

**NORTHEAST DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND INFRASTRUCTURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT, TARABA STATE,
NIGERIA**

¹Adeoti, Janet Alaki, ² Benjamin, Dantani, ³ Samuel, Douglas Banja & ⁴ Joseph, John

^{1&3}Department of Political Science, Federal University, Wukari, Nigeria

³Taraba State College of Education, Zing

⁴Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Taraba State University,
Jalingo

¹Janeadeori012@gmail.com.

²dantanibenzamin6@gmail.com, ³douglasbanjasamuel@gmail.com and

⁴jjyaks00@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Infrastructural development is a critical driver of post-conflict recovery and socio-economic stability in regions affected by insurgency and chronic underdevelopment. Established in 2017, the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) was tasked with leading the reconstruction and development efforts in Nigeria's northeast. While its interventions in epicenters of the Boko Haram conflict have been documented, its role in stabilizing neighboring areas like Taraba State remains under-examined. This study investigates the scope and assesses the effectiveness and sustainability of NEDC-led infrastructural projects in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Anchored on the Basic Needs Theory, the study employed a descriptive survey design, utilizing primary data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, beneficiaries, and local officials, supplemented by secondary data from relevant publications. Findings reveal that the NEDC has implemented a multi-sectoral portfolio of projects with significant investments in road rehabilitation, water infrastructure, and education, alongside healthcare, electrification, housing, and skill acquisition. These interventions have tangibly improved agricultural trade, access to clean water, educational conditions, and healthcare delivery, thereby addressing fundamental human needs and enhancing federal government presence. However, the study uncovers critical challenges related to sustainability, including a top-down implementation approach that limits community ownership, the absence of formal maintenance frameworks leading to early infrastructure decay, and inadequate capacity-building components. The study concludes that while the NEDC has made commendable strides in infrastructure provision, the long-term developmental impact in Wukari is jeopardized by these structural weaknesses. It recommends a

strategic shift towards institutionalizing participatory governance and integrated sustainability protocols.

Keywords: *Infrastructural Development, Northeast Development Commission (NEDC), Basic Needs Theory, Sustainability,*

Introduction

Infrastructure plays a critical role in post-conflict recovery and sustainable development, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected regions. Globally, development institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank emphasize that functional infrastructure roads, schools, healthcare facilities, water supply, and communication systems forms the foundation for economic revitalization, social cohesion, and political stability (World Bank, 2021; African Development Bank, 2022). In regions emerging from violent conflict, infrastructural reconstruction is not only a developmental necessity but also a strategic instrument for restoring livelihoods, rebuilding trust in the state, and preventing conflict relapse.

Nigeria's northeast has experienced prolonged insecurity, primarily due to the Boko Haram insurgency and related humanitarian crises, which have resulted in the destruction of public infrastructure, displacement of populations, and erosion of local economies. In response, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) through the NEDC Act of 2017 to coordinate reconstruction, rehabilitation, and long-term development interventions in the affected states. The Commission's mandate includes rebuilding critical infrastructure, supporting socio-economic recovery, and addressing structural development deficits in the region (NEDC Act, 2017).

Scholarly and policy attention on the NEDC has largely concentrated on insurgency epicentres such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, where the scale of devastation has been most visible (Ibrahim, 2020; Mustapha & Yusuf, 2022). However, the northeast is not a homogeneous space, and development challenges vary significantly across states and local government areas. Taraba State, particularly its southern axis, has experienced recurrent communal conflicts, seasonal flooding, and chronic

infrastructural neglect, which continue to undermine socio-economic development and human security (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2021).

Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) is a major socio-economic hub in southern Taraba State, yet it faces persistent infrastructural deficits, including poor road networks, overcrowded educational facilities, and under-equipped health centres. Although the NEDC has reportedly implemented projects such as classroom construction, road rehabilitation, and ICT facilities in the area, there is a noticeable absence of systematic, independent, and location-specific assessments of these interventions. Existing data from UNDP (2022) and the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) further indicate that infrastructural inadequacies remain a major constraint to development in Wukari.

Moreover, as a federal intervention agency operating within Nigeria's complex federal structure, the NEDC's activities are influenced by intergovernmental relations, bureaucratic challenges, funding constraints, and political considerations in project selection and implementation (Mustapha, 2021). Without strong community participation, effective monitoring mechanisms, and sustainable maintenance frameworks, infrastructural projects risk rapid deterioration or misalignment with local development priorities (Ibrahim & Bello, 2023).

Against this backdrop, there is a compelling need to empirically examine the nature, scope, effectiveness, and sustainability of NEDC infrastructural interventions in Wukari LGA. Such an assessment is essential for understanding whether federal reconstruction agencies are effectively addressing localized development needs and contributing meaningfully to post-crisis recovery and equitable development in Nigeria's northeast.

Contextualizing the Study: Concepts and Existing Literature

Northeast Development Commission

The Northeast Development Commission refers to the federal agency established by the NEDC Act of 2017 to coordinate humanitarian, reconstruction, and developmental interventions in Nigeria's northeast region. The Commission's mandate encompasses the rehabilitation and reconstruction of public infrastructure destroyed by insurgency, promotion of socio-economic recovery, and facilitation of long-term development strategies tailored to the needs of the region (NEDC Act, 2017). In operational terms, the NEDC serves as a special-purpose development vehicle, bridging immediate humanitarian needs and sustainable development objectives. Within the context of this study, the NEDC is conceptualised as a policy-driven institutional mechanism whose interventions are expected to directly impact physical infrastructure, economic revitalisation, and social stability in affected localities, including Wukari Local Government Area.

Infrastructural Development

Infrastructural development, in this context, refers to the systematic provision, expansion, and improvement of basic physical and organisational structures needed for the functioning of a society. According to the World Bank (2021), infrastructure encompasses transport networks, educational and health facilities, water supply systems, energy grids, and ICT facilities, all of which are fundamental to economic growth and human well-being. It is both a process and an outcome requiring planning, financing, construction, and maintenance and is measured by its accessibility, quality, and ability to meet the socio-economic needs of the population (AfDB, 2022). In post-conflict and underdeveloped areas like parts of Taraba State, infrastructural development is a critical tool for rebuilding livelihoods, enhancing service delivery, and promoting political stability.

From a development policy perspective, this study conceptualises infrastructural development as the tangible manifestation of NEDC's mandate in Wukari. The

quality, relevance, and sustainability of such infrastructure depend not only on technical execution but also on the alignment with community priorities, institutional coordination, and long-term maintenance frameworks. This implies that successful infrastructural development in Wukari is a function of both physical delivery (e.g., roads, schools, clinics) and institutional effectiveness (e.g., participatory planning, transparency, and sustainability measures).

The NEDC in Post-Conflict Development Discourse

The establishment of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) represents a significant institutional response to the complex developmental challenges in Nigeria's northeast region. Scholars have examined the Commission from various perspectives, with existing literature focusing primarily on its operational framework, challenges, and overall impact in severely conflict-affected states.

Several studies have documented the NEDC's institutional architecture and strategic positioning within Nigeria's federal system. Mustapha (2021) analyzes the complex intergovernmental relations that shape the Commission's operations, highlighting how federal-state dynamics influence project implementation. Similarly, Ibrahim (2020) examines the NEDC as a policy response to insurgency, emphasizing its mandate to bridge humanitarian assistance and long-term development objectives.

The Commission's infrastructural focus has attracted scholarly attention, particularly regarding its approach to post-conflict reconstruction. Adamu (2021) and Aliyu & Usman (2020) note that the NEDC plays a crucial role in rebuilding social infrastructure and tackling the root causes of violent extremism through economic empowerment programs. The Commission's interventions in housing construction, road rehabilitation, and agricultural support have been identified as key components of its reconstruction agenda (Okeke & Usman, 2022).

However, critical perspectives highlight significant operational challenges. Yusuf (2022) and Okon & Bashir (2021) point to issues of transparency, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and poor coordination with international partners and civil society

organizations. These studies suggest that these limitations compromise the long-term impact of the Commission's interventions. Particularly relevant to this study is the critique regarding minimal community engagement in project development and implementation, which several scholars identify as a fundamental weakness in the NEDC's operational model (Ikelegbe, 2013; Onapajo, 2014).

The geographical focus of existing research presents a notable gap in the literature. While substantial attention has been given to the Commission's work in insurgency epicenters like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa (Mustapha & Yusuf, 2022; Olaniyan, 2021), there is limited empirical research on its interventions in relatively stable but underdeveloped areas like Taraba State. This gap is particularly significant given that regions like Wukari LGA face developmental challenges that, while different from direct insurgency impacts, are nonetheless severe and require targeted intervention.

Furthermore, existing studies have predominantly employed macro-level analysis, with limited attention to community-level perceptions and the micro-dynamics of project implementation. The voices of direct beneficiaries, local government officials, and community stakeholders remain largely undocumented in the scholarly discourse on the NEDC's work outside core conflict zones.

From a theoretical perspective, the literature on post-conflict reconstruction emphasizes the importance of context-specific approaches that address both physical reconstruction and social cohesion (Paffenholz, 2015). The Basic Needs Theory, which underpins this study, has been applied in various development contexts but remains underutilized in analyzing the NEDC's infrastructural interventions, particularly in locations characterized by both post-conflict challenges and chronic underdevelopment. This study therefore contributes to filling these gaps by providing a localized, empirical examination of the NEDC's infrastructural interventions in Wukari LGA, with particular attention to community

Theoretical Review

While the Basic Needs Theory provides a human-centered, normative lens for this study, its focus on outcomes can be complemented by theories that critically examine the processes and power dynamics of post-conflict development. Two such frameworks Institutional Theory and the Theory of Public Value offer distinct yet powerful analytical tools for explaining the findings of this study, particularly concerning the implementation model, institutional contradictions, and the contested nature of project success. This review will outline these theories and demonstrate their applicability to the NEDC's interventions in Wukari LGA.

Institutional Theory, advanced by scholars such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Scott (2014), posits that organizations operate within a broader social and political environment of norms, rules, and beliefs an "institutional field." To gain and maintain legitimacy, organizations often conform to the dominant structures and practices of this field, a process known as isomorphism. This conformity can be coercive (from laws and regulations), mimetic (copying perceived successful models), or normative (through professional standards). However, this quest for external legitimacy can lead to a "decoupling" between an organization's formal structures/policies and its actual on-the-ground practices.

This theory provides a compelling lens for analyzing the NEDC. As a federal agency born from the NEDC Act of 2017, it is subject to powerful coercive isomorphism from the federal government's mandate, budgetary processes, and political expectations. Its multi-sectoral portfolio reflects a mimetic isomorphism, aligning with the standard, internationally-sanctioned template for post-conflict reconstruction agencies (e.g., UN Peacebuilding Commission models) that emphasizes physical infrastructure across health, education, and roads.

The study's findings directly illustrate the consequences of this institutional positioning. The top-down implementation model is not merely an operational choice but a structural feature of an agency seeking to demonstrate federal presence and legitimacy to its political principals in Abuja. The participatory deficit and misaligned project priorities can be interpreted as a classic case of decoupling: the NEDC's

formal mandate is to foster sustainable, community-driven recovery, yet its actual practices prioritize rapid, visible delivery to satisfy political and bureaucratic performance metrics. This decoupling explains why projects are "dropped" on communities and why maintenance frameworks are absent; building the structure satisfies the immediate legitimacy requirement, while its long-term functionality is a secondary concern for the institutional pressures the NEDC faces. The tension with local government agencies, as noted in the findings, further exemplifies conflict within the institutional field, where overlapping mandates and different sources of legitimacy (federal vs. local) create friction and undermine coordination.

The Theory of Public Value, developed by Mark Moore (1995), shifts the focus from organizational conformity to value creation. It argues that public managers should act as strategists, aiming to create "public value" outcomes that citizens collectively deem valuable. This requires managing a strategic triangle: 1) defining and substantiating public value outcomes, 2) building a supportive authorizing environment (legitimacy and funding from political overseers, the public, and other stakeholders), and 3) developing operational capacity to deliver.

Applying this theory, the NEDC's work in Wukari presents a case study in navigating this triangle, with both successes and critical failures. The tangible assets roads, boreholes, clinics represent an attempt to create clear public value by addressing fundamental service gaps. The initial community gratitude indicates partial success on this vertex. However, the theory insists value is defined not by suppliers but by citizens. The study's findings reveal a gap here: the lack of participatory planning means the definition of value was imposed rather than co-created, leading to potential misalignment (e.g., a hall vs. a road).

The NEDC appears to have focused heavily on securing its authorizing environment at the federal level, ensuring political support and continued funding. However, it neglected to build a robust, local authorizing environment among the Wukari community and the Taraba State government. The absence of maintenance frameworks and local ownership committees signifies a failure to convert

beneficiaries into legitimate co-authors and stewards. This weak local authorization jeopardizes long-term value.

Finally, the theory highlights the operational capacity challenge. The NEDC demonstrated capacity in project construction but revealed a critical incapacity in establishing the operational systems for sustainability (maintenance protocols, local technical training, inter-agency coordination). According to Moore's framework, an intervention is only strategically successful if it strengthens all three vertices of the triangle. The NEDC strengthened federal authorization and built physical assets but failed to co-create the definition of value with locals or build the operational capacity for enduring impact, thus creating "value" that is inherently fragile.

Institutional Theory and the Theory of Public Value offer complementary, process-oriented explanations for the study's core findings. Institutional Theory explains why the NEDC operates in a top-down, project-centric manner it is structurally conforming to the political and bureaucratic pressures of its institutional field, leading to decoupling from sustainable, community-embedded practices. The Theory of Public Value, in turn, provides a normative framework to assess how this approach leads to strategic failure in creating durable public value, diagnosing the neglect of the local authorizing environment and long-term operational capacity as critical flaws. Together, these theories move the analysis beyond whether needs were met (Basic Needs) to interrogate the deeper institutional logics and strategic misalignments that determine whether those met needs will last, thereby offering a richer explanation for the sustainability challenges documented in Wukari LGA.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Basic Needs Theory, which emerged in the 1970s through the works of development economists such as Paul Streeten, Mahbub ul Haq, Frances Stewart, and development institutions like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank (Streeten et al., 1981). The theory arose as a critique of growth-focused models of development that emphasized

macroeconomic expansion while neglecting poverty reduction, inequality, and the welfare of marginalized groups.

At its core, the Basic Needs Theory argues that development should prioritize the satisfaction of fundamental human needs such as food, water, healthcare, education, housing, and access to essential infrastructure before measuring progress in terms of economic growth indicators (Streeten et al., 1981). According to this theory, sustainable and equitable development is only achievable when individuals, particularly those in deprived regions, have access to the minimum resources required to live productive and dignified lives.

Application of the theory to the study

The application of this theory is highly relevant to understanding the infrastructural development efforts of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in Wukari Local Government, Taraba State. Wukari, like many communities in the North-East, faces multiple infrastructural deficits ranging from poor road networks, inadequate healthcare facilities, insufficient schools, irregular electricity supply, to lack of access to safe drinking water. These gaps directly reflect the failure to meet the basic needs of the population, thereby impeding human development and limiting social and economic participation.

Using the lens of Basic Needs Theory, this study treats infrastructure not merely as physical capital but as critical enablers of human welfare and empowerment. For instance, road construction enhances mobility and market access; schools and healthcare facilities build human capital; electricity supply and water systems improve living standards; and communication infrastructure connects communities to wider opportunities. Therefore, NEDC interventions in Wukari can be evaluated in terms of how far they address these basic needs, reduce poverty, and promote inclusive development.

Therefore, the Basic Needs Theory provides both a normative foundation and a practical evaluative tool for assessing the performance of the NEDC. It helps

determine whether the Commission's projects in Wukari Local Government are effectively targeting urgent material deprivations, aligning with people-centered development, and laying the groundwork for sustainable livelihoods. By situating infrastructure within the framework of human needs, this study highlights the role of the NEDC in bridging historical development gaps and fostering equitable growth at the grassroots level in Taraba State.

Methodology

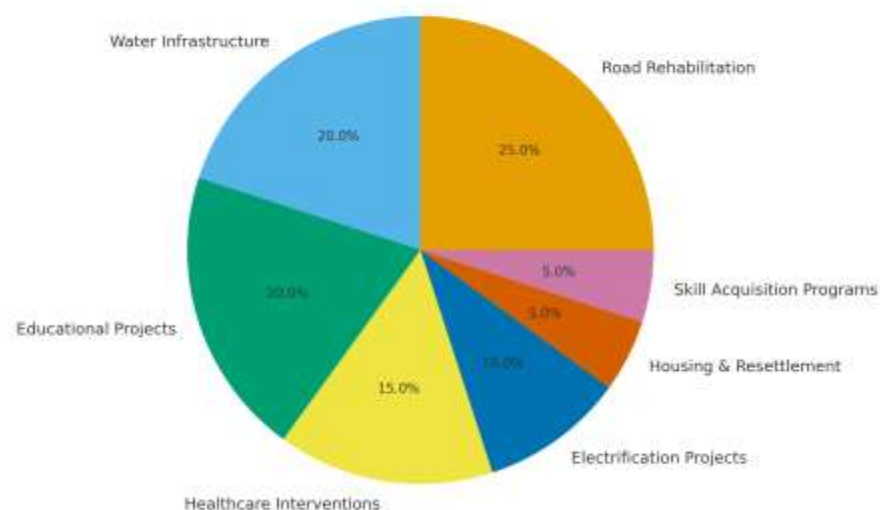
The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore the role of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in promoting infrastructural development in Wukari of Taraba State. This design was chosen for its suitability in capturing and analyzing the current state of infrastructural interventions and their impact on local communities. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including community leaders, project beneficiaries, local government officials, and health and education personnel. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with youth groups, women's cooperatives, and university students to gain diverse perspectives and in-depth qualitative insights into the perceived benefits and challenges of NEDC projects. Personal observations during site visits further enriched the data by providing contextual understanding of project locations and their usage. Secondary data were obtained from relevant academic journals, government publications, institutional reports, and official documents from the NEDC, which provided background context and validated primary findings. Data were thematically analyzed, with emerging patterns categorized under infrastructure types, site locations, community responses, and sustainability concerns. This methodological approach ensured a balanced and evidence-based evaluation of the effectiveness, equity, and social inclusion dimensions of the NEDC's infrastructural interventions.

Result and Discussion

The Role of the Northeast Development Commission in Promoting Infrastructural Development in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State

What is the strategic rationale and sectoral distribution of the Northeast Development Commission's infrastructural interventions in Wukari Local Government Area? The establishment of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in 2017 represented a pivotal federal intervention aimed at addressing the profound developmental deficits exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency and decades of state neglect in Nigeria's North-East. While its primary operational focus has historically been on epicenters of conflict like Borno and Adamawa, the Commission's mandate logically extends to stabilizing neighboring regions like Taraba State, where spillover effects, communal conflicts, and historical underdevelopment persist. Wukari Local Government Area, a critical socio-economic and political hub in southern Taraba, has thus become a recipient of various NEDC initiatives. These interventions, strategically targeted at sectors crippled by instability and neglect such as road connectivity, water supply, education, healthcare, electrification, and housing aim to foster socio-economic recovery, bolster state legitimacy, and build a foundation for sustainable peace.

Figure 1: Distribution of NEDC Infrastructural Interventions in Wukari LGA



Source: compile by the author, 2025

The pie chart above provides a quantitative snapshot of the NEDC's portfolio in Wukari LGA, revealing a strategic emphasis on foundational infrastructure. Road

rehabilitation and construction constitute the largest share at 25%, a clear indication of the priority placed on unlocking the agricultural economy and improving rural-urban integration. Water infrastructure and Educational projects each claim 20%, reflecting a direct response to two of the most pressing human security needs: access to clean water and the development of human capital. Healthcare interventions at 15% demonstrate an effort to strengthen a beleaguered public health system, while Electrification (10%) targets the enhancement of security and night-time commerce. The smaller but critical segments of Housing and Resettlement (5%) and Skill Acquisition (5%) address the consequences of displacement and youth unemployment, respectively. This distribution, while not exhaustive, illustrates a deliberate attempt to apply a multi-sectoral approach to development in line with the Commission's broad mandate.

Enhancing Road Connectivity and Unlocking Agricultural Potential

The agrarian economy of Wukari LGA is fundamentally dependent on the ability to move goods from fertile farmlands to central markets. For years, the deplorable state of rural feeder roads, particularly the Wukari-Tsokundi axis, acted as a severe constraint on economic growth, leading to significant post-harvest losses and disincentivizing commercial agriculture. The NEDC's intervention in rehabilitating these critical arteries has been one of its most impactful contributions.

How does rural infrastructure serve as a multi-dimensional catalyst for economic revitalization, social cohesion, and state-citizen relations in post-conflict settings? A yam farmer from Tsokundi Ward provided a compelling testimony to this transformation:

"Before the NEDC's intervention, this road was a source of perpetual loss. During the rainy season, it became a treacherous quagmire, impassable for vehicles. We relied on motorcycles, which could only carry small quantities at exorbitant costs. It was a common sight to see heaps of tomatoes and yams rotting by the roadside because they couldn't reach the market in time. The economic discouragement was palpable. Now, with the graded and compacted road, everything has changed. Small trucks and buses can now access our villages directly. The time to market has been cut by more than half, the cost

of transportation has dropped significantly, and the quality of our produce upon arrival is preserved. This has not only increased our profit margins but has also encouraged us to expand our farmlands, knowing that the logistical nightmare has been alleviated." (Interview with Farmer, Tsokundi Ward, March 2025)

What has been the concrete impact of the new road on your community, beyond just getting crops to market? A community elder further elaborated on the socio-political ripple effects:

"The value of this road goes beyond commerce. In the past, when there was a medical emergency or a security threat, response times were agonizingly slow. The isolation made us feel abandoned. Now, security personnel can patrol these areas, and health workers are more willing to be posted to our clinics because they know they are not completely cut off. This road has, in a very real sense, reconnected us to the state and restored a measure of confidence in governance." (Interview with Elder, Wukari Town, March 2025)

This field evidence corroborates the arguments of Oni and Okanlawon (2020), who posit that rural road infrastructure is not merely a physical asset but a catalyst for integrated development, strengthening value chains, enhancing food security, and reinforcing the social contract between the state and its citizens.

Expanding Access to Clean Water: A Cornerstone for Health and Gender Equity

What types of infrastructural interventions has the NEDC reportedly implemented in Wukari Local Government Area? The provision of clean, accessible water is a fundamental prerequisite for public health and socio-economic development. In Wukari, communities like Avyi and Chonku historically depended on distant, often contaminated, streams and ponds, leading to high prevalence of waterborne diseases and imposing a heavy time burden on women and girls. The NEDC's installation of solar-powered boreholes has been a transformative intervention in these areas.

How has the new water project specifically changed the daily lives and opportunities for women and girls in your community? A leader of a women's cooperative in Avyi Ward articulated the profound multi-dimensional impact:

"Water was more than a need; it was a tyrant that dictated the rhythm of our lives, particularly for the women and girls. Our daughters would wake before dawn to embark on long, sometimes dangerous, journeys to fetch water. This directly competed with their education many were consistently late or too tired to concentrate in school, and some eventually dropped out. The health consequences were a constant drain on our meager resources; treating typhoid and diarrhea was a regular household expense. The introduction of the solar-powered borehole has been nothing short of liberation. The distance to fetch water has been reduced from kilometers to a few minutes' walk. The water is clean, which has led to a noticeable decline in stomach illnesses. Most importantly, time our most precious resource has been given back to us. Our daughters are now in school on time, and we, the mothers, have reclaimed hours each day that we can now invest in our farms, in petty trading, or in rest. This single intervention has touched every aspect of our well-being: health, education, economic empowerment, and even domestic peace." (FGD with Women's Cooperative, Avyi Ward, March 2025)

This testimony powerfully aligns with the findings of UNICEF (2021), which consistently highlight that investments in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure are among the most effective means of advancing gender equity, improving educational outcomes for girls, and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Educational Infrastructure as a Vehicle for Human Capital Development

What types of infrastructural interventions has the NEDC reportedly implemented in Wukari Local Government Area? The state of educational infrastructure is a telling indicator of a society's investment in its future. In Wukari, many public schools, such as the Government Day Secondary School, suffered from severe dilapidation leaking roofs, collapsed walls, and a dire lack of furniture creating an environment fundamentally hostile to learning. The NEDC's renovation of classroom blocks and provision of solar-powered lighting sought to address this critical gap.

How has the renovation of your school changed the daily experience and outlook for you and your fellow students? A senior student at the renovated Government Day Secondary School shared his experience:

"Studying here before the renovations was an act of perseverance. During the rains, lessons would be disrupted as we scrambled to avoid leaking water. The heat was often unbearable, and the general atmosphere was one of neglect, which subconsciously communicated that our education did not matter. The transformed classrooms have not only provided physical comfort but also a psychological boost. We feel valued. The solar lights have perhaps been the most revolutionary addition. For many of us whose homes lack electricity, the school has become a haven for learning even after sunset. Our evening prep sessions are now productive and safe. This extended access to a conducive learning environment is directly reflected in our improved academic performance and ambitions." (Interview with Student, Government Day Secondary School, April 2025)

From your perspective as an educator, what impact has the school renovation had on teaching quality and the school's standing in the community? A teacher at the same school highlighted the broader institutional impact:

"Beyond the bricks and mortar, the provision of teaching aids and modern learning materials has re-energized the teaching process. We can now employ more interactive teaching methods. The morale among staff has improved because we feel equipped to do our jobs properly. This intervention has helped to stem the tide of students migrating to private schools and has restored a sense of pride in public education." (Interview with Teacher, April 2025)

This resonates strongly with Olanrewaju (2019), who argues that qualitative investments in educational infrastructure are not merely about construction but are fundamental to nurturing human capital, fostering social mobility, and building a foundation for long-term, sustainable development in marginalized regions.

Strengthening Health Infrastructure: Between Progress and Persistent Gaps

What types of infrastructural interventions has the NEDC reportedly implemented in Wukari Local Government Area?

The healthcare sector in Wukari LGA has long been characterized by inadequate facilities, equipment shortages, and erratic power supply, severely compromising the quality of care, especially in maternal and child health. The NEDC's renovation of

Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Avyi and Rafinkada wards, including the installation of solar power and provision of basic equipment, represents a significant step towards bridging this gap.

What practical difference has the renovation and solar power made for providing maternal and newborn care at this clinic? A midwife at the Rafinkada PHC gave a poignant account of the change:

"There is no comparison between the 'before' and 'after.' I recall numerous occasions where we conducted deliveries at night using the faint light from a phone or a kerosene lantern. It was risky for both the mother and the newborn, and it was deeply stressful for us as healthcare providers. The solar power system has guaranteed constant lighting and can power essential medical devices. We now have basic resuscitation equipment and a reliable refrigerator for storing vaccines and certain drugs. The renovated structure itself, with its improved hygiene facilities, reduces the risk of infections. We can now offer a safer, more dignified service, which has increased community trust and utilization of this facility." (Interview with Health Worker, Rafinkada PHC, April 2025)

It is important to contextualize these improvements within the broader health landscape. The state government's complementary initiative, the Kefas Care Clinics, has provided additional access points for medical services and health outreach. However, despite these combined efforts, a senior medical officer at the General Hospital Wukari pointed to enduring systemic challenges that the NEDC's project-based approach has not yet resolved:

"The donated equipment at the General Hospital is appreciated, but it presents a new set of challenges. We lack the specialized technical staff to operate some of the more sophisticated machines to their full capacity. Furthermore, when this equipment inevitably develops a fault, there is no clear budget line or protocol for its maintenance and repair. We risk having expensive paperweights in a few years. The NEDC's interventions are vital, but they need to be part of a more holistic strategy that includes continuous capacity building for staff and a sustainable plan for technical support and

maintenance." (Interview with Medical Officer, General Hospital Wukari, March 2025)

These accounts are consistent with Adebayo and Ibrahim (2020), who emphasize that while infrastructural upgrades are crucial, the full benefit of such investments in the Nigerian health sector can only be realized when they are coupled with parallel investments in human resources and robust operational systems.

Assessing the Effectiveness and Sustainability of NEDC Interventions in Wukari LGA

The ultimate measure of any development intervention lies not only in its immediate effectiveness but also in its long-term sustainability. An in-depth assessment of the NEDC's projects in Wukari reveals a landscape of commendable achievements shadowed by significant structural vulnerabilities that threaten to undermine the durability of these gains.

Immediate Effectiveness and Community Appreciation

There is a broad and consistent consensus among beneficiaries that the NEDC's interventions have successfully addressed critical, immediate needs. The physical evidence of renovated schools, functional boreholes, and improved roads has tangibly enhanced livelihoods and service delivery.

To what extent do NEDC interventions in Wukari LGA demonstrate sustainable development outcomes, and how can empirical assessment inform more resilient, community-owned, and maintenance-sensitive project models for FCAS? A beneficiary of the NEDC's skill acquisition program, now a self-employed tailor, illustrated the profound personal impact of a well-designed empowerment initiative:

"The three-month training in tailoring and fashion design was a turning point in my life. But the true masterstroke was the starter pack the sewing machine and the basic toolkit. This wasn't just training; it was a launchpad. I didn't have to struggle to raise capital to begin. From my small shop, I now make uniforms for three local schools and undertake tailoring for individuals in the community. This enterprise sustains my family and has given me a standing I

never had before. The NEDC could leave tomorrow, but the skill embedded in me and the tool in my possession are assets that will continue to yield dividends. This is the kind of development that doesn't expire." (Interview with NEDC Skill Acquisition Beneficiary, Wukari, April 2025)

This example underscores that interventions which directly transfer skills and productive assets to individuals have an inherently high potential for sustainability and grassroots economic multiplication.

Sustainability Challenges and the Maintenance Conundrum

In stark contrast to the success of skill acquisition, the sustainability of large-scale physical infrastructure is highly precarious. The most recurrent theme in stakeholder interviews was the near-total absence of clear, funded, and institutionalized maintenance frameworks.

How do critical gaps in participatory planning, maintenance frameworks, and holistic support systems threaten the long-term sustainability of NEDC's physical infrastructure projects in Wukari? A youth leader highlighted the vulnerability of the solar electrification projects:

"Our joy at seeing the solar streetlights and clinic panels is already being tempered by anxiety. In the GRA area, two of the solar lights have been flickering for weeks, and one is completely dark. There is no visible signage indicating who to contact for repairs, and no community committee has been formally entrusted with this responsibility. We fear that this is the beginning of a familiar story: a gradual decline into total dysfunction, returning us to the darkness we thought we had escaped. A project without a maintenance plan is an incomplete project." (Interview with Youth Leader, Wukari Town, April 2025)

This observation finds strong resonance in the work of Ikelegbe (2013), who identifies the "post-commissioning abandonment syndrome" as a critical pathology of public project implementation in Nigeria, often stemming from a disconnect between capital expenditure and recurrent maintenance budgets.

The Participatory Deficit and Its Implications for Ownership

A critical finding from the field research is that the top-down modality of project delivery, while ensuring swift execution, has inadvertently stifled the development of local ownership, which is the bedrock of sustainability.

What are the potential shortcomings or risks in how development projects are currently delivered to communities like yours, despite their obvious benefits? A prominent civil society activist in Wukari provided a detailed critique:

There is no denying that the NEDC's projects the clinics, the boreholes are addressing real needs. People see these structures and are genuinely grateful. A functional borehole in a water-scarce community is an immediate relief. However, gratitude is not the same as ownership. The prevailing feeling here is that these projects are conceived, designed, and delivered from a distant office... They are, in a sense, imposed from above. The problem with this approach is twofold. First, it can lead to a misalignment of priorities. A community's most pressing need might be a repaired access road, but they receive a community hall. Second, and more fundamentally, the lack of involvement creates a passive recipient mentality. When a project is simply 'dropped on us,' the community's role is that of a user, not a steward. They are not part of the conversation about location, design, or, most critically, maintenance. What we need are structured community needs assessments and genuine town hall meetings. When a community has debated, chosen, and helped plan a project, they feel a sense of co-authorship. They are more likely to form committees, collect minor fees for maintenance, and protect the assets from vandalism because they see it as theirs. This participatory gap is the single biggest threat to the long-term survival of these otherwise commendable interventions."(Interview with NGO Worker, Wukari, April 2025)

This perspective is powerfully affirmed by Adeyemi (2021), who argues that sustainable development is inextricably linked to participatory governance. Furthermore, the UNDP (2021) stresses that community participation is not a mere procedural formality but a core ingredient for resilience, as it embeds projects within the local social and institutional fabric.

Gender and Social Inclusion Outcomes

The NEDC's interventions have yielded positive, albeit uneven, results in terms of social inclusion. The water projects, in particular, have had a demonstrably positive gendered impact by reducing the domestic burden on women and girls.

How has the new borehole changed opportunities for women and girls in your community beyond just having clean water? A participant in a women's cooperative in Avyi explained:

"The calculus of our daily lives has changed. Before the borehole, our daughters' education was often the casualty of the water crisis. Now, they go to school consistently. Furthermore, the reliable water supply has become a raw material for small-scale enterprise. Many of us now produce and sell local drinks like zobo and kunu. The income, though modest, gives us a degree of financial autonomy and enhances our status within the household. This infrastructure has empowered us economically and socially." (FGD with Women's Cooperative, Avyi, April 2025)

This aligns with the findings of joint UNICEF/WHO (2022) reports, which consistently demonstrate that reducing the time and effort required for water collection is a key driver for improving girls' educational outcomes and enabling women's economic participation.

Conclusion and recommendations.

The findings of this study provide comprehensive answers to the research questions that guided this investigation into the Northeast Development Commission's infrastructural interventions in Wukari Local Government Area. Through empirical assessment, this research has revealed both the transformative potential and the structural vulnerabilities of the NEDC's approach to post-conflict development.

The study confirms that rural infrastructure, as demonstrated by the rehabilitated Wukari-Tsokundi road, serves as a powerful multi-dimensional catalyst. It not only revitalized the agricultural economy by reducing post-harvest losses and transportation costs but also strengthened social cohesion and state-citizen relations by improving security response times and healthcare access, thereby

restoring community confidence in governance. This directly addresses the core inquiry of how infrastructure functions in post-conflict recovery settings.

Regarding the types of interventions implemented, the NEDC has deployed a strategic multi-sectoral portfolio targeting fundamental human needs. The Commission has executed tangible projects including road rehabilitation, solar-powered boreholes, educational facility renovations, healthcare center upgrades, electrification initiatives, housing support, and skill acquisition programs. These interventions collectively represent a concerted effort to bridge the infrastructural deficits that have long characterized Wukari LGA.

The assessment of effectiveness and sustainability reveals a complex landscape. While immediate effectiveness is evident through improved agricultural productivity, enhanced educational outcomes, better healthcare delivery, and successful economic empowerment through skill acquisition, the long-term sustainability of physical infrastructure remains precarious. Critical gaps in participatory planning, maintenance frameworks, and holistic support systems threaten to undermine these gains. The absence of formal maintenance protocols and the top-down implementation approach have created what stakeholders describe as a "post-commissioning abandonment syndrome," where infrastructure decays rapidly without local ownership and institutionalized support systems.

The participatory deficit represents perhaps the most significant challenge identified. The study found that while communities express gratitude for NEDC projects, this does not translate into genuine ownership. Projects conceived and delivered through top-down approaches lack the community engagement necessary for long-term stewardship, often resulting in misalignment with local priorities and inadequate maintenance commitment.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings both validate and challenge the Basic Needs Theory framework. The NEDC's multi-sectoral approach aligns perfectly with the theory's emphasis on addressing fundamental human needs—water, healthcare,

education, and livelihoods. The documented improvements in these areas demonstrate the theory's continued relevance in guiding development priorities in marginalized regions. However, the sustainability challenges uncovered suggest that the theory requires extension beyond mere provision to encompass participatory governance and institutional sustainability. Meeting basic needs temporarily is insufficient; what matters is creating systems that ensure these needs are met perpetually through community ownership and institutionalized maintenance frameworks.

Therefore, for the NEDC's developmental footprint in Wukari to be truly transformative and durable, a strategic shift is imperative. The Commission must transition from being a sole provider of infrastructure to a facilitator of sustainable development. This requires institutionalizing participatory planning, establishing co-managed maintenance systems with local government and communities, and integrating capacity-building components alongside physical infrastructure. By doing so, the NEDC can ensure that its vital interventions evolve from being isolated projects into enduring assets that continue to serve the people of Wukari long after the commissioning ceremonies are over.

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the Northeast Development Commission's interventions in Wukari LGA and similar contexts:

- i. Institutionalize Participatory Planning and Community Ownership Models. The NEDC should mandate structured community engagement including participatory rural appraisals (PRAs) and town hall meetings at all stages of the project cycle, from needs assessment and site selection to design and monitoring. Furthermore, the Commission should establish and fund Community Project Management Committees (CPMCs) for each intervention. These committees, comprising elected community members, local government representatives, and civil society actors, should be formally tasked with

overseeing maintenance, managing minor repair funds, and fostering a sense of local ownership to ensure the long-term functionality of projects.

- ii. Develop and Implement Integrated Sustainability Protocols. For every infrastructural project, the NEDC must develop a comprehensive Sustainability Plan that is co-signed by the relevant local government authority. This plan should clearly outline post-commissioning responsibilities, including a dedicated budget line for maintenance and repairs, provisions for technical capacity-building for local users and government staff, and a transparent framework for reporting faults. This move from a project-based to a system-based approach will help prevent the rapid deterioration of assets and protect the Commission's significant capital investments.

References

- Adamu, M. (2021). Post-conflict reconstruction in Nigeria: The role of the NEDC. *Kaduna Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2), 115-132.
- Adebayo, A., & Ibrahim, B. (2020). Decentralizing health infrastructure in rural Nigeria: A pathway to reducing preventable deaths. *Journal of African Health Sciences*, 20(3), 45-59.
- Adeyemi, S. (2021). Federal infrastructure and public trust in marginalized Nigerian communities. *African Governance Review*, 8(2), 110-124.
- African Development Bank. (2022). *Infrastructure and sustainable development in Africa*. Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: Author.
- Aliyu, B., & Usman, K. (2020). Conflict and development: The emergence of the North-East Development Commission. *Journal of African Development*, 6(1), 42-57.
- Eze, C. (2022). *Governance and infrastructural gaps in Nigeria's post-conflict zones*. Lagos, Nigeria: University Press.
- Ibrahim, A. (2020). The Northeast Development Commission: Policy responses to insurgency. *Nigerian Journal of Conflict Studies*, 5(1), 88-102.

- Ibrahim, L., & Bello, M. (2023). Community participation and project sustainability in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Development and Social Integration*, 12(4), 201-218.
- Ikelegbe, A. (2013). Public policy and program failures in Nigeria: The challenges of participatory development planning. In A. Mohammed (Ed.), *Governance and public sector management in Nigeria* (pp. 112-130). Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press.
- Mustapha, M. (2021). Intergovernmental relations and development agencies in Nigeria. *African Journal of Public Administration*, 15(2), 77-95.
- Mustapha, M., & Yusuf, H. (2022). Assessing federal interventions in Nigeria's northeast. *Journal of Peace and Security Studies*, 11(1), 55-70.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Taraba State poverty and infrastructure report 2022*. Abuja, Nigeria: Author.
- North-East Development Commission (Establishment) Act, 2017. *Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette*.
- Okeke, C., & Usman, B. (2022). Post-conflict reconstruction and the role of the Northeast Development Commission in Nigeria. *African Journal of Public Administration and Development Studies*, 9(1), 88-105.
- Okon, R., & Bashir, H. (2021). Challenges of post-insurgency development in Nigeria: A review of the NEDC. *Peace and Security Review*, 4(2), 98-112.
- Olaniyan, A. (2021). Insurgency, infrastructure, and state legitimacy in northeastern Nigeria. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 43(1), 33-50.
- Olanrewaju, D. (2019). Educational infrastructure and human capital development in rural Nigeria. *Journal of African Educational Development*, 4(2), 45-59.
- Onapajo, H. (2014). Development planning and community participation in Nigeria: Evaluating the gaps. *African Studies Quarterly*, 15(4), 67-84.
- Oni, T., & Okanlawon, T. (2020). Rural road infrastructure and socio-economic integration in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Urban and Regional Planning*, 5(1), 22-35.

- Oruonye, E. D., & Ahmed, Y. M. (2021). An appraisal of the challenges of rural infrastructure development in Taraba State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: B Geography, Geo-Sciences, Environmental Science & Disaster Management*, 21(3), 1-10.
- Paffenholz, T. (2015). Unpacking the local turn in peacebuilding: A critical assessment towards an agenda for future research. *International Peacekeeping*, 22(4), 365-382.
- Streeten, P., Burki, S. J., Haq, M. U., Hicks, N., & Stewart, F. (1981). *First things first: Meeting basic human needs in the developing countries*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Participatory governance: A pathway to inclusive development in Africa*. New York, NY: Author.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Localized development challenges in northeastern Nigeria*. Abuja, Nigeria: Author.
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). *Water, sanitation, hygiene, and gender equality: A synthesis report*. New York, NY: Author.
- World Health Organization, & United Nations Children's Fund. (2022). *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2020: Focus on inequalities*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene.
- World Bank. (2021). *World development report 2021: Data for better lives*. Washington, DC: Author.