

# Effects of Socio-economic Development Challenges on Rural Communities in Nigeria: A Expository Study of Odugbo Community in Apa LGA of Benue State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Rural communities in Nigeria face various socio-economic development challenges that hinder their progress and well-being. This study examines the effects of these challenges, particularly in Odugbo community, located in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The research aims to identify key socio-economic barriers and propose strategies for sustainable development. **Method:** This study is based on the Social Capital Theory and employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research. Primary data were collected through questionnaires administered to 350 randomly selected participants, including community members and relevant stakeholders. Secondary data were obtained from literature, reports, and other documentary sources. The mean scores were used for analyzing research questions, while content analysis was applied to secondary data. **Results:** Findings indicate that inadequate infrastructure, limited access to healthcare and education, poor road networks, high poverty rates, and limited economic opportunities are significant socio-economic challenges in the Odugbo community. The study also highlights various strategies to address these issues, including community engagement, access to financial services, external support and partnerships, government policies, and awareness creation. **Novelty:** This study contributes to existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of socio-economic challenges in a specific rural Nigerian community and proposing localized strategies for sustainable development. The findings emphasize the importance of community-driven initiatives and external collaborations to overcome socio-economic barriers.

## INTRODUCTION

Rural communities in Nigeria play a vital role in the country's socio-economic development. They are home to a significant portion of the population and contribute to key sectors such as agriculture, livestock farming, and natural resource extraction. However, these communities often face numerous challenges that impede their progress and hinder their ability to thrive. Nigeria's rural communities face a range of interconnected challenges affecting various aspects of their development. These challenges include limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, clean water, and electricity. Infrastructure deficits, including poor road networks and inadequate transportation systems, further hinder economic activities and connectivity. Additionally, rural communities often experience limited market access and face difficulties in accessing credit and financial services, which constrains their economic opportunities and productivity. Socio-cultural factors, such as gender inequality and traditional norms and practices, can perpetuate social and economic disparities within these communities.

Rural communities in Nigeria face various socio-economic development challenges that hinder their progress and well-being. These challenges can be attributed to factors such as limited access to basic infrastructure, inadequate healthcare and educational facilities, high poverty rates, and limited economic opportunities [1], [2]. Rural communities are typically located in non-urban areas, characterized by low population density and agriculture as the main source of livelihood [3]. The socio-economic development challenges in these communities arise due to their geographical remoteness, inadequate government support, and limited social services [1]. In terms of infrastructure, rural communities often lack proper road networks, electricity, and access to clean water and sanitation facilities [2]. The inadequate provision of healthcare services, including facilities and professionals, further exacerbates the health challenges faced by rural communities [3]. Additionally, limited educational opportunities and a lack of quality schools contribute to lower educational attainment levels among residents [1]. These factors collectively result in high poverty levels, limited job prospects, and insufficient access to financial services and markets in many rural areas.

Effective utilization of resource potential, along with the amplification of innovative processes, is essential for ensuring sustained socio-economic growth under contemporary conditions. The efficacy of sustainable socio-economic development for economic entities is contingent upon management's capacity to impact all business processes and align internal capabilities with environmental challenges, thereby ensuring competitiveness through the implementation of well-developed strategies on a global scale. This study offers a database of intervention strategies and programs in the Odugbo community, aiming to identify existing gaps and provide relevant suggestions.

#### **A. Statement of the Problem**

The effects of socio-economic challenges on rural communities include high levels of poverty, limited job prospects, and inadequate access to financial services and markets [3]. Agricultural activities, although dominant, often face constraints such as limited access to credit, outdated farming practices, and market challenges [1]. Understanding and addressing these challenges are crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria. The case of Odugbo community in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State represents a microcosm of the socio-economic development challenges faced by rural communities in Nigeria. This study focuses on Odugbo community, aiming to examine the specific effects of the socio-economic development challenges it faces and propose strategies for improvement. The choice of Odugbo was motivated by the severe lack of socio-economic development and the high level of poverty observed in the area. Crop farmers constitute over 80% of the population of Odugbo community. This study will identify the main effects of socio-economic development challenges faced in Odugbo community and determine potential strategies and interventions to address these challenges, providing useful recommendations.

## **B. Objectives of the Study**

This paper generally examined the effects of socio-economic development challenges on rural communities in Nigeria, particularly, Odugbo community in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include to:

1. Identify the main effects of socio-economic development challenges faced by the Odugbo community in the Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the potential intervention programmes that can address the socio-economic development challenges in Odugbo community and promote sustainable development.

## **C. Research Questions**

Two research questions guided this study.

1. *What are the main effects of socio-economic development challenges faced by the Odugbo community in the Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?*
2. *What are the potential interventions programs that can address the socio-economic development challenges in the Odugbo community and promote sustainable development?*

## **D. The Concept of Socio-Economic Development**

**Socio-economic development** refers to the process of improving the social and economic well-being of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It involves enhancing people's quality of life, reducing poverty, promoting economic growth, and addressing social inequalities [4], [5]. Socio-economic development encompasses various dimensions, including economic, social, and environmental aspects. It involves creating opportunities for productive employment, improving access to education, healthcare, and basic services, promoting gender equality, fostering social cohesion, and ensuring environmental sustainability [4], [5]. A key objective of socio-economic development is to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society. It aims to create an enabling environment that supports equitable distribution of resources, reduces disparities, and promotes social justice [4], [5]. Efforts toward socio-economic development require a multi-sectoral approach and collaboration between various stakeholders, including governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. It involves formulating and implementing policies and programs that address the specific needs and challenges of different communities and regions [4], [5].

## **E. The Concept of Rural Development**

The notion of **rural development** in Nigeria lacks a cohesive definition, as researchers interpret it from diverse perspectives. Some view rural development as a process of expanding opportunities for rural people to achieve their full potential through education and to participate in decisions and actions that affect their lives. Such perspectives include initiatives aimed at enhancing rural productivity, generating job opportunities, and eradicating extreme poverty, disease, and illiteracy. Olayide, Ogunfowora, Essang, and Idachaba [6] see rural development as a mechanism for delivering essential amenities, infrastructure, enhanced agricultural production, extension services, and job opportunities for rural inhabitants. A clear understanding of

the notion of development provides a better perspective on rural development. Hornby [7] characterizes development as the incremental advancement of an entity, resulting in enhanced complexity or strength—essentially, the process of creating or innovating something new. This concept indicates that growth entails a gradual progression through incremental changes. Umebali [8] perceives development changes as multi-faceted, including alterations in structures, attitudes, and institutions, along with economic growth, reduced inequality, and the elimination of absolute poverty. He contends that development encompasses an economic growth component, an equity (social justice) component, and a socio-economic transformation component, all of which are self-sustaining. Simon [9] describes progress as an enhancement in quality of life, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, rather than focusing solely on material standards of living. He asserts that growth must be seen as contextually and temporally relative, requiring suitability to the time, geography, society, and culture.

It is evident that rural development is neither a singular event nor an instantaneous occurrence. It is a deliberate and progressive journey towards an improved state with defined benchmarks. Rural development has been characterized in several ways. Olayide *et al.* [6] define rural development as a process involving coordinated efforts aimed at substantially increasing the productivity of rural resources, with the primary goal of improving rural income and generating employment opportunities to enable residents to remain in their communities. It is a comprehensive strategy for boosting food production and establishing physical, social, and institutional infrastructure to achieve effective healthcare delivery, accessible quality education, and sustainable agriculture. Currently, rural development needs to be prioritized due to multiple factors, including a high and intolerable poverty rate, inadequate access to social and economic infrastructure and services (such as safe drinking water and sanitation), elevated health challenges like high infant and maternal mortality rates, prevalent malnutrition and disease, and low school enrollment rates among children.

#### **F. The Concept of Community Development**

The concept of **community development** has been defined in various ways. To gain a better understanding, one can consider the terms “community” and “development” separately. In this context, a community is viewed as a group of people with similar identity and history living in a distinct geographical area. It could also refer to a place where people who share common values or background reside. Many scholars trace the origin of modern community development as a discipline to post-World War II reconstruction efforts aimed at improving less-developed countries [10]. Others point to the American “War on Poverty” of the 1960s, with its focus on addressing local housing and social issues, as a significant influence on contemporary community development [11]. In fact, the roots of community development are much older. A major contribution of early community development initiatives was the recognition that a city or neighborhood is not just a collection of buildings but a *community* of people facing common problems with untapped capacities for self-improvement. Today, “community”

is defined in myriad ways: in geographic terms (e.g., a neighborhood or town – communities of place) or in social terms (e.g., a group of people sharing an online space, a national professional association, or a labor union – communities of interest).

Christenson and Robinson [12] characterized community development as a process where a group of people in a locality make a decision to initiate a social action process to change their economic, social, cultural, and environmental situation. These scholars view community development from the perspective of activities carried out by a group of people in a specific area with the common goal of starting and implementing actions that will improve their quality of life. Flora and Flora [13] support this view, arguing that community development can occur when people in a given community come together and work cooperatively to improve their collective well-being.

### **G. Theoretical Framework**

This paper employs the Social Capital Theory developed by James S. Coleman in 1988 [14]. The theory posits that social networks and relationships within a community play a crucial role in fostering socio-economic development. Trust, reciprocity, and shared norms and values are essential components of social capital. Social capital enables individuals and communities to access resources, information, and support networks, and it can facilitate collective action, cooperation, and problem-solving within communities. Moreover, social capital can lead to positive socio-economic outcomes, including improved livelihoods, increased social cohesion, and enhanced well-being.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Primary data were obtained via a questionnaire delivered to a randomly chosen cohort of 400 individuals from the community and pertinent stakeholders. Secondary data were obtained from existing literature, reports, and other documentary sources. This research used a descriptive survey design. The research population consisted of adult men and females, both indigenous and resident, from the designated region. The questionnaire tool was developed on a four-point Likert scale, with response possibilities from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The average score was used to examine the study questions. To ascertain the acceptance and rejection thresholds for each item concerning the study questions, a decision rule was established wherein mean scores of 2.50 and above were deemed acceptable, while scores of 2.49 and below were rejected. The mean and standard deviation were calculated using a statistical software, while the secondary data would be examined using content analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Results***

This chapter deals with the presentation of data collected from the structure questionnaire, and the analysis of data obtained for this purpose. The major source of data collected was from the primary source and Secondary Source. That is, use of

structure questionnaire were administered to respondents. The interview question items were analyzed individually to give credence to the research subject matter.

The questionnaire was administered to four hundred (400) respondents randomly chosen for the study, 350 questionnaires were returned valid and found useful for the study. The questionnaire was self-administered.

**Table 1.** Demography of Respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	203	58
	Female	147	42
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>
Age of Respondents	18-30 years	179	51.1
	31-40 years	125	35.7
	41 years and above	46	13.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>
Qualification	FSLC/O'Level	145	41.4
	NCE/OND	122	34.8
	HND/Bachelors	70	20
	MSc/MEd/PhD	13	3.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2024

The table 1 above indicates that 203 respondents, constituting 58%, were male, while 147 respondents, representing 42%, were female. This indicated that the male population exceeded that of their female counterparts. The table revealed that 179 respondents, constituting 51.1%, were aged 18-30 years; 125 respondents, accounting for 35.7%, were aged 31-40 years; and 46 respondents, representing 13.2%, were aged 41 years and above. The table revealed that 145 respondents, constituting 41.4% of the population, possess FSLC/O'Level certificates; 122 respondents, accounting for 34.8%, hold NCE/OND certificates; 70 respondents, representing 20%, have HND/Bachelor's degrees; and 13 respondents, making up 3.8%, possess MSc/MEd/PhD degrees.

**Research question one:** *What are the main effects of socio-economic development challenges faced by the Odugbo community in the Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?*

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics on the main effects of socio-economic development challenges faced by the Odugbo community in the Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

S/N	Socio-economic challenges	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Inaccessibility to basic infrastructure	152 (608)	121 (363)	31 (62)	46 (46)	350 (1079)	3.08	Accepted
2	Poverty	158 (632)	133 (399)	29 (58)	30 (30)	350 (1119)	3.19	Accepted

3	Absence of quality of healthcare services	149 (596)	111 (333)	13 (26)	77 (77)	350 (1032)	2.94	Accepted
4	Poor educational opportunities	162 (648)	137 (411)	11 (22)	40 (40)	350 (1121)	3.20	Accepted
5	Unemployment	171 (684)	119 (357)	37 (74)	23 (23)	350 (1138)	3.25	Accepted

**Source:** Authors' Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows the respondents' opinions on the main socio-economic development challenges faced by the Odugbo community. For each of the five listed challenges, the mean score exceeds the decision threshold of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents that these are significant issues. Inaccessibility to basic infrastructure, poverty, absence of quality healthcare services, poor educational opportunities, and unemployment all have mean ratings above 2.5, meaning respondents **agree** that these are the main effects of socio-economic development challenges in Odugbo. This implies that the community is significantly hindered by lack of infrastructure and services, leading to poverty and unemployment. These findings suggest that the government and stakeholders must address these challenges to facilitate rapid socio-economic development. The above findings are consistent with observations by Chamberlin and Jayne [15], Gilmour [16], and Duru and Duru [17], who found that common challenges in many rural areas include limited access to basic infrastructure (such as roads, electricity, and healthcare facilities), limited educational opportunities resulting in lower educational attainment, and constrained economic opportunities leading to higher poverty rates and limited job prospects.

**Research question Two:** *What are the potential interventions programs that can address the socio-economic development challenges in the Odugbo community and promote sustainable development?*

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics on the interventions programs that can address the socio-economic development challenges in the Odugbo community and promote sustainable development.

S/N	Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
6	Community engagement and participation	166 (664)	112 (336)	33 (66)	39 (39)	350 (1105)	3.15	Accepted
7	Access to interest free loan	143 (572)	115 (345)	31 (62)	61 (61)	350 (1040)	2.97	Accepted
8	External support and partnerships	198 (792)	89 (267)	22 (44)	41 (41)	350 (1144)	3.26	Accepted
9	Government policies	153 (612)	107 (321)	33 (66)	57 (57)	350 (1056)	3.01	Accepted

10	Awareness creation in Odugbo community	147 (588)	109 (327)	29 (58)	65 (65)	350 (1038)	2.96	Accepted
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**Source:** Authors' Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 above has five (5) questionnaire items on the potential intervention programs that can address the socio-economic development challenges in the Odugbo community and promote sustainable development. The result from item number 6 showed that community engagement and participation was accepted as a potential intervention program with a Mean score of 3.15. Item number 7 was accepted with a Mean score of 2.97 which implies that provision of access to interest free loan is a major potential intervention. Also, respondents' responses to item 8 on external support and partnerships, was accepted with a Mean score of 3.26. The item number 9 on government policies was accepted with a Mean score of 3.01. Item number 10 on awareness creation in Odugbo community was accepted with a Mean score of 2.96.

### **Discussion**

The findings from Table 2 reveal that the main socio-economic challenges of rural communities in Nigeria were strongly acknowledged by the respondents. The respondents indicated that inaccessibility to basic infrastructure, poverty, absence of quality healthcare services, poor educational opportunities, and unemployment are critical issues. This aligns with the findings of Chamberlin and Jayne [15], Gilmour [16], and Duru and Duru [17], who noted that limited access to basic infrastructure (roads, electricity, healthcare facilities) is a common problem in many rural areas. Similarly, educational opportunities in such areas may be limited, resulting in lower levels of educational attainment among residents. Constrained economic opportunities lead to higher poverty rates and limited job prospects in rural communities.

The findings of the study regarding intervention programs (Table III) show that respondents agree on several key strategies for improvement. They indicated that community engagement and participation, access to interest-free loans, external support and partnerships, government policies, and awareness creation in Odugbo community are all viable interventions. These strategies suggest a multifaceted approach: mobilizing the community's own efforts and participation, improving access to credit, seeking external collaborations, implementing supportive government policies, and increasing awareness and education within the community.

### **CONCLUSION**

**Fundamental Finding:** The study highlights the pressing socio-economic challenges faced by rural communities in Nigeria, particularly in Odugbo, Apa Local Government Area of Benue State. Key issues identified include poor infrastructure, inadequate access to healthcare and education, lack of proper road networks, high poverty levels, and limited economic opportunities. These factors collectively hinder the overall development and well-being of the residents, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve living conditions and foster economic growth.



**Implication :** The findings underscore the necessity for government intervention and policy reforms aimed at enhancing rural infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. Addressing these challenges can lead to improved healthcare, better educational access, and increased economic opportunities, ultimately fostering sustainable development. Furthermore, targeted poverty alleviation programs and skill development initiatives can empower individuals to become self-sufficient, reducing their dependence on external aid. **Limitation :** This study is limited by its focus on a single community, Odugbo, which may not fully represent the diverse challenges faced by rural communities across Nigeria. Additionally, data constraints and the lack of comprehensive statistical records may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research incorporating a broader scope with comparative analyses across multiple rural areas would enhance the robustness and applicability of the conclusions. **Future Research :** Further studies should explore the effectiveness of government policies and development programs in improving rural socio-economic conditions. A comparative analysis across different states in Nigeria can provide deeper insights into region-specific challenges and best practices. Additionally, research on the role of private sector involvement and community-driven initiatives in rural development could offer alternative solutions to address socio-economic disparities.

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