



Local Government and Socio-Economic Development of Rivers State: A Study of Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, 2011-2021

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated local government and socio-economic development with focus on Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, 2011-2021. The study adopted four objectives in the areas of the connection between local government and socio-economic development, the relationship between fiscal autonomy and socio-economic development, the challenges local government encounter in socio economic development and measures aimed to ensure socio-economic development in the local government. Max Weber bureaucracy and the systems theory were adopted as the theoretical frameworks. The study adopted the survey research design for data collection and analysis. Findings revealed among others that there exists a relationship between local government and socio-economic development. However, this relationship does not impact positively on socio-economic development due to poor implementation of policies, poor financing, embezzlement of funds and political interference. Also, there is absence of fiscal autonomy due to excessive control by state actors and political godfathers and this has led to poor project execution, and sub-standard facilities in socio-economic development. Based on the identified issues, the study recommended among others that the council should partner with the National Assembly members to enact laws that would abolish state-joint local government account while also collaborating with other interventionist agencies to raise funds that would boost socio-economic development. It should ensure that the local council identify and improve on market development, primary education, primary healthcare and infrastructures that would impact on the local people. Also, the council should ensure that staff are constantly trained to be competent to manage socio-economic programme.

Keywords: local government, socio-economic development, fiscal autonomy, bureaucracy

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic development of Okrika council area is viewed from the perspectives of access to social amenities, poverty reduction techniques, hospital and health places, education, business and economic improvement, physical structures and access to capital. The effective involvement of the local council to ensure adequate achievement of these socio-economic factors is an indication of the willingness to get rid of the menace. Unfortunately, lack of focus on issues of quality of life, inadequate records on population growth rate, health care facilities, quality access to education and varied resources for a decent standard of living have over the period under review exposed the local indigenes to criminality and other social vices which invariably bedevilled the performance of Okrika local government area in socioeconomic development. To address the issues enunciated above, Okrika local government council in collaboration with the communities development committees and other non-governmental agencies such as state employment expenditure for results, Millennium Development Goal, Sustainable Development Goal, etc devised

strategies such as regulating cost of transportation, embark on empowerment programmes, reduction of tenement rates and licences fees, construction of jetties, drainages, and short roads, cash assistance to petty traders, revitalization of town halls, etc to mitigate the effects of hardship in rural living and enhance socioeconomic development yet the perceive success remains very minimal in the local government.

The debate on political, administrative and financial autonomy of the local council has been a huge impediment that infringes on the performance as well as functional ability in socio-economic development in Okrika local government and Nigeria-wide. The constant political but undue interference of the state government has exacerbated the practice of corruption to the punching of local government estimates to financial embezzlement as well as gross inadequacy of well trained and qualified personnel to bring about the much-desired socio-economic development. This practice portends a major danger to realising socio-economic development in Okrika local government. The council area which is located in a strategic business-oriented environment is also been faced with deluge of issues ranging from inefficient officials, lateness, unnecessary absenteeism, gossip, moonlighting, lack of innovation and creativity, amorous relationship, etc has practically relegate the system to a subtle ground for rewarding laziness and mediocrity. The process of enhancing socioeconomic development has also received some forms of lapses which grossly hinder the quality of lives of the rural people in Okrika local government. Despite governments' efforts to address these lapses through several reforms, the effect of poverty, unemployment, and other socio-economic issues are still very wide-spread among the rural dwellers in Okrika local government. To this end, this paper seeks to investigate local government and socio-economic development of Okrika council area in Rivers State, 2011 - 2021.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Max Weber Bureaucratic Theory: The framework of analysis used in this study is the bureaucratic theory as propounded by Max Weber in 1947. This theory is believed to have a better analytical strength to explain the structure or pattern upon which local government operates within the frameworks of some basic characteristics of bureaucracy to ensure efficient and effective service delivery. These characteristics include according to Nwankwo (2009) are:

1. A hierarchically defined authority structure, with limited areas of command and responsibility;
2. A specified sphere of competence;
3. Strict and systematic adherence to discipline and control in the conduct of official duties;
4. Recruitment based on merit and technical qualifications;
5. The existence of a career structure with a system of promotion based on seniority, merit or both;
6. A system of remuneration in the form of salary with a right to pension.
7. Impersonality of official.

In Weber's view according to the author, the above characteristics if followed would lead to precision, orderliness, efficiency and effectiveness of the local government. The ideal construct postulated by Weber, according to Oko and Uyionore, (2003) promotes the existence of a system of control based on rules which regulates the whole organizational structure and serves as apparatus for the achievement of maximum efficiency. It is in this light that local government is defined according to the 1976 guidelines of local government reform as Government at the local level exercised through representative council, established by law to exercise powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs (including staffing) and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of service and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and ensure, through devolution of these functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The above view-point implies that there are essentials distinguishing characteristics of local government which are also well articulated in the scholarly work of many other scholars. These features according to Eme (2009) are as follows:

1. Localness: this particular feature implies that local government is the lowest tier of government; it is government at the grassroots or local level. Consequently, local government is subordinate but subservient; to the central/federal or state government.
2. It has a legal existence enshrined in the constitution as in Nigeria. This protects it from arbitrary actions of higher authority. As a legal entity, it can sue or be sued and has a perpetual succession. This implies that the life of a local government does not expire with the end of each administration.
3. It enjoys substantial autonomy. Although local governments are subject to state or federal government control in certain areas, but they enjoy a reasonable degree of independence in administrative and financial affairs.
4. It exists within a defined territory.
5. Local government exercises its authority over a given population. In other words, as a corporate entity, local government is created to serve citizens resident in a known location.
6. It exercises specific powers and performs certain functions as enshrined in the constitution or statutes (as in Nigeria).
7. The council is composed of elected representatives of local people.
8. Local government is usually divided into departments, divisions or units which facilitates the accomplishment of its goals, objectives and functions.

Using the foregoing premise, socio-economic development in Okrika local government now put to question the ability of the local bureaucrats to adhere to bureaucratic procedure and prevent the local government from reckless bureaucratic bottlenecks. The politicization of appointment contravenes what Adamolekun, (2009) referred to as neutral competence of the civil service. The idea of neutral competence, or authority of expertise, according to Adamolekun is that appointed officials who are recruited on the basis of competence and expert knowledge, skills and experience are valuable for conducting the business of government can help to educate politicians and restrain their partisan inclinations. This role was put succinctly in the British context in the 1954 North Cote Trelyon Report thus: Permanent officers subordinate to Ministers yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability and experience to be able to advise, assist and to some extent to influence those who are from time to time set above them.

It was on the basis of the above, Key (1942) in Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014) observed that politicians dominate the issues which have a high content of political judgement and a low content of technical expertise while administrators dominate the issues with a high content of technical judgement, (e.g science and technology matters), and that in regard to issues both a high content of political judgement and technical expertise, politicians and administrators take decisions by cooperative effort as partners in a joint enterprise (e.g the budget process). The existence of this picture, according to Adamolekun, (2009) would enable the career officials to serve an incumbent government with competence, loyalty and fairness. The interaction between the two groups (politicians and administrations) with reference to cooperation, partnership, trust and loyalty that is implied by their joint enterprise will provide overall leadership of governmental administration. In the Nigerian situation of our time, the expected partner, trust and loyalty have been ruined by the politicization of appointment in the civil service and local government in particular, thus, hampering governmental efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery in socio-economic subsector.

Conceptual Clarification

Local Government: There is no unanimous agreement between scholars on the definition of local government. However, the United Nations Office of Public Administration in Ola and Tonwe (2009) defines local government as a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected. Hence, the definition of local government was made clearer by Kirk Green in (Ola and Tonwe, 2009) who submitted that each unit of local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics: a given territory and population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive and administrative purposes, a separate legal identity, a range of powers and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central

or intermediate legislature. The Guidelines for Local Government Reform of (1976) in Idakwoji and Stephen (2013) defines local government as Government at the local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and determine activities of state and federal government.

Despite the wide appeal or acceptance of the above definitions, it has some flaws. The assertion that the governing body of a local government can be “locally selected” is faulty. It implies that in the case of Nigeria for instance, all the Caretaker Committees of management and Sole Administrator system instituted by the various military administrations and even civilian administrations as we have in Nigeria presently can still be seen as local government whereas, in actual fact, such appointed bodies are mere brands of local administration rather than local government (Onah, 2003).

Development: Development as a concept has no single and universally accepted definition. That is why Todaro and Smith (2011) defined it as a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social systems. In line with the conceptualization by Todaro and Smith, Ering (2014) views development as a process of improving the quality of all human lives, such improvement may include raising people’s living levels (e.g. income, consumption, education, medical services etc.) via relevant economic growth processes. On his part, Ottong (2006), defined development as the act of creating conditions conducive to growth of people’s self-esteem through the establishment of social, political as well as economic systems and institutions, which promote human dignity and respect. He stated further that it implies increasing access to better life (improved welfare) and the freedom to choose by enlarging the range of choices available. In the words of Ekong (2003) cited in Ering (2014), development is a process of social change in which the people of a community organize themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual problems, and execute this maximum of reliance upon the resources of the community. Silas Liman in Idakwoji (2015) observed that the concept of development is heavily value loaded, and that its operational definition is a matter of what the writer cherishes as the goal or objective of the economy. However, the conception of Silas Liman has been criticized on the grounds that there are many ways to look at an issue without necessarily making it value-loaded. It should be realized that the crisis in the concept of development or any concept for that matter makes the concept more interesting exciting and expansive. Putting all the definitions of development together, it can be rightly asserted that development is both a physical process as well as a state of the mind while we are thinking of physical transformation, it equally very vital to think of the transformation of the state of the mind in the community or society. It is only when this is done that the desired physical development can take place. This is so because all people. No matter how beautiful a programme of development might be, if the state of the minds of the people is not transformed to agree with such programme, the attainment of the goal of development will become a mirage.

Socio-Economic Development: There are many definitions of the term ‘socio-economic development’ which can be viewed from the perspective of Gross State Income (GNI), physical structures and capital, as well as access to modern luxuries. The transformation of the society and the emergence of new social and economic organizations are critical indicators of development (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). Socio-economic development is the process of social and economic development in a society which is measured with indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy as well as levels of employment (Ering, 2014). It refers to society related economic factors which relate and influence one another. The greatest rationale for the creation of local government globally is essentially to employ it to assume responsibility for the socio-economic development of rural areas directly as well as also contribute indirectly to the development of the country. This development has been viewed from two fundamental vantage positions and or view-points: Socio-economic as well as holistic. The socio-economic perspective was hinged on the traditional definition that expressed concerns for social problems such as poverty, inequality and unemployment which must be alleviated to bring about socio-economic development in the rural areas in the country. Socio-economic development is a product of development and can be defined as the process of social and economic transformation in a society. Socio-economic development embraces changes taking place in the social sphere mostly of an economic nature. Thus, socio-economic development is made up of processes caused by exogenous and endogenous factors which determine the course and

direction of the development. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic impacts are, for example, new technologies, changes in laws, changes in the physical environment and ecological changes (Idakwoji, 2013). Going by the above, socio-economic development can be rightly defined as that aspect of state development that is concerned with the social and economic advancement, where improvements in the wellbeing of people are generated through strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is the combination of social and economic development which includes the advancement or improvement in the standard of living and the increase in economic life and conditions of the people. It deals with issues of production of food, good roads, stable electricity supply, access to potable water, health care facilities, education and skill acquisition, housing and shelter, access to communication and digital internet facilities, employment and job creation, security, etc. If the above description is in any way near what the real thing should be, it is obvious that there is no way true development can happen by sheer accident. True development through socio-economic facilities must have to be consciously and deliberately planned for and painstakingly nurtured into being and healthy growth. Socio-economic development policies give rooms for other forms of development programmes to actualize its goals for the benefit and well-being of the social system.

Socio-Economic Development in Rivers State

Development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the economic and social system of a people (Inyanga, 2007). Although opinions may vary as to what constitutes development, in which ever way it is looked at, indices that point to development are those that link it to the delivery of inherent social and economic services to the society. Indices of social and economic development expected to be derived from those that revolve around improvement in household equipment, mobility, shelter, savings and investments, expansion in farm production, etc. For instance, impact evaluation measures changes in the well-being of individuals, households, communities or firms can be attributed to a particular Project (Baker, 2000). The writer stated further that impact evaluation is needful because it helps to provide baseline evidence of effectiveness of an intervention, helps in building the knowledge base of what works in development, assists to justify programme spending and helps to assess the causal link between an intervention and an outcome of interest. This impact study was carried out on Green River Project (GRP).

The Green River Project (GRP) is an agricultural extension and rural development initiative of the Nigerian Agip Oil Company Limited that aim to advance the socio-economic development of the state. According to the Agricultural and Rural Management Institute (ARMTI, 1992) and GRP (2007), the GRP came to existence in 1987 when the Federal Government of Nigeria called on multinational oil producing companies in the country to work hard towards developing the agricultural production base of their host communities which was fast deteriorating as a result of the increasing activities of oil companies (Nnodim and Isife, 2004). The activities of Green River Project are expected to culminate into effects that would result into socio-economic development of rural lives in its host communities. Onwurah, et al., (2006) observed that the increase in the number of beneficiaries of Green River Project's extension activities is not in doubt, but what is in doubt is increase in the socio-economic capabilities of the beneficiaries. The socio-economic development indices of the programme were adopted to reveal the impact for farm size, wet cassava root and maize grains per beneficiary. They were estimated with the use of football field, the farmers' full bags and head pans respectively and converted into hectares or tonnes as the case may be per planting season.

Synoptic Dimensions of Socio-Economic Development in Okrika

Okrika is one of the twenty-three (23) local government areas in Rivers State. The local government is strategically located with utmost economic potentials due to its abundance of rivers, seas and oceans with many fishing communities that depend on artisanal fishing activities as their means of livelihood. The

community members rely on the artisanal fishery for income generation. Both men and women engage in fishing, shrimping, fish processing and marketing.

The local government is also believed to have contributed meaningfully to the socio-economic development of their communities due to its enormous responsibilities, and this situation invariably translates to economic development. Socio-economic development deals with the welfare of the people in terms of the ability to raising national income, reducing poverty, and more equitable distribution of wealth and income and, ultimately raise the standard of living of the people. The productive contributions of the local government include building and expansion of market stalls, provision of seed capital to farmers, provision of nets, traps, canoe and other fishing equipment to fishermen and the acquisition of entrepreneurial and vocational skills for the production of goods and services for consumption, and for sustainable income. Okrika local government's socio-economic development activities include Health care, skills acquisition and the building and maintenance of markets. They also provide an important source of labour for cash crop production, and through the application of agricultural skills to generate additional income.

Meanwhile, Mbeni (2012) noted that the people of Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State do engage in fishing activities as their means of livelihood. They depend on aquatic resources for food, employment and income. They use small motorized and un-motorized canoes for catching fish, shrimps, periwinkle, and other aquatic animals for food and as means of livelihood. Most fishing communities lack infrastructural development and this contributes greatly to the low standard of living in most coastal communities. Fisherfolk through their community development efforts mobilise for provisions of some basic amenities for their betterment. The belief among most Nigerian communities that it is the sole responsibility of the government and its agencies to provide the needs of their communities and that government should develop the communities by providing the entire necessary infrastructures, social and physical amenities has also been held by the people of coastal communities in Okrika local government area. But this belief has gradually faded out because presently, the local government is also being confronted with enormous challenges which has reduce their efficiency in terms of service delivery while most coastal communities through self-help initiatives, come together to carry out some developmental projects and programmes such as building of classroom blocks, market stalls, bus stop, health care services, portable drinking water, provision of scholarship schemes for indigenes outstanding scholars, and so on. However, the view of Mbenu was further refuted by Management Partnership (2001) and thus revealed that no community can develop without the contribution of the local government. He stressed that government might not be effective in exacting development but her policies and programmes are too sacrosanct to be abnegated and that the socio-economic development of any community hinge on government policies and programmes to thrive.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design which involves the use of both primary and secondary data. It also allows researchers to focus on a particular phenomenon to collate and analyse information from large documents in sample or group in which their responses were used for the purpose of generalization. The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane technique for minimum sample size determination.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

- n = Sample size
- N = Population size = 319,700
- e = Level of significance = 5% (0.05)

The formula is substituted below:

$$n = \frac{319,700}{1 + (319,700 \times 0.05^2)} = \frac{319,700}{1 + (319,700 \times 0.0025)} = \frac{319,700}{1 + 799.25} = \frac{319,700}{800.25}$$

$$= 399$$

Based on the sample size, 400 questionnaires were distributed to the three Okrika Kingdom to solicit information from respondents while the systematic random sampling technique was adopted for the study. This sampling technique was used because it saved time and was less susceptible to error than the simple random sampling.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Local government and socio-economic Development: The result of our hypothesis which revealed that there is connection between Okrika local council and socio-economic development, however exposed that the is weak. This result is also affirmed by about 80% of our respondents that despite the fact that the Okrika local government has not properly feel the impact of socio-economic development, there is no gainsaying the local government council is pivotal to the socio-economic development of Okrika. Corroborating the above, a respondent confirmed and thus, revealed that

Participants of programmes were provided with different apparatus such as fishing nets, hoes, cutlasses, canoes, speed boats, boat engines, basins, etc to help improve on the socio-economic situation of the council area. In addition, other beneficiaries of the programme were awarded instant casual employment by the refinery and other interested bodies, while others were given cash assistance (M. Eli, personal communication, January 24, 2023).

A close look at the programmes organized by the Okrika council between 2011 – 2021 is an indication that the policy of the government is mainly targeted at socio-economic development in an attempt to better the lives of socio-economic dwellers. Adedire (2014) describes these policies as vehicles aimed to stimulate and enhance economic growth, as well as get the socio-economic sector to contribute meaningfully to the local economic and social development. However, an interviewee who responded to the connection between Okrika council and socio-economic development revealed that

Okrika local government has experienced a large majority of youths roaming in search of white-collar jobs. The sea where their main source of livelihoods laid has been contaminated leaving most profitable aquatic organisms dead. Agricultural farming which would have been the alternative is believed to be the women’s occupation. Uninterrupted electricity supply has further negatively affected socio-economic development in the area. Also, local farmers are not able to go into mechanized farming as a result of paucity of funds occasioned by poor disbursement of credit and loans. We struggle to survive and most times find it difficult to feed our families nor sell. (N. Tamuno, personal communication, January 28, 2023).

The view of the interviewee above is a testament that there is a strong connection between local government and socio-economic development in the Okrika council area, but, however, this connection has not engendered socio-economic development in the council area. This position has been buttressed by about 60% of the respondents. This study reiterates that Okrika council area is very strategic to economic potentials due to abundance of sea foods, and access to petroleum products. However, the area is still fraught

with excess poverty, lack of drinkable water, inadequate health facilities, few markets, unemployment, amongst others.

Local government fiscal autonomy and socio-economic development of Okrika Council area: The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between fiscal autonomy and socio-economic development. This is affirmed by Tiku, Obeten & Onyenemerem (2019) who defined fiscal autonomy as simply the generation and management of finance and other economic potentials of the local government to improve on the socio-economic wellness of the local people. Local government, by the principles of its creation, is expected to exercise both political and financial autonomy. Meanwhile, in an interview with a staff of the local government council on fiscal autonomy, he revealed that

During the period of 2011-2021, Okrika council has suffered huge capital deficit. The council's borrowing rate increased geometrically in such that the council finds it difficult to pay staff salaries and carry out other legitimate responsibilities. Funds were completely under the purview of state political actors. Political godfathers were never good to the system. They appropriate funds met for socio-economic development for themselves at the point of disbursement of monies and the local authorities do not have a say in the fiscal affairs (anonymous, personal communication, February 10, 2023).

It is predicated on the fact that when local government has power to take decision on its own as regarding its finance and policies, rural areas will have the assurances of socioeconomic development. Another respondent's contributions on fiscal autonomy is encapsulated as follows

Monies meant for socio-economic development of Okrika council area have been diverted in other cases mismanaged by the state governor. When there is inadequate fund, government policy on every aspect of administration collapse. Our people are not feeling the impact of development. The council is handicapped when funds are stolen, diverted, mismanaged for personal reasons. Developmental policies are short-lived. The people invariably suffer the most (anonymous, personal communication, February 28, 2023).

Ehiri (2010), contends that inadequacy in the provision of social services such as education, healthcare services, etc. is a product of failure to grant autonomy to local government. He added that local governments have constitutional responsibility for providing essential services within the sphere of jurisdiction but lacks the financial autonomy to do so. Samihah (2011), on his part argues that the responsibility of providing basic essential services and bringing about socio-economic development has been delegated to local governments as the third tier of government. He went ahead that the types of social services which a local government may require to provide include housing water, adult and vocational education, rural electricity, feeder roads, and transport primary health facilities and other social services would require finance.

Another respondent stressing the importance of fiscal autonomy revealed that

Fiscal autonomy would empower the local council to cater for the varying degree of needs and preferences in service delivery. It exerts cost-effectiveness and responsibility on the part of the council and improves lives through skill acquisition, innovation and increases socio-economic indices of the citizens (M. Boma, personal communication, February 28, 2023).

In the light of the above, it is crystal clear that lack of fiscal autonomy has hindered efficiency of local agency in programme implementation, with adverse effect on the socio-economic development. This view has been adopted by majority of respondents who stated that lack of fiscal autonomy does not engender socio-economic development in Okrika.

Challenges of local government and socio-economic development in Okrika council area: The result of hypothesis and respondents' analysis revealed that there are numerous challenges confronting the Okrika local government and its socio-economic development. Available secondary data also confirm issues that hinder the successes of the local government in socio-economic development. Respondents revealed that the issue of funding is a big challenge. An interviewee who was interviewed on the challenges rocking the council area and its socio-economic activities revealed that

Okrika local government has a very bogus plan for socio-economic development programmes but this plan has been hindered by shortage of funds. Our primary school, health, markets, and business activities are adequately not being monitored due to lack of funds. You see pupils who are supposed to be in school roaming the streets during school hours, children hawking for either parents or guardians while others are seen scavenging (I. Tamunokuro, personal communication, March 7, 2023).

The position above is corroborated by another respondent who revealed that

The local government has suffered excessive control over its affairs by the state governor. It now exists under the muddy waters of political godfathers. The political will and commitment of local leaders do not come to fulfilment. We have experience policy instability whenever there is a change of government. Beneficiaries and intended participants of socio-economic programmes do not, most time, pick interest due to this instability and lapses (P. Biakpara, personal communication, March 15, 2023).

Similarly, this is evident in the history of most of the socio-economic development programmes which are often saddled with disappointments. Another respondent who was interviewed on the challenges confronting Okrika council area and socio-economic development stated thus

Okrika council area has experience deluge of socio-economic development programmes. Some of the programmes were implemented but with little impact on the people while others were tied and attributed to the government that initiated them and thrown to the bin upon their disengagement from service (T. Abere, personal communication, March 25, 2023).

The above information is an indication that there is proliferation of socio-economic development programmes. This has created a problem of policy implementation. Proliferation of policy creates issues during the implementation process. These issues may rise from double effort, monotony and brain stagnation and loss of interest. Arising from the strong words of Obot, another respondent revealed that

Okrika council is bedevilled with a lot of challenges in its socio-economic development process. I have observed with shame how a team member does not understand his role in policy implementation. Most of those charged with the responsibility to monitor socioeconomic development programmes end up messing up the process. Incompetence of staff despite their huge degrees do not impact on programme and policy implementation (J. Ogube, personal communication, March 30, 2023).

Emanating from the above interview, 60% of the respondents revealed that Okrika council has a significant number of able-bodied youths who could contribute independently to socio-economic development of the area but, however, result to get-rich-quick attitude. Most of them indulge in illegal bunkering activities, thuggery, and collection of dues and levies from buyers of petroleum products. 30% of the respondents claimed that apart from corrupt partnership, lack of autonomy, incompetent staff and low-level education of personnel, state control over finances, lack of policy direction, unnecessary bureaucracy, amongst others were factors that hinder its socio-economic development.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that local government has a strong and positive relationship with socio-economic development, and that fiscal autonomy has a positive impact on socio-economic development in Okrika council area. The positive relationships are demonstrated in the discussion of findings where beneficiaries revealed that the agency has provided few infrastructural facilities, education, healthcare facilities, skill acquisition programmes, and reduces poverty. However, the study also concluded that socio-economic development programmes were not properly coordinated by the council due to several factors such as change of administration, lack of fund, incompetent staff, embezzlement of funds, implementation problems, crime-fighters' collaborators, etc. These factors undermine the impact of local government in socio-economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, the study recommends that followings:

- i. Okrika council should partner with the National Assembly to sponsor a bill to repeal Section 162 to abolish state-joint local government account and collaborate with state and interventionist agencies to raise funds that would develop and improve opportunities to boost socio-economic activities.
- ii. Okrika council should ensure that staff are constantly trained to be competent to manage socio-economic programmes and be responsible for the failure of any programme during implementation.
- iii. Okrika council should maintain its capacity building programmes to improve staff performance level, tackle financial corruption and strengthen collaboration with other agencies for transfer and retention of knowledge to enhance socio-economic development.

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