



***Rural Stagnation and the Role of Funding Agencies in
Development of Nigeria: A Review Paper.***

***Aliyu M.K. And Qasim, O.A. Bala .A, Al-Mustapha A,
A.Haruna***

*Department of Agricultural Extension, Nigerian Agricultural Extension and
Liaison Services (NAERLS), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.*

Abstract

The paper sets to examine critically the causes of the rural stagnation and the role of rural funding agencies in Nigeria. A survey of the past policies on rural development programmes by Nigerian Government and funding agencies such as the World Bank Assisted Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) and the River Basin Development Authority, which are the 'core' of Nigeria agricultural and rural development programmes, reveals clearly that the programmes were based on International Technology Transfer (ITT), which were rather counterproductive and deficient in many ways. First, it disregards the felt needs of the rural dwellers and secondly, it enforces development from above. In other words, all the past policies and programmes cannot help in achieving the desired rural development objectives. The study used content development to review existing literatures to discuss the subject matter and then concludes with some recommendations amongst which were; an integrated community development approach, shifting 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, development of indigenous technological base through experimentation and adaptation and the creation of Rural Development Plan Implementation Review Centres (RDPIRCs) and Research-Extension-Farmer Input Linkage System (REFILS); in rural

communities where implementation takes place. Going by these would bring the desired sustainable developments in the rural communities of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Rural Stagnation, funding agencies, development.*

Introduction

The problem of rural development in Nigeria have been of great concern to the different tiers of government due to the alarming rate of rural-urban migration. Nigeria is predominantly a rural society as the vast majority of her population dwells in the rural areas (Ele, 2006; Nwuke, 2004). According to Onibokum (1987), rural development is faced with the paradox that the development oriented rural economy relies heavily on non-productive people who are ill-equipped with outdated tools, lack technical information, lack scientific and cultural training, and whose traditional roles and access to resources pose problems for their effective incorporation into modern economic system.

There is an overwhelming need to accord rural development a priority so as to enable them contribute meaningfully to the socio-cultural and socio-economic development of Nigeria. The bulk of Nigeria's wealth is derived from agriculture and oil which lies in abundant quantity in

rural communities. Currently, over 80% of the entire population live in the rural area, but much has not been done in terms of social amenities and infrastructural facilities. The stagnation in the development of the rural areas has not only resulted to the mass exodus of rural dwellers to the urban centres, but has also made the rural areas less attractive for socio-economic investment.

Ariyo (1991) asserts that the massive rural-urban drift of able-bodied young men and women led to declining productivity in agriculture, increasing food imports, growing unemployment and the widening gap in welfare terms between the urban and rural areas. Related studies affirmed that rural areas of Nigeria are areas where the lack of basic socio-economic infrastructures, poverty, and conflict have become a strong characteristics of the rural communities.

Nigeria is predominantly a rural economy, if development is to take place and become self-sustaining, it must therefore, emphasis more on

rural transformation. It is universally acknowledged that rural areas are very important to a nation. They serve as the base for the production of food and fiber. Yet, despite the importance of the rural areas, they have been neglected for long. Development plans of the country, therefore emphasized on rural economic development. But in the implementation of the planned objectives, the success was rather limited due to some constraints, at the top of which was the lack of participation by the stakeholders, i.e rural dwellers. The role played by government has failed at addressing the key issues in rural economic development. It is therefore, the responsibility of the funding agencies who can penetrate the rural communities to engage them in participatory development process for the rapid development of the rural areas. It is the rural dwellers alone who can effectively identify their own problems and adequately identify their perceived needs. It therefore, becomes imperative that they be involved in the design and implementation of development programmes meant to improve their welfare (Ime, 2014).

This paper will attempt to critically review available literatures on the above subject and make recommendations for a way forward towards sustainable development of the rural communities in Nigeria.

Concept 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.

Development is a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment. Hence, development is a constant process of transformation. It is a dynamic concept denoting a state of ceaseless change. Rural Development is the improvement of the living standards of the low-income population living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis, through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. In essence, rural development implies a broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with changes consequent upon this.

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.

According to Sam (2014:6), there have been attempts by successive regimes in Nigeria at poverty reduction and rural development; the approaches have usually been determined by the interpretation given to rural development by the different regimes or interventionists. Prominent among these programmes as he noted are:

- Accelerated Poverty Alleviation Programme,
- School to Land Programmes,

- Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), 1987
- Community Bank (CB), 1990
- National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA), 1991
- Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLP), 1987
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE), 1986
- The National Youth Employment and Vocational Skills Development Programme
- Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)
- The National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), 1989
- The 7 point Agenda, 2007
- Integrated Community Development Project,
- State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy(SEEDs),
- Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy(LEEDs), and
- The Transformation Agenda, etc.

Unfortunately, none of these programmes have been able to radically change the poor standard of living in rural Nigeria as most of them are deficient in in-depth insight and systematic frameworks for realization. In addition, Ilori (1999:93) in Tenuche and Ogwo (2005:126) enumerated other various programmes aimed at developing the rural areas. These include the Agricultural Development Programmes and River Basin Development Authorities, Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution, rural electrification schemes, rural banking schemes, urban and rural water supply schemes, credit schemes to small scale holders through various specialized institutions, transport schemes, health schemes, Universal Primary Education scheme, and low cost housing scheme. These policies show the zeal of different governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which has led to the proliferation of development agencies. Despite the numerous rural development policies introduced at different times by successive governments coupled with the huge financial and material resources employed, little or nothing is felt at the rural level as each policy has often died with the government that initiated it before it starts to yield dividends for the rural dwellers. Onuorah (2006) in agreement with this claim confirmed that not

minding the lofty objectives (policies and government initiatives) of such efforts ever endured beyond the government that initiated the schemes.

Understanding the reality of rural stagnation in Nigeria.

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 80 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 stagnation. 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 live able 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 stagnation is urban migration which is daily reducing the active population of the rural areas in Nigeria. In fact, 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 overall 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 stagnation 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.

Role of funding Agencies in Rural Development in Nigeria.

Funding agencies have played tremendous roles in rural development in Nigeria. Some of such roles include the following:

- Human Capital Development and technical assistance. They embark on the training of people in the area of skills acquisition. They also award scholarship to deserving students to study both at home and abroad. They render technical assistance to both Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and governments.
- Development of small scale farmers. They give support and assistance to small scale farmers by providing them with loans/grants. They also provide them with improved seedlings and technical advice that facilitate their growth and development.
- Research, monitoring and evaluation. They conduct research on very sensitive issues with a view to making recommendation on how to improve such situation. They also carry out the responsibility of effective monitoring and evaluation of projects.
- Enlightenment campaigns. They carry out enlightenment campaigns and sensitization programmes. Such campaigns create awareness and educate people on government policies and programmes.
- Advocacy for the poor. Advocacy funding agencies shoulder the responsibility of defending the poor and promoting specific causes. In most cases, they become spokespersons for the poor and attempt to influence government policies and programmes on their behalf.
- Conflict resolution and peace building. Non-governmental organizations have emerged as an Indispensable partner in conflict resolution and peace building. They have complemented the efforts of governments and other stakeholders in reconciliation and peace building.

In the words of Konteh (1999), the potential strength of funding agencies as an effective check to state power and dynamic agents of grassroots empowerment and development has been recognized by successive governments since independence. Funding agencies will continue to play a leading role in the promotion of good government, poverty alleviation, education, health, infrastructural development and promotion of sustainable rural development.

A critique of the performance of rural development agencies and their role in the rural developments 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, exclusion and invariably stagnation? 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 stagnation of 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 (2003) 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, NGO’s and civil society and community development organizations) would take part in the decision-making process, as well as in the execution of the development programmes.

Recommendations

1. There should be proper coordination and synergies of all developmental projects embarked by the Nigerian government and the funding agencies (NGOs) targeted at uplifting the rural areas to avoid duplication of efforts and rivalry in order to forestall progress and sustainability of its set projects.
2. 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”.

- a. 3. There should be 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.
- b. 4. There should be proper monitoring and evaluation of ongoing projects which should include the beneficiaries as part of the monitoring team. This would enable the project to be assessed at each point to ensure it is meeting up the desired objectives.
 1. 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.
 2. 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.
 3. 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.
 4. 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.

5. There should be creation of Rural Development Plan Implementation Review Centres (RDPIRCs) in rural communities where implementation takes place. This will assist to constantly review the conditions for efficiency in service delivery. These centres should lay emphasis on poverty reduction, employment generation, and transportation improvement, village upgrading, and making the environment conducive for living, working and recreation.
6. Research-Extension-Farmer Input Linkage System (REFILS); an umbrella organ that coordinates the research and extension activities of the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) in Nigeria should be well coordinated and funded by the government to play its role as the representation of institutional dynamics of linkage between National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIS), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), farmers and input agencies.

Conclusion.

Finally, this paper reiterates that the highly centralized development planning approach of the past five decades has failed to address Nigeria's rural development issues. A new approach and implementation of the development programmes is needed and such development programmes should be propelled by a multidisciplinary team involving all the stake holders, funding agencies(NGO's) . More so, there should be a synergy in the interventions programs by the government and the funding agencies which must be demand driven in line with the needs of the rural people . This paper therefore posits that rural development planning should start from the people themselves in a bottom- up strategy. Putting trust in the rural people, they may begin to assume responsibilities for their thought and action. It is my earnest believe that if the recommendations and the identified laxities are addressed, Nigeria should move out of its state of rural stagnation and 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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