

Rural Development Policies in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

The development of rural areas and particularly in developing societies has remained a challenge to policy makers, and developments experts. Policies, programmes and theories aimed at improving the broad socio-economic well being of the rural poor have been initiated and pursued since 1960. Characteristically, these policies and programmes have had varying degree of successes and problems. The paper adopts the desk research and takes a critical appraisal of policy documents, theoretical models and programmes of government at all levels (federal, state and local governments) and their implication for rural development. The findings of the study show that though a number of policies, programmes have been initiated and executed, and theories propounded, they have tended to serve the interest of the political elite and their cronies to the chagrin of those whom the policies and programmes were planned for. To a large extent, these policies and programmes have made the policy makers richer and in most cases the programmes abandoned and or not sustainable. Based on the findings we recommended an alternative approach to rural development that is, the participatory approach that is infused with elements of conscientisation.

Keywords: Rural development policies; conscientisation and participatory approach.

Introduction

The development of rural areas until very recently was not given much attention and prominence in Nigeria. Much of her policies were concerned with changing the urban landscape and the fortunes of urban dwellers. The realization on the part of policy makers and development experts that national development cannot be true development until the vast rural areas of the country are developed and brought into the mainstream of development, then and only then can we talk of true development

Right from the colonial period the rural sector constitutes the socially and economically backward areas of Nigeria. Besides, the gap between the rural areas and urban areas has continued to widen in an alarming proportion. Invariably, the peasant population who formed the bulk of rural areas and produce much of the agricultural products that the nation depend on seemed neglected by government, a situation that has resulted in the much orchestrated problems of rural-urban drift, declining agricultural production and its attendant food shortage, unemployment, urban congestion and over stretched facilities (Ottong, Ering, and Akpan, 2010 and Saheed and Okide, 2012).

However, in Nigeria and in most Third World societies, there had been an increasing upsurge in the concern for problems of underdevelopment especially as they affect rural areas. The concern is the need to optimize yields from natural as well as human resources by exerting control of influence upon all parts of such resources in order to realize maximum benefit from the development efforts, Ebong (1991).

According to Abasiokong (1982:9):

Developing countries (including Nigeria) have now more than ever come to be convinced that in order to ensure the overall development of their countries, the rural areas must be transformed and brought into the mainstream of their countries (*bracket mine*).

It is in realization of this fact that policies aimed at the improvement of the rural areas have been announced and pursued by governmental authorities at various levels, (federal, state and local) and communities, particularly since the 1960s. The rural population have reacted in their various ways, while the policies and the people's reactions have also had considerable locational and spatial implications for the rural development landscape, Ajaegbu (1976).

Even so, such bold attempts have not achieved much success in solving problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality in rural Nigeria. Nor have the policies and efforts of government at various levels been able to stem the tide of rural-urban drift. This paper takes a look at rural development policies in Nigeria and their implications for rural development. In other words the paper takes a critical look at major strategies, approaches or theories taken so far by Nigerian governments to change the rural landscape and what has been their

practicability in terms of social change and improving the socio-economic well-being of the rural poor.

Nigeria's Rural Development Policies: An Overview

Development issues occupy an important position in the minds of scholars, policy makers and development experts especially as it affects Third World Societies. No wonder then that the concept of development has been subjected to several meanings and interpretations. In spite of the several definitions, the meaning of development has evolved from its narrow conceptualization with economic growth expressed in aggregate economic indicator of GNP or per capita income to a more broad-based conceptualization as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty.

The meaning of rural development has also evolved over time in line with current realities. According to the World Bank (2000), rural development is understood as strategies and policies designed at improving the economic and social life of a specific group of people – rural poor. Wikipedia (2014) describes rural development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic well being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated area.

Historically, efforts at developing rural areas have been pursued since the colonial times. The concern has been to transform the mostly agrarian society in order to reach a common set of development goals based on the capacities and needs of the people. Policies aimed at the improvement of the rural areas and pursued by various governments (federal, state and local) have been put in place and pursued particularly since 1960s.

Ering (2012) and Ebong (1991) have both maintained that Nigeria rural communities have ever before the advent of colonization indulge in various forms of community self-help schemes such as construction of village moats, shrines, village squares, markets and a host of other activities. In other words, development activities have been part of Nigeria's cultural heritage. But the institutionalization of modern rural development schemes can be traced to the 1920s when the British colonial office adopted the strategy of community development as a special development model for the rural areas of all colonial territories. The concern then was to make up for the short comings of traditional British school system by imparting skills such as carpentry, house building, shoe repairing, etc in community development centres.

After Nigeria's political independence in 1960, federal and regional governments vigorously pursued conscious and deliberate policies of transforming rural policies. In the 60s, the federal and regional governments were preoccupied with the establishment of farm settlement schemes. This policy thrust gave rise to the various farm plantation spread across Cross River State and other states of the federation. The prime objective of these development policies was to prevent the exodus of youths from villages to the urban areas.

However, this failed because they were largely incoherent and uncoordinated efforts and programmes within individual settlements.

In 1976, another rural development policy was rolled out, it was the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and was a major rural development policy of Murtala/Obasanjo government. The concern at this time was to bring down the escalating prices of food items and arrest the rate of food importation (NZirim, 1985). But it turned out to produce more millionaires at the expense of rural farmers.

The next policy that was initiated by the Obasanjo regime was the establishment of River Basins and Rural Development Authorities in 1978. Though succeeding governments continued with this policy option with all amount of determination to change the fortunes of rural areas, it has tended to make rural dwellers to recede deeper into walloping poverty, Ejue (1998). This witnessed another policy failure and waste of huge amount of financial resources put into the programme.

The World Bank in the 70s made immense efforts in helping to develop the rural areas. It decided to shift more attention to rural development as a means of alleviating the problems of rural dwellers. These programmes did not yield much dividend to the assaulted peasants (World Bank, 1980).

In the same vein, the civilian regime of Shagari in 1980 launched the Green Revolution. Though the efforts were geared towards improving agricultural productivity, it turned out to be a revolution for the rich instead of addressing the problems of the poor.

Despite all these efforts made in the past to effect rural development in the country, the conditions of the rural dwellers have not improved, rather they have further deteriorated. In 1985, the Babangida administration introduced the Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). This involved or has to do with an integrated rural development approach to rural development planning. This is a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach of all stakeholders (persons and agencies) concerned, aimed at involving rural people in determining policies and planning and implementing programmes that are designed to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions and enable them to make a positive contribution to national development. The Directorate helped in opening rural roads and providing other infrastructures, thus raising the hopes of the rural people. However, the scheme eventually collapsed due to the lack of the culture of continuity of government policies and programmes. It died a natural death, Ejue (1998).

In line with the main current in the society, and the contention that women who comprise more than half of the world's human resources and are central to the economic as well as the social well being of societies, development cannot be fully reached without their participation; in 1986, Mrs. Mariam Babangida introduced the "Better Life for Rural Women". The aim was to change the fortunes of rural poor women and improve their well-being, but who have through their activities sustained the economy. The "Better Life

Programme” was later changed to “Family Support Programme” by Mariam Abacha during the Abacha’s administration, but the aims and concerns remain the same. In spite of the good intentions and resources pumped into the programme, it turned out to be a monumental failure. This situation led to the compelling need to integrate the rural areas of the country into mainstream of national development. The programme served the purposes of the rich urban women than the rural women it was designed for. It became “Better Life for Urban Women”.

The Obasanjo regime at inception in 1999 has put in place a major policy design aimed at alleviating the poor in the society – the “Poverty Alleviation Programme”. The direction of the programme from the outset could not be ascertained. So much money pumped into the programme. It has been argued that the policy thrust of Olusegun Obasanjo Administration towards the eradication of unemployment and poverty, if doggedly and seriously pursued could change the fortune of rural poor in particular and Nigeria in general. In spite of the billion of naira that was put into the programme, poverty skyrocketed within the eight years of his administration. Poverty figures released by the Central Bank of Nigeria (2008), show that 66% of Nigerians were living below the poverty line. Poverty line is an imaginary international income level for those living below one dollar per day.

The Yardua and Jonathan administration of 2011 continued with the “poverty Alleviation Programme” of Obasanjo, and more financial allocations were made into reducing poverty levels in the society. The emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region and the Boko Haram crises in North Eastern Nigeria coupled with limited financial resources thwarted the implementation of the programme. Attention and efforts were focused on finding solution to the problem of militancy in order to improve the revenue profile of government from oil sales. It is argued that it would be very difficult to pin down Jonathan’s administration to any specific rural development programme. However, scholars are agreed that his (Jonathan’s) administration has made concerted efforts in the area of agricultural development, but issues of high level of corruption and the lack of political will to tackle it have impacted negatively on this very important policy-agricultural development.

It must be argued here that the rural development policies taken so far since the colonial period were contained in Nigeria’s major development plans of 1946-1956; 1962-68; 1970-74; 1975-1980; 1981-85. These policies could be subsumed under regional development, agricultural development and community development policies. The prime objectives of these development policies were to increase rural productivity and income in rural areas. And since agriculture is the predominant form of activity in rural areas, the most important instruments for achieving these objectives have been agricultural programme.

Theoretical Synthesis of Nigeria’s Rural Development Policies

We have made deliberate attempt to review rural development policies particularly since 1960 in order to appreciate better their effectiveness in changing the socio-economic lives and well-being of rural dwellers. This section will examine the major theoretical

orientations or approaches initiated and pursued since the 60s and their implication to rural development.

A close examination of studies and rural development policies enunciated and pursued so far by the Nigerian governments at various levels (federal, state and local) reveals major theoretical orientations. In other words, these policies could be subsumed under certain theoretical frameworks. Each of these would be identified and analysed in terms of its theoretical utility in transforming the rural landscape and specifically the lives of the rural people.

Theoretical Approaches to Rural Development and Social Engineering

A close look at the policies of rural development in Nigeria suggests that we can largely group them into two main theoretical models: the engineering and the clinical models, but more specifically, it is possible to distinguish four main theoretical approaches. These approaches will be examined against the backdrop of social engineering, that is their suitability and ability in causing things to happen.

Sectoral Approach: This is one of the oldest and popular approaches that has continued to be used all over the world. This approach or model according to Ntukidem (1991) involves annual budgets and plans drawn up in sectoral terms on the basis of ministerial and departmental reports and projects. This takes into account government policies, strategies and programmes, and in each case the designers are careful to embrace all the constitutional functions assigned the sectors. The sectoral approach entails a comprehensive plan broken down into a workable timetable. Targets are set and financial provisions made or expected to be made according to schedules. The plan is seen in sectors – agriculture, industry, transport, education health, administrative and services sectors, Ntukidem (1991).

In Nigeria, since independence, we have consciously or unconsciously been adopting the sectoral approach to development. This is in terms of yearly budgets and development plans that are periodically drawn. In-built in these budgets and development plans are provisions that are made for development of rural areas and the people. For instance, in the development plans of 1946-56, government had hoped to achieve rural and regional development through the provision of portable water, road construction, provision of dispensaries etc. along with simultaneous organization of layout for the reconstruction of villages and towns.

In the first and second National Development Plans (1962-68 and 1970-74) period, emphasis was placed on agricultural development and the encouragement and sustenance of community self-help efforts to achieve rural development. For example, 1970-74 development plan period it was stated that the:

Growth of the rural sector in Nigeria is more a process of mobilizing under-utilised and non-utilised land and labour. With better community price incentives, the peasant farmers respond with higher production through

increased labour inputs ... the role of the rural sector in the development process is particularly remarkable in the use of agricultural surplus which it generates, (Nigeria, 2nd Development Plan, 1970:23).

More significant is the Third Development Plan, which recognized the fact that rural development is more than agricultural development. The plan policy was dominated by the high input pay-off model which attributes improved productive capacity to a package of high yielding and profitable new inputs on which farmers can invest, (Schultz, 1964).

The Fourth Plan period (1981) maintained that isolated emphasis on agricultural development was not enough. It therefore set as its objective that of providing employment opportunities, self reliance in basic food production, higher per capital real income, foreign exchange earnings and the provision of raw materials as basic benefits for the development of the agricultural sector.

These policy allocations as shown in the development plans above were well intentioned. However, the distance between policy and practice as Nigeria experiences have shown is great. They have never been implemented instead budgetary allocations made have gone a long way in developing the pockets o individuals. Apart from the first plan that ran into problems because of the civil war, others had peculiar problems. Since most of our leaders were military dictators some of the plans could not be implemented because they were truncated by counter-coups detats. Sometimes funds meant for specific projects were diverted and used in organizing fraudulent elections.

Yearly budgets also suffered the same fate and sometimes money allocated to certain sectors are never released to such thereby hampering their development. The shoddy way these plans were implemented did not allow us to gain the benefits of sectoral analysis. For instance, the sectoral analysis enabled us to know the growth and laggard areas or sectors of the economy. Also it helps to identify and know the contributions of each sector to the economy, and consequently sustainable development. These were not to be.

The Structural Approach: The contention of this approach is based on the transformation of major institutions and structures of the society. It is believed that if these structures are transformed in line with modern or western democratic ideals, the society will develop. In terms of rural development, it is to restructure existing structures and institutions to meet the needs of the people and help transform their lives for the better, (Charles, 2010).

The structural approach also has elements of liberation. For instance, the major concern of the feminist and women liberation movement is the restructuring of the family and the entire society especially the African society. That is, restructuring those major institutions that have kept women in bondage from contributing their quota to general development of the society. This has been the major argument of the feminist and women's liberation movements in the society.

An examination of the Nigerian society shows that a number of rural development policies were aimed at changing the well being of women in the rural areas. The “Better Life Programme” of Mariam Abacha were specifically aimed at addressing the fortunes of women in terms of supplying facilities, accessibility to credit facilities and others.

However, as stated earlier above, the implementation of the programme were hijacked by the wives of privileged few in the urban centres. Resources meant for the implementation of the programmes were used for selfish ends. In areas where the programme had structures constructed and facilities put in place, these had no meaning and relevance to the people’s needs and aspirations, thus defeating the aims and objectives of the programme. Also, recent researchers have provided evidence to show that mere manipulation of spatial structures may not lead to efficient redistribution of wealth and improvement in the level of welfare, Chanery (1968). In some instances, such manipulation have been known to worsen the existing inequalities and bring about a more undesirable structures and further exacerbate socio-economic conflicts, Logan 1973, Hermensen (1972).

Integrated Rural Development Approach: This is a very recent approach adopted by government in tackling the problems of the rural poor. Integrated rural development emerged from the fact that past efforts have contributed little to improve the well-being of people, the ultimate goal of development. As a matter of fact, in many cases the conditions have worsened. The rate of growth in food production fell from 0.7% per capita in 1952/62 to -0.7% in 1970/74. This was in spite of the “Green Revolution”. The number of illiterate people is still increasing and this is in spite of a worldwide effort to eradicate illiteracy.

The integrated rural development is not denying the need for economic growth and modern technology, rather, in addition, the strategy emphasizes the fact that the economic base in the rural areas has to be broadened through efforts to mobilize and better utilize human and natural resources by providing services; by creating motivation and purchasing power through better distribution of income and employment opportunities; by establishing closer links between the agricultural, industrial and service sector in the rural areas; and by improving the conditions of living regarding housing, water supply, roads, etc, through assistance to self-help actions.

Integrated rural development is different from general development because, as a matter of policy, it places greater emphasis on the mobilization and development of human resources potential and on achieving a more equitable access to resources and fairer distribution of income. With regards to planning, integrated rural development goes beyond the agricultural sector. It embraces at the national level an overall policy conducive to achieving social improvements of the rural masses and takes up the complexity of regional area development when it comes to implementation, including aspects of administrative decentralization and people organization. As a national philosophy, the concept of integrated rural development programmes, relying heavily on the concept of regional self-reliance as well as on its own efforts.

A cursory look at Nigeria's recent policy on rural development shows that the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) introduced by the Babangida Administration in 1985, adopted the integrated rural development policy. As it lasted, the rural poor hived a sigh of relief. Infrastructure facilities were being put in place across the country's rural and urban areas.

However, researches have shown that even though DFRRI recorded major successes and achievements in the transformation of rural landscape in certain states, a number of problems were identified. On major facilities supplied, and others put in place, most were not put into use as the rural dwellers do not know how to use them. Scholars have argued that at least, the people should have been educated and mobilized for some of the sensitive projects. More so, most of the routes opened were not wide enough, very murder and poor quality roads with untarred surfaces, such unsurfaced roads are hardly passable during the rainy seasons when vehicles get stuck in mud.

The programme was also riddled with problems of misappropriation of funds which affected seriously the operation of the programme. In 1994, the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure was allowed to die a natural death. Up till today no programme has been structured to take over DFRRI's laudable gains.

The Humanistic Approach: This is purely educational programme concerned with consciousness raising and empowerment. According to Ntukidem (1991), it entails the improvement of the society's capacity to understand, manage and control its environment; and merely to exploit it. It involves improving individual and group consciousness towards meaningful co-operation with other human groups for the good of all. It is to change people's attitudes, perception, and their behaviour in order to achieve development.

A humanistic approach to development maintains that by heightening or changing man's ability to appreciate his own endowment, we arm him with a new vision and a new tool with which to shape communal space and therefore, shape his life and his fortune. Only the type of self-consciousness that humanistic approach to development generates can bring about self-emancipation and make the rural people exert sufficient control over an environment that appears to them as given and unchangeable.

In the area of changing attitude, Shanin (1968) contended that:

Day by Day the peasants make the economists sigh,
politicians sweat, and the strategists sweat, defeating their
plans and prophecies all over the world – Moscow and
Washington, Peking and Delhi.

In other words, for development programmes to be successful, the people need to be educated in order to change their attitudes towards programmes or projects. The humanistic approach requires the type of education that awakens human consciousness to the realization of the fact that what distinguishes the rural areas from the city are not the bright lights, the

paved streets, the high concentration of people, opportunities, activities and services at locations within each reach; Ntukidem (1991)

The most fundamental thing that a humanistic approach to development can achieve is a thoroughgoing transformation of attitudes, beliefs and outlook towards life, not only to people in the rural, but also in the urban centres. Scholars have argued that this is the type of development that enables us to see other people and the world as a community of human individuals capable of contributing their best to societal development at all times.

In Nigeria, a number of government policies exist that fall under this approach. The creation of War Against Indiscipline (WAI) in 1984, Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Reliance (MAMSER) in 1987, National Orientation Movement (NOM) in 1986, and currently the National Rebirth Campaign (1999), are a few among other programmes created by different governments to raise peoples' consciousness both in urban and rural areas. The concern of these programmes and policies are to educate the people to appreciate and participate in government programmes and policies. They are also aimed at attitudinal and behavioural change, setting the stage for development.

It is however sad to note that by and large these educational programmes only stopped at the urban centres, while the rural people are left to grope in the dark in terms of government programmes, policies and actions. Sometimes, people turn these programmes for self-enrichment and therefore, money meant for the execution of projects and programmes are diverted. Government good intentions are through these processes thwarted and thus negating development programmes and actions.

MAMSER, an educational and mobilizing programme was tied to Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) to help educate and mobilize the citizenry both in urban and rural areas, why was such a beautiful creation allowed to be destroyed by man's inordinate quest for wealth at the expense of the general development of the society? There is need to search for a way out of this quagmire and help put the society on the path of growth and development.

An Alternative Approach to Rural Development

An examination of government policies and programmes show that they have failed to address the issues of poverty and the under-development in Nigeria. The programme and policies and their implementation were elitist and bourgeois. Instead of enriching the peasant farmers, the programmes and policies have tended to create a new class of elites (millionaires) through contract awards and through embezzlement of funds. Current researches have shown that any programme(s) and policy that is meant for the people must involve them at all stages of the project or programme, from the initiating stage to the stage of implementation and evaluation. The programme(s) for social engineering must be infectious, touching on the lives of the people and changing the rural landscape, (Ering 2011; Ottong, Ering and Akpan, 2010).

The Humanistic approach to rural development one would say is a brilliant idea because it appeals to human consciousness. As an approach for educating and mobilizing rural people the instruments for mobilization as past experiences have shown, has been subjected to many abuses. Sensitive analyst of development speak of a “crises of faith” highlighted by “disappointment, controversy ... even cynicism and bitterness” over an inability of the humanistic approach and other approaches to breach the gap between the rich and the poor or to improve the well being of rural people, (Obetta and Okide, 2012) and Jamieson (1987).

Given this widespread discontent and disillusionment, development has failed to live up to expectations. It shows that something fundamentally is wrong with the way development has been conceptualized, planned and implemented. Therefore, we must look at a new approach, a new paradigm that could transform the rural poor. We proffer a “double-barrel” approach to rural transformation. The “double barrel” approach is a combination of two methodologies – the “Participatory Rural Appraisal” and ‘Conscientisation’. The Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which is derived from Rapid Appraisal (RA) reacts favourably and creatively to the expectations, needs and people-oriented responsibilities of development as well as to develop account ability, all of which the new paradigm promises to address. In other words, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) put the local people (rural people) squarely in the centre of development programmes. The development planners or researchers go to the villages more as learners, convenors, catalysts, and facilitators. This approach help to uncover local knowledge and understanding, the goal of the approach is to enable rural people to do their own investigations, to share their knowledge and teach others to do the analysis and presentations, to plan and to own the outcome. Rapid Appraisal (RA) is a methodology for international development research, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It is a methodology used to gather, analyse and deliver research and development information that is timely, cost effective, accurate, contextual, of doing so. The Rapid Appraisal (RA) or Community Driven Development (CDD) as it is now known is an insightful and highly useful as basis for development planning and action. Rapid Appraisal is suitable in virtually all development sectors. This contention is in agreement with the observations of (Ering; Etuk; Enang and Omono, 2012; Chigbu 2012; and Ebong, 1991).

‘Conscientisation’ on the other hand is learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and take action against the oppressive elements of reality, Freire (1990). It is the radical interrogation of (or dialogue with) reality in order to reveal its contradictions, irrationalities, problems of the society (problems of discrimination) and oppressive elements and develop the means of corrective human intervention. Conscientisation is a new instrument of conduct for human engineering and overcoming traditional structures. It is to encourage and equip the learner to know and respond to the concrete realities of his or her society.

This is a purely educational but dialogical method. ‘Conscientisation’ is founded on the grounds that true development in the society cannot be possible without taking into

consideration the contributions of the women folk whether in rural or urban areas. This instrument will be used to expose rural dwellers to see women and children as partners in the development of the society; and the need to create a society that is free from prejudices, injustices, discrimination and oppression of women, the overriding objective is the humanistic transformation of the society.

Conclusion

The development of rural Nigeria as a matter of deliberate policy for the entire societal development remains a central problem to policy makers. A review of past policies and approaches to rural development in Nigeria show that there were bedeviled with a number of problems. At the centre of these problems is the human factors that have been washed with, the need to get rich at all cost. People for whom development programmes and projects are planned for and particularly the none involvement of women in development process.

An alternative approach to Nigeria's rural development must take into consideration all the factors identified above and the stakeholders. In other words, it must be participatory. There is also the lack of involvement on the part of the by way of carrying the people along at every stage of will do this magic. It is also necessary to raise the consciousness of the rural population as a way of social engineering, so that they come to realize the follies and contradictions in the society. Through this "double-barred approach", the Nigerian rural landscape and the entire society could be transformed.

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