

REVIEW PAPER

ENHANCING STATE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS THROUGH THE WARD DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NIGER STATE

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ABSTRACT

The primary responsibility of the government is to develop communities under its jurisdiction through community development projects. The development of the rural areas creates conditions conducive for community living, enhances the legitimacy of government and promotes state-community relations. But the political profligacy of government has led to the over-emphasis on urban development at the expense of rural development. The thrust for urban development created social challenges for rural community dwellers in terms of neglect, alienation, rural poverty and underdevelopment. Under the neo-liberal theory of development, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy and the Millennium/Sustainable Development Goals integrated rural development into the national development agenda. This paper examined the developmental strategies adopted by President Obasanjo and Governor Muazu Babangida Aliyu administrations with a view to ascertaining the propriety of the ward development programme (WDP) on rural development in Niger State. It concluded that the lukewarm approach adopted by the Muazu administration in the implementation of the WDP accounts for the 'no-success syndrome' associated with the policy and hence, advocated for adequate funding of the programmes due to its attributes as vendor for good governance in Niger State, Nigeria, Africa at large.

Key Word: Ward Development, Corruption, Investment, Rural Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary concern is focused on institutional reforms to enhance the mode of social services delivery, improve the welfare of citizens and change the contour of development in favour of the rural populace to improve state-community relations. This paper generates intellectual debate that supports development and good governance in the rural areas in Nigeria and Africa at large. The transformation of the rural areas into epicentres of development and democratic growth by government is cardinal to good state-community relations. The failure to accomplish this specific task questions the development agenda of government and the drive to building a virile nation. Reminiscent in the rural areas are rural neglect, rural poverty, unemployment, rural alienation, absence of basic amenities, rural to urban migration and rural crime in the midst of national affluence. The existence of this phenomenon in Nigeria is an enigma to human capital development, good governance and state-civil society relations. The effort of the Muazu Babangida administration in Niger state to promote rural development through the ward development projects was a laudable project but the political will to implement the policy was at variance with its benefit to civil society. The ward development project (WDP) was design to engage the local people in the development of their community. However, the implementation of the WDP was subjected to the dialectics of political materialism. Poor commitment to implementing the programme reduced the WDP to a mere political talk show.



The paper is divided into five parts. Part one introduces the paper and a theoretical framework was established for the paper in part two. In part three, the allegory of the state and community development was examined and in part four the dialectics of the ward development programme in Niger State is discussed. In part five, conclusive remarks that identified specific solutions to the research problem is made.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts the Basic Needs Theory (BNT) to provide a baseline discussion for the theme of the paper. The underlying assumption of the basic need theory is that basic infrastructure is of primary importance to human existence. Basic infrastructure is needed in the rural areas to make life comfortable for community dwellers. The dearth of health, educational, housing and transport facilities and energy and regular supply of power in the rural areas are vectors of human misery, deprivation, alienation, destitution, high mortality rate and poor quality of life. Access to basic necessities of life like food, shelter, clothing, quality nutrition, water and good sanitary conditions, employment opportunities and good transportation and communication networks are rights and privileges any responsible government provides for her citizens. It is worrisome that many rural communities in Nigeria are shadows of communities under the influence of government. The wealth of the nation has not been used by our leaders to generate optimal social benefit returns for the masses. Corruption has undermined all attempts by government to harness the gains of economic growth for the development of the rural people. There is no correlation between the huge budgetary allocation made by government and level of development at the rural areas across Nigeria.

The attendant crisis of development arises from a political culture that supports corruption and the bias nature of the resident pattern adopted by elites who chose to reside in urban at the expense of the rural areas. To this end, the development of the rural areas appeals very little to the conscience of the elites. For instance, Sule and Yahaya (2012) argued that there are no primary health centres, and where they exist at all, there are complaints of inadequate health personnel, lack of drugs and medical equipment for efficient health care delivery in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The high profile of rural neglect in the Federal Capital Territory underscores the situation in remote communities to the headquarters of the regional governments. The general condition associated with rural communities is bad roads. This makes the transportation of farm produce to markets located in urban centers difficult thereby aggravating rural poverty, food shortages and the cost of living in the urban areas. This phenomenon amounts to the marginalization of the rural poor and the neglect of the greater social majority. Adibe (2012) captured this more vividly in his assertion that:

With virtually every part of Nigeria claiming it is marginalized, there is a pervasive sense of alienation from the Nigeria project which appears to have triggered a massive retreat from the state as people seek to construct meanings or resolve their essentialist crisis in chosen primordial identities- often with the Nigerian state as the enemy.

The retreat of the state from embarking on socio-economic development projects and the emphasis on the private sector model underscores the fact that government have renege on her commitment to fulfilling fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy to the rural dwellers. Realistically, access to basic facilities in the rural areas is a catalyst to food security, entrepreneurship development, economic growth and development and national security. The relationship between basic needs (ends) and economic growth (means to an end) is underscored by Jhingan (2007) and Goldstein (1985). Goldstein established a correlation between basic needs and economic growth and argued that government should spend a high percentage of her Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in the provision of the basic necessities of life for her citizen. The provision of the needs variables and its accessibility mirrored the Physical Quality of Life Index and the Human Development index of citizens and serves as measureable indices for comparing levels of development and good governance between societies. The 2006 survey carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that majority of Nigerians lived on less than twenty thousand (N20, 000.00) a year. The human development index of Nigeria shows a general low profile across the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory. The measureable indices of human capital development index identified by the United Nations Development Programme report (2009) are poverty, inequality, gender empowerment and development and life expectancy.



The enormous task of developing the rural areas cannot be undertaken by government alone especially in times of resources challenge. Therefore the need for government to go into partnership with the private sector, civil society organizations and donor agencies in the initiation, formulation, implementation and evaluation of community development projects is advocated. The interventionist approach as advocated by the World Bank and the Donor agencies is fundamental to successful implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Programme by the federal government and the ward development projects by the Niger State Government and as a nexus for good state-community relations. The provision of basic infrastructure to rural communities by government as noted by Fei, et al (1979) do not reduce the capacity of government to invest in other sectors of the economy given the experiences in Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Uruguay and Thailand. Productive investment results to economic growth, national development and improved standard of living. Economic growth is driven by a healthy and productive work force and their effective utilization to development ends.

Development enlarges the choices people and their capabilities in relation to their needs, aspirations and preference (UNDP, 1990) and provides the premise for social justice. The provision of social amenities to rural dwellers on the basis of social justice reduces the propensity of youth crime and deviant behaviour. The lack of social and economic platform for human empowerment has exposed the youths to political manipulation and negative propaganda and ethnic and religious nationalism. The fall-out of this development is the Niger Delta uprising, the Boko Haram uprising, cattle rustling and kidnappings has renewed the assertion that the state of nature has remerge in more gruesome manner than it was in the primitive age. The danger the modern state of nature pose to national unity and economic development given the sophistication in military hardware is immeasurable. The high correlation between rural neglect, youth unemployment and youth violence shows that the nation building in Nigerian project is at the brink of collapse. The reduction in government expenditure and the savings via subsidy removal in education, health, agriculture and petroleum is surreptitiously to finance military operations against negative social forces created by neo-liberal reforms.

THE STATE AND THE ALLEGORY OF WARD DEVELOPMENT

The state is one of the major actors in the implementation of community development projects. It is one of the agents of development. In partnership with the World Bank, nongovernmental organization, faith-based organizations and donor agencies she implements community development projects with a view to transforming the life of her citizens. Ward development is a variant of community development programme. The state is a product of the general will that metamorphosed into a political community with distinctive demographic features, definable territorial limits and a government that presides over the social, political, economic and cultural relations among nationals and non-nationals that do legitimate business within its area of jurisdiction. Its sovereign powers are a product of productive social engagement with individuals that have the same political expectation and identical socio-political values. The state is recognized as a macro and micro agent of development. The former view sees the state as a supranational entity whose primary responsibility is the development of the whole nation. This function is statutory to the federal governments. The later consideration treat the state as a sub-national political unit whose political authority and demographic index is subsumed under the political authority of the macro state. Regional governments (state and local government in Nigeria) fall into the categories of the micro state.

Community development is associated with state welfarism. Under the neo-liberal philosophy of development, such welfarist programmes are jointly coordinated between government and the private sector under public-private partnership and the Build-Own-Operate and Transfer (BOOT) nexus. The state empowers and strengthened the capacities of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations to provide essential services to citizens. Berger and Neuhaus (1977) suggests that since these institutions lie between individuals and society's alienating mega structures (quoted in Starr, 1988), they should be empowered to enable them play complimentary roles with the (*neo-liberal state emphasis mine*) state in the development process. Neo-liberal institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have advocated the involvement of civil society organizations in the initiation, formulation, implementation and evaluation of community development policy by government especially in third world nations.



According to Agbonjimi (2015) through the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), the World Bank assisted the Nigerian government with \$140million (about 30 billion naira). The amount is meant for the implementation of community driven projects in twenty six (26) states (Adamawa, Anambra, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Katsina, Kebbi, Kano, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba, Yobe, Zamfara states) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The disbursement made by the World Bank from 2009 to 2014 for the implementation of the first phase of the project was US\$ 200 million. Specifically, in 2013, about \$380 million was earmarked to be spend by the World Bank on Community and Social Development Projects in Nigeria. According to Okunmadewa (2015), the first phase of the World Bank funding of the Community Social Development Project (CSDP) which benefited over 5,600 communities and about 2 million people in 26 states of the federation was fully disbursed by December 2014.

The projects are sited in poor communities predominated with the most vulnerable households in the country. The World Bank assisted fund is meant for the financing micro-project facilities like the rehabilitation and construction of school class rooms, health centers and clinics, skills acquisition, rural electrification, rural transport, community water schemes, community housing schemes, school feeding, scholarships, workfare, school uniform, books, community centers and market rehabilitation among others. Special grant are also provided for the internally displaced persons, poor households, widows and the physically challenged. The integration of the rural inhabitants into the management of the community development projects is to create social inclusion, gender empowerment and transparency and accountability and in the long run enhances state-communities relations. The funds provided by the World Bank are used to provide basic infrastructures in rural communities in many states in Nigeria (Konjhodzic, 2015). For instance, in Igonigoni community in Abi Local Government Area in Cross River state, the cost of the World Bank Sponsored Community Development Projects (WBSCDP) implemented is six million five hundred and ninety eight thousand two hundred and ninety six (N6, 598, 296.00) naira. In the same vein, the cost of the WBSCDP in Woleche Otukpo in Yala Local Government Area is seven million one hundred and fifty six thousand fifty (N7, 156, 050.00) naira (World Bank, 2013). The fund was invested in 192 community driven projects to increase the access of the poor to improved social and natural resources. The involvement of CSOs and donor agencies in community development has produced remarkable result in the fight against disease, HIV/AIDS, malaria, hunger, high maternal and infant mortality rate, poverty and unemployment. They have promoted sustainable community development and strengthen state-community relations.

Many fiscal policy instruments have been created by the Federal government to provide funds for the development of rural communities in Nigeria. Notable of these fiscal instruments are the Petroleum Equalization Trust Fund, the Petroleum Technology Development Fund, the Education Trust Fund, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, the Universal Basic Education Fund, the Excess Crude Account, the External Reserve Fund and the Nigerian Sovereign Wealth Fund among others (Otinche, 2015). According to Otinche (2015) the later has three fund components broken down into the stabilization fund, the future generation fund and the Nigerian infrastructure fund. The fund is managed on the basis of financial sustainability, independence and transparency. This has enabled the 36 state governments and the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) to provide improved means of transportation (buses and tricycles), youth empowerment, erosion control, construction and renovation of classrooms, agriculture and irrigation and libraries among others. The SWF is used by the Niger state government to provide basic facilities for the rural dwellers in Niger state (Niger State Government, 2013; 2014) In Nigeria, development goals are set by the macro state for the micro state to implement sometimes without adequate financial backup. This super ordinate-subordinate and benefactor-beneficiary relationship allows little room for effective decentralization as a necessity for community development. The autonomy of regional government like the local government is constrained by the exuberant political interest of state governors whose inclination to control the resources of the local government override public interest and community development.

Therefore, the capacity of the nation state in Africa at large and Nigeria in particular to accelerate the pace of rural development is constrained by fiscal indiscipline and poor decentralization and political conflicts between the state government and the local government administrators respectively. Section 15 Subsection 3(a) of the 1999 Constitution mandated government to provide adequate facilities for every community with a view to promoting even development. In section16 (1 and 2a and b) the state is mandated to:



Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity, build an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy; control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness for all citizens on the basis of equality and social justice and equality of status and opportunity (1999 Nigeria Constitution, 1999).

The Federal, State and Local Governments are mandated to provide adequate medical and health facilities for all persons; free, compulsory and universal primary education; free secondary education; free universal education and free adult literacy programme (Constitution 1999). The frenzy of development in the rural areas is lost to the selfish interest of political leaders who are engrained in the culture of self aggrandizement. Industrialization is urban based and rural bias and as tax resources are weakly applied to development needs, the base of capital formation, human capital development, entrepreneurship development and economic growth in rural communities is weak. The channeling of tax resources to rural development would in Toye and Moore (1998) context:

Create a possibility for taxpayers to call the government to better account for its spending. To the extent that the government decides to respond to these demands, the basis exists for the growth of government accountability and therewith the growth of government legitimacy. Indeed, such demands and responses have historically led on to the emergence of more democratic types of government.

Citizens pay taxes without getting commensurate social benefits in terms of investment in transportation, health, education and general infrastructure. Due to political insensitivity the minimum standard for good governance are rarely meet. The urban slum and rural communities are largely associated with backwardness, shanty settlements and poor hygiene and lack of basic amenities. The lack of rural development has led to brain drain to the urban centers. This is due to lopsidedness in the distribution of social amenities like housing, health and education facilities, good network of communication, transportation and energy supply. These facilities are catalyst to good standard of living and human capital development and gender empowerment. The World Bank (1975) had emphasized the designing of development strategies that would improve the economic and social life of the rural poor. The goal is to reduce the contradictions associated with rural underdevelopment and urban development and the attendant social vices that accompanied rural-urban migration. This integrationist process of development facilitates the task of nation building, national integration and enhances national security. National security is threatened by rural poverty, inter-ethnic and inter-religious hostility and intolerance occasioned by the unhealthy competition for scarce resources. Resource scarcity breeds social alienation and desperation with bleak chances of survival. The gloomy hope for survival is depicted by the hunger index provided by the 2010 report of the International Food Policy Research Institute for Africa below.

The data for Nigeria is highlighted on the table for emphasis. The above data reflects a state of destitution for the second class and third class citizens in Africa as reflections in Chad, Niger, Somalia and Ethiopia shows. These are features of subjective citizenship associated with social stratification where neighbourhood communities like Karmu, Kubwa, Dutse, Nyanya, Mararaba, and Zuba among others in the Federal Capital Territory faced is facilities affordability crisis and access and affordability in communities too remote to urban centers.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE WARD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In 1991, the Dasuki report (1991) recommended the integration of the people into the community development gridline through the creation of pyramidal administrative units with the village and neighbourhood committees at the base and the development area offices, the intermediate units and the local government council at the apex. The village and neighbourhood committees were voluntary organizations created to:

Monitor the activities of public officers deployed to the village or neighbourhood;
Community development; cooperatives; control and allocation of rural land; control of the exploitation of natural resources; care of the old and disabled; rehabilitation of orphan and delinquent; monitor enrolment and attendants in school and control of movement of persons.



In 1999, the Obasanjo administration introduced integrated rural development policy (IRDP) with a view to improving the economic, social and political well-being of rural dwellers. State governments were encouraged to incorporate the NIRDP into their respective state development plans. The NIRDP failed to meet the realistic social expectation of the citizen given the degree of rural destitution, deprivation, poverty and alienation. The ward development programme introduced by the Muazu Babangida administration in 2008 via the Establishment of Ward Development Projects Committees Law 2009 (as amended in 2012) (Niger State Government, 2009) emanates from this political sympathy. Political sympathy is transient and dynamic in nature and changes with changes in the political taste of leaders. The ward development policy allows local communities to identify, initiate and implement self-beneficial projects in the 274 wards in Niger State.

Table 1: Global Hunger Index in Africa 1990-2010

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Year	1990-1992	2004-2006	1988-1992	2003-2008	1990	2008	1990	2010
Kenya	33.0	30.0	17.4	16.5	10.5	12.8	20.3	19.8
Liberia	30.0	38.0	16.9	20.4	21.9	14.5	22.9	24.3
Libya	1.0	2.0	4.1	5.6	3.8	1.7	<5	<5
Madagascar	32.0	35.0	35.5	36.8	16.7	10.6	28.1	27.5
Malawi	45.0	29.0	24.4	15.5	22.5	10.0	30.6	18.2
Mali	14.0	10.0	33.5	27.9	25.0	19.4	24.2	19.1
Mauritania	10.0	8.0	43.2	19.4	12.9	11.8	22.0	13.1
Mauritius	7.0	6.0	12.6	12.4	2.4	1.7	7.3	6.7
Morocco	5.0	4.0	8.1	9.9	8.8	3.6	7.3	5.8
Mozambique	59.0	37.0	28.4	21.2	24.9	13.0	37.4	23.7
Namibia	29.0	19.0	21.5	17.5	7.2	4.2	19.2	13.6
Niger	38.0	28.0	41.0	32.9	30.5	16.7	36.5	25.9
Nigeria	16.0	8.0	35.1	26.7	23.0	18.6	24.4	17.8
Rwanda	45.0	40.0	24.3	18.0	17.4	11.2	28.9	28.1
Senegal	28.0	25.0	19.6	14.5	14.9	10.8	20.8	16.8
Sierra Leone	45.0	46.0	25.4	21.3	27.6	19.4	32.7	28.9
Somalia	-	-	-	32.8	20.0	20.0	-	-
S/Africa	6.0	5.0	10.3	10.1	5.6	6.7	7.3	7.3
Sudan	31.0	20.0	35.9	31.7	12.4	10.9	26.4	20.9
Swaziland	12.0	18.0	8.1	6.1	8.4	8.3	9.5	10.8
Tanzania	28.0	35.0	25.1	16.7	15.7	10.4	22.9	20.7
Togo	45.0	37.0	23.5	20.5	15.0	9.8	27.8	22.4
Tunisia	1.0	1.0	9.1	3.3	5.0	2.1	5.0	<5
Uganda	19.0	15.0	19.7	16.4	18.6	13.5	19.1	15.0
Zambia	40.0	45.0	19.5	14.9	17.2	14.8	25.6	24.9
Zimbabwe	40.0	39.0	8.0	14.0	7.9	9.6	18.6	20.9

Source: IFPRI Global Hunger Index (2010).

Key provided by author: 1&2= Proportion of undernourished in the population (%) 1990-1992. 3&4= Prevalence of under-weight children under five years (%) 2004-2006. 5&6= Under five mortality rate (%) 1990-2008. 7&8= Global Hunger Index data from 1988-1992; 2003-2010.

INSTITUTIONAL PLATFORM FOR THE WARD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Niger state government established administrative structures in each of the 25 local government Councils of Niger state to oversee the effective implementation of the programme. The Directorate of Ward Development Projects (DWDP) headed by an Executive Secretary appointed by the Executive Governor to hold office for a



renewable term of three (3) years. The Directorate has four departments namely Administration and Finance, Technical (Project Engineering Section) and Management and Information System (monitoring and evaluation) departments. The State Ward Development Project Committee (SWDPC) has the Executive Governor as chairman, chairmen of the 25 Local Government Projects Advisory and Monitoring Committee, chairmen of the 25 local government councils, the Co-coordinator Local Government Project Advisory and Monitoring Committee and the Executive Secretary of the Directorate of Ward Development projects as Secretary. The State Ward Development Project Committee ensures that the ward projects are in consonance with the goals of the development policies of the Niger state government. It ensures that need-based quality projects are executed. It reviews the 274 ward development projects and to ensure that funds are judiciously.

The Ward Development Projects Committee (WDPC) consists of 7 members and the Local Government Project Advisory and Monitoring Committee (LGPAMC). The membership of the former consists of a woman of high integrity, a Councillor representing the ward irrespective of political affiliations, a retired civil servant, private sector businessmen and women, a retired military, a Police or Para-military officer or a religious leader as chairman. The Councillor of the ward served as Secretary. The primary responsibility of the WDPC is to prepare bills of quantities for projects to be executed as contained in the annual ward development plans and forward same to the Director of Works of each LGPAMC for consideration and approval. On the other hand, the Local Government Project Advisory and Monitoring Committee (LGPAMC) consisting of 7 members oversee project management at the local government level. Membership of the committee comprise a Commissioner, Special Adviser, Executive Secretary or Director General as chairman, a senior state civil servant on GL. 12 and above as the Coordinator, Community Development Officer, Principal Women Development Officer, Directors of Finance and Works as members. The Executive Chairman of the Local Government council is the Secretary to the LGPAMC. The primary responsibilities of the LGPAMC are:

To review and approve projects in consultation with the ward development committee;
Prepare annual ward development projects; Prepare annual ward development projects implementation plan detailing out priorities and time lines; Perform oversight functions on projects implementation; and Ensure that projects are fully executed before the release of funds to the ward development committees for new projects (EWDP Law 2012).

The achievement of these goals is trajectory and constrained by the lack of commitment by the Muazu Babangida administration to effectively implement the ward development projects (WDPS) in Niger state. The WDP was one of the social fantasies projected by the Muazu administration as a political tool to score cheap political points. The lack of commitment to implement the WDPs by the Muazu administration shows the lack of correlation between political vision and political commitments and rural underdevelopment in Nigeria.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND THE WARD DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

As statutory with all development policies, the Niger state government established a Ward Development Fund (WDF) for the financing of the various projects in the 274 ward in the 25 local government councils in Niger state. The fund is managed by the Directorate for Ward Development. At the local government level is the Local Government Advisory and Monitoring Committee Account established to warehouse the funds. To ensure there is transparency and accountability in the management of the WDF, the Commissioner of Finance, the Local Government Chairman, Director of Finance and Secretary to the Local Government are made signatory to the WD account. The initial start-up capital for each ward was five hundred thousand (N500, 000.00) naira. This amount was subsequently increased to one million (N1, 000,000.00) naira was to be progressively increased to two billion naira. However, the overall management of the WDF was shrouded in corruption. Cumulatively, the sum of 12 million naira was allocated to each ward annually for ward development (Niger State Government n.d). For efficiency and routine administration, 0.5% of the total sum disbursed in the state is allocated to the Office of the Project Implementation Coordinator and 2% disbursed to the Directorate as operational cost.

The recurrent expenditure for the Directorate in the year 2008 and 2009 was one hundred and ten million seven hundred and twenty thousand (N110, 720.000.00) naira. The capital expenditure for ward development in 2008 and



2009 was one billion ninety six million (N1, 096,000,000.00) Naira. The least amount given to a Local Government Council for the respectively years was forty four million (N44, 000,000.00) Naira while the highest amount stood at N60 million Naira. A total of N1.5 billion was spent on all the ward development projects. An estimated N274 million was spent in a month and N3.288 billion in a year on ward development between 2008 and 2009. The amount paid depends on development needs and challenges associated with each ward. Funds disbursement to the committee is done via the bank holding the accounts of such ward development committee. The funds are audited twice a year by a team of qualified auditor appointed by the Directorate.

THE POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS

The ward development project was introduced as a pilot scheme for three months to ascertain its political and operational feasibility. It is obvious that the programme is one of the best grassroots oriented development programme introduced in recent time. Its bottom-up approach to development makes it more integrative and promotes good governance. The enabling law streamlines the goals of the programme thus:

The actualization of participatory democracy through people's popular participation in project executions after need assessment; enthronement of bottom-up approach to community development; actualization of participatory decision-making by the people on matters concerning them; and let them decide what they need by themselves and actively participate in its execution, ownership and sustainability (Niger State Government Law No. 24, 2009).

The programme was no doubt participatory and it raises people's hope about the performance of the Muazu Babangida administration. Official records have shown that about one thousand six hundred (1600) ward development projects were executed in the 274 wards in the state from the five hundred thousand (N500, 000. 00) naira disbursement in 2009 and about 200 projects were near completion. Overall, 4,293 ward development projects were executed by the Muazu Babangida administration during the period under review as shown below:

Table 2: Number of Completed Projects between 2009 and 2010

Number	Types of Projects	Number of Projects
1	Boreholes	690
2	Renovation/construction of schools	468
3	Renovation/construction of culverts and drainage	306
4	Renovation/ construction of clinics	192
5	Construction of market stalls	23
6	Electrification projects	70
7	Construction of religious places of worship	38
8	Renovation of courts & Police Stations	6
9	Renovation of district/village head residence	12
10	Construction of desk & chairs	2,448
11	Fencing of cemeteries	7
12	Grading of feeder roads	31
Total	Total number of Projects Implemented	4,293

Source: Niger State Directorate of Ward Development Projects

The 4,293 projects implemented within the experimental three month are significant achievement when placed in the line of progressive thinking. Such speculative thinking estimated the numbers of projects to have been implemented by the Muazu administration at 17, 172 ward development projects a year. If this was done, Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu (the then Governor of Niger state) should have been seen as the DOYEN of rural development in Niger state, Nigeria and Africa at large. The state government subjected the implementation of the ward development to administrative orbiting and political eclipse which beclouded the vision behind its introduction.



THE POLICY CHALLENGES

It is not out place to forecast the challenges to the programme. Most of the issues raised are generated in the course of discussion with some agents of the state government who were involved in implementing the scheme. Some of issues raised are incidental to the research problem. One of such problem is the contradiction between the political interest of the state government and the realistic social expectation of the programme to the people. This contradiction manifested in poor funding and policy halt or failure. The ward development programme was a political entrapment to secure the people's mandate in the April 2011 governorship election. Regrettably, seventeen months into the second tenure (September 2012 the time of writing this paper) of the Muazu Babangida Aliyu administration no amount was disbursed to any ward for the execution of ward development projects due to political profligacy. The policy goal was narrow minded due to the non inclusion of entrepreneurship development programmes in the policy blueprint.

Another defect has to do with the structural alignment of local government finance with the financial structure of the state government. In Nigeria, local government councils are subsidiary enterprises of the state. The fund federally allocated to local government councils are managed by the state government through a State Local Government Joint Account against the tenet of fiscal federalism. This form of insubordination leads to political alienation and rural underdevelopment. The monthly allocation to local government councils in Nigeria for the month of January 2012 and from June 1999 to May 2007 is presented below for emphasis.

Judging from the figure on table 3, a total of one hundred and fifteen billion, eight two million nine thousand nine hundred and seventy five naira forty two kobo (N115, 082,009,975.42) was given to Local Government Councils in Niger state in the period under review. But it is less convincing to think that this stated amount was actually given to local government councils by the Niger State Government in exact sum released by the Federal Ministry of Finance. It is also an understatement to think that this problem is peculiar to Local Government Councils in Niger State alone.

The question that demands answer from state governors and which none would give satisfactory answer is whether they do release to the local government councils the amount statutorily allocated by the federal government? Without much prompting, the answer is no. What is also not clear is if the one million (N1, 000, 000. 00) naira used in financing the ward development by the Niger State government is part of the local government funds surreptitiously withheld by the state government and now used for political propaganda in the ward development programme. This principal-agent relationship is the bane of rural development in Nigeria today. Until state governors change their attitude towards the management of resources meant for local government councils or the constitution is amended to guarantee direct allocation to local government councils from the federation account any effort at ward development by the Niger State in promoting good governance in rural communities in Niger State in particular and Nigeria at large would amount to scratching the elephant back with a stick. Statutorily, state governments are mandated to give 10% of the internally generated revenue and percentage grants to the local government. But how religious state governors are in respecting this constitutional obligation can be answered in political rhetoric. With such complimentary financial assistance local government councils in Niger state and Nigeria at large should have been able to confront the task of grassroots under development head-on. The bane of rural development in Nigeria is the commercialization of political offices.

Executive positions at the local government have been transformed into personal estates by state governors who run the local government councils on a father-son basis. They finance the elections of godsons into executive offices at the local government level or run the local government council on a Care-taker Committee basis (a committee that lacked the statutory powers to implement capital projects) and create a principal-agent relationship with absolute control over local government finances. Naturally, political agents rarely questioned the authority of their principal and this has given room for the diversion of funds meant for development to servicing political interests at the expense of providing health facilities, access road, water and sanitation facilities and electricity among others. This is engineered by the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) which is a mortgage on local government autonomy. This negative trend in inter-governmental fiscal relations has affected the pace of socio-political development, destroyed public trust and confidence, alienated the masses from government as well as lowers the legitimacy profile of government in Niger state and Nigeria at large. Frankly speaking, people's perception about the



Muazu Babangida Ailyu administration is not as enthusiastic as it was at the beginning of his administration in 2007. This is not good signal for any government at whatever level.

Table 3: Revenue Allocation to Local Government Councils by Federation Allocation from June 1999 to May 2007 and January 2012

No	State	Amount 2012	June1999- May2007
1	Abia state	7,485,873,220.67	66,957,033,320.83
2	Adamawa	3,172,168,134.51	88,385,118,660.50
3	Akwa Ibom	4,206,354,131.80	110,896,366,303.24
4	Anambra	3,193,523,180.97	85,847,453,591.19
5	Bauchi	3,583,529,111.24	98,833,751,081.01
6	Bayelsa	1,356,695,247.15	38,101,830,075.82
7	Benue	3,713,364,292.12	100,676,342,004.41
8	Borno	4,229,882,163.36	114,329,322,081.28
9	Cross River	2,660,076,766.60	74,990,493,054.80
10	Delta	1,696,169,971.19	97,961,571,804.08
11	Ebonyi	1,906,610,604.99	51,780,333,382.06
12	Edo	2,687,636,093.18	77,565,785,400.62
13	Ekiti	2,184,765,812.75	60,134,219,325.71
14	Enugu	2,575,651,178.27	68,964,491,966.13
15	Gombe	1,855,825,711.84	49,916,381,357.36
16	Imo	3,702,139,104.12	99,280,101,362.71
17	Jigawa	1,892,345,429.02	108,615,763,243.89
18	Kaduna	4,186,424,562.34	117,182,125,094.69
19	Kano	6,316,212,006.36	370,935,172,516.81
20	Katsina	5,017,303,690.17	139,822,729,992.43
21	Kebbi	3,104,490,118.64	86,787,009,340.22
22++	Kogi	3,206,753,240.66	86,187,515,182.33
23	Kwara	2,463,135,269.63	66,011,107,696.79
24	Lagos	6,506,652,880.69	149,392,517,393.59
25	Nasarawa	1,964,151,382.59	54,487,876,090.81
26	Niger	3,967,208,019.36	111,114,801,956.06
27	Ogun	2,999,906,124.15	81,197,512,355.95
28	Ondo	2,734,388,802.17	74,082,244,267.18
29	Osun	3,776,600,018.74	102,574,611,292.67
30	Oyo	4,796,723,645.24	127,369,093,326.38
31	Plateau	2,735,320,489.71	73,434,508,057.07
32	Rivers	1,690,769,566.65	104,313,280,579.65
33	Sokoto	3,438,048,292.60	96,232,809,149.69
34	Taraba	2,678,352,904.05	72,869,810,839.60
35	Yobe	2,619,962,444.80	72,326,009,351.84
36	Zamfara	2,466,991,228.08	70,091,324,490.36
37	FCT, Abuja	1,653,712,729.13	43,324,238,682.88
38	Grand Total	122,079,797,310.59	3,313,534,856,541.80

Source: Daily Trust (April 16, 2012) and Wuam and Talla (2010).

The ward development programme has failed to yield the desired result because of the political orbiting that results in inconsistency in financing the programme and more so from the lean and subservient financial relations of the local government with state governments. With the exception of some policy analysts, those who are profiting from constitutional largess has seen nothing wrong with it.



RESEARCH PROGNOSIS

This paper attempts to chart a new course for state-community relations in Nigeria and Africa at large by examining the strategic responses from the Niger State Government in improving the welfare of rural dwellers through the ward development projects. The ward development programme has provided salutary evidence that broad participation of the people in the process of governance facilitates the task of nation building and bridge the gap in lines of social communication between the government and the governed. The sustainable implementation of this programme would bridge the gap in urban development and rural underdevelopment, ease the strain on infrastructural facilities in urban communities, and reduce the tempo of rural-urban migration and urban crime and its associated national insecurity. The presence of these social ills is reflection of bad governance. The success of ward development programme was thwarted by the feeble financial position of the local government and its subservient relationship with the state government. In spite of these challenges, this culture of community governance promoted state-community relations in Niger state. Against this background, this research provides some policy digests for government.

The implementation of public policies at all levels of government, in general, and Niger State, in particular, should be consistent and should transcend the life of each administration. The Niger state government should sustainably fund the ward development programmes as this will enhance its legitimacy. The ward development policy should be reviewed to make it all inclusive by building in human capacity development, entrepreneurship development and agricultural development as basic components. The fund budgeted for ward development could be used to build skill acquisition centers for entrepreneurship development. The state joint local government account should be abolished and direct allocation made to local government councils. This will give financial autonomy to the local government and raise the expectation for social service delivery to rural dwellers given efficient management. The amount allocated by the Niger State government for the implementation of ward development projects should be reviewed upward and judiciously used. Government should provide basic amenities to rural communities to encourage labour retention for the agricultural sector.

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