Enhancing Rural Development in Nigeria: Periscoping the Impediments and exploring the Imperative actions.

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Abstract

The rural sector of Nigeria has not witnessed significant level of development in the part 52 years of the nation’s independence. This is evidenced in the apparent lack of Basic Infrastructural facilities. This situation is so impute of the various measures or programmes that have been put in place to enhance the development of the rural sector. It is against this that the study is considered necessary and in carrying out the study we had as basic objectives, to thoroughly examine the impediments to the realization of the rural development objectives the nation and to explore the necessary or imperative actions to enhance the development of the nations rural sector. In carrying out the study we relied mainly on secondary sources of information or data gathering and consequently adopted content analysis technique in our analysis. The basic finding are that there is noticeable de-emphasis of pro rural development policies and ineffective implementing even the developed policies or programs to enhance the realization of the development of the rural sector, government, need to pay serious attention to developing and ensuring effective implementation of rural development policies and programs. As well, the political representatives from the various rural areas of the country need to be involved in articulatory relevant rural development programs for their constituencies and following up with effective unwitting to ensure effective implementation by government.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is essentially a rural society with the vast majority of her population dwelling in the rural areas (Ole, 2006; Awake, 2004). Indeed, about 70 percent of Nigerians dwell in the rural areas (Aboyade, 1976). Specifically, rural areas of Nigeria lie outside the densely built-up environment of turns, cities and sub-urban villages and their inhabitants are engaged primarily in agriculture as well as the most basic of rudimentary form of secondary and tertiary activities (Adebeyo, 1998; Ezeah, 2005). Basically, rural area which is the opposite of urban area refers to the country side whose population engages mainly in primary production activities like agriculture, firstly and rearing of livestock (Ele, 2006).

The rural sector is, indeed, very vital in the socio-economic development equation of the nation. The rural areas, for instance, is the major source of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufactures (Olatunbosun, 1975). Indeed, the rural areas engage in primary economic activities that form the foundation for the country’s economic development.

Given the importance attached to the rural sector of the national economy, enhancing the development of this sector should be central to government and public administration and for which the sector would witness tremendous level of infrastructural development. This sector would further enhance the ability of the sector for further contribution to the overall national growth and development.

Unfortunately, over the years the development strategies and efforts in Nigeria has been more urban based or focused resulting to relative neglect of the rural areas as evidenced in the apparent death of basic infrastructural facilities.
in the rural areas. Indeed, as Ayichi (1995) observes, the rural areas in Nigeria are characterized by inadequacies of human needs as reflected in the near absence of some basic infrastructures. Ezeah (2005:3) specifically in this respect observes thus:

The Nigerian rural areas are neglected areas. Even though social amenities are also not adequate in some urban areas. The situation in the rural areas is far worse and many communities lack basic amenities like good roads, markets, electricity, pipe borne water etc.

Very curious and more noisome still is that even the modest efforts by government has not resulted in meaningful enhancement of the development state the rural areas in Nigerians (Ezeah, 2005). These efforts have among others, included the institutionalization of the local government to serve as an agent for enhancing rural development, the establishment of Directorate of Roads and Rural Infrastructure (BFRRI) to enhance infrastructure development in the rural areas, the development in the rural areas, the establishment of rural water scheme, the establishment of Better Life for rural women programmes, the establishment of ministry of Agriculture and Rural development, the establishment of National Directorate of employment (NDE), and the establishment of Millennium Development project through Rural infrastructure, the establishment of community banks (defunct) and Micro Finance Banks to enhance the availability of financial services earners. (Ajadi, 2010). It is this background that overview the underdevelopment status of the Nigeria rural sector, to critically examine the impediments in realizing the needed enhancement in the development state of the rural areas in Nigeria and to explore policy action or measure that would be imperative up the persistent underdevelopment of the Nigeria sector is to be effectively addressed or tackled.

Conceptual Clarification:

To create a context for a clearer appreciation of the discussion and analysis, the following two major or central concepts of the study need to be clarified.

1. Development: The word development means different things to different people. Some take it to mean change while some see it as advancement, improvement or progress. To others yet, development entails modernization or westernization (Ele, 2006). For instance, development, in the view of Porters (1975) entails transformation. It, indeed, entails transformation or advancement to a better and desired state and the term development is better understand or appreciated when another concept is prefaced to it and in which case we may have political development, educational development, technological development, cultural development, social development, rural development etc.

2. Rural Development: Deriving from our understanding of what development generally is, rural development is then that part of development that seeks to enhance the quality of life in the rural areas by providing basic infrastructure facilities (Wzeah, 2005). Indeed, the basic objective of rural development is reduction in poverty and improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. In essence, rural development is a many sided process or a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of the rural man and his environment. Infact rural development can only be meaningfully and substantially achieved when the rural population becomes agents of their own development. It is perhaps, in this direction, that Ele (2006) posits that it is not enough to provide for them; they should be “enabled” to develop themselves and their environment.

Olayiwole and Adeleye (2005) classified the infrastructural development requirement of the into three. One is the basic infrastructure which entails the availability of good roads, water (pipe borne water), rural electricity, storage, and processing facilities etc. two is the social infrastructure which is concerned with health and educational facilities, community centre’s, fire and security services etc. three is the institutionalized infrastructure which is concerned with credit and financial institutions and agricultural research institutions etc.

Highlight of the rural underdevelopment status of the Nigerian rural sector
Even though successive governments in Nigeria have made some infective, towards enhancing rural development, its realization has remained a mirage. This is evidence by the apparent lack of basic infrastructural facilities and glancing presence of general low standard of living among the rural populace (Olatun Bunso, 1975). Indeed as Fos (1996) and Nwuke, (2004) observe, poverty is prevalent among the rural dwellers as about 70 percent of the people in Nigeria living below poverty line are domiciled in the areas. Indeed, there is usually deplorable road net work and absence of all year round reliable access to most rural areas. This is made more critical as the topography of some rural communities is characterized by ubiquitous valleys and hills and other geological challenges like clayey and swampy areas. This poses enormous challenges in road construction (Olayiwole and Adeleye, 2005). Water supply in the Nigerian rural areas is observed to be grossly inadequate while potable water is equally scarcely available with the spread of water borne diseases increased by the accompanying low sanitary conditions. Ele (2006) too observe 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 dudgeon of underdevelopment. It is as indeed the road networks in rural areas in Nigeria are maintained through community effort. This is not effective as the contemporary road development needs of the rural areas are such that more community efforts cannot adequately address. There is too, very apparently, poor quality education in most rural areas in Nigeria (Ele, 2006) Ijere (1992) notes too that rural education is characterized by limited functional or work oriented education and disdain for handicraft and technical subjects. Generally, there is apparent lack of development in the rural areas of Nigeria as reflected in the war total lack of basic infrastructure, and social services. In Enugu state, 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 underdevelopment is urban migration which is daily reducing the active population of the rural areas in Nigeria. Indeed, as Nwankwo and Apeh (2006) note, rural-urban migration id dysfunctional not only to rural development of the urban areas. In essence, rural underdevelopment contributes a drag to the over national development.

It is indeed, unfortunate as Ijere (1992) observes that the Nigerian rural sector which produces 95 percent of the food crops in the country has been traditional linked with poverty and underdevelopment characteristics that include comparatively prior 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 centres for promotion of rural industrialization, skills acquisition centres for manpower and skills development, developed market and commence to enhance rural economic activities and the accompanying income.

**IMPEDIMENTS TO EFFECTIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EFFORTS IN NIGERIA.**

1. Relative Neglect for rural development policies: Generally, there has been less emphasis on rural development in Nigeria. Indeed, as noted in the Enugu state vision 2020 document (2009:16) “Over the years, the development strategies in Nigeria generally has been urban biased and relative neglect of the rural areas resulting into a death of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas” Fundamentally, there is a grass rural neglect in Nigeria’s development policies which has resulted to rural underdevelopment as reflected in the lack of rural industrialization and poor physical, social and institutional infrastructure (mlon, 1992). This prevalent orientation according to Olasiyi (1992) is closely connected with the colonial economy which
is still promoted in Nigeria. Olasiyi (1992: 38) in this respect specifically observes thus:

The 1960 political independence did not change the pattern of rural/urban polarization. Nigerian leaders have continued to maintain the British colonial development legacy which serves the external economic interest and impoverish the standard of hiring among rural dwellers. “Olarenwaju and Foyin (1992) note too that such development strategy of concentrating investments in urban areas has resulted to a wide imbalance in rural and urban development. Another factor the reinforced the neglect for rural by development by the government in Nigeria is the over reliance on the petroleum economy. Indeed, the petroleum economy has become the main stay of the country’s economy. For this, government has, over the years, paid less attention to the development of the major activities of the rural areas particularly agriculture. Oshin (1992) in this respect contends that agriculture has continued to divindel more as it looses its economic importance following the greater emphasis on the petroleum sector. In essence and according to Ele (2006), the emphasis on petroleum economy and the subsequent neglect of the agricultural sector has contributed substantially to current poor state the rural economy and the general rural sector underdevelopment.

2. Lack of integrated rural development effort: Beyond, the general neglect of development policies for the rural areas in Nigeria, another factor that significantly militates against rural development in Nigeria is the inability of rural development institutions to co-operate among themselves and to ensure that their respective initiative, action and mandates reinforce and support each other and that their activities are streamlined to effective realize governments rural development objectives. Idown (1999: 181) observes this impediment to rural development in Nigeria in his comment thus:

“The activities of various bodies involves in the development efforts and activities never doredaited as expected. This is to say that the expected co-ordination among the different department, ministries, Federal, states and the local government for instance, on the implementation mechanism has been very difficult to achieve”.

Ele (2006) in his study too notes that the rural development efforts in Nigeria has not been given the integrated approach it requires. Indeed, the integrated approach which recognizes the need for both the human and material factors as they support and reinforce one another is an essential factor in enhancing rural development in Nigeria (Nwankwo and Apeh, 2006).

3. Ineffective implementation of rural development policies, project and programming. As has been recognized earlier in this work, Nigeria has over the years nonetheless developed some policies to enhance substantially; reaching the development objectives of those policies and programs is bordered around the pattern and nature of their implementation which has been characterized by ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

As Ele (2006), Ikelegbe, (2006) and Nweke, (2006) effective policy implementation is usually very difficult to realize particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. The inability of the relevant rural development agencies to effectively implement rural development policies could be as a result of inadequate resources, which quite often is a real threat to successful implementation of rural development policies. It could as well be as result of the pervasive corruption in the Nigeria public service bureaucracy. Such corrupt tendencies most often, significantly increases the possibility that allocated fund for rural development projects and programs may be misappropriated or embezzled and thus hampering effective implementation and the consequent realization of policy development and objectives. For instance, the Agricultural Development (ADF) that was intended to raise agricultural products and improve conditions of the rural population, the Directs rate of food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure intended to transform the rural infrastructure were unable to meet their development objectives due largely to poor implementation (Ajadi 2010). Indeed, the rural development strategies do not work in a vaqcuum. Their effective implementation requires functional and capable institutions with appropriate institutional arrangement for their effective implementation.

Another major explanation for the effective implementation of rural development policies in
Nigeria is the discontinuation of rural development policies. Most often, rural development policies or programs are discontinued whenever there is a change in government leadership. Usually, new government abandons the projects and programs of its predecessor even when such policy is appropriate. In this respect, Ajadi (2010) notes that there is usually the absence of sustained cohesive and conclusive implementation of rural development policies. It is this propensity that led to the abandonment of better life for rural women of General Ibrahim Bagangida to the introduction of the family support programme by the succeeding regime of General Sani Abacha. In the context of this most rural development policies are not implemented to their logical conclusion.

4. Poor commitment of the political representative, towards enhancing rural development. The political leaders in Nigeria, either at the executive or the legislature arm, have all come from given rural areas of the country. These politicians at different points and time, have observes the development needs of these rural areas and made promises too on how to address these development concerns of the respective rural areas of origin. However, their will and interest to actually articulate those problems and the strategies or programs for addressing them have, indeed, not been noticeable. The prevalent and common observation is that they, hardly pursue conclusively the lutin to the development needs of rural parts of their constituency. This lack of interest and political will to project the development needs of the rural areas at the relevant political a bureaucratic power points does not induce government’s prompt attention to the development needs of the rural areas. This is again reinforced by the fact that most political office holders (local government councilors and Supervisors, state commission and chairman of local government areas, state legislatures and federal legislature all detest hiring in the rural areas and have opted to ranker. Live in the metropolitan state capital or federal capital territory, Abuja. For this, they do not feel the impact of the gross deprivation obtainable in the rural areas and for which they tend not to realize the urgent and shire need for enhancing development in the rural areas.

The imperative actions for enhancing rural development in Nigeria
1. Fundamentally, government needs to place rural development at the top of the agenda of the national development in realization of the fact that enhanced rural development as a prerequisite for meaningful and sustainable overall national’s development.
2. Government again needs to de-emphasize total focus on the oil sector and to enhance agricultural development through in addressing the needs of rural farmers with functional incentives. This is necessary as increased income from agricultural activities which is the main stay of the rural economy will arrest the rural – urban drift and improve the quality of the life of the rural dwellers. Indeed, when far man shift from the use of traditional tools like hoes and matchets to the use of modern tools like tractors, their production increases from subsistence to commercial quantities. Another dimension to this is the need for the establishment of agro – allied industries as growth or development driver of the rural areas. Such agro – processing industries could be in the areas of rice milling and packaging, processing of cashew and groundnut products, cassava and cocoyam floor packaging, processing of pineapple or oranges and paw-paw into fruit juice etc.
3. The political representatives and leadership need to identify with the development need of the rural areas of their constituencies. Indeed, they need to articulate such needs and ensure that they become inesrral parts of the government’s development agenda. Beyond this, they also need to monitor the implementation of set out rural development policies and programmes. Again the political representatives like the federal legislators could enhance rural development by devoting part of their constituency development allowance to rural sector development. This is necessary as such display of commitment to rural development by the political leadership will in turn, trigger greater commitment towards initiating rural development project and rural on the side of the rural communities themselves
4. There is equally the need not only adequately budgetary allocation for rural development but very importantly in ensuring that
such allocated funds are judiciously used to implement rural development projects and programs.

5. There is equally the need for monitoring and integrating of the various national state and local government policies and programmes on rural development and the co-ordination of the activities of all the rural development institutions. It is specifically suggested here that the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is mandated to ensure this integration of the various policies and activities of all the pro rural development institutions and agencies including private rural community initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The rural areas of Nigeria is largely characterized by lack of basic infrastructure facilities and general underdevelopment enhancing the rural development status is a prerequisite for sustainable nationals development. The various policy reassures and progressive as develop to enhance development in the rural areas by successive governments in Nigeria have not translated with visible and meaningful transportation of the rural sector. This is as a result of some impediments, for the eventual realization of enhanced rural development, certain action or policy measures are considered imperative overcoming these impediments suggested imperative acting is expected to lead significantly to enhanced rural development in Nigeria.

REFERENCES


