

Rural Development Policies and the Challenges of Realizing the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n2p643

Abstract:

Rural development is a multi-dimensional approach by which the productivity, income and quality of life in terms of health, nutrition, education, and other characteristics of satisfactory life of rural people can be improved or transformed. Examples abound in Nigeria since political independence of rural-financial and development projects ranging from health to roads which are executed in rural settlements. Rural development efforts or rural transformation involves the changing of the social and economic structures, institutions, and processes of the rural settings. The exercise should be seen as a balanced development with emphasizes on equitable distribution and creation of gains. The paper introduced the concept of rural development with selected examples of rural development policies in Nigeria. This paper also discussed the factors that have hindered the success of rural development programmes from achieving its aims and objectives of bettering the life of the poor with the consideration of the Marxian political economy theory as it affect the realization of MDGs in Nigeria by 2015 and concluded with the recommendations that the politics of stakeholders in the management of rural development policies to be put off.

1. Introduction

Rural development as an exercise is geared towards a specific field requiring thought and action on the government and the populace which its effect is a socially conditions one meaning that it brings about improved conscious relationship amongst individuals; groups and organizations. According to Idachaba (1980) in Ndagara (2005), rural development efforts must be derived from the needs and aspirations of the rural people and not necessarily in response to the needs of the urban political economy such as unemployment, food shortage, and rural urban migration. It entails a line up programme of actions targeted at increasing the efficiency of the rural population to the extent that there is rural steady power supply to the extent that standard of living and productivity are enhanced, and education and the environmental sanitation promotion are witnessed.

According to Abah (2000:157), rural development in Nigeria dates as far back as the 1940s when projects as a Bamenda Cross River and the Niger Agricultural scheme Mokwa, 1954, were launched. Abah says, since that period, successive impact of all the efforts are yet to be fully felt in the rural areas. Supportively Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005) asserts that, there is absence of infrastructure, which improves the quality of life like potable water, electricity and good feeder roads. However, this situation has made the rural settlement a difficulty for young school leavers.

In another development, rural development has been mono-cultural field to agriculture which is the occupation of the rural settlers thereby relegating other sectors of development needs of the rural people to the background. In the words of Ndagara (2005:139), the process of rural development is therefore synonymous with agricultural development;

but agriculture cannot develop unless other rural development amenities are present. It is on this note Abah (2005:155) succinctly put that:

To many people, rural development simply means agricultural development; to some it is primarily concerned with welfare. These views are myopic because rural development should affect all aspect of the economics, social and political lives of the people who inhabit the rural areas and it should be relevant to the alleviation of all the conditions associated with the rural sector. It is true that economics base of the rural people is agriculture, but beyond food, they also need education, employment, decent housing, medical care, electricity, roads, other means of communication, entertainment, facilities for social interaction, etc.

2. Selected Rural Development Programmes

Past successive governments in Nigeria have put up rural development programmes. These are the following:

1. Operation Feed and Nation (OFN), 1975
2. National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), 1972
3. The Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure 9DFFRI0, 1986 ;
4. Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), 1987;
5. Community Bank (CB), 1990;
6. National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA), 1991;
7. Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLP), 1987;
8. Family Support Programme (FSP), 1994;
9. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NApep), 2001; just to mention few.

Following these development, Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005:91) assumed that rural people have benefit little from most of these rural development programmes. This paper takes a look at reasons for their failure with a theoretical framework and put forward suggestions for the way forward.

3. Failure Of Rural Development Programmes

Particular attention will now be devoted to examined the reason which have been largely responsible for the failure of various rural development programmes. Nigeria as a nation is peculiar because, formulation of policies and programmes does not take any government by surprise. This accounts for her numerous development plans, poverty alleviation and rural development programmes, agencies and commissions for development, etc. amidst which the anticipated changes in lacking;

Okoli in Onah (2006:ix) averred that:

The problem in Nigeria is not about conceptualizing policies, plans, programmes and projects. Neither is it about putting down development plans... All the plans are supposed to be prosecuted through programmes and projects. In spite of all the plans and concomitant programmes and projects, there are still lamentation on the state of the socio-economic development and welfare of the people. The indicators being the low level of human development index and widespread poverty.

With all the efforts made to uplift the qualitative standard of living of the rural inhabitants in Nigeria from pre-independence to post-independence, it is unfortunate to note the sad situational position of the rural setting. In the same view, Omale (2005:159) observed that, the story of the poverty of rural Nigeria was that of continuous woes and that, despite all that had gone into it in ideas and plans and relatively increased funding as at the early 1990s. Also, Muoghalu (1991:93) opines that, despite the numerous strategies adopted in Nigeria, the rural areas are at best worse off. Lamenting further he comments that;

In terms of income, urban-rural wage differential has risen fourfold. Social services and amenities remains largely inaccessible except by traversing long distances of foot. But the greatest negative effect has been on agriculture that has remained largely primitive and has lost its most active labour force to the urban areas making the rural areas the "Deserted Village" of Goldsmith.

Summoning up his assumption, Omale (2005:160) asserted that, as it seemed, if the problem of underdevelopment of rural Nigeria was not due to paucity of ideas and plans and at the same time not due to failure to adequately fund rural

Nigeria, what could have been the problem? Answering this question, this paper viewed that community and rural development policies recorded perpetual failure due to the following summed up reasons:

- Corruption and embezzlement of fund
- Adoption of Top-Botton Model, and
- Absence of a Reliable Database.

4. Corruption and Embezzlement of Fund

Corruption and embezzlement of public fund have been factors that characterized the administration of development programmes in Nigeria. According to NEEDS Document (2004:100), systemic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability have been major sources of development failure. It gives forms of corruption but those that have affected the rural development programmes are: misappropriation or diversion of fund; demanding of percentages from contractors over an awarded contract (ie kick back); under and over invoicing, bribery, etc. These forms of corruption had become salient decimal in the implementation of rural development policies of every administration for over the years. Achebe (1983:53) posits that:

Public funds are now routinely doled out to political allies and personal friends in the guise of contracts to execute public works of one kind or another. Generally, a political contractor will have no expertise whatsoever nor even the intention to perform. He will simply sell the contract to a third party and pocket the commission running into...millions for acting as a conduit of executive fiat... Alternatively he can raise cash not by selling, the contract but by collecting a 'mobilization fee" from the Treasury, putting aside the contract for the time being or for ever.....

More often than not, rural development projects are always poorly implemented. Besides, scattered uncompleted projects, poor supervision and "blind acceptability of acclaimed completed projects are bane of Nigeria rural development programmes. In the view of Soubbotina (2004:120), such degradation of social capital threatens social cohesion and render development unsustainable. Only time shall tell if the Millennium Development Goals (programme) will cross the hurdle of corruption and embezzlement of its funds in Nigeria.

5. Adoption of Top-Bottom Model

In discussing the meaning of this model of rural development in Nigeria, Maduagwu (2000:1) says; is the master and servant relationship associated with the programmes to alleviate poverty. Government claims to know and understand what poverty is, who the poor are and what they need in order to alleviate their poverty. He said further that, the Abuja big men cannot claim to understand what it is to be poor (as they claimed).

Similarly, it is proverbially said that 'it is he who wears a shoe knows where it pinches'. The several efforts targeted at developing the rural areas by the Federal, State and Local Governments, are not yielding the envisaged results because of this major factor. Muoghalu (1992:129) argued thus:

In an effort to develop the rural area. Third World governments have articulated policies and adopted strategies... Unfortunately no thought has been given to the need to come up... with an operational efficiency. This is the missing link and its absence has resulted in what Ostrom et al referred to as 'duplication of functions, overlapping jurisdiction; unnecessary antagonisms and the existence of 'autonomous units of government' and a polycentric development system.

In the same development, Omale and Ebiloma (2005) supported that, one recurring factor in the problems of rural development in Nigeria from colonial era to date is that of failure by planners to involve the rural people in policies, strategies and plans meant for their development. Policies and plan have always been designed and devised by government and brought down for implementation in rural areas. This is the unpopular Top-Down approach (ibid). Where local resources are not adequately utilized and when new techniques are forced on the rural people, they tend to show resentment and apathy to these new methods. Sustainability of rural development programmes and projects becomes difficult (Tenuche and Ogwo, 2005).

On a sincere ground, virtually all foreign and home drawn rural development policies have fell victim of this factor. The recent one is the Millenbnum Development Goals (MDGs) made to be realized in 2015. This is a programme designed in far away New York to develop Third World rural communities even without their notice to spell out felt needs. To this end, according to Tenuche and Ogwo (2005), the people in turn distance themselves from government programmes and projects as they do not see it as their own, thus resulting in apathy. Top-Bottom Approach to rural development exercise is the bane of rural underdevelopment in Nigeria in particular and developing countries at large. In essence, this agree with what Onah (2006:64) remarked that, this pervasive gloom from our observations is not

necessarily due to lack of good development plans, but arguably, by a combination of such factors as exclusion of the masses from plan formulation and implementation processes.

6. Absence of a Reliable Database

NEEDS (2004:109) recognized that Nigeria's national statistical system is weak. It says, the current system, managed by the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), is governed by the 1957 Statistics Act, which is obsolete. According to Onah (2006:253), the consequence of this, is that planning for programmes/projects at various levels of government is basically done on ad hoc basis. Data on many other key development areas are also lacking and when available, are often incomplete or inaccurate. In the same way, Paul (2006:12) sees that, the capital problem-associated with the designation of poverty alleviation programmes for rural communities in Nigeria is the non-availability and poor consolidation of data. This assertion put itself to test following the massive protest against the released 2006 Census results by the National Population Commission (NPC).

However, timely and reliable statistics according to NEEDS (2004) are critical to effective planning, monitoring, and evaluation of performance. The efficacy of rural development policies is based on an accurate data. This to a great extent is responsible for the failure of programmes and projects in Nigeria (Onah, 2006).

7. Theoretical Framework

The State in Marxian Political Economic Theory continues to be an instrument of cheating and class dominance. To this end, Marx argues that as the masses became poorer and more numerous, the capitalist became fewer and controlled greater concentration of the means of production, whose full productiveness they throttled back for their own gain (Mazi Mbah 2006:34).

As noted by Tenuche and Ogwo (2005:124), the fundamental exploitative relations between the Nigeria elite classes who designed and implement rural development programmes and rural poor masses guarantee that rural development programmes and policies have the likelihood to consolidate the predominant class and exploitative interests of their imperialist collaborators. The assumption that the rural communities cannot identify their felt needs is an example of an opportunity for exploitation. Some of the policy efforts made so far which includes Agricultural Development Programmes, Rural Infrastructural Development Programmes, Rural Banking and Credit Guarantee Scheme, Transportation Schemes, Health Care Delivery Schemes, educational Programmes that are rural driven, Low cost Housing Schemes, Gender Development Policies and other poverty alleviation programmes. Resources for the programmes are controlled by the bureaucracy (Tenuche and Ogwo, 2005:125).

In a clearer analysis Bhagwan and Bhushan (2005:125) pointed out that;

...after the end of colonial rule, the emerging free states-called the Third World Countries, started the process of socio-economic development which led to phenomenal expansion of bureaucracy and the rise of a new class, a bureaucratic bourgeoisies in many of these countries. This class soon acquired social and political parameters on account of the various political and social factors. This new class was western oriented and framed in western methods of administration with the aid of western countries in the form of training abroad and financial assistance for development projects. This new class of administrators was able to establish bureaucratic authoritarianism and hierarchical formation which substituted for mass mobilization and popular participation, the two essential ingredients of development administration...

In the same theoretical analysis, Fezzes Heady in Bhagwan and Bhushan (2005:126) identified the following major characteristics of bureaucracy in the management of development programmes in the developing countries thus:

- i. The basic pattern of administration is initiative rather than indigenous;
- ii. The bureaucracy are deficient in skilled manpower necessary for development programme;
- iii. They work for realization of goals other than the achievement of programme objectives;
- iv. There is widespread discrepancy between form and reality;
- v. Operational autonomy

The above elaborately stands to mark the planning and execution of rural development programmes unresponsive to rural needs, unrepresentative of the rural populace at large, and elitist in nature and character. Example is the well equipped nature of government hospital and health care centres in the urban cities. This is due to the fact that urban setting harbours the programmes' planners and managers. Also is the much propagated National Health Insurance

Scheme. Privatization, Commercialization, Liberalization, Deregulation, etc. policies which remains exploitative-driven and class-centered.

8. Realization of the Millennium Development Goals

To achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria putting into consideration the numerous exploitative nature and failure of development policies in Nigeria and developing countries. Soubbotina (2004:127) writes that the governments of developing countries are the most important actors in the development process, and no amount of foreign aid can be effective in a country where the government is corrupt or fails to implement good policies enabling national economies to grow.

During 2005, Nigeria received significant windfall gains from the sale of its mineral stock, particularly crude oil which stands to serve as an opportunity to accelerate the construction of an adequate physical infrastructure for the achievement of the MDGs (MDGs reports, 2005:14). However, even government truly seeking to accelerate their countries' development face a lot of difficult choices, if only because they have to operate with limited resources. While development is by its nature a comprehensive process of change, governments must nevertheless, identify and focus on a few areas where their limited action can make the biggest difference (Soubbotina, 2004:128).

In some case, national poverty reduction strategies were comprehensive enough to stand for sustainable development strategies, but in some others, social policies aimed at poverty reduction were formulated without adequate consideration of economic and environmental policies, even though the poor were known to be badly affected by environmental losses. At the same time, policies for agricultural and industrial development in many cases have failed to take into account poverty reduction and environmental protection priorities (Ibid).

Formulating comprehensive national development priorities and coordinating their achievement is a crucial task that can never be entrusted to the private sector or to any foreign aid providers. In another development however, Nigeria agricultural sector's workforce is dominated by aged people that substantially rely on the use of modern equipment are worth while (MDGs Report, 2005:14). If improvements are not accelerated, the achievement of these goals by the year 2015 deadline in many or even in most developing countries with Nigeria is doubtful inclusive. Again, Okoli in Onah (2006) remarked that:

Effective management of development programmes and project is the only strategy of consummating the objectives of development plans and, thus, positively impacting on the needs of the citizens. In addition, the year (2015) for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is fast approaching. How far have we been able to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger? How far has Nigeria been able to reduce by the projected proportion? To inch further in attempting to achieve and the imperatives of project management must be observed.

There are so many challenges facing Nigeria's attainment of the MDGs in the year 2015. These positioned an average sensitive citizen at a doubting point. To this end, Onah (2006:40) highlighted that, the question that face Nigerian leaders has not been whether to plan or not, but what kind of development plan to adopt in dealing decisively with the problem of widespread poverty, large scale unemployment, technologically backwardness, low-capacity utilization, inadequate and decayed social and physical infrastructure, illiteracy, urban congestion, short-life expectancy, excessive debt burden, high incidence of diseases and environmental degradation.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Rural Nigerians are tired of failed policies and programmes that are meant to change their situation-basically that the much desired betterment did not take place in amidst beautiful rural development policies. It is on this basis the paper concludes with the following recommendations that:

The politics of stakeholders' who are considerably far from the ordinary people which is devoid of accountability, transparency and responsibility should be avoided. When the peasants are eventually remembered, a well organized structure ought to be put in place to check the running of the programmes that concerns them. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Judiciary should be of help in this direction. Rural people have no wherewithal to submit lengthy petition against contractors and politicians alike. It is therefore necessary to still empower the EFCC along with the independence of the Judiciary, capable human and financial resources to embark on monitoring to rural communities where development programmes are in action. It will help to check the excess of corrupt contractors.

Furthermore, the rural inhabitants should be allowed to participate in the affairs that are meant to change their condition. They should be carried along in the choice of their programme's manager, planning and implementation

process. In a nutshell. Integrated Rural Development Approach should be adopted against Top-Down Model. This shall not only lead to achievement of the aims and objectives of rural development programmes but will go along way to eliminate apathy.

On a final note, proper monitoring and evaluation research should be involved for variety of purpose not only as means of improving programmes but to justify or endorse an ongoing programme and sometimes to investigate or audit it in order to lay blame for failure, abolish it when necessary and change its leadership.

When all these are done, even though we may not attain the MDGs in 2015, Nigeria's rural development situation will witness a better change.

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