

# Locational Efficiency of Local Government Headquarters as Regional Development Centres in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the efficiency of Local Government Headquarters in Rivers State first, in terms of their location as regional development centres and secondly in terms of their location in relation to their rural communities as well as in the provision, distribution and accessibility of services to the inhabitants of these Local Government Areas (LGAs). The study covers the twenty-three LGAs of the State in which both the linear measurement of the distance and transport costs between the LGAs Headquarters and the various communities and their coordinates were obtained. Copies of questionnaires were distributed across 242 communities, while Geo-referenced maps, land size of the study area, GPS and Arc-GIS 10.1 software were also used. The access opportunity model statistical technique used in analyzing the level of accessibility to administrative services located in the headquarters by the rural communities revealed variations in the accessibility to administrative services in the state with accessibility level of 18.25 which is less than 16.00 UNO access radius. Interaction between the LGAs headquarters and its rural communities also decreases in intensity and frequency as distance between them increases. The paper thus recommends that the distance of the communities to their Local Government Headquarters should be within convenient access radius preferably 16 kilometers and affordable transport cost.

**Key words:** Local Government Area Headquarters, location efficiency, regional centres, accessibility.

## 1. Introduction

The existence of Local Government Headquarters have become a global phenomenon. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the Local Government is not just an explicit strategy of spatial closure or territorial decentralization of power, Local Government has been accepted as a vital instrument for rural and urban development (Kalu, Eke and Ehiodo, 2010). The provisions in Part II, section 7 (1) of the 1999 constitution form the institutional framework for local government system in Nigeria (FRN, 1999). This schedule tends to derive mainly from the basic and constitutional transition Provisions Decree 15 of 1987. According to Oviasuyi, Idada and Isirojie (2010), several reasons have been given for the evolution and creation of local government in Nigeria. These range from political, social and economic reasons. They are to: bring governance nearer to the people, administrative convenience, ensure that resources are effectively mobilized and preserve heritage and common interest of the people.

Before 1976, several systems of local government existed in Nigeria, but the 1976 Local Government Reform evolved for the country a uniform system of local government. The 1976 Local Government Reforms conceptualized Local Government as third tiers of government operating within a common institutional framework with defined functions and responsibilities. The 1976 reform entrusted development responsibilities to the people at the grassroot level and also sought the effective delivery of services to the rural communities (Jonny, 2012; Eboh, 2010). In other words, local government was meant to be the "Government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers in defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial power to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas..." (FRN, 1976).

In the 1976 Local Government Reform, each of the Local Government Areas created, has its Headquarters. Local Government Headquarters refer to a sizeable politico-administratively defined territory with considerable population, whose functions are primarily political and administrative governance and the provision of services to their predominantly rural hinterland (Owusu, 2005; Mabogunje, 1980). Also, a town serving as Local Government Headquarters is described as locationally efficient when it allows clusters of services, facilities and infrastructure that cannot be economically located in small villages and hamlets to serve a widely dispersed population from an accessible central place (Gbarazia, 2013). In other words, LGAs Headquarters are

meant to serve as growth centres (lower than the state capitals) from where developmental influences will spread to the rural communities around it. They are also expected to function as mediator of productive and consumptive activities of the local regions and the outside world (FRN, 1981; Mabogunje, 1980).

The 1976 Local Government Reforms recognized the fact that the obligations of the local government is to get the government down to the grassroot and to give the rural dwellers a sense of belonging (Asisu, 2012). In realization of these, the Federal Government in its 1976 reform proposed the following as part of the local government reform. These are to:

- (i) Ensure that the socio-economic and administrative services located at the local government headquarters should be such that it can be effectively and efficiently utilized by the rural settlements in the service areas.
- (ii) Activate the participation of the people in the process of government. This contains a dual purpose of (a) Mobilizing the people politically in the basis of their natural communities and (b) beyond the democratic values, the active participation of people implies the ability of the people themselves to appropriate for their benefit the socio-economic, administrative, political and other vital services and influences usually originating or located at the headquarters.
- (iii) Enhance administrative efficiency. This implies the ability of the administrative institutions located at the headquarters to extend its services to effectively cover their service areas. (FRN, 1976, 1999).

A deep sense of belonging is the crucial variable in the locality principle. This implies that the rural communities should not be too far with respect to difficult distance and accessibility from their headquarters (Stefanie and Mckinlay, 2011). Monitoring accessibility is therefore important because it can help identify who has access to and therefore benefits from services and who might be disadvantaged (Defra, 2015). One way of measuring accessibility is the time taken to travel to particular service locations. It was this measure that was adopted in a study carried out in London on the core accessibility indicators by the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) (Defra) on accessibility to services in rural and urban areas. For each service location, they (Defra) calculated the percentage of target users within the resident area for the relevant service who have 'reasonable' access to the given service location by different modes of transport. In this study, 'Reasonable access' is considered a measure of accessibility which takes into account the sensitivity of users to the travel time for each services (Defra, 2015).

However, there have been several complains from the LGAs that the influence of the local government headquarters are not greatly felt in the rural hinterlands in terms of service delivery (Oviasuyi, Idada and Isiraojie, 2010). Consequently, the living conditions of the rural people have remained unaffected by development efforts. These situations have necessitated the interest to examine LGAs Headquarters first as regional development centres, and investigate whether these LGAs Headquarters are efficient in terms of their location in relation to their rural communities and in the provision, distribution and accessibility of the services to the inhabitants of the local government areas in Rivers State. To achieve this goal, the following specific objectives that were pursued among others are to:

- (i) Examine the extent to which location of Local Government Headquarters enhance efficiency in service delivery.
- (ii) Determine the accessibility of the administrative services located at the Local Government Headquarters in their service provision to their rural communities.

## **2. Conceptual clarification**

### **2.1. Location and efficiency**

Location of places and objects is the starting point of all geographic study including our personal movements and spatial actions. Location can be considered in two different senses absolute and relative. Absolute location is the identification of a place by some precise and accepted system of coordinates, while relative location is the position of a place in relation to that of other places or activities. (Fellmann, Getis, Getis and Malinowsky, 2005; Margo, 2015). It is the position of Local Government Headquarters in relation to their surrounding rural communities. Efficiency generally refers to how far we are getting the particular outcome for the given output with as much less wastage as possible. It is the ability to avoid wasting materials, energy, efforts, money and time in doing something or in producing a desired result. Local Government Headquarters is described as locationally efficient because it allows clusters of services, facilities and infrastructure that cannot be economically located in small villages and hamlets to serve a widely dispersed population from an accessible central place (Awosu, 2005, Gbarazia, 2013). Thus, efficient location involves to cluster activities and public services together into commercial centres to maximize accessibility and overall affordability (Litman, 2006).

### **2.2 The concept of a region**

The term "region" has a variety of meanings associated with it. A region according to Fellmann, Getis

and Getis (2000) refers to any area with distinctive and unifying physical and cultural characteristics that set off and makes it substantially different from surrounding areas. The local government structure can be taken to mean an administrative framework and a specific policy of spatial closure designed to foster the allocation and spread of public goods to the rural regions of the country. It is a functional region which possess a functional centre and a surrounding hinterland or community area severed by this centre (Ajaegbu, 1976).

### 2.3. *The concept of development*

Development as a concept implies change and improvement. Madu (2007) conceived development as the enhancement of individual's ability to shape their lives. Mabogunje (1980) conceived development as distributive justice, socio-economic transformation and for essentially a human progress. To Okowa (2009), development must be seen to transcend economic and physical realm in terms of individual and collective well-being: a safe environment, freedom from want, opportunity for personal growth and enrichment and access to goods and services.

### 2.4. *Accessibility as a concept*

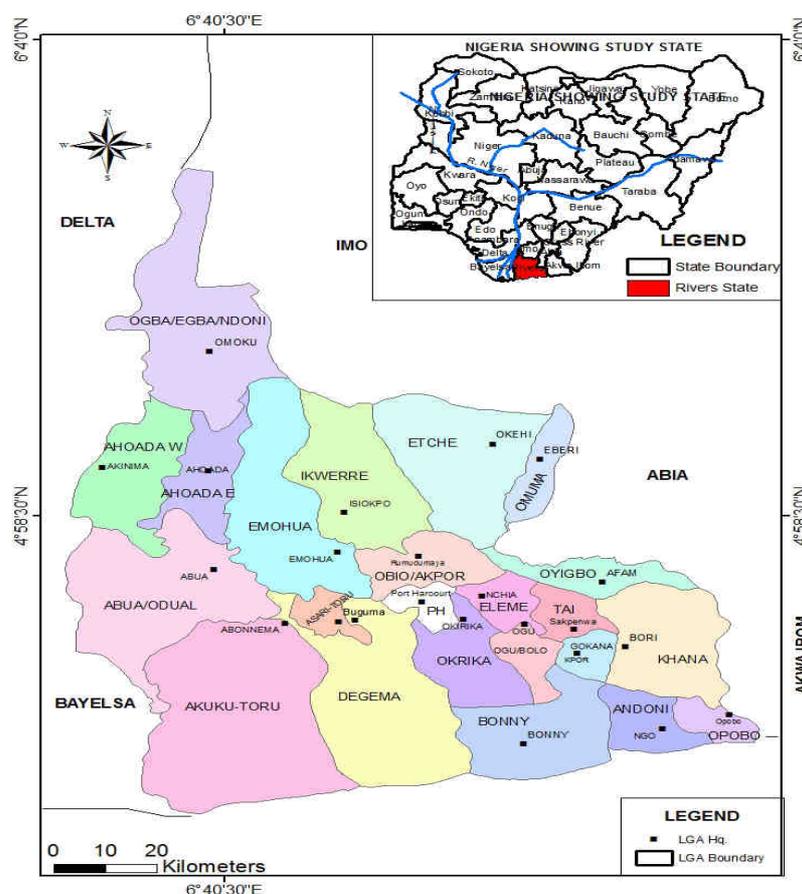
A basic law of geography tells us that in a spatial sense, everything is related to everything else but that relationship is stronger when items are nearer one another (Tobler, 1970). Also, the principle of least effort in human behaviour states that natural events reach their goals by the easiest or least costly route (Abler, Adams and Gold, 1977). Accessibility is thus related to the concept of minimum effort or movement minimization. It is the ability of people to reach the chosen destination at which they carry out a given activity (Mmom, 2004). It is a function of proximity of a place or population measured in distance to the destination of interest. The ability to get to a place involves money, time and other cost – incurred in getting to such a location. It involves the interrelationship between the population of rural areas, the facilities which they require and the transport link between this population and the facilities located at the local government headquarters. Accessibility is the means by which people can reach the desired activity sites such as those offering employment, shipping, medical care or recreation (Kadri and Hannes, 2010). In the context of this paper, someone could be said to have 'reasonable' access to the given service location by different modes of transport. Thus, 'Reasonable access' is a measure of accessibility which takes into account the sensitivity of users to the travel time for each (Defra, 2015).

## 3. **Materials and Methods**

### 3.1. *The study area*

The geographical area known as Rivers State is located between latitudes 4<sup>0</sup>45' North and 4<sup>0</sup>75' North of the Equator and Longitude 6<sup>0</sup>50' East and 6<sup>0</sup>83' East of the Prime Meridian. It is bounded on the South by the Atlantic ocean, to the North by Imo, Abia and Anambra States and to the East by Akwa Ibom State and to the West by Bayelsa and Delta State. (See fig. 1).

In terms of size and land area, the State occupies a total land area of 19,077km<sup>2</sup> (4,276.9sq miles) and is ranked 26<sup>th</sup> of the 36 States in Nigeria. Rivers State was created by General Yakubu Gowon administration through Decree No. 19 of 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967 with its capital city in Port Harcourt. The State is the nerve centre of the oil and gas and petro-chemical industries and oil related business in the country. The state is nicknamed the "Treasure Base of the Nation" not just because there are always treasures at the bottom of the rivers and many water bodies which criss-crossed the state (Oluwaseun, 2013), but a huge percentage of the revenue from Oil and Gas that is sustaining the economy of the nation is partly gotten from the state.



**Figure 1: Rivers State Showing Local Government Areas and Headquarters**

Source: Rivers State Ministry of Lands & Housing Map

### 3.2 Research methodology

The data for this study were sourced from primary and secondary sources. A total number of 242 communities which is 30% of the 791 communities in the 23 local government areas of the study area was randomly selected. Out of a total of 9,142 copies of questionnaire distributed in the 242 sampled settlements, 8,471 copies were retrieved representing 92.67%. The questionnaire was administered to heads of households or responsible adults (between the ages of 35 years and above) in the selected communities. The aim of this was to determine the extent to which the individuals are able to access for themselves the administrative services located at the headquarters. Another variable considered was the frequency of visits by individuals from the communities to the local government headquarters measured in the questionnaire to range from (i) daily visits to the headquarters (ii) twice weekly (iii) once weekly (iv) once forth-nightly (v) monthly and (vi) rarely visits

To examine the extent to which location of local government headquarters enhance efficiency in service delivery, both the linear measurement of the distance and transport costs between the LGAs Headquarters and the various communities and their coordinates were obtained. Geo-referenced maps, land size of the study area, GPS and Arc-GIS 10.1 software were also used. The access opportunity model was then used to analyze the data obtained. By applying the access opportunity model statistical techniques, the study adopts the United Nation Organization (UNO) Access standard of 16 Kilometers radius (Travelling distance) from the communities to the General Hospital as our frictional effect of distance (Omufonnwan, 2003; UNO, 2010; Gbarazia, 2013).

## 4. Results

The frequency of visit between the sampled communities and their local government headquarters is an indication of the level of interaction among them. Table 1 revealed the general pattern of movements between members of the communities in the various local government areas and the local government headquarters. The table revealed that two local government areas recorded very high level of interaction on the daily visits column. They are Eleme (57), and Gokana (50) out of a total respondents of 524 while the least is Oyigbo (7) followed by

Degema (10). On the once monthly column, we have Ogu-Bolo (216), followed by Oyigbo (212) out of a total 3,326 respondents.

**Table 1: Distribution of the frequency of interaction between each of the 23 local government headquarters in Rivers State and their rural communities.**

S/No.	Local Government Areas /size (sq.kms).	Frequency of visits to the local government headquarters						Total	
		Daily	Twice weekly	Once weekly	Once forth-nightly	Once monthly	Rarely		
1	Abua/Odual	704	26	35	42	54	142	67	366
2	Ahoada East	341	16	35	39	58	131	52	331
3	Ahoada West	403	21	27	29	36	169	81	363
4	Akukutoru	1443	17	32	33	51	150	65	348
5	Andoni	233	34	54	47	64	118	77	384
6	Asaritoru	113	28	36	60	72	123	54	373
7	Bonny	642	24	41	44	55	130	74	368
8	Degema	1,011	10	14	16	33	190	124	387
9	Eleme	138	57	68	70	94	51	20	360
10	Emuoha	831	27	36	43	69	121	60	356
11	Etche	805	11	27	32	50	150	85	355
12	Gokana	126	50	65	71	85	77	32	380
13	Ikwerre	655	25	46	49	72	150	45	387
14	Khana	560	14	30	32	48	171	84	377
15	Obio/Akpor	260	12	26	34	61	137	76	346
16	Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	960	13	16	18	28	162	84	321
17	Ogu-Bolo	89	8	15	16	20	216	104	379
18	Okrika	222	43	49	52	75	108	49	376
19	Omuma	170	17	36	44	73	145	56	371
20	Opobo/Nkoro	130	15	20	22	35	197	10	390
21	Oyigbo	148	7	16	21	32	212	101	389
22	Port Harcourt	109	22	30	52	66	139	75	384
23	Tai	159	27	35	45	57	137	79	380
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19,077</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>1,288</b>	<b>3,136</b>	<b>1,666</b>	<b>8,471</b>

**Source: Researcher's field work, 2015.**

Table 2 shows the percentage distribution of the frequency of interaction of members of the communities with their local government headquarters. On percentage bases, it shows that the nearer the settlements to their local government headquarters, the higher their level of interaction with their local government headquarters on the daily visit column and the farther away the settlements, the higher the level of interaction on the monthly and rarely visits columns.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Frequency of Functional Interaction in the 23 Local Government Headquarters in Rivers State and their Rural Communities**

s/n	Local Government Area	Headquarters	Daily	Twice weekly	Once weekly	Once fortnightly	Once monthly	Rarely
1	Abua/Odualk	Abua	7.10	9.56	11.48	14.75	38.80	18.31
2	Ahoada East	Ahoada	4.83	10.57	11.78	17.52	39.58	15.71
3	Ahoada West	Akinima	5.79	7.44	7.99	9.92	46.56	22.31
4	Akukutoru	Abonnema	4.89	9.20	9.48	14.66	43.10	18.68
5	Andoni	Ngo	8.85	14.06	12.24	16.67	30.73	20.05
6	Asaritoru	Buguma	7.51	9.65	16.09	19.30	48.49	14.48
7	Bonay	Bonny	6.52	11.96	11.96	14.95	35.33	20.10
8	Degema	Degema	2.58	3.62	4.13	8.53	49.10	32.04
9	Eleme	Nchia	15.83	18.89	19.44	26.11	14.17	2.78
10	Emuoha	Emuoha	7.58	10.11	12.08	19.38	33.19	16.85
11	Etche	Okehi	3.10	7.61	9.01	14.08	42.25	23.94
12	Gokana	Kpor	13.16	17.11	18.68	22.37	20.26	8.42
13	Ikwerre	Isiokpo	6.46	11.89	12.66	18.60	38.76	11.63
14	Khana	Bori	3.71	7.96	8.49	13.00	45.36	22.28
15	Obio/Akpor	Rumuodomaya	3.47	7.51	9.83	17.63	39.60	21.97
16	Ogba/ Egbeme/ Ndoni	Omuoku	4.05	4.94	5.61	8.72	50.47	26.17
17	Ogu-Bolo	Ogu	2.51	4.70	5.02	6.27	67.71	32.60
18	Okrika	Okrika	11.44	13.03	13.83	19.95	28.72	13.03
19	Omuma	Eberi-Omuma	4.58	9.70	11.86	19.68	30.08	15.09
20	Opobo/Nkoro	Opobo	3.85	5.13	5.64	8.97	50.51	25.90
21	Oyigbo	Afam	1.80	4.11	5.40	8.23	54.50	25.86
22	Port Harcourt	Port Harcourt	5.73	7.81	13.54	17.19	36.20	19.53
23	Tai	Sakpenwa	7.11	9.21	11.84	15.00	36.05	20.79
	Entire State		6.19	9.31	10.75	15.20	39.26	19.28

**Source: Researcher's field work, 2015**

The result in table 2 further shows that, while for instance, Eleme LGA recorded 15.84% out of a total respondents on the daily visit rolls and 14.17% on the once monthly rolls, Oyigbo LGA records 1.80% on the daily visit rolls and 54.50% on the once monthly rolls. Respondents of the settlements nearer to the local government headquarters gave reasons for their high level of interaction to include nearness, good roads and low transport costs, while communities farther away said that their reasons are due to long distance of their communities from their headquarters, poor terrain, bad roads and high transport cost. On a general trend, the tables revealed that the closer the settlements to their local government headquarters, the higher their level of interaction and the farther away the settlements from their local government headquarters, the lower the level of interactions.

Table 3 shows the level of accessibility to administrative services located in the local government headquarters by the rural communities. The access opportunity model statistical techniques was used to test the level of accessibility of the services located at the headquarters. The United Nations (UNO) access standard of 16kilometers radius (travelling distance) from the communities to the General Hospital (located at the headquarters) is adopted as our frictional effect of distance.

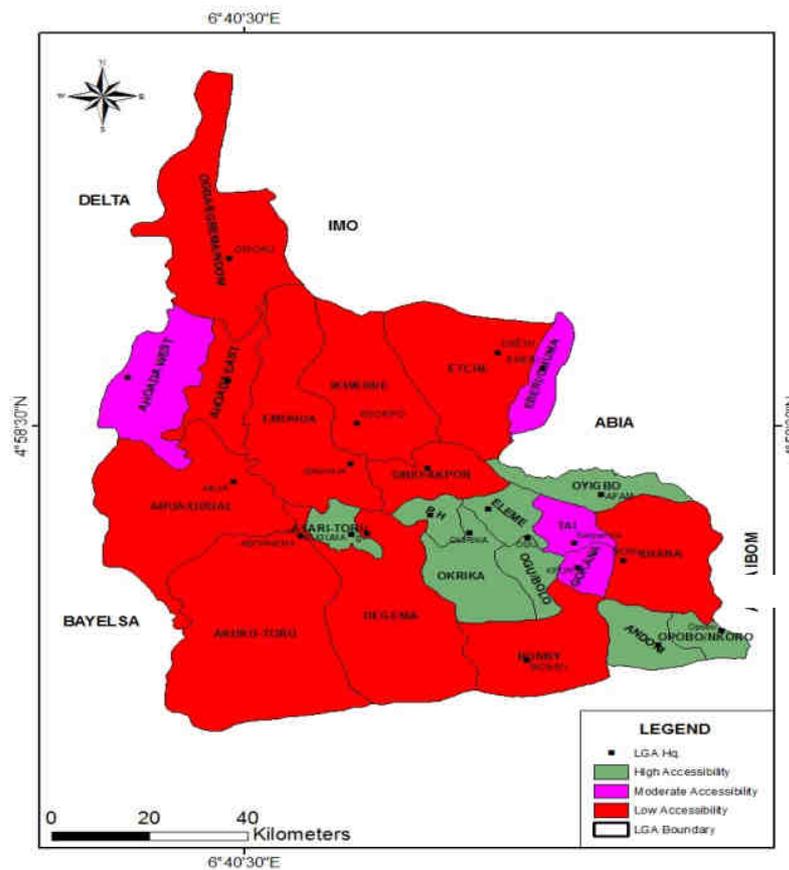
**Table 3: Level of accessibility to administrative services located in the local government headquarters by the rural communities.**

S/N	LGA	Size (KM <sup>2</sup> )	mean distance to Headquarters (kms)	Mean transport cost to LGA Headquarters (₦)	Average Opportunity index where k =16km.
1	Abua/Odual	703	13.05	600.00	18.77
2	Ahoada East	341	10.82	340.00	16.05
3	Ahoada West	403	11.19	670.00	9.62
4	Akukutoru	1443	25.65	780.00	29.60
5	Andoni	233	9.75	760.00	4.69
6	Asaritoru	113	5.80	470.00	3.85
7	Bonny	642	9.70	560.00	18.34
8	Degema	1,011	25.24	480.00	33.70
9	Eleme	138	6.46	280.00	7.89
10	Emuoha	831	12.19	250.00	53.18
11	Etche	805	13.43	400.00	32.20
12	Gokana	126	4.11	200.00	10.08
13	Ikwerre	655	8.56	270.00	38.81
14	Khana	560	11.98	380.00	23.58
15	Obio/Akpor	260	11.44	220.00	18.91
16	Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	960	10.37	300.00	51.20
17	Ogu-Bolo	89	7.85	640.00	2.23
18	Okrika	222	12.98	730.00	4.82
19	Omuma	170	7.91	250.00	10.88
20	Opobo/Nkoro	130	6.44	470.00	4.43
21	Oyigbo	148	10.08	330.00	7.18
22	Port Harcourt	109	3.64	220.00	7.93
23	Tai	159	5.82	240.00	10.60
	<b>The entire state</b>	<b>19077</b>	<b>12.28</b>	<b>430.00</b>	<b>18.25</b>

Source: Researcher's field work, 2015

By applying the access opportunity model, table 3 shows that the level of accessibility varies from 2.23 in Ogu-Bolo local government area to 53.18 in Emuoha local government area. The mean level of accessibility for the entire state is 18.25. From the table, 10 local government areas out of the 23 local government areas are above the mean while 13 are below the mean level since the number of local government areas above the mean of 18.25 is lesser than the LGAs below the mean, we therefore accept the null hypotheses that the administrative institutions located in the local government headquarters are not accessible to their rural communities.

To achieve a better classification of the local government areas, the 23 local government areas were categorized into high accessibility, moderate accessibility and low accessibility. The United Nations access standard of 16 kilometers radius (travelling distance) from the community to the General Hospital is used for the classification. Based on this, Scores from 0 – 7.99km are categorized as high accessibility, 8.00-15.99km as moderate accessibility and 16kms and above as low accessibility. Based on this categorization, eight (8) local government areas are highly accessible in Rivers State. They are Eleme, Asaritoru, Andoni, Ogu-Bolo, Okrika, Opobo/Nkoro and Oyigbo. Four (4) local government areas are moderately accessible. They are Ahoada West, Gokana and Omuma LGAs, while eleven (11) are of low accessibility. They include Abua/Odual, Ahoada East, Akukutoru, Bonny, Degema and others. A graphical representation of the study area showing high, moderate and low accessibility pattern is shown in figure 2 below.



**Fig. 2: Levels of accessibility of the communities in Rivers State to their LGAs Headquarters**

Source: Researcher's field work, 2015

### 5. Discussion of findings

The main obligations of the 1976 local government reform is to get the government down to the grassroots and to give the rural dwellers a sense of belonging (Asisu, 2012). In realization of this, the federal government proposed that the socio-economic and administrative services located in the local government headquarters should be such that it can be effectively and efficiently utilized by the rural dwellers in the service area. It is also expected to activate the participation of people in the process of government. A deep sense of belonging is the crucial variable in the locality principle. This implies that communities should not be too far with respect to difficult distance and accessibility from the headquarters. To enhance functional interaction and to achieve efficient and effective service delivery, local government headquarters were expected to be efficiently located.

The findings revealed that a poor level of accessibility exists between the local government headquarters and most parts of its adjoining settlements. Respondents on the difficulties their communities are encountering in their effort to participate more fully with their local government headquarters give their reasons as high transport cost, long distance, poor terrain, and difficult accessibility like bad roads, and rivers / sea (for riverine communities). Interaction between the local government headquarters and its rural communities decreases in intensity and frequency as distance between them increases. This situation is related to the principle of least effort or movement minimization and a basic law in geography which states that in a spatial sense, everything is related to everything else, but that relationship is stronger when items are nearer one another (Abler, Adams and Gold, 1977; Tobler, 1970).

It is further established from the findings that, using the access opportunity model statistical technique in analyzing the level of accessibility to administrative services located in the headquarters by the rural communities, it revealed variations in the accessibility to administrative services in the state with accessibility level of 18.25 which is less than 16.00 UNO access radius (UNO, 2010). Most of the local government areas in the study area are too large to make their impact felt in most of the settlements in terms of promoting easy accessibility between the headquarters and its hinterland. It can rightly be said that its large size does not encourage meaningful citizens participation and benefiting from available services meant to be easily accessed

by other communities in such LGAs.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the aims of creating a standardized, autonomous and viable local government is to “bring governance closer to the people”. The local government headquarters by being the rallying point is an area of concentration of social and economic benefits and the attraction of infrastructure. They are therefore, meant to serve as growth centres (lower than the state capitals), from where developmental influences will spread to the rural communities around them. But our findings revealed that accessibility affects the rate of utilization of administrative services located in the local government headquarters thereby making the headquarters not to be locationally efficient in terms of their relationship with their rural communities and in their distribution and accessibility of the services.

Based on the findings of the study, we make the following recommendations that:

- The LGAs headquarters should be located in centrally and as accessible centres to the rural communities. Since most of the communities are very distant from their headquarters and also of low accessibility to their headquarters,
- that the distance of the headquarters to the rural communities in each local government area should be within convenient access radius and affordable transport cost preferably within 16 kilometers travelling distance as recommended by the United Nations Organizations (UNO).
- There should be improvement of the rural roads and rural access. The systems of road with better connectivity should be carefully planned to effectively integrate the rural communities with the local government headquarters on one hand, and each region with all others in the national system.
- To make the impacts of the local government headquarters to be felt by the rural settlements and to encourage meaningful identity and participation, local government boundaries should be re-organized and the various boundaries should be based on interaction analysis and the propensity for services located at the local governments to spread to their hinterlands.
- Lastly, policy developments in the local government headquarters should be properly evaluated to enhance performance and accountability. Lastly, there should be properly monitoring of the projects carried out in the local government areas.

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