

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MARYLAND COUNTY, LIBERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study sought to examine the role of local governance towards rural development in Maryland County, Liberia. The study objectives were; to ascertain the relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County, to determine the relationship between Transparency of local governance and rural development in Maryland County, to assess the relationship between Rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County. This study used a correlational research design. The study population was 253 and these included Maryland County Local Government top officials, local government staff and people of Maryland County. However, a sample size of 155 respondents was determined using the Slovene's formula. The researcher distributed 152 questionnaires, only 148 were returned and the remaining 3 respondents were interviewed. The researcher used purposive and simple random sampling methods. Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was collected from the respondents through self-administered questionnaire and key informant interview guide. The data was presented in tabular form with frequencies, percentages and descriptive statistics. The males were 85(57.4%) and females 63(42.6%), this implies that the number of men was higher than that of women due to societal beliefs that men are more hardworking than their female counterparts are. The study concludes that Systems of accountability embody the entirety of positive and negative motivational factors that push units and people in government to behave responsibly in the performance of their duties and in expending resources. This study strongly recommends autonomy for local governments in such a way and manner that enhances its performance of constitutional and ancillary roles. Local governments should strive to raise and maintain revenue that would enable them deliver projects and services that guarantee quality living to the grassroots. This has the potency of reducing the incidence of rural-urban drift.*

KEYWORD: Local Government, Local governance, Rural Development, Rule of Law, Transparency, Accountability.

I. INTRODUCTION

Local governance is a right and capability of a community executed directly in compliance with the established statutory procedures and through representatives of local authorities that are not affiliated with the system of state government bodies (Enero et al., 2004). A local government is a form of public administration, which, in a majority of contexts, exists as the lowest tier of administration within a given state. The term is used to contrast with offices at state level, which are referred to as the central government, national government, or (where appropriate) federal government and also to supranational government which deals with governing institutions between states.

Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development has traditionally centered on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006). However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the character of rural areas. Increasingly tourism, niche manufacturers, and recreation have replaced resource extraction and agriculture as dominant economic drivers. Rural development is a comprehensive term. It essentially focuses on action for the development of areas outside the mainstream urban economic system. We should think of what type of rural development is needed because modernization of village leads to urbanization and village environment disappears.

Globally, where the ideals and strategies for effective development have been understood the correct way, Local governance is the focus of government efforts at promoting rural development (Abah, 2010). For instance, the local government represents the third tier of governmental organization in the United States– the others being the

Federal and State governments. Frequently, the term “Grassroots administration” is employed as this has the additional advantage of graphically describing the location of this governmental arrangement. In reality, it is not vested with the powers and resources that it deserves. It becomes obvious overtime that to effectively develop, the people must be adequately mobilized (Arowolo, 2010). A purposeful combination of the local (peoples) effort/energies with that of government with the objective of improving socio-economic conditions and encouraging political participation is a key factor in rural development.

In Africa, since recent history, the local governance has been geared toward rural development for example in Nigeria has always been to the advantage of few individuals in the privileged class (Chioma, 2014). In addition, the administrative systems surrounding the implementation of rural development programmes do not usually function in the interest of the majority of rural dwellers that such programmes ought to capture or accommodate. This fact is applicable to existing institutions, whether commercial, private or traditional (Denga, 2003). In Ethiopia, the local government, being the government nearest to the rural populace, is one of the best institutions for generating motivation and encouraging mobilization for self-help, as well as inducing the much-needed wider participation of the local population in the decision-making process at the local level.

In Liberia, it is estimated that rural local governments account for about 80 percent of the entire country’s population, and it is plausible to argue as pundits do, that the so-called third world is a rural world where any meaningful discussion of rural development really means not only talking of overall national development, but also because it is in the rural areas that the problem of inequitable distribution of resources or a marked lack of purchasing power and of grinding poverty in which the wretched members of society stagnate and stare one in the face with brutal clarity (Ele, 2006). To guarantee the satisfaction of basic social needs, therefore, local responsibility and co-operation must be encouraged and that can best be developed through the participation of the local citizenry, not only in the affairs of their local government, but also in their own community affairs. It is important to observe that the existence of the third-tier system of government in Liberia should at least, halt the deteriorating living conditions in the rural areas of this country.

Statement of the Problem: The objective of local governance in Liberia is to bring rapid development benefiting community at local level throughout the country (Ijere, 1992). The goals of rural development should be to improve people’s productivity and enable them to participate in their social, political and economic life. Some problems and challenges could be encountered in the process of seeking for success in rural development in the country. The local government has roles in employment creation. This would give them more confidence in managing their own affairs and help to protect their environment (Olowu, 2016). However, there are several obstacles and challenges combine to hinder the effectiveness of local governance to rural development which includes inadequate financial resources, economic and social inequality and others (SerdarYilmaz&VarshaVenugopal, 2012). In Maryland County, the local government authorities can prepare and implement development plans and regulate markets, sanitary services, slaughterhouses, fire brigades, and mortuary and burial services. However, study (SerdarYilmaz&VarshaVenugopal, 2014) result show that most of these discretionary powers are on paper only and as most decisions on laws and planning seem to be top down . Thus, there is a problem in the power structure, which ultimately affects the autonomy of the local government to decide and implement schemes and programs for the welfare of the community. The recognition and importance of local government in the development process is prompted by the need to tackle local socio-economic problems and to manage participatory development. As a result, the level of decentralization and participation cannot solve the various rural development problems faced by the rural populace as the Maryland County local government is facing a series of challenges in implementing rural development plans and programs (Bowman & Kearney, 2016). Empirical Investigations further show that the country’s high level of corruption, Inequality, constitutional violation, and misuse of Public resources were identified as major obstacles to successful rural development of Liberia (Tuwea, 2019). It is against this background that the Researcher investigated local governance and rural development in Liberia.

Specific Objectives: i. to ascertain the relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County. ii. To determine the relationship between Transparency of local governance and rural development in Maryland County iii. To assess the relationship between Rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County.

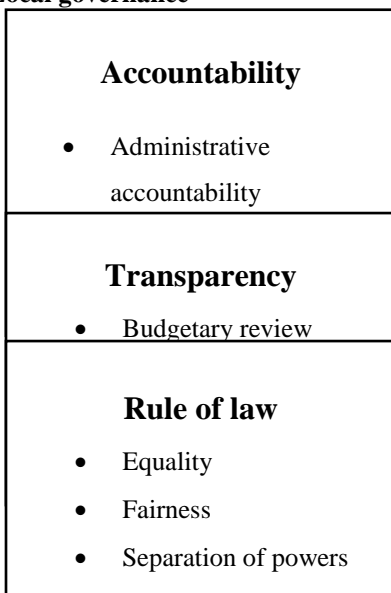
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review: The study was based on the Local development theory. The theory was developed by Romer P in (1987). The local development theory is a theory in social sciences based on the identification and use of the resources and endogenous potentialities of a community, neighborhood, city, municipality or equivalent (Rondinelli&Nellis, 2000). The local development theory considers the endogenous potentialities of territories. Economic and non-economic factors that influence local development processes. Among the non-economic factors, social, cultural, historical, institutional, and geographical aspects can be decisive in the process of rural development. In the year 2000 a multidisciplinary team of social scientists from several European countries argued, in a joint article published in SociologiaRuralis (2000), that rural development basically was practiced without theory (Ploeg et al, 2000) . Since then, rural development processes in Europe have gained considerable momentum and resulted in a dazzling array of new practices characterized by new dynamics and unanticipated impacts.

Nevertheless, in 2006 the OECD again referred to the need for “a new research agenda in rural development” (2006: 19), implying that the nature, dynamics and heterogeneity of rural development processes, as they unfold in practice, were inadequately expressed in new theoretical frameworks. At the same time, rural development policies have continued to develop at supra-national, national, regional and local levels and, in the social sciences there have been some major shifts (away from earlier and, in retrospect, too limited and inflexible, models) that allow for a better understanding of a rapidly changing world. The theory can usefully be drawn together to study rural change and the best ways to achieve desired objectives. Additionally, the specialist expertise of natural and biological scientists, engineers, as well as education and health professionals are clearly essential in dealing with the challenges of rural development. Local Development Theory emphasizes the need to promote desirable change which requires good co-ordination between the various actors involved in rural development (farmers, rural residents, government organisations, NGOs and other civil society organisations, donors, rural development professionals, researchers, private firms and businesses) (Ploeg et al, 2000).

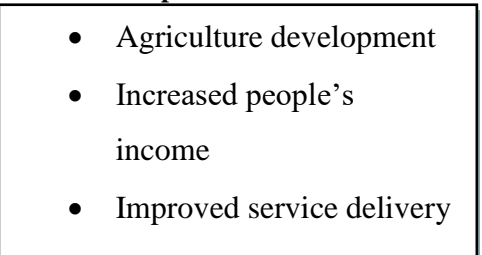
2.4 Conceptual Framework

Local governance

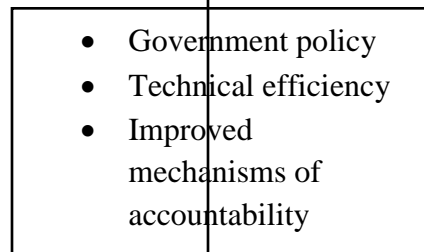


Independent Variable

Dependent Variable



Intervening Variable



Source: Researcher (2020)

According to the above conceptual framework, the independent variable is local governance which includes; Accountability of local governance (Administrative accountability, Political accountability and personal accountability), Transparency of local governance (Budgetary review, Audits and Financial disclosure statements) and Rule of law of local governance (Equality, Fairness and Separation of powers), whereas the dependent variable is rural development, (agriculture development, Increased people’s income and Improved service delivery).

III. Related Studies

Relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

Addressing poverty through governance Liberia faces a number of developments and good governance challenges (Nakpodia&Achugbue, 2012). This is especially true for rural areas where 94% of the country's poor live. Stronger local governance institutions, together with increased participation and citizen engagement, offer key strategies to address poverty in countries such as Liberia. These strategies seek to bring government closer to citizens, so that public officials can more easily meet the demands of citizens and be accountable to them. The result is better designed and targeted interventions across a range of basic services (Newcombs, 1953).

Administrative accountability: Bureaucratic accountability. Separating administration from politics weakens the link of accountability between elected and non-elected bodies, which inevitably creates pressures for inventing other mechanisms of administrative accountability (Peters, 2015). Perhaps the strongest degree of control can be achieved through hierarchy based 'bureaucratic accountability' There seems to be a wide consensus that bureaucratic accountability is based on a hierarchic relationship between superiors and subordinates, rules and regulations and supervision. These kind of hierarchic relationships and traditional mechanisms of accountability tend to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy (Romzek, 2011).

Political accountability: The concept of accountability is closely tied to concepts of democracy and legitimacy (Mulgan 2010). Those who govern have to answer for their actions to a wider public either directly, when politically elected or appointed, or indirectly as subordinates of politically elected bodies. If they fail to do so they can be substituted in democratic elections. This constant threat forces the ruling government to respond to the demands of a constituency, who can thus hold their government to account (Dwivedi&Jabbara, 2017). Many scholars have referred to this kind of accountability as political accountability or 'political responsibility. The political accountability is external in nature, since the body in control, a constituency, resides outside the body that is being called to account (Romzek&Dubnick, 2011).

Personal accountability: The idea of internal control as means of accountability is perhaps best captured in so called 'personal accountability', which refers to personal values and ethics as guidelines for acting in the public interest (Mulgan 2000). The personal integrity of an individual is largely shaped by shared values, ethics and beliefs communicated within the organisation or within a certain collective In public administration the mechanisms of personal accountability are closely tied to the prevailing administrative culture and its values and ethics, (Sinclair, 2014).

Relationship between Transparency of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

Increasing transparency at the local level has come to be recognized as an important element in tackling some of the challenges to sustainable development (Okoli&Onah, 2002). Transparency improves governance because it enhances citizen participation, fosters greater accountability and helps combat corruption. This second publication in the Urban Governance Toolkit Series produced by the United Nations Human Settlement Programme and Transparency International outlines a set of tools for building transparency in local governance.

Budgetary review: Budgeting is a key policy instrument for public management and management of the firm; it is a familiar activity to many as it is practiced in our private lives as well as in businesses, government and voluntary groups. The use of budgets in government circle long preceded its application in enterprises or the business sector. In the stable economic environment of the period before the world wars, few large companies particularly in the U.S.A and U.K used budgets for variety of purposes (Lambe,2012).

Audits: An audit is an "independent examination of financial information of any entity, whether profit oriented or not, irrespective of its size or legal form when such an examination is conducted with a view to express an opinion thereon (Carslaw, Mason, & Mills, 2007)" Auditing also attempts to ensure that the books of accounts are properly maintained by the concern as required by law. Auditors consider the propositions before them, obtain evidence, and evaluate the propositions in their auditing report.

Financial disclosure statements: Financial statements can present quality in government financial management. By looking into financial statement disclosure, the user can know several vital information regarding how the government manages the country, especially how well the accountability and governance of government. Financial statement usually has accounting standard. Generally, all ASEAN countries published governmental financial statements, and it has unique accounting standard (Ernst and Young. 2011).

Relationship between rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

In recent years, the concept of the "rule of law" has been gaining increased attention in academic and political circles (Tolu, 2014). Now, a major opportunity to capitalize on the recent fascination with the rule of law is on the horizon: the post-2015 generation of Millennium Development Goals. In September 2000, world leaders came together to proclaim, in the Millennium Declaration, that "the central challenge we face today is to ensure that

globalization becomes a positive force for the entire world’s people”. The Declaration pledged the UN General Assembly’s commitment to a set of ambitious, time-bound, measurable goals to promote development and reduce poverty (World Bank, 2004).

Equality: Equality addresses power inequalities (be they political, economic, legal, or cultural) and requires the extension of development gains to the most excluded groups and individuals (UNOHCHR, 2008).**Fairness:** Fairness is a core value of socialism as well as the soul of the rule of law in China. Fairness is the lifeline of the rule of law (Sen, A., 1999).

Gaps in the literature:There has been growing recognition of the importance of rural development as an instrument in the overall development of the contemporary developing world. This is because of the glaring gap between the rural and urban areas in terms of infrastructural, resources distribution, human resources development and employment, which has made rural development imperative (Ogbazi, 1982 in Zakariya’u, 2014). This imbalance has subjected the rural areas to more disadvantaged economic position. It has induced rural – urban migration, thereby, increasing unemployment situation in the urban areas, while, simultaneously depriving the rural areas of their agricultural workforce. There are several studies, which have been done in relation to the above.Kakumba(2010),investigated Local Government citizen Participation and Rural Development: Reflection on Uganda’s Decentralized system. His research established that the cardinal goals of decentralization seem to be elusive. He further established that the central government’s conceived strategies should out list participation in order to attain strong ownership and empowerment.Pollnna et al (2017) studied Input for and output of local governance in Rural Development. The study established that inadequatefunding conditions for Private actors set limitations for their involvement for their projects implementation. Another study was done in Thailand bykhongsatjaviwat (2015)on Local government.However,hardly any of the above examined Local Governance and Rural development in the context of Liberia, the gap which the researcher intends to fill.

IV. METHOD

The study used correlational research design. The quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze data on the study topic and qualitative method was used in data collection and analysis and general information on the subject matter that were collected from the different stakeholders involved in the study. This design was used because it brings out clearly the relationship between the two variables. The study was specifically non-experimental because the researcher wanted to describe and make observations of what the real results would be for purposes of making decisions based on the facts to improve the situation.

This study was conducted in Maryland County which had a total population of 136,404 households according to the Population Census conducted in 2008.The sample size of the study consists of253 of target population and was determined through purposive and random sampling methods. This is so because the nature of data to be generated required different techniques for better understanding of the research problem under investigation. Besides this the approach is also commonly known for achieving higher degree of validity and reliability as well as elimination of biases. The sample size of this study was determined using Slovene’s formula.

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

Where N=target population, n=sample size, α=0.05 level of significance.

$$n = \frac{253}{1 + 253(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{253}{1 + 6325}$$

$$n = \frac{253}{1.6325}$$

n = 155 Respondents

Both primary and secondary data collection methods were used to collect relevant data to the study. Data collection methods that were considered in such a way that relevant information wascollectedas much as possible with little inconvenience to respondents. The data involved information from the questionnaires only. Data from the field was too raw for proper interpretation. It was therefore vital to put it into order and structure it, soas to drive

meaning and information from it. The raw data obtained from questionnaires was cleaned, sorted and coded. The coded data was entered into the Computer, checked and statistically analyzed using the statistical package for social scientists (SPSS) software package to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was applied to describe the primary variable and associated indicator items related to the study objectives. The Pearson product correlation Co-efficient analysis was used to test the relationship among the variables and regression coefficient models to determine the extent to which the independent variables impacts on the dependent variable. The results were presented in form of tables then discussed in relation to existing literature. Conclusion and recommendations were drawn in relation to the set objectives of the study.

V. RESULT DISCUSSION

The following are the result of the research and discussion analysis based on objective by objective; the first objective of this study was to assess how Accountability of local governance has led to rural development in Maryland County. Table 4.4 gives the summary of the findings.

Table 1: Relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

Correlations			
		Accountability of local governance	Rural Development
Accountability of local governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.456**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	148	148
Rural Development	Pearson Correlation	.456**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	148	148

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is evident from the Table 1; above that there was weak positive significant relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County since the findings indicate that relationship stood at 0.456 on the Pearson correlation scale and its significance was at 0.000. This is interpreted as significant and positive relationship between the two variables. This rejects hypothesis and thus also signifies that weak positive significant relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County. This implies that Accountability of local governance plays an important role in boosting the rural development.

The study found out that there was weak positive significant relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County since the findings indicate that relationship stood at 0.456 on the Pearson correlation scale and its significance was at 0.000. This is interpreted as significant and positive relationship between the two variables. This rejects hypothesis and thus also signifies that weak positive significant relationship between Accountability of local governance and rural development in Maryland County. This implies that Accountability of local governance plays an important role in boosting the rural development. This is in line with (Nakpodia & Achugbue, 2012) who noted that addressing poverty through governance Liberia faces a number of development and good governance challenges. This is especially true for rural areas where 94% of the countries chronically poor live. Stronger local governance institutions, together with increased participation and citizen engagement, offer key strategies to address poverty in countries such as Liberia

Table 2: Relationship between Transparency of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

Correlations			
		Transparency of local governance	Rural development
Transparency of local governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	148	148
Rural development	Pearson Correlation	.559**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	148	148

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study findings revealed that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Transparency of local governance and rural development in Maryland County stood at 0.559. The significance of the relationship was within the acceptable range as it stood at 0.00 which rejects hypothesis and this signifies that the relationship between the two variables was positive and significant. With the revelation of the findings presented and discussed above, it necessitated for the rejection of the null hypothesis that had been adopted by the study all through. The alternative hypothesis was, thus, adopted that suggested that the allowances had a positive significant relationship with rural development. This implies that transparency of local government helps to empower citizens and thus leading to rural development.

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Table 4.4 3: Relationship between rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County

Correlations			
		Rule of law of local governance	Rural development
Rule of law of local governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.837**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	148	148
Rural development	Pearson Correlation	.837**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	148	148

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study findings revealed that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County stood at 0.837. The significance of the relationship was within the acceptable range as it stood at 0.00 which rejects hypothesis and this signifies that the relationship between the two variables was very strong, positive and significant. With the revelation of the findings presented and discussed above, it necessitated for the rejection of the null hypothesis that had been adopted by the study all through. The alternative hypothesis was, thus, adopted that suggested that the allowances had a positive significant relationship with rural development. This implies that Rule of law of local governance plays an important role in enhancing rural development.

The study findings revealed that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Rule of law of local governance and rural development in Maryland County stood at 0.837. The significance of the relationship was within the acceptable range as it stood at 0.00 which rejects hypothesis and this signifies that the relationship between the two variables was very strong, positive and significant. With the revelation of the findings presented and discussed above, it necessitated for the rejection of the null hypothesis that had been adopted by the study all through. The alternative hypothesis was, thus, adopted that suggested that the allowances had a positive significant relationship with rural development. This implies that Rule of law of local governance plays an important role in enhancing rural development. This is in line with (Arowolo, 2010) who noted that there are many good reasons to include the rule of law whether under its own name or that of a sister moniker such as “access to justice” in the next generation of MDGs. These include its contributions to sustainable development, poverty reduction, and citizen security and empowerment.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that Systems of accountability embody the entirety of positive and negative motivational factors that push units and people in government to behave responsibly in the performance of their duties and in expending resources.

The study concluded that increasing transparency at the local level has come to be recognized as an important element in tackling some of the challenges to sustainable development. Transparency improves governance because it enhances citizen participation, fosters greater accountability and helps combat corruption.

The study concluded that where the rule of law is lacking count for disproportionately high percentages of the developing world's poor, uneducated, and infant deaths. In advanced economies too, those portions of the population denied access to justice suffer from higher levels of discrimination in education and other public services.

The study recommends that areas endowed with basic natural resources should expectedly grow faster than less endowed areas and also hasten the process of rural development. This argument is however faulted on the premise that there are areas abundantly endowed with basic natural resources, which have continued to stagnate especially in Liberia

As a corollary, local governments should be more people-centred in approach, such that necessary collaboration/partnership with communities in its domain can facilitate the process of rural development.

Local governments should play pro-active roles in engaging the services of agricultural extension officers and agents in teaching and dispersing modern farming methods to the farmers. This has the advantage of inculcating the necessary adaptive methods in farming with improved yield which guarantees food sufficiency and reliance.

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