the roads as measures to implement the Ring Road Project in Rivers State. They also notes that the Ring Road Project has kick off from UTC Junction in town. Julius Berger workers are on sight working and most roads around town have being blocked, there is a big sign post at UTC junction showing alternative routes for road users. According to them, Government has also created a strong awareness campaign of the project to the general public by going to radio and television stations to talk on the importance of Ring Road Project to Rivers people.

The impacts of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State

A question was asked to know the impacts of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State. Responding to the above question, the entire transporters and businessmen/women interviewed both agreed that the Ring Road Project is meant to promote rural development, extend trade, and improve rural competitiveness through an efficient and affordable integrated transport system in Rivers State. According to them, the create linkages between rural and urban dwellers thus increasing the opportunities to access goods and services situated in nearby rural communities or major towns/markets. They further notes that if the Ring Road Project is completed it can lead to better access to market centres for the rural manufacturers and ensure better availability of inputs and raw materials at cheap prices which can extremely impact the income opportunities of the rural poor in Rivers State.

Similarly, the entire farmers/fishermen, chiefs and youths interviewed both agreed that Ring Road Project will facilitate agricultural development by providing a boost to the agricultural production by making water, seeds and other raw materials needed for farming reach in time to the farmer. They further notes that improvement in agricultural production can not only reduce rural poverty directly by increasing profits of poor households but it can also cause reduction in poverty indirectly by raising agricultural wages and lowering food prices in Rivers State.

In the same vein, the entire transporters, businessmen/women and farmers/fishermen both agreed that Ring Roads Project will ensure shorter travel time and the time saved this way can help the rural poor to be more productive and generate increased profits. The time saved can be used for doing other off-farm jobs as well where farmers can earn some extra profits in the state.

Similarly, the entire respondents interviewed both agreed that Ring Road Project can lead to changes in profits sources as they can enhance non-agriculture profits opportunities. According to them, better connectivity through better roads in the rural areas can enhance off-farm employment opportunities too as masses can move freely from one place to another. Particularly, women, labourers and small contractors can benefit from the improved mobility and move out of the villages to the nearest employment centres and earn a better income in Rivers State. They also agreed that Ring Road Project will help to enhance accessibility of rural masses to quality education services. They can travel to nearest towns and cities and get better and higher education which can open better employment opportunities for them. Through this way, rural poor can earn a better living for their family in the state.

The challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State

A question was asked to know the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. Responding to the above question, majority of the respondents agreed that exclusion of other local government areas in the Ring Road Project are the major challenges that may affect the project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. They both agreed that the state government generates more revenue from the excluded local government areas compare to six selected local government areas for the Ring Road Project in the state. According to them, the excluded local government areas (Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Gokana, Khana, Andoni and many others) are also rich in agricultural activities in the state and excluding these local government areas will make the aim of the Ring Road Project not to achieve rural development in the state.

Similarly, majority of the businessmen/women and transporters interviewed agreed that poor planning is one of the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. According to them, Ring Road Project is not supposed to pass through densely populated areas but through new cities to bring expansion. That the government ought to have mapped out the areas and acquired lands for the project about 15 years ago to avoid unnecessary demolition and damages.

In the same vein, majority of the respondents also agreed that involving corrupt officials in the project; poor monitoring and supervision; poor Corporation between the communities and contractors; poor disbursement of the approved funding; and insecurity are the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State.

The possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State

A question was asked to know the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. In reacting to the above question, majority of the respondents agreed that inclusion of other local government areas in the Ring Road Project are the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. According to them, the inclusion of other local government areas into Ring Road Project will help in connecting agricultural and non-agricultural income earners together, thus promoting rural development in the state.

Similarly, majority of the respondents also agreed that non-involvement of corrupt officials in the project; proper planning, adequate monitoring and supervision; strong corporation between the communities and contractors; adequate disbursement of the approved funding; and adequate security are the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The measures put in place by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State

The study reviewed the measures put in place by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. The response of the respondents interviewed showed that Government applied various measures to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State. The measures applied include: meeting with the beneficiaries' communities and individuals whose houses/shops are marked for demolition; adequate compensation for those whose houses and shops are marked for demolition; demolition of houses and shops along the road; providing adequate funds; construction of the road phase to phase. This finding is line with the study by Emeka (2020) who investigated the measures taken by Government in executing Ring Road Policy in Ebonyi State. The study found that meeting with the beneficiaries' communities and individuals whose houses/shops are marked for demolition; adequate compensation for those whose houses and shops are marked for

demolition; demolition of houses and shops along the road; providing adequate funds; construction of the road phase to phase are the measures taken by Government in executing Ring Road Policy in Ebonyi State.

The impacts of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State

The finding revealed the impacts of Ring Road Project on rural development in Rivers State. The responses of respondents interviewed, revealed that the Ring Road Project is meant to promote rural development, extend trade, and improve rural competitiveness through an efficient and affordable integrated transport system in Rivers State. The project is expected to create linkages between rural and urban dwellers thus increasing the opportunities to access goods and services situated in nearby rural communities or major towns/markets. The project will also ensure shorter travel time and the time saved this way can help the rural poor to be more productive and generate increased profits. The time saved can be used for doing other off-farm jobs as well where farmers can earn some extra profits in the state. This implies that Ring Road Project can enhance off-farm employment opportunities as masses can move freely from one place to another. The rural dwellers can also travel to nearest towns and cities and get better and higher education which can open better employment opportunities for them. Through this way, rural poor can earn a better living for their family in the state. However, several recent empirical studies have validated the preceding (Victor, 2020; Emeka, 2020; Alake, 2020).

The challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State

The findings of the study revealed the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. According to the response of respondents interviewed, exclusion of other local government areas in the Ring Road Project; involving corrupt officials in the project; poor planning; poor monitoring and supervision; poor corporation between the communities and contractors; poor disbursement of the approved funding; and insecurity are the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. This finding is line with the study by Victor (2020) who investigated the challenges underpinning the East West Road project in the Niger Delta Region. The study found that involving corrupt officials in the project; poor monitoring and supervision; inadequate funding; and insecurity are the challenges underpinning the East West Road project in the Niger Delta Region.

The possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State

The study also revealed the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. According to the response of respondents interviewed, inclusion of other local government areas in the Ring Road Project; proper planning; non-involvement of corrupt officials in the project; strong corporation between the communities and contractors; adequate monitoring and supervision; adequate disbursement of the approved funding; and adequate security are the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State. This finding is in synergy with Edward (2020) who investigated the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing agricultural development in Ebonyi State. The study found out that non-involvement of corrupt officials in the project; adequate monitoring and supervision; adequate funding; and adequate security are the possible ways to strengthen Ring Road Project towards enhancing agricultural development in Ebonyi State.

Conclusion

In the light of the discussions above, the study discovered that the measures put in place by the Government to implement Ring Road Project in Rivers State are meeting with the beneficiaries’ communities and individuals whose houses/shops are marked for demolition; adequate compensation for those whose houses

and shops are marked for demolition; demolition of houses and shops along the road; providing adequate funds; construction of the road phase to phase. The study also discovered that the Ring Road Project is meant to promote rural development, extend trade, and improve rural competitiveness through an efficient and affordable integrated transport system in Rivers State. The project is also expected to create linkages between rural and urban dwellers thus increasing the opportunities to access agricultural and non-agricultural produce situated in nearby rural communities or major towns/markets. Through this way, it will create employment opportunities for the rural dwellers, help the rural poor earn a better living for their family in the state. The project is also expected to enhance ease movement for rural dwellers who wish to go the nearest towns and cities to acquire quality education and return the same day after learning. However, the exclusion of other local government areas in the project; involving corrupt officials in the project; poor corporation between the communities and contractors; poor planning; poor monitoring and supervision; poor disbursement of the approved funding; and insecurity are the challenges that may affect Ring Road Project towards enhancing rural development in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the researcher, therefore, makes the following recommendations:

1. Rivers State Government should include other local government areas in Ring Roads Project. Inclusion of other local government areas in the project will help in connecting agricultural and non-agricultural income earners together, thus enhancing rural development in the state.
2. Rivers State Government should not involve those officials with questionable character or corrupt past records in the implementation of Ring Roads Project if they want to achieve success. Non-involvement of corrupt officials or individuals will facilitate speed completion of the project in the state.
3. Rivers State Government should set up of a committee that will adequately monitor and supervise the contractors handling the Ring Roads Project. Adequately monitoring and supervision of the contractors will help to facilitate the speed completion of the project within the stipulated time in the state.
4. Rivers State Government should adequately disburse the approved funds for the Ring Roads Project. Adequate disbursement of the funds for the project will help in completing the project at due time and thereby enhancing rural development in the state.
5. Rivers State Government should provide adequate security for the contractors and rural dwellers during the construction of the roads. Provision of adequate security will help in relaxing the minds of the contractors and rural dwellers during the construction of the roads in the state.

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