

ENHANCING RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PERISCOPING THE IMPEDIMENTS AND EXPLORING IMPERATIVE MEASURES.

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Abstract: The rural sector of Nigeria has not witnessed significant level of development in the past 52 years of the nation's independence. This is evidenced in the apparent lack of basic infrastructural facilities and abysmal poor quality of life in the rural areas. This situation is so inspite of the contributions of the rural sector to the overall national development. It is this noted worrisome situation and the necessity for addressing the problem that inspired the need to carry out this study. In carrying out the study, we had as our basic objectives, to generally overview the underdevelopment state of the Nigeria rural areas and its implications, to thoroughly examine the impediments to the realization of meaningful rural development in the country and to explore the necessary or imperative measures to enhance the development of this very important sector of the Nigerian society. In gathering the data for the study, we relied mainly on secondary sources of information or data gathering and, consequently, adopted content analysis technique in our analysis. The basic findings are that there is no significant emphasis on pro rural development policies. Very critical again is that even the few formulated ones are not being effectively implemented. There is, as well, ineffective political representation of the rural areas particularly as it relates to articulating and attracting development projects and programs. Measures considered imperative for the realization of meaningful enhancement in the development state of the rural areas include the need for government to pay serious attention to developing and ensuring effective implementation of rural development projects and programs. As well, the political representatives from the various rural areas of the country need to be involved in articulating relevant rural development programs for their constituencies and following them up with adequate monitoring to ensure effective implementation by government. The local governments should equally have to focus their activities towards carrying out their statutory role of initiating and executing rural development projects and programs.

Key words: Rural areas, development, infrastructure, rural development, enhancement, impediments

1. Introduction

Nigeria is predominantly a rural society as the vast majority of her population dwells in the rural areas (Ele, 2006; Nwuke, 2004). Indeed, about 70 percent of Nigerians dwell in the rural areas (Aboyade, 1976). Specifically, these rural areas refer to the geographical areas that lie outside the densely built-up environment of towns, cities and the sub-urban villages and whose inhabitants are engaged primarily in agriculture as well as the most basic of rudimentary form of secondary and tertiary activities (Adebayo, 1998; Ezeah, 2005). Infact, a rural area, which is the opposite of an urban area, refers to the country side whose population engages mainly in primary production activities like agriculture, fishing, and rearing of livestock (Ele, 2006). Indeed, 90 percent of the rural labour force engage directly or indirectly in agriculture (Nyagba, 2009).

The rural sector of Nigeria is, very vital in the socio-economic development equation of the nation. It is, as observed by Nyagba (2009) that the most important sector of the Nigerian population is the rural areas. For instance, the rural sector is the major source of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufactures (Olatunbosun, 1975). As a matter of fact, the rural areas engage in primary economic activities that form the foundation for the country's economic development. (Abah, 2010).

Given the contributions of the rural sector to the national economy, enhancing the development of the sector should be central to government and public administration. This is necessary as such would further enhance the ability of the sector for increased contribution to the overall national growth and development.

Unfortunately, over the years, the development strategies and efforts in Nigeria has been more urban based or focused resulting to relative neglect of the rural areas as evidenced in the apparent dearth of basic infrastructural facilities in the rural areas (Abah, 2010). Indeed, as Okoli and Onah (2002) observe, the rural areas in Nigeria are characterized by inadequacies of human needs as reflected in the near absence of some basic infrastructures with its attendant features of degradation and deprivation. Ezeah (2005:3) specifically, in this respect observes thus:

The Nigerian rural areas are neglected areas, even though social amenities are also not adequate in some urban areas. The situation in the rural areas is far worse and many communities lack basic amenities like good roads, markets, electricity, pipe borne water etc.

In the same vein, Abonyi and Nnamani (2011: 255) note thus;

“Today, rural poverty persists in Nigeria despite the prosperity created by the country's oil wealth and this is evident in the difficulty experienced by many in satisfying their basic needs for food, water and shelter. Lack of these basic needs has held rural development in Nigeria to ransom”

Indeed, Abah (2010) observed that the most evident display of Nigeria under development condition is the rural areas and that the deplorable condition of the Nigerian rural sector is emphatic.

Very curious and worrisome still is that even the few policies and programs initiated and implemented by government over the years have not resulted in meaningful enhancement of the development state of the rural areas in Nigeria (Ezeah, 2005). These efforts had among others, included the institutionalization of the local government to serve as an agent for enhancing rural development, the establishment of the Directorate of Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) to enhance infrastructure development in the rural areas, the establishment of River Basin and Rural Development Authorities, the establishment of Rural Water Scheme, the establishment of rural electrification scheme, the establishment of Better Life for Rural Women Programme, the establishment of National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the establishment of Millennium Development Project through Rural Infrastructure, the establishment of Rural Banking Programme, Community Banking (defunct) and Micro Finance Banking to enhance the availability of financial services to the poor, low income earners and the rural dwellers (Ajadi, 2010). Olarenwaju (1992: 14) even argues that rather than these polices enhance rural development, they tended to further have underdeveloped them as he notes thus;

“The manner in which rural development has been conceived by the successive Nigerian governments and the type of rural development policies that have been implemented over time in the country have contributed substantially to the current poor state of the rural economy

It is against the foregoing that we considered it necessary to generally overview the underdevelopment state of the Nigerian rural sector, to critically examine the impediments in realizing the needed enhancement in the development state of the rural areas and to explore necessary policy actions or measures that would fast track the development process of the Nigerian rural sector.

Conceptual Clarification:

To create a context for a clearer appreciation of the discussion and analysis, the following two major or central concepts of the study are clarified below.

1. **Development:** Development is a household concept in both the developed and developing countries. It is, however, conceptualized variously by different people. Some take it to mean change while some see it as an advancement, improvement or progress. To others yet, development entails modernization or westernization (Ele, 2006). For instance, development, in the view of Porters (1975) entails transformation, advancement to a better and desired state. Similarly, Okoli and Onah (2002) assert that development involves progression, movement and advancement towards something better. They emphasized further that the movement should be on both the material and non-material aspects of life. In essence, development goes beyond economic and social indicators to include the improvement of human resources and positive change in their behaviour. In any case, the prevailing conception of development connotes essentially enhancement in the well being of people (Okoye, 2000). Indeed, basic to any development process is man’s desire to a better life and better environment (Oyevbaire and Odagunja, 1992). So development is perhaps one social phenomenon that is desired and craved for by every society, group or community.

Rural Development: Deriving from our understanding of what development generally is, rural development is then that part of development that seeks to enhance the quality of life in the rural areas by providing basic infrastructural facilities (Ezeah, 2005). Indeed, the basic objective of rural development is reduction in poverty and improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. Bello-Imam (1998) in this vein defined rural development as spatially sectional but determined and conscious attempt to focus on the general upliftment of the living conditions of men in the rural areas. So, rural development in Nigeria entails the process of making life more satisfying and fulfilling to the millions of Nigerians who live in the rural areas.

Rural development is a many sided process or a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of the rural man and his environment. In essence, development in this context entails developing the rural human person and as well as his environment. Emphasizing the aspect of human development as an essential part of rural development, Mustapha (1989) notes that rural development implies a broad based re-organization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with daily tasks of their lives and with changes consequent upon it. It is perhaps, in this direction, that Ele (2006) posits that it is not enough to provide for the rural people; they should be enabled to develop themselves and their environment. The foregoing entails that development can only be meaningfully achieved when the population becomes agents of their own development. The development requirement of the rural areas should, therefore, be multi-dimensional. In this direction, Olayiwole and Adeleye

(2005) identified and classified the infrastructural development requirements of the rural areas into three. One is the basic infrastructure which entails the availability of good roads, water (pipe borne water), rural electricity, storage, and processing facilities etc. Two is the social infrastructure which is concerned with health and educational facilities, community centres, fire and security services etc. Three is the institutionalized infrastructure which is concerned with credit and financial institutions and agricultural research institutions to aid or enhance the economic activities and income of the rural population. The provision of these infrastructure will ensure integrated rural development that entails the promotion of rural productive activities, supportive human resource development and enlargement of enabling rural infrastructure. Rural development from this integrated perspective is defined by Abonyi and Nnamani (2011: 290) thus;

Rural development is multidimensional improvement in the existential characteristics of the ruralities in ways amenable to their integration within the parameters of improved national life and their ability to contribute to the positive building of latter

The foregoing exposition points to the fact that rural development essentially should entail a deliberate planned change in all aspect of the rural communities with a view to attaining desired improvement in all aspects of their life.

1.1 Highlight of the rural underdevelopment state of the Nigerian rural areas

Even though successive governments in Nigeria have made some efforts towards enhancing rural development, its meaningful realization has remained a mirage. Eke and Oghator (2011) observe this in their comment that most rural development programmes in Nigeria has ended up in the pages of national newspapers and television announcements with the rural areas languishing in backwardness, stagnation, poverty and misery. This is evidenced by the apparent lack of basic infrastructural facilities and glaring presence of general low standard of living among the rural populace (Olatunbunso, 1975). Indeed as FOS (1996) and Nwuke, (2004) observe, poverty is prevalent among the rural dwellers as about 70 percent of the people in Nigeria living below poverty line are domiciled in the rural areas.

Specifically, the Nigerian rural areas are, for instance, characterized by deplorable road network and absence of all year-round reliable access road. This situation is made more critical as the topography of some rural communities are characterized by ubiquitous valleys and hills and other geological challenges like clayey and swampy areas. This poses enormous challenge in road construction (Olayiwole and Adeleye, 2005). Ele (2006) too observes that there is, indeed, a problem of rural transport as mostly all the rural roads are not accessible and link bridges are dilapidated and in some cases even non – existent. And since accessibility is a necessity for development, its lack in most rural areas holds them

back in the dungeon of underdevelopment. It is noteworthy that most of the road networks in rural areas in Nigeria are maintained through community efforts. This cannot really be effective as the contemporary road development need of the rural areas are such that mere community efforts cannot adequately address.

There is too, very apparently, poor quality education in most rural areas in Nigeria (Ele, 2006). Ijere and (1992) note in this respect too that rural education is characterized by limited functional or work oriented education and disdain for handicraft and technical subjects. Okoh and Onah (2002:159) make similar observation as they note thus:

The privilege of education which, for instance, is supposed to be a birth right of every Nigerian child is an illusion to many poor rural dwellers. In some places, there are no schools at all while in some others the schools are shabby, ill-equipped and poorly staffed.

Nigerian rural areas is equally characterized by apparent lack of health institutions as there are hardly any well equipped hospital health centres, clinics and maternal homes. Onah and Okoli (2002) observe similarly that in most rural areas of Nigeria, no medical institution of any sort exists at all and that where they do, the people have to travel very long distances to get to them.

Water supply in the Nigerian rural areas has also been discovered to be grossly inadequate and with the spread of water borne disease increased by the accompanying poor sanitary conditions (Ele, 2006). Abah (2010) observes too that, rural areas in Nigeria is also characterized by depressingly meager annual per capital income, poor liveable houses and various forms of social and political isolation. In summary, there is apparent lack of development in the rural areas of Nigeria as reflected in the near total lack of basic infrastructure, and social services. In Enugu state of Nigeria, for instance, a survey of the development needs of the 471 communities in the state as at 2009 revealed that 385, 342, and 304 rural communities lack access to accessible road, portable water/borehole and cottage hospitals respectively (Enugu state, 2009).

One major consequence of the rural underdevelopment is urban migration which is daily reducing the active population of the rural areas in Nigeria. Infact, as a consequence of persistent underdevelopment, there has been noticeable high level of rural-urban migration in search of better standard of living and wider opportunities for meaningful economic and social activities (Oghoghoulje and Gerry-Eze, 2011). Indeed, as Nwankwo and Apeh (2006) note, rural-urban migration is dysfunctional not only to rural development but retards the over all national development.

Summarily, it is unfortunate as Ijere (1992) observes that the Nigerian rural sector which produces 95 percent of the food crops in the country has been traditionally linked with poverty and underdevelopment characteristics that include comparatively poor standard of living as a result of lack of basic amenities like access roads, portable water access to affordable and quality supply, basic health care facilities, electricity, functional primary and secondary education facilities, basic agricultural facilities like irrigation storage facilities and other farm inputs like fertilizer for enhanced rural agricultural activities, industrial centers for promotion of rural industrialization, skills acquisition centers for manpower and skills development, developed market and commerce to enhance rural economic activities and the accompanying income.

1.1.1 Impediments to rural development enhancement in Nigeria.

1. Relative Neglect for rural development policies: Generally, there has been less emphasis on rural development in Nigeria. The Enugu State Vision 2020 (2009:16); in this respect notes thus;

Over the years, the development strategies in Nigeria generally has been urban biased and for which there exists relative neglect of the rural areas resulting into a dearth of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas

In reality, there is a gross rural neglect in Nigeria's development policies which has resulted to rural underdevelopment as reflected in the lack of rural industrialization and poor physical, social and institutional infrastructures (Mahon, 1992). This prevalent orientation, according to Olasiji (1992), is closely connected with the colonial economy which is still promoted in Nigeria. Olasiji (1992: 38) in this respect specifically observes thus:

The 1960 political independence did not change the pattern of rural/urban polarization. Nigerian leaders have continued to maintain the British colonial development legacy which serves the external economic interest and impoverish the standard of living among rural dwellers.

Olarenwaju and Toyin (1992) note too that such development strategy of concentrating investments in urban areas has resulted to a wide imbalance or gap in rural and urban development. This factor of relative neglect for rural development was reinforced by government's over-reliance on the petroleum economy. Obviously, the petroleum economy has become the main stay of the country's economy and for which government has, over the years, paid less attention to the development of the major activities of the rural areas particularly agriculture. Oshin (1992) in this respect contends that agriculture has continued to dwindle more as it loses its economic importance following the greater emphasis on the petroleum sector. In essence and according to Ele (2006), the emphasis on petroleum economy and the subsequent neglect of the agricultural sector has contributed substantially to the current poor state of the rural economy and the general rural sector underdevelopment.

2. Lack of Integration of the various rural development efforts: Beyond, the general neglect of development policies for the rural areas in Nigeria, another factor that significantly militates against rural development is the inability of the rural development institutions to co-operate among themselves and to ensure that their respective initiatives, actions and mandates are coordinated to reinforce and support each other and that their activities are streamlined towards effective realization of government's rural development objectives. Idon (1999: 181) observes this impediment to rural development in Nigeria in his comment thus:

The activities of various bodies involved in the development efforts and activities never dovetailed as expected. This is to say that the expected co-ordination among the different departments, ministries, Federal, states and the local governments for instance, on the implementation mechanisms has been very difficult to achieve.

Ele (2006) in his study too notes that the rural development efforts in Nigeria has not been given the integrated and comprehensive approach it requires. This has been dysfunctional to rural development and as Abah (2010) argues, rural development in order to be effective has to be comprehensive, involving all aspects of rural life and involving the complimentary efforts of the local government, state government and federal government as well as the communities and voluntary agencies. Integration is indeed, necessary as the factors involved in rural development are interrelated and mutually enhance one another in their effectiveness (Okoli and Onah, 2002).

3. Ineffective implementation of rural development policies, projects and programs. As has been recognized earlier in this work, Nigeria has over the years, nonetheless, developed some policies to enhance the development of the rural areas. Realizing the development objectives of those policies and programs has, however, been constrained by the pattern and nature of their

implementation which has been characterized by ineffectiveness and inefficiency. As Ele (2006), Ikelegbe, (2006) and Nweke, (2006) contend, effective policy implementation is usually very difficult to realize particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. Implementation of rural development policies have, no doubt, been characterized by similar ineffectiveness and inefficiency. The inability of the relevant rural development agencies to effectively implement rural development policies could be as a result of inadequate resources which, quite often, is a real threat to successful implementation of rural development policies. It could, as a well, be a result of the pervasive corruption in the Nigerian public service bureaucracy. Such corrupt tendencies, most often, significantly increases the possibility that allocated fund for rural development projects and programs would be misappropriated or outrightly embezzled and thus hampering effective implementation and the consequent realization of the policy development goals and objectives of the policy. For instance, the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) that was intended to raise agricultural products and improve conditions of the rural population and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure intended to transform the rural infrastructure were unable to meet their development objectives due largely to poor implementation (Ajadi 2010). Indeed, rural development strategies do not work in a vacuum. Their effective implementation requires functional and capable institutions with appropriate institutional arrangement for that.

Another major explanation for the ineffective implementation of rural development policies in Nigeria is the discontinuation of rural development policies. Most often, rural development policies or programs are discontinued whenever there is a change in government leadership. Most times, new government abandons the projects and programs of its predecessor even when such programs are appropriate. In this respect, Ajadi (2010) notes that there is usually the absence of sustained, cohesive and conclusive implementation of rural development policies. It is this propensity that led to the abandonment of Better Life For Rural Women program of General Ibrahim Bagangida and to the introduction of the Family Support Programme by the succeeding regime of General Sani Abacha. In the context of this propensity, most rural development policies are not sustainably implemented and to their logical conclusion.

4. Poor commitment of the political representatives, towards enhancing the development of their rural constituencies. The political leaders and representatives in Nigeria, either at the executive or the legislature arm, have all come from given rural areas of the country. These politicians at different points and time, have observed the development needs of these rural areas and even made promises too on how to address these development concerns. However, their will and interest to actually articulate these needs and the strategies or programs for addressing them have, indeed, not been noticeable. The prevalent and common observation is that they hardly pursue conclusively the relevant programs for enhancing the development needs of the rural parts of their constituencies. This lack of interest and political will to project the development needs of the rural areas at the relevant political or bureaucratic power points does not induce government's prompt attention to addressing the development needs of the rural areas. This scenario is again reinforced by the fact that most political office holders (Local Government Chairmen, Councilors and Supervisors, State Commissioners and State Legislatures and Federal Legislatures) all detest living in the rural areas and have opted to, rather live in the metropolitan state capitals or the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. For this, they do not feel the impact of the gross deprivation obtainable in the rural areas and for which too they tend not to realize the urgent and dire need for enhancing development in the rural areas. These attitudes do not reflect effective political representation particularly for the rural population. Indeed, as Baba (2011)

notes, political representation in Nigeria is essentially for private benefit and not for public benefit. This reasonably explains the non-challant attitude by political leaders and representatives towards enhancing national development generally and that of their respective rural constituencies particularly.

5. The Administrative inefficiency of the Local Government Areas: The local government areas occupy a strategic position in the development process of the rural areas. Even though it cannot be reasonably assumed that other higher tiers of government (state and federal tiers) do not have a role to play in enhancing rural sector development, the task constitutionally centres, in a larger part, on the local government. As Anikeze (2012) argues, the primary purpose of local government is to provide essential local services and thus accelerate the pace of social and economic development of the rural and grassroots people. Indeed, the reconstitution of Nigeria into 301, 589 and 774 local government areas in 1976, 1991 and 1996 respectively was meant ostensibly to bring government closer to the local people and to speed up rural development. Sad enough, this objective has not been noticeably realized (Tony, 1995; Baba, 2011). This is even so, despite the huge monthly statutory allocations to the local government areas. The inability of the local governments to work towards enhancing the rural development could, in large parts, be attributed to poor and inept leadership and pervasive corruption in the local government administrative system (Halidu, 2012; Anikeze, 2012). The high level of corruption, for instance, makes it difficult for them to channel adequate fund and energy to effective rural development. As Anikeze (2012) notes, the interest of the local government leadership primarily revolves around trivialities or at best around those schemes for which they hope to derive immediate personal gains. The net effect of this has been general stagnation in the development process of the rural people and their environment.

1.1.1.1 The imperative measures for enhancing rural development in Nigeria

1. Fundamentally, government needs to place rural development at the top of the agenda of the national development in realization of the fact that enhanced rural development is a prerequisite for meaningful and sustainable overall national development policies and programs. Further to this is the need for consistency in the execution of rural development programmes. Indeed, implementation of appropriate rural development programs should continue irrespective of changes in government.

2. Government again needs to de-emphasize total focus on the oil sector and to enhance agricultural development through addressing the needs of rural farmers with functional incentives. This is necessary as increased income from agricultural activities, which is the main stay of the rural economy, improves the quality of the life of the rural dwellers. For instance, when farmers shift from the use of traditional tools like hoes and machetes to the use of modern tools like tractors, their production increases from subsistence to commercial quantities. Another dimension to this is the need for the establishment of agro – allied industries as growth or development drivers of the rural areas. Such agro – processing industries could be in the areas of rice milling and packaging, processing of cashew and groundnut products, cassava and cocoyam flour packaging, processing of pineapple, oranges and paw-paw into fruit juice etc.

3. The political representatives and leaders need to identify with the development needs of the rural areas of their constituencies. Indeed, they need to articulate such needs and ensure that they become integral parts of the government's development agenda and that policies or programs initiated to address them are monitored to ensure proper implementation. This is necessary in view of the fact that rural dwellers on their own, do not constitute any meaningful political force and so development policy formulations generally ignores them. Again the

political representatives like the federal legislators could enhance rural development by actually devoting part of their constituency development allowance to rural sector development. This is necessary as such display of commitment to rural development by the political representatives will, in turn, trigger greater commitment towards initiating rural development projects and programs on the side of the rural communities themselves

4. There is equally the need not only to adequately make budgetary allocation for rural development but, very importantly, in ensuring that such allocated funds are judiciously used to execute rural development projects and programs.

5. There is also the need for monitoring and integrating of the various national, state and local government policies and programmes on rural development and the co-ordination of the activities of all the rural development institutions. It is specifically suggested here that the federal government creates a federal ministry that will have the mandate to ensure the integration and harmonization of the various strategies, policies activities and goals of all the pro-rural development institutions and agencies including private rural community initiatives and those of Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

6. The local governments in Nigeria need to eschew corruption particularly at the leadership level and emphasize accountability, due process, prudence and diligence. Again, the leadership need to refocus firmly on its primary and statutory duty of administering local and rural development in integrated and sustainable manner. It is expected that the democratization process in Nigeria will aid the coming into existence of visionary and purposeful leaderships in the local government system. Such responsible leaderships will be inclined to developing appropriate policies and programs that can be effectively implemented to address the rural underdevelopment needs in Nigeria. Indeed, with such commitment of government leadership at the state and federal government levels in Nigeria towards enhancing development at the rural areas, the nation would significantly key into the millennium rural development goals and objectives.

Conclusion

The article has looked at the issues of rural underdevelopment in Nigeria, examined the impediments to enhancement of the rural development and proffered solutions towards improving rural development administration. In conclusion, the study posits that the rural areas of Nigeria is so far largely characterized by lack of basic infrastructure facilities and general underdevelopment. This is in spite of their immense contributions to the national development. Enhancing the rural development status is therefore a prerequisite for sustainable national growth and development. Realizing this enhancement depends on how the identified impediments to it are tackled. The adoption of the recommended measures, which are considered imperative in overcoming the impediments, are expected to lead significantly to enhancement in the rural development process in Nigeria.

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