



THE ROLE OF NIGERIA'S FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF HOST COMMUNITIES: AN EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to evaluate the role of Nigeria's federal universities on the economic development of their host communities. The study employed the descriptive survey research design on a sample size of 277, selected through simple random sampling from six host communities. Host communities of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri and the University of Jos served as case study. Questionnaires were utilized as instrument for collecting the necessary data which were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study indicated that Nigeria's federal universities have played positive role in the economic empowerment of members of their host communities. The study maintained that the economic empowerment derived from opportunities the universities provided to indigenes of host communities and the enhanced commercial activities brought to the area by the location of such institutions in their domain. Arising from the findings, the study recommended that Nigeria's federal universities should sustain those policies that economically empower members of the host communities such as recruitment of indigenes, adoption of village farms, patronage of local contractors and payment of quarterly honorarium to the traditional rulers of host communities.

Keywords: Role, Development, Land, Host, Community, Nigeria

Introduction

In Nigeria particularly, and Africa in general, individuals and families attach much importance to land. Cases abound of land conflicts in families and communities that led to death

of many people. This is largely due to the people's emotional attachment to land based on spiritual, historical, financial and social reasons. As Enisan and Aluko (2015) indicate, land is required for various uses in both the urban and rural areas of society. It is a major factor of production and a vital element in the socio-economic development of any country or society. The land on which Nigeria's federal universities are located belonged to individuals, families and communities prior to their acquisition by the Government. With such acquisition, the affected individuals are deprived of the use of the land. Consequently, the economic benefit land owners derived through farming on such land is lost. The Government is supposed to pay compensation to land owners for economic crops and any improvement on the land. However, the compensation is usually so paltry and the process for actualizing the payment fraught with so much bureaucratic bottleneck and corruption that many land owners die without getting the money.

Having parted with their precious patrimony (land) in exchange, as it were, for a federal university, it becomes necessary to find out from the indigenes of host communities how they have fared with the advent of the institutions. Specifically, this study seeks to find out how the coming of federal universities have affected host communities, in terms of commercial activities, economic empowerment of families and attraction of physical development to these areas. This evaluation becomes more germane considering that, apart from the federal universities established in 2010, the age of Nigerian federal universities range from 20-58 years. Given their age, these institutions are mature for appraisal.

The Concept of Development

Development is a concept that has attracted a lot of discourse by scholars, policy makers, statesmen, development partners and citizens of various nations. It is a multi-dimensional subject that covers many fields, including biology, economics, sociology and psychology. According to Todaro (1992), development is a multi-faceted process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth. In essence development must represent the entire spectrum of changes by which an entire social system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory, to a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually 'better'.

There are three major theories of development. The first is the stages of Economic Growth theory which regards development as a series of sequential stages of economic growth through

which all countries must pass. The second is the International Dependence theory which focuses on external and internal institutional constraints on economic development such as gross inequalities in land ownership, highly unequal and imbalanced international trade relationships. The third is Free-Market theory which maintains that development thrives in an atmosphere of competition brought about by 'free markets' devoid of Government intervention. According to the Free Market theorists, the Government should only serve as a provider of enabling environment and regulates only where necessary.

Development has three main objectives. The first objective is to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health, water, electricity and protection to all members of society. Every well-meaning Government has a responsibility to ensure that its development agenda is geared towards addressing the basic life-sustaining needs of its citizens. The second objective of development is to raise the levels of living through incomes, the provision of better education, more jobs and creation of environment that is congenial for wealth creation, investment and industrialization. All these will not only enhance material well-being but also generate greater individual and national self-esteem. The third objective of development is to expand the range of economic and social choice available to individuals and nations by liberating them from servitude and dependence. This freedom is not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to ignorance and human misery.

Goulet (1971) identified three basic components or core values of development. The first is life-sustenance which stipulates that development must provide basic human needs including food, shelter, health and protection. The second core value is self-esteem which advocates that development should strive to empower people so as to increase their self-esteem and dignity. The third core value is freedom which regards development as emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and liberation from social servitude of people to nature and diseases.

Do Nigeria's federal universities have any role to play in the pursuit of the objectives of development, especially as it relates to host communities? This study will address the matter by investigating to find out whether the coming of federal universities affected the economic or material condition of indigenes of host communities for good or bad.

Methodology

In this study a descriptive survey design was used to determine the evaluation of the role of Nigeria's federal universities in the economic development of their host communities. This design was adopted in consideration of the large nature of the study population. Two Nigerian federal universities located in different geographic zones of the country and six host communities were used as case study. These were, the Federal University of Technology, Owerri which is a specialized institution located in South Eastern Nigeria and the University of Jos that is a conventional university based in North Central Nigeria. Three host communities were purposively selected from each of the two universities based on land ownership in the institutions. Ihiagwa, Eziobodo and Obinze were the host communities selected from the Federal University of Technology, Owerri. From the University of Jos, Naraguta, Angwa Rukuba and Angwa Rogo were chosen.

The sampling method employed was simple random sampling technique. The study used a sample size of two hundred seventy seven respondents. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. While books and journals constituted major secondary sources, the questionnaires served as primary source of data for the study. The measures of the instrument (questionnaires) used were scored on a four point Likert scale format. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The results arising from the data analysis are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 below shows the degree of agreement or disagreement of indigenes of host communities as to whether the establishment of federal universities on their territories led to enhancement of commercial activities in their areas. About 39.7% of the respondents from FUTO host communities strongly agreed that the advent of the institution accelerated commercial activities in their communities while about 37.7% just agreed. On the aggregate, about 77.4% of the respondents affirmed that the location of FUTO led to enhancement of commercial activities in the host communities. Conversely, on the aggregate about 22.6% of the respondents from FUTO host communities did not share the views of the majority.

Table 1: Enhancement of Commercial Activities

	Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)		University of JOS (UNI JOS)	
Response	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	58	39.7	40	30.5
Agree	55	37.7	49	37.4
Disagree	17	11.6	20	15.3
Strongly Disagree	16	11.0	22	16.8
Total	146	100	131	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Regarding the University of Jos, on the aggregate about 67.9% of the respondents maintained that the coming of the institution led to enhancement of commercial activities in the host communities. On the other hand, on the aggregate about 32.1% of the respondents disagreed with the dominant opinion on the matter.

Table2: Economic Empowerment of Families

	Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)		University of JOS (UNI JOS)	
Response	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	37	25.3	36	27.4
Agree	51	35.0	42	32.1
Disagree	30	20.5	33	25.2
Strongly Disagree	28	19.2	20	15.3
Total	146	100	131	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

As shown in table 2, about 25.3% of the respondents from FUTO host communities strongly agreed that the coming of the institution led to the economic empowerment of families in these areas while about 35.0% simply agreed. On the aggregate, about 60.3% agreed that many

families from the host communities were economically empowered as a result of the location of FUTO. Conversely, on the aggregate about 39.7% stated that the establishment of FUTO did not economically empower families of the host communities.

With respect to UNIJOS, on the aggregate about 59.5% of the respondents indicated that the advent of the university led to the economic empowerment of families from the host communities. On their own part, on the aggregate about 40.5% did not agree with the position of the majority.

Table 3: Attraction of Infrastructural Development

Response	Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)		University of JOS (UNI JOS)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	40	27.4	30	22.9
Agree	52	35.6	47	35.9
Disagree	29	19.9	20	15.3
Strongly Disagree	25	17.1	34	25.9
Total	146	100	131	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

As can be seen in table 3, on the aggregate about 63.0% of the respondents from FUTO host communities affirmed that the establishment of the university quickened the infrastructural development of the host communities. On the other hand, on the aggregate about 37.0% disagreed with the dominant view.

Concerning UNIJOS, on the aggregate about 58.2% maintained that the university attracted infrastructural development for the communities. Conversely, on the aggregate about 41.8% did not share the opinion of the majority.

The findings of this study indicate that the University of Jos and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri have played positive role in the economic development of their host communities. Respondents from host communities in both institutions were unanimous in their

affirmation that the emergence of the institutions led to enhanced commercial activities, economic empowerment of families and attraction of infrastructural development in the host communities. This outcome thus points to the fact that universities have the innate capacity to transform obscure and rural communities into flourishing centres of commerce. This finding is in line with the position of Oni (2005), Ojo (1985) Omeire (2010), and Nwaoma and Omeire (2014) to the effect that the university is a major institution that has promoted and sustained development all over the world.

The location of federal universities in an area usually leads to the emergence and blossoming of such commercial activities as transportation, business/secretarial centres, barbing and hair dressing salons, restaurants and bars, tailoring and fashion design outfits, pharmacies and patent medicine stores etc. Members of the host communities benefit from the enhanced commercial activities either directly as owners of the business or indirectly as landlords who rent their buildings to commercial operators.

The economic empowerment of host community families may take the form of recruitment of indigenes as staff of the university or some becoming local contractors and doing minor works in the institution. Some host community members can also become landlords to staff and students while others may engage in petty trading within or around the university. Some universities also pay quarterly honorarium to traditional rulers of host communities as token of their appreciation for the role of the royal fathers in maintaining peace and stability in the environment.

Families in host communities are also empowered through facilities provided by federal universities. Some federal universities as a matter of deliberate policy adopt certain farms from host communities. Extension staff from the faculties of Agriculture are assigned to work in concert with owners of such farms and apply improved technologies to grow the business of the farmers. The end result is usually improvement in farm produce and higher earnings for the affected farmers. Also some federal universities own micro-finance banks while others attract commercial banks to their campuses. Members of host communities do also benefit from the services and facilities provided by these banks. Some federal universities also undertake periodic medical outreaches to selected host communities and offer free medical services to people in the area. The beneficiaries are thus relieved of the financial burden of health service at such times.

Furthermore, in a global context, the existence of universities are sometimes used as baits to attract foreign investors to an area. For example, Thomas (2002), a member of a British trade mission to Japan, indicated that one of the most important points they used in attempting to woo Japanese companies to invest in a particular location was the proximity to a higher education cluster because of the potential synergies. When these industries are eventually established, the host communities will benefit economically, either through the employment of its members or patronage by the company's employees.

The outcome of this study also indicates that the establishment of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri and the University of Jos attracted infrastructural development of host communities. The reasons for this affirmation may not be far-fetched. In the first instance, the land on which the university is located is an integral part of the host communities. Consequently, any improvement on such land in terms of development of physical structures, landscaping, internal road networks or provision of municipal services remains a major feature of the communities on whose land the university is situated. Without the establishment of a federal university on it, such land may have been under utilized for purposes of subsistence farming rather than enhancing the image and physical development of host communities.

Furthermore, the location of federal universities in an area lead to the opening up of such areas. Investors are usually attracted to build housing estates and hostels around the university communities. Also federal universities as major stakeholders and contributors to the economy of their host states usually attract such Governments to intervene in the physical development of host communities. Such interventions might be in the area of road rehabilitation, provision of electricity, water supply or location of viable projects.

5.0 Conclusion

This study appraised the role of Nigeria's federal universities in the economic development of host communities. Six host communities from the Federal University of Technology, Owerri and the University of Jos (three from each institution's area) were used as case study. The result of the study revealed that most of the respondents from the host communities in the two institutions were unanimous in the position that their communities have benefitted economically from the location of the University of Jos and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri on their land. The result showed that the economic empowerment that host

community members enjoyed emanated largely from the enhanced commercial activities brought about by the establishment of the institutions and the opportunities that these universities offered to the indigenes. The study also indicated that federal universities attracted physical developments such as road rehabilitation and electrification to their host communities.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Nigeria's federal universities should sustain policies that economically empower members of their host communities. Such measures might include employment of indigenes, adopting community farms and primary/secondary schools, patronizing local contractors from host communities, undertaking periodic medical outreaches to selected communities and payment of quarterly honorarium to royal fathers of host communities.
- (ii) The Nigerian Federal Government should take cognizance of the fact that apart from providing opportunity for higher education, federal universities offer the ancillary benefit of positively impacting on the economy of their host communities. This realization should guide policy makers in deciding the location of new federal universities. This is particularly germane for a heterogeneous nation such as Nigeria where the need for equity cannot be over emphasized.

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