

# An Integrated Approach to Rural Development in Nigeria

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#### **Abstract**

Rural development practice in Nigeria has spanned over 10 decades from pre-independence to the current decade. This paper attempts a time-series review on rural development practice in Nigeria to see what has changed over a fairly long period of time. Various development plan periods have been examined in relation to rural development practice. The review shows that the greater part of public efforts on rural development was subsumed under agricultural development which was more exploitative to the rural resources and residents than improve their quality of life. Although relatively improved understanding of rural development manifested among policy makers beginning in the late 1980s, the paper argues that such understanding surprisingly did not translate into corresponding improvement in rural development practice because of several factors including weak institutional arrangements, corruption and absence of coordinated practice among competing agencies.

It is the view of this paper that in order to facilitate agricultural development, government should adopt an integrated rural development approach which is a multi-dimensional strategy for improving the quality of the life of the rural people. It concludes that rural development is imperative for improved of agricultural growth and development in Africa.

Keywords: Development, Rural area, Nigeria, Developing Economy, Agriculture.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary events around the world have shown increasing concerns for the 75 percent or more people inhabiting the rural areas, which is also the case in Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria's internal disparity between rural and urban areas still remains very high even after several national and regional development efforts (Onokerhoraye, 1978; Udeh, 1989; Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). Measured in terms of quality of living, social opportunities, physical facilities, human development and standard of living, the overall score for rural areas still stands very low in comparison with its urban counterparts.

Rural population in Nigeria have varied over the years in response to rapid urban expansion and accompanying rural-urban migration. Historically, what is known as Nigeria today was dominantly a rural settlement? Although some semblance of city-type settlements existed in parts of the Muslim North and Yoruba, actual urban settlement evolved along the coast in response to commercial trades.

This explains the emergence of such coastal port towns as Lagos, Port Harcourt and Calabar. With very poor access to physical and social infrastructures, there was no systematic effort at recording the actual population of the rural areas beyond estimation. Although the colonial government did some documentation of the Nigerian population, post-independence effort at estimating the number of people residing in the rural areas started in 1963. The 1963 Census recorded 80.7% of the national population residing in the rural areas. This proportion dropped to 70.13% in 1985 and was estimated to further drop to 69% by 1990s (Muoghalu, 1992). In 2005, it was estimated that 53% of the Nigerian populace resided in the rural areas (World Development Reports, 2005) and in 2011; the World Bank reports recorded 51.6% of Nigeria's rural population. These statistics are, however, countered by some recent reports projecting the rural population above 70% of the Nigerian population (see Presidential Report, 1999; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010).

Rural areas in Nigeria have generally been associated with agriculture which still depends on manual and local efforts. The implication is that the rural areas depend on agricultural sector for income, employments and other livelihoods opportunities. Despite its contribution to the national economy and GDP, rural areas in Nigeria remain very poor and deeply neglected (IFAD, 2011). Investments in physical, social and economic infrastructures have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centers, while the highest number of the populace lacks access to safe drinking water. In the Nigerian context, the rural areas are associated with poverty and, as such, not



attractive to live.

The aim of this paper is to attempt a systematic review of rural development practice in Nigeria specifically focusing on it being an integral part of any nation. The rural areas cannot just be overlooked because of its important in the economy; it is in the rural areas that raw materials are being produced for further production of finished goods, for final consumption e t c by those in both the rural and urban areas. This study therefore aims to identify the important of rural development, and its effect on the economy at large since the background of any economy to be great depends on the agricultural sector which is the major occupation of those who resident in rural areas in Nigeria.

## 2.0 OVERVIEW & DISCUSSION

Semantically, the term "rural" is an adjective that precedes a noun; Nouns such as a place, a person or a thing. Therefore such nouns should be society, community, economy, dwellers, people, areas, environment etc. it is strictly compared to the antonym, urban. Rural and urban are two broad categorization of a society. Such as urban societies; rural societies, urban dwellers; rural dwellers, urban communities; rural communities, etc.

The term "development" is an adverb that gives more information about a thing, place, person an even an adjective. Thus, the adverb (development) gives more information about the adjective (rural). Essentially therefore, rural development as a concept is colloquially used in development literature as it is simply a combination of adverb and adjective- both, seeking to describe and give more information about a noun (community, area, people, dwellers, environment, society, etc). Our choice of the concept of rural-community development is to capture the real meaning of the entire concepts.

Therefore, we seek to assert that most; if not all definitions of community development is actually talking about "rural-community development". This is premised on the assumption that development does not occur in a vacuum but in a place. That place (community) is the noun that the adjective (rural) seeks to describe and the adverb (development) gives more information about.

To conceptualize the concept of rural-community development, the characteristics of a rural area will suffice alongside variety of definitions of community development from renowned scholars and institutions, which will be compared with the various definitions of the misconstrued concept of rural development. Outlining the features of a rural area, Ekekpe and Ekpe (2009) averred whether you are in the northern part of the country or in the southern part, you will be struck by the very level of abject poverty; mass illiteracy; unsanitized environment; lack of clean water supply; lack of access roads; unavailability of health care facilities; improper and inadequate housing; poor lighting particular at night; large family sizes; small income; defeatist/fatalist attitude; small land parcel ownership; out-mode ineffective farming implement etc. these conditions discourage the educated young persons from remaining in the rural areas. In line with the above features of rural development, scholars have defined rural development variedly. For instance, Obinne (1991) perceived it as involving creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potential through education which affects their lives. Others like Olayide, Ogunfowora, Essang and Idachaba (1981) view it as means for the provision of basic amenities, infrastructure, improved agriculture productivity and extension services and employment generation for rural dwellers.

Therefore its conceptualization suffices as Hornby (2000), defines development as the gradual growth of decision and action which affect their lives. Hence, this definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes, changes, which Umebali, (2006) saw as 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. Viewing the concept differently, Simon (2004) sees it as an improvement in quality of life, not just in material standard of living but in both quantitative terms.

Rural Development therefore is 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. According to Van der Ploeg et al. (2000), rural development is reconstructing the eroded economic base of both the rural economy and the farm enterprise. Rural development ensures the modernization of the rural society and the transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. Rural development may also be seen as an ideology and a practice. It may also be the bringing of the countryside into an active state, as well as the transformation of the inferior nature of the country side into something more superior in terms of activities.

According to the World Bank (1975) rural development must be clearly designed to increase production. It recognizes that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services, such as health and education, not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy.

Since political independence in 1960, various Nigeria governments have adopted various strategies and methods at developing the rural areas of the country. However, Ikotun (2002) noted that in spite of pious official pronouncements, and declaration of intentions as contained in the development plans, at the end of each plan



period rural life remained unchanged. Each plan came with new promises and raised hopes that were never fulfilled. The First National Development Plan, 1962-1968 for example had agriculture as its priority which is considered to be synonymous with rural development, but capital budget and expenditure on agriculture during the plan period was only 42 percent. The Second Development Plan, 1970-1974 had as its main thrust, the attainment of a just and egalitarian society and claimed to place high premium on reduction of inequality among social groups and between urban and rural areas, not withstanding, this aspect of the plan was partially executed. It is significant to note that it was only during the Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980 that attempts were made to engage in what has been referred to as "integrated rural development" in Nigeria. This refers to the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPS) that were sponsored by the World Bank.

It is to be noted that despite the active involvement of the World Bank in the ADPs, for which the country has taken loans worth billions of Naira, Nigeria has continued to be deficient in food production and the standard of living of the people, especially in the rural areas still very low. Thus, development programmes in Nigeria established under development agencies since independence to date, apart from the National Development Plan stated above, are listed as follows:

- 1. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)
- 2. The Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE); The Low Cost Housing Scheme;
- 3. Adult Education Scheme;
- 4. Rural Electrification Scheme;
- 5. Rural Banking Schemes;
- 6. Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs);
- 7. River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs);
- 8. Rural Water Supply Schemes
- 9. Transports Schemes;
- 10. Health Schemes such as Sanitary, Immunization, Primary Health Care, etc.;
- 11. The National Better Life Rural Women Programme;
- 12. Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER);
- 13. National Orientation Agency (NOA);
- 14. National Agricultural Land and Development Agency (NALDA);
- 15. Research Programme;
- 16. Artesian Fishery and Small Ruminant Production Programme;
- 17. Pasture and Grazing Reserves;
- 18. Accelerated Crop Production Scheme;
- 19. The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP);
- 20. Primary Health Care Programmes;

Specifically however since early 1980s, rural development agencies that were in place include:

- 1. The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI);
- 2. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE);
- 3. Disease Eradication Scheme;
- 4. Expanded Programme on Immunization;
- 5. Basic Primary Education Scheme (BPES);
- 6. The Nomadic Education Programme;
- 7. The Migrant Fishermen Scheme;
- 8. Adult Support Basic Education Programme;
- 9. Federal Assisted Mass Transit Scheme;
- 10. State Assisted Transport Scheme;
- 11. Ferry Transport Schemes (in the Riverine areas and Lagos);
- 12. Low-Cost Housing Estate Scheme;
- 13. Federal Environmental Protection Agency;
- 14. Flood and Soil Erosion Control Programme;
- 15. People's Bank;
- 16. Community Banks;
- 17. National Agricultural Insurance Company (NAIC);
- 18. Nation Insurance Corporation of Nigeria (NICON); and
- 19. Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), etc.

Moreover, in evaluating the performance of Development Agencies and the problems associated with their apparent failure, Nweke (2003) poses the problem of political communities. In his, Nigeria is a rich country, but its people are poor. The World Bank ranks Nigeria among the 25 poorest countries. Since independence in 1960 and 2003, the fundamental question that logically arises is: what strategies should Nigeria adopt to ensure the efficiency of its programmes against poverty and exclusion?



One major problem has been that since independence, successive governments simply made a rehash of the old strategies for rural development under new names. Also, another factors that has contributed to the failure of rural development agencies to achieve their noble goal of poverty eradication in Nigeria today is the policy of the centralized control of the programmes of rural development set up by members of the elite who do not have the data available from the deprived social groups or even from the private sector.

However, if the strategies adopted by government have to succeed, the Nigerian government would have to adopt a policy of efficient consultation and collaboration based on partnership, with the political communities. Thereby Such an arrangement would make it possible, on the one path, for the programmes to be mutually controlled by the authorities and the rural dwellers themselves, and, on the other path, for the necessary responsibility of a transparency. Okafor (2003) in contributing to the search for viable solutions to the problem of stunted rural development in the third world opined that the relationship between governance and socioeconomic development become significant today.

The analysis of some of the programmes of government since independence in its rural development efforts to date as depicted above highlights their effects, which would explain why over 70 percent of the Nigerian populations still live below the poverty threshold. A survey by Okafor (2003), of 450 Nigerians randomly selected to represent all the strata of the society; revealed that the failure of the old poverty reduction and rural development programmes is mainly attributed to:

- 1. The politicization of the programme by men in power;
- 2. The poor "ownership" of the programme by over half the population (70%) which surely affects its attitude and involvement.
- 3. The proliferation of projects with little, if any effort to harmonize and/or coordinate their activities.
- 4. The lack of sustainability arising from the abandonment of programmes as soon as the Head of State, often its initiator, leaves office.
- 5. A top-down approach to project formulation, rarely the bottom-up approach.
- 6. Little or no involvement of the Non-Governmental Organizations or other parties concerned in the development projects.
- 7. The inadequate funding of the project.
- 8. The allegations that a large share of the fund, committed by the government has been misappropriated and fraudulently end up in private pockets.

Rural development practice in Nigeria can appropriately be said to be driven by three key institutional regimes namely, the colonial regime (pre-independence); the military regimes (the military has ruled Nigeria from 1966 to 1999 with a brief interlude between 1979 and 1982) and; the democratic era (effectively from 1999 to date). From the colonial era to the early 1980s, policy understanding and direction on what should be 'rural areas' and how its development should be catalyzed was narrowly focused on agricultural improvement and productivity.

This understanding gave rise to many agriculturally based programs including the Agricultural Marketing Board, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Green Revolution; Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), among other minor ones. Emphasis on agricultural development made some policy and economic sense at that time given the role and importance of agriculture at various levels in the Nigerian economy.

During the colonial period, the role of agriculture in sustaining the empires of the colonial masters through commodity exports and cheap labour and capital has been variously acknowledged (Watts and Bassett, 1986; Iwuagwu, 2006; Abdu and Marshall, 1990). In terms of employment, Abba et al (1985, cited in Abdu and Marshall, 1990) noted the role of agriculture as the country's main industry as far as employment was concern with over 65% of the population being dependent on it for livelihood. As early as 1964, Liman, M.,(1982, cited in Abdu and Marshall, 1990) had reported a 70% of GDP contribution from the agricultural sector to Nigerian economy.

Approaches to rural development started receiving some significant conceptualization from the 1980s, when a holistic look was taken of rural development by subsequent policies, programs and regimes. According to Filani (1993), by the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was some improvement in the conception of what constituted rural development. In this case, rural development at policy and practice levels was conceived in a way that transcended mere agricultural development to incorporate the development and expansion of rural infrastructures, emphasis on poverty alleviation and socio-economic empowerment of the rural inhabitants.

Subsequent focus on rural development was more centered on poverty alleviation and employment programs. These approaches dominated the democratic era beginning from 1999 to present. Programmers such as poverty alleviation program (PAP: 1999-2000); National Poverty Eradication program (NAPEP) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS: 2003-2007) were more focused on creating youth employment, providing rural infrastructures and the development and conservation of natural recourses. While the rest of the post-1999 democratic poverty alleviation programs could not record serious impact on minimizing



incidence of poverty in rural Nigeria (Omah, 2004; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at least, on records, was able to spread its impact across rural areas. Such wide coverage was possible as a result of the commitment of the various ties of government to duplicate the program within their respective domains. Although it looks a bit statistically difficult at this moment to comprehensively assess the progress recorded by NEEDS in the light of its initial objectives of poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of the people especially in the rural area. few studies, at least, point to the conclusion that NEEDS was not different from previous public programs in terms of political commitment and implementation practices. Marcellus (2009) specifically noted that while Nigeria's wealth rose within the period of NEEDS owing to better petroleum oil prices and substantial debt relief by the Paris club, the average Nigerian especially in the rural areas remained disproportionately very poor quite contrary to some official figures from the Central Bank of Nigeria (the author cited CBN, 2005).

While Osagie (2007) saw poor leadership and uncoordinated action as responsible for program failures (as in NEEDS), Marcellus argued that public policy plans in Nigeria are only seen as perfunctory obligations which hardly receive commensurate action towards goal realization. From several quarters, the call that rural development needs to be given priority attention have come. Several reasons for such urgency such as 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 mortality rate, malnutrition and disease prevalence and lower enrolment of children in school has been cited.

#### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria is blessed with natural as well as human resources that have not been properly channeled to ensure equitable distribution of wealth derived therefrom and ensure the overall development of the country as a whole. It has been shown that where the country is in the development ladder has been due to failure of successive governments since independence to succeed in the rural development efforts which has retarded the per capita income of the average Nigerian, thereby placing a large percentage of the populace below the poverty line. This inadequate mobilization of the natural and human resources can be eliminated with political will, commitment and continuity rather than unpredictability of rural development programmes and agencies. Since past governments have tried several development strategies without much success, integrated rural development approach should be given a deeper application.

This paper has attempted a time-series characterization of rural development in Nigeria at the levels of pre-and post-independence practices. Important feature about Nigeria's rural development approach is its association with agricultural development, characterized by various levels of exploitation. Policies and programs often tended more in the use of rural agricultural resources for the sustenance and development of available urban centers. This, more or less, dictated the type of infrastructures that were planned for rural areas, some of which only served the interest of the urban political and administrative elites. Such pattern of exploitative relationship prevailed up to the late 1980s, when improved understanding of rural development began to translate into a more comprehensive and integrated development outlooks.

Although rural development conceptualization had seemingly received little hope beginning from the late 1980s to the democratic period beginning from 1999, actual practices have been confronted with challenges of policy and practice inconsistencies as well as the phenomenon of corruption. It is seen that rural development policies still have the imprint of short-lived lifespan, which come and disappear with a specific regime. This trend consistently dominated post-independence rural development practices to present date. While this problem has been explained in relation to weak institutional arrangements, the phenomenon of corruption among public officials and elite groups often ensures that important public policy and rural development agenda of governments do not get directly to the intended beneficiaries by way of unduly influencing project distribution, kickbacks, ethnic and patronage politics, contract inflation and poor job execution.

Most of the rural development policies in the present democratic dispensation hardly have clear focus. Some plans carry many ambitious and overlapping objectives while actual implementation is often, in most cases, not related to local needs. Politicization of development benefits and absence of professionalism in planning and implementation have conspired to render most rural development plans very ineffective.

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