

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURAL DECAY AND CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE: A CASE STUDY OF NEW ROAD IN NEKEDÉ

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Abstract

This study examines rural infrastructural decay and challenges of sustainable development in Imo state Nigeria, a case study of Nekede New Road. Most governments in the state – local and state – have paid little or no attention to rural infrastructures in Imo State. The urban centres have often been the centres of concentration of these governments. This is even so when huge budgetary provisions are made annually for infrastructural developments at the grass roots by the state governments, but could hardly be accomplished. This study relies on secondary sources of information in accomplishing its goal and as such employs descriptive research apparatus. It reveals that most of the basic infrastructures in Nekede New Road area, where they exist, are either decayed or simply moribund. Such infrastructures include; road, pipe-borne water, electricity, school, housing etc. The paper recommends a workable public private participation (PPP) formula to stem the tides of decay and sustain the development initial of the area.

*Keywords: Rural infrastructural decay, Sustainable Development,
Public Private Participation.*

Background to the Study

Imo State is one of the thirty six states of the federation of Nigeria. It has twenty-seven local government area councils and over two hundred communities. The state is predominantly rural, having over eighty percent rural content. The major towns are Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe which also have rural contents in their constituents. For instance, Owerri which is made up of Owerri North, Owerri Municipal and Owerri West local government areas has rural communities surrounding the main town. One of these rural communities is Nekede. Nekede is divided into two by the Otamiri River so that one can comfortably distinguish between the two as Nekede Old Road and Nekede New Road. The former being the actual origin of the main ancient Nekede Kingdom!

Nekede New Road is made up of Umudibia (Umuerim, Umuokomoche, Umuokoto, Umuofocha) and Umuoma. This part of Nekede houses the famous Federal Polytechnic Nekede, one Nekede community secondary school, two primary schools- one in Umuoma (central school) and the other in Umokoto (Umudibia Primary school). There are several nursery, primary and secondary schools including the Bethel Seminary of the Assemblies of God Church. There is also the industrial cluster market which is still to blossom to full capacity operation. There are lots of micro industrial outfits and commercial activities in the fold of business centers and provision stores with students' hostels of all sizes dotting the area as well. Between Umuoma and Ihagwa, are a major police station and a mobile police base. Nekede is linked to Owerri through a major road which formed the Aba road. On the other side, the same road links Owerri through Ihiagwa and Obinze. There are intra-community roads ramified in the community.. There are also other infrastructures like culverts, demonstration farm facilities, bridges, telecommunication facilities, sanitation and drainages among others.

It is imperative therefore for these infrastructures to be functional to enhance sustainable development in Imo State. For Imo State to be developed, the component communities must be set on the path of sustainable development. The term sustainable development has been considered in the 1987 Brundtland report as "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" it contains two major issues which include;

1. Concept of need
2. Ability to meet present and future needs (Omaka, 2012).

To achieve this in Imo State, there must be a conscious, deliberate and concerted effort towards providing the basic needs, as it were, to the citizenry and ensuring that these needs serve both present and future generations. It is against this

background therefore that this paper sets out to examine the state of roads already provided in terms of meeting present and future needs as well as challenges confronting the state in the bid to providing good road network.

Conceptual and Literature Review

It is important to clarify the thematic framework of this study. The major themes are; sustainable development and infrastructural decay.

Sustainable Development

The term “sustainable development” has been considered in the 1987 Bruntland report as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Omaka, 2012). Sustainable development implies a broad view of human welfare, a long term perspective about the consequences of today's activities, and global cooperation to reach viable solutions (Adedeji, 2014). According to the Bruntland commission (1987, cited in Adedeji, 2014), “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability to future generations to meet their own needs”.

Sustainable development in general term is the provision of adequate and affordable basic needs of life for the present generation without jeopardizing the prospects of subsequent generations (Ebiringa, 2012). Adedeji (2014) noted that “Development is all about the utilization of natural resources to provide goods and services, a business activity for the betterment of mankind”. Sustainability, he said, is ensured only upon striking a balance between living conditions and resource usage. When one sidelines the other the whole system collapses, in most cases, with irreversible environmental damages. He argued that “the real transition from “Development” to “sustainable Development” is possible only with changes in business attitudes and actions.

Professor Philippe, Sands (cited in Omaka, 2012) identified four elements of sustainable development as reflected in international agreement thus:

1. Firstly, the need to preserve natural resources for the benefit of future generation (the principle of inter-generational equity).
2. Secondly, the aim of exploiting natural resources in a manner which is “sustainable”, productive”, 'rational,” “wise” or appropriate (the principle of sustainable use).
3. Thirdly, the equitable use of natural resources, which implies that use by one state must take account of the needs of other states (the principles of equitable use, or intra generational equity); and

4. Fourthly, the need to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into economic and other development plans, programmes and projects and that developmental need are taken into account in applying environmental objectives (the principle of integration).

Omaka (2012) noted further that the concept of sustainable development aims at integrating long term ecological considerations into economic and development strategies and it is this phenomenon which places it on the global terrain. Such development strategies are required for the overall development of Imo State. Hence, there must be such conscious efforts as this paper considers, in order to develop the communities and indeed the state.

Infrastructural Decay

According to Ajanlekoko cited in Olayode (2010), "Infrastructure generally has to do with the provision of tangible assets on which other intangibles can be built on, which revolves around housing, provision of power (electricity), transportation, education, communication and technology. Olayode noted that infrastructural facilities are the basic amenities that make life worth living in any community. Since, it improves the socio-economic well being of the inhabitants in any society, most developed nations in the world jumpstarted their economics by building up and sustaining their infrastructure growth. He identified two types of infrastructure;

"Hard" and "Soft"; according to him, "hard" infrastructure refers to the large physical networks necessary for the functioning of a modern industrial nation, while "soft" infrastructure refers to all the institutions which are required to maintain the economic, health, cultural and social standards of a country, such as the financial system, the education system, the health care system, the system of government and law enforcement, as well as emergency services.

Okafor (2010) identified certain characteristics as attributes of infrastructural facilities thus;

1. high sunk costs
2. non-trivialness in consumption at least to congestion limit
3. possibility of price exclusion
4. Bestowing externalities on society.

He therefore concurred with Lall (2007) that infrastructural services is defined to broadly include, roads, ports, airports, communication networks, water supply, irrigation systems, electric power, etc. He said that the A World Bank added schools, housing and urban services to the list.

Infrastructural decay is a form of environmental decay which Kalu (1999) identified the deleterious role of man in the problem. He summed it up that the rural areas are being harmfully industrialized, as developers cramp up “buildings along the major roads of our rural communities creating what I may describe as harmful congestions or rural slums”. About the rural areas as well, Kalu pointed out that: “In rural Nigeria a lot of harm has been done to our forestry reserves by way of mechanized agriculture, mining activities, timber exploitation etc. Rural land and wild life, according to him, are vastly disappearing. According to Olayode (2010), “Today, 50 years after independence, the state of infrastructure in Nigeria is at a collapsed State. The infrastructure in Nigeria is at a collapsed state. The infrastructural base of development is weak and thus the various levels of government have been making efforts at overcoming the challenges posed by the integration because of the poor existing knowledge about infrastructural development and management. He therefore identified poor investment in the power sector, high debt and low service delivery culture as the bane of electricity sector in Nigeria. He added vandalism of PHCN installations, inadequate gas supply, illegal connections, unbridled corruption, low water level at the hydro power stations, policy inconsistency and the long monopoly enjoyed by the electricity company as well as lack of political will to do what was right by the government as other serious reasons why the power infrastructure in Nigeria is a failure. On road infrastructure, Olayode identified lack of maintenance culture as a bane. Ibe, Abanobi and Okoronkwo (2012) noted this about the Imo State situation;

“Roads and Transportation have suffered dearly in the state... Chief Ohakim only resurfaced some of the roads. It is perhaps Owelle Rochas Okorochoa that had the heart to truly embark on massive construction of new roads, opening thereby many hitherto forgotten link and arterial roads.. Unfortunately, however, Owerri city is still hemmed in by the near absence of major roads that connect it with other cities...pp.7”

The immediate consequence of this failure is that “the citizenry are usually skeptical when invited to contribute financially to a government project (Onyike, 2010). In Nigeria, and indeed Imo State, the viral germ that has destroyed the infrastructures is hydra-headed as it consequently has spread its hooks to all the sectors- education, health, social and economic.

Causes of Infrastructural Decay

The decay of infrastructure in Nigeria is not without causes. Arimonu (2012) identified the following as causes of failure in the transport sector;

1. Lack of professionals in the system
2. Lack of information and poor management system

3. Poor enforcement of transport rules
4. Inadequate information and enlightenment
5. Lack of inter/multi-modality
6. Scarcity of energy (fuel)
7. Social, Economic and cultural problem
8. Institutional framework problem

Onyike (2010) emphasized that “competence and efficiency are sacrificed on the altar of party patronage and parochialism”, as a result, “mediocre contractors and consultants are engaged to carry out important and expensive infrastructure projects. He identified also policy inconsistencies, economic instability, civil service bureaucracy, high inflation, lack of maintenance culture, large shortfall between budget and actual figures as banes to the actual development and sustainability of development in the State. Okoronkwo (2010) noted that “ The terrain and rock structure are difficult to manage in the construction of roads. Olayode (2010) identified the following causes of infrastructural decay in Nigeria:

1. The misrule of our leaders which made the rural areas (including Nekede New Road) to be abandoned and left to deteriorate.
2. Rural-urban migration which mounted pressure on urban facilities leading to inadequate shelter and overcrowding, inadequate and inefficient transport systems, poor infrastructure facilities and services, development of slum areas in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano and Port Harcourt, poor environmental conditions.
3. Lack of adequate financial and other resources to solely develop infrastructure by government. This resulted in the failed, abandoned or collapsing infrastructure in the country (including Nekede).
4. Non-implementation of policies and/or total lack of policy coordination between tiers of government, inadequate budgetary allocation for social infrastructure development and lack of maintenance culture plus poor governance and corruption. Poor attitudes to public facilities, bad leadership and poor follower ship are also among the causes identified to be working against infrastructural facilities in our society.
5. Huge capital investment is required to take the situation out of the woods. The banks too lack the financial muscles to fund investments in infrastructures especially given the current lending rate in the country which is as high as 18-22% while deposit rate is as low as 5-8%.
6. Housing deficit as a result of low income earned compared to the inability of these set of people to access loans from the bank due to cut-throat rates. According to Agwu (2012), the gap between the cost of housing and the salary (of workers in Imo State) is too wide. The implication being that a

- typical civil servant cannot save and therefore, cannot invest in housing.
7. Failure of Nigeria to produce components needed for project works was also responsible for high project costs in the country
 8. Political uncertainty in the country is also fingered.

Results and Discussion

The Situation at Nekede New Road (Umudibia)

Nekede New Road, like every rural community in Nigeria, is affected by the same syndrome alluded to in the text above. The roads linking Owerri to Nekede have been in a sorry state since the end of the Mbakwe Regime. Under the Udenwa and Ohakim tenures (i.e. between 1999 and 2011) the road was considered the worst in the country. Ihiagwa was not also accessible from Umudibia (Nekede New Road). This was also reflected in the transport fare from Nekede New Road to Owerri, a five-to-eight minute's drive (that is also trek-able) drivers charged a hundred naira on normal days; on occasions of road congestion, it went as high as N150 to N200 per head. This was worse between 2009 and 2011. In 2012, however, following the election of Owelle Roachas Okorocha in 2011 (a governor under the then opposition platform), the road was rescued albeit at near perfect level. The rescue mission has sustained the road since 2012 till date with few pot holes though.

The table nature of the land in Nekede New Road couple with the lack of drainage facilities leaves the roads water logged, marshy, impassable and seasonal (see plates 1-3). The consequence is damages on buildings, personal belongings, domestic animals, cars and even leading to blight or slum. The quality of persons living in the area (aside the students) is falling increasingly. This too is having its toll on property values, safe for the increasing short supply of accommodation in Imo State urban and suburban areas. The roads have no gutters, and even where they exist, they are not cared for. The road to Federal Polytechnic Nekede does not encourage one driving more than once in and out of the campus in one day. Each movement is a threat to the car and health (see plates 1-5).

Besides, the marshy water logged terrain is a breeding ground for mosquitoes which are the main vectors of malaria. The poor water state is also a vector of typhoid and so this explains the proliferation of private hospitals in this neighborhood to cash on the palpable situation. Borrowing the words of Kalu (1999), developers cramp up buildings along the major roads (too close to the roads and on the gutters) of Umudibia creating a situation of rural slum or harmful congestion. The bridge linking Nekede New Road to Nekede Old Road collapse over thirty years ago and is still in that state till date.

The Umudibia Primary School and Central School Umoma school fences have been seriously neglected. In the case of Umudibia Primary School, the adjoining intra-community road is often a death trap so; motorists find solace through the school as they keep pulling down parts of the fence to find alternative routes.

Conclusion

Infrastructure in Nekede New Road is in sorry state of decay. There is obvious absence of maintenance culture; lack of commitment by government and the poorly planned neighborhood have led to the general decay of infrastructure in the area. The existing infrastructure is moribund and the poor state of the economy, unstable policy measures are key to the decay of infrastructure in this area. This is a serious threat to sustainable development of the state. The future generation has no guarantee of a suitable living place tomorrow.

Recommendations

In line with these myriads of problems and the obvious threat to sustainable development in Imo State the paper recommends as follows;

1. Roads and other projects should be awarded to tested competent hands and not used as a loaf of bread to appreciate political god fathers. As Mbadiwe (1999) advised "Road developments should not be an instrument for politics".
2. Government should bite the much it can chew. The idea of piling all sorts of projects on the lean state purse should be discouraged.
3. The pre-paid meter system of electricity consumption should be introduced in this area to make the people police the installations; if people know that their subscription is exhaustive and that the brunt of re-subscription will fall back on them, they will fight illegal connections and vandalization by themselves.
4. Federal government and local governments should live up to their responsibility of maintaining federal and local roads in the area.
5. In line with the submissions of Awuzie, Mc Dermott and Akujuru (2014), Yakub and Waziri (2013), Olayode (2010), and Onyike (2010), Government should adopt the public private partnership (PPP) initiative in funding infrastructural projects in Nekede New Road and Imo State in general.

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Appendix



Plate 1: Showing the State of Federal Polytechnic Road



Plate 2: Showing the State of Road Near Polytechnic- FUTO Road Junction



Plate 3: Showing One of the Bad Spots on the Nekede New Road, Road



Plate 4: Part of the Deplorable Road in Nekede



Plate 5: Some Volunteers Trying to Salvage Some of the Bad Spots on the Road



Plate 6: Showing Part of the Umuofocha/Umuokomoche to Owerri Road