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## SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AGRO-POLICY IMPLEMENTATION & OTHER ISSUES

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### Abstract

*This paper examines some of the past development strategies, such as industrialization, farm settlement scheme, and several agricultural programs among others adopted by government in Nigeria and aimed to effect the transformation of the poor state of living and infrastructure and the socio-economic wellbeing the country's rural areas. Although programs and strategies roll over each other with succeeding regimes (military and democratic), yet the high hopes and aspirations of the rural dwellers for better life appear to have constantly eluded them despite the huge budgetary investments on copious formulations and implementations of replete policies and programs put in place. It is estimated that about 75 percent of Nigerians still live in rural areas, and even with awareness of this fact, implementation of the programs under dedicated policy thrusts in order to bring development to this major segment of our population, has continued to lag over decades of effort. Obviously, the mechanisms and/or strategies for sustainable rural development in the Nigerian context abound at least in theory, but, lack of political will, truncated program- implementation, pillage of resources for rural development among others, appear to have crashed the several lofty ideals of rural development designers. It is averred that sustainable rural development strategies especially in lines of agriculture, agro-industrial and agro-allied value chains and businesses, if adequately adopted and adapted in Nigeria, could transform the rural areas to enviable heights in human and socio-economic development.*

**Keywords:** Rural dwellers, strategies, agro-policy implementation, transformation, industrialization.

### Introduction

The interest in rural development (RD) continues to be at crescendo among various stakeholders, because arguably majority of our population are still rural dwellers. More so, the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), among others confirmed that over 60 percent of the segment of this our population (rural dwellers) still lives in abject poverty, till date.

However, despite many policies and programmes /projects, designed to change this ugly picture, the downward trend is yet to be reversed. In other words, the rural areas are still known for lack of pipe borne-water, good roads, hospitals, electricity, recreational facilities, *and etcetera*. Lack of political will, distorted program/project implementation, as well as misappropriation and misapplication of resources for rural development are at the central issues of this sad trend. This paper attempts to wonder why rural development in Nigeria appears to have defied all efforts to make it succeed, and to outline new measures that could be put in place to reverse the sluggish trends.

### Rural Development: Conceptual Clarification

Rural development is defined as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social lives of a specific group- the rural people, in form of provision of infrastructure or social amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water, transportation, etc. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest, among those who seek livelihood in rural areas. These groups include small scale farmers, tenants, landless women, etc.

Lele (1975) emphasizes three dimensions of rural development as follows:

- Improving the living standard of the subsistence population. This involves mobilization and allocation of resources so as to reach a desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive services available to the subsistence rural sectors.
- Mass participation: This requires that resources and classes as well as productive and social services actually reach them.
- Making the poor self-sustaining: This again requires development of appropriate skills and implementing capacity and the presence of institution at the local, regional and national levels to ensure effective use of existing resources and to foster the mobilization of additional financial and human resources for continued development of the subsistence sector-self sustenance this means involving as distinct from simply reaching the subsistence population through development programmes.

Mobogunje (1981) and Ollawa (1983) similarly defined rural development as involving the restructuring of rural economy so as to lift it from being a dependent peasant and largely agricultural economy to modern agro-industrial economy capable of sustaining the quality of life in our rural areas. Stocker (1991) insists that the process of rural development is, “development from below”, a strategy that is largely need-oriented, labor-intensive, small scale regional resource-based, and rural-centered with appropriate technology. Nzelibe (1991) sees rural people “as the subject and object of development. In other words, rural development is geared towards the upliftment of the socio-economic and political levels of the rural people. The citizens should therefore be at the centre of any meaningful development efforts. Rural development strategies should gear towards the active participation of the citizens and should disabuse their minds that they can only become passive recipients of the benefits of government development efforts.” Olisa (1991), Ogbuagu (1993) and Ihejiamaizu (2002) highlight integrated rural development and transformation as an aspect of rural development which recognizes the essences of all human and material factors relevant in rural development, their positive and negative potentials in rural development goals and implementation, as well as a radical transformation of the rural areas, alleviation of rural poverty and enhancement of the quality of rural life, productivity and income.

### **Analytical Methods and Strategies for Rural Development (RD)**

Strategies are methods that are employed in addressing particular problems and situations. Let us consider two methods the elements of which are as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Methods/Strategies for Rural Development

S/N	Segmental (Parallel) Method	Integrated (Interactional) Method
	Expresses an arrangement that allows for the pursuit of developmental programs in a mutually exclusive way. Strategies are:	This is regarded as the best strategy which employs a comprehensive approach, in contrast to the narrow (segmented) approach. Strategies include:
1	Agricultural Self sufficiency	Model Farms, Funds and Capital grants; Markets
2	Infrastructural Development	Rural Industrial Parks, SMEs,
3	Mass Rural Literacy Campaign	Schools & Healthcare
4	Social services e.g. Better Life Program.	Fadama I, II, & III
5	Seminars , Workshops	Cooperative Society formation
6	Trainings, Skill acquisition	Community Development

Sources: *Ihejiamaizu (1996); Omeje (2008).*

### 1) **Agricultural Self- Sufficiency**

Agricultural self-sufficiency refers to the capability of a nation to produce enough food and allied agricultural products to serve its need. Self- Sufficiency in agriculture, also correctly refers to national development strategy that will make it possible for a particular country to rely on the utilization of domestic resource to produce most of its required agricultural goods and services. A country characterized by Agricultural Self- Sufficiency will not be a haven for the practice often referred to as “open door policy” which allows indiscriminate and often irrational importation of agricultural goods and services.

The following are the major features of agricultural self-sufficiency:

- ❖ There must be heavy reliance on domestic agricultural resources for the production of required food items and agricultural raw materials.
- ❖ There must be a reduced dependence ratio on outsiders (external sources) for needed food items and agro-based raw material for the local industry.
- ❖ By means of public policies such as pursued under import regulations and other international trade policies, effective supervision and control of imported food and agro-based raw material should be ensured.
- ❖ The economy must be able to maintain relatively high level domestic price of agricultural produce.

### **Agricultural self-sufficiency: Enhancing factors**

Areas of emphasis to achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture include;

1. Provision of credit facilities which could be by way of soft loans acquired through the instrumentality of such organization as loan boards, which offer financial assistances to the farmers, since the individual farmers may not be in a position to meet the rather stringent conditions of other financial institutions such as commercial banks.

2. There has to be improved farming methods, including the skills and technological considerations.
3. There has to be provision of adequate and appropriate infrastructures.
4. There should be in place, progressive land or agrarian policies or reforms aimed at achieving among others, easy access to land by farmers; thus checking the unholy practice whereby land acquisition remain the monopoly of a few individuals or groups.
5. There should be provision of improved and appropriate farming inputs such as fertilizers, seed varieties, pest control systems, etc.
6. There should be in place, the policy of price stabilization as a means of saving the farmers from the vagaries or the uncertainties associated with price fluctuations.
7. There should be in place, policy of price subsidization through programmes such as agricultural insurance schemes, to compensate and if need be make-up for the losses incurred by unfortunate farmers in the unanticipated disaster.

It is generally believed that the above factors will provide the necessary stimulus and motivational impetus to the farmers, the results of which will be higher productivity, higher earnings, higher revenue prospects for increased savings and therefore investment surpluses is a sine qua non to rural and national development.

## **2) Rural Industrialization**

One of the alternative paths to rural development is the rural industrialization approach. This approach found most acceptable the pursuit of rural development through the establishment of cottage industries. By their very nature, cottage industries including the agro-industrial parks in towns and cities are of the small scale type based largely on simple technology and of course little capital outlay. The philosophy as advanced by Mobogunje (1981) and Ollawa (1983) is that if properly designed and pursued, the strategy could play the dual role of faster mobilization of resources on one hand and on the other hand, achievement of backwards and forward linkages crucial for development. The backward linkage dimension underlines the need to address and mobilize local resources as inputs for industries' productive activities. It is further argued that such backward linkage will provide funds, open up hidden potentials in the locality and provide encouragement for the farmers and other rural producers whose products will constitute the bulk of the inputs required by such industries.

From the angle of forward linkage, such industries would produce not only for local or domestic needs and demands; they would also attract other investments that would rely on their products as raw material- or feeder-inputs for chain development and agro-processing. The implication is that by utilizing indigenous resources or inputs to produce for domestic needs, channels of supplies to processing plants will be boosted leading to increased job creation for the rural unemployed, and boom in socio-economic development. A notable advantage is that by providing such employment opportunities to the rural people, the problem associated with rural-urban migration will receive a direct frontal check.

### 3). Co-Operatives Establishment as A Strategy for Rural Development

A cooperative society refers to a registered group of individuals who put their resources together in order to enjoy greater benefits of economy of scale, and by so doing avoid undue competition and exploitation. By way of classification, we have producer and consumer cooperatives. Cooperative movements are uniquely characterized by high degree of democratic principles which drive grassroots initiative ventures. The cooperative societies depend on local initiatives for their finance and management. Ajibola (1977) holds the view that grassroots-initiated programs would enhance voluntary commitment, and because of this, many Third World countries have resorted to cooperative movement, as a reliable concept for mobilizing resources for development. Furthermore, cooperative societies are seen as constituting very important institutional channels for rural development. A good example of using cooperatives as instruments for development in Nigeria can be found in the test-runs by some states in Nigeria; namely, Oyo, old Bendel (Edo, and Delta), Ogun and Imo State. Existing policy attitudes towards cooperative as re-stated in several official documents of these state, testify to this. In one of such documents, the government of erstwhile Bendel state proposed using cooperative societies as avenues and instruments for developing the rural areas, coordinating their economic activities and channeling healthy development to rural dwellers. The other States mentioned above also used similar methods via the formation of cooperatives and provision of direct and indirect financial aids for the proper running of approved cooperative ventures to bring about rural development.

**Problems of Cooperative as an Instrument for Rural Development** These include:

- i. **Organizational problem:** The major source of this organizational problem is inadequacy of administrative personnel. In different parts of the country, people complain of dearth of trained and experienced hands to organize and run the cooperative societies. As such, most cooperative societies break down for want of appropriate advice and lack of business experience among cooperators. This explains why many a time people are sent abroad or to institutions of higher learning where such programs exist to acquire the skills necessary to improve the lot of cooperative societies for overall development purpose.
- ii. **Financial problems:** It is generally argued that financial assistance to cooperative societies is hardly forthcoming from the government notwithstanding proclamations to the contrary, for example in 1988, the government of Cross River State budgeted about ₦51.2m to assist the state cooperative societies in their development roles, but at the end of that financial year, only N4.8m was actually disbursed to them (Duru, 2000).
- iii. **Environmental problems:** At the social level, the problems posed by some unprogressive belief system such as the Osu caste in Igbo land takes its toll on the efforts of people coming together to form cooperative societies. The same holds true for sectional interests that appear irreconcilable, such as the communal clashes between the Ugeps and the Adims in Cross River State, the Ezza's and the Ezillo's in Ebonyi State etc.
- iv. **Funds diversion:** In some cases, unfortunately, the cooperative organizations and cooperators use part of their funds for political or other purposes instead of employing such resources to the primary needs.

#### **4). Community Development (CD)**

This approach to rural development has increasingly but lately become something in vogue, especially in the third world countries since the Second World War, the concept of community development was defined at the Cambridge Summer Conference on Africa in 1984, as a movement designed to promote better living to a whole community with the active participation and if possible, on the initiative of the community; but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques the (Government) should arouse and stimulate it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. Community Development is an arrangement designed to better the living conditions of the people through their participation or initiative. At the advent of the Christian missionary, the community development approach by way of self-help effort was adopted to encourage communities to build and maintain schools, markets, health and civic centres, etc. The colonial district officers also adopted the same approach to construct federal roads, bridges, and other infrastructure by the 1950s; these projects were conspicuous in several parts of the country. During the years of independence, many African political leaders were quick to see the opportunities presented by the community development approach and capitalized on them, and even encouraged further intensive pursuit. There was at this point, the institutionalization of community development as a socio-economic policy for development in these newly independent countries. This presupposed the belief then that it was highly suitable for the rural sectors development. Consequently, many African governments established community development divisions in their different relevant ministerial departments to give assistance to the efforts of the rural communities in their C.D. projects. Lele (1975) writing on the subject matter of community participation conceptualized community development as both as a program of development and a method of achieving development. He observed that community development predated the advent of colonialism in tropical Africa and pointed at self-help projects undertaken by communities during the pre-colonial era through the community development approach. As a program and method of achieving development, C.D. gained tremendous international recognition in 1956 when U.N. adopted a new definition namely, that "C. D. is a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are augmented by those of government or government authorities to improve on the communities, to integrate these communities into the main stream of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national development".

From the foregoing therefore, C.D. consists of three major functions, namely:

- Participation by the people themselves in the effort to improve their level of living and ,
- The provision of technical and social services by the government in ways which encourages initiative and self-help.
- Satisfying a political means of government to fetch a congenial atmosphere under which the government and the people can cooperate to achieve development.

#### **Shortcomings of C.D. as a Strategy for Rural Development:**

- There is often a tendency for conflict of interests to arise between the central planners and self-help developers. The perspective of these two groups has often been a great variance. The result of this variance has been the mushrooming of large number of

unviable projects which have come into conflict with various development plans. One of the methods of resolving these differences is to incorporate the various project plans of the C.D. groups into the Local Government development plans which in turn is incorporated into the state or national development plans.

- There is also another problem, especially from the view of central planners, that most of the CD projects are often non-revenue yielding (e.g., schools, town halls, etc). This argument had been criticized as amounting to undue generalization since projects such as bridges, roads, etc embarked upon by the C.D. groups are equally productive even if indirectly.
- The third problem relates to the relationship between physical planners and self-help activities. In this direction, the sitting of projects such as health centers, schools, roads, etc, has often been seen as irrational from the point of view of central planners.
- The formulation and implementation of the CD policy can lead to unequal distribution of public resources including “matching grants” by corrupt government officials.

### **Integrated Rural Development (I.R.D) Approach**

The I.R.D. is a multi-dimensional strategy for improving the quality of life for rural people. It is based on the assumption that the socio-economic framework of the traditional rural system is obsolete, and so IRD strategies are designed to change this framework and promote structural changes. The FAO (1970) in its World Social Situation report, identified the features of Integrated Rural Development as follows:

- To improve levels of living and participation in the development process for all rural people.
- By the creation of conducive commitment, with comprehensive and phased programmers for agricultural production and complementary rural development
- Through the mobilization of human resources and provision of appropriate services, adapted to physical, socio-economic and cultural conditions with greater emphasis on the active involvement of rural people at various stages of implementation and levels of decision-making
- Through a focused strategy for rural development.

In spite of the above, the major concern is that the rural areas where the vast majority of Nigerians live are largely untouched by the economic and the infrastructural development efforts by government; suggesting, perhaps that the I.R.D. approach might not be working swiftly as conceptualized. There is no gainsaying, the fact that participation of the rural masses in the development of programs which affect them will enhance their support and consequently, the success of development programs. In effect, it is apparent that the emphasis of policy makers especially in agricultural and rural development spheres should be to reverse the situation where the ideas of the local people are generally ignored. It must be stated that while policy thrusts in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s (for example, 1988 and 1991 local government reforms) have emphasized enhancing rural development and participation of the rural people in the public affairs that affect them, may have in some areas achieved some positive results, yet the socio-economic disparities between the urban and rural areas are still wide. Thus, profound reforms are still needed to meaningfully mobilize the rural poor for development.

### Implementing R.D. Strategies in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

The task of implementing rural development programs is a daunting one replete with challenges such as bad road networks, high cost of food, illiteracy, rural-urban migration, poor health care system, corruption among others. Most rural roads are at deplorable conditions, the feeder roads are mostly inaccessible during rainy season, while other areas do not have accessible roads at all. The local government whose duty is to provide and maintain these roads since the local government Reforms of 1976 are not performing to redress the ugly situation. This constitutes a problem / challenge, since evacuation of agricultural products from farms cannot be realized without good road network.

Corruption has been tagged the number one obstacle to development in Nigeria (Offiong 1986; Arnold, 1977; Fadshunsi, 1986; Agbonfo, 1986). Many well-conceived rural development programs have not thrived in our society due to corrupt practices among, the political elites, bureaucrats and project implementers. Corruption among decision – makers is like girth which knocks the wheels of progress (Agbonfo, 1986). Therefore, the practice of public accountability should be enforced vigorously. In other words, project executors from inception should be monitored to ensure that resources earmarked and released are judiciously utilized on projects promptly.

### Prospects & Strategies for Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria

The future of rural development in Nigeria is very bright, and will even get brighter with the country's return to full-blown civilian democracy in which those who are elected in the actual popular vote cast will endeavor to defend their election and prove their performance mettle while in office to merit the second term. The following strategies are suggested as a way forward to obtaining an enduring development of the rural section of our country Nigeria (Details of which and more are as given in Table 2) :

- i. A Holistic Investment in an All-Participatory Agriculture
- ii. Aggressive Development of Agricultural and other commodity Value Chains
- iii. Installation of Industrial Parks Matched with Handy Facilities & Machinery
- iv. Taking Decisive Approach to Providing Rural Infrastructure to rural Communities
- v. Establishment of markets, Processing & Packaging Centres close to Primary Producers
- vi. Liberalized establishment of Export Processing Centers across the Country.

**Table 2. Strategies for Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria**

S/N	ITEM HEADING	ACTION / MEANS OF ATTAINMENT	DURATION
I	Holistic Investment in an All-Participatory Agriculture	PPP and Equivalent Stake-holding with rural farmers in every aspect of agriculture and related enterprises	Long term (15-20 years)
II	Aggressive Development of Agricultural and Other Commodity Value	PPP under government policy initiated to tackle rapid and improved agro-and non-agro production their value chain	Medium term (8-15 years)



	Chains	development.	
III	Installations of Industrial Parks Matched with Handy Facilities & Machinery	Government intervention with Finance institutions and rural entrepreneurs and Cooperative bodies. In designated communities with greatest productivity.	Medium term
IV	Decisive Approach to Infrastructure Provision	PPP; strong and implementable policies to achieve a phased but unconditional provision of access routes, pipe-borne water, electricity, recreation & healthcare facilities in rural locations. Enact pro-poor policies to drive the schemes.	Long term
V	Establishment of markets, Processing & Packaging Centres close to Primary Producers	Bring markets very close to primary producers of commodities, crafts and agricultural produce; create centres with installed facilities for processing and packaging of produced goods, exportable technologies and agro-products right there in the rural areas as is practiced in China, and Korea.	Short term (4-8 years)
VI	Liberalized Establishment of Export Processing Centres Across the Country	Create export processing centres in each Senatorial District according to commodity and agro-produce in which it excels.	Short term
VII	Policy on Siting of Industries in rural Locations	Enact policy guiding investors to site industries, factories and supply outfits of finished goods in rural locations for ready employment to the inhabitants.	Short term
VIII	Promotion of SMEs among Rural Dwellers	Rural producers of crafts, and commodities of different types, farmers, artisans and traders should, under policy guideline, be encouraged to form small and medium scale enterprises where they can maximize or fulfil their dreams and potentials in business and enhance their living conditions.	Short term.

*Note: PPP= Public-private partnership mode of stakeholder participation in funding and monitoring of projects in Nigeria's modern development policy.*

The strategic items in Table 2 are self-explanatory in terms of the actions required or means by which they can be attained and the time it would take to achieve them. However, it needs to be said that the “all-participatory” agricultural production policy should be unambiguous in formulation. Government, private investors, donor agencies, technical experts and agents must sit down with the rural stakeholders to decide the mode and proportions of participation in particular or specific agricultural production in their areas. The present plans being touted by governments to import multinational firms from abroad to come and establish mega farms shall, in all, mean to deprive the rural farmers of their traditional enterprise. They must be part of the new schemes being arranged by the governments. While the mega farms are conceived for the hinterlands utilizing large hectares, the rural inhabitants should benefit from technical training and re-training in order to be involved. Processing and packaging centres should be close to the locations where the primary commodities are produced and the rural dwellers should acquire the skills involved in order gain satisfactory and effective employment.

Metallurgical foundries for tools and household equipment including utensils and cutlery (pots, plates, spoons, forks, knives), stoves, cylinders, lanterns, machetes, local and Indian-type of hoes, shovels and spades, hammers and mattocks, diggers, wheelbarrows, pans, tanks, drums, buckets, bins, furniture items, door keys and padlocks, bolts and hinges, etc, manufactured by artisans should be sourced and installed at affordable rates for use in locations designated as industrial parks. Clusters of these parks should be well planned and budgeted for by government on annual basis.

With regard to infrastructure provision, asphalt-tarred roads, drinking water, electricity, hospitals, sporting fields/stadia, and recreation centres (for out-door and indoor games) should be planned and budgeted for annually. And they should be provided under phased allocation to rural communities to better their lives and to spur them into engaging in socio-economic enterprises of their choice utilizing those amenities at their disposal. The provisions should be made unconditionally, without requiring counterpart funding. Experience has shown that across the States, the community development program known as Community Service & Development Project (CSDP) or any other name by which it goes in each State, aimed at providing the infrastructural amenities to communities based on counterpart funding between the State government and the affected community is fraught with “sharp” practices between the implementing Officials and representatives of the communities. It is an example of the several kinds of fraudulent attitudes toward development efforts that have come under severe criticism. One of such criticisms is published by Toyo (2001:27) and extracted *inter alia*:

“As for the ruling class in Nigeria, to it “development” means acquiring a share of petroleum money and using it to buy houses in London or New York, copy the kinds of houses they admire in British and American cities, and buy the latest items of conspicuous consumption that they can find in the foreign capital, or industrial countries” .

In the case of the CSDP, programs are unusually delayed and/or delivered on inflated costs, while some are abandoned indefinitely. Moreover, many rural communities can be so poor as to be incapable of raising the counterpart funds. Such communities should not be left in perpetual proletarian underdevelopment on account of their poverty. Thus, the provision of amenities to Nigeria’s rural locations in the hinterland should be based on a pro-poor policy which is long over-due for introduction in the country.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria had over the years, vigorously pursued the phenomenon of rural development without actually addressing the root causes of under development. These factors, which are not quite exhaustive, revolve around rural poverty, negligence of the agricultural sector, corruption and ineptitude in implementing programs. Of these factors, the issue of corruption comes top, being that it appears to have a domino effect on other factors (variables). For instance, if project implementers desist from diverting funds to private vaults, agricultural projects will thrive and rural poverty would be reduced and the standard of living of the people will obviously improve. Our political leadership should conceive of development in a manner that is people-oriented, pro-poor and taking into consideration the immediate and long term needs of the masses. Development should not be seen in terms of their personal selfish ends, which seems to be the norm now.

By redressing the problems and adopting a holistic approach including a pro-poor unconditional allocation of basic infrastructure to the rural communities to take account of their socio-economic needs, our country will attain a great milestone in rural development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

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