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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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#### ABSTRACT

The quest for rural development in Nigeria has spurred government at all levels to initiate various efforts aimed at solving perennial problems of the rural areas. At different period, they have launched series of programmes to ensure better living for the rural dwellers. This study relied on secondary data by making use of past literature in order to examine the successes and shortcomings of the programmes. The focus of this paper therefore is to critically examine the various rural development programmes in Nigeria in terms of achievements and challenges and thereafter recommend planning and policy issues to the policy makers. While some programmes have been acknowledged to have yielded the expected results even up till today, many others are short lived and failed to achieve results. This is evident in the predominance of the problems they were meant to solve in the first place- rural poverty, rural-urban migration, low productivity, illiteracy and maternal mortality among others. The paper concluded by recommending some holistic measures to ensure sustainable rural development programmes in Nigeria. These include the design of comprehensive template for rural development, massive industrialization of rural areas, citizen participation, public-private partnership in rural development and discipline among the ruling elites among others.

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#### INTRODUCTION

In its general term, development has been described as a process by which man increases or maximizes his control and use of the material resources with which nature has endowed him and his environment. According to Afigbo, (1991) development consists of five main ingredients: increasing material wealth for the use of individuals and the nation; eliminating unemployment; eliminating poverty and want; eliminating inequality, and increasing the general availability of labour-saving devices. Arising from this, therefore, rural development is a multi-dimensional process through which the productivity, income and welfare, relating to health, nutrition, education, transportation, employment and other features of better living conditions of rural people can be improved upon or transformed. According to Igbokwe and Ajala (1995), the earliest attempt at rural development during the colonial era took the form of community development, and later agricultural extension. The community development approach emphasized self-help to improve health, nutrition and community welfare, whereas the agricultural extension approach was concerned with improving the agricultural productivity. The goal of both programmes ultimately was to produce primary products for the feeding of European industries. This era was also characterised by the development

of transport networks in form of railway system not for the benefit of the rural people, but primarily for the benefit of the European business. The early years of Nigeria's independence also witnessed colossal concentration of development efforts on the modern sector of the economy, however, to the exclusion of investment in the rural economic base. The problems emanating from the total neglect of rural areas and consequential pressures on the urban economy thus generated a serious concern for the government at various levels. Therefore, the problem has been how to develop rural areas both in terms of economic and human resources. Towards this end, a number of development approaches have been pursued by the various governments in Nigeria. These consist mainly in the establishment of projects, programmes, and capacity-building institutions. Regrettably, while some of these programmes and projects relatively succeeded, many of them were stillborn and unable to achieve the expected goals for which they were designed. This failure results from a number of administrative inefficiencies such as corruption, lack of comprehensive rural planning, misplacement of priorities, lack of citizen participation at both the initiation and implementation stages of the programmes among others. The solutions so far advanced have remained practically elusive, unserviceable and unrealistic. This situation has therefore posed serious challenges to the development strategies in Nigeria and other developing countries. Hence, the conditions of the peasantry or rural communities, in recent years, have consistently worsened or deteriorated as more and more Rural Development Programmes and strategies have been unfolded.

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The rural sector is still largely characterized by absence of basic human needs and underdevelopment in agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Williams, 1994). It is pertinent at this point to understand that rural development is a process of not only increasing the level of per capita income in the rural areas but also the standard of living of the rural population measured by food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security among others. It is therefore the focus of this paper to critically examine the various rural development programmes with a view to highlighting their achievements and challenges and thereafter offer recommendation for sustainable rural development.

### Conceptual Issues

For better comprehension of the contents of the study, it is considered noteworthy to conceptualise the various issues raised by this work.

### Concept of Rural Area

The concept of rural area has been addressed in various ways by different scholars depending on varying context. It is also conceptualised as it occurs to different countries and nations based on geographical, activities and population characteristics. The 1996 census dictionary defines rural areas as "sparsely populated lands lying outside urban areas" (Statistics Canada, 1999a: 226). According to Wikipedia rural areas are large and isolated areas of an open country with low population density. United States Census (2000 census) defines rural areas as comprising open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents (population/administrative-based); areas designated as rural can have population densities as high as 999 per square mile or as low as 1 person per square mile (population/land use-based). United States Department of Agriculture (2002 farm bill) defines rural areas as any area other than a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants, and also the urbanized areas contiguous and adjacent to such a city or town. Functionally, a rural area is a geographical area characterized by primary activities such as extraction, farming and gathering among others. Harmonizing all these definitions, especially as concerned this study, rural Nigeria is measured by two indices: a spatial index, indicating the percentage of the population living in rural areas, and by occupational index which shows the percentage of the labour force in agricultural occupation. It therefore connotes a spatial entity with low population density and whose activities are majorly of primary activities such as agriculture, extraction and gathering among others. It is estimated that agricultural activity occupies four-fifths of the rural population of Nigeria.

### Concept of Rural Development

The concept of rural transformation/Development has different interpretation to different people because of its multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary nature. Hunter (1964) was among the earliest to use the expression *Rural Development* which he considered as the "starting point of development" characterized by subsistence. According to Mabogunje (1980), rural development implies a broad-based re-organization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with

changes consequent upon this. As stated elsewhere, rural transformation is a process of mobilizing and harnessing human and material resources of all the rural populaces with a view to improving their socio-economic situations through qualitative and quantitative changes (Ogunnowo, 1997). In essence, rural transformation is a planned change in the living standards of the rural population and making the process of their development self-sustaining. World Bank (1995) defined rural development as a process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low-income rural dwellers and households. This definition is defective as it dwelt majorly on the economic growth, which is just an aspect of development. Taking into cognizance, the economic growth and social upliftment as aspects of development, Ijere (1990) regarded rural development, as the process of increasing the per capita income and the quality of life of the rural dwellers to enable them become prime mover of their own destiny.

The United Nations Agency for Social and Economic Development posits that rural development is the quantitative change or upliftment in the standard of people in the rural areas, brought about through integrated approach, by both governmental and non-governmental agencies and the people themselves. Obinne in Ogidefa (2010) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potential through education and sharing in decision and action which affect their lives. He also viewed it as efforts to increase rural output and create employment opportunities while eliminating fundamental (or extreme) cases of poverty, diseases and ignorance. Therefore, combining all the essential elements of development, Rural Development can be described as the integrated approach to food production as well as physical, social and institutional infrastructural provisions with an ultimate goal of bringing about both quantitative and qualitative changes which result in improved living standard of the rural population. Although, it is argued that agricultural productivity is not synonymous with rural development but constitutes a very crucial aspect in achieving it since it is the main stay of the economy and that most of the people in rural areas across the country are engaged on land (Abass, 1993). In developing countries, such as Nigeria, rural development encompasses all efforts targeted at improving the fortunes of the rural dwellers. They include agricultural set-up projects, rural water supply projects, rural electrification projects, rural health and disease control projects, rural education, rural feeder-road and maintenance projects, Adult education campaign, rural telecommunication system, and rural industrialization.

### Sustainable Development

Rural development deficient of sustainability is not likely to stand the test of time; hence, the concept of sustainable development is crucial in this kind of study. Sustainable Development as a new paradigm world over has been explained differently. According to the Brundtland commission report which globally initiates and popularizes the concept, Sustainable development is defined as "Development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 45). Abumere (1997), referred

to the concept to mean that in our use of environmental resources to satisfy current demands, we must not inflict irreversible damage on the environment in such a way as to jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Simply put therefore, sustainable development advocates designed development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of unborn generations in meeting their own needs.

### Objectives of rural development

Based on the scope of rural development- improving the total welfare of the rural low-income people, Ijere, (1990) identified the following objectives of rural development:

- (i) To have greater commitment of the resources to the rural areas in terms of budgeting allocation and actual expenditure.
- (ii) To ensure popular participation of the rural people in the identification of priorities, planning of programmes as well as their implementation.
- (iii) To lay greater emphasis on the use of total resources and promotion of local skills.
- (iv) To expand and improve on rural infrastructure such as roads, markets stalls, electricity, water and storage facilities.
- (v) To maintain political and social stability
- (vi) To create rural employment opportunities
- (vii) To increase commodity out-put and production and subsequently increase food and food supply as well as rural farm incomes

### Overview of Rural Development in Nigeria

Overtime, successive governments have embarked on several programmes targeted at rural development. Other approaches have been by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), cooperatives, individuals through private initiatives, corporate bodies as well as International Organizations. These efforts shall be examined under these two time frame- Pre-independence epoch and Post-Independence epoch

#### Pre-Independence Experience in Rural Development

Government's involvement in infrastructural provision began as far back as 1917 when the colonial government promulgated the Township ordinance. This ordinance classified settlements in the country into three classes: namely, the first, second and third class townships. The first class townships harboured the whites and their workers. There was heavy concentration of infrastructure in these settlements e.g. Lagos. In other words, they differ from the second and the third class townships, which received little or no facilities.

In the same era, roads and railway lines were constructed across the country, in the name of and ostensibly for the development of rural areas. However, the real reason for such constructions was exploitative rather than welfaristic, it was to enable the colonialists and the imperialists to tap and evacuate our agricultural products such as groundnuts, cocoa, cotton, and palm produce. This particular motive dictates the pattern of rail system in Nigeria in particular and developing countries in general, where rail lines only connect the hinterlands with the sea ports from where the agricultural products could be

transported overseas. In the rural areas within this era, agricultural mechanization was introduced to increase the hectares of food production for export; and also for the maximization and exploitation of the rural areas. The objective of the development of the rural areas during this period is secondary and not of primary objective. In other words, the direction of development at this period was foreign- centred rather than for rural development per se. As such, the few developments recorded in the rural areas across the country in this period were by chance, rather than planned. In a nutshell, a common feature of rural development plans at pre-independence period was a single emphasis on agricultural development and productivity. While in the recent time the rural areas are still described as synonymous with peasant and subsistent agriculture (Onokerhoraye, 1978; Udeh, 1989; Abdu & Marshall, 1990; Filani, 1993; Iwuagwu, 2006; Saheed, 2010), it is equally seen as synonymous with absence of basic infrastructural facilities such as sanitation, electricity, pipe-born water, good roads and health care services.

#### Post-Independence Experience in Rural Development

Even though, the political drivers of the post independent Nigeria were indigenous, majority of who came from rural settings, the period witnessed colossal concentration of development efforts on the modern sector of the economy at the expense of investment in the rural economic base. Government intervention in rural transformation then were in response to lifting urban pressures emanating from rural neglect and improving export commodity earnings (Igbokwe & Ajala, 1995). The resources meant to open up the rural areas were diverted to service the urban centers. Example of such were the building of the famous Cocoa House in Ibadan, the first Television Station in Africa and other numerous urban projects all of which were financed with the proceeds from taxes and levies from the rural farmers. The action led to dramatic influx of rural dwellers into the urban areas as it became more profitable and more sensible to remain in cities even as unemployed than to be enslaved in the rural areas only to "feed the nation". As posited by Raheem *et al*, (2014) the inflow of human resources from the poor regions to the rich regions will greatly increase the population sizes of the latter, thereby creating complex socio economic problems of unemployment and overcrowding residential accommodation. However, in the 1970s, there was a renewed effort in what was called rural development. Although, the first and second national development plans (1962-68; and 1970-74) were not basically concerned about developing the rural localities, serious concern for rural development at the national level was first highlighted in the third national development plan (1975-80). The plan emphasized the need to reduce regional disparities in order to foster national unity through the adoption of integrated rural development.

The total budget allocation in the third national development plan was N32 billion. The plan provided for the allocation of N90 million towards nation-wide rural electrification scheme, the establishment of nine River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) in addition to the two existing ones (Sokoto and Rima (RBDAs) by decree Nos. 25 and 28 between 1976 and 1979 respectively (Adedipe, 2002), the construction of small dams and boreholes for rural water supply and the clearing of feeder roads for the evacuation of

agricultural produce and the supply of electricity to rural areas from large irrigation Dams. In a similar development, the Fourth National Development Plan (1981-85) exhibits several distinguishing features, but most importantly, it was the first plan in which the local government tiers were allowed to participate fully in their own right. (Fourth National Development Plan, 1981). Also, According to Filani (1993), the 1981-1985 national development plan marked a turning point in rural development efforts in Nigeria because it was the first to recognize the rural sector as a priority area. The plan emphasized among other things the need for balanced development of the different sectors of the economy and of the various geographic areas of the country. It also emphasized the importance of rural infrastructural development as a vehicle for enhancing the quality of rural life. Consequently, about N924 million was allocated to the eleven River Basin Development Authorities whose functions include among other things, the construction of boreholes, dams, feeder roads and jetties. About 12,064 kilometers of feeder roads, 2,280 wells, 29 farm service centres, 2,650 boreholes, and 249 earth dams, were expected to be constructed by the River Basin Development Authorities.

The Federal Government also allocated N645 million for a country-wide electrification, in addition, all the states of the federation allocated N700.4 million for the electrification of about 1,600 towns and villages in their areas of jurisdiction, while transport facilities such as construction of motor parks, and petrol filling stations and provision of inter village commuting services were also provided by local governments for rural transportation development. At the state level, the various state governments spelt out different policy issues in the forth development plan. For instance, in Oyo State, the government identified four cardinal programmes for itself. These include free education at all levels, free medical services, integrated rural development and gainful employment while other states in the federation also embarked on projects that could meaningful impact on the lives of the citizenry. In order to effectively implement the above programmes, the sum of N1,642,401 million were allocated to the various sectors of the economy. The rural sector received much attention at the period as many local roads were upgraded, 27 Primary Health Centres, 105 health clinics and 6 comprehensive health centres were established across the rural areas. In addition, wells were sunk in rural areas where piped water is not available and more rural communities were connected to the national grid through electrification scheme. In spite of these efforts, however, it is pertinent to note that the conditions of the rural inhabitants continued to be poorer, and their lives more miserable. This is because the projects were either not the right priority aimed at developing the rural people, or perhaps, they could not stand the test of time because of unsustainable practices.

### Approaches to Rural Development in Nigeria

Realizing the importance of rural areas in the development of Nigerian economy and the need to adequately harness resources to better the lives of the rural dwellers that constitute substantial segment of the population, successive governments had in the past rolled out series of programmes and approaches aimed at arresting the ugly situations bedevilling the rural populace. Some of these are highlighted below:

**The National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP):** This project was launched in 1973 during the military era under General Yakubu Gowon and it continued until 1976 when it was replaced by the Operation Feed the Nation Programme by General Olusegun Obasanjo. It was an agricultural strategy aimed at increasing food production in specific areas and sub-sectors of the agricultural economy. NAFPP relied heavily on the cooperative approach as well as on technical assistance for its success. The scheme was a well-conceived and guided change programme for rural development, especially in the area of food production.

**The River-Basins Development Authority (RBDA):** It was established in 1976 and 1979 by decrees 25 and 28 respectively and further expanded in 1983 (Adedipe, 2002). The sole aim of the authority was to harness the water resources of the river basins across the country in order to better the lives of the citizens. It was an idea borrowed from developed and other developing countries such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, where flooded area was dammed for irrigation farming, water navigation and Hydro Electric Power (HEP) generation. In addition, the project was designed to make the nation self-sufficient in food production and to uplift the socio-economic standard of the rural dwellers. To this end, substantial funds were allocated to the programme in the Third National Development (1975-80). However, the activities of the authority showed that the development philosophy was still the trickle-down approach as rural development was not a serious issue in its objectives which include inter alia:

- i. Undertaking comprehensive development, both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use.
- ii. Undertaking scheme for the control of flood, and erosion, and for the water-shed management including afforestation.
- iii. Construction and maintenance dams, dykes, wells, boreholes, irrigations and drainage systems.
- iv. Provision of water from reservoir and lakes for irrigation purposes to farmers and recognized associations, as well as for urban water supply scheme.
- v. Control of pollution in rivers, lakes, lagoons, and creeks.

From the objectives, it can be confirmed that the activities of the authorities were only focused at the development of material things, rather than the people. And again, it was a kind of top-down approach, thereby leading to its partial success.

**The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs):** This project was launched in Nigeria in 1975, and was financed by the trio of the World Bank, the Federal and State Governments. The example in Oyo state was the Oyo North Agricultural Development Project (ONADEP), later metamorphosed to Oyo State Agricultural Development Programme (OYSADEP). Its main objective was to raise productivity, increase farm output, income and standard of living of the rural people. It has its headquarters in various locations across the country and zonal offices in close proximity to the farmers. The programme offered farmers access to extension services, trainings and workshops as well as affordable farm inputs. Besides, some rural roads were opened up and others rehabilitated while water provision was

also given consideration through construction of dams. However, due to lack of technical know-how, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds and embezzlement, the programme could record just little achievement in actually developing the rural areas.

**Operation Feed the Nation (OFN):** It was launched in 1976 by Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (the then Head of State). It was designed to rekindle the consciousness of the generality of Nigerians especially, those living in the rural areas to the advantages of the agricultural occupation. The objective of the programme was to among others, mobilize the nation towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production. The Operation Feed the Nation was not specifically a rural development strategy, but the rural areas benefited through inputs and professional advice. However, it was on record how the project, rather than solve food problems created opportunities for the ruling class to appropriate national funds. They were appointed Board members and given fat contracts at the expenses of the masses who were meant to be originally served by the idea.

**Green Revolution:** Launched in 1980 by civilian administration headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, it was designed to boost food production. Its main objectives include among others, to make the country self-sufficient in food production within. It however failed because the same government that instituted Green Revolution with the aim of making Nigeria self-sufficient embarked on a large-scale importation of rice from India and America (Raheem *et al*, 2014; Otoghagua, 1999). This singular act of the government rendered the aim of the programme in achieving rural development useless, as there was no protection for the local farmers from foreign competition.

**Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS):** This programme was meant to ease farmers and rural dwellers' access to credit facilities. Some financial institutions were established and empowered by the government to disburse loan facilities to the rural dwellers with little or no interest and without collateral securities. This in the aim of government would encourage high productivity and strengthen the financial base and economy of the rural populace. Unfortunately, however, in no distant period, mismanagement crept in their activities and the banks collapsed, without actually serving the purpose for which it was established.

**Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI):** This directorate was one of the numerous rural development policies instituted by the then President of Nigeria, Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida during his almost a decade administration. The main thrust of the programme according to Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995), is to improve the quality of life and standard of living of the majority of the people in the rural areas. In achieving this, the following objectives were set:

- i. to utilize the enormous resources of the rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the security, socio-cultural, political and economic growth and development activities of the rural areas;
- ii. to ensure a deeply-rooted self-sustaining development process based on effectively mobilized mass participation,

beginning from the grass roots and spreading thereafter to the wider economy.

DFRRI was really a transition effort to genuine rural development in Nigeria. It developed rural access roads to connect rural-rural communities, rural-urban centres and farmers to the markets. This is because prior to the introduction of the programme, one of the serious problems facing farmers and farming activities was poor road network. (Raheem *et al*, 2014) Government surveys indicated that 60,000km of rural feeder roads were either constructed or rehabilitated under the first phase which was completed in 1987. In 1990, a total of 30,724.34km of rural feeder roads were completed and accepted as having met the required specifications under the second phase of the project. Another 55,576.24km of rural roads were constructed in 1991. However, in 1992, a total of 85,592.82km of rural feeder roads were completed, inspected and accepted. Other major areas where DFRRI's activities were targeted were in the area rural electrification, with the first phase taking off in 1987. Two model villages in each local government area of the country were selected as prototype. By 1989, 142 electricity projects were completed in phase 1. In 1990, 114 communities in 11 states were provided with electricity. In 1991, 325 communities were supplied with electricity, and another 506 communities benefited in 1992. In the area of water supply to rural communities, 4,000 wells/boreholes were reported to have been sunk by 1989. Another 1,291; 11,310 and 18,680 wells and boreholes were sunk in 1990, 1991 and 1992, respectively (Ekpo & Olaniyi, 1995).

**Table 1. DFRRI's Completed Projects on Economic and Social Infrastructures**

Year	Amount Allocated (₦ Million)	Feeder Roads (km)	Rural Electricity (No. of communities)	Borehole s/wells
1986	500	—	—	—
1987	400	60,000	—	—
1988	500	30,000	—	—
1989	300	30,000	142	4,000
1990	300	30,728.34	114	1,291
1991	152.3	55,576.24	325	11,310
1992	250	85,592.82	506	18,680

Source: DFRRI Press Briefing (1992) and adapted from Ekpo & Olaniyi, (1995)

Also, in 1987, DFRRI engage in livestock, horticulture and aquaculture development programmes and recorded enormous progress. For instance, as at the end of 1987, it was able to produce 3,624 tonnes of assorted breeder seeds for livestock, while in 1990, 1,633 tonnes of seeds of arable crops, 4,598 million oil palm seedlings and 294,072 tonnes of groundnut seeds were distributed to farmers. In 1991, the achievements improved some 4,033.13 tonnes of improved seeds, 17,112 million seedlings, 2,666 million fingerlings and 14,529 tonnes of fodder seeds were produced and distributed to farmers. In 1992, 846,224 fruit seedlings for horticulture, 5,726.13 tonnes of arable crops seeds and 3,466 million fingerlings were produced and distributed to farmers as shown on table 2 below (ibid). Other areas embarked upon by the directorate include the development and dissemination of improved technology. It collaborated with Nigerian Building and Road Research Institute (NBRI) and other related agencies on research into the provision of local raw materials and improving local technology for construction of houses in

Table 2. DFRRRI's Supply of Agricultural Inputs

Year	Arable crops (tonnes)	Oil palm (million)	Groundnuts (tonnes)	Fodder seeds (tonnes)	Horticulture (tonnes)	Fish (million)
1987	—	—	—	3, 624	—	—
1988	—	—	—	—	—	—
1989	—	—	—	—	—	—
1990	1, 633	4, 598	294, 072	—	—	2.67
1991	4, 033.13	17, 112	—	14, 529	—	2.67
1992	5, 726.13	—	—	—	846, 224	3.47

Source: Adapted from Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995).

rural areas, In addition, DFRRRI also helped in the formation of Community Development Associations (CDAs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Community Banks to cater for the services of the rural dwellers that ordinarily would not have been served by the commercial banks which were domiciled in the urban centres. Ever since then, the CDAs and the CBOs have been instrumental in the development of rural areas. However, in spite of the landmark achievement recorded by the directorate, like the other rural development strategies before it, change of government policies as well as mismanagement and priority misplacement weakened its scope and thus could not take the rural development to “the promise land”

**The Better Life for rural women Programme:** This programme, established in 1987 by the then first lady Hajia Maryam Babangida, was an offshoot of Beijing Conference of 1985. (Akanbi, and Jekayinfa, 2011) The objectives of the programme was to among others stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, and sensitize the rest of Nigerians to their problems, (Obasi and Oguche 1995). The programme can aptly be described as second to none in the various efforts at championing the cause of women in Nigeria. Apart from launching the women folk to their role as society leaders and managers, its various activities at all level of governments propelled the inert talents in them in all human endeavours. It also led to the “institutionalisation” of the position of First Ladyship and establishment of ministries of women affairs in all the states of the federation, (Ijere, 1990: 59).

**National Directorate of Employment (NDE):** Rising unemployment issue in the 1980s in Nigeria led to the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment by the administration of Ibrahim Babangida. It was designed to cushion the effect of the structural adjustment programme (SAP). It offered the youths who were job seekers the opportunity to be on their own through agriculture, industry and handicrafts. Loans were made available for the unemployed who have one skill or the other with little or no interest. NDE was and is however confronted with low funds, bureaucratic bottle neck and tribalism.

**The National Directorate for Social Mobilization:** Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) as was popularly called was established in 1987 by the same government, and was known to be strong in the articulation and campaign for people’s rights. It also proved its worth in the sensitization of masses towards government policies and programmes. It had its tentacle spread all over the country, educating and informing people about their rights and duties, which is considered as the first step in rural development strategies.

Other programmes aimed at rural development in the past are National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF), Rural Banking Scheme (RBS), Family Support Programme (FSP), Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS). All of them were established to better the lives of the rural dwellers to ensure better standard of living.

### Success Stories of Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria

Every efforts of government emanates from the point of view of solving a particular problem either social, political or economic and developmental problem. As can be seen from the objectives of rural development put forward from the onset of this work, the purpose of embarking on rural development programmes by any governments whatsoever hinged on achieving certain goals- eradicating poverty, raising standard of living of the rural people, promotion of rural skills, creation of employment and raising of literacy level among others. The million dollar question therefore is how far have government efforts in solving rural problems succeeded in Nigeria? Has the rural- urban disparity been eliminated? Is poverty no longer hunting the rural dwellers? What about the employment issues, have government rural development strategies been able to curtail rural-urban drift resulting from under development of rural areas in the country, and many more? Judging from the results of the series of programmes evolved over the years as tools for rural development in Nigeria, it can be inferred that certain level of success has been recorded, at least. However, the overall achievements of the programmes have been characterized with mixed feelings. While some areas have recorded partial success though short lived, others were outright failure. Some of the successes are highlighted below:

1. The days of the 1973 National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) of Gowon regime, the 1976 Obasanjo programme of Operation Feed the nation (OFN), the Shagari era of Green revolution and Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) and agricultural related financial institutions such as ADBs, NACRRIB and NAIC among others were the best for Nigerian farmers and rural dwellers as a whole. At least, most people had access to cheap farm inputs as most of them were subsidized. This development was responsible for increase productivity, high standard of living and encouragement to engage in farm business. However, the hope of rural dwellers was cut short with the mismanagement of the projects leading to their eventual collapse. Also, the governments at various periods did not help matters as they also encouraged importation of staple foods like rice and wheat which finally killed local production.

2. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) established by the Babangida regime has been able to fix many unemployed Nigerians, while substantial number of people have also benefited from its skill acquisition schemes. Some graduates and school leavers were and still able to secure job through NDE. This means food on the table of many Nigerians who would have been perpetually pauperized.

3. Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) had many successes recorded in the areas of construction and rehabilitation of rural roads. Many farmers and their produce were linked to the urban markets. The provision of potable water, through construction of dams and sinking of bore holes and open wells in rural areas where pipe borne water is not available was also unprecedented. Moreover, tremendous achievements are recorded in the area of rural electrification as many rural villages are connected to the national grid. There was also massive production of crop and livestock breeds for rural farmers (see table 2) thereby translating to high standard of living and development in the rural areas across the country.

4. The Better Life for rural women Programme, established in 1987 by the then first lady Hajia Maryam Babangida was an offshoot of Beijing Conference of 1985. The programme was second to none in various efforts to champion the cause of women in Nigeria. It was so articulate that it became slogan throughout the length and breadth of the country. One of its numerous successes is the establishment of ministries of women affairs in all the states of the federation (Ijere, 1990) and "institutionalisation" of the position of First Ladyship in the country. At least, these offices embark on some health, education and poverty eradication projects in both rural and urban settings.

5. The River-Basins Development Authority (RBDA) with its objective as captured in the fourth national development plan (1975-80) established about eleven river basins. The resources of these rivers – water, fertile land, fish etc were harnessed for the development of the respective areas. Through these, many rural communities benefited from irrigation farming, farm input and loans to further enrich their businesses. The project indeed recorded some successes in the areas where they were located before diminishing return set in.

6. Universal Basic Education (UBE) is another strategy target at rural development in Nigeria and it records high degree of success. Among other things, it is able to reduce the illiteracy level in rural areas across the country. Also, nomadic education and adult literacy programmes meant to educate the Fulani cattle rearers and the old population of illiterate came on board and is able to increase the literacy level of Nigerian

7. Other rural development programmes such as National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF), Rural Banking Scheme (RBS), Family Support Programme (FSP), and Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), also recorded some handful achievements in their respective areas, even though, some of them could not be sustained by successive governments.

## Constraints to rural development in Nigeria

Rural development in Nigeria during the last four decades and the Rural Development strategies pursued or adopted have been to a larger extent inappropriate, irrelevant to the environment and needs of the people, misdirected and misplaced. In fact, they could be better regarded as misplacement of priorities. This view is according to Abass, (1993) contested on the realization that the solutions to the problems of unemployment, land pressures, equitable income distribution and the improvement of the living conditions of the poorest strata of the people have been deficiently met; leading to further and aggravated problem of poverty, pauperization, inequality as well as the creation of a new breed of home slavery. Again, there is this erroneous misconception by successive governments that rural development is synonymous with agricultural development only. Efforts by such governments to pump money into agricultural development did not yield the meaningful results, as there is more to rural development than agricultural development (a subset of rural development). It is pertinent to note at this juncture therefore that the interest of this paper, just like that of planners and world development bodies is far from whether or not some quantum of success is recorded, rather, the interest concerns the sustainability of rural development strategies. Therefore, the following have been identified as challenges militating against sustainable rural development in Nigeria.

**Lack of comprehensive template for rural development:** It has been observed that over the years, there have been no National policies for Rural Development or where it exists; it has not been holistically pursued. This leads to the idea of only fragments of policy statements or programmes by different regimes which of course die with the regimes that adopted them or become weak at the expiration of the administrations. Examples include DFRRI, ADPs and NDE among others.

**Lack of Industrialisation:** The rural development programmes in Nigeria failed to record tremendous success due to deficiency in infrastructural development. Usually, rural areas are dotted with primary products, however, without industries to process them most of these products cannot command high prices since they are not transformed into variety of uses.

**Lack of spatial focus in rural development planning has handicapped the rural development programmes:** Usually most villages in the country are scattered. This raises the problem of threshold population for sustaining the infrastructural provision. For instance, villages where infrastructures like schools and hospitals have been provided before have witnessed the closure of these facilities due to lack of threshold population.

**Lack of National Institutional Base:** The Nigerian rural development strategy lacked a philosophical, ideological and holistic foundation. It had a body (policy-makers and government functionaries) but had no soul to give it life and sense of direction. The usual practice has been to be in office propounding slogans and manifestations for the people below. That was instrumental to the failure of some rural development projects such as Farm Settlement Scheme, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, etc.

**Inadequate Community Participation:** The top-bottom approach to rural development employed by successive governments hindered longevity of the development, as there is absence of total community participation. Due to the approach adopted, people see most of the programmes as imported idea (tokunbo), and so, could not be sustained because people are not interested in the projects since it is not their priority. There is little or no attempt to allow the rural communities to identify the problems and goals, analyze their own needs, and commit themselves to the achievement of targets. Local experts, Chiefs and community leaders, were taken for granted in deciding what projects to embark upon, and where and how to execute them. The planners do not consult even the interest groups, the co-operatives, and professional organizations. Therefore, once the rural dwellers are not themselves given room to participate in planning, the chain of the planning process is faulty and no better output will be recorded.

Rural Development strategies in Nigeria have been trivialized by the politicians, simply because there is no comprehensive rural development plan from where strategies can be originated. Hence, the country's strategies to solve the rural poverty had been embedded in ad hoc, lopsided and cosmetic ideas as occurred to the government of the day and its agencies. Imagine at this age of development, politicians can be giving out clippers, stoves, slippers and other consumable items to their constituents in the name of poverty eradication programmes. In the real sense of it, are they not actually elevating and procreating poverty in the land. All these arise because of lack of integrated rural development programmes in Nigeria.

**Lastly, corruption, embezzlement and misappropriation of public fund:** Large scale corruption and indiscipline have at various times hindered efforts directed at rural development in Nigeria. Public officials entrusted with public funds have been found wanting. Rather than use resources earmarked for rural development for the purpose, government officials and politicians connive to misappropriate such fund for personal use. Also, money meant for various developments have been found domiciled in foreign accounts where such can hardly be repatriated even if discovered.

### **The Way Forward and Planning Recommendations**

For rural development to indeed serve the purpose for which it is designed, it must be sustainable, efficient and affordable. In order to achieve all these, certain planning etiquettes must be observed.

**Design of comprehensive template for rural development-** Just as master plan serves as a guide for city's overall development- be it physical, economic or social, a comprehensive template for Nigerian rural development is highly required. This will serve as a source from which any government in power derive its modus operandi for enduring rural development programmes. With this in place the issue of "do what you feel, I do what I think strategies" that have characterised our rural development in the past will be eliminated.

**Massive Industrialisation-** Both rural and urban development requires a buoyant economy beyond agricultural investments. Experience from other climes of the world indicates that while agricultural development could increase the economic prosperity of the rural people, the sustainability of the development goes beyond that. For any country to develop, it must scamper for industrial revolution. (Rostow, 1960). This is not to condemn investments in agriculture in its entirety; however, the economy of the developing country, Nigeria inclusive is likely to remain stagnant (at the base), if manufacturing is not given consideration. For instance, most of our agricultural products perish on the farm due to lack of industries to process them into finished products that can be exported to earn foreign exchange. E.g. mango, orange and pine apple among other farm produces. So, the dream of developing rural areas may remain elusive for years, and no amount of investment in agriculture can solve rural development if government fails to industrialise to actually jump start the economy of the rural people.

**Appropriation of robust budgetary allocation to rural development projects-** Heavy budget should not only be appropriated for rural development programmes, it should be efficiently managed and also thoroughly monitored to ensure success. Also, the business as usual attitude should be jettisoned. Resources meant for development should actually be for such purposes for which they are meant.

**Adoption of citizen participation as a veritable instrument for sustainable rural development-** As has been identified as a constraint to rural development in Nigeria and indeed other developing countries of the world, community participation in all strategies adopted to enhance rural development is very crucial. The model of bottom-up approach should be favoured as against its top-down counterpart if meaningful achievements must be recorded. Ideas for development should be spontaneous rather than imported. Governments and policy makers should allow the community people to decide on their priority while they (policy makers) only advise and guide. Projects should be decided with the people not for them.

**Political Empowerment and liberation of the Rural People-** it is becoming a tradition that the local government administration presumed to be the closest to the people of the grass root is no longer championing their causes. Rather than organise elections and allow the locals to control their affairs by themselves, majority of the managers of local administration are now "imported managers" who are appointed by the Governors without the consent of the people. Apart from the fact that some of them do not know the problems of the community, they are at the mercy of the state governors who hire and can fire them should they deviate from their agenda which in most cases may not be in tandem with the wishes of the community people. Allocations meant to develop the rural people are siphoned leaving rural area in perpetual underdevelopment and misery. If rural development must be truly sustained, the rural dwellers should be allowed to control their affairs politically without external domination. They should be encouraged to form discussion groups to articulate their problems and try to solve them internally. "Caretakerism" in local government administration is just an extension of military dictatorship which earn condemnation



both nationally and internationally as undemocratic, anti people and anti development.

**Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in the development of rural areas-** As can be noticed in all areas of development home and abroad, the paradigm is shifting towards involving the public-private strategy in the establishment and management of infrastructures. This ensures the participation of all and sundry in the management of people's affairs as they are becoming too cumbersome for government alone to saddle. This study therefore recommends the idea similar to the Tertiary Institutions Trust Fund (TETFUND) institutionalised in the tertiary institutions across the country where industries, multinational companies and individuals would partner with the government to improve rural infrastructures and ensure better living of the rural inhabitants.

**Discipline and Change of attitude towards public investment-** The managers of Nigerian nation should have a change of attitude. The inordinate ambition to enrich self at the detriment of the masses should be controlled, if not, no amount of efforts at raising the standard of the rural people will succeed. Both the leadership and the followership should eschew corruption, indiscipline and other acts capable of reversing the wheel of development. In this direction, the anti-graft agencies such as EFCC and ICPC should be empowered to act stiffly without favour. Any act of corruption should be strongly dealt with, with no sacred cow. Here, this study strongly advocates for the practices in the "Asian Tigers" countries like China where embezzlement of public fund is accompanied by death penalty to serve as deterrent to others.

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#### Conclusion

This paper has been able to evaluate rural development programmes in Nigeria. It x-rayed the objectives, the approaches, successes and constraints to sustainable rural development it was discovered that since development is for the people, it must be designed to meet their needs if it must be sustained. However, the tune of rural development in the present day Nigeria has much to be desired, as it emanates from the whims and caprices of individuals who govern, not from any articulated document and hence, its lopsidedness and misplaced priority. It was also discovered that while some quanta of success were recorded, many constraints militated against the development of rural areas in the country. These ranged from lack of comprehensive rural development plan, lack of community participation, and lack of spatial focus in rural development planning to lack of Integrated Pilot Demonstration among others.

The paper therefore suggested design of comprehensive template for rural development, massive industrialisation, appropriating substantial budgetary allocation for rural development, public private partnership and discipline. It also strongly recommended citizen participation, advocating for the

idea that rural development efforts must be originated from aspirations of the rural people not as felt by the drivers of urban political economy, among other recommendations as way forward. It concluded by urging the policy makers, the leadership and the followership to have a change of attitude towards public investments for enduring and sustainable rural development in the developing countries in general and Nigeria in particular.

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