

NORTHEAST DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN JALINGO AND ARDO KOLA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Infrastructural development plays a pivotal role in accelerating socio-economic transformation, especially in post-conflict regions such as Nigeria's North-East. The objectives of the study are to investigate the role of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in promoting infrastructural development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Taraba State and to assess the effectiveness, equity, and community impact of NEDC-led projects and their implications for local economic development and social inclusion. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, combining both primary data gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and personal communications and secondary data from journals, reports, and scholarly publications. Anchored on the Basic Needs Theory, which emphasizes the provision of essential services to marginalized populations as a foundation for inclusive development. Findings reveal that the NEDC has significantly contributed to infrastructure provision in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola, notably through the installation of solar-powered lighting systems, the construction of a virology laboratory at FMC Jalingo, the sinking of boreholes, and campus lighting at Taraba State University. These interventions have improved public health, educational productivity, security, and night-time economic activities. However, the study also uncovered concerns about geographical disparities in project distribution, inadequate maintenance frameworks, and limited community involvement in planning and sustainability. The research recommends that the NEDC adopt a more inclusive, equitable, and participatory approach to project implementation. Specifically, it should institutionalize community ownership structures and ensure balanced development between urban and rural communities.

Keywords: Infrastructural Development, Northeast Development Commission (NEDC), Basic Needs Theory, Social Inclusion, Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Introduction

Infrastructural development remains a cornerstone for socio-economic change and regional integration in developing nations, especially in post-conflict or neglected regions. In Nigeria, like many developing nations, the provision of suitable infrastructure is crucial for supporting economic growth, boosting social well-being, and promoting sustainable development (Kaberuka, 2019). Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states make up the North East area, which has been disproportionately impacted by insurgency, especially Boko Haram's actions. As a result, there has been extensive infrastructure damage, population relocation, and interruption of economical operations (Kaberuka, 2019). The Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) was created by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2017 in response to these complex issues, with the main goal being to coordinate the Northeast region's rehabilitation, rebuilding, and sustainable development (NEDC Act, 2017).

In order to solve the region's developmental deficiencies, the NEDC was intended to be a strategic organisation that focused on areas including rural electricity, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation. The Commission's function is crucial for both humanitarian intervention and rebuilding as well as for fostering long-term resilience through infrastructure development, claim Okeke and Usman (2022). Even though Taraba State has experienced less insurgency than Borno or Yobe, it still faces major infrastructure problems, particularly in local government areas like Jalingo (the state capital) and Ardo-Kola, which are crucial for regional access and economic connectivity.

Inadequate rural electrification, limited access to clean water, poor road infrastructure, and a lack of healthcare and educational facilities have all historically plagued Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas, impeding development and exacerbating rural-urban disparities (Aliyu, 2021). In order to address these issues, the NEDC has started a number of infrastructure-related projects around the state, such as building classrooms, health facilities, water boreholes, and restoring important road corridors. The extent, durability, and communal effect of these initiatives are still up for debate, though.

The objectives of the study is to examine the role of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in promoting infrastructural development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Taraba State and to assess the effectiveness, equity, and community impact of NEDC-led projects and their implications for local economic development and social inclusion. The research intends to add to the expanding body of knowledge on regional development initiatives in Nigeria by concentrating on these two local governments and by offering evidence-based suggestions for bettering policy.

Literature Review

The NEDC (Establishment) Act of 2017 created the North-East Development Commission (NEDC), which was a deliberate institutional reaction to the Boko Haram insurgency's destruction of infrastructure and humanitarian catastrophe in North-East Nigeria. The Commission, which is tasked with coordinating the region's relocation, rehabilitation, and rebuilding, acts as a hub for development planning in the six states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. Through economic empowerment and youth-focused initiatives, the NEDC plays a crucial role in repairing livelihoods, re-establishing social infrastructure, and tackling the underlying causes of violent extremism, according to academics like Adamu (2021) and Aliyu & Usman (2020). In an effort to reduce unemployment, the Commission has built housing units for displaced people, repaired roads, distributed agricultural inputs, and started ICT training. The NEDC has been criticised for its lack of transparency, bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor coordination with foreign partners and civil society, and minimal community engagement in project development and execution, despite its noteworthy accomplishments. According to Yusuf (2022) and Okon & Bashir (2021), these flaws compromise the treatments' long-term effects. The Commission is a top-down, state-led strategy for reconstructing conflict-affected communities from the perspective of post-conflict reconstruction theory, but its success depends on open government, community involvement,

and long-term peacebuilding tactics. Therefore, to guarantee that the Commission carries out its mandate efficiently and fairly throughout the North-East, academics and development specialists suggest reforms that give priority to local involvement, third-party oversight, and closer cooperation with both domestic and foreign partners.

Conceptualizing Infrastructure in Development Discourse

Infrastructure occupies a central place in development studies, recognized as a fundamental driver of economic growth, human capital development, and social inclusion. Scholars and development institutions alike have provided diverse yet complementary definitions of infrastructure, underscoring its multifaceted role in enabling functional societies and sustainable economies. The World Bank (2019) broadly defines infrastructure as the essential physical and institutional systems such as transportation, water supply, electricity, and telecommunications that facilitate the functioning of an economy and enhance the delivery of public services. This perspective is echoed by Todaro and Smith (2015), who describe infrastructure as public utilities and services that are indispensable for economic production, modernization, and the reduction of poverty, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Estache and Fay (2007) provide a more structural and policy-oriented definition, viewing infrastructure as large-scale, capital-intensive systems that demand long-term investment and strategic planning, particularly in sectors like transportation, energy, and sanitation. Their emphasis lies on the governance and financing of infrastructure in developing contexts. Within the Nigerian development landscape, Akinyosoye (2010) defines infrastructure as the physical and organizational structures required for societal operations, stressing its significance for regional integration, national cohesion, and public welfare. Similarly, UN-Habitat (2020) adds a critical urban development lens, conceptualizing infrastructure as both the tangible physical networks and the institutional frameworks that ensure equitable access to essential services in urban spaces, especially in the face of rapid urbanization.

Ajakaiye (2015) expands the concept further by linking infrastructure to macroeconomic transformation, arguing that infrastructure both physical and regulatory serves as a catalyst for investment, industrialization, and long-term structural change. His analysis draws attention to the intersection of infrastructure with governance, policy coherence, and economic competitiveness. Taken together, these scholarly insights establish that infrastructure is not merely about the construction of physical assets but encompasses a broader developmental agenda involving access, quality, equity, and sustainability. This is particularly pertinent in post-conflict and marginalized regions like Nigeria's North-East, where infrastructure serves not only economic functions but also peacebuilding, social restoration, and state legitimacy. As such, the evaluation of infrastructural development must consider not just physical outcomes, but also governance, community engagement, and long-term sustainability.

Concept of Infrastructural Development

Infrastructural development refers to the construction, expansion, and improvement of foundational physical and organizational structures needed for the functioning of a society and economy. This includes transportation networks (roads, railways, and airports), energy systems

(electricity, gas), water supply, sanitation, telecommunications, and social infrastructure such as schools and healthcare facilities (World Bank, 2019). The concept is deeply rooted in development economics and is widely regarded as a catalyst for economic growth, industrialization, and social welfare improvement. According to Todaro and Smith (2015), infrastructure acts as a basic input in the production process and facilitates the mobility of goods, services, and people, thus boosting productivity and market efficiency.

Scholars emphasize that infrastructural development is not just about physical assets but also about improving access, quality, and sustainability of services that enable socioeconomic transformation. As noted by Estache and Fay (2007), effective infrastructure helps reduce poverty, improve living standards, and bridge urban-rural divides. In many developing countries, especially in Africa, infrastructural development is often linked to governance, public investment policies, and donor support. In Nigeria, for instance, inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure has long been identified as a major constraint to development, with significant implications for job creation, regional integration, and poverty reduction (Akinyosoye, 2010). In the post-conflict context, such as in Nigeria's North-East, infrastructural development takes on a more strategic dimension as a tool for peacebuilding and social reconstruction. Here, infrastructure is not only about economic recovery but also about restoring state legitimacy, rebuilding trust in government institutions, and creating inclusive spaces for displaced populations. However, critics argue that infrastructural projects often suffer from corruption, poor planning, and elite capture, which undermine their developmental potential (Transparency International, 2021).

In the context of this study, infrastructural development refers to the deliberate planning, funding, construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of essential physical and social facilities such as roads, bridges, culverts, markets, public toilets, boreholes, classrooms, and health centers undertaken or facilitated by the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) to restore, improve, and enhance the living conditions, economic activities, and social services in communities affected by conflict and underdevelopment in Nigeria's North-East region. This definition emphasizes both the tangible (physical structures) and intangible (service delivery and community impact) outcomes of infrastructure-related interventions aimed at regional stabilization and development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the basic need theory. The Basic Needs Theory emerged in the 1970s, strongly advocated by development economists such as Paul Streeten, Mahbub ul Haq, Frances Stewart, and institutions like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank. The theory arose as a critique of growth-focused development models that ignored poverty, inequality, and the welfare of marginalized populations (Streeten et al., 1981). At its core, the Basic Needs Theory asserts that development should prioritize the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of all people, particularly the poor, before focusing on broader economic growth indicators (Streeten et al., 1981). These basic needs include access to food, water, shelter, healthcare, education, transportation, and communication infrastructure. The

theory posits that a development approach focused on meeting these needs leads to more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable progress. It also emphasizes that the state and public institutions have a primary responsibility to provide these essential services, especially in underdeveloped or conflict-affected regions.

This theory is highly relevant in examining the infrastructural development efforts of the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) in Taraba State. The NEDC was established as a strategic intervention to rebuild and rehabilitate areas devastated by insurgency and chronic underdevelopment in Nigeria's North-East. In Taraba State where many communities face poor road networks, inadequate health and educational facilities, erratic electricity supply, and limited access to clean water these infrastructural gaps represent a direct failure to meet basic needs.

By using the Basic Needs Theory as a framework, this study recognizes infrastructure not just as physical structures but as critical components of human welfare and empowerment. Roads, healthcare centers, schools, water supply systems, and electricity are essential in reducing poverty, improving living standards, and enabling citizens to participate meaningfully in economic and social life. The theory helps assess how well the NEDC is addressing the core necessities of communities in Taraba State and whether its projects align with the broader goal of people-centered development.

In essence, Basic Needs Theory offers a normative and practical lens for evaluating whether the NEDC's infrastructural interventions are effectively targeting the urgent material deprivations in Taraba State. It also provides the conceptual grounding for proposing sustainable and inclusive development policies that prioritize human welfare at the grassroots level.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore the role of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in promoting infrastructural development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas 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.

Brief History of study Areas

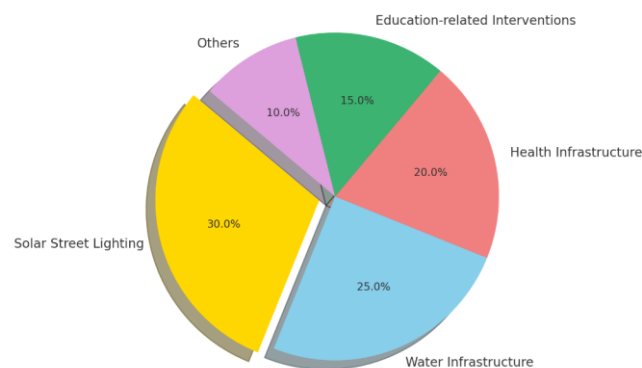
Jalingo, the capital of Taraba State in northeastern Nigeria, was originally established as a colonial administrative outpost by the British in the early 20th century. The name "Jalingo" is believed to have originated from the Fulfulde word "*Jalingo*", meaning "superior place" or "headquarters." Historically, Jalingo was part of the Muri Emirate, which was created in the late 19th century and later integrated into the British colonial system under indirect rule (Patek, 2014). Following Nigeria's independence, Jalingo grew in administrative and political relevance, especially after Taraba State was created in 1991, with Jalingo designated as the state capital. Ardo Kola Local Government Area was carved out of the former Jalingo Local Government Area in 1996 during the military regime of General Sani Abacha. The area is predominantly inhabited by the Fulani, Mumuye, Jukun Kona ethnic groups, who engage primarily in farming, cattle rearing, and petty trading (Ibrahim, 2017). Ardo Kola is traditionally under the influence of local chieftaincy institutions, such as the Ardo (Fulani leader), which play key roles in community leadership and conflict resolution. Its creation was part of broader efforts to bring governance closer to the grassroots and enhance development in rural communities.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Role of the Northeast Development Commission in Promoting Infrastructural Development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas of Taraba State

The creation of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in 2017 marked a significant federal government response to the long-standing developmental challenges of the northeastern region of Nigeria. While the Commission was primarily established to facilitate the rehabilitation and resettlement of communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, its developmental reach has expanded to include relatively peaceful states such as Taraba. In particular, the Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas have witnessed noticeable infrastructural developments as a result of the NEDC's interventions, which have been tailored to address critical gaps in basic amenities, health care, and rural development.

Figure 1: Distribution of NEDC Infrastructural Interventions in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola



The pie chart illustrates the distribution of NEDC infrastructural interventions across Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas, highlighting five key categories of development. The most prominent, accounting for 30%, is the installation of solar street lighting systems, which

were strategically sited along Mission Road, Justice Mahmoud Mohammed Way, Sabongari Matan Mobile, Mile Six Road, Palace Way in Jalingo, and the ATC area in Ardo-Kola, significantly improving night-time security and economic activity. Water infrastructure, constituting 25%, includes solar-powered boreholes in Sabongari Matan Mobile and the TSU Hostel Area, which addressed chronic water scarcity and eased domestic burdens. Health infrastructure, making up 20% of the interventions, is exemplified by the establishment of a virology laboratory at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Jalingo, boosting diagnostic capacity during outbreaks. Education-related projects (15%) are represented by the provision of solar lighting and the creation of an ICT Resource Centre at Taraba State University, facilitating a safer and more technologically enriched learning environment. The remaining 10% covers other initiatives such as minor road rehabilitation and digital skills training, further supporting the Commission's goal of holistic regional development.

Enhancing Public Utilities through Solar Street Lighting Projects

A prominent aspect of the NEDC's intervention in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola LGAs has been the deployment of solar-powered street lighting systems. These installations were strategically sited in areas previously plagued by darkness, criminal activity, and social stagnation after sunset. Locations such as Mission Road, Justice Mahmoud Mohammed Way, Sabongari Matan Mobile, Mile Six Road, Palace Way, and ATC (in Ardo-Kola) have all benefited from these installations.

A resident of Mile Six Road expressed the transformative impact of these streetlights:

“For years, we lived in fear of venturing out at night. Armed robbery, petty theft, and even snake bites were common in this area due to the lack of visibility. The solar lights brought by the NEDC have not only lit our streets but have also brightened our lives. Today, shops operate longer, and our children can move around safely.”(Interview with a Community Member, Jalingo, March 2025)

Similarly, a youth leader in Sabongari Matan Mobile stated:

“These lights are not just electricity poles. They have helped reduce crime, encouraged night trade, and given people a sense of belonging. For the first time, we feel noticed by the government.” (FGD with Youth Leaders, Jalingo, March 2025)

A local trader at General T.Y. Danjuma Way, ATC (Ardo-Kola LGA) account that:

“For many years, this entire stretch of road from the roundabout to the University boundary was known for darkness and danger once the sun went down. People were afraid to walk, let alone do business at night. I used to pack up my shop by 6:30 pm, especially during the harmattan when visibility was poor. But since the NEDC installed these solar lights, the entire environment has changed. I now stay until 10 pm, and sometimes later during Ramadan. It's not just about more profit it's about feeling safe. We used to hear stories of okada snatchers and street urchins. Now, those fears have reduced drastically.” (Interview with a Local Trader. ATC Junction, Ardo Kola April 2025)

Thus, beyond mere illumination, the solar lighting projects have tangibly influenced security, economic activity, and social cohesion in affected communities. This field account is supported by Mustapha and Nasir (2019) who argue that community-based electrification, especially in

underserved urban areas, plays a vital role in reducing urban crime and increasing productivity, particularly among informal traders and artisans. Similarly, the National Infrastructure Master Plan (2014–2043) identifies street lighting as a foundational component of urban infrastructure that enhances security and improves night-time economy, especially in growing towns and cities.

Improving Health Infrastructure: The Virology Laboratory at FMC Jalingo

In the healthcare sector, the NEDC's construction and equipping of a Virology Laboratory at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Jalingo stands out as a landmark project. Prior to this intervention, Taraba State lacked the facilities to test for viral infections such as Lassa fever, Hepatitis, and even COVID-19, relying heavily on distant laboratories in Abuja or Plateau State. This dependency often led to delays in diagnosis, poor response time during outbreaks, and avoidable fatalities.

Senior medical personnel at FMC explained:

“The NEDC-funded virology lab has revolutionized our disease surveillance capacity. We now conduct real-time tests and provide rapid diagnostics, particularly during viral outbreaks. This capacity did not exist before, and it was a major public health gap in the entire state.” (Interview with Laboratory Scientist, FMC Jalingo, April 2025)

Another interviewee, a public health officer, further noted:

“The virology lab has had a spill-over effect staff are being trained on advanced diagnostics, and our medical records are now more accurate. This kind of capacity-building infrastructure should be replicated across the region.”

This intervention underscores the NEDC's role in not just delivering infrastructure but also in promoting sustainable development through capacity enhancement and institutional strengthening in the healthcare sector. This is corroborated by World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) data, which emphasizes the critical need for decentralized virological testing capabilities in low-resource settings to reduce disease transmission and mortality rates. Also, Obi (2019) observes that access to local diagnostic laboratories is key to strengthening primary healthcare in Nigeria and should be prioritized in rural and peri-urban settings.

Addressing Water Scarcity through Solar-Powered Boreholes

In Sabongari Matan Mobile, one of the most significant interventions was the construction of a solar-powered borehole, which addressed chronic water scarcity issues in the area. Before this intervention, residents relied on unreliable hand-dug wells and expensive private water vendors. The installation of a borehole, powered sustainably by solar energy, drastically changed access to clean water and reduced waterborne diseases.

An elderly woman in the community said:

“Water was like gold here before. We used to wake up at 4 am to queue at the only well, and during dry seasons, we had to buy water from vendors. Today, with the solar borehole, every household has easy access to water without spending money or fighting at wells.” (FGD with Women's Group, Sabongari, April 2025)

This intervention reflects a convergence of environmental sustainability and human development, consistent with the NEDC's mandate to empower communities through basic

social infrastructure. This testimony is supported by UNICEF and WHO's Joint Monitoring Programme (2022), which shows that solar-powered boreholes are among the most sustainable methods of delivering water in off-grid communities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Eze and Nnaji (2021) also note that water infrastructure investments significantly reduce the burden on women and girls, enhancing school attendance and economic participation.

Educational and Institutional Benefits: The Case of Taraba State University, ATC

The installation of solar streetlights around Taraba State University (TSU) in the ATC area of Ardo-Kola LGA has had direct implications for educational productivity and campus security. Students interviewed during a campus FGD emphasized how the lighting system enabled them to engage in academic work during the night and reduced cases of harassment and theft on campus.

A 300-level student explained:

“Before the lights, we couldn't read past 7 pm without fear. The environment was dark and unsafe. Since the solar lights were installed, I can stay in the reading hall until midnight and walk back to my hostel with confidence.” (FGD with TSU Students, ATC, March 2025)

ICT Resource Center Coordinator at TSU posited that:

“The ICT Resource Center established by the NEDC has become the heart of our digital transformation drive. We've hosted training on GIS mapping, SPSS software, even basic coding and cyber hygiene for undergraduates. For many of these students, it's their first time interacting with computers outside of their phones. It has also reduced pressure on departmental labs. More importantly, it is bridging the digital divide students from rural LGAs like Karim-Lamido and Donga now have access to tools they once only heard about.” (personal communication with ICT Resource Center Coordinator TSU, April 2025)

Female Students' Group TSU Hostel Area posited that:

“The solar borehole has been a blessing. We used to queue for hours at the old manual pump, and sometimes pay up to ₦200 for a bucket of water from private vendors. It was worse during dry season girls missed lectures just to fetch water. Now, this borehole runs on sunlight and never fails. It has improved hygiene, saved us money, and given us back our time. We've even formed a women's hygiene group that now uses the water source to produce homemade soap and liquid disinfectants for sale.” FGD with Female Students' Group (TSU Hostel Area, April 2025).

This project thus demonstrates how the NEDC's interventions intersect with broader development goals such as education, youth empowerment, and gender safety. This aligns with Akinyemi (2021) who highlights how improved school infrastructure, particularly lighting, contributes to a safer academic environment and enhanced academic performance. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that safe and well-lit educational spaces are essential for promoting inclusive learning and reducing gender-based violence in schools and universities.

Stakeholder Perception and Socioeconomic Implications

Beyond the physical projects, the qualitative data gathered show that the NEDC's presence has reshaped how communities perceive federal government interventions. Respondents consistently described the projects as “timely,” “impactful,” and “people-oriented.” However, concerns were also raised regarding sustainability and equity.

According to a local civil society actor in Jalingo:

“While we commend the NEDC, we are worried that there is no maintenance structure. Who takes care of these solar panels when they get faulty? Also, some communities feel left out, so future projects should be better distributed and include community voices from the onset.” (Interview with NGO Representative, April 2025)

Supporting this is Yusuf (2022) who argues that people-oriented infrastructure projects enhance citizens’ trust in government institutions, especially in post-conflict or marginalized regions. Likewise, Adeyemi (2021) contends that federal presence through visible, functional infrastructure can serve as a bridge between marginalized communities and central governance, enhancing national unity and stability.

The analysis of field data reveals that the Northeast Development Commission has significantly influenced infrastructural development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola LGAs through carefully targeted interventions in lighting, healthcare, water supply, and education. The projects have yielded measurable impacts on community welfare, security, and economic vibrancy. Nonetheless, sustainability mechanisms and participatory planning remain areas that require improvement to consolidate the gains of NEDC interventions in these LGAs.

Equity and Challenges Associated with NEDC-led Infrastructural Interventions and Their Implications for Local Economic Development and Social Inclusion

While the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) has undertaken notable infrastructure projects across Jalingo and Ardo-Kola LGAs, a deeper examination reveals disparities in the spread of these interventions and the structural and operational challenges affecting their impact. This section evaluates the extent to which NEDC projects promote equitable development, foster local economic opportunities, and facilitate inclusive community engagement, drawing from field data and existing literature.

Geographical Disparities and Perceived Inequities

Field data indicate that a majority of NEDC infrastructure projects are concentrated in urban centres, particularly Jalingo town, with relatively fewer interventions in more rural or underserved communities within Ardo-Kola LGA. This distribution pattern has generated perceptions of exclusion and dissatisfaction among some rural dwellers.

During an FGD in Garin Mallum of Ardo-Kola, a participant lamented:

“We hear about the solar lights and water projects in Jalingo, but nothing has reached our side. Are we not part of Taraba State too? We need water, light, and even access roads here.” (FGD with Community Members, Ardo-Kola, April 2025)

This sentiment is supported by Mustapha and Nasir (2019) who note that spatial disparities in infrastructure development often result from urban-centric planning and political calculations, leaving out rural populations and exacerbating regional inequality. Similarly, Obiyan (2013) argues that skewed project distribution undermines the principle of spatial equity, a key dimension of social inclusion in development planning.

Economic Impact and Informal Sector Growth

Despite perceived inequalities, communities that benefited from NEDC infrastructure reported significant economic stimulation, particularly in the informal sector. In Jalingo town, solar streetlights and boreholes have enabled night-time trading, reduced cost of water procurement, and increased productivity.

A roadside food vendor on Palace Way explained:

“Before the lights came, I closed by 7 pm. Now I can stay until 10 or even 11 pm. It means more income for me and better food service for night workers and travelers.” (Interview with Informal Trader, Jalingo, March 2025)

This is corroborated by Eze and Nnaji (2021) who observed that access to basic infrastructure like electricity and water reduces the cost of doing business and boosts microeconomic activity, especially among women and low-income earners. Likewise, UN-Habitat (2020) links well-planned urban lighting to safer commercial spaces and broader citizen participation in the urban economy.

Challenges in Implementation and Sustainability

Despite the visible benefits, several interviews revealed ongoing concerns about the quality, maintenance, and long-term sustainability of NEDC projects. Many solar installations lack proper maintenance arrangements, and water facilities face the risk of breakdown without community ownership frameworks.

A youth leader in ATC raised the following concern:

“Some lights are already not working. We don’t know who to report to. If this continues, the whole place will go dark again. There should be a way for communities to maintain these things.” (Interview with Youth Leader, ATC, April 2025)

This challenge echoes Ikelegbe (2013) who emphasizes that development projects in Nigeria often suffer from weak maintenance cultures and unclear institutional responsibility post-implementation. Onapajo (2014) also noted that absence of local engagement in project planning and follow-up often leads to infrastructural decay and reduced community ownership.

Gender and Social Inclusion Outcomes

The impact of NEDC projects on gender and social inclusion was notably highlighted during discussions with women in Sabongari Matan Mobile. Participants reported that the solar-powered borehole eased the domestic burden of water fetching, allowing more time for income-generating activities.

One participant stated:

“Before the borehole, our daughters skipped school to queue at wells. Now, we send them to school while we go to the borehole. Even our small businesses selling zobo and kunu have improved because water is now available.” (FGD with Women’s Cooperative, Jalingo, April 2025)

This aligns with UNICEF/WHO (2022) findings that access to water infrastructure improves girls’ education and women’s participation in economic activities. Akinyemi (2021) also argues that infrastructure when inclusive can bridge gender gaps and strengthen household resilience in urban and peri-urban communities.

Community Engagement and Political Trust

Field data showed that where projects were delivered, trust in government institutions particularly the federal government improved. However, the lack of transparency in project site selection and the absence of community consultation have in some cases reinforced skepticism about elite-driven development.

A civil society activist in Jalingo observed:

“People are happy with what the NEDC has done, but they also feel these things are done without involving them. There should be community needs assessments, town hall meetings, not just projects dumped on us.” (Interview with NGO Worker, April 2025)

This is affirmed by Adeyemi (2021) who argues that sustainable development requires participatory governance structures, where beneficiaries contribute to project design and monitoring. UNDP (2021) further notes that participatory development not only ensures relevance but also enhances local ownership and maintenance of infrastructure.

Conclusion

This study set out to analyze the role of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in promoting infrastructural development in Jalingo and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas of Taraba State, with particular attention to equity, challenges, and the broader implications for local economic development and social inclusion. Findings from both field data and secondary sources demonstrate that the NEDC has made commendable strides in delivering critical infrastructure such as solar-powered streetlights, a virology laboratory at FMC Jalingo, solar-powered boreholes, and public lighting in Taraba State University. These projects have led to significant improvements in health service delivery, access to potable water, security, night-time economic activity, and educational productivity. Respondents widely acknowledged the tangible benefits of these interventions and the renewed sense of federal presence in communities that had long felt marginalized.

However, analysis of equity and sustainability revealed critical concerns. The geographical distribution of projects shows a skew toward urban centres such as Jalingo, with rural communities in Ardo-Kola feeling neglected. Moreover, the lack of maintenance frameworks, limited stakeholder engagement, and absence of community ownership threaten the long-term viability of these projects. Gender and social inclusion outcomes were positive where interventions reached their targets, particularly in water access and education, but remained uneven overall.

Therefore, while the NEDC’s interventions have had a positive impact, the effectiveness and sustainability of these gains are challenged by gaps in equity, planning, and community participation. Strengthening institutional frameworks and rethinking project implementation strategies are imperative to ensuring that the developmental footprint of the NEDC is inclusive, durable, and socially transformative.

Based on the findings from the two objectives, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Promote Equitable Distribution of Infrastructure Projects: The NEDC should adopt a more balanced approach to infrastructure allocation by ensuring that rural and

- underserved communities, particularly in Ardo-Kola LGA, receive equal attention alongside urban centres. This can be achieved through needs-based assessments and inclusive planning frameworks that prioritize spatial equity.
- ii. Institutionalize Maintenance and Community Ownership Structures: To ensure the sustainability of interventions such as solar lights and boreholes, the NEDC should establish local maintenance committees, train community members, and integrate repair protocols into project implementation. This will enhance local ownership, prevent infrastructure decay, and extend project lifespan.

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