

Sustaining the Development of the Rural Areas in Nigeria

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Abstract: Various strategies had been adopted in developing our rural areas in Nigeria. Sustainability and continuity are the major problem that Nigeria strategies are having. The Government and the rural populace should put hands together in making sure that each programme/strategy outlived the administration that established it as we have the NEEDS programme in the country in line with the MDGs. A consistent evaluation should be done constantly so that a yielding success of the programme could be achieved at all levels in the country and not allowing corruption and politicking to hijack its good benefits as aspired for by the rural people.

Key words: Sustaining development, rural area

INTRODUCTION

The development of the rural areas is vital to the economy of a country like Nigeria where majority of the people lived in the rural areas. The concern should not be focused on Agricultural development, every sector that makes the rural area must be developed to a habitable environment as we have in the urban centers. Rural development is concerned with the improvement of the standard of living of the low income population living in the rural areas on a self sustaining basis through transforming the socio-economic spatial structures of their productive activities^[1,2]. The rural areas serves as the bedrock upon which the urban areas depend on in every sector of their development. The government should not pay a lip service in developing and sustaining the strategy/programme embarked upon in developing the rural areas of Nigeria. Sustainability of the strategy/programme should be the focal point in ensuring that the rural areas have an equitable development. The continuity of the programme/strategy would transform the economy of the rural areas as poverty is eradicated and or reduced to the bearest minimum as means of achieving the MGDs goal of poverty eradication^[3].

The programme on NEEDs (National Economic, Empowerment Development Strategies), SEEDs (State Economic Empowerment Development strategies and LEEDs (Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategies) must be sustained and continued, so that the aims and objectives would be achieved and the rural people will benefit from LEEDs. The programme should start with LEEDs in other for development to diffuse and spread from the Local (rural) areas through to the urban areas because of neglect and inefficiency of programmes of the past in not having listing impact in the rural areas.

In doing this the MGDs will have positive and sustainable impact on the rural populace, if programmes would be properly executed without corruption and given the rural areas the chance of having an equitable development comparable to the urban areas.

The strategies of NEEDs focuses on re-orientation of values, poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment generation. The plan was different from the previous strategies in that information were collected from farmers, teachers, labourers, factory owners and University Professors, community based organizations and all concerned stakeholders, each states were made to draft their own SEEDs programme which identifies priority areas of development and government and key beneficiaries will work at national level to develop strategies for key-sector which include agriculture, manufacturing, solid minerals and small and mechium scale enterprises so that adequate finance could be provided.

In reducing poverty mostly among the rural populace NEEDs sets to address the farmers needs through the provision of improved irrigation, machinery and crop varieties that will increase agricultural output, improving the education system, health care delivery with emphasis on HIV/AIDS preventable diseases malaria, tuberculosis and reproductive health related illnesses).

FUNDAMENTALS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The underlying principle of rural development could be seen in it's various definition in literatures. Gana^[4] defines rural development as the res-structuring of the rural economy so as to lift it from being a dependant peasant and largely agricultural economy capable of sustaining the quality of life. It is a process of bringing

improved level of living to the rural population with a notable and reasonable change at all levels of living^[5]. Rural development also implies structural transformation of rural institutions i.e. the rural market, infrastructure, sources of finance, the land tenure system, social amenities, increase in rural employment (with) a growing income as result of labour productivity and better standard of living for the rural populace^[6]. Akinbode^[7] stated, Rural development as involving a broad spectrum of issues among which are the problems of agricultural materialization, rural industrialization, job creation, transport development and provision of adequate housing and shelter for the rural dwellers:

Fundamentals of rural development: Lele^[2] viewed it as improving the standard of living of the masses with low income residing in the rural areas and make the process of development self-sustaining. The important feature of this definition are:

- Improving the standard of living of the agrarian population means mobilization and allocation of resources so as to give an equity to the welfare of the rural areas.
- Mass participation will involve the low income rural population who gets the productive impact.
- Self-sustenance means involving the rural population through developmental programmes.

The significant of this idea is that people should be involved and that individual should get the available resources.

Rural development recognizes that improved food supplies and nutrition, basic facilities i.e. education, health, housing and transportation will not only improve their physical qualities but increase their productivity which will enhance the economy at all levels. In line with this World Bank (1975) defined rural development as a strategy to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people-the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest amongst those who a livelihood in the rural area.

It should be directed towards meeting the basic necessities of life which are, healthy living, knowledge acquisition and a good living standard.

The definition of rural development should be that which is dynamic and meet the challenges of our changing norms ethos and values in the rural areas, rather than focusing on the agricultural sector.

PAST RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA

The idea of rural development and transformation became paramount for successive government in Nigeria

in other to ameliorate the problems facing the rural areas and, give the rural environment a face-lift thereby leading to various efforts of the government in rural development. The earlier focus was on increasing the agricultural output in the rural areas through a review the land tenure system operating in Nigeria. At the achievement of this, farm settlement were established in the then Western and Eastern Region of Nigeria. The impact of the programme was not felt in the surrounding rural environment which was aimed at their rural development. The failure of this target led to the establishment of Integrated Rural Development.

The Integrated Rural Development Scheme involves the allocation of considerable investment either directly through infrastructure, or indirectly via scarce highly trained manpower and financial subsidies. It was consciously formulated systematic multi-sectoral programme aimed at attaining the integration of the people in the rural areas into the mainstream of income groups in the country^[1] and to make the rural areas attractive, give the youth the contentment of self belonging in the country and to bridge the gap of uneven development between the rural and urban areas.

In realizing these objectives the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) was set up in the states of the federation and aimed mainly at increasing agricultural output. Improved seedlings, storage facilities, machinery and marketing facilities were introduced to the farmers. It succeeded in increasing agricultural outputs, but, not in developing the areas.

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) 1976, river basin development authorities 1977, agricultural credit schemes 1978, Land use Decree 1978 and Green Revolution in 1980 were all concerned with improving the agricultural sector of the rural areas.

Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Agricultural Infrastructure (DFRRI) focused on rural roads construction, provision of infrastructure, providing storage facilities, availability of rural credit system and restructuring of the commodity boards. The programme had initial success but unfortunately it did not last long enough to proffer permanent solution to the problems of the rural dwellers and the objective of rural development could not be sustained despite the positive impact it had in the rural areas.

The various strategies adopted in the past focused mainly on improving and increasing the agricultural output of the rural areas. Developing the agricultural sector is not synonymous to rural development rather it is 'a part in the whole' of rural development. The strategies were seen as government programmes and also it lacked rural people participation in conceptualization and implementation of such a programme.

SUSTAINING RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Sustainability means that resources are used in such a way that it continues to be available for the present and future generation. Also it is a way of insuring that the future generations have equal opportunities to the resources the world offers.

There should be a re-focus of how we develop the rural areas with the advent of Information Technology (IT), Communication System (GSM), Globalisation and meeting the objectives of the MDGs.

Sustainable development is not only about the environment, rather it is the capacity of the human society (rural areas) to bring about a permanent reform in order to safeguard the imbalance between humans and their natural life support system^[8]. A development would be sustainable if it has a transparent rule, played accordingly and responsibly. It requires actions across all sectors and disciplines (water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity). The severity of problems varies from one location to another and to achieve a reasonable outcome a co-ordinated and sustained commitments to action is required both from the rural dwellers and the governments.

In sustaining the development of the rural areas in Nigeria through the NEEDS programme, economically viable programmes should be adopted and that which is socially justifiable to the rural populace. Basic infrastructure should be provided in all the rural areas of Nigeria in order to reduce migration to the urban areas. The reforms should not focus on improving and developing the agricultural sector only as it has been for the past strategies adopted in Nigeria in developing the rural areas, it should be an encompassing development that is sustainable and continuable for all round development of all the sectors of the rural economy.

The rural areas will develop if we can prevent corruption in order to achieve a reliable sustainable and continuable development programmes. Politics should not influence the recommended implementation of the programmes because if we fail to achieve a positive impact, we shall be starting from the scratch in the future and have a complicated problems that the dynamic environment might have created them. Funds should be used for the purpose that is meant for. A details progress of work should be made available to the public to a certain

if the reports correspond to the development on ground in the rural area that is applicable to.

CONCLUSION

Rural development should be viewed as poverty, reduction (eradication, economic empowerment, provisions of qualitative education, Health facilities, social amenities, basic infrastructure, accessible and functioning Information Technology (IT) and communication system that is sustainable and continuable for the rural areas. Corruption and politicking should be eradicated so that a positive impact could be felt at last in the rural areas.

The rural dwellers should not view any programme as belonging to the government that initiated it, the self-belonging of the programme will make achievable and transform the life of the rural dwellers with a life long positive impact.

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