

Rural Transformation Programme and Sustainable Development in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates rural transformation programmes in Cross River State, Nigeria, with a focus on their role in promoting sustainable development. It critically examines initiatives aimed at poverty reduction, food production, education enhancement, and employment generation, while highlighting the socio-political and economic challenges encountered. Emphasis is placed on the contributions of the Cross River State Government (both past and present) alongside the efforts of individuals and non-governmental organisations. Key programmes reviewed include the Poverty Alleviation Programme, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), and the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). The findings reveal that while these programmes were well-intentioned in policy design, their implementation has often been hindered by weak political will and inadequate attention to rural realities, resulting in limited developmental impact. The study concludes by recommending the establishment of locally driven community development programmes across rural communities in the state. Such grassroots initiatives would not only strengthen collaboration with local, state, and federal authorities but also deepen the drive for inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Rural Transformation, Sustainable Development, Poverty Reduction, agencies, socio-political, Cross River State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, rural transformation has emerged as a crucial instrument for socio-economic intervention and development across local communities, particularly within developing nations. Both donor agencies and national governments have prioritised rural areas in their development strategies, focusing primarily on agricultural support initiatives such as mechanisation, fertiliser application, irrigation schemes, and the use of improved seed varieties (Lacroix, 2011). This transformation phase reflects a broader global trend that gained momentum during the post-World War II era and intensified during the 1960s decolonisation period. It marked a significant shift in international aid

structures and economic policy frameworks, aiming to address persistent underdevelopment in rural regions.

According to the *Federal Republic of Nigeria at 50* (2010:618), the evolution of Nigeria's socio-political development programmes has been complex and uneven since gaining independence in 1960. Despite numerous national initiatives, progress in rural transformation has been hindered by weak implementation, fragmented policies, and limited political will. Alege (2005:55) underscores the efforts made by successive governments in establishing specialised credit institutions and rural development programmes designed to combat poverty and squalor in remote communities. However, many of these initiatives have become moribund, operating on outdated regional models without effective monitoring or renewal.

The World Bank (1979) defines rural transformation as a strategic set of interventions aimed at improving the socio-political and economic conditions of rural populations. These interventions are typically directed at the most vulnerable groups within these communities, including women, children, smallholder farmers, and land tenants. The scope of rural transformation extends beyond agriculture to include education, healthcare, infrastructure, and institutional development—key elements in improving rural livelihoods and ensuring sustainability.

Sustainability in rural development demands a balance between resource utilisation and long-term socio-political stability. It calls for the integration of national infrastructure planning with the equitable distribution of services to prevent the exhaustion of socio-economic and environmental resources. Socio-political transformation, in this context, entails creating inclusive platforms through which rural populations can participate in governance and policy-making processes. Despite government interventions, many rural communities in Nigeria remain underserved, grappling with poor access to electricity, potable water, healthcare, and road infrastructure. The World Bank (2003) reports that the per capita income in rural Nigeria remains below \$280, further complicating political participation and limiting economic mobility due to the lack of infrastructure and essential services. Rural socio-political transformation is a multifaceted process involving shifts in political systems, economic structures, and social dynamics. These shifts are often driven by advocacy movements, policy reforms, decentralisation, and cultural evolution. Elements such as globalisation, urbanisation, government policy frameworks, and technological advancement also play critical roles in shaping the trajectory of rural communities. However, the interplay between these socio-economic and political forces is often complex, producing both opportunities for growth and new challenges that require coordinated responses at community and governmental levels. Social movements and behavioural change, including shifts in attitudes and values, are equally essential in promoting long-term transformation.

In the Nigerian context, persistent issues such as political instability, poverty, corruption, inflation, insecurity, and unemployment continue to impede rural development efforts. These conditions create an environment of fear, reduce trust in public institutions, and weaken service delivery systems. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the contributions of both community actors and government institutions in promoting rural transformation in Cross River State, Nigeria. Special emphasis is placed on identifying the underlying causes of development challenges and exploring strategic responses to insecurity, poverty, and other socio-economic barriers to sustainable rural development.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to evaluate rural transformation programmes and sustainable development in Cross River State with particular reference to Socio-political challenges confronting rural transformation. The specific objectives were to;

- i. Ascertain the extent whether rural transformation awareness can positively predict sustainable development in Cross River State.
- ii. Determine the extent whether socio-political challenges have a positive predictive effect on sustainable development in Cross River State.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

In line with the above stated objectives, the following hypotheses were tested;

- i. Rural transformation does not positively predict sustainable development in Cross River State
- ii. Socio-political challenge has no positive predictive effect on sustainable development in Cross River State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Rural Transformation Programmes

Rural transformation has long occupied a prominent place in Nigeria's development discourse. The concept encapsulates improvements in quality of life through physical, educational, social, and political advancements. It entails transformative processes such as agricultural enhancement, infrastructure development, and socio-political mobilisation, all aimed at reducing rural-urban migration, improving food security, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing access to healthcare.

Ocheni, Atakpa, and Nwankwo (2012) noted that rural transformation in Nigeria has been insufficient, leading to persistent rural-urban migration. This pattern has resulted in the exodus of skilled professionals from rural areas, leaving a vacuum in local service delivery. Consequently, rural transformation becomes a difficult task in the absence of requisite human capital. Similarly, Montanari and Peragine (2008) identified key challenges to rural development, including depopulation, high mortality rates, negative population growth, poverty, youth unemployment, and deteriorating infrastructure. These issues have exacerbated social inequality and hindered sustainable development.

Okhankhuele and Opafunso (2013) observed that the widening disparity between urban and rural areas in Nigeria reflects policy failures. Developmental efforts remain skewed in favor of urban centres, driven by income inequality, access to social services, and political prioritisation. For sustainable rural transformation to take root, there must be a strategic focus on quality education, agricultural productivity, and infrastructural investment. The integration of social amenities and economic incentives can foster political inclusion, community empowerment, and long-term socio-economic balance in rural environments.

Development Programmes in Cross River State

Development programmes in Cross River State are typically structured to enhance human capacity through education, skill acquisition, and professional development. Nkese, Ndem, and Ogun (2016) defined development programmes as policy-driven government interventions targeting issues such as child protection, women's empowerment, healthcare services, and support for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). These initiatives seek to address fundamental socio-political needs and improve the well-being of citizens across the state.

Despite these commendable efforts, significant portions of the rural population remain marginalized. Structural inequalities, poor implementation, and insufficient outreach continue to limit the impact of these programmes, leaving many rural communities underdeveloped.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development refers to meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It hinges on economic growth, environmental protection, social equity, and political participation. The concept underscores human capital development as a key strategy for empowering rural populations and achieving long-term socio-political transformation.

Abah (2000) identified environmental protection, economic advancement, and social inclusion as the key pillars of sustainable development. These principles underpin the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global framework adopted in 2015 to address issues such as poverty, hunger, education, inequality, and climate change. In rural areas, sustainability involves building resilience through inclusive governance, responsible resource use, and long-term investment in human and material capital.

Sustainability requires coordinated planning, monitoring, and implementation strategies, involving stakeholders at multiple levels. Community-based approaches that engage civil society, government, and international organisations can create a shared platform for long-term rural transformation. Programmes must focus on balancing ecological systems, promoting environmentally friendly technologies, and developing inclusive social institutions. The collective efforts of NGOs, policymakers, industrialists, and local leaders are essential to ensuring that rural communities become active participants in their own sustainable development journey.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design, drawing on tested hypotheses to interpret rural transformation in Cross River State. The target population was selected from three rural communities within the state's three senatorial districts, including government agencies. Data were collected using intercept surveys focused on socio-political challenges. A sample size of 140 respondents was initially selected through convenience sampling. Of the distributed questionnaires, 120 (81%) were completed and returned, while 20 were excluded due to non-compliance or incomplete responses. The 120 valid responses formed the basis for the study's data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Transformation Theory, which provides a robust framework for analysing socio-political and economic changes in rural settings. As articulated by Ujo (1999:115–166), transformation theory emphasizes the transition from agricultural reliance to diversified economic engagement, particularly through increased urban interactions and policy-led rural development. This theory situates rural transformation as both a structural and behavioural shift, encompassing technological advancement, infrastructure improvement, and social mobilisation.

Aziz (1978:114–120) applied transformation theory to China's rural development, highlighting how the country managed to sustain food production for over 1.1 billion people despite limited cultivable land. The success was attributed to a robust socio-political strategy that integrated local governance, agricultural innovation, and international support. In Nigeria, similar efforts were made during the Obasanjo administration (1999–2007), where land cultivation and backyard farming were encouraged through subventions and credit schemes. While commendable, these efforts were challenged by issues such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, and policy inconsistency, underscoring the need for integrated approaches that align economic diversification with social equity.

Rural Development Programmes in Cross River State

Over the years, several rural development programmes have been introduced in Cross River State to stimulate growth and reduce rural poverty. These initiatives aim to enhance agricultural productivity, improve food security, and reduce dependence on imported products. Some notable programmes include:

- Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GES)
- Community-Based Natural Resources Management Programme
- FADAMA III Project
- Green Revolution and Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
- Rural Electrification and Banking Schemes
- Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)
- Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZs)
- National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)
- Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)
- Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP)
- Family Support Programme and Family Economic Advancement Programme

Cross River-specific initiatives include the Cross River Agricultural Development Programme, Cross River Economic Empowerment Scheme, Farm Credit Scheme, Agriculture and Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARES), and the Rural Access and Mobility Project (CR-RAMP). These programmes aim to provide financial, material, and infrastructural support to rural farmers across the state's 18 Local Government Areas.

Challenges of Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development in Cross River State

Despite numerous initiatives, rural transformation efforts in Cross River State have encountered significant challenges. Larson (1985) noted that many government policies in rural areas fail due to

poor funding, unrealistic goals, and weak implementation mechanisms. Structural factors such as topography, population density, technological limitations, and environmental conditions further hinder effective policy deployment.

Ugo (1999) highlighted additional constraints, including bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, and intra-agency conflict. Mismanagement of funds and lack of accountability often result in the abandonment of promising initiatives. Furthermore, heavy reliance on a single revenue source limits the government's capacity to fund transformational programmes, while poor communication infrastructure and economic instability contribute to policy discontinuity.

Demographic Profile Analysis

The demographic composition of the study sample revealed several insights:

- **Gender:** Male respondents accounted for 63.2%, indicating higher male participation in rural development activities.
- **Age Distribution:** The 26–35 age group constituted the majority at 70%, followed by 18–25 years (17%), 36–45 years (10%), and those aged 46 and above (3%). This suggests that younger populations are more engaged in rural transformation.
- **Education:** Most respondents held HND or equivalent degrees (70%), followed by Bachelor's degrees (22%) and postgraduate qualifications (5%).
- **Occupation:** Farming was the dominant occupation (70%), followed by skill acquisition trades (26%) and civil service (4%).

These findings suggest a youthful, agriculturally active rural population, yet one that is vulnerable to migration due to unemployment and underdevelopment.

Table 1: Variable frequency %

GENDER	Male	92	76%
	Female	30	24%
OCCUPATION	Farming	85	70%
	Civil Servants	5	4%
	Skill-	32	26%
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	B.Sc	33	22%
	HND/Graduate	83	71%
	Postgraduate	9	5%
	Doctorate	1	2%
AGE	18-25	21	17%
	26-35	32	70%
	36-45	11	10%
	46-above	5	3%

Source: Field Work, 2025

From the above analysis, the paper conclude that demographic profile of respondent used in the study are the overwhelming majority middle aged, male, farming, HND holders.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS I

For specific objective one to be achieve that states ascertain the extent whether rural transformation awareness can positively predict sustainable development in Cross River State; a null hypothesis was formulated that states that rural transformation can positively predict sustainable development.

In order to ascertain the concern of this study, the respondents were subjected to question and answers, 5-8 of the questionnaires. The responses to the questions were used in tabulating the “statistical texting of the hypothesis. The responses are shown in table 2

Table 2: Rural Transformation Awareness of Sustainable Development

S/N	STATEMENT	DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE				
		Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.	Is the rural development challenge near to us?	6(%)	Nil	5(4.1)%	32(26%)	70(65%)
6.	Has government made effort toward the challenge	6(5.4%)	3(2.1%)	Nil	80(67.5%)	47(36.5%)
7.	Is this effort effective or efficient	12(9.3%)	10(8%)	5(4.0%)	80(65.4%)	26(21.2%)
8.	Are rural people involve in this decision	7(6.3%)	9(7.5%)	5(4.1%)	48(21.4%)	84(68%)

Source: Field Work, 2025

In order to realistically ascertain the basic extent whether of rural transformation awareness can positively predict sustainable development. The responses to question 5-8. These responses are shown in table 3.

Step I: The average responses to above statement are determined by the respondents that disagree and agree to the statements.

Table 3: Rural Transformation Awareness Positive Predictor Sustainable Development

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Agree	90	75
Disagree	30	25
Total	120	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 3 shows that out of 120 respondents sampled 90 representing 75% believe that rural transformation awareness can positively predict sustainable development thereby failing to support the “Null hypothesis formulated” whilst, the remaining 30(25%) held a converse view, i.e support the null hypothesis. The actual statistical test was developed using the Z-score test proportion which formula is shown below;

$$Z_c = \frac{\bar{x} - p}{s / \sqrt{n}}$$

Where Z is the Z-score calculated

N = Sample size

P = Probability that Ho is true

\bar{x} = respondents supporting Ho

S = standard deviation

The hypothesis was tested base on the formula by 0.5(5%) significance level

Table 4: Computation of Standard Deviation

ALTERNATIVES	X	$x - \bar{x}$	$(x - \bar{x})^2$
Strongly disagree/ neutral/ disagree	30	-40	-1600
Strongly agree/agree	90	40	1600
Total	120	0	3200

Source: Field work, 2025

Table 5: Socio-political challenges positive predictive effect on sustainable development

ALTERNATIVES	FREQUENCY OF MENTION	PERCENTAGE
UNACCEPTED	20	16.6
ACCEPTED	100	83.4
Total	120	100

Source: Field work

From the above table, we could observe that 100 (83.4%) of the respondents significantly responded positively, meaning that socio-political challenge has positive effect on sustainable development in Cross River State - Nigeria, while 16.6% (20) does not accept rural transformation. This implies that socio-political challenges have no positive effect on sustainable development. The socio-political statistic test conducted shows that 2 score test, promotion which has been earlier stated on the study of socio-political challenges which has no positive predictive effect on sustainable development with a computation of standard deviation shown in table 6:

ALTERNATIVE	x	$x - \bar{x}$	$(x - \bar{x})^2$
Unaccepted	20	-39	-152
Accept	100	39	1521

Source: Field work, 2025

This implies that the socio-political challenges have positive prediction on the effect of sustainable development, since $Z_c < Z_t$ resulting to rejection of the null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to assess the relationship between rural transformation programmes and sustainable development in Cross River State. The empirical findings yielded two significant outcomes that warrant further interpretation and scholarly reflection.

First, the results indicate that awareness of rural transformation positively influences sustainable development outcomes in the state. This was validated through the application of the Z-score proportional test, which confirmed the predictive power of rural transformation awareness. This finding aligns with the empirical conclusions of Ocheni, Atakpa, and Nwankwo (2012), who observed that awareness initiatives are integral to facilitating rural transformation. Similarly, Lacroix (2011) highlighted the socio-political importance of transformation awareness, emphasising its dependency on the population's understanding and engagement with development processes.

Second, the findings reveal that socio-political challenges also significantly predict the trajectory of sustainable development. Again, this result was supported through the Z-score proportional analysis. The conclusion resonates with previous studies by Okhankhue and Opafunso (2013), Nkese, Ndem, and Ogun (2016), and Pearse (2014), all of whom recognised that development is often stifled by systemic issues such as inadequate funding, inefficient administrative structures, environmental challenges, and the absence of modern technology. Additional constraints identified include poor

farming conditions, lack of fertiliser and improved seedlings, and limited access to critical infrastructure.

Implications of the Findings

The implications of these findings are substantial. First, the results suggest that rural transformation is intricately tied to government policy effectiveness and rural-urban migration trends. The non-implementation or poor execution of rural development programmes over the years has resulted in widespread socio-political stagnation in Cross River State. According to Okhankhuele and Opafunso (2013), these challenges manifest as inadequate road access, food insecurity, inflation, poverty, exclusion, ignorance, and general underdevelopment.

Lykke (2002) argued that concerns about rural-urban migration are often educationally rooted, resulting in socioeconomic gaps and disparities in living standards between rural and urban populations. Additionally, rural poverty is unevenly distributed and not confined to specific geographic zones. Arhewe (2014) observed that fishing communities within the state are among the most impoverished, often relying on subsistence agriculture that is vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations.

Clinton (2013) added that insecurity is typically more prevalent in underdeveloped rural areas. In this light, the growth recorded in certain areas of Cross River State remains fragile and is largely dependent on government policy direction, infrastructure investment, and institutional stability. The failure to establish robust governance frameworks for the provision of public goods, infrastructure maintenance, and peace-building has resulted in limited transformation outcomes.

Finally, the findings indicate that the absence of dedicated rural development agencies and policy review mechanisms continues to hamper programme effectiveness. There is a notable lack of federal, state, and local government collaboration in the formulation and maintenance of rural development institutions.

Conclusion

This study explored the nexus between rural transformation programmes and sustainable development in Cross River State. The analysis revealed that both rural transformation awareness and socio-political challenges significantly affect the state's ability to achieve sustainable development. The findings suggest that while transformation initiatives exist, their implementation is hampered by corruption, resource mismanagement, and poor leadership attitudes.

The study further highlights that subsistence farming remains dominant in rural areas, with limited uptake of modern farming technologies. Additionally, existing policies have failed to attract skilled individuals from urban areas back to the rural communities due to inadequate infrastructure and limited economic incentives. Overall, bridging the rural-urban developmental divide will require renewed commitment, institutional reforms, and strategic policy enforcement at all levels of government.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of rural transformation programmes and promote sustainable development in Cross River State, the following recommendations are proposed:

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1. **Establish Monitoring Agencies:** Government should create specialised agencies responsible for the regular monitoring, evaluation, and supervision of rural development programmes to ensure accountability and efficiency.
2. **Conduct Feasibility Studies:** Comprehensive feasibility studies should precede the implementation of any rural development project to ensure contextual relevance and sustainability.
3. **Improve Communication Channels:** There should be transparent and consistent communication platforms between the government and rural communities to facilitate participation and feedback.
4. **Promote Joint Initiatives:** Development projects should be jointly initiated and implemented by both the government and local communities, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

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