

Democracy and sustainable development in rural communities of Ebonyi State, Nigeria: The bridge-building role

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Abstract

The inadequacies of socio-economic and infrastructural facilities in the rural communities in Nigeria continues to pose serious challenge to the various governments in the country. The availability of these socio-economic infrastructure were believed to have enabled the rural community dwellers have access to the wide distribution of the benefits of the economic growth, significant improvement in the incomes and assets of the poor which would improve their living standard. This study therefore set out to examine the effect of democracy as a bridge builder in the provision of sustainable development in the rural communities in Ebonyi State. The study contends that sustainable development in the rural communities was a typical outcome of the application of democratic principle. It asserts that the practice of democracy is a determining factor in the sustainable development of rural communities in Ebonyi state. The study posits that democracy is the type of government that can guarantee the right of citizens to improved incomes and assets of the poor and to a large extent improve their living standard. The data for the study were collected from documentary sources, media commentaries, scholarly inputs and direct observation, while content analytical approach was adopted. The study adopted system's theory as its framework of analysis. The study found out that the previous undemocratic governments approach to rural development were not consistent hence, it had no significant impact on the lives of the rural community dwellers. The paper concludes that democracy remains a viable bridge builder for community development in Ebonyi state even though the programme was not sustainable as the impacts were minimal.

Keywords: Democracy, sustainable development, rural communities, Ebonyi State

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Introduction

The issue of sustainable development in the rural communities of Nigeria has been of great concern to various governments in the country (Nkwede 2017). This has attracted the attention of non-governmental organizations, scholars, development experts, international development organizations among others. The general agreement is that sustainable development in the rural communities is a global issue that requires the attention of every government as it impacts positively on the general well-being of the people involved whether in the developed or developing countries.

Nigeria was heeded all over the world as a torch bearer in terms of development in the entire African continent, but unfortunately she has continued to be regarded as one of the least developed countries in the world despite her abundant natural and human resources (Okpata 2009). Various reports showed that Nigeria is so underdeveloped that over seventy percent of its population lack finance to take care of their immediate needs, lack food, shelter, access to health care services, education while child and maternal mortality rates have continued to grow, children of school age drop out of school for odd jobs, while the people do not have access to socio-economic and infrastructural facilities despite the plethora of development programmes initiated and implemented in the past by various governments in the country (World Bank Report 2008).

This alarming indicator triggered the review of all existing developmental programmes in the country by the democratic government that was enthroned in 1999, in order to harmonize and sustain them. To achieve this, the democratic government had to partner with two International Banks; the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The target was to have a programme that would focus on sustainable rural development and support community-based activities. Other aims of the programme were to enhance the people's access to social-economic infrastructure and make available more development resources at the rural communities. The target beneficiaries were the rural community dwellers through a design that would enable them have control and enhance their standard of living.

Having adopted this, the democratic government equally keyed into other International development programmes in addition to the ones it initiated. Some of these programmes included; Millennium Development Goals in 2000, Poverty Alleviation Programme in 2000, National Poverty Eradication Program in 2001, Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme in 2001, National

Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy 2004, Community and Social Development Programme in 2009 (Wikipedia 2010).

In 1996 when Ebonyi State was created, the state became a major development center. The daunting challenges of redressing the palpable state of underdevelopment of the state was prominent, prompting the state to replicate all these national programmes in Ebonyi State, which became a major platform for sustainable development of Ebonyi State (EB-CPRP 2009).

These programmes were designed to among other things:

- a. Upgrade the provision of infrastructure in the areas of health, education, electricity, and water sectors.
- b. Build multipurpose infrastructure in the rural communities including feeder roads and bridges.
- c. Improve access to the supply of social-economic services
- d. Improve the management and services of natural resources
- e. Enhance safety nets support

Against this backdrop, the study aims at examining the effect of democracy and sustainable development in rural communities of Ebonyi State. In doing this, the study is divided into five sections. Section one delved into the general background of the study, section two dealt with delineation of key concepts viz; democracy, sustainable development and rural development in Nigeria. Section three captured theoretical framework and methodology. Section four focused on data presentation and analysis while section five wrapped it up with conclusion and recommendations.

Delineation of concepts

Democracy

Democracy is the system of government that is concerned with giving the citizens the opportunity to participate in decision making on issues that concern them. It is anchored on equal participation of all citizens irrespective of class, gender or status in the society. The practice of democracy engenders equal right, justice, peace and the rule of law. Here the citizens in all ramifications are regarded as partners in deliberating on issues that affect their lives with government officials, both at the rural community, state and central levels.

As a system of government, democracy has been an age long practice. Mohammed (2006) explains that a certain rudimentary democracy existed in pre- historic hunter-gatherers society where little outside interference and assumption of equality prevailed. As man started settling in large group, certain degree of hierarchy started emerging into their governance. He further emphasized that the real democracy emerged at about 500BC when the Greeks and the Romans established systems of government based on popular participation. After the fall and decline of Greek city state and the Roman system, democracy declined and only resurfaced in the early 12th century in the city state of Northern Italy. Others that practiced democracy included; the Phoenicians and the Egyptians.

What is paramount in the concept of democracy both ancient and modern democracy is that they all emphasized on the concept of representative democracy, placing participation as the factor. Though democracy has different meaning to different people, depending on the angle one looks at it, but in our scope, democracy is examined from the position of allowing the citizens the freedom to actively participate in issues that affect them, especially the rural community dwellers. As a concept, democracy connotes the show of human quest for autonomy, hence Edoh (2003) opines that democracy portrays rule by the people which upholds the doctrine of autonomy. Though, this opinion of seeing democracy as rule by the people have been criticized by scholars who argued that the level of autonomy enjoyed by citizens in democratic setting is not guaranteed in all democratic governance. This prompted Allison (1994) to argue that the word democracy had become a tool of propaganda as those who defend the type of government they practice tend to use the word democracy as a cover up while in the real sense of the meaning, what they practice is far from the real meaning of democracy, especially in those places where the citizens were not given equal right, equal opportunity to participate on issues that concern them or grant justice, equity and rule of law. This conflict in the term prompted Ogundiya (2010) to observe that the only first call for democracy is the assent that all people are equal in some important respect since it is only on this ground that all should be treated equally in certain political respects. This brought about the rise of what constitute democracy and how democracy is measured. This is to avoid isolating the core principles of democracy which would serve as bases for measuring democracy, as virtually every government claim to be democratic politically.

Essentially, democracy is a form of life or government which recognizes the dignity of rational man to have a say in “who is to rule him” and “how he is to be ruled”. It promotes the right of man to conduct his affairs as maximally beneficial as possible, though within the confines of morality. Thus, democracy is a system of government where leadership in a country is attained by majority participation in the selection or election process. Put in a simple parlance, Abraham Lincoln described it to be “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. The expression suggests that democracy means a system of government in a country based on the firm principles.

Historically, the practice of democratic ideals in Nigeria started in 1922 when four elective posts (three for Lagos and one for Calabar) were provided for by the 1922 constitution. Hitherto, what is now called Nigeria was largely made up of kingdoms. It was the elective principle mentioned above that somewhat brought about party politics in Nigeria with the formation of Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). In 1923 the Richard constitution of 1946 widened the legislative scope council in Lagos to cover the whole of Nigeria. It would be recalled that up till that time the legislative council created by the proceeding constitution of 1922 could only legislate for the Lagos colony and southern provinces. Under the Mcpherson constitution of 1957, the legislative council was supplemented by a House of Representatives which had majority of members elected indirectly. The Regional Houses of Assembly were given powers on local legislation, and the Western Province gained its own house of chiefs. Elections were through Electoral College whereby electors in the primary election needed residence tax as qualifications to elect members of a provincial college. The provincial colleges elected members to each regional house of Assembly, which then elected from among its own members those who would represent them in the House of Representatives.

The 1954 Littleton constitution structured Nigeria as a federation. The Governor was replaced by a governor-General and the regional lieutenants, by Governors. A federal house of representatives was created with a speaker, 184 elected members, 3 officials and 6 special members. The federal council of ministers had authority over all matters on which the house of representative might legislate. The house of representative had exclusive power in external migration, citizenship etc. In the North, there were elections with Franchise restricted to adult male. In the West, there were direct elections as well as in the east and in Lagos based on adult suffrage.

Nigeria went to the polls on December 12, 1959, on 1st October 1960, Nigeria became independent and a republic in 1963. The constitution of 1979 provided for an executive president, a 96 – member Senate and 450 member House of Representatives in 1993, elections for a civilian president were held in June. However, the election results were cancelled on spurious grounds.

In 1999, Nigeria held elections for a civilian government and adopted a new constitution. Olusegun Obasanjo, who as a military ruler and had handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1979, was elected president as a civilian.

On 27th May 2003, Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in again as the president of the Federal Republic, sequel to his re-election in April 17 2003 polls (Michael, 2011). Again, in May 29th 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was sworn in as president of Nigeria following the terminus of Obasanjo,s send tenure. Similarly, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was on 29th May 2011 sworn in as the president of the Federal Republic after the conduct of a general election in February, 2011. Then, came, a general election conducted on 28th March, 2015 that brought Mohammadu Buhari in as president of Nigeria after his swearing in on 29th May 2015. President Buhari subjected himself for a second tenure in the general election conducted on 23rd February, 2019 and was again sworn in on 29th May, 2019 as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

From the above historic account of Democracy in Nigeria, it can be seen that democratic governance has to do with the exercise of legitimate power either directly or indirectly through elected representatives but the interesting thing is that this use of power is usually with the consent of the people. Those at the helm of affairs in a democratic set- up are supposed to provide answers to socio-political and economic questions. Bello and Obadan (2004) agreed with this view when they conceive of democratic governance thus:

Under democratic governance, factors such as economic equality, fraternal feeling and political liberty within a defined territory are indispensable prerequisites. The institutional expression within democratic governance in contemporary times are equal rights for all normal adults to vote and stand as candidates for election; equal eligibility for executive and judicial offices (provided the essential qualifications for the performance of the assigned duties are satisfied); and freedom of speech, publication and association.

The ability of the citizenry to enjoy these numerous advantages of democracy is usually dependent on a number of factors ranging from socio-economic and natural endowment of the people. This equally goes to show that democracy has a lot of respect for the fundamental rights of the people and the rule of law. Whenever a government refuses to observe religiously these features of democracy, such an administration cannot be said to be democratic. But for these idea features of democracy to be achieved in any polity, the people need to tolerate each other and imbibe the spirit of “give and take”, as under a political democracy, the minority are to be given a sense of belonging in the decisions of the majority. Democratic governance cannot be realized if either the majority or minority are isolated from the policies of government.

For Roberts and Edwards (1991) democracy carries with it certain fundamental features. In their postulations, democracy entails popular participation; absolute respect for the rule of law; a general guarantee of fundamental freedoms which lubricate popular participation; periodic competitive, free and fair elections with the vote of every citizen counting equally; respect for majority rule as well as the readiness of the minority to acquiesce in the decision of the majority; accountability, guarantee of separation of powers in practice, transparency and responsiveness in governance and opportunity for change of government or any leadership found wanting.

Democracy should be seen as providing opportunities for all citizens to develop their potentials because in an environment where majority of the citizens are not literate, many of the citizens cannot take active part in the decision-making process. It, therefore, behoves on government that is said to be democratic to aid free education. Government should equally guarantee the citizens job security, a take home pay that would actually take the people home and provide a good condition of service for workers. It is only when this is done that the ever-waning gulf between the rich and the poor would be bridged.

Agreeing with this stand, Appadorai (1978) opined that:

Democratic governance demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character, rational conduct and active participation in the government; the intelligent understanding of public affairs; independent judgment; tolerance and unselfish devotion to public interest.

In contrast to the above position, democracy as is experienced in Nigeria is far from producing individuals that can really contribute rationally to the policies of government but rather, it had produced for the Nigerian society individuals who are not only fearful but uncritical, and in that stead are not interested in the happening in government, a development that does not guarantee is continued survival.

Importantly, democracy as earlier pointed out is the best and most cherished system of government the world over, the system is not without its flaws. Bello and Obadan (2004) saw the problems inherent in most democracies around the world to include;

- Problems arising from inability to fulfill its precondition. This, they asserted makes democratic governance rule of ignorance as it pays attention to quantity and not to quality.
- Democracy tends to be capitalist in nature, as it represents nothing but the rule of propertied oligarchy.
- Fundamental attributes of democracy like quality and majority rule remain as myth as the smaller number can remotely control the majority with its wealth.
- The basic assumptions of democracy are practically difficult to fulfill. For according to them, the citizens are supposed to be intelligent, have self-control and conscience, for good democratic governance to flourish, but, these assumptions are not adequately fulfilled.

Indeed, it should be stated that there is no system without its weakness and in the words of Diamond (1990) “democracy is the most widely admired type of political system but also the most difficult to sustain.” Be that as it may, democracy has won the hearts of most people across the globe especially its guarantee of fundamental freedom and the rule of law and to that extent not comparable with any other system in terms of its humane treatment of people (Agena 2005).

Sustainable development

Sustainable development refers to the type of development where the use of available resources meets the need of the citizens and still conserves such resources for further use (Wikipedia 2010). This portrays that such resources are used in a manner that both present and future needs of the citizens are met. The

term is equally regarded as the type of development that is capable of meeting with the needs of the people at present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs (Ukaga 2010). Ukaga argues that the term sustainability varies, depending on who is using it. This shows that there are various approaches to the discussion of sustainability. However, while there is different views on the concept of sustainable development and the specific policy and practice options for achieving it as noted by scholars, there is an agreement on some of its principles such as: the ability to meet the basic needs of citizens fairly and efficiently, reserving alternative for use in the present and future generation to be able to meet their own needs, promotion of the well-being of the community dwellers by allowing them to participate and be active in matters that concern them, maintaining that differences and productivity of nature, managing and using available resources in such a way that it would yield the desired outcome, connecting various aspect of sustainable development such as political, social and economic aspects, being accountable to the people, reduce waste, having a long time view of every developmental programme and fostering cooperation and shared responsibilities among all concerned.

It was based on this that Adebayo (2010) maintains that the concept of sustainable development are efforts geared towards the improvement of the natural resources to enhance the human living standard in such a manner that the needs of the future generation will equally be guaranteed. Remarkably this shows that sustainable development is the ability to maintain the resources of the state for the collective use of the citizens while good efforts are simultaneously made to reserve such resources for the use of the coming generation.

In 1987, a United Nations commission chaired by the then Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Bruntland published a report called “The Bruntland Report” and defined sustainable development as development that meets the need of the present generations without compromising the ability of feature generations to meet their own needs. The presumption that sustainability has something to do with non-depreciation of the natural capital stock is explicit in the Bruntland Report.

The World Bank Report (2003) defined sustainability in terms of opportunities for future generations, using a triangular framework to illustrate the idea of sustainable development. According to the report, the new framework includes economic, social and ecological objectives, expanding each of these objectives from the traditional, economists’ perspective. Under the framework, equity is a new economic objective, and social objectives are

expanded to include things like empowerment participation, social mobility and cultural identity. The crux of the report is the goal of sustainable development to further each of these objectives; economic, social and ecological; simultaneously over a long term, so that they may be enjoyed by future generations.

Ahmed et al (1989: 61) said the concept of sustainable development grew out of the recognition that resources are finite. That means that there are not limitless supplies of clean water and air, oil, natural gas, minerals, farm lands, top soils, space and other resources. They contend that:

As the earth's population grows, the share of resources available to any given individual use of the earth's resources depletes. Building more roads, for instance, means paving over large amounts of land that can no longer be used for other purposes. One day oil will run out, no matter how worthy the use for which it might be put in progress.

The objective of sustainable development according to Ahmad et al is to ensure that resources are not used up by bringing into practice 'conservation of resources, elimination of wasteful practices and environmentally friendly technologies'. This submission is made in the light that all development, uses resources; human, natural and capital.

Adeniyi (1999: 114) viewed sustainable development in the context of management resources in such a way that societies can fulfill their needs while maintaining the essential ecological processes, biological diversity and naturally occurring life support systems'. This concern for ecological sustainability is of course important for our study in a country where we tend to base our development on a single asset of crude oil.

Anwana (2003: 21) understands the concept of sustainable development as a way of shifting support for conservation and environment to make it also play a part in improving human welfare. Anwana suggests that in the spirit of sustainable development, in utilizing natural resources, there must of necessity be the allowance and consideration for the next user or generation. Bankole (2002:44) writing on the challenge of development said the concept of sustainable development said the concept of sustainable development is a vision of the world built on the principle of 'peace, solidarity, equity and shared power, environmental integrity, social justice, human rights and biodiversity'.

The then United Nations Secretary-General (1997-2006), Mr. Kofi Annan said at a closing press conference of World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, that sustainable development will put us in a path that reduces poverty while protecting the environment, a path that works for all people, rich and poor, today and tomorrow’.

Brookfield (1991: 32) in his contribution on sustainable development begins from the recognition that, while there is indeed a set of natural limitations, there may also be a sustainable way out. He said the role of human activities in relation to nature is to modify ecosystems and to accelerate change in natural systems. Brookfield concludes that making sustainable development realizable involves:

Maximizing and optimally distributing the net benefits of economic development, so far as these can be achieved, while establishing and reaffirming the condition of security under which the services and qualities of natural resources can be maintained, restored or improved into the foreseeable future.

For the overall success of sustainable development, Brookfield insists that a strong and civil society is needed.

Chinsman (1999: 333) on his part recognizes a strong focus on meeting the basic needs of the people with emphasis on food security, health education and employment, all of which are essential for enhancing human capacities and enlarging opportunities to meet the challenges of sustainable development. Pearce et al (1992:3) summarized the key condition for achieving sustainable development as ‘constancy of the natural capital stock’. In stating the necessary conditions for sustainable development, Udoh (1996: 32) insists that local communities “must be treated as stakeholders in exploration, extractive and exploitation activities of natural resources. It is clear that the number one goal Udoh’s thesis will achieve is that of supporting the economic and social development of people living close to natural areas, thereby ensuring the ‘sustainable use and benefits of our heritage’. He states clearly that achieving sustainable development would mean that:

On the policy level, we do not trample on the knowledge of local people who we realize, have extensive environmental knowledge. This knowledge must be fully utilized and harnessed and they must form an integral part of any management as principal stakeholders.

Ndubuisi (2002) on proffering conditions for sustainable development focuses on institutions of government. He contends that the government of the day must of necessity, put in place policies and legislations that take into cognizance the 'multifaceted role of the rural poor in their relationship to biodiversity'. He also maintained that the issues of land ownership and use must be addressed. The unsustainable practice of most predator investors on natural resource operating in Nigeria is inconsistent with and diametrically opposed to Udoh and Ndubuisi's views as shown by Doifie (2000: 27) in this comment.

Agreements on extractive activities especially oil and gas production are negotiated and signed, contracts for the sale of oil and gas are sealed, yet the local people whose communities harbour these resources are neither part of it nor are they consulted.

Bankole (2002: 44) affirmed that it is of critical importance that the governments of nations take serious steps towards developing action plans and measurable targets in the five critical issue of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002 addressed. They are: water and sanitation, energy, agricultural productivity, biodiversity and ecosystem management, and health.

Rural development in Nigeria

The efforts in developing the rural communities all over the world have been of great concern to various governments. This has necessitated various administrations in Nigeria to have come up with one type of programme to the other. Virtually, rural development experts agree that there is the dire need to develop Nigeria's rural communities. Chigbo (2001) states that different administration attempts in developing the rural communities started before Independence down to Independence era. Manning (2007) agreed with the assertion when he states that the past administration initiated and implemented many programmes that were directed on the improvement of basic services. It was believed that the improvement of these basic services in the rural areas would help in the creation of job opportunities and as well improve the real income of the people. This plan was carried out by the colonial masters who used ten-year development plan for Nigeria between 1946 and 1956. The main aim then was to improve the production of cash crop, and due to the rural nature

of the area, they embarked on the construction of roads and communications to assist them evacuate the farm produce from the hinter land.

The attainment of independence in 1960 inspired Nigeria to believe that the only means to attain economic success as witnessed in the developed world was to embark on industrialization. This made the government to reduce its attention on the development of rural areas as attention shifted more to agriculture which would serve as sources of raw materials for industrialization. Oyemoni (2008) noted that in order to achieve this, various regional governments were allowed to plan their development based on what they felt was the problems of their people. This made the government to allocate 13% of the gross capital spending to agriculture in the first National Development Plan of 1962-1968. In 1970 -1974 period of the second National Development Plan, the federal government identified three major areas in the agricultural sector for intervention which includes, grants for development of agriculture, forestry and livestock and fishery. Oyemoni (2008) noted that the assistance in these areas helped in the creation of jobs while the rate of inflation and unemployment was relatively low which enhanced the rating of Nigeria in the early 1970s as one of the 50th most developed countries in the world.

The fourth National Development Plan stipulated the aims that were associated with the increase of real income of the people and the reduction of income disparities, with such programmes as; the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP). Most of these programmes were made to take care of employment generation, agricultural output and income enhancement and to reduce rural – urban migration. Other developmental programmes put in place in Nigeria at the period include; Operation Feed the National (OFN) set up in 1977, Free Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) set up in 1977, Green Revolution established in 1980, and low-cost Housing Scheme, Agriculture Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), Rural Banking Program, National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), (Omotola 2008). Contributing to this, Manning (2007) noted that Nigeria had oil boom in the 1970s and that the oil boom made Nigeria to neglect the agricultural sector which was the economic base. The oil boom led to economic growth but the boom did not impact on the industrial sector as industries were not established. Since Nigeria did not deem it necessary to utilize the proceeds from the oil boom to establish industries which it had in its previous plans before the oil boom, when the recession of the 1980s came, the economy crashed due to decline in oil prices.

It was at this time that wages could not meet the essential needs of the people while social services in the country got bad as the available socio-economic and infrastructural facilities available could not be maintained while other developmental efforts could not be sustained. Based on this, Chigbo (2001) explains that it was in an effort to salvage the situation that prompted Nigeria to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programme which its implementation worsened the living condition of the people. It was after this period that Nigeria came up with more developmental programmes between 1986 and 1993 that were aimed at providing socio-economic amenities which made the people have access to food, healthcare services, education, housing, employment, drinking water etc. Some of these programmes include: Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life Program (BLP), People Bank of Nigeria, Community Bank, Family Support Programme, and Family Economic Advancement Programme. However, most of these development programmes were not sustained (Oyemoni 2008).

As a result of the worsening conditions of the people, the democratic government that was enthroned in the country on 29th May, 1999 came up with more sustainable development programmes that would involve the full participation of the rural community dwellers.

Sustainable development programmes in Ebonyi State

The introduction of Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme in addition to the Millennium Development Goals and Ebonyi State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy ushered in Sustainable Development Programme in the state which was as a result of the democratic government efforts at finding the best approach to tackling community development in the state. These programmes especially the community-based poverty reduction programme came up after the process of the development analysis carried out in the country that was supervised by the National Planning Commission and the Federal Office of Statistics with the assistance of the World Bank and Department for International Development, United Kingdom (World Bank, 2009). Due to collaboration efforts of these agencies, a data base was developed where a participating development assessment was carried out in 16 communities. This assessment later involved 36 communities in 13 states. The outcome of this database was completed and updated through consultations that were undertaken by both the federal and state governments of Nigeria, the

African Development Bank, the World Bank, Department for International Development, United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, and was based on the policy changes needed to revitalize Nigeria's development efforts.

The draft sustainable development plan had also anticipated six guiding principles which were:

1. Project must be demand driven
2. Have community participation
3. Have decentralized decision making
4. Be implemented directly by communities
5. Empower local communities through skill enhancement
6. Have a minimum of hierarchy

It was equally designed to reflect sustainable government principles of bottom-up, and development programme to be managed by autonomous state level social fund agencies.

Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme was keyed in by Ebonyi State in 2004 while it commenced operation in 2005 after signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and payment of its counterpart fund, and was designed in line with the operating principles to among other things:

- a. Upgrade the building of infrastructure in the education sector, health, electricity, and water.
- b. Construct rural feeder roads, bridges and multiple uses infrastructure in the community.
- c. Enhance supply of access to socio-economic services
- d. Ameliorate natural resource management services
- e. Supply of safety nets support.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted Systems theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. This is based on the gap in the body of literature within the area of analysis of the issues discussed here and arising from the position of other theories of sustainable development programmes.

This theory contends that governance is a social contract and that those elected to govern the people owe it as a duty to see to the welfare of the masses, and to achieve this, every program of government is aimed at achieving the

desires of the citizens, and to achieve this, the people should be given the opportunity to participate in the decision and implementation of programs that concern them. It is when these different groups work together to achieve the purpose of accelerated and sustainable development especially in the rural communities that the social agreement between the government and the citizens are said to have yielded the desired results. The citizens while participating in such development programmes, see the programmes as theirs and would continue to collaborate with other government institutions to protect and sustain it.

Wikipedia (2010) states that one of the proponents of systems theory reciprocally connected the idea of interaction, representation, communication, transaction, growth and development, time, and space into systems theory which deals with interaction with other component parts in which each person brings personal ideas of self, and level of growth and development to attain desired goal. This shows that to attain any goal, that those concerned irrespective of their levels in knowledge should come together to harness their individual or group ideas to attain the desired goal.

The success or otherwise of organizational objective is determined by the system, when the government act as the system while the citizens act as the sub-system.

Methodology

Ex-Post-Facto research design was employed in this study. The raison d'eta for ex-post facto design is because it is a systematic empirical study in which the independent variables cannot in any way be manipulated or controlled simply because the situation of study had already taken place. The Community- Based Poverty Reduction Programme commenced in Ebonyi State in 2005 and winded up in 2009. It was later replaced with Community and Social Development Programme (CSDP) in the State.

Data was sourced from existing records like books, journals, United Nations documents, World Bank publications, government and other official publications, internet materials, other documents related to Community-Based Poverty Reduction Programme in Nigeria and direct observation.

Content Analytical approach was employed in the study. This analytical technique was adopted as a result of the need for a reliable scientific method for assessing, analyzing and interpreting a large variety of materials. Ipso facto, we

relied vividly on this analytical technique to evaluate the data generated in the course of this study. For clarity of purpose, content Analysis is a research technique adopted primarily for the objective, systematic and qualitative analysis and interpretation of information.

Data presentation and analysis

The current posture of development in rural communities of Ebonyi State is a corollary of number of projects embarked upon by Ebonyi State government through the instrumentality of Ebonyi State Community-Based Poverty Reduction Agency in partnership with the World Bank.

The Agency has been directly involved in the construction of many micro projects ranging from provision of health centers, classroom blocks, roads /bridges, borehole drilling, rural electrification, market stalls to civic/skill acquisition centers. A synopsis of the Agency's selected and executed projects across the state are showcased in tables 1, 2, and 3 below:

Table 1. Summary of micro project implementation by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Program

S/N	ITEM	INCEPTION TO DATE
1	Total sensitization visits	52
2	Total desk appraisal	180
3	Total field appraisal	127
4	Total number of micro projects approved	124
5	Total number of communities trained	121
6	Total number of funded micro – projects	124
7	Total number of completed micro-project	124
8	Total cost of funded micro –projects	557,373,296
9	Total funds commitment by CPRP	772,912,869
10	Total funds commitment by communities	54,49,374

11	Actual funds received from L.G.A	Nil
12	Actual funds received from State	107,912,899
13	Actual funds received from other sources (interest)	114,070
14	Total disbursement to micro- projects(SG)	73,942,899
15	Total disbursement to micro-projects	502,923,922
16	Balance of disbursement to micro-projects	Nil
17	Total amount disbursed since inception	772,912,869
18	Number of benefiting communities	121
19	Estimated population of the benefiting communities	1,210,000
20	Number of completed micro—projects in use	119
21	Total number of staff trained	24
22	Total monitoring and evaluation visits	1262

Source: Final Implementation Report of Ebonyi State CPRP Technical Committee Report of March, 2009.

The above table shows the activities of one of the sustainable development programs; Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Program, in the development of rural communities in the State.

Table 2. Sectorial distribution of micro projects by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Program (EB-CPRP)

S/No.	Sector	Number approved since inception	Number completed since inception	%
1	Health	12	12	9.7
2	Education	40	40	32.3
3	Water supply	15	15	12
4	Feeder road and culverts	17	17	13.7
5	Sanitation	1	1	0.8
6	Rural electrification	9	9	7.3
7	Market infrastructure	5	5	4.0
8	Civic / skill acquisition	24	24	19.4
9	Others (specify) Agro processing	1	1	0.8
	Total	124	124	100

Source: Final Implementation Report of Ebonyi State CPRP Technical Committee Report of March, 2009.

Table two above shows the areas of intervention in the development of the rural communities by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme.

Table 3. Distribution of sub-projects and approved funds to local government areas

S/N	LGA	SENATORIAL ZONE	NUMBER FUNDED SINCE INCEPTION	FUNDS DISBURSED SINCE INCEPTION (N)	%
01	Abakaliki	Ebonyi North	11	42,622,560	8.5
02	Ebonyi	Ebonyi North	07	25,323,238	5.0
03	Izzi	Ebonyi North	14	57,106,225	11.4
04	Ohaukwu	Ebonyi North	24	99,949,495	19.4
05	Ezza	Ebonyi Central	10	41,024,889	8.1
06	Ezza South	Ebonyi Central	07	29,138,560	5.8
07	Ikwo	Ebonyi Central	09	41,661,123	8.3
08	Ishielu	Ebonyi Central	10	41,021,669	8.2
09	Afikpo South	Ebonyi South	13	52,174,128	10.4
10	Afikpo North	Ebonyi South	04	15,410,158	0.3
11	Ivo	Ebonyi South	07	28,866,675	5.7
12	Ohaozara	Ebonyi South	03	11,700,000	2.3
13	Onich	Ebonyi South`	05	16,925,202	3.4
Total			124	502,923,922	100

Source: Final Implementation Report of Ebonyi State CPRP Technical Committee Report of March, 2009.

Table three above shows the distribution of projects in the rural communities of the thirteen Local government areas of the state by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Program.

At the close of the program in March 31, 2009, the state advanced to the present Community and Social Development Program (CSDP) while the Millennium Development Goals advanced to Sustainable Development Goals with the major aim of maintaining the available infrastructure in the state while new ones keep coming onboard.

Impact of the micro-projects on rural dwellers

Pro to the implementation of Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme as a measure for sustainable rural community development, the rural communities in Ebonyi state were in dire need of socio-economic and infrastructural facilities. The rural communities were bedeviled by high rate of infant and maternal mortality, illiteracy occasioned by high school drop-outs, lack of skilled manpower, bad roads, lack of drinking water, lack of electricity, bridges and coverts to connect communities, lack of health centers, market infrastructure, dirty environment among others as revealed by the findings of this study.

In the process of enthroning sustainable development in the rural communities by the democratic government in Ebonyi State, the Community Based –Poverty Reduction Programme embarked on the provision of health centers, classroom blocks, water supply, feeder roads and culverts, rural electrification, market infrastructure, civic/skills acquisition centers among others. At the completion of the programme, there was presence of these micro projects in the benefitting communities. However, the presence of these projects has not significantly given the expected results as shown below.

Health centers

The study reveals that despite the construction of health centers by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme, that the rural communities still lacked health care services. This is evidenced by the findings that mortality rates especially the infant and maternal mortality in the studied rural communities has remained unabated. This indicates that the building of health centers alone is not sufficient to guarantee sustainable and effective health care services, showing that more still need to be done to adequately equip the available health centers with the needed drugs, health care workers as well as strategies for their sustenance. This has become necessary as the study revealed that most of the health centers built by the programme lacked drugs, health workers, hospital equipment among others in these communities.

Education

In the area of education, the findings revealed that the rate of illiteracy in the studied rural communities still remained high as pupils of school age still drop out of school in great numbers while school enrollment has not significantly improved. The above result is not unconnected with lack of instructional materials and physical facilities in these schools, as the construction of class room blocks alone embarked upon by the programme was not enough to motivate parents to send their wards to school.

Employment generation

The study further revealed that the rate of unemployment has not significantly reduced in these communities after the completion of the programme. The findings showed that the infrastructure needed to facilitate job creation such as electricity in the rural communities were not easily accessible to the real poor, as the high cost of connecting electricity to the homes of the poor was unaffordable thereby allowing only the rich to benefit from the programme. This has drastically affected the possibility of improving their income earnings, since the poor and unemployed ones who would have used such facilities to embark on such jobs as welding, sales of cold drinks, barbing, salon and repairs of electronics among others, were denied access, leaving only very few to use such opportunities to create jobs.

In the area of skills acquisition centers, it was uncovered that these centers were built without equipment and as such, were left lying idle in these communities. In the line of market infrastructure, the market stalls were built but instead of sharing them to the poor that needed them, they were bought over by the rich ones who in turn, rent them at exorbitant prices to the poor ones.

Furthermore, in the area of feeder roads and culverts, the findings revealed that the construction of feeder roads and culverts in these communities were not properly done by those involved, as most of the feeder roads constructed by this programme had already been washed away by rains while majority of the constructed culverts have broken down, making it very difficult for the rural community dwellers to evacuate their farm produce to where they can sell them. This situation cannot guarantee sustainable development in the rural communities in Ebonyi State.

Water supply

The study equally revealed that the rural communities still lacked water despite the number of boreholes constructed in these communities by the programme, as almost all the boreholes had broken down without repair. This is not unconnected with inadequate provision for their sustainable maintenance. The situation has forced many communities to be sharing pond water with animals which in many occasions have resulted in the outbreak of diarrhea and other water related diseases that had claimed several lives in the state.

As a result of the above findings, the implementation of the Community-Based Poverty Reduction Programme has not significantly improved the standard of living of the rural community dwellers as the impacts still remain low. Furthermore, these micro-projects are not sustainable since no appropriate agency is responsible for their maintenance.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the development processes of the various governments in Nigeria as it concerns sustainable development in the rural communities. With the introduction of various sustainable development programmes in the state when democracy returned in the country in 1999, the activities of Community-Based Poverty Reduction Programme has been examined, and it was discovered that the challenges of sustainable development has been on how to keep with what we have, as the system was engulfed in lack of sustainability and lack of maintenance culture. We realized in the cause of the study that democracy has come to assume a new aura of significance in the modern world affairs. This was based on the interest of the world to embrace democracy, given that it is perceived to enhance sustainable development.

Though, democracy is totally misinterpreted and wrongly practiced in some countries especially the developing world in the areas of mismanagement of public fund, poor economic and developmental policies, poor political will, lack of freedom of expression and association, accountability of the state's administrative organs, equal rights and participation of the local citizens in the formulation and implementation of developmental plans and as well guarantee security to the entire populace, it is still assumed to be the bridge –builder in terms of sustainable development especially in the rural communities due to its representative principle. Most importantly, democracy has a better opportunity

to facilitate the provision of and equal distribution of resources and basic needs of man. It is the embracement of sustainable rural development that can address the general problems that militate against rural dwellers and affects the quality of rural life. This measure entails the mobilization of the domestic resources which includes human resources to increase production and stimulate employment, raise the capital flow of the rural community dwellers, reduce poverty and alleviate their standard of living. It equally enhances agricultural development, rural industrialization development, education, health care facilities, rural housing, and transport, sanitation through provision of access to good water, roads and bridges.

The rural community sustainable development programmes of the democratic government allowed for full participation of the citizens and created avenue for the citizens to initiate development programmes through bottom–top approach which enhanced sustainable development which Ebonyi State benefited tremendously in various rural development programmes initiated by the state government. The democratic government therefore stands as bridge –builder in sustainable development in Ebonyi State.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made for democracy to continue to play the role of bridge builder in sustainable development in the rural communities of Ebonyi State.

1. Electorates should be allowed to elect leaders of their choice by allowing their votes to count, as this will enable them have genuine say on how they are governed and be willing to participate in developmental programs in their rural communities
2. Elected leaders should be made to address the structural problems that have continued to stunt economic development in the rural communities where majority of the population reside by seeing infrastructure as top priority of the government
3. Government should create agencies responsible for the continues maintenance of existing infrastructure in the rural communities of the state
4. Abandonment of rural community development projects should be discouraged in democratic governance irrespective of the administration that initiated such project since government is a continuum.

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