
Rural Dominance and Ineffective Rural Development Programmes as Challenges to Increase Agricultural Production and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: Cross River State Example

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Abstract

After spending billions of Naira in a long history of rural development effort, there is rural dominance, with a rural population of about 70 percent in Nigeria. Agricultural production that declined since 1960's has been stagnating to this day. The inability of government to reduce the rural landscape; rural population, as well as poverty through these rural development programmes call for a critical examination of the rural development process that has been applied, and why it failed to achieve these important objectives. The abandonment of these programmes for National poverty eradication programme (NAPEP), the National, State, and Local economic empowerment and development Strategies portray wrong steps to finding solutions to important national challenges. This paper made effort to identify these challenges and provide solutions for increased agricultural production and poverty reduction in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole.

Nigeria's third National Development plan (1975-1980) stated that the main objectives of rural development are increased rural productivity and income, diversified rural economy, and the enhancement of the quality of life of rural farmers. Clearly, and correctly stated, the objectives aim firstly, at developing the dominant rural landscape; Secondly, to make the rural landscape functional for increased agricultural production so as to raise incomes of rural farmers.

Thirdly, diversify the rural economy; and finally, improve the living standard of rural farmers.

The question is, how do we develop the rural areas to achieve these objectives? To a few scholars, developing the rural areas involves the creation of urban Centres in the rural landscape for a rural-urban continuum, i.e., to create a hierarchy of urban centres for functional relationship with the rural centres. But other scholars see rural development as agricultural development, since agricultural production is the only economic activity in the rural areas. A third group see rural development as both agricultural production and the provision of rural infrastructure. The views of scholars in our second and third schools of thought have been dominant at influencing rural development projects in Nigeria.

Baba (1993) stated that integrated rural development aim at promoting more rapid development of the rural areas through a sustained effort to raise agricultural productivity, and provide basic human needs such as hygienic water supply, health facilities/ access roads, electricity, etc. Similarly, Lacroix (1985) stated that rural development by definition is oriented towards benefiting primarily the poor. Hence in a narrow interpretation, rural development is agricultural development among poor segment of rural population. In these definitions rural development is seen as agricultural development. Thus, effort directed at achieving the objectives over the years has been concentrated at agricultural production.

Koinyan (1987) stated that agricultural development is not synonymous with rural development, and opined that the aim of the Directorate of food, roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was to move away from past narrow sectoral pre-occupation to an over-all formulation of a national development policy that embodies all sectors of development. As a result, DFRRI attempted the inclusion of all sectors of national development like industrial and technology development, political process, food and agriculture, grass roots sports development among others. Unfortunately, the directorate failed to include spatial organization to create a hierarchy of growth centres that can sustain national development.

Adalemo (1990) stated that settlements play a key role, and act as starting points for rural development. With socio-economic facilities settlements in a hierarchy of central places (rural-urban continuum) have wholesale and retail shops, banks, hospitals, industries, food processing facilities, etc. These create the demand, and stimulate increase agricultural and industrial production.

Matiki (2008) stated that rural development is national development and opined that the Dichotomy between rural development and national development is a false one, and that this is responsible for the wrong process of rural development that hinders both the planning and implementation of programmes. He emphasized that spatial organization i.e. the creation of a hierarchy of central places in rural areas is the most important process of rural development.

The Reason for the Failure of Ineffective Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria

The main components of rural development in Nigeria as in most developing countries have been two – the component related to agriculture (often regarded as the most important), and the component related to social infrastructure.

Our concern here is to determine the impact of infrastructure on rural development. How do rural roads, rural health, rural education, rural electricity, etc, influence, stimulate and sustain agricultural production in the rural areas? If farmers make increases in agricultural production over and above their consuming need, and there are no markets to sell their crops will rural roads and other infrastructures sustain their production? Although the contribution of good health facilities and rural schools help to increase production, can these sustain agricultural production?

In his evaluation of the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) Idacha (1980) noted that all the ADP projects at Lafia, Ayangba Gusau and Funtua like similar projects before them made increases in crop and livestock production. But these were not sustained. He recommended the establishment of growth centres to sustain agricultural production, and stated that in Nigeria urban and rural areas have developed in a parallel fashion with no hope of convergence. He also advocated an inclusion of a marketing system to achieve stable prices for food stuff and in the long run this will create a prosperous agricultural industry. Subsequent rural development programmes like DFRRI, the Better Life for Rural Women programme? (BLP), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), are the recent effort to eradicate poverty (Aliyu 2001) that led to the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), States Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS), designed by the National Planning Commission (2004) have not consider vital aspects that hinder rural development. While the intention to create an urban-rural continuum or a hierarchy of central places as a rural development strategy has a clear objective of achieving high incomes for rural farmers because of the ease in selling their crops with the agricultural production base with the supply of infrastructure does not have any clear vision of what this process can achieve. Wondering about this when he established DFRRI, Babangida established DFRRI and noted all.

Lack of a clear vision of the end product of our rural development efforts could easily lead to a set of inconsistent policies. It is therefore, important for us to have a clear perception of the fundamental goal of rural development. Should the emphasis be on merely raising commodity output or on the creation of enlightened, modernizing, productive, self-reliant and highly adaptable rural communities? In order words, should the primary concern be

on raising output or on enhancing the capacity of rural communities to transform their environments so as to ensure not only greater productivity but better living conditions? (1981: 7)

These important challenges identified by the ex-military president have not been solved till today. DFRRI, BLP and FEAP failed because of inconsistent policies. Similarly, NAPEP, NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS with inconsistent policies are likely to fail to achieve the desired objectives.

Lack of Clear Vision of Strategies for NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS that Can Reduce Extreme Poverty and Hunger

NAPEP, established by Obasanjo's administration in 2001 had a combination of the programmes and schemes of DFRRI and National directorate of employment (NDE). NAPEP scheme are – Youth Employment scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). The detail programmes of the schemes are:

1. Youth employment scheme (YES), has-
 - a. Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP)
 - b. Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP)
 - c. Credit Delivery Programme (CDP)
2. Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RID), has-
 - a. Rural Transport Programme (RTP)
 - b. Rural Energy Programme (REP)
 - c. Rural Water Programme (RWP)
 - d. Rural Communication Programme (RCP)
3. Social Welfare service scheme (SOWESS), has
 - a. Qualitative Education Programme (QEP)
 - b. Primary Health Care Programme (PHP)
 - c. Farmers Empowerment Programme (FEP)
 - d. Social Service Programme (SSP)
4. Natural Resources Development and Conservation Schemes (NRDC), has
 - a. Agricultural Resource Programme (ARP)
 - b. Water Resources Programme (WRP)
 - c. Solid Minerals Resource Programme (SMRP)
 - d. Environmental Protection Programme (EPP)

NAPEP executed only a few of its programmes that became visible in most parts of Nigeria like the Rural Communication Programme, the Keke-NAPEP- a tri-cycle transport service that is found in some urban centers of the country. Its agricultural and infrastructure, rural transport, rural energy and others were not executed. But the youth employment scheme-programmes were, and are still being executed by the NDE.

Unlike NAPEP,DFRRI made significant achievements in the registration of Community Development Associations, (CDA's) Cooperative Societies, Clubs, etc; the construction of over 40,000 kilometers of rural roads all over the country; provision of many rural electrification schemes; water supply through thousands of bore holes; building of rural health centers, rural women farms, food crop processing facilities; supply of several million tons pf seeds, seedlings, fingerlings, fertilizers, and other inputs. But increased production of food, and cash crops that was achieved in the first few years, were not sustained to reduce extreme poverty because of low producer prices, (Matiki, 2007).

NAPEP had not found its feet when in 2004 NEEDS, SEEDS, and LEEDS were established. According to Okon and Bassey (2010) in terms of contents the NEEDS document argues that its policy provisions are not the usual “trickle down” of growth, but a well targeted poverty alleviation focus.

The key components of the Programme are:

- i. The reform of government and institutions.
- ii. Growing of the private sector
- iii. Implementing a social charter and
- iv. Value reorientation.

According to the National Planning Commission document on NEEDS (2004), the new programme has four medium to long term ultimate goals viz:

- i. Poverty elimination and reduction
- ii. Employment generation,
- iii. Wealth creation, and
- iv. “Ethical (value) re-orientation”

Clearly, although NEEDS document intent to achieve more than the usual “trickle down” of growth, the key components of the Programme portray lack of a clear vision of strategies that can lead to the achievement of the medium and long term goals of poverty elimination, etc. What has the reform of government and institutions, growing the private sector, implementing a social charter, etc, got to do with poverty elimination and reduction, employment generation, etc? While Babangida (1987) identified lack of a clear vision of the end product of our rural development effort, we observe above the lack of a clear vision of the strategy or process that can lead to the end product (poverty elimination, etc) that has been clearly visualized. Thus, our ability to develop the rural areas for poverty reduction lies not only on having a clear vision of the end product of our rural development effort, but also on having a clear vision of the strategy to adopt in order to achieve the desired objectives.

Growth (Market) Centres at National and State Levels As Rural Development for Agrarian Commercialization

Markets that stimulate agrarian commercialization are usually located in urban centers, Hartshorn and Alexander (2000) stated that the principal function of the city is to provide services for its citizens, transients, and the surrounding hinter-land. These activities embrace a variety of service and management functions, including retailing, banking, wholesaling, etc. With at least 50,000 population they strongly influence the surrounding rural areas in community to work, and to sell their agricultural products, travels by urban (city) residents to the country side for recreation, as well as the spread of information through print and electronic media.

Although Nigeria has 36 State Capitals and Abuja including 774 Local Government (LG) centers, these do not generate functional relationship with the rural areas. About three quarters of the LG centers are villages, while the state capitals including Abuja were split into two or more Local Government Areas by past military administrations. This has denied them the ability to act as effective growth centres to simulate crop production in the rural areas.

Ineffective Rural Development Programmes and Rural Development Challenges in Cross River State

Cross River State has a population of nearly 3 million people in 2006 in an area of over 23,000 sq. kilometres. It has 18 Local Government Areas. Cross River State has Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja, and Obudu considered as urban centres. Apart from Calabar, the others have population sizes of between 10,000 – 30,000 and none of these can be considered as a viable urban centre that can stimulate agricultural production in the rural areas. About Calabar, Ntukidem (1980) stated that the greatest limitation of the town has been the weak socio-economic links with the rest of the subordinate towns. He noted that Calabar is typically a parasitic and consumer city generating only administrative services in return for the food and services brought into it from the hinterland.

Although Calabar has a population above many cities, it lacks port industries like active port cities, no wholesale shops, departmental stores, and commercial activities that can stimulate rural centers to increase agricultural production for hunger and poverty reduction. Similarly, the other local government centers are small towns, village towns, and villages that can not stimulate and sustain increase in agricultural production in their surrounding rural villages for poverty and hunger reduction.

Table 1 shows the status of each Local Government Areas (LGA); urban headquarters; the number of rural villages in each LGA, urban daily markets, and periodic urban, and village markets (also see figure 1):

Table 1: Status of L.G.A Headquarters, Number of Villages and Urban/Village Periodic Markets in Cross River State

S/N	LGA	L.G.A Hqtrs.	Status of LGA Hqtrs	No. Villages in LGA	Viabie urban markets	Periodic urban markets	Periodic village markets
1	Abi	Itigidi	Village-Town	42	-	1	17
2.	Akamkpa	Akamkpa	Village – Town	63	-	1	12
3	Akpabuyo	Ikot Nakanda	Village – Town	62	-	1	24
4	Bakassi	Ikang	Village	28	-	-	11
5	Bekwarra	Abuchiche	Village	40	-	-	12
6	Biase	Ibogho	Village	59	-	-	16
7	Boki	Boje	Village	53	-	-	19
8	Calabar Municipal	Municipal	Urban	9	1	7	-
9	Calabar South	Anantigha	Urban	6	1	6	-
10	Etung	Effraya	Village - Town	24	-	1	8
11	Ikom	Ikom	Urban-(small)	46	-	1	18
12	Obanliku	Sankwalla	Village – Town	28	-	1	9
13	Obubra	Obubra	Village – Tow	55	-	1	31
14	Obudu	Obudu	Urban (small)	39	-	1	12
15	Odukpani	Odukpani	Village – Town	59	-	1	23
16	Ogoja	Ogoja	Urban (small)	54	-	2	18
17	Yakurr	Ugep	Urban (small)	20	-	1	8
18	Yala	Okpoma	Village - Town	57	-	1	17

Source: Field work between 2009 – 2011

Since rural development over the years have failed to develop growth centres. Cross River State portrays a good example of the dominance of periodic village markets in Nigeria. With increase in transport fare in the late 1980's, rural dwellers in the state resorted to establishing periodic village markets to avoid high transport fare to urban and larger periodic village markets far from their villages. In 1983 Ogoja had 9 periodic markets-two (2) periodic urban, and seven (7) periodic village markets. But by 1995 she had 20 periodic markets - 2 period urban, and 18 periodic village markets. This increase affect the entire state and it allows the middlemen to lower producer prices that farmers receive for their crops, which in turn discourage increased crop production. Stating this problem, Johnson (1976) wrote:

“The basic determinant of economic progress and human well-being are increase output, improved productivity, and a will to intensify human effort and creativity. In rural societies that are only partially monetized, and that lack adequate and fair marketing facilities, a great deal of potential productive power is wasted, not because there is endemic lassitude or indolence, but

because there are no compelling incentives that will galvanize people into productive action. The greatest possible production is not achieved, hence the potential marketable surplus is not brought to market. As a result, both the individual producer and the nation suffer an opportunity loss”.

There is wide-spread hunger and extreme poverty in the country because there is a rural landscape dominance with a rural population of over 70% who do not have any compelling incentives that stimulates them into productive action. So, when our politicians talk about “Reform Agent”, 7 points Agenda, or transformation agenda to achieve food security, they fail to identify the challenges involved, and the solutions that can speed increased agricultural production for food security and poverty reduction.

Because of difficulties of marketing agricultural products, 73% of rural farmers in Cross River State consider themselves poor (Anaro 2005). Okon and Bassey (2010) stated that Akwa Ibom-LEEDs lacked focus on the real development needs of the rural people. It also lacked emphasis on human empowerment and wrong targeting of the poor, among many other defects, and that it cannot act as a development strategy for rural areas. Matiki (2010) stated that, past and present rural development programmes in Nigeria and other developing countries have failed because of the misconception about rural development programmes as agricultural development programmes. Thus, the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger that result from increase agricultural production for sustainable development can only be achieved in Nigeria, if effective rural development programmes are designed and implemented.

Conclusion

Since independence, rural development effort of Nigerian governments have been concentrated on the symptoms of undeveloped rural landscape – low rural incomes or poverty, low agriculture production, undiversified rural economy and low living standard in rural areas. Agricultural production with the supply of infrastructures, have wrongly been considered as the “process” for developing the rural areas. But low agricultural production and the others above, are symptoms of the rural landscape. To develop the rural landscape we have to organize it into a rural-urban continuum or hierarchy of central places. When a landscape is at this stage, the urban and rural centers (villages) become functionally interrelated. As a result, agriculture and industrial production become commercialized. Farmers’ production increases and this is sustained to reduce their poverty and hunger that leads to sustainable national development.

Recommendation

The Federal government that has the wherewithal should undertake a spatial organization process for a hierarchy of central places all over the country to stimulate agrarian and industrial commercialization for poverty reduction and food security in the state and Nigeria as a whole.

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