

# IMPROVING CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIA: NEEDS ALIGNMENT AND REFORM STRATEGIES FROM SOKOTO STATE

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## Abstract

*Constituency development initiatives in Nigeria have become a vital means of connecting the government with citizens on the ground. These projects mainly aim to provide socio-economic advantages by offering infrastructure, job opportunities, and empowerment. Despite their importance, the effectiveness of constituency development is widely debated, especially in Sokoto State, where issues such as misalignment of needs, mismanagement, and sustainability concerns persist. This paper examines the obstacles to the success of constituency projects and proposes reform strategies to achieve better outcomes. It relies on existing literature, policy documents, and reports through a documentary data collection and analysis approach. Findings show that constituency development faces three interconnected challenges: inadequate alignment of projects with community needs, limited beneficiary involvement in project planning and monitoring, and weak accountability systems that allow for resource misappropriation. Additionally, many projects prioritise political favouritism over genuine developmental goals, often resulting in duplication, abandonment, or fleeting impacts. The paper contends that effective reform should emphasise establishing participatory planning, enhancing monitoring and evaluation processes, and ensuring that constituency projects align with both state and national development goals. By using Sokoto State as a case study, the analysis offers insights for wider reforms across Nigeria. This research contributes to the public policy literature on distributive politics and offers practical policy recommendations to boost grassroots development. The study concludes that aligning constituency development efforts with community needs, while implementing strong governance reforms, will not only enhance effectiveness but also reinforce democratic governance and foster citizen trust.*

**Keywords:** Constituency projects, Sokoto State, Needs alignment, Reform strategies, Development effectiveness, Governance.

## 1. Introduction

Constituency Development Projects (CDPs) have become a key method for directing resources from elected officials to their local areas in Nigeria. Created to address the urgent need for fair development, they aim to provide public goods and

services such as schools, healthcare facilities, roads, water sources, and empowerment programs. The underlying concept is that legislators, being closer to the grassroots, can better understand local needs and shape project design to mirror community priorities (Ibrahim, 2017). This concept is grounded in the broader context of participatory democracy, in which citizens should enjoy the benefits of representation (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010).

Worldwide, Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) or projects exist in various forms. For example, Kenya's CDF programme was established to promote fair resource distribution and boost grassroots development (Baskin, 2010). Similarly, the Philippines has a system established under the Priority Development Assistance Fund (Chua, 2013). These experiences show that, when well structured, constituency projects can serve as tools for social equity and inclusive growth. However, global evidence by Nassor & Suleiman (2019) indicates that poor execution, elite capture, and corruption can hinder their developmental objectives.

Nigeria has faced similar challenges. In the Nigerian setting, CDPs were officially incorporated into the federal budget framework in the early 2000s, allowing lawmakers to have a say in a portion of capital projects (Uzochukwu & Chukwuemeka, 2018). While the system has managed to spread visible infrastructure and small-scale empowerment programs, it has also faced significant criticism. Academics and civil society groups contend that constituency projects are frequently politicised, poorly matched with actual community requirements, and susceptible to corruption (Yagboyaju, 2020). Rather than functioning as developmental tools, they can, at times, serve as avenues for personal gain and favouritism (Oviasuyi & Idada, 2010).

In Sokoto State, these issues are especially apparent. As one of Nigeria's least affluent states, Sokoto grapples with deep-rooted developmental challenges, including inadequate healthcare, low literacy levels, poor infrastructure, and high unemployment rates (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Consequently, constituency projects present a crucial chance to fill these foundational gaps. However, observations show that many projects do not address real community needs. For example, communities might be given boreholes in places where water scarcity is not a major concern, while rural roads continue to be overlooked (Aliyu, 2022). Additionally, empowerment efforts like providing sewing machines or motorcycles can sometimes be misaligned with the career aspirations of beneficiaries, thus hindering sustainability.

Another issue is the minimal community involvement. Most projects are started and executed with little consultation from those intended to benefit. This situation undermines ownership and accountability, often resulting in project abandonment (Ogundiya, 2011). Furthermore, weak monitoring and evaluation systems hinder the ability to track progress, assess impact, or penalize non-performance. From a governance viewpoint, CDPs embody both promise and contradiction. On one side, they represent the decentralization of development and responsiveness from legislators. Conversely, their ineffectiveness raises concerns about accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness in democratic practice (Barkan, 2009). In Sokoto State, where socio-economic needs are pressing, the implications are particularly significant. Enhancing the effectiveness of constituency projects could greatly help in alleviating poverty, improving service delivery, and fostering citizens' trust in democratic institutions (Abdulrahman & Yahaya, 2020). This paper thus explores the challenges of constituency development effectiveness in Sokoto State, concentrating on needs alignment and strategies for reform. It questions why projects frequently fail to produce sustainable development and suggests strategies for improvement. By placing Sokoto within Nigeria's broader developmental landscape, the study adds to both academic discussions and policy solutions aimed at bolstering constituency development as a practical tool for grassroots change.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

### 2.1 Conceptual Review

#### 2.1.1 Concept of Constituency

A constituency is an area or community represented by a political officeholder. It is a specific electoral region where voters elect their representative to the National Assembly. The term constituency refers to a geographical electoral district. In countries outside Nigeria, it designates a specific area into which the country has been divided for elections and representation, from which a parliamentary member is elected to serve in parliament (Benjamin, 2014). In Nigeria's federal system, the National Assembly comprises 109 senatorial districts: 3 from each of the 36 states and one from the FCT, while 360 members of the House of Representatives are elected from 360 clearly defined federal constituencies based on proportional representation.

#### 2.1.2 Concept of Constituency Project

A constituency project refers to any project conceived, designed and implemented within a legislative constituency with the collaboration, input or influence of the legislator(s) representing that particular constituency in the legislature. Such projects, however, are funded by national or state budgets (Orimogunje, 2015). In other words, "Constituency Project/Development Funds" was defined as "funding arrangements that channel money from the central government directly to electoral constituencies for local infrastructure projects" (Orimogunje, 2015). In Nigeria, Constituency Projects, officially called Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIP), are public projects selected by Federal legislators to extend the dividends of democratic governance to their various constituencies to enhance development in the countryside. Procedurally, the projects are recommended to the Executive during the budgeting process for implementation. However, National Assembly has the constitutional oversight obligation on government projects as its checks and balances function to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance (Orimogunje, 2015).

Dogara (2016) described constituency projects in Nigeria as developmental initiatives implemented by various government MDAs in the constituencies of state and federal legislators, as outlined in the budgets of the Federation or State. These projects emerged in response to Nigerians' demands for equitable distribution of infrastructure development (NILS, 2016). Meanwhile, Tambuwal (2016) argued that the Legislature views Constituency and Zonal Intervention Projects as vital strategic drivers of socio-economic development and regeneration in our country. Therefore, it is a development initiative focused on the constituencies by allocating resources to local government areas to achieve socio-economic objectives. The primary aims of the programme are to finance projects with a direct socio-economic impact to enhance lives, reduce poverty, and facilitate general development. It supports rural development projects, particularly those aimed at alleviating poverty and improving grassroots infrastructure (NILS, 2016). While officially termed Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIPs) in Nigeria, similar initiatives in other countries are referred to as "Constituency Development Funds" (CDFs) or "pork barrel projects." This also includes projects that the legislator has brought to the constituency through collaboration with legislative committee chairs, civil society Organisations, and international development agencies, as well as projects or programmes executed with personal resources.

Furthermore, constituency projects resemble U.S. congressional allocations known as "pork barrels," "earmarks," or "member items" in national and state-level policymaking. The management of these projects has occasionally been controversial because it raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of government service delivery. It emphasises the extent to which such service delivery can be made accountable, the role of legislators in selecting development priorities, and how public participation in policymaking can be enhanced (Udefuna, Jumare & Adebayo, 2013). The 1999 Nigerian Constitution clearly establishes the framework for the rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances among the branches of government; however, a point of disagreement in its operation concerns constituency projects. Thus, questions have arisen regarding these projects, such as: what is the constitutional source or legal basis for such projects in Nigeria? Would the implementation of these projects not conflict with the principles of accountability and transparency enshrined in the Constitution and other statutes? Would such projects continue in light of the answers that might be derived from the questions posed above? (Orimogunje, 2015). The term 'dividends of democracy' or "democratic dividends" is popular in Nigeria and is used by various individuals, including politicians, scholars, and political commentators. The common denominator across all usages of the term relates to the development of the general populace in any democratic culture (Edigin and Otoghile, 2011).

Since the primary essence of democracy is to guarantee the welfare of the people, their wishes, and aspirations, constituency projects are indeed dividends of democracy that serve as a channel through which democracy can foster development in society through good governance (Udefuna, 2013).

Overall, constituency projects involve direct interaction between representatives and constituents, and the allocation of projects that benefit the community lies at the heart of the initiative. Therefore, it allows for evaluating how local interests are considered in representative actions and how their impact on constituents can be observed. The fact that it captures the substantive actions of legislators in Nigeria

suggests that it can indicate the extent to which they utilise this policy initiative to address the needs of constituents (Benson, 2018).

### 2.1.3 Emergence of Constituency Project in Nigeria

In Nigeria, constituency projects emerged at the dawn of the Fourth Republic, motivated by Nigerian legislators' quest for a more equitable distribution of resources to their constituencies as "dividends of democracy" Funding for constituency projects evolved as a form of government financing appropriated by the legislature, aimed at ensuring the fair distribution of public goods throughout the country via constituency- based initiatives (Kakungu, 2013; Ochieng & Tubey, 2013; Ojwang, 2014). Issues related to constituency projects came into the public domain in Nigeria during President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration. Constituency projects are development initiatives aimed at periodically enhancing the lives of people across different constituent units (Ezeobi, 2021). Citizens were assured that such a scheme would directly impact their lives, particularly those at the grassroots level, and bring governance closer to them. The primary purpose of any government is to deliver public goods to the majority of the populace through effective governance. Public goods include boreholes, public health services, parking facilities, and the lighting of public spaces and roadways, among others (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). In Nigeria's case, the people were eager for democracy's dividends and demanded benefits from their elected representatives. Thus, constituency projects respond to Nigerians' aspirations for democracy and dividends.

As a result, Constituency projects were created to ensure at least the presence of government in each constituency by having some grass-roots projects sited in each during the budgeting process. Legislators were only required to identify projects they wished to be sited in their constituencies for inclusion in the budget, with a financial limit for the budgetary provisions for such projects in each constituency. The 1999 Constitution gave the National Assembly the power to appropriate government funds, as highlighted in sections 80 (2, 3, and 4) of the CFRN 1999 (Udefuna, P. N., Jumare, F. & Adebayo, F. O., 2013). Senator Femi Okuronmu posited that the rationale behind the introduction of the constituency project was: To guarantee a minimum presence of government in every district by having some grass-roots projects sited in each one during the appropriation process. Legislators were only required to nominate projects they wished to be sited in their electoral districts for inclusion in the budget, with a financial ceiling for the budgetary provisions for such projects in each constituency. The awarding of contracts, and the supervision and payment for such contracts, were left entirely in the hands of the appropriate executive agencies of government (Udefuna, Jumare, and Adebayo, 2013).

Similarly, Senator Ayogu Eze confirmed this position, arguing, "Our role is simply to identify the projects for our constituency while the Executive arm of government will identify the contractor to implement the project" (cited in Tunji, 2010). The CFRN 1999 equips the National Assembly with the power to appropriate funds for government spending, as indicated in sections 80(2), (3), and (4). The former Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, asserted that the concept of constituency projects arose from the need to ensure fair distribution of infrastructure so that every part of the country has good representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. "Ekweremadu argued that this is because allowing governors and senators to decide where projects should be sited would lead to uneven development in the country. Therefore, all representatives typically propose what their

constituents want" (Anyanate, 2009) (Udefuna, Jumare, & Adebayo, 2013).

It can be concluded from the foregoing that the concept of the constituency project arose from the need to ensure fair and equitable distribution of infrastructural facilities. This also guarantees adequate representation for every region of the country in the State House of Assembly, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. However, legislators only recommend programmes and projects to be located in their constituencies based on the needs and requests of their constituents. The awarding of contracts, as well as the management and payments related to such contracts, are entirely controlled by the executive agencies of government (Udefuna, Jumare, & Adebayo, 2013).

### 2.1.4 Constituency Project in other Climes

Constituency projects are not unique to Nigeria. In fact, they have become a growing phenomenon in democratic nations and exist in one form or another in numerous countries worldwide. In the USA, constituency projects are referred to as Pork Barrel projects, while in other countries, they are known as "Constituency Development Funds" (CDFs), among other terms. This concept is also found in many countries and is likened to "pork-barrel" or "earmarks" in the United States. The practice originated in India but gained prominence when Kenya established a CDF in 2003. Due to its success in Kenya, this practice has spread to other African countries (Orimogunje, 2015). Currently, about 23 other countries in Africa operate CDFs, mostly under the same mechanisms and name. However, the degree of control legislators have over these funds and the level of local citizen participation varies from one country to another (Benson, 2018).

### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study utilized Participatory Development Theory. The theory focuses on the engagement of communities in making decisions about projects that impact their lives. Grounded in post-development and human-centered viewpoints, it critiques top-down development methods and champions inclusive, grassroots approaches (Chambers, 1997). Its core argument is that development efforts are more effective, sustainable, and equitable when beneficiaries take an active role in designing, implementing, and monitoring them. In the context of constituency development in Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto State. This framework emphasizes the importance of aligning projects with the actual needs of the people. Currently, many projects are conceived and executed by lawmakers without systematic community engagement, resulting in outcomes that often overlook local priorities. For instance, constructing skill acquisition centers in areas lacking basic water or healthcare services illustrates a disconnect that undermines project effectiveness.

Participatory Development Theory offers a perspective for analyzing how inclusive participation can boost governance effectiveness. When citizens partake in needs assessments, priority setting, and monitoring, constituency projects are more likely to resonate, be accepted, and be sustained. This also encourages accountability, as legislators and contractors face community evaluation. Moreover, the theory emphasizes the importance of institutional alignment. Successful constituency development necessitates cooperation among legislators, implementing agencies, and community stakeholders. Weak institutional frameworks and patronage politics obstruct this collaboration. Nevertheless, integrating participatory strategies in budget planning and oversight can close these gaps. Therefore, Participatory Development Theory provides both explanation and guidance for this study.

It clarifies why numerous constituency projects falter (due to exclusionary practices and weak institutions) while also suggesting reforms (such as participation, alignment, and accountability) to enhance constituency development effectiveness in Sokoto State and beyond.

### 3. Methodology

This study uses the documentary method as its main research strategy. The documentary method entails the organized gathering, examination, and assessment of existing documents and records to yield insights and support research arguments (Bowen, 2009). It is especially fitting for political science investigations where official reports, policy papers, scholarly publications, and civil society reports offer rich sources of secondary data. For this study, data will be collected from a diverse array of documentary sources. Official government documents like budget reports, National Assembly constituency project allocations, and oversight committee reports will deliver information on the legal and institutional framework of constituency development in Nigeria. Academic literature, comprising journal articles, books, and dissertations, will present theoretical and empirical insights on governance effectiveness, participatory development, and reform approaches. Reports and publications from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international development partners, and local civil society organizations will shed light on grassroots experiences, implementation challenges, and calls for reform. The approach to analysis includes thematic content analysis. Important documents will be examined carefully, and common themes like political patronage, needs misalignment, weak accountability, and best practices will be recognized. The analysis will combine data from various sources to enhance validity and reliability. For instance, official budget allocations will be compared with civil society monitoring reports to evaluate the difference between policy and reality. The selection of the documentary method is supported by the study's emphasis on constituency development, a topic that is well recorded in public records and academic discussions but challenging to explore solely through primary data due to political sensitivities. Furthermore, this method allows access to historical data, enabling the researcher to identify trends and patterns in constituency project execution over time. Nevertheless, the method has limitations. The dependence on secondary data means the researcher is limited by the accuracy, completeness, and possible biases of available documents. Official reports might downplay challenges or overstate successes, while civil society reports could be swayed by advocacy objectives. To address these limitations, the study uses data triangulation by cross-referencing various sources and prioritizing peer-reviewed and trustworthy documents.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Needs Alignment and Reform Strategies for Constituency Development

In Sokoto State, as in other parts of Nigeria, constituency projects have been implemented across sectors such as water supply, education, healthcare, road construction, and empowerment programmes. However, the outcomes of these projects have been inconsistent, raising serious concerns about institutional effectiveness, accountability, and inclusivity (Ojo, 2014; Olurode, 2017). A recurring problem in Sokoto State is the gap between constituency projects and the actual needs of local communities. Several real-life examples highlight this issue. For example, in some rural areas of Wurno

and Goronyo Local Government Areas, solar-powered boreholes were installed using constituency funds. Yet, many quickly fell into disrepair due to a lack of maintenance and community involvement (Connected Development, 2020). Likewise, reports from civil society groups suggest that in locations where healthcare was most needed, lawmakers prioritised building markets or skills centres that ended up underused or completely neglected (CDD, 2019). These examples demonstrate how political favouritism and elite interests often influence project choices more than thorough needs assessments (Keefer & Khemani, 2009).

Institutional flaws further worsen the problem. Constituency projects are usually included in the federal budget through zonal intervention funds, but oversight remains insufficient. Agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) or the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which often host some of these projects, have limited capacity to monitor quality and enforce regulations. In Sokoto State, contractors frequently suspend projects midway, while legislators face little accountability due to the absence of independent oversight (Olurode, 2017; Transparency International, 2021). Political favouritism also significantly hampers project efficiency. Many legislators use constituency projects to reward supporters or strengthen electoral support. For example, empowerment initiatives like distributing sewing machines, motorcycles, or grinding machines are often aimed mainly at party loyalists rather than the wider community. Although these projects provide short-term relief, they do not address fundamental development challenges such as access to quality education, reliable water supply, or sufficient road infrastructure (Kawu, 2018). Lessons from other countries offer valuable insights. In Kenya, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has faced criticism for mismanagement, yet reforms have introduced community participation in project selection via Constituency Development Committees (Okungu, 2017). In India, the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) has also attempted to align development funding with local demands, though issues of accountability remain (Yamamoto, 2007). These examples underscore the importance of adopting participatory approaches and transparent monitoring systems to enhance constituency development outcomes.

In Sokoto State, promising practices are emerging. Civil society groups such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and Connected Development (CODE) have begun community-led monitoring of constituency projects using platforms like Follow the Money. These efforts have put pressure on lawmakers to complete stalled projects and have improved citizens' understanding of budget allocations (CODE, 2020). These examples highlight the potential of participatory monitoring as a means to support institutional reforms.

Overall, the issues in Sokoto State point to deeper structural and institutional flaws. Constituency projects are affected by political manipulation, misalignment with actual needs, ineffective monitoring, and a lack of sustainability plans. However, successful practices from Nigeria and abroad indicate that reforms focused on participatory development, institutional alignment, and transparency can greatly enhance project efficacy (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010). The goal, then, is not to abandon constituency development efforts but to reform them to boost governance effectiveness and make them tools for inclusive community growth.

The findings of this study reveal significant mismatches between constituency projects and the actual needs of

communities in Sokoto State. Instead of being driven by participatory needs assessments, projects are often selected based on political favouritism or elite negotiations. This results in the implementation of projects that do not address essential developmental gaps, leading to the inefficient use of limited resources and disillusionment among residents. Political favouritism emerged as a central issue. Lawmakers frequently use projects as tools for electoral strategies, distributing resources selectively to their supporters. Such actions undermine the developmental goals of constituency projects, turning them into instruments of political loyalty rather than tools for community development. While distributing motorcycles, sewing machines, and similar empowerment items may offer temporary benefits, they do not address long-term structural needs such as improved healthcare, better roads, and sustainable education. Weak accountability measures further exacerbate the problem. The absence of independent oversight allows legislators and contractors to avoid scrutiny. Projects are often poorly executed, overpriced, or left unfinished without consequences. Although anti-corruption agencies like the ICPC and EFCC have occasionally intervened, their efforts have been inconsistent and sometimes politically motivated, limiting systemic reform. Meanwhile, institutional weaknesses hamper the effectiveness of implementation agencies. These agencies lack adequate monitoring capacity and coordination, resulting in duplication or neglect. In Sokoto State, this has resulted in communities abandoning or having non-functional infrastructure, while essential social services remain unmet. Nonetheless, the study also highlights opportunities for reform. Civil society initiatives, especially through digital accountability platforms, have demonstrated that participatory monitoring can enhance transparency and involve citizens. Experiences from countries like Kenya suggest that constituency funds can be managed more effectively when community committees play a leading role in project selection and oversight.

#### 4.2 Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of constituency development in Sokoto State, focusing on aligning needs and strategies for reform. The analysis reveals that although constituency projects aim to bridge the gap between governance and community development, their implementation has been affected by political favoritism, weak accountability, and institutional deficiencies. As a result, many projects fail to address urgent community needs and are often left incomplete or poorly managed. The Participatory Development framework stresses the importance of involving all citizens in setting developmental priorities. Data from Sokoto State indicates that the lack of such participation has resulted in poorly aligned projects, communities feeling powerless, and public resources being wasted. Furthermore, inadequate institutional coordination has rendered oversight ineffective, allowing political elites to control development processes within the constituencies. Nevertheless, the study also highlights opportunities for improvement. Insights from Kenya and local civil society initiatives suggest that with enhanced participatory approaches and accountability systems, constituency projects can significantly contribute to inclusive growth and good governance. Reforms that incorporate participatory needs assessments, improve oversight, and promote transparency will ensure that constituency projects serve as genuine tools for grassroots empowerment rather than merely instruments of patronage.

#### 4.3 Recommendations

- i. To improve the effectiveness and transparency of constituency projects, it is essential to prioritise participatory needs assessments that genuinely reflect grassroots priorities. Engaging local communities in setting project agendas ensures relevance and responsiveness. Additionally, incorporating sustainability measures such as structured maintenance plans and systems for community ownership can help prevent project abandonment and promote long-term impact. Drawing from global models like Kenya's Constituency Development Fund (CDF) committee system, adapted for Nigeria's unique context, can further strengthen inclusivity and project relevance.
- ii. Equally important is the need for robust accountability mechanisms. This includes establishing independent oversight committees, implementing digital reporting platforms, and ensuring public access to mandatory project audits, all of which can greatly improve transparency. Civil society organisations (CSOs) should be formally involved in project monitoring efforts, serving both as watchdogs and as channels for community feedback. Together, these recommendations seek to foster a more participatory, transparent, and sustainable framework for constituency project implementation.

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