
Rural Development Policy and National Development: The Way Forward

By

IMOH IMOH-ITA

*Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic,
Ikot Osurua.*

Abstract

The aim of this paper was to examine the important role Rural Development Policies in Nigeria have played in the overall development of the Nigeria polity. To achieve this, the paper examined the various development plans formulated since Independence in Nigeria – such as the first, second, third and fourth National Development Plans which covered the period of 1970 – 1985 respectively. In the end, the paper concluded that these plans had contributed to the formulation of policies that have helped the Nigerian society towards agricultural sustainability.

Since independence in Nigeria, different rural development programs and policies have come up with each new administration.

Each administrative policy on rural development came up with an adjustment modification of the previous policy to improve on the new policy. Rural development is encompassing as it involves human and infrastructural development.

Rural development therefore means an attempt to affect and influence the lives of the rural dwellers to meet up with the social standard of the urban. In describing development, Ekot (1987) opined that it relates to desirable social and economic change, improved living conditions for which economic growth and industrialization are essential. Seers (1972) ascertained that development relates to reduction in poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Rural development policies in Nigeria since independence were conscious attempts to effect change in the rural area through policies that affect the rural dwellers directly.

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 4 No. 1, November, 2012

The Concepts of Development and Rural Society Development

Todaro (1990) summed up development to man “a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. As it relates to rural development, it means the entire economic and social system of the rural environment must change to resemble the urban in all ramifications.” Most interesting of the advocates of development is Aboyade (1975) who saw development from the sustainable point of view “development is essentially a continuous process of generating and more efficiently allocating resources for achieving greater socially satisfying ends.” This means availability of resources and improving the utilization of available resources. It involves natural, human and financial factors as well as complex social organization, level of technology, efficiency of management and the content of public policy.

Rural Society

In order to have a clearer picture of the need for rural development policy, rural environment would be discussed. Ekong (1988) highlighted some of the characteristics of rural society to include: High population density, high level of illiteracy, poverty, lack of social and basic infrastructure, high mortality rate etc. In rural environment, life is on subsistence scale which at times is not even enough to meet up family needs in terms of food. Generally, the rural life is the opposite of urban life. Rural areas have high population density and occupation of the people relates to the natural endowment of the society which shapes the peoples’ way of life to that direction. Rural environment harbors about 80% the countries population (Mabogunje, 1981). This population is made up of farmers and animal rearers (Singh, 1971). Thus, Adegboye (1972) defined development as “the development of the rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to most effectively and efficiently utilize intellect, technology and other resources for further development of themselves and their resources.

The Federal Government of Nigeria since independence has formulated policies to improve and affect the lives of rural dwellers positively. Since the population of those at the rural settlement is higher than the urban, policies on rural development have been formulated to improve the lives of the rural dweller as well as control migration rate to the urban area among other objectives. Nigeria’s rural development plans are majority on infrastructural development and Agricultural development. Both plans seek to address issues related to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and absence of social amenities to mention a few in rural areas.

Development Programs Since Independence

The first national development plan took place from 1962-1968. This plan did not spell out clear terms of rural development but was centered on agriculture because foreign exchange was mainly through the sale of agricultural produce. The plan encouraged the assemblage of agricultural produce for export purpose (Olawole & Adeleye, 2005).

The second National Development Plan 1970-74. This plan was launched after the civil war. The plan was an attempt to rehabilitate economic activities in the war affected areas. In the plan, government allotted ₦500,000 for village regrouping which was rather too small for infrastructural development. One of the objectives of the plan which was village regrouping did not address any issue of rural development such as pipe borne water, electricity, health education etc.

The third national development plan was from 1975-80. The budget allocation for rural development was ₦32 billion and it was to foster national unity through adoption of integrated rural development. The plan apportioned ₦90 million towards nation wide rural electrification scheme, establishment of nine River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAS), the supply of electricity to rural areas from large irrigation Dam, the construction of small dams and bore holes for rural water supply and the clearing of feeder roads for the evacuation of agricultural produce. (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2005).

The fourth National development plan between (1981-85) was more encompassing and significant because it was carried out by a civilian regime and it was more interested in developing the rural areas. Local governments were also allowed to participate directly in developing their areas. The plan emphasized the importance of rural infrastructural development as a vehicle for enhancing quality of rural life. The sum of ₦924 million was allocated to the eleven River Basin Authorities for development. Amongst the projects carried out in this period were

- i. Upgrading some local government roads.
- ii. Establish 27 primary health centres.
- iii. Provide wells in rural areas where piped water was not available.
- iv. Extend rural electrification scheme to phase five in addition to the existing four.

On the realization that the larger population of people dwell in rural areas, therefore to reduce inequality and create employment as well as provide certain services, the government embarked on rural development. In fostering development in the rural areas, policies were designed to align with the major occupation of rural dwellers which is agriculture. Thus the first rural development policy in Nigeria since independence.

The first national development plan was in the first republic which was focused on developing the urban areas. After the civil war, the development plan of 1970-1974 was focused more on the policy of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation. There was shortage of food and agricultural produce. This shortage of food supply led to the launching of agricultural development projects (ADPs) as the second national development plan (Okpaga, 2002). ADPs focus was on small scale farmers as the focal point of incremental food production. The program was to increase food production through supply of inputs, infrastructural development e.g. dams, roads, seed multiplication and extension services.

The third national development plan 1975-80 tried to correct the imbalances of the second development plan. Therefore, programs such as National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) by Gen. Gowon, the River Basin Development Authorities and the integrated agricultural development project came up. With these programs, there was increase in irrigation projects, abundant supply of fertilizers and input subsidies and agricultural credits. Lands use decree was promulgated in this period which transferred ownership of land to the state and the people holding it in trust for the government. It was during the third national development plan that operation feed the nation (OFN) program was initiated during the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo.

Of all the rural development policies, agriculture was the central issue, hence various rural development programs were agriculturally based.

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

Operation feed the nation was the first major program designed specifically to tackle agricultural issues. This was initiated in 1976 by General Olusegun Obasanjo's military rule. The objectives of OFN include:

- i. To mobilize all able bodied Nigerians towards the production of staple food items.
- ii. To utilize abundant resource.
- iii. To ensure self-sufficiency and self reliance in the production of basic items of food and raw materials in order to reflect the true sovereignty of the nation.
- iv. Curb migration of our youths in their attempts to look for jobs in the cities.
- v. To guarantee all farmers and growers reasonable share of the nation's wealth in exchange for their labour and capital investment (Ekanem, 1979). It was a national policy set up to involve mass participation. In order to achieve the success of the program, committees were set up from different quarters headed by the chief of staff, supreme headquarter. A monitoring mechanism was put in place to ensure the success of the implementation of the policy. States and local governments also set up their various committees in line with the federal to achieve the objectives of the national policy.

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There was mass mobilization through the media encouraging people to farm. Apart from mobilizing the populace, providing and distribution of fertilizers, the federal government also embarked on a number of projects such as livestock development and fishery development which all aimed at the production of more food.

The program also introduced mechanized farming as modern farming equipments were distributed to different state committees to assist the farmers cultivate more hectares of land.

The Green Revolution Programme

The program replaced Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). It was planned to remove the deficiency of OFN and meet the need of small scale farmers. It was an integrated agricultural program to meet the large population of small scale farmers that mostly reside in the rural areas (Ogbuogu, 1995).

Green Revolution had other programs under it. Programs such as Agricultural Development Area Program (ADA), National Food Production Program (NAFPP), Livestock Development Program (LDP), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Forest Development Program (PCD) all designed as the basic unit of development for each local government area. The objectives of the program included:

- i. Making Nigeria self-sufficient in basic food needs.
- ii. Educating the masses of the people on the need for self-reliance and self sufficiency in food production.
- iii. Production of raw materials for agro based industries.
- iv. Diversification of the country's source of foreign exchange through increased agricultural export.
- v. Stimulating a sense of pride in agricultural activities etc. (Ekot, 1987).

The program sought to enhance the construction, maintenance and rehabilitation of infrastructural facilities such as bridges and culverts, roads, housing, power and water supply. It also encouraged the private sectors to actively participate in the overall drive for agricultural revolution and to increase investment in the sector. (Ekot, 1998).

In 1981, General Buhari introduced the back to land program compelling everybody to go back to farming. Different state governments embraced it and it was successful by then.

The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)

DFRRI was established in 1986 by President Ibrahim Babangida's regime. It was created to effectively promote grassroots social mobilization and rural development program in collaboration with state governments.

Objectives of DFRRI

- i To improve the quality of life and the standard of living of the majority of the people in the rural areas.
- ii. For enormous resources of the rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the security, socio-cultural, political, economic growth and development of the nation by linking the growth and development of rural areas with those of the local government areas, the state and the nation.
- iii. To ensure a deeply rooted and self sustaining development proved based on effectively mobilized mass participation starting from the grassroots and encompassing the entire nation thereafter (Ekot, 1987).

The directorate was administered by the three tiers of government. At the federal, it was administered by the chairman who was appointed by the president. The Directorate maintains links with other ministries such as health, transport, Agriculture, science and technology. At the state level, the directorate was administered by a high-ranked public officer appointed by the state Governor and it was located in the Governors office. At the local level, the state Directorate also had village development committee at the level to carry out the objectives of DFRRI. All activities from the local-federal were controlled by the presidency through appointed officers. The project gulped ₦1.9b as of that time (Maduagwu).

Better Life Program

The wife of General Babangida initiated a program which was directed at improving the life of those at the rural areas. Better life for rural women was designed to use other means other than agriculture to better the lot of the rural women. Amongst such means were sewing, hair-dressing, craft and arts etc.

Family Support Program

This was the pet project of Mrs Abacha during the regime of Abacha as the head of state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The design of the program was to enhance/support the family by the family engaging in productive ventures such as farming, vocational training, skill acquisition etc. Along side family support program was the family economic advancement program almost to achieve the same objectives as the family support program. Family support program gulped about ₦10 billion (Maduagu).

Conclusion

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has had series of rural development and infrastructural plans with each successive government. Each government comes up with a rural development policy directed at changing the lives of the rural dwellers for the better while trying to improve on previous policies. Each of the policies came with

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different administrative patterns designed by the government of the day. Each program was funded directly by the federal government and some states and local governments contributed where necessary. However, the objectives of the policies were not to make profit but to directly affect the lives of those at the rural communities positively. Rural urban migration was not stemmed as people kept moving to the urban centres for better conditions of living. That is to say that the objectives of the policies were never attained.

Recommendations

In the course of studying the different development policies for the rural communities in Nigeria since independence, some short falls have been observed which subsequent governments can check in order to have successful rural development programs. Therefore, the author recommends that:

1. Policies should be formulated based on environmental need of the people not generalizing the needs of the entire country.
2. Policies should be formulated to relate with the occupation and culture of the people.
3. Basic education and adequate information dissemination should be carried out on the people that the policy is designed for.
4. Basic infrastructure should be put in place first before any policy is embarked upon.
5. Policy makers should not distant themselves from the rural areas. For instance, local government chairman and counselors should reside in rural centres.
6. The ceremonies and projects should not be done in the urban centres but in the rural centres.
7. There should be policies and programs by succeeding government instead of starting new ones with new names and objectives that are similar.

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