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IMPACT OF ELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT: INTERROGATION OF AGRARIAN COMMUNITIES IN ETHIOPE EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

Henry. E. Ogbe [1], Austine Ejovi [1], N. Eunice Belonwu [2]* and Onyemaechi Ugboh [2]

[1]Department of Political Science, University of Delta, PMB 2090 Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Delta, PMB 2090 Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria

Corresponding author: eunice.belonwu@unidel.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of elected local government councils in advancing rural development within the agrarian communities of Ethiope East Local Government Area (LGA), Delta State, Nigeria. Six agrarian communities were purposively selected, and 60 respondents were randomly sampled. Data were obtained through structured questionnaires using a four-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, and mean scores—and inferential correlation analyses. Findings indicate that rural development in the area is markedly low, particularly in critical sectors such as agricultural extension services, infrastructure, potable water supply, healthcare delivery, electricity, and educational facilities. All development indicators recorded mean values below the 2.00 benchmark, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with the elected council's performance. Respondents attributed the poor development outcomes to several constraints, notably corruption (mean = 3.02), political godfatherism (mean = 2.92), inadequate transparency (mean = 2.92), limited funding (mean = 2.52), insufficient administrative capacity (mean = 2.73), and state-level interference (mean = 2.32). Correlation analysis revealed significant associations between perceived rural development and gender (P=0.001), marital status (P=0.012), education (P=0.020), and membership in community associations (P=0.006), while variables such as age, occupation, income, religion, and family size showed no significant influence. The study concludes that active electoral participation has not translated into tangible rural development outcomes. It recommends enhanced electoral integrity, improved financial accountability, strengthened community institutions, and prioritization of essential rural development initiatives to ensure that democratically elected councils more effectively drive rural transformation in agrarian settings.

Keywords: Agrarian Communities, Impact, Local Government Performance, Rural Development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's adoption of a democratic local government system is anchored on the principle that democracy derives its legitimacy from credible elections. Elections serve as the mechanism through which citizens select representatives to manage public affairs. According to Ogbe & Ejovi (2024), democratic local government is an institutional arrangement in which elected representatives from local communities administer public resources to ensure efficient service delivery based on their knowledge of local needs. Consequently, any local government constituted through elections qualifies as a democratic local government. A major turning point in Nigeria's grassroots development occurred with the 1976 Local Government Reforms, which aimed to strengthen local governments as instruments of socio-economic transformation (Ayuba, 2021; Jimoh, 2023; Adisa, 2024). This reform facilitated the introduction of several rural development programs, including Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDA), designed to address rural poverty and infrastructural deficits (Ugwuozor et al., 2022). Development, however, is multidimensional and dynamic, requiring continuous adaptation to changing social and economic conditions (Akpan & Udoakah, 2019; Muhammad, 2021; Manuwa, 2023).

Rural development entails sustained efforts to enhance the quality of life in rural populations by expanding opportunities, increasing productivity by transforming stagnated socio-economic conditions of rural communities to a supportive situation for development and improving access to essential services (Ugwuozor et al., 2020; Manuwa, 2023; Ogbe & Ejovi, 2023). Ethiope East Local Government Area exhibits many characteristics typical of rural communities in developing countries, including low income, poor health outcomes, limited access to clean water, inadequate

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sanitation, and weak educational infrastructure (Scoones, 2019; Behera et al., 2020). These constraints limit agricultural productivity, restrict economic diversification, and increase household vulnerability (Saif-Ur-Rahman et al., 2018; Kanyangarara et al., 2021). Additional barriers, such as restricted credit access, weak markets, and inadequate extension services, exacerbate rural poverty (Pomeroy et al., 2020; Suresh & Bharat, 2023; Akanwa & Idakwo, 2025).

Local governments, constitutionally designated as the third tier of government, are empowered to drive grassroots development through primary education, rural roads, agriculture, sanitation, and community mobilization (Mukoro, 2019; Edih, 2020; Ekeukwu & Umah, 2021). Elected councils are thus expected to articulate community needs and implement participatory development programs. Despite these mandates, the elected council of Ethiope East Local Government has underperformed in delivering rural development. Residents continue to experience weak agricultural support, poor infrastructure, and inadequate social and economic services, prompting protests over water, roads, and farming assistance (Delta Group Advocates, 2023; Kehinde & Alabi, 2025). Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution affirms elections as the foundation for the establishment of local government councils, emphasizing the need for accountability, participation, and responsiveness to local priorities (Mukoro, 2019). Given the centrality of elections to local legitimacy and performance, this study examines the impact of local government elections on the development of agrarian communities in Ethiope East LGA.

The general objective of the study is to x-ray the impact of Ethiope East Local government on rural development in selected agrarian communities, while specific are to:

I. Assess the perception and level of rural development in Ethiope East Local Government agrarian communities.
II. appraise the efforts of the elected Ethiope East Local Government Council towards rural development in Agrarian communities
III. Identify limitations of Ethiope East Local Government Council towards rural development in selected Agrarian communities.
IV. recommend ways to alleviate limitations to ensure rural development in Agrarian communities

Hypotheses of the Study

- There is a significant relationship between respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics and Perceived Level of Rural Development.

The conceptual diagram (Fig. 1) illustrates the pathways through which an elected local government council influences rural development. The council functions through governance mechanisms such as transparency, accountability, representation, and community participation which guide the distribution and management of development inputs. These inputs include agricultural support, infrastructure projects, educational services, healthcare delivery, and essential utilities like water and electricity. Together, these governance processes and development inputs lead to the implementation of rural development programs, which produce both direct outcomes (e.g., improved services and infrastructure) and indirect outcomes (e.g., increased civic engagement, poverty reduction, and improved quality of life).

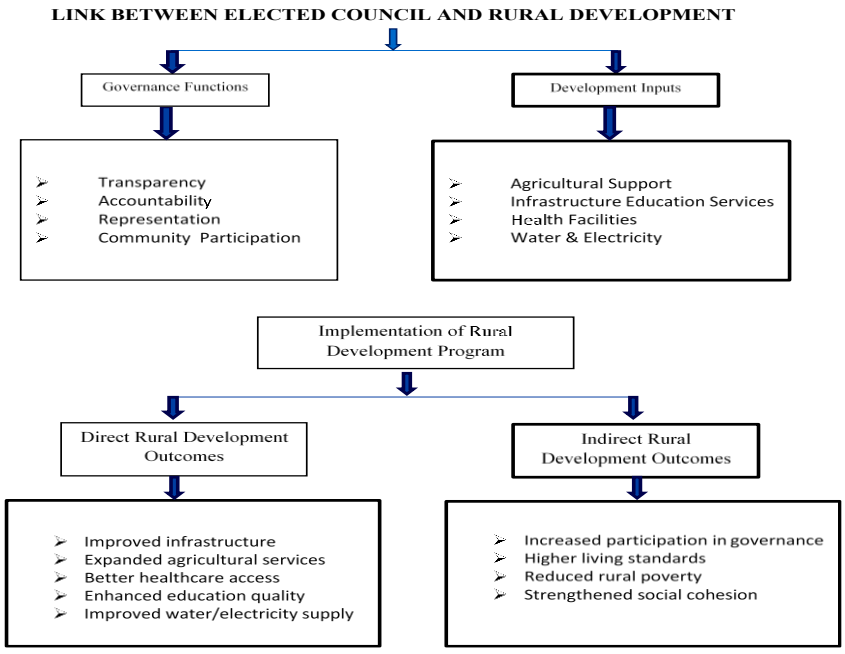

Fig. 1: Conceptual Diagram of linking between elected council and rural development.

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study Area

This study was conducted in Ethiope East Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, Nigeria, covering a land area of approximately 378.6 km². The LGA is predominantly rural with strong agrarian characteristics, comprising several farming communities whose socio-economic activities primarily involve crop production, fishing, and small-scale trading. Ethiope East was selected for its agricultural potential and strategic importance to grassroots governance and rural development planning. The socio-economic challenges faced by these communities make the area suitable for assessing the impact of local government administration on rural development.

2.2. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques was employed. Purposive sampling was first used to select six agrarian communities based on their high concentration of farming households and relevance to rural development assessment. Within these communities, simple random sampling was used to select respondents, ensuring equal representation and minimizing selection bias. A total of 60 respondents, including community members and local government functionaries, were administered structured questionnaires to obtain sufficient data to evaluate community perceptions, council performance, and socio-economic correlations.

2.3. Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire developed on a four-point Likert scale to measure agreement, perception, and satisfaction levels. Questionnaires were physically distributed and retrieved by trained research assistants to ensure accurate administration.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including percentages, frequency distributions, and mean scores, were used to present respondents' socio-economic characteristics and perceptions of rural development and council performance. Inferential statistics, specifically correlation analysis, tested the hypothesis: Ho: There is a significant relationship between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their perceived level of rural development. This analysis determined the strength and direction of the relationship between demographic variables, such as gender, marital status, education, and association membership, and perceptions of rural development efforts within the LGA.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows the socio-economic profile of respondents from the agrarian communities in Ethiope East Local Government Area which indicates a predominantly female representation (58.3%), reflecting strong female participation in rural economic and political activities, consistent with Ezeamama & Ofozoba (2023). The mean age of respondents was 48.95 years, showing that most participants were mature adults actively engaged in farming and community decision-making, suggesting that local government policies and electoral outcomes directly affect an economically active demographic. This result is consistent with Belonwu et al. (2023), who also observed that individuals in this age group are in their productive years.

Regarding marital status, 60% of respondents were married, highlighting stable family structures that may influence collective decision-making and engagement in local governance. Educational attainment showed that 58.3% completed secondary education, while only 1.7% held higher qualifications, indicating moderate literacy levels that could affect engagement with electoral processes and rural development initiatives (Eche et al., 2023).

The family size distribution showed that 46.7% of households had four to six members, indicating a moderate dependency ratio and potentially shaping expectations for government interventions. Farming was the predominant occupation (73.3%), confirming the agrarian nature of the communities which is in agreement with Belonwu et al. (2022), who concluded that an average years spent in farming is sufficient for one to gain considerable expertise, while most respondents (60%) earned ₦51,000–₦100,000 monthly, reflecting modest income levels influencing perceptions of local government performance.

Religiously, respondents were diverse, with Christians at 43.3% and Traditional worshippers at 48.3%, suggesting a pluralistic belief system affecting community cohesion. Additionally, 90% had resided in their communities for over ten years, and 90% were members of community associations, indicating strong social capital. These characteristics underscore the importance of inclusive and participatory local government elections for effective rural development in Ethiope East.

3.2. Perception of Rural Development in Agrarian Communities of Ethiope East LGA

Findings in Table 2 on respondents' perceptions of rural development in the Area indicate generally low levels

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of infrastructural provision and agricultural support services. A substantial majority of respondents (88.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that agricultural extension services were regularly available, as reflected in a low mean score of 0.68. This highlights a significant institutional gap in farmer support. Similarly, access to essential farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, and agrochemicals was perceived as grossly inadequate, with 93.3% of respondents disagreeing (mean = 0.58). These conditions suggest a heavy reliance on traditional farming practices, which constrain productivity and income growth.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (n = 60)	Mean
Gender	Male	41.7	—
	Female	58.3	—
Age (yrs)	< 25	6.7	48.95
	25–34	10.0	
	35–44	20.0	
	45–54	26.7	
	55–64	20.0	
	≥ 65	16.7	
Marital Status	Married	60.0	—
	Single	11.7	
	Divorced	16.7	
	Widowed	11.7	
Education	Informal	18.3	—
	Primary	8.3	
	Secondary	58.3	
	Diploma/NCE	13.3	
	HND/Degree	1.7	
Family Size	≤ 3	18.3	—
	4–6	46.7	
	≥ 7	35.0	
Occupation	Farming	73.3	—
	Trading	8.3	
	Civil Service	13.3	
	Artisan	5.0	
Monthly Income	< ₦20,000	6.7	₦61,283.33
	₦21,000–₦50,000	30.0	
	₦51,000–₦100,000	60.0	
	> ₦100,000	3.3	
Religion	Christianity	48.3	—
	Islam	3.3	
	Traditional	43.3	
	Others	5.0	
Years of Residence	< 5 years	6.7	14.08
	5–10 years	3.3	
	> 10 years	90.0	
Association Membership	No	10.0	—
	Yes	90.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Perceptions of rural infrastructure were equally poor. Most respondents disagreed that farm-to-market roads were in good condition (78.3% disagreed and 13.3% strongly disagreed; mean = 0.97). Inadequate rural roads increase transportation costs, exacerbate post-harvest losses, and reduce market access, thereby discouraging active participation in agricultural value chains.

Basic social amenities were also rated unsatisfactory. Approximately 71.7% of respondents reported inadequate access to clean water (mean = 1.05), while 68.3% indicated insufficient healthcare services (mean = 1.22). The lack of potable water increases vulnerability to water-borne diseases, supporting the findings of Gwimbi et al. (2019) on rural water shortages in Africa. Healthcare inadequacies were attributed to both limited facilities and staffing shortages, consistent with Ali et al. (2020), who documented deficits in skilled rural health personnel across sub-Saharan Africa. Educational facilities were similarly inadequate, with 76.7% of respondents disagreeing that schools met community needs (mean = 1.08). Poor educational infrastructure limits innovation and the adoption of improved farming techniques. Electricity supply was also insufficient, as 86.6% disagreed that it enhanced economic activities (mean = 0.92), constraining agro-processing and rural enterprise development. Overall, all

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mean scores fell below the 2.00 benchmark, indicating widespread perceptions of underdevelopment across key sectors. These findings suggest that elected local governments have yet to translate electoral promises into tangible development outcomes. Strengthening agricultural extension services, upgrading infrastructure, and improving access to essential social services remain critical for sustainable agricultural growth and rural transformation in Ethiope East LGA.

Table 2: Perception on Rural Development Level in Ethiope East Local Government Agrarian Communities

Items	SA %	A %	UD %	DA %	SDA %	Mean
Regular Agricultural extension services	3.3	8.3	0.0	30.0	58.3	0.6833
Accessibility of Farm inputs to farmers	0.0	5.0	1.7	40.0	53.3	0.5833
Rural roads connecting farms to markets are in good condition	0.0	1.7	6.7	78.3	13.3	0.9667
Availability of Clean water supply	1.7	6.7	3.3	71.7	16.7	1.0500
Healthcare facilities are accessible and functional in my area	1.7	6.7	13.3	68.3	10.0	1.2167
Adequate Educational facilities (primary and adult education)	0.0	5.0	8.3	76.7	10.0	1.0833
Electricity supply has improved rural economic activities	3.3	5.0	5.0	53.3	33.3	0.9167

Mean 2.00 = Agreed; Source: Field Survey, 2024.

3.3. Appraisal of the Efforts of the Elected Ethiope East Local Government Council toward Rural Development

The findings as seen in Table 3 indicate that although most respondents participated in the most recent local government election (mean = 2.40), there was widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of the elected Ethiope East Local Government Council. The low mean score (1.82) for the perception that the chairman and councilors were freely chosen suggests concerns about limited transparency and weak representativeness in the electoral process. Across major development sectors, respondents reported low levels of satisfaction, as reflected in mean scores for agricultural support (0.70), clean water provision (1.02), rural road construction or rehabilitation (1.03), borehole provision (0.95), healthcare delivery (1.10), and educational facility upgrades (1.00). Additionally, limited consultation with farmers and rural residents (mean = 0.92) indicates weak community participation in development planning. Despite active electoral participation, this engagement has not translated into tangible development outcomes, as shown by the low mean score (1.17) for development resulting from elections. These findings are consistent with the findings of Anyebe (2017), Ogunseye (2020) and Awofeso & Ogunne (2020), who reported poor local government performance in rural development. Overall, the results underscore the need for improved accountability, enhanced community engagement, and more effective implementation of rural development programmes in Ethiope East.

Table 3: Appraisal of Elected Ethiope East Local Government Council Efforts towards Rural Development

Items	SA %	A %	UD %	DA %	SDA %	Mean
Participated in last local government election in the LGA	13.3	48.3	11.7	18.3	8.3	2.4000
The elected chairman and councilors were freely chosen	1.7	26.7	35.0	25.0	11.7	1.8167
The elected council provided agricultural support programs	0.0	6.7	5.0	40.0	48.3	0.7000
Clean water supply is adequate in my community	1.7	1.7	13.3	63.3	20.0	1.0167
Elected council constructed or rehabilitated rural roads	0.0	0.0	8.3	86.7	5.0	1.0333
Elected council has provided water facilities in my area.	0.0	1.7	8.3	73.3	16.7	0.9500
Elected council improved primary healthcare delivery	0.0	3.3	15.0	70.0	11.7	1.1000
Elected council upgraded educational facilities	0.0	5.0	13.3	58.3	23.3	1.0000
Regularly consult with farmers /rural dwellers on development needs	0.0	1.7	6.7	73.3	18.3	0.9167
Participation in LGA election has led to visible development	6.7	10.0	5.0	50.0	28.3	1.1667

3.4. Constraints Affecting the Effectiveness of the Ethiope East Local Government Council in Rural Development

The findings on Table 4 reveal several key constraints that undermine the effectiveness of the Ethiope East Local Government Council in promoting rural development. Corruption emerged as the most critical limitation, recording the highest mean score (3.02), which reflects widespread perceptions of fund mismanagement. Political godfatherism, candidate imposition, and poor accountability (mean = 2.92 each) were also identified as major obstacles, indicating that political interference and limited transparency weaken effective local governance. Igene et al. (2026) were of the opinion that inconsistent leadership transitions, political interference, and weak institutional frameworks often disrupt ongoing development efforts. These findings are also consistent with evidence from Nasarawa State and findings of Habibov et al. (2019), who argue that corruption globally suppresses economic growth, discourages investment, and deepens inequality.

Inadequate funding (mean = 2.52) further constrains the council's capacity to implement development projects, while limited technical expertise among elected officials (mean = 2.73) highlights deficiencies in administrative

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competence. State government interference (mean = 2.32) also restricts local autonomy, reducing responsiveness to community needs, while electoral challenges (mean = 2.83) were perceived as hindering rural development. These constraints mirror national trends reported by Atakpa & Igboeche (2019), Adedeji (2019), Amaechi (2020), and Bawontuo et al. (2021), underscoring the need for reforms that strengthen transparency, fiscal autonomy, accountability, and institutional capacity at the local government level.

Table 4: Identification of Limitations of Ethiope East Local Government Council towards Rural Development

Items	SA %	A %	UD %	DA %	SDA %	Mean
Insufficient funding hinders the LGA's ability to execute rural development projects.	10.0	58.3	8.3	20.0	3.3	2.516
Corruption and mismanagement of LGA funds affect rural development	21.7	66.7	3.3	8.3	0.0	3.016
State government interference reduces the autonomy and effectiveness of LG	5.0	46.7	28.3	15.0	5.0	2.316
The elected local government officials lack the technical capacity to implement development programs	10.0	66.7	13.3	6.7	3.3	2.733
Political godfatherism and imposition of candidates undermine democratic elections	15.0	70.0	8.3	5.0	1.7	2.916
Poor accountability and transparency characterize the operations of the LG council	21.7	60.0	10.0	5.0	3.3	2.916
The challenges facing LG elections directly affect the quality and pace of rural development in agrarian communities	15.0	61.7	61.7	15.0	8.3	2.833

Mean 2.00 = Agreed; Source: Field Survey, 2024.

3.5. Measures for Improving Local Government Elections and Enhancing Rural Development in Ethiope East LGA

The findings as indicate in Table 5 revealed that respondents identified several key measures for improving local government elections and enhancing rural development in Ethiope East Local Government Area. A large majority (80%) agreed that intensified voter education campaigns and strengthened election security would reduce violence, intimidation, and low voter turnout, suggesting that limited civic awareness and insecurity remain major constraints to effective grassroots elections. Furthermore, 75% emphasized the need for greater transparency in local government financial management, underscoring the role of accountability in building public trust and ensuring efficient use of development resources. Similarly, 70% supported prioritizing essential rural development projects, including roads, schools, healthcare, electricity, and water supply.

A substantial proportion (65%) called for strict penalties against electoral malpractices such as vote buying, while 61.7% advocated increased participation of women and youth, highlighting the importance of inclusivity. Additionally, 55% supported greater involvement of community leaders and farmers' associations in governance. In contrast, measures such as training electoral officers, strengthening electoral body independence (33.3%), improving logistics (36.7%), and post-election monitoring (40%) received lower support, reflecting limited confidence in institutional reforms. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for enhanced civic engagement, transparent governance, and inclusive participation to achieve credible elections and sustainable rural development.

Table 5: Suggested Solutions to Improve Local Government Elections and Rural Development in Ethiope East LGA

Suggested solutions	Yes %	No %
Intensify voter education campaigns in rural communities.	80.0	20.0
Strengthen security during elections to prevent violence and intimidation.	80.0	20.0
Enforce strict penalties against electoral malpractice and vote buying.	65.0	35.0
Train and monitor electoral officers for transparency.	33.3	66.7
Ensure community leaders and farmers' associations are involved in governance.	55.0	45.0
Increase transparency in the use of local government funds for development.	75.0	25.0
Provide adequate logistics and timely delivery of election materials.	36.7	63.3
Promote women and youth participation in elections.	61.7	38.3
Strengthen the independence of electoral bodies from political interference.	33.3	66.7
Prioritize rural development projects (roads, schools, healthcare, electricity, water).	70.0	30.0
Encourage community participation in monitoring elected officials after elections.	40.0	60.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

3.6. Hypotheses of the Study

3.6.1. Relationship between Respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics and Perceived Rural Development

Table 6 shows the correlation analysis result which was conducted to determine the relationship between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their perceptions of rural development in Ethiope East Local Government Area. The results indicate that some variables significantly influenced perceived rural development, while others had no meaningful effect. Gender showed a positive and significant relationship with perceived rural development (r = 0.046, P=0.001), suggesting minor perceptual differences between male and female respondents,

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possibly reflecting variations in access to rural services or levels of engagement in local governance. Marital status (r = 0.321, P=0.012), educational attainment (r = 0.300, P=0.020), and membership in community associations (r = 0.351, P=0.006) also exhibited significant positive relationships, implying that married, educated, and socially active individuals tend to perceive higher levels of development due to greater civic awareness and involvement. Conversely, age, family size, occupation, monthly income, religion, and years of residence were not significantly related to perceived rural development. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of education and social participation—particularly community association membership—in shaping perceptions of rural development, consistent with Amah & Okechukwu (2019).

Table 6: Relationship between Respondents' Socio-Economic Characteristics and Perceived Level of Rural Development

Variables	Rural development scores	
	Coefficient (r)	Prob. Level
Gender	0.046	0.001*
Age	0.081	0.541
Marital status	0.321	0.012*
Education	0.300	0.020*
Family size	0.057	0.663
Occupation	0.119	0.365
Monthly income	-0.152	0.245
Religion	-0.16	0.904
Years of residence	0.175	0.182
Membership of community association	0.351	0.006*

*Significant at 5% level (P<0.05); Source: Field Survey, 2024.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the contribution of elected local government councils to rural development in the agrarian communities of Ethiope East Local Government Area (LGA). The findings reveal a significant disconnect between electoral participation and development outcomes, indicating that democratic processes have not translated into improved living conditions for rural residents. Despite active political engagement, critical development indicators—including agricultural support, infrastructure, education, healthcare, potable water, and electricity—remain inadequate. This underscores the inability of elected councils to convert electoral legitimacy into meaningful socio-economic progress. The appraisal of council performance identified major governance deficiencies, including weak agricultural interventions, deteriorating infrastructure, limited social services, and poor stakeholder engagement. Structural and political constraints—such as corruption, political interference, inadequate funding, limited technical capacity, and weak accountability—were identified as major impediments. Correlation analysis further showed that education, marital status, gender, and community association membership significantly influenced perceptions of development, highlighting the role of civic awareness and social participation. Meaningful rural development therefore requires reforms that enhance transparency, accountability, institutional capacity, and inclusive community participation.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declared that they have no competing interest that could have affected the conduct or results of the study.
Data Availability: All data generated from the study are presented in this paper.

Ethics Statement: This was obtained from leaders of the communities investigated

Author's Contributions: The authors contributed equally to the conception, execution and report of this study, and jointly accept full responsibility for its integrity and accuracy.

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