

Analysis and Critical Review of Rural Development Efforts in Nigeria, 1960-2010

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Abstract

The work took a hard and critical look on the past and present efforts of the Nigerian Governments on rural industrialization and development as a panacea to rural poverty in the country. Both empirical and theoretical examination and analyses of the chequered efforts of the previous and present administrations of the Federal Government of Nigeria indicates that “Bad Governance” and “policy inconsistency” had remained the bane of all attempts at rural industrialization and development in the country, thereby exacerbating the poverty level of the rural dwellers. Consequently, the work concludes by noting that rural development in Nigeria since 1960-2010 had remained a paradox, because the more efforts the government claims to make on rural development the worse the level of poverty in the rural areas turns out to be. It is advisable to point out that from the findings of the study, the best solution to tackling Nigeria’s rural poverty and development is for the present government in the country to ensure good governance and policy consistency which will tackle corruption at its roots in the rural communities in particular and the society in general.

Key words: Rural development; Government; Programme; Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Rural development in the world generally and in the third world in particular has assumed the front-burner status since early eighties because governments have realized that except given the seriousness it deserves and closing the gap between theory and practice in this area, the goals of achieving accelerated national development especially at the rural level which is the grassroots base, will remain elusive at least in the third world. One major reason for this assertion is that taking Nigeria as an example, the bulk of the population lives in the rural areas, which is the grassroots where development is most desirous. Apart from this lopsided population ratio, the bulk of the rural areas are poor and hardly live above the poverty line of one American dollar per day. More importantly, development is measured mostly on the scale of per capita income of nations, which is the ratio of the gross national income to entire population. Therefore, the development of rural areas signals to a greater extent the level of national development and the situation of the nations in the development ladder.

Buttressing this assertion, Idode (1989), citing a portion of the 1975-80 Nigeria National Development Plan stated that:

It is necessary to recognize that about 70% of the Nigerian population live in the rural areas and have benefited relatively little from the rapid economic growth of the past few years. The improvement in the welfare of the average Nigerian will therefore require substantial increase in rural income. Accordingly, in the allocation of scarce resources, in the course of plan implementation, priority will be given to programmes and projects directly benefiting the rural population, particularly projects to increase the income of small holder farmers and to improve the economic and social infrastructure to the rural area.

There is therefore, reason to believe that the question of how to accelerate expansion in the agricultural sector and how best to improve welfare for the masses of the people in the rural areas is now the focus of considerable

government attention. It is however sad to observe that from independence to date, there has been a great disparity between successive government pronouncements and the establishment of various development agencies towards attaining rural development and the actual results of implementation efforts. The concern of this chapter is to explore the meaning of rural development, how it can be accelerated; its sustainability in Nigeria especially at the local government level; examine the major institutions involved in the task of rural development in Nigeria and proffer the way forward for accelerated and sustainable rural development in the country with specific reference to Cross-River State Local Government Councils.

1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The word "rural" means different thing to different people. The American Bureau of Census classifies a group of people living in a community having a population of not more than 2,500 people as rural, whereas in Nigeria, the Federal Office of Statistics defines a community with less than 20,000 people rural.

Generally speaking, according to Afolayan (1995), rural areas are easily identified by other various criteria, apart from population. Such criteria include:

a) Level of infrastructural development i.e. road networks, educational institutions, water supply, electricity, health facilities, communication, etc. The rural area lacks most if not all of these infrastructures and where they are available the quality as well as quantity is usually below desirable standard;

b) Occupational differentiation: Most rural dwellers earn their living by engaging in subsistent agriculture production;

c) Housing: Housing in rural areas are generally below the standard an average person will be proud of;

d) Extent of community planning: Community development activities in the rural areas are often carried out with little or no planning at all, such that future development activities cannot be undertaken without interfering with the existing structures;

e) Arising from the combination of the above factors is a characteristic abject poverty when related to the economic buoyancy of urban centers.

Rural development has therefore been described in different ways by different authors, depending on the discipline or line of thought of the person concerned. This is because the subject of rural development is multidisciplinary and the definition of such author will depend on the area where he/she focuses attention. But all definitions have a central theme, which is "improvement of living conditions of the rural people". What the different definitions do is to lay emphasis on the process of getting the central objective of rural development achieved. Here we shall look at a few definitions.

Aslam (1981) defined the concept as "a process aimed at developing the rural poor, their economy and institutions from a state of stagnation or low productivity equilibrium into dynamic process leading to higher levels of living and better quality of life." Similarly, Schumacher (1983) conceived rural development as "developing the skill of the masses to make them self-reliant through instruction which supply appropriate and relevant knowledge on the methods of self-help". It can be seen that the above definitions, coming from training specialists, tend to lay emphasis on the development of human resources while the following definition taken from a World Bank publication focuses attention on the development of the environment rather than human beings.

Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless (Aliy, 1999). Taken together, available definitions emphasize the central point that rural development is about promoting the welfare and productivity of rural communities, about the scope and quality of participation of rural people in that process, and about the structure, organization, operations and interactions and facilities which make this possible.

The term "accelerated rural development" involves integrating all efforts on rural development to ensure effective and speedy attainment of stated objectives. It is an integrated approach to rural development which has to do with putting the entire act together, with clarifying the objectives and bringing all the agencies, facilities and programmes involved into a common framework of action for the attainment of the objectives.

The "sustainability of rural development" refers to long-term human and material sustenance. It is the continued existence of programmes long after their establishment. Sustainability is central to all rural development effort. Without it, investments in the rural development effort are short lived and of no effect.

A programme's results are called sustainable if they are utilized by the direct recipients after the completion of the programme without further external assistance. To plan for sustainable results, programme designers must pay close attention to the content of three programme formulation framework (PFF) sections: Major elements, host government commitment and inputs.

Major Elements: Are the outputs and activities logically organized and sufficient to produce capabilities that can be sustained by the direct recipients? For example, are few days training enough for trainees to actually perform better in their job?

Host Government Commitment: Is the government or other national institutions clearly committed to build

and sustain capabilities in terms of its policies, plan and resources, now and in the future?

Inputs: Are the required national resources in terms of personnel, equipment, facilities and budget actually being provided to develop capabilities?

Sustainability is not created by planning alone, however, deliberate programme management and monitoring of the conditions that will bring about sustainability is essential during programme implementation.

When applied to rural development, “sustainability” is not limited only to continued existence of programmes long after their existence; it also means that sustainable rural development can be defined both as a process and as a policy goal. As a process, it defines a movement and a desire for development efforts and programmed to take cognizance of ecological factors by ensuring ecosystem balance. It is a call that development should both destabilize the environment by over drawing a nature introducing pollutants into the ecosystem or disrupting or terminating other forms of life (the non-human species) so that our planet can be made safe and habitable even as we appropriate the bounties of nature for human ends.

Sustainable rural development calls for the introduction of environment friendly technologies, habits, production systems and environmental impact assessment (EIA) of human activities so as to avoid activities that may have adverse effects on the environment as well as the human and non-human species.

As a policy goal in sustainable rural development addresses the creation, promotion and co-ordination of awareness, enabling conditions and concrete action towards rural development. It describes the initiative of government. Policy makers, environmental protection groups, industrial executives and the international community involving many people and organizations of different categories, social classes and interest at various levels in becoming knowledgeable skilled pursuers of sustainable rural development and to transmit such knowledge, skills and strategies to target individuals and groups (Olugbenga, 2002, p.65).

As a policy goal, sustainable rural development is a key-phrase that matches globalization and the information technology revolution in importance (Toyoda, 2001, p. 4). It views investment in the environment as a way of harmonizing rural society and the natural environment on a long term basis.

The above views are related to the three indices to sustainable development as enunciated by Lafferty (2000, p.42), namely:

- an ecologically sustainable society;
- global equity (elimination of poverty); and
- presence (inter generational equity).

Sustainable rural development requires these at the grassroots levels with an eye for rural peculiarities (World Bank, 2001, p.1)

2. AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN NIGERIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE TO DATE

Since political independence in 1960, various Nigeria governments have adopted various strategies and methods at developing the rural areas of the country. However, Ikotun (2002) noted that in spite of colossal amount of money that have gone into implementing rural development programmes and the proliferation of rural development agencies one after the other, not much impact has been made. He went further to state that in spite of pious official pronouncements, and declaration of intentions as contained in the development plans, at the end of each plan period rural life remained unchanged. Each plan came with new promises and raised hopes that were never fulfilled. The First National Development Plan, 1962-1968 for example had as its priority, agriculture (considered as synonymous with rural development) but capital budget and expenditure on agriculture during the plan period was only 42 percent. The Second Development Plan, 1970-1974 had as its main thrust, the attainment of a just and egalitarian society and claimed to place high premium on reduction of inequality among social groups and between urban and rural areas. These noble objectives notwithstanding, this aspect of the plan was partially executed. It is significant to note also that it was only during the Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980 that attempts were made to engage in what has been referred to as “integrated rural development”. This refers to the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPS) that were sponsored by the World Bank. It is to be noted that in spite of the active involvement of the World Bank in the ADPs, for which the country has taken loans worth billions of Naira, the country has continued to be deficient in food production and the standard of living of the people, especially in the rural areas still very low.

Thus, as far back as early 1970s, rural development has been identified as a strategy for improving the economic and social life of the rural poor in Nigeria since then, successive governments at various levels have embarked on several programmes aimed at rural development. Some of the development programmes established under development agencies since independence to date, apart from the National Development Plan stated above, can be broadly listed as :

- 1) Operation Feed the Nation (OFN);
- 2) The Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE);
- 3) The Low Cost Housing Scheme;
- 4) Adult Education Scheme;
- 5) Rural Electrification Scheme;
- 6) Rural Banking Schemes;
- 7) Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs);
- 8) River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs);
- 9) Rural Water Supply Schemes;

- 10) Credit schemes to small holders through various specialized institutions;
 - 11) Transports Schemes;
 - 12) Health Schemes such as Sanitary, Immunization, Primary Health Care, etc.;
 - 13) The National Better Life Rural Women Programme;
 - 14) Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER);
 - 15) National Orientation Agency (NOA);
 - 16) National Agricultural Land and Development Agency (NALDA);
 - 17) Research Programme;
 - 18) Artesian Fishery and Small Ruminant Production Programme;
 - 19) Pasture and Grazing Reserves;
 - 20) Accelerated Crop Production Scheme;
 - 21) The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP);
 - 22) Primary Health Care Programmes;
- Specifically however since early 1980s, rural development agencies that were in place include:
- a) The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI);
 - b) The National Directorate of Employment (NDE);
 - c) Disease Eradication Scheme;
 - d) Expanded Programme on Immunization;
 - e) Basic Primary Education Scheme (BPES);
 - f) The Nomadic Education Programme;
 - g) The Migrant Fishermen Scheme;
 - h) Adult Support Basic Education Programme;
 - i) Federal Assisted Mass Transit Scheme;
 - j) State Assisted Transport Scheme;
 - k) Ferry Transport Schemes (in the Riverine areas and Lagos);
 - l) Low-Cost Housing Estate Scheme;
 - m) Federal Environmental Protection Agency;
 - n) Flood and Soil Erosion Control Programme;
 - o) People's Bank;
 - p) Community Banks;
 - q) National Agricultural Insurance Company (NAIC);
 - r) Nation Insurance Corporation of Nigeria (NICON); and
 - s) Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), etc.

At this juncture, a look at the essence and contributions of few of the agencies will be considered.

2.1 The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)

The agency was created in 1973 by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture with primary aim of increasing staple food production through the promotion of improved production technologies among the small-scale farmer, especially in rural areas. The major success of the programme is that

it led to an appreciable improvement in food production in the 1970s and above all it laid a good foundation or an effective researcher-farmer linkage. But unfortunately the programme has been kept dormant for a long time since after the regime that introduced it left the stage.

2.2 The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs)

The River Basin Development Authorities came into being between early and mid 1970s as a result of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations recommendation. The number was increased to eleven in 1978 and to eighteen in 1984, but later reduced again to eleven in 1986. The authorities were created to develop the water resources potential of the country for agricultural and domestic purpose. Their attention was focused mainly on agricultural production including crop, fisheries and livestock even when the name was changed in 1984 to reflect their potential role as rural development agency. However, the name was reverted in 1986 to its original one and the agricultural component removed, limiting the authorities to a narrow mandate of water resources development. While some believe the authority has some impact, the general consensus is that the output from the authorities does not justify the huge amount of funds channeled into them particularly during the Second Republic.

2.3 The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs)

The origin of the ADPs dates back to 1972 when the Federal Government of Nigeria in conjunction with the World Bank and the State Governments of the North-Central, North West embarked on investigations aimed at identifying suitable areas for pilot agricultural development projects. These were to serve as experimental before committing huge amount of money on full scale projects (Adejo, 1983). These investigations led to the establishment of three enclave ADPs in Funta, Gombe and Gussau between 1976 with joint funding by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the World Bank and the respective state governments.

The objectives of the ADPs were listed as

- to increase production, and
- to raise rural income and hence the standard of living of rural dwellers.

The success achieved in these pilot projects and others that followed led to the establishment of the eventual thirty-one statewide ADPs in the country. The programme is assessed to be a major contributor to the significant growth recorded in the agricultural sector in the late 1980s to early 1990s (CBN, 1993). However, there is fear that the programme may not be able to survive long after the World Bank would have withdrawn their funds.

2.4 The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

The Operation Feed the Nation came into being just at a time the National Accelerated Food Production

Programme (NAFPP) is just finding its feet. It was introduced by the Federal Military Government under General Olusegun Obassajo in 1976 with a major objective of creating awareness about the importance of agriculture in national development. The programme was designed to involve all the segments of the population including students who were engaged during the long vacations. The main problems with the objectives were not specific and therefore not measurable. The programme naturally passed away with the regime that introduced it.

2.5 The Green Revolution Programme

The Green Revolution Programme was created in 1980 by the civilian administration of the Second Republic (Alhaji Shehu Shagari). The programme was meant to accelerate the country's movement towards self-sufficiency in food production. The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were used as a vehicle for bringing about the aim of the programme. The programme went a step ahead of others by introducing agricultural credit for small-scale farmers. However, the programme was seriously affected by unnecessary political rivalry between state-controlled and federal-controlled programmes. It was heavily politicized that the real farmers hardly benefited from the activities of the programme; it finally died with the exit of the founding fathers.

2.6 The Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)

The scheme was established by the Central Bank of Nigeria in the mid 70s with the primary aim of providing guarantee to Commercial Banks for loans taken by them for agricultural purposes. The scheme included the creation of an Agricultural Credit Guarantee Fund (ACGF) jointly by the Federal Government and the Central Bank of Nigeria. Under the scheme the commercial banks were required to channel a minimum proportion of their loan portfolio into the agricultural sector. The commercial banks are made to deposit the shortfall with the Central Bank, which made such fund available to Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank for its operation. The scheme was not too successful then in meeting the requirement. This is due to the risk involved in granting loans to small-scale farmers scattered about in the rural areas.

2.7 The Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)

The Directorate Of Food, Road, And Rural Infrastructure was established by the Babangida government on the 7th February, 1986 by Decree No. 4 of 1987, consequent upon the realization that agricultural development that was not accompanied by the provision of necessary social, economic and institutional infrastructure will not lead to the desired rural development. The directorate was to help the rural communities to identify and evolve viable local level projects by using local community organizations and institutions. DFRRI was also to provide the rural

communities the necessary technical and financial support for the projects through the project development stages. Greater community participation is the bane of the DFRRI as a concept.

The Directorate during the active period of its existence (1985-1993) made its presence felt but its failure to evolve an effective community participation strategy has created sustainability problems for its various projects. In early 1994, the DFRRI was merged with the Ministry of Agriculture and became a department in the ministry. Even though the unit is still overseeing most of its former activities, the prominence which it enjoyed as an autonomous directorate is now more concerned with having its separate vote removed. The unit is now more concerned with monitoring its erstwhile activities than engaging in actual construction of rural infrastructure, thus, ending the days of its flamboyance. It is now in a slumber after the regime that created it left the stage.

2.8 Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER)

The Directorate of Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction was created with the objective of mobilizing Nigerians towards economic recovery and developing a new social and political order. In other words, the fundamental mandate of MAMSER was to facilitate the nation's process for pooling together, harnessing, actualizing and utilizing potential human resources for a self-reliant transformation of the economy. Its programmes for the attainment of its objectives included the inculcation in the populace generally political education, social justice, self-reliance, mass literacy, renewed war against indiscipline. With emphasis on promoting leadership by example at all levels, operation service alert for armed forces, promotion of excellence in public services etc..

In spite of various difficulties, the Directorate was able to make tremendous impact in its efforts at mobilizing Nigeria to build a good society, characterized by better life, fair distribution of resources, integrity, honesty, peace, progress and genuine development.

Since 1993 however, MAMSER lost its autonomous existence and became a Department in the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. However, the fact that a new National Orientation Agency was set up to continue the work of moral education where MAMSER left off, is a testimony to the fact that the work of national moral rejuvenation was not yet accomplished.

2.9 National Orientation Agency

After the dissolution of the board of the Directorate of MAMSER in 1983, it paved way for the inauguration of a new outfit, the National Orientation Agency. The new Agency is a corporate body which emerged from the merger of the Public Enlightenment and War Against Indiscipline and the National Orientation Movement

division of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. This was necessitated by the need to pool together and consolidate all efforts and resources utilized by the three bodies in their fields of public enlightenment, social mobilization and value reorientation.

The agency which was formally established in August 1993 has the following among others as its objectives:

- Ensuring that governmental programmes and policies are better understood by the general public.
- Mobilize favourable opinion for such programmes and better.
- Encourage formal education through public enlightenment activities and publications.
- Establish feedback channel to government on all aspects of Nigerian national life.
- Establish appropriate national framework for educating, orientating and indoctrination of Nigerians towards developing socially desirable attitude, values and culture which project individual/national pride and positive national image for Nigeria;
- Restore and sustain discipline in our national life;
- Instill in the populace a sense of absolute loyalty to he fatherland;
- Ensure and uphold leadership by example and
- Foster respect for constituted authority.

As at date, the activities of the agency are yet to be fully and widely felt by the majority of Nigerians. The multifarious problems faced by the agency might make it to eventually turn out to be an exercise in futility.

Various other governmental agencies with similar case histories include the National Directorate of Employment, the moribund Peoples' Bank, the Community Banks, Nigeria Agricultural Insurance Scheme, Better Life for Rural Women, Nation Agricultural Land Development Authority, Family Economic Advancement Programme, etc. with lofty ideals and objectives which were either partially realized or woefully a failure; thereby failing to bring about the desirable rural development in the country to date. What reasons can be adduced for this failure?

3. A CRITIQUE OF THE PERFORMANCE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES IN NIGERIA

In evaluating the performance of Development Agencies and the problems associated with their apparent failure, Nweke (2003) poses the problem of political communities. For him, Nigeria is a land of paradoxes: it is a rich country, but its people are poor. The World Bank ranks the country among the 25 poorest countries in the world. Yet as has been depicted above, the country since independence in 1960 and 2003, according to him, there have been 15 ministries charged with the fight against poverty for rapid rural development and about 30 institutions, agencies and programmes, designed

to energize the struggle against poverty, ensure rural development and stimulate the process of inclusion.

The fundamental question that logically arises is: what strategies should Nigeria adopt to ensure the efficiency of its programmes against poverty and exclusion?

One major problem has been that since independence, successive governments simply made a rehash of the old strategies for rural development under new names. Not only were these programmes hijacked by the political class, which has never been honest in the formulation and execution of public policy. Then too, the governments, one after other, hardly ever sought the participation of the political communities (regrouping of the organs of government, pressure groups, the media) and individuals, all this for various reasons. And yet it seems obvious that the political communities have, each of them an interest in every specific political field and try to exert through consultation and partnerships with the political decision makers as they design and implement the policies likely to enhance poverty eradication and ensure rural development.

One of the major factors that has contributed to the failure of rural development agencies to achieve their noble goal of poverty eradication in Nigeria today is the policy of the centralized control of the programmes of rural development set up by members of the elite who do not have the data available from the deprived social groups or even from the private sector. If the strategies adopted by government have to succeed, the Nigerian government would have to adopt a policy of efficient consultation and collaboration based on partnership, with the political communities. Such an arrangement would make it possible, on the one side, for the programmes to be mutually controlled by the authorities and the rural dwellers themselves, and, on the other side for the necessary responsibility and transparency. This has been the major preoccupation of many Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Agencies like the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a host of other United Nations agencies in their position are partners in the poverty reduction programmes and donors as well as lenders to rural development projects in the third world.

Okafor (2003) in contributing to the search for viable solutions to the problem of stunted rural development in the third world opined that the relationship between governance and socio-economic development has become important that today, the international community (in particular the multilateral financial institutions) recognizes that the correction of the macro-economic imbalances, market reforms and trade liberalization are no longer enough to improve economic efficiency and promote sustainable rural development. The reality of today's world demands that the promotion of good government

in all its ramifications should be the essential element of the frame in which the economy can prosper. These ramifications embrace for example respect for the rule of law, enhanced efficiency in and responsibility for the public sector, the reinforcement for the partnership between the private and public sectors and civil society; the enlargement of the mechanisms of decision-making.

The analysis of some of the programmes of government since independence in its rural development efforts to date as depicted above highlights their effects, which would explain why over 70 percent of the Nigerian populations still live below the poverty threshold. A survey by Okafor (2003), of 450 Nigerians randomly selected to represent all the strata of the society; revealed that the failure of the old poverty reduction and rural development programmes is mainly attributed to:

- Their weak political base and their personalization;
- The proliferation of projects with little, if any effort to harmonize and/or coordinate their activities.
- The lack of sustainability arising from the abandonment of programmes as soon as the Head of State, often its initiator, leaves office;
- A top-down approach to project formulation, rarely the bottom-up approach
- Little or no involvement of the Non-Governmental Organizations or other parties concerned in the development projects;
- The inadequate funding of the project.

Besides, the performance of the rural development agencies and programmes launched either by the agencies or government are almost always second-rate. The reasons suggested for this by Okafor (op cit) include:

- The politicization of the programme by men in power;
- The poor “ownership” of the programme by over half the population (70%) which surely affects its attitude and involvement;
- The allegations that a large share of the fund, committed by the government has been misappropriated and fraudulently end up in private pockets, etc.

Lastly, the efficient tools of poverty eradication and rural development would be shared governance and a scenario in which all the parties involved (government, private sector, civil society and community development organizations) would take part in the decision-making process, as well as in the execution of the development programmes.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the lessons of experience put together from government participation in rural development programmes through the development programmes have been shown to grossly lack proper coordination of activities of the different agencies (both public and private) that are in the business of rural material

development agencies which are supposed to work as partners in progress engage in unhealthy rivalry that leads to nothing but wastage of human and material resources. We have got more than enough agencies to bring about rural development in this country, what we now need is proper coordination of the existing agencies. In fact, rationalization of rural development agencies and programmes may have to go along with our efforts to institutionalize a proper system of coordinating the activities of these agencies. Therefore, different regimes need not proliferate rural development agencies but rather should seek ways by which we can utilize what we already have to our greatest advantage. Effective coordination can be put in place, if Nigerians reduce their tendency to build and defend territories around themselves. Heads of rural development projects/programmes should be ready to cooperate and work with others whose activities are complementary with theirs for the good of the society.

An important ingredient for success of any programme or activity is total commitment of all concerned to the objectives of the programme or activity. This again is very much lacking in Nigeria. Every regime wants to embark on something new because it wants to be identified with a new programme, and in the process we end up going many steps backward, thereby killing the initial programme of the past government by abandoning it. Examples of programmes which were adjudged beneficial but abandoned as soon as the regime that introduced them passed away abound. It is therefore being advocated that existing programmes should be properly and objectively assessed by new regimes before being thrown into the garbage cans for no reason other than “our disagreement with the originating regime or government”.

Recent findings in the field of rural development have led to the conclusion that popular participation based on involvement of the beneficiaries of a rural development project at all stages or phases of the project is an important factor of the sustainability and success of the project. Our experience is that more often than not, rural development projects are implemented without the involvement of the local people at all; in cases where they are said to be involved, their involvement does not go beyond contributing part of the funds required for the project execution. There is a need for project sponsor and managers to evolve methods of involving the local people who are the intended beneficiaries right from the identification phase through to the time of completion. The people’s contributions in form of ideas, financial and human resources will serve as a motivating factor for them to see to the complete success of the programme. The factor is that the local people know and understand their environment and conditions better than the policy formulators and decision makers who operate from outside. It should also be noted that an aspect of participation that is most lacking is the monitoring and evaluation of programme by the beneficiaries themselves.

At worst, they should be adequately represented on the monitoring and evaluation task forces appointed by the government and its agencies.

Emphasis should be placed on the development of infrastructures which are prerequisite for sustainable rural development. It is not enough to make provisions for just physical infrastructure but administrative as well as institutional infrastructure which are complementary to ensure a balanced rural development. Efforts should equally be directed at mobilizing the people to organize themselves into viable groups such as cooperatives, community development association and social clubs which can be used as vehicles for the development of the rural areas.

There is need for a shift from the wholesale importation of foreign technologies and models that have not proved effectively beneficial to the needs of the rural populace to action research, and the development of indigenous technological base through experimentation and adaptation. This will be more relevant to the needs of the rural dwellers. It is not enough to proclaim an intention to embark on action research but rather the need to back up such intention with concrete, necessary action and enablement. Above all, there is need for total commitment on the part of the government based on political will as well as from the people. It is all too trite to state that the primary catalytic force in rural development is a sustained commitment on the part of the state to develop the rural sector. Commitment based on political will, would ameliorate the persistent failure of rural development efforts in Nigerian. This will ensure adequate funding of projects, the elimination of changing policy midstream, adequate planning, moral support for projects and keeping to policy guidelines as well as accountability.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is blessed with natural as well as human resources that have not been properly channeled to ensure equitable distribution of wealth derived therefrom and ensure the overall development of the country as a whole. It has been shown that where the country is in the development ladder has been due to failure of successive governments since independence to succeed in the rural development efforts which has retarded the per capita income of the average Nigerian, thereby placing a large percentage of the populace below the poverty line. This inadequate mobilization of the natural and human resources can be eliminated with political will, commitment and continuity rather than unpredictability of rural development programmes and agencies. Since past governments have tried several development strategies without much success, integrated rural development approach should be given a deeper application.

Finally, it is perhaps the frustration with the various strategies of development that prompted some scholars

of development administration, like Balogun (1980) to call for a new development strategy which will focus attention on the moral or ethical aspect of the man in the development efforts, rather than on material acquisition because of the importance of the moral factor of man in ensuring the success of the formulation as well as the implementation of any rural development efforts. Due to the temptations of material possession and lure of political position de-emphasizing this aspect has scuttled the development process and made mockery of government efforts which has accounted for the stagnancy of the development processes in the country. Government should equally avoid excessive bureaucratization, politicization and personalization of the rural development agencies as these have been factors responsible for the low performance of development efforts of government in the country from independence to date.

We believe that if the recommendations and the identified laxities are addressed, Nigeria should move out of the unenviable position of being among the poorest countries of the world in the face of material, human and natural endowments.

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