

Addaiyan Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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(An international Publisher of Research & Academic Resources)

Journal Homepage: <https://aipublisher.org/projects/ajahss/>

ISSN: 2581-8783 (Online)

DOI: 10.36099/ajahss.3.6.16

Rural Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects for Transforming the Rural Majority**M.O. IBITOYE (Ph.D)***Department of Political Science and International Diplomacy, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.***Corresponding Author***

M.O. IBITOYE (Ph.D)

Article History

Received: 20.06.2021

Accepted: 29.06.2021

Published: 30.06.2021



Abstract: This paper assesses rural development in Nigeria. It specifically examines the extent to which the government has positively impacted on the living conditions of the majority of Nigeria's population who lives in and earns their living in the rural areas. Data for this paper were gathered together from secondary literature sources. Evidently from the findings, past governmental policies on rural development have always been elitist, state centrist, and state-directed policies without the desired impact in effectively transforming the lives of the rural dwellers to an appreciable level. The study, therefore, suggests that the government should as a matter of policy generate alternative strategic options which aim at addressing the problem of rural development through the participation of the people.

Keywords: Rural development, Nigeria, Participation, Policy, Prospects, Transforming, Rural Majority.

Introduction

The goal of development is to ensure that the quality of human living conditions reaches an acceptable standard. This realization has stimulated the desire among policy-makers, bureaucrats, administrators, civil society, and scholars alike for development strategies which are beneficial to all spectrum and strata of the society, touching the lives of the poorest and lifting them up as it were from the abyss of poverty, squalor, and ignorance as opposed to a few privileged minorities (Soola, 2002).

The above expression is a pointer to the fact that rural development occupies a significant position of centrality in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of rural areas. The term essentially denotes the process through which the efforts of the people themselves are linked with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social, cultural, and political conditions of the local communities as well as integrate them into the life of a nation, thus contributing to the overall national development.

There is now widespread understanding that rural development initiatives will have little or no impact and may not even reach their important objectives unless they are participative and sustainable. Therefore, crucial to the whole idea of rural development is the need to elicit people's participation.

Participation generally tends to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of Development programmes (Ibitoye, 2017). It is increasingly associated with the promotion of the democratic process by strengthening citizen's capacity to actively involve and contribute to development initiatives.

Like empowerment, participation is both an end and a means to that end. As citizens achieve a more meaningful level of participation, so is their capacity to take control over other areas of their lives also expands.

However, there have been diverse reports and comments by the general public that successive governments have not done much in alleviating the suffering of the rural dwellers who are the majority. Hence, this paper is concerned with the total transformation of the rural populace in Nigeria's political space. This paper also aims at making some recommendations on how to ensure the development of the rural areas.

Conceptual Issue: Rural Development

The concept, rural development means different things to different people. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall attempt few definitions as follows; Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development has traditionally centered on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry (Wikipedia). Hoshier (1995) as cited in Dauda (2010) defined rural development as a "multi-dimensional" process which includes the development of socio-economic conditions of the people living in the rural areas and ensures participation in the process of development for complete utilization of physical and human resources for better living conditions.

Adegboye (1973) conceptualized rural development as the development of the rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to most effectively and efficiently utilize their intellect, technology, and other resources for further development of themselves and others. The South African Rural Development Framework (SARDF) also defined rural development as a way of helping rural people to set the priorities in their own communities through effective and democratic bodies by providing the local capacity; investment in basic infrastructure and social service, justice, equity, and security; dealing with the injustices of the past and ensuring the safety of the rural population especially that of women (SARDF, 1991: 9)

Furthermore, the World Bank (1975) conceived rural development as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a group of people – the rural poor. It involves extending benefits to the poorest among those seeking a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants, and the landless.

Irrespective of what rural development is all about, rural development is said to have occurred when there is general upliftment in the living standards of the rural majority as the the ultimate objective of rural development is a steady and sustained upliftment of the living

standards of the rural dwellers.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts ‘Urban-bias’ theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. Among the leading exponents of this theory are Lipton and Bates [Lipton, 1977& Bates, 1981]. ‘Urban-bias’ theory simply refers to a political economy argument according to which economic development is hampered by groups who by their central location in urban centres, are able to mount pressure on the government to protect their interests. It is a structural condition of urbanization and its growth often leads to a saturated labour market, truncated opportunity structures in rural areas, overburdened public services, distorted sectoral development in the world economies, and economic growth due to the high costs of urban development.

Lipton (1977) in his work, titled, “Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban-bias in World Development”, ascribed the continuance of mass poverty in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) to the ‘Urban-bias’ behind their development. To him, Less Developed Countries (LDCs) have paid more attention to industrialization than agricultural development and that in consequence, the rural sector in their economy has suffered in relation to their urban areas. In other words, the theory proposes that development planning in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) is biased against rural areas in that most of the economic resources are allocated to the urban areas than the rural areas, thereby making the poor to get poorer. Furthermore, he argued that the urban centres are favoured by the politicians at the expense of the countryside. This takes on a variety of forms: the infrastructure is concentrated in cities; the countryside is taxed harshly and the price policy turns relative prices in favour of urban pursuits.

Consequently, a critical assessment of the Nigerian state since 1960 till date shows a wide gap between the urban and rural dwellers in terms of infrastructural facilities, among others. More and quantitative better advantages are accrued to the urban centres and these advantages make itself noticeable in various aspects of national life while the rural dwellers continue to suffer by the reason of their location. Therefore, the “Urban-bias” theory provides a framework of analysis through which Nigeria's rural development can be studied.

Historical Overview of Rural Development in Nigeria

Several policies to the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria especially in the rural areas where poverty abounds have been carried out by the successive government in the past and present in their determination to improve the living conditions of the rural dwellers. However, these policies have not in any tangible way translated into significant improvements in the lives of our people. The rural development policies as expressed in the First, Second and Third National Development Plan (1962-1968, 1970-1974, and 1975-1980) included some rural developmental objectives such as; to increase rural income and production, to expand the rural economy and improve the quality of life of the rural inhabitants by providing them with basic socio-economic amenities such as; electricity, pipe-borne water, motorable roads, health, and educational facilities, among others.

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) (1974) was introduced to deliver better quality and high yield varieties of farm inputs and to guarantee the adequacy of food supply for the growing population. The River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) (1976) was established to make

available adequate water for agricultural production. The Operation Feed the Nation Programme (OFN) (1980) was also established to mobilize the Nigerian population into the production of adequate food for its people by the use of better agricultural practices. The Green Revolution Programme (GRP) (1980) followed thereafter. The Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) (1988) was equally established in order to increase food production, production of industrial raw materials and increase the real income of farmers. The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (1986) was not left out as it came into existence so as to make available rural infrastructures to the communities.

In addition, more poverty reduction programmes/policies were introduced by the Nigerian government from 1993-1998. These are; National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Better Life Programmes (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), People's Bank of Nigeria [PBN], and Community Banks (CB). In 1994, the Nigerian government set up a broad-based Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC) with a primary objective to advise the government on poverty alleviation programmes. In 1996, the Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA) was introduced with the sole aim of ensuring that the poor partake in the designing, formulation, implementation, and management of poverty alleviation prospects that affect them.

The task of meeting the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians also led to the setting up of the Joda panel in 1999 which resulted in the introduction of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2000 designed primarily to provide employment to 200,000 unemployed youths all over the country. By 2001 PAP was phased out as a result of structural inefficiency and fused into the newly created National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). NAPEP subsequently strategized its operations on four Sectoral schemes namely; Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS), and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (NAPEP, 2001 & 2003).

In 2003, still under the same government, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the federal, State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) at the state and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) at the local level were introduced. The brief regime of President Yar'adua introduced seven-point agenda which includes critical infrastructures, Niger-delta, food security, human capital development, land tenure, and homeownership, national security intelligence and wealth creation (Asobie, 2007). The administration of President Jonathan launched "Youth Enterprise with Innovation", "You Win" and "Subsidy Re-Investment Programme"– "SURE-P". The present government under the leadership of President Buhari also introduced N-Power and Trade Monies, among others.

In spite of the various programmes and/policies put in place to address the problems of rural areas, the results have not been encouraging as most of the people in rural areas remained impoverished and socio-economically and politically stagnated.

Essential Elements of Rural Development

Idachaba (2011:3-6) provides the core elements that are usually considered as the basis of a good rural development policy to include the following:

Enhanced agricultural productivity and production- Since agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the rural dwellers; any effort to raise rural productivity and production must start with agriculture. Efforts must be geared towards the timely provision of affordable farm machinery/equipment, fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, among others. In addition, the national agricultural research system must be capable of producing the required packages of the new mechanical, chemical and biological technologies to suit different environmental niches and these packages must be delivered to the farmers when they need them.

Increases in farm producers' incomes- Increases in producers' incomes constitute the hub of enhanced rural welfare. Therefore, increases in production do not necessarily translate into increases in producers' income except certain steps are taken to raise farmers' shares of urban retail expenditures on food and agricultural products.

Enhanced production and income from rural non-farm industries- Rural man, even within the strict domain of material well-being, is a multiple income earners. In view of this fact, integrated rural development programming must identify those rural non-farm goods and services, the demands for which are income elastic. Technology packages need to be identified for enterprises as diverse as food (food processing and baking); textiles and weaving apparel, spinning and weaving, dyeing, tailoring, shoemaking and repair, etc. Increased production from these sources will automatically lead to multiplier effects on rural development and other linkages.

Integration of rural production, processing, and marketing- Increases in farm production may not lead to corresponding increases in value-added accruing to farmers if there are no processing and other marketing facilities. Inadequacies in these facilities often result in the flow of significant proportions of the gains from incremental production to the non-farm sector. The existence of guaranteed food and agricultural market holds the key to sustained confidence in the agricultural industry.

Narrowing the rural wealth and income inequalities- The narrowing of wealth and income inequalities holds the key to the long-term social stability of the rural sector. Post-project inequalities should be less than pre-project inequalities. That is, rural development programmes must not make the rich richer and the poor poorer. No doubt, the equalization of access to new technological and market opportunities and the narrowing of wealth and income inequalities will definitely assist the peasant rural majority.

Rural man as the centerpiece of rural development strategy- The core objective of rural development is the upliftment of the quality of life of the rural man. He needs to be seen much beyond his role as a producer of surpluses of food and fibre to feed the urban economy to his role as a consumer that is equally entitled, like his urban counterpart, to the basic necessities of life. The corollary to this is that the rural sector should be viewed not just as the source of surpluses of food and fibre that should be exploited for

the benefit of the urban economy and its (urban) people but as a place deserving of purposeful development.

The social and political integration of the rural sector- For social harmony and stability, rural man must have a sense of belonging- they must not feel alienated from the rest of the society. This requires that integration goes beyond the enhancement of rural incomes and the provision of social amenities. It includes the spatial integration of the rural and urban sectors through the development of transportation links, postal and telecommunications facilities, and countrywide penetration of the print and electronic media. This integrated rural development approach also requires the active representation of rural interests in all matters affecting their material well-being.

Development of institutions for integrated rural development- Well formulated rural development strategies serves little or no purpose when there are no viable institutions put in place to implement them. Therefore, constitutional provisions must be such that will encourage the complementary roles of different tiers of government in rural development programming. The multi-sectoral nature of rural development requires the co-ordination of inputs from different ministries and parastatals.

Justifications for Rural Development

The term rural development is not limited to developing countries alone, even many developed countries have very active rural development programmes, hence the following justifications for rural development in Nigeria:

The rural sector is of strategic importance for the poorer nations of the world, Nigeria inclusive. It is the source of primary products (agricultural produce and minerals) for export to the advanced industrial countries and of food stuffs and labour for the national and industrial centres (Long, 1997).

Extensive rural development programmes has the capacity to minimize rural-urban migration. Rural dwellers do not have access to the basic infrastructures such as pipe-borne water, hospital, electricity, good roads, among others that could actually improve their well-being. This development has resulted to rural-urban migration which has always put the former at a greater disadvantage.

The rural population that constitutes about 70% of the total population in Nigeria is backward, primitive, and under-developed. These rural areas are largely constrained by certain inhibitive factors that tend to militate against realistic and sustained economic development, hence, the need to strengthening various strategies that aim at improving the quality of life of the rural dwellers.

Sustainable development of rural areas can make a powerful contribution to four critical goals; poverty reduction widely shared growth, national and global food security, and sustainable development (World Bank, 1997).

The need to reduce the wide gap between the rural and urban dwellers especially in the area of credit facilities, income-generating, and income-supporting activities as this will prevent the young adults who are found of looking for opportunities in the cities which may not be available at times.

To correct the policies imbalance between the rural and urban sectors. It has been observed with keen interest that government tends to concentrate most of the development programmes in the urban centres

to the total neglect of the rural masses. This singular action among others has always been encouraged by the erroneous belief that rural areas are not productive enough and therefore could not contribute much to the social, economic, and political development of the country (Aderonmu, 2010).

As the majority of the poor reside in the rural areas, the prime goal of rural development is to improve the quality of life of the rural people by alleviating poverty through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programmes and by improving rural people's livelihoods in an equitable and sustainable manner both socially and environmentally through better access to assets (natural, physical, human, technological and social capital) (in its financial or economic and political forms) that enable them to improve their livelihoods on a sustainable and equitable basis.

Major Challenges to Rural Development

Scholars and development studies experts including Olurode (2002), Makinde (2005), Olomola (2009), Ijaiya (2011), Aladegbola & Saliu (2012), Akindayo (2015), Faloye (2018), among others, have attributed the failures of the rural development programmes in the past to the following factors:

Poor Funding – The most consistent reason for the failure of most of the developmental programmes has remained poor funding arising from a poor budget allocation which has made it difficult to make a meaningful impact on the rural dwellers. Fund allocation is often an indication of commitment, determination, or seriousness of government concerning any programme. Projects that are not the government's favourites are systematically starved of fund while those that are favoured for whatever reasons often including corruption, ethnic or parochial interests are largely funded. Without mincing words, this has negative implications on the development and welfare of the people.

Poor Data Generation – Adequate data is very imperative for any meaningful development in different fields of social, cultural, economic, and political activities. Such data should be done on the scientific basis and comprehensively. Therefore, a comprehensive 'Data Bank' is a necessity in the development process. However, poor data generation has been one of the fundamental problems faced in the course of carrying out developmental projects in the past as the burden of reconciling the gamut of data obtained from governmental research outlets such as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), OXFAMA, among others, have always remained unresolved, hence, the conflicting and contradicting data are legion. For example, no one knows the number of Nigerians living in poverty as of today. Therefore, one could argue that any programme that is not data-driven is bound to fail.

Corruption/Fraud – No nation can bear the cost of corruption which impedes development and minimizes the ability of the government to reduce poverty among the rural dwellers. Once corruption becomes entrenched in the policy of a nation, its negative effects multiply as it hampers the effective delivery of public goods and services. It is a common thing to see few individuals to corner or divert the little budget allocations from year to year to the utter exclusion of the targeted beneficiaries. This has resulted in the failure of various developmental programmes embarked upon by the government in the past. The import of the argument is that sustainable development in the face of corruption, fraud, selfish and primordial interest among the majority of Nigerians may be difficult to achieve.

Lack of Political Will – Lack of strong political will, coupled with weak transparency and accountability mechanism in governance has adversely affected the welfare of the rural settlers. A demonstration of strong political will would be the application of strict penalties for any tier of government that do not meet their targets, enforcement of those penalties, the establishment of a client-feedback mechanism, and periodic public reporting on the implementation of programmes to the general public. The Nigerian government must recognise the fact that this factor is absolutely essential to its work on development at the local level. There is much work to be done in this respect and it must be recognised that in many ways the key is the mobilization of political will. Unfortunately, this important aspect has not been given serious attention it deserved in the past.

Lack of Continuity – Several attempts have been made by successive governments – both military and civilian over the years to address the problem of rural dwellers. Examples of such efforts are; the First, Second and Third National Development Plans, Community Development Programme (CDP), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), seven-point agenda, “You Win”, SURE-P and N-power among others, are without meaningful achievements. Although, they all have good intentions of alleviating the suffering of the rural areas and the poor masses in general. However, the neglect of these programmes in the past by the successive government has further impoverished the rural masses.

Lack of Participation – Participation development, according to Ijaiya (2006) involves partaking, sharing, and contribution to a project by the people. The participation of the supposed beneficiaries as suggested by the Participatory Development Model has always been jettisoned by the government. Most of the rural development had always been met with colossal failures due to the fact that the interest of the poor masses were hardly put into consideration before designing, formulation, implementing, monitoring, and evaluation of the various programmes.

Summary and Conclusions

The role government must play in social service delivery for the enhancement of general public welfare, particularly the rural dwellers has been a major source of concern for both the government and the governed. Since its independence till date, the Nigerian government has initiated many policies and programmes aimed at transforming the lives of rural dwellers. Though laudable, all these programmes were obviously unable to make the desired positive impact in effectively alleviating poverty and suffering of the people and most especially in more vulnerable and economically less viable rural areas.

This study has successfully highlighted different reasons for the failure of the government to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the people. The conclusion is that the various policies/programmes have failed due to poor funding, poor data, corruption, non-participation culture which entails people's involvement in the designing, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of various programmes, among others. Therefore, for government to achieve effective delivery, capacity to perform is essential and efforts must be beyond drafting policies on paper but must also contain achievable independent delivery mechanisms with proactive bureaucratic elements.

Recommendations

Rural development initiatives in the past have always been unsuccessful due to certain inhibitive factors earlier discussed. In view of this, the following recommendations are important elements of any successful programme aimed at transforming the lives of rural dwellers:

Adequate financing through an independent finance body. All the activities of this body must be carried out in an orderly manner where honesty, transparency, and accountability are the order of the day.

The basic principles of the Participatory Development Model should be adopted in all developmental projects and the beneficiaries should be put into consideration before designing formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

There should be comprehensive and reliable data to capture all categories of the citizenry so as to aid and facilitate effective planning for future policies.

Future programmes should be seen to be devoid of corruption, fraud, nepotism, favoritism and not to be used to settle party loyalists.

The Nigerian government must develop a strong political will to strengthening programmes that will make lives more meaningful and bearable for the rural dwellers.

Both old and new rural programmes should be allowed to continue as long as they have the capacity to impact positively on the lives of the poor masses who live in the rural areas.

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