

## An Appraisal of Nigeria's Rural Development Programmes and Policies: Lessons Learnt and the way forward

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### Abstract

*In Nigeria, development programmes and policies have been formulated over the years with a view to achieving greater social equity and maintaining socio-economic balance particularly among rural households. However, there are enormous gaps, between policy formulation, implementation and reality in the level of development among the rural populace. It is within this context that this paper appraised the various policies and programmes targeted towards rural development which were put in place by various administrations in Nigeria. These programmes includes several ADPs, OFN, the Green revolution programme, Better life for African rural women, the various programmes implemented by the RBDAs as well as those carried out under the DFRRI. The paper went further to establish the various factors responsible for the failure of these programmes such as Exclusion of relevant professionals in policy formulation, planning and implementation, Conflicting programs and projects, Policy somersault and inconsistency, Corruption and embezzlement, Misplaced priority, Inadequate manpower and technical know-how. Based on the identified lapses in the implementation procedures, the study recommends that well balanced interactions should be established between the government and the various stakeholders in the rural sector not only when policies and programmes are formulated but also when they are being implemented and evaluated so that the much desired developmental activities can manifest. Concerted efforts should also be made to ensure that any policy or programme initiated is accomplished to the letter.*

**Keywords:** Rural, Rural development, Programmes, Policies and Nigerians

### INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at the rural development programmes and policies in Nigeria revealed that several attempts have been made to develop the rural areas since colonial times. The concern has been to transform the mostly agrarian society in order to reach a common set of development goals based on the capacities and needs of the people. Ering (2011) maintained that before colonization, Nigeria rural communities have indulged in various forms of community self-help schemes such as construction of village moats, shrines, village squares, markets and a host of other activities. In other words, developmental activities have been part of Nigeria's cultural heritage.

According to World Bank (2008) a vast majority of people across countries live in the rural areas, Nigeria has 60% of her population living in the rural areas. Bearing this in mind, the roles which the rural sector plays in the generation of national wealth and national development cannot be underestimated. In view of this, there has been synergy between all agencies, government organizations and institutions to undertake and monitor the complicated process of nation-building, development and integration with particular reference to rural settings. This

orientation is a deviation from the erstwhile arrangement whereby developmental efforts in all spheres were concentrated in the urban areas to the detriment of the rural areas. The intention of government is to bring the neglected rural areas into the mainstream of national development.

Despite the enormous contributions of the rural dwellers to national wealth, it appears ironically as if successive developmental programmes implemented by the government were geared towards their exploitation and impoverishment; as they yet suffer mass poverty and deprivation under the programs.

The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the pattern of rural community development in Nigeria especially in those areas which have the greatest impact on the lives of the rural dwellers. This is to establish the factors responsible for the failure of past rural development programmes and policies in Nigeria and draw lessons from the gaps in the implementation of the programmes.

Furthermore, the paper attempts to carry out an assessment and conceptual clarification of these programmes and policies as they affect rural community development in Nigeria, from where inferences were drawn on the way forward.

### **Concept of Rural Development**

Development as a concept is basically used to refer to the positive growth and quality of peoples' lives in relation to qualitative change in economic performance rather than quantitative change. In essence, development is the process of adding improvements to the quality of life of the population, the creation of local, regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. In the context of rural background, it connotes developing better physical, social and economic conditions of the rural poor living in the rural areas.

The concept of 'rural' has generated a controversial and ideological discussion among scholars and rural sociologists. In a social perspective, it connotes a more deeply rooted community life built around natural phenomenon; and occupationally it is highly dependent on crop farming, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities.

Rural development is closely connected with agricultural development. This is because of the strong interconnection between agriculture and rural development. However, agriculture is not the only possible occupation of the rural people, and cannot be the only means of enhancing their well-being. Mosley (2003), viewed rural development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of the people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. It is about reduction of poverty, increasing productivity, providing basic services like health, education, drinking water, sanitation, extending infrastructure etc. Odiba (2001) further stated that rural development physically transforms a backward community to stages represented by symbolic presence of structures such as modern buildings or town halls, schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, pipe borne water and electricity. In this sense, rural development can be seen as an attempt aimed at creating the external manifestation of an ideal society in form of large scale modern programmes and projects.

Consequently, the basic objective of rural development is to organize, develop and utilize available resources (both human and material) in such a manner that inhabitants of rural areas would have the opportunity to meet their basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) including

provision of education, and health without degrading the environment (Adeyemo, 1989). This implies that the growth and development of the rural area requires a strong ethos of mass participation and sustainability (Obasi, 2013).

It can be said therefore that rural development encompasses the entirety of rural life including the economic, political, social, and cultural development of the rural people. For the past five decades, nothing has really changed in the Nigerian rural setting. The rural areas are still in a deplorable state of neglect, with no pipe borne water, electricity, good healthcare services, good roads, education etc. The main feature of the rural areas in Nigeria has been that of depression, degradation, poverty, and deprivation. The high rate of rural-urban migration is one of the consequences of this neglect. Thus, it seems previous efforts at rural development have failed.

### **Historical Trends in Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria**

The institutionalization of modern rural development schemes can be traced to the 1920s when the British colonial office adopted the strategy of community development as a special development model for the rural areas of all colonial territories. The concern then was to make up for the short comings of traditional British school system by imparting skills such as carpentry, house building, shoe repairing, etc. in community development centres (Ebong, 1991).

Beginning from the late fifties, various attempts were made to develop peasant agriculture by the colonial government through several schemes in order to promote rural development. The western region first introduced the Farm Settlement Scheme between 1959 and 1960 and other regions immediately followed suit (Amalu, 1988). The main objective of this scheme was to settle young school leavers in a specified area of land, making farming their career and preventing mass migration from villages to urban areas in search of white collar jobs. Amalu (1988) further identified the followings as some of the reasons why the scheme was not achieved:

- i. Some of the settlers were too young and inexperienced in farming, as a result a high percentage among the young settlers dropped out.
- ii. Settlers who assumed that participating in the scheme would eventually earn them some allowances were discouraged and some withdrew as soon as the allowances were not paid any more.
- iii. Finally, expenses made on the scheme were not channelled to increase agricultural output as targeted. Expenses were incurred mainly on installation of infrastructure like construction of houses, schools, markets, roads etc.

After Nigeria's political independence in 1960, numerous national programmes and policies aimed at the improvement of the rural areas were initiated and pursued by the federal, state and local governments. The post-independence period witnessed the conception, planning and implementation of agricultural programmes focused on job creation, agricultural and rural development and food security for the country (Agber & Akaaimo, 2003). This paper intends to review some of the intervention programmes of successive governments in Nigeria, as they affect the rural poor in their immediate external environment.

### **The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPS)**

The Agricultural Development Programme is a World Bank assisted programme in conjunction with the Federal and State Governments. The programme officially started in 1975 in the

Northern Nigerian towns of Gombe and Gusau with two pilot projects (Jibowu, 2005). The principal aim of ADP was to boost the productivity of the peasant farmers through supply of farm inputs, extension services, construction and maintenance of rural roads. It also fostered the establishment of cooperatives. This became necessary because of the need for the application of knowledge and skills in all significant aspects of agriculture.

The activities of ADP in Nigeria spread over three thematic areas; provision of rural infrastructural facilities, conducting worthwhile trainings on improved agricultural technologies and supply of farm inputs. This program was made up of Extension/technology transfer, Adaptive research, input supply and other rural infrastructural provision. Other major operational components of the ADP's include the Training and Visit as well as the Unified Agricultural Extension System. The achievements of the projects in the two northern states further encouraged other state governments to embark on more of such projects and this led to the establishment of 31 nationwide ADPs in Nigeria.

Today, the ADPs in majority of the states stand just as symbols of past glory. Auta & Dafwang, (2010) reported that the programme was successful in Bauchi, Kebbi, Kano, Kogi and Lagos states because they enjoyed excellent funding status from their respective state governments which led to the effective performance in these states. They further revealed that 63.6% of the states that adopted ADP suffered inadequate funding and this resulted in retrenchment of staff, inability to meet the required logistics, maladministration and unimpressive extension services nationwide.

### **The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA)**

This programme was launched in 1976 during General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime as a result of the negotiations between the United Nations (UN) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) on the existing abundant water resources in the country and its possibility of increasing agricultural productivity. The programme focused on establishing twelve River Basin Development Authorities (Ayoola, 2001). The objective of the programme is to enhance the economic potentials of the existing water bodies focusing mainly on undertaking comprehensive development of both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use; providing water from reservoirs and lakes for irrigation purposes to rural farmers, controlling pollution in rivers in accordance with national laid down standards; developing fishes and improving navigation on the rivers within the authority's area and assisting the state and local governments in the implementation of rural development works. Some of the RBDA's include: Sokoto-Rima basin, Hedejia-Jamaera basin, Upper Benue basin, Lower Benue basin, Cross river 1basin, Anambra-Imo basin, Upper Niger basin, Lower Niger basin, The Niger Delta basin, The Benin-Owena basin, Ogun-Oshun basin and The Lake Chad basin. (Ayoade, 1988).

However, the aims and objectives of this intervention programme could not be achieved for the following reasons: exclusion of rural populace from decision making and implementation process, policy discontinuity, inadequate funding, neglect and abandonment by successive past military regimes and lack of understanding of its core mandates (Onwuanaeze, 2009).

### **Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)**

OFN was a major rural development policy which commenced in 1976 during the Military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. This programme was designed to actively increase food production in the entire nation by creating awareness about the importance of agriculture, mobilizing the nation towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production and

encourage good and balanced nutritional habit. The programme attempted to mobilize the general public to participate actively in agricultural production. This propelled Nigerians to engage in farming through the following strategies: increased bank credit to rural farmers, guaranteed minimum and attractive prices for various agricultural commodities, provision of subsidized production inputs, and establishment of agro-service centres.

Some of the successes recorded were the construction of feeder roads to facilitate the transportation of both cash and food crops from rural to urban areas, the allocation of 10 aircrafts for serial spraying against pests which attacks crops and also the importation of day-old chicks which were later distributed to the various OFN farms across the country.

OFN seemed to have an unclear definition of its goals. Therefore, it is hard to measure up the overall impact of the program on rural development in Nigeria. Although the campaign and sensitization programme generated a lot of awareness but the rural farmers who are the real producers were excluded. Other challenges were: Indiscriminate use of land for farming activities, lack of knowledge on farming experience, lack of effective coordination between the local government council and the committees set up to implement the programme. The programme naturally ceased from existence with the exit of the regime of the then Federal Military Government

### **The Green Revolution Programme**

The green revolution program was inaugurated by Shehu Shagari administration in 1980. The main idea was to hasten Nigeria towards self-sufficiency in terms of food production. This programme replaced OFN and it aimed at increasing food production and raw materials in order to ensure food security and enhance rural development through the use of modern farm inputs such as improved variety of seeds, fertilizers and tractors. The federal government provided agrochemicals, improved seedlings, irrigation facilities and credit facilities for small-scale business owners in rural areas and also improved marketing and favourable pricing policy for agricultural products.

Green Revolution programme could not achieve its objective of increasing food supply because there were delays in execution of most of the projects involved in the programme. The projects were not monitored and evaluated according to (Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe, 2012) therefore; it perished with the exit of its founders.

### **Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)**

The directorate was one of the numerous rural development policies initiated in Nigeria under the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986 to rectify the unimpressive efforts and major errors of earlier rural development programmes. According to Ekpo & Olaniyi (1995), the programme was established to improve the quality of life (in nutrition, housing, health, employment, industrialization, road, water, electricity supply and standard of living of the rural dwellers.

In accomplishing this, the following objectives were set out: to harness the enormous resources that exist in the rural areas for socio-cultural, political and economic development of the rural areas, to ensure a deep-rooted self-sustaining development process based on mobilized mass participation beginning from the grass roots and spreading thereafter to the wider economy. A community-based approach was initiated considering the long history of communal living of

the people which further led to the mobilisation of people through cooperative societies, age groups, trade unions, and craft associations, women organisations, youth organisations, sports and recreational organisations, local security organisations and so on for their self-development.

DFRRI provided basic amenities of modern living and developed rural access roads to connect rural-rural communities, rural-urban centres and farmers to the markets. This is because prior to the introduction of the programme, one of the serious problems encountered by farmers and farming activities was poor road network.

DFRRI was later suspended by the administration and this weakened the programme and rendered it less effective. According to Obasi (2013), there were allegations that DFRRI took credit for past programmes by replacing the banners and posts with reports attesting to the completion of projects executed through previous programmes, thus exaggerating the reported impacts of DFRRI. Also, there were allegations of large-scale embezzlement, poor management of infrastructure, policy inconsistency and accountability by the initiators and organizers of the Programme (Obasi, 2013). After scrapping DFRRI in 1994, its functions were shared among the departments under the Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development.

### **Better Life Programme (BLP) For African Rural Women**

Better Life Programme for rural women was initiated by Her Excellency, Late Dr. (Mrs) Maryam Babangida (wife of General Ibrahim Babangida) in 1987 (Ozoani, 2019). BLP was conceived at a workshop organized by Late Dr. (Mrs) Maryam Babangida with an agenda of discussing relegation of rural women in national development. Its main goal was to make the rural woman become self-reliant and relevant to her family first and the society at large. The programme was designed to alleviate poverty by motivating and empowering rural women through adult literacy and skills acquisition training towards achieving better living standards (Obasi & Oguche, 1995). Other objectives of the program include; reducing maternal and child mortality rate by increasing basic healthcare facilities for women, providing income generating opportunities in agriculture and cottage industries, integrating rural women into national development plans and developing educational training for women.

Though there were observable successes in very few states of the federation and the federal capital territory (FCT) such as the provision of more agricultural inputs to women farmers, provision of farmlands to rural women in Akwa-Ibom, Ondo and Kaduna states through local government councils and community heads for cash crop production, provision of loans and credit facilities to women, BLP centres also provided recreation and relaxation facilities for rural women after the day's work, provision of water pumps and irrigation pipes during dry-season to women in the Northern parts of the country, agricultural extension services, workshops and seminars during which important techniques and new research methodologies were taught.

The programme also suffered a fate similar to that of DFRRI as political power changed from one person to another. The major setback of the programme was that most of its activities were concentrated in the urban communities. At the centre of these activities, the elite women living in the urban communities were more conspicuous than the rural women. Most of the glamorous and flamboyant activities of BLP were exhibited at the national and state capitals. The rural women who were the focal point of the programme were neglected and side-lined from the mainstream of events and activities of the programme. There were strict co-operative

regulations for registration which included a lot of financial collateral that could not be met by most rural women that needed access to agricultural loans. Better Life programme later transformed into Family Support Programme (FSP) in 1994 and subsequently to Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1996 under the administration of late General Abacha and his wife Mrs. Maryam Sanni Abacha with similar concepts and objectives like that of BLP, but rather than focusing on women alone, the programme embraced all members of the family. In spite of the good intentions and resources pumped into the programme, it turned out to be a colossal failure without any positive effect on the rural people.

From the submissions above, it is evidently clear that past government efforts at rural development failed. Apart from implementation constraints identified above, other reasons for the failures of these programmes were given by scholars.

Nagya (2001) identified three reasons why past government efforts at rural development failed. These include: Lack of proper understanding of the rural settings, misconception of rural problems, and lack of comprehensive planning which led to poor implementation and execution of programmes. He further stated that past government efforts at rural development were externally induced and the bulk of the activities took place in the urban areas excluding the major stakeholders (rural farmers) in the planning and implementation processes. This greatly affected the rate of adoption and compliance of some of the strategies by these peasant farmers.

Akin-George (2006) further described the programmes as capital intensive programmes. A large sum of money was spent in acquiring land for the projects, building houses for displaced settlers, buying inputs and irrigation facilities, among others. Apart from this, at the implementation level, some essential inputs such as improved seedlings and fertilizer were inadequately provided. Farm inputs were not released at the time they were required.

He observed that corruption, lack of transparency and accountability by those who implemented the programmes was another major challenge to the effectiveness of the programmes. He further explained that most of these rural development programmes were politically driven without taking into consideration the implication on the rural populace.

### **Factors Responsible For the Failure of Past Rural Development Programmes and Policies in Nigeria**

The stated objectives of successive rural development programmes were not achieved due to the following reasons:

#### **a) Exclusion of Relevant Professionals and stakeholders in Policy Formulation, Planning and Implementation**

One of the challenges identified in the implementation of rural development programmes and policy in Nigeria is the problem of poor policy formulation and implementation. It could be rightly said that policy makers in Nigeria are good at formulating policies to achieve sustainable development in rural areas as well as initiating the programmes. The missing link between these policies and programmes put in place to achieve development in the rural settings in Nigeria is as a result of the gap that exists between the government and the various stakeholders within the sector as well as lack of opportunities for decision making. In most cases the rural sociologists, agriculturists and more importantly the rural dwellers are usually sidelined during rural development policies and programmes formulation, planning and implementation. It is important to note that these various stakeholders are not only in better

positions in identifying, planning and formulating policies and programs that will best suit the needs of the rural dwellers but also ensure that such policies and programmes are implemented to the letter. Non-participation of these stakeholders has been a serious impediment for the development of the rural sector in Nigeria, and by extension the increase in poverty level arising from the dwindling standard of the economic fortunes of the people in this group or sector.

**b) Conflicting Programmes and Projects**

Another problem militating against rural development in Nigeria is the conflicting role of projects and programmes. It is a common phenomenon in Nigeria to see an administration initiating similar and conflicting programmes and policies. Similarly, whenever there is a change of government, the new administration is in the habit of discontinuing with the programmes and policies put in place by the previous administration. For instance, Better Life Programme for Rural women initiated in 1987 was later transformed into Family Support Programme (FSP) in 1994 and subsequently to Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1996 with similar concepts and objectives.

**c) Policy Somersault and inconsistency**

In Nigeria, despite the several policies and programmes towards rural development put in place by past administrations in the country, non-commitment and inconsistency on the part of these administrations have retarded the impacts of these policies and programmes on rural dwellers. In other words, notwithstanding the efforts exerted, the policies and programmes have not been fruitful to promote rural development in Nigeria and inconsistency has been identified as the cause of the failure. For instance, Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe (2012) noted that “Family Support Programme (1994) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (1996); Operation Feed Nation (OFN) and River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were initiated almost at the same time (1976). According to them, these sudden changes retards development and do not allow development policies and programs to fulfill their mission.

**d) Corruption and Embezzlement**

Corruption has been seen as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation. This monster did not spare the rural development sector. The funds meant for the development of rural areas is either diverted to other areas or embezzled by government officials. So many developmental projects have not materialized simply because of the poor and corrupt human factor. Lack of social and political commitment has strangled many rural development policies and programmes.

**e) Lack of adequate Monitoring and Evaluation**

Government policy meant for development of rural areas, are not followed to the letter. There have been many policies designed to develop the rural areas but these programmes lack adequate monitoring and evaluation techniques. Usually, the government representatives charged with rural development stays at the nation's or states' capital from where they attempt to develop the rural areas.

**f) Inadequate Manpower and Technical Know-how**

The sector lacks adequate manpower such as rural sociologists who understand the “sociology” of the people. In other words, people's norms, values, beliefs etc. need to be taken into



consideration when policies are formulated. In many cases development is not achieved in the rural areas because of lack of understanding of rural people's context of life and project. There are no mincing words that adequate skilled manpower in handling the policy and programme will not only bring about rural development but more importantly make the sustainable developmental goal a reality as envisaged by national and international organizations.

### The Way Forward

Having identified the factors responsible for the failure of past rural development policies and programmes, and pinpointed the missing links that have hindered the fruitful accomplishment of these programmes, this paper recommends that a well-articulated and balanced interaction should be established between the government and the various relevant stakeholders in rural sector development; not only when policies and programmes are being formulated or planned but also when they are being implemented and evaluated so that the desired objective can manifest. To this end, concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that any policy or programme initiated is accomplished to the letter. The problem of corruption and embezzlement needs to be tackled headlong in order to develop the rural sector which in turn will support sustainable development in Nigeria. Until culprits are identified and brought to book to serve as deterrents, meaningful achievements towards the development of the rural sector may remain a mirage.

### CONCLUSION

This paper highlighted the important concept of rural development. It also traced the historical trend of rural development policies and programmes put in place by several administrations in Nigeria; towards improving the wellbeing of the rural populace and relevant lessons were drawn from the various policies and programmes.

Nigeria being a country with most of her populace in the rural areas, rural development should not be taken with levity. This paper therefore contends that all hands must be on deck to tackle the problems challenging the development of the rural sector in the country because proffering solution to these problems would result in sustainable development.

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