

Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities and Rural Development: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Successive governments in Nigeria have adopted different strategies and programme to develop the rural areas because majority of people in the country live and find their livelihood in the rural areas. The paper therefore, set out to compare how the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities have developed their host communities, to identify the constraints of the organisations in developing rural areas; and to proffer recommendations to the constraints of the organisations in developing their host communities. Primary and secondary data were obtained using questionnaire and documents respectively. The primary data were presented using frequencies and percentages. It was revealed that inadequate funding, poor maintenance culture, staff retrenchment and commercialisation of the organisations have negatively affected their efforts in rural development. It was therefore recommended that government should disburse funds adequately and timely to the organisations and more qualified personnel be recruited into the services of the organisations. Above all, the government and host communities of the organisations should support and be committed to the activities of the River Basin Authorities to facilitate their success.

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rural Development has been the preoccupation of many developing countries for a long time because the overwhelming majority of the people in these countries live and find their livelihood in the rural areas. More so, a considerable proportion of the national income is derived from rural areas as a result of direct economic activities of the rural populace.

In Nigeria, prior to the advent of oil as the major income source, primary products played very important role as economic bedrock of the nation. In the realization of the above facts, various Nigerian governments adopted different development strategies in order to bring transformation to the rural areas. One of such strategies adopted was the establishment of River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs).

The lower and Upper Benue River Basins and Rural Development Authorities, just like other River Basins in the nation were established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to bring development to their host communities through the creation of employment opportunities, augmenting income of rural dwellers and the provision of social amenities (FGN, 1976). The organisation thus embarked on programs and projects to boost agricultural product through mechanization and the development of water resources potentials of the nation. These functions entailed direct agricultural production, construction of dams, dykes, polders, drilling of boreholes for potable water supply and construction of rural roads, bridges etc to link project sites.

The extent to which the lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities have comparatively realized their set targets in their host communities is the focus of this paper.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The development of rural areas as a cornerstone for the overall development of Nigeria has become both a problem and challenge to leaders of the country. This is epitomized on the fact that rural development can check rural-urban migration and its adverse effects of rural depopulation and also to avert urban unemployment.

In the realization of the above, different governments in Nigeria have embarked on different strategies at transforming rural areas where bulk of the population reside, and where much of the national wealth is derived. However, despite the huge sums of money sunk into the rural development strategies over the years in Nigeria, the organisations have not substantially developed the rural areas. What reasons account for the inability of the lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities to develop their host communities?

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. Have the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities Developed their host communities?
- ii. What are the factors responsible for the inability of the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities to develop their host communities?
- iii. Have the strategies adopted by RBRDAs been appropriate and effective?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to ascertain the disparity of rural development efforts of the two River Basin Authorities. Other objectives of the paper are:

- i. To identify the factors that constrained the River Basin Authorities in Rural development.
- ii. To proffer solutions to the constraints of the River Basin Authorities in rural development.

1.5 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

- i. The Lower Benue River Basin Authority has not developed its host communities more than the Upper Benue River Basin Authority.
- ii. The Lower Benue River Basin Authority has not achieved in land clearing and preparation more than the Upper Benue River Basin Authority.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Many studies on River Basin and Rural Development Authority have emphasised on their developmental strides at the neglect of comparative analysis. The study is therefore significant because it has clearly stated the differences in the rural development efforts of the two agencies that are located along the River Benue plain.

1.7 THE SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study covers the rural development efforts of the lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities such as the drilling of boreholes for portable water supply and mechanized agriculture between 1990 -2000. The execution of these functions in Benue and Nassarawa states is comparatively studied vis-a-vis that in Adamawa and Taraba which are some of catchment areas of the two river basin authorities.

The limitations of the paper are time and financial constraints, inaccessibility to some documents as well as non-challant attitude of some respondents during the field survey.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data form the sources of information for the paper. The primary data were generated from questionnaire and interviews administered to staff of the River Basin Authorities and the general public especially the beneficiaries in the four catchment areas of the organisations earlier mentioned. Out of 430 questionnaires administered (216 from Lower Benue River Basin, 214 from Upper Benue River Basin), 334 were returned. Out of the 334 questionnaires returned, 174 were from staff and the general public in Benue and Nassarawa states, and 170 from staff and the general public in Adamawa and Taraba states.

Stratified random sampling was used in administering the questionnaires on the staff sample size because they (staff) are hierarchically arranged in the organisation; while accidental sampling was used on the customer/general public because everybody within the project site have the opportunity of been selected for the study.

Secondary data for the work were gathered from textbooks, journals and government documents. These were used to augment the primary data.

2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Related literature on rural development is reviewed hereunder.

2.1.1 RURAL AREA

A rural area (or the country side, as it is referred to in most countries) is an area that is not urbanized, lacking basic facilities of modernization. They have low population density and typically much of the land is devoted for agriculture. There is a significant level of low per capita income.

According to Ebong (2000), rural areas are characterized with poor infrastructural facilities, poor access roads, poorly equipped health centres, inadequate employment opportunities etc.

Sule (2007) however, maintains that rural areas are noted for their degree of poverty. At the lowest level are street children and those living in poor houses and asylums, people living under bridges and near gutters or in slums.

2.1.2 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This involves effecting improvement in living standards of farmers and the rural populace in general. It constitutes a process of planned change for which the one approach or the other is adopted for improvement and or transformation of the lot of the rural populace.

Olayide (1981) sees 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.

To Obinne (1991), rural development involves creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potentials through education and share in decision and action which affects their lives.

While Rogers and Whiting (1976) defined rural development not only as providing jobs and increased income to rural people but also improving the quality of rural living through increased and improved community services.

Lyam (1990), in his performance analysis of rural development projects in Benue state highlighted on the funding, output and infrastructural development of the organisations. He opined that poor funding has been instrumental to the ineffectiveness of River Basins and Rural Development Authorities in the country; and that since 1989, to date; RBRDAs no longer partake in direct farming activities. Rather, they assist farmers to produce crops through the provision of prepared land and some infrastructures such as access roads, water supply (irrigation facility) and electricity in some cases. He however did not state how far the agencies have achieved in their mandate.

The Annual Report of the Central Bank of Nigeria (1990), on the other hand, states that the position of activities in the RBRDAs (including the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities) declined further following the rationalization of their functions and substantial cut back in their funding (see appendix A). Nevertheless, total land area irrigation by the authorities increased marginally by 19 percent to 69,200ha over the level in the previous year. The number of dams, boreholes and roads constructed and/or maintained on the other hand dropped by 25.074 and 30.3 percent to 12,428 and 69 respectively. With the rationalisation of the functions of the RBRDAs coupled with the then privatisation commercialisation programmed the Authorities no longer handle the distribution of farm inputs and direct agriculture production.

Abdul (1995) stated that River Basin and Rural Development Authorities were established to harness the water resources of the country for agricultural production, including crops, livestock and fisheries. To a large extent, they failed to achieve this laudable objective. He enumerated reasons for this abysmal failure as

- i. Their capital intensiveness
- ii. Over-reliance on international agribusiness for supply of heavy equipment, management and finance.
- iii. They had no clear and well tailored goals and operational objectives.

He further said that the confusion and the failure that characterized the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities are clear manifestation of the absence of a well-define policy planning frame work for rural development in the country. He did not however suggest how the agencies could put on a sound footing to execute their functions.

On the investment and performance of RBRDAs, Ukwu (1993) said government has spent heavily on River Basin and Rural development Authorities, but the result has not justified the investment. At best, the impact has been marginal. And sometimes it has been harmful as, for instance, when an irrigation project displaces more farmers than can be resettled, or when a dam denies natural seasonal irrigation to vast areas and numerous communities downstream of it, for the sake of providing ideal conditions over a limited area for a few fortunate farmers. He did not suggest what should be done for the displaced rural dwellers.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

The paper adopts the Sectoral Model as its theoretical frame work. The model according to Ntukidem (1991), considers annual budgets and plans drawn up in sectoral terms on the basis of ministerial and departmental reports and projects for development. The plan is seen in sectors – agriculture, industry, health, education, transport, administrative and services sectors among others. In-built in these budgets and plans are provisions that are made for the development of the rural areas and the people.

To lend the theory to the topic of discussion, yearly budgetary allocations are made to the agencies through the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development (FMWR&RD) so that they can carry out rural development projects.

3.1 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data collected during field survey is hereunder presented in tables and analysed in simple percentages.

Table 2: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAPITAL BURGET APPROPRIATION TO RBRDAs FROM 1995-1999

S/N	RBRDAs	GROUP	1995 (₦m)	1996 (₦m)	1997 (₦m)	1998 (₦m)	1999 (₦m)	TOTAL 1995-1999 (₦m)
1	Chad Basin	A	118.725	114.329	183.610	121.500	105.000	643.164
2	Hadeja-Jama're	A	97.800	149.645	148.000	180.000	165.000	740.445
3	Sokoto-Rima	A	150.000	151.130	581.000	225.000	190.000	1297.130
4	Anambra-Imo	B	102.410	83.450	81.200	112.950	105.000	485.010
5	Ogun-Osun	B	64.000	74.144	284.100	184.500	167.000	773.744
6	Lower Benue	B	76.200	83.480	58.000	73.800	70.000	361.480
7	Lower Niger	B	160.000	125.750	208.000	121.500	100.000	715.250
8	Upper Benue	B	100.000	104.600	130.000	145.000	135.000	614.600
9	Upper Niger	B	95.000	131.037	75.000	117.000	181.000	599.037
10	Benin-Owena	C	109.600	143.093	76.000	235.800	395.000	959.493
11	Niger delta	C	64.874	78.797	78.000	94.500	95.000	410.671
12	Cross River	C	335.000	159.590	180.000	122.400	109.000	905.990

Source: LBRBDA Corporate planning Unit.

The table 2 above shows that the lower Benue River Basin Authority, as compared with the Upper Benue River Basin Authority was under funded in the five years. This explains why the boreholes sunk by the authority were less compared to those sunk by the Upper Benue River Basin Authority as stated below.

Table 3: Sinking of Boreholes

Year	No. of Boreholes Sank (LBRBRDA)	No. of Boreholes Sank (UBRBRDA)	Total
1996	6	8	14
1997	6	7	13
1998	9	10	19
1999	6	8	14
2000	3	5	08
Total	30	38	68

Source: Corporate Planning Units of the Lower and Upper RBRDAs

The table 3 above demonstrates that, to whom much is given, much is desired. Thus Upper Benue River Basin Authority has sunk more boreholes than Lower Benue River Basin Authority.

3.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MECHANIZED AGRICULTURE (LAND CLEARING AND PREPARATION) BETWEEN THE LOWER AND UPPER BENUE RIVER BASIN AUTHORITIES

Respondents in the four catchment areas of the River Basin Authorities were asked to rate land clearing and preparation as part of the achievement of the focal River Basin Authorities. Their responses are stated in the table below

Table 4: land clearing and preparation

Responses	Rural People (Benue & Nassarawa)	LBRBRDA (Staff)	Rural people & UBRBRDA (Adamawa & Taraba)	UBRBRDA (Staff)	Total	% of respondents
Strongly agreed	32	15	30	15	92	28
Agreed	40	20	37	18	114	34
Strongly disagreed	20	10	20	07	57	17
Disagreed	22	15	25	08	70	21
Total	114	60	112	48	334	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

As seen from the above table, 92 respondents (28%) in the four catchment areas of the River Basin Authorities strongly agreed that the organizations have cleared and prepared land for farmers, and 115 or 34% agreed. However, 57 of the respondents represented by 17% strongly disagreed that the organizations did not clear and prepare land for rural farmers, and 70 (21%) respondents disagreed.

Given the total number of 207 respondents that strongly agreed and agreed, the drift was more towards the assertion that the organization cleared and prepared land for rural farmers.

3.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As gathered from the respondents, the following are the constraints of the River Basin Authorities in developing their host communities:-

Inadequate funding and untimely release of budgetary allocations from government to enable the authorities to meet its commitments to its customers is fundamental problems of the River Basin Authorities.

The privatization and commercialization Decree No. 28 of 1988 has affected the RBRDAs. The RBDAs as they are cannot be commercially viable. Government has to inject funds to complete ongoing viable capital projects before the organizations can then be commercially viable.

Vast farmlands with potentials for viable irrigation development / crop production are left lying waste because of lack of funds for maintenance, high inflation, inadequate project staff, and ageing of plants and machinery that are very expensive to maintain.

Staff retrenchment coupled with removal of materials left the immovable assets such as buildings and irrigation structures to the mercy of thieves, vandals and bush fire.

It was also discovered that the Upper Benue Basin has developed its host communities more than the Lower Benue Basin in infrastructural facilities. The data on table three augment this position.

However, in the area of land clearing and preparation, the Lower Benue Basin has achieved more than the Upper Benue Basin. The information on table four of the paper collaborate this position.

4.1 CONCLUSION

The survival of the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities, just like the other River Basins in the nation entirely depend on the commitment of the states and the National Government. The creation as well as proliferation of rural development programmes/project by successive government in the nation explains why little or no attention is given to the River Basins to effectively discharge their responsibility of developing the rural areas of Nigeria.

4.2 SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The Federal Government should assist and as well support the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities to partake actively in agricultural activities since the RBRDAs are quite close to rural farmers. To achieve this;

- ✓ Funds should be timely and adequately disbursed for the activities of the River Basins Authorities;
- ✓ More renovation works should be done to project buildings, irrigation facilities, maintenance of machines and farmlands;
- ✓ More qualified personnel be enlisted into the services of the organization; and
- ✓ The rural / host communities should also support and protect the facilities / equipments of the organizations in their domains.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Operations of the RBRDAs

Revenue /expenditure Profile (N million)	1988 (1)	1989 (2)	1990(3)	% change between	
				Land 2	2 and 3
Total allocation	83.0	241.4	121.8	31.9%	-49.9%
Actual disbursement	123.0	210.3	60.8	71.0%	-71.1%
Land development (*000ha)					
(a) Land Preparation	70.4	73.8	72.1	4.8%	2.3%
(b) Land under Irrigation	51.3	67.9	69.2	32.6%	1.9%
Infrastructural facilities provided					
(a) Dams	28	16	12	-42.9%	25.0%
(b) Boreholes (Number)	480	462	428	-3.8%	-7.4%
(c) Roads (Km)	3,604	99	68	-97.3%	-30.3%

Source: CBN Annual report and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31/12/90. (page76).

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