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RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CONCEPT, APPROACHES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

There is an overwhelming need to accord rural development a priority on the 'must-do-list' of government at different levels if the rural communities must contribute meaningfully to the social, cultural and economic development of Nigeria. A bulk of the Nigerian wealth is derived from agriculture, and oil which lie in abundant quantity in rural communities. Current estimates put the rural population at over 80% of the entire population of almost 140 million people. So far, not much in terms of infrastructural development has been done to bring this bulk of concentration of both human and material resources to contribute optimally to national economy. The neglect has resulted to the mass exodus of rural dwellers and in turn has made the rural area qualitatively and quantitatively depopulated, and progressively less attractive for socio-economic investment. There is the need to strengthen and encourage cooperative and community based initiatives in the formulation and management of rural development programmes. Also, cooperative philosophy should be inculcated in rural dwellers as its grassroot appeals make it an ideal means of promoting sustainable rural development.

Keywords *Rural development, development, programmes, grass root*

Introduction

In terms of level of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities, standard of living and general livability, the gap between the urban and rural areas in Nigeria is very wide. This leads to what is appropriately characterized as the rural urban dichotomy. The rural areas are usually grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructure are concerned. As a result of the relative underdevelopment of the rural areas when compared with the urban centres, rural areas are usually zones of high propensity for out-migration.

The challenges and prospects of rural development in Nigeria have been of great concern to the different tiers of government due to the rate of rural-urban migration. Onibokun (1987) sees rural development to be faced with the paradox that the production oriented rural economy relies heavily on non-productive people who are ill-equipped with outdated tools, technical information, scientific and cultural training and whose traditional roles and access to resources pose problems for their effective incorporation into modern economic systems, whereas the consumption oriented urban economy is flooded with male (people) many of who are either unemployed or unemployable, or marginally employed or underemployed in the urban centres where they choose to live. As a result of this mass exodus, the rural areas have become qualitatively depopulated and are progressively less attractive for social and economic investments while the urban areas are becoming physically congested, socially unhealthy and generally uneconomic to maintain.

The various policies of the Nigerian government on rural development are to improve the living condition in the rural areas with a view to curbing the streaming rural-urban migration. These policies show the zeal of different governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) which has led to the proliferation of development agencies. Despite the countless numbers of rural development policies introduced at different times by successive governments coupled with the huge financial and material resources employed, little or nothing is felt at the rural level as each

policy has often died with the government that initiated it before it starts to yield dividends for the rural dwellers. Onuorah (2006) support this claim when he states that not minding the lofty objectives (policies and government initiatives), such efforts never endured beyond the government that initiated the schemes.

It is pertinent to note that rural development plays an important role in the Nigerian economic development both at the micro and macro level. Agriculture and oil which lie in large reserves below the Niger-Delta, which is dominated by rural communities, propel the Nigerian economy. Regrettably, oil and agriculture wealth which is derived from the remotest parts of the rural areas and those of the Niger-Delta has been used by successive governments to finance major investment in the country's infrastructure to the detriment and perhaps, underdevelopment of the rural area and its dwellers. Stock (2005) laments that as a result of the neglect of agriculture and the rural area, Nigeria now imports farm products to feed its (her) people with untold hardship on the rural people. He continues that Nigeria remains one of the world's poorest countries in terms of per capita income and rural development. Umebali and Akuibilo (2006) note that oil exploration and agricultural activities are carried out in rural areas and both yield the highest revenue for the nation. Interestingly, as revealed by Umebali (2004), literature shows that greater percentage of the total population live in rural areas and most of them are engaged in agriculture. If we must make the rural areas attractive to live, then meaningful effort geared towards sustainable rural development must be aggressively and vigorously pursued as this will alter the certainty of poor quality of life in the rural areas which Adalemo (1987) sees as the main phobia that has often pushed migrants to the perceived opportunities in the urban centres.

Again, there is this erroneous misconception by successive governments that rural development is synonymous with agricultural development only. Efforts by such governments to

pump money into agricultural development did not yield the meaningful change desired hence efforts should be made to include provision of modern infrastructure, primary health care, food and shelter, employment opportunities, recreational facilities, affordable and compulsory primary and secondary education, loans and other incentives, to be part of rural development for the benefits of rural dwellers. It is against this background that this paper attempts to holistically examine the concept, approaches, challenges and prospects of rural development in Nigeria.

Concept

The concept of rural development in Nigeria lacks a unified definition as different scholars tend to view it from varying perspective. Some scholars look at rural development from the aspect of education/training like Haddad (1990), and Hinzen (2000). Obinne (1991) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potential through education and share in decision and action which affect their lives. He views efforts to increase rural output and create employment opportunities and root out fundamental (or extreme) cases of poverty, diseases and ignorance. Others like Olayide, Ogunfowora, Essang and Idachaba (1981) view rural development as means for the provision of basic amenities, infrastructure, improved agriculture productivity and extension services and employment generation for rural dwellers.

An understanding of the concept of development will give a clearer picture of rural development. Hornby (2000) defines development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc; the process of producing or creating something new. This definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes. Umebali (2006) sees the changes to be multi-dimensional involving changes in structures, attitude and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth; the reduction of inequality

and eradication of absolute poverty. He asserts that development involves economic growth component, equality or social justice component, and socio-economic transformational component which are all on a self sustaining basis. Viewing the concept differently, Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) but also in quantitative terms. He opines that development must be seen as actually and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society, and culture.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that rural development is not a one-off thing or an immediate and snap phenomenon. Rather, it is a gradual and progressive process towards perfection having a set standard in mind. Rural development has variously been defined. Olayide et al (1981) see rural development as a process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increase in rural resources productivity with the central objective of enhancing rural income and creating employment opportunity in rural communities for rural dwellers to remain in the area. It is also an integrated approach to food production, provision of physical, social and institutional infrastructures with an ultimate goal of bringing about good healthcare delivery system, affordable and quality education, improved and sustainable agriculture etc. As it is today, rural development need to be given priority attention. Several reasons for such urgency include high and unacceptable rate of poverty, poor access to social and economic infrastructure and services such as access to safe drinking water supply and sanitation, higher rate of health indicator such as infant and maternal mortality rate, malnutrition and disease prevalence, and lower enrolment of children in school.

Obot (1987) suggests that rural development achievement could be measured in the areas of roads, water supply, housing, electricity, building of model communities, access to quality education, improved health care delivery and availability of food and agricultural products for the

rural settlers. The objective of the National Policy on Rural Development as outlined by Ogbazi (1992) encapsulates an ideal situation of an acceptable level of development in the rural area. These objectives can be paraphrased to include:

- promotion of the social, cultural, educational and economic well being of the rural population,
- promotion of sustained and orderly development of the vast resources in the rural areas for the benefit of the rural people,
- increase in and diversification of job opportunities and improvement of income in the rural areas,
- mobilization of the rural population for self-help and self-sustaining programme of development, and
- up-lifting of the technological based industries in the rural area.

Adelemo (1987) sees the concept of rural development to include resettling displaced communities or adopting new types of housing unit. He continues that rural development should include alongside land-use development, economic factors such as land carrying capacity for each area as it relates to farm land, irrigation, improved farming method and finance. From the above, it is obvious that scholars tilt the concept of rural development toward their area of specialization and perhaps, interest hence the assertion that the concept lacks a unified definition.

However, if the opinion of Simon (2004) about development is worth anything, it means there is the possibility for the level of rural development to be reversible as poverty levels, life expectancy and educational attainment etc. can all decline as a result of inappropriate policies, corruption and bad governance, natural disaster or human-induced disasters, war and civil conflicts in the rural area.

Approaches

Overtime, successive governments have embarked on several programmes targeted at rural development. Other approaches have been by NGOs, cooperatives, individuals through private initiatives, corporate bodies as well as International Organizations. The various programmes initiated and mostly targeted at the rural sector by government include the following:

- National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)
- River-Basin Development Authority (RBDA)
- Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)
- The Green Revolution (GR)
- Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)
- Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)
- Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BETTER LIFE)
- National Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC)
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
- National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)
- National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)
- National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF)
- Rural Banking Scheme (RBS)
- Family Support Programme (FSP)
- Universal Basic Education (UBE)
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)

A cursory look at the introduction, establishment, implementation and the objectives of majority of the above programmes will reveal that they are mainly targeted at rural development in an attempt to better the lives of rural dwellers, stimulate and enhance economic growth, as well as get the rural sector to contribute meaningfully to the national economic and social development. These programmes have direct or indirect impact on rural development and can broadly be grouped into specific and multi-specific programmes. The specific programmes are those directed mainly at agriculture, health, education, housing, transport, infrastructure, finance and manufacturing. Such programmes were initiated in the early 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, most of the multi-specific programmes were put in place in the early 1990s and thereafter to handle general projects, such as NDE, DFRRI, Better Life, Family support etc.

Many of the specific programmes had some positive effects on rural development although Obadan (2002) says the target population for some of them was not specified explicitly to be poor people (rural dwellers). Examples of such as the RBDAs, ACGS, RBS, etc., which were designed to take care of such objectives as employment generation, enhancing of agricultural output and income, and streamlining rural-urban migration, which no doubt impair rural development. Other development programmes such as OFN, Green Revolution, Free and compulsory primary education, low cost housing schemes etc. impacts positively on the rural dwellers but most of them could not be sustained due to lack of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of the intended beneficiaries of the programmes hence according to Chiloikwu (2006), most of them died with the government that initiated them.

Challenges

Rural development is faced with challenges which have made the effect of government's efforts at different levels, NGOs, private initiatives and international involvement not felt by the intended beneficiaries. Umebali and Akubילו (2006) list some of them to include:

- Vicious cycle of poverty;
- Poor infrastructure;
- High population density,
- High level of illiteracy
- Low social interaction and local politics and
- Rural-urban migration

A major challenge is that the hypothetical rural dweller who is the thermometer through which one determines the impact of rural development in the words of Chinsman (1997) continues to give negative readings as he is seen to be ravaged by an excruciating poverty, ignorance and disease. A lot of rigours, bottlenecks and unnecessary bureaucracy are often attached to rural development process. This is evident in the history of most of the rural development programmes which are often saddled with disappointments.

Another challenge is the issue of proliferation of development programmes. Some are so superficially implemented that the average targeted population (rural dwellers) doubt the sincerity of the initiators. Such proliferation can easily be noticed from the many numbers of such that died with successive government that initiated them. The problem of implementation is another glaring challenge. Obot (1989) justified this claim when he writes that the development policies geared towards the improvement of the rural dwellers remained almost a house-hold word without corresponding success especially at the implementation states. To this end, some of them are haphazardly implemented as a result of poor supervision. Perhaps, this is why water taps abound in

so many rural communities but without water since their installation. Also, most of the low cost housing estate built by some state government during the 2nd republic are yet to be completed and handed over to the intended beneficiaries 25 years after. This may also be the reason why the Community and People's Banks system failed.

The issue of funding is also a big challenge. Some of the rural development programmes are so bogus without a clearly defined source of funding. The cases of the Housing for All, UBE etc. are clear examples. They are often initiated before sourcing for funds from philanthropists and international donors which may never come. Other challenges include armed conflicts ranging from ethnic, religious and communal issues which do not provide enabling environment for the implementation of sustainable development programmes in such areas. For instance, a situation where foreigners and government workers in some coastal rural areas are target of kidnappers demanding ransom is obviously not favourable or conducive for developmental work.

Corruption poses a very big threat to rural development. There is lack of integrity, accountability and transparency on the part of people who are supposed to implement developmental projects in the rural areas. Nwakoby (2007) laments that public funds (made for rural projects) are stashed away in bank vaults in Europe and America, while an overwhelming proportion of the population lives in abject poverty.

Prospects

Prospect is derived from the Latin word '*prospectus*' meaning view, look forward or look at. It refers to the possibility of something (desirable) happening soon; a chance or the likelihood that same thing will happen in the near future. It is a mental vision of something that is expected to happen soon; a direction in which something or an endeavour faces (Encarta 2005). The prospect of rural development shall be analyzed in line with the above definition.

A mental view of the efforts of government at different levels towards rural development overtime have been heartwarming save for poor implementation at different stages and the monumental corruption that has defiled all known creative maneuvers. The rural development direction and terrain is crowded with inconsistencies and distortions. Little wonder Asolo (2000) compares Nigeria development experience to that of an Aids patient who because of intrinsic pathological abnormality in the body system finds it difficult to respond to all medical entreaties. After about 3 decades of introduction of most rural development programmes, the scorecard is nothing to write home about. The rural area still lack structural foundation which development can be sustained.

The above scenario notwithstanding, the zeal of successive government in Nigeria to develop rural areas is evidenced by the proliferation of development agencies which often make use of NGOs, cooperatives and volunteers to introduce and implement development projects. The rural dwellers can be encouraged to form cooperatives alongside their various interests. Through such joint efforts and participation, rural development can be stimulated and sustained. Government perception of rural cooperatives has been warm hence it has always involved them in most rural development programs. Sustained rural development requires policies that will stimulate rural growth and employment and in so doing, provide income for rural dwellers and social welfare for people who cannot benefit directly from rising income.

Form the perspective of looking forward to, Obadan (2002) sees rural development in the areas of human capital development and social services. The most permanent and deepest way to ensure ideal development in the rural area is to invest in human beings which policies like NDE, NAPEP, UBE, LEEDS, etc are meant to do. Again, these programmes are relatively successful at

the rural level, although with some reservations, if they will not go the way others before them went.

Also, rural development has brought about improved access to resources, increase and diversity of agriculture, food security, promotion of non-farm activities, employment creation, construction and maintenance of new roads, rural electrification and provision of transformers, and water supply. Other noticeable near improvements are in the areas of granting of micro-credit and soft loans for rural dwellers through the defunct People's Bank and Community Banks which later transmuted to Micro-Finance Banks, affordable and compulsory education at the primary level, and improved rural cooperatives and community participation. Recently, some states bankrolled enrolment for the Junior and Senior Secondary School Certificate examinations for their students while effort is being intensified to ensuring proper implementation of the UBE programme. Some states have at different times provided, through their ADPs and Directorates of Rural Agriculture, in cooperation with local cooperative and extension officers, improved seedlings and fertilizers for rural communities which have relatively improved the quality of life of people in the rural areas.

Conclusion

Sustainable development, according to Odigbo and Adediran (2004) is human focused, long-term and enduring, and not a quick fix. Government has a chief role of building and financing an enduring political, social, cultural and environmental structure on which rural development can thrive, through the encouragement and recognition of the roles of cooperatives, NGOs, and private initiatives as their grass root appeals promote sustainable rural development. This paper strongly recommends the need for government to concentrate its efforts to the encouragement of private initiatives, teaching and propagation of cooperative philosophy and peaceful coexistence to the rural

dwellers, as such education forms the bedrock for rural development. By this, the rural dwellers who are the principal target of rural development will be taught 'how to fish instead of being given fish' through guided efforts, to initiate, participate and executive desirable projects in their communities.

Recommendations

Rural development is all encompassing and so, cannot be taken piece-meal (Adalemo, 1978). A relegation of an integral part (housing, education, infrastructure, healthcare delivery, agriculture and food security, cooperatives, employment and optimal utilization of the potentials of the rural dwellers, etc.) may easily rubbish and erase the seeming gains of others. In order to ensure improved and sustainable rural development, the following salient points need to be religiously pursued and implemented by government and stakeholders:

- Establishing a policy framework that maximizes the incomes of the working rural dwellers through policies to promote rural self-employment and reliability.
- encouraging and strengthening cooperative and community based initiatives in the formulation and management of rural development programmes, in liaison with available NGOs and the three tiers of government to avoid duplication of efforts, while fostering effective coordination; this includes increased access to micro-credit facilities through the establishment of more cooperative, community and micro-finance banks in the rural areas,
- effective human capital development in the form of skills development, provision of healthcare delivery, and other social and educational services,
- providing additional and maintenance of existing infrastructural facilities as earlier listed above,

- encouraging the principle of continuity whereby successive governments adopt the viable rural development programmes initiated by their predecessors,
- carrying out periodic surveys, the rural dwellers' development priority in order to ensure that they are carried along in efforts to better their lives; and
- tackling and curbing crime, violence and youth restiveness, which according to Osaloye (2008) could be through better policing and creation of recreational facilities in the rural areas.

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