



## National Development Plans and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Environmental Situation

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**Abstract:** National development planning involves processes which ensure that policies and strategies are realized, and that development which cuts across all levels of government and society are fully integrated into nation-building. Nigeria has initiated many development programs and plans from the colonial to the postcolonial period. This review analyzes the contributions of the National Development Plans of 1960-1985 to rural development in Nigeria. It reasons that the National Development Plans did not bring about meaningful development to rural areas due to several factors including corruption and mismanagement, faulty planning from above rather than bottom-up approach, and pursuance of colonial and neocolonial dependent economic and social policies among others. To achieve rapid and sustained rural development, it recommends government to adopt a rural-based and bottom-up approach to development, especially in economic development. Rural areas which are major sources of Nigeria's vast natural resources and home to half of national population should not be left with little of the wealth generated from the use and management of these resources. Hence, there is need for more budgetary allocation and socio-economic amenities for rural areas.

**Keywords:** Development, national development plan, rural development.

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### INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, successive governments have declared rural development a priority with several organizations, institutions and agencies set up to undertake and monitor the complicated process of integrating rural areas into national development (Haruna, 2000; Oruonye, 2013; Takeuchi, 2001). The Nigerian government is aware that the rural area which is home to 50% of total population (World Bank, 2018) serves an important role in generating national income. The rural area is a major source of capital formation and a primary market for raw materials for industrial processes in Nigeria (Abah, 2010; Nyagba, 2009; Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013),

and rural development is crucial for the structural transformation and economic development of Nigeria (Gana, 1996; Omeje & Ogbu, 2015; Mammud, 2019). The National Development Plans of 1960-1985 and other rural development programs like Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) among others dedicated to tackle the problem of rural underdevelopment underscores government realization of the need to bring rural areas into the mainstream of national development. Despite the numerous objectives and strategies of rural development pronounced by policy makers, enormous gap still exists between policy

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formulation and implementation, and the level of development in reality (Onuorah, 2006).

This review examines the pattern of rural development in Nigeria, especially in sectors with greatest impact on the lives of rural dwellers. It contends that the declared objectives and policy statements of successive governments in Nigeria have been mere rhetoric and smokescreen intended to hide a systematic exploitation of the rural dwellers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This section defines the key concepts of development, rural area, and rural development.

#### **Development**

Development is a broad concept with no clear definition which is often equated with economic development though they do not mean the same thing. Development is a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structure, attitudes and institutions, acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty (Todaro, 1977). It involves the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system, improvement in income and output, radical changes in institutions, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs (Myint & Krueger, 2016). Development cannot be tied to economic development only but a general improvement in the living conditions of people over time. Seers (1969) asked certain questions about a country's development. What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three have declined from high levels then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country. If one or two of these has been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development even if per capita income doubled. The above questions hint that the level of development of a nation is an indicator of economic growth measured by the productive capacity of its economy which translates to growth in national income. Economic development is the criterion for defining a country's level of development and is the capacity and creative capability of people to effectively transform the natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the imaginative and practical application of their creative talent and productive power. To meet the basic needs of food, housing, clothing, health, transport, education, employment, and increased per capita income people must be empowered (Gana, 1986).

The above definitions suggest that development must include the reduction or

elimination of poverty, illiteracy, inequality, diseases, malnutrition, unemployment, etc. It connotes the ability to provide the basic necessities of life such as food, housing, accessible and affordable healthcare, jobs, good roads, water, electricity and education among other needs.

#### **Rural Area**

The word 'rural' connotes a place with agricultural orientation and rustic lifestyle with farm houses, mud houses, barns, sheds and other structures of similar purposes. Population is among the characteristics that differentiate rural areas from urban areas, especially in developed countries. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, population alone is not adequate to explain rural area. According to Olisa and Obiukwu (1992), the main features of rural areas are degradation, depression, and deprivation. In most rural areas in Nigeria, basic infrastructures are too inadequate for meaningful development. In other words, they lack infrastructures like good roads, health facilities, potable water, electricity, etc. The people engage in subsistence agriculture and their standard of living is low. They are poorly served by almost all public amenities and they show considerable resistance to change.

#### **Rural Development**

Rural development or community development is a multi-dimensional process involving such areas as agriculture, health, education, provision of infrastructures, social life, political and economic issues, commerce and industry among others, and their integration with the national economy. It is often assumed by policy makers and development planners that rural development is synonymous with agriculture. To correct this impression, it is necessary to carry out an integrated conceptualization of rural development. According to the United Nations (1976), the concept of rural development implies a composite or comprehensive program for rural areas in which all relevant sectors such as agriculture, housing, education, employment, and health are considered as interlinking elements in a system having horizontal and vertical linkage in operational and spatial terms. It is a holistic concept which recognizes the complexity and inter-relatedness of the many variables which influence the quality of life in rural areas. It is a complex process which involves the interaction of economic, social, political, cultural, technological and other situational factors (Aziz, 1979). These factors should be integrated with local government policies and plans as well as the objective of improving the quality of life of the people in the rural area. Rural development is concerned with self-sustaining improvement of rural areas and broad-based

reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and the changes consequent upon this (Mabogunje, 2015).

### **National Development Plans (1960-1985)**

Below is a review of the institutions, agencies, policies, and strategies of Nigeria's development plans and how they affect rural development

#### ***First National Development Plan (1962-1968)***

Following the discovery of crude oil in 1956, and its exploration and exportation in commercial quantities from the next decade, agricultural output diminished as crude oil replaced it as the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. This was despite the push for economic diversification in Nigeria dating back to early 1960s with the First National Development Plan of 1962-1968 (Chete *et al.*, 2014). The First Plan launched in June 1962 by then Prime Minister of Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa was expected to last till 1968 (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1962). The First Plan allocated funds to enhance the living standard of Nigerians with no clear policy for rural development. Fund allocations gave priority to transport and communication, electricity, primary production, trade and industry. The First Plan was hampered by the civil war of 1967-1970.

#### ***Second National Development Plan (1970-1974)***

The Second National Development Plan launched by Gen. Yakubu Gowon started in 1970 instead of 1969 because of the civil war which necessitated the extension of the First National Development Plan to 1970 (FRN, 1970). Building a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a just and egalitarian society; a land of opportunities for all citizens; and a free and democratic society were the objectives of the Plan which represented Nigeria's first attempt to grapple with real development (Ejumudo, 2013). The Second Plan stated its priorities to be agriculture, industry, transportation, and manpower development. Despite its objectives, which include building a just and egalitarian society, the Plan further strengthened the dichotomy between rural and urban areas.

#### ***Third National Development Plan (1975-1980)***

The Federal Government's concern for rural development received its first articulated expression in the guideline to the Third National Development Plan (Enyi, 2014). This Plan existed during Gen. Murtala Mohammed and Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo regimes and became a landmark in the history of National Development Planning because the size of the Plan was very large; almost ten times the size of the Second National Development Plan (Ayo, 1988). Secondly, as it was handled by the National

Economic Advisory Council (NEAC) established in 1972 comprising government officials of various technicalities and backgrounds and representatives of various bodies such as private organizations, trade unions, chambers of commerce, manufacturers' associations, agricultural associations and other professionals, it was expected to consult widely due to the large membership base. Finally, the objectives of the plan were massive and wide-ranging including increase in per capita income, even distribution of income, reduction in unemployment level, increase in supply of high level manpower, economic diversification, balanced development, and indigenization of economic activities (Ejumudo, 2013). It was proposed to be a blueprint for the industrial development of Nigeria (FRN, 1975). The development of the rural sector during the Third Plan was envisaged to concentrate on raising agricultural productivity which is the predominant occupation of rural dwellers through increase in per capita income, more even distribution of income, reduction in unemployment, economic diversification, etc. It also intended to ensure the provision of basic amenities like potable water, electricity and healthcare. Under the plan, doctors were expected to serve a year or two in rural areas during the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program. Other efforts towards stimulating rural development were the Badeku Project initiated by the Department of Agricultural Economics in University of Ibadan; the Uboma Project; the socio-medical project at Igbo-Ora in Oyo State; Ishoya Rural Development project by University of Ife; the Guided Change Project by the Institute for Agricultural Research of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; and the Rural Development Project of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. These projects served as models of what is achievable in rural areas (Enyi, 2014).

The breakthrough in rural development came in 1976 with the creation of the Department of Rural Development under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. This department coordinated and monitored the progress of the integrated agricultural development projects. It was the Federal Government's plan to extend agricultural projects to all states with the objectives of increasing agricultural productivity and rural incomes and improving the living standards of rural dwellers. The launching of the local government reforms of 1976 was an important milestone for the government in the evolution of Nigeria Local Government System. The reforms emphasized the need for mobilization and participation of people at the grassroots in rural development. It was through an effective local government system that the human and material resources of Nigeria could be mobilized for rural development. The reforms was hoped to enshrine

the principle of participatory democracy and political responsibility in every Nigerian. From the reform, every stratum of the Nigerian society was to benefit from the continued prosperity of the country. However, due to shortage of funds and personnel, the local government reforms did not live up to the expectations of the rural populace.

Despite the above-mentioned objectives of the Third Plan and with Federal Government's financial capacity for implementation, the political will was almost completely lacking. Consequently, the Third Plan did not make significant impact on the welfare of the rural people in the proposed sectors. In fact, Nigerians in leadership positions were more concerned with sharing the oil wealth than laying the foundation for rural development.

#### **Fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985)**

The Fourth National Development Plan made during Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration was an improvement on the Third Plan (FRN, 1981) which tried to further consolidate the process of laying a solid foundation for socio-economic development. All subsectors were retained as in the Third Plan, except in cases where increased funds allocations were made. The objectives were also more enlarged and definitive in the Fourth Plan (Ejumudo, 2013). The objectives of the Fourth Plan include increase in real income of average Nigerians, more even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups, increase in level of skilled manpower, reduction in unemployment, economic diversification, balanced development, increased citizen participation in the ownership and management of productive enterprises and greater self-reliance, technological development, increased productivity and promotion of a new national orientation conducive to greater discipline, better attitude to work and clean environment (Ayo, 1988). The order of priority was industry (13%), agriculture (12.6%), and education (11%). The Fourth Plan also emphasized the promotion of a new national orientation (Ejumudo, 2013). It did not make any departure from the position of the previous plans on rural development which remained improvement in the living conditions of the rural people. It highlighted rural infrastructural development as a means of increasing the living standard in rural areas. Thus, according to Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005), the following allocations were made:

- ₦924 million naira to eleven River Basin Development Authorities for the construction of boreholes, dams, feeder roads and jetties
- Federal and State Government allocation of ₦645 million and ₦700.4 million respectively for electrification purposes

- ₦2.8 million for rural water supply schemes and ₦312 million for water projects in local government areas of states like Anambra, Plateau, Cross River, Bendel, and Borno

Many local and states governments also proclaimed numerous policy that could enhance the living standard of rural dwellers (Ugwuanyi, 2014). Programs like the Directorate of Foods, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), etc. were meant to bring about rural development in Nigeria. However, they did not bring much success because they were poorly conceived and implemented (Ajadi, 2010).

The Fourth Plan's strategy was the use of oil revenue to ensure all-round expansion in the production capacity of the economy and to lay a foundation for self-sustaining growth (Egonmwam & Ibodje, 2001). It was anticipated that exports led by petroleum would generate enough funds to actualize the plan that had been formulated. Regrettably, petroleum exports revenue was far below anticipated projections. It was projected that ₦79.449 million would be earned from petroleum exports between 1980 and 1984, but only ₦52.78 million which is 66.4% of the projected figure was earned (Okigbo, 1989). With dwindling resources to finance the Fourth Plan, the Nigerian economy witnessed debt service and balance of payment problem coupled with high level of inflation. Most of the projects started at the beginning of the Fourth Plan could not be completed and these alongside several spillover projects from previous Plans had to be abandoned (Jaja, 2000). The growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per annum was only 1.25% compared to 5.5, 13.2 and 4.6% under the previous National Development Plans (Onah, 2010). According to Alapiki (2009), the plan period of 1981-1985 was the most dismal in the economic history of Nigeria at that time.

#### **Analysis of the National Development Plans**

The first, second, third, and fourth development plans was neither national nor developmental. According to Usang (2018), the postcolonial environment which essentially defines the problem of rural underdevelopment is the same as the earlier colonial environment. No serious effort was made to terminate the stifling neocolonial domination and exploitation that is the basic generating force of contemporary underdevelopment. In the Third Plan when industrialization was introduced, it did not change the structure of the neocolonial capitalist planning and economy. The policies exhibit a basic lack of urgency and plan discipline in any program or project and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie elevate their selfish

class interests over and above national interests and objectives (Enyi, 2010).

Not only were the plans for rural development faulty, it was not in the interest of the ruling class to implement. The ultimate objective of national development planning should be the improvement of the welfare of individuals and the entire society. This presupposes the selection of appropriate means to meet the needs of the various communities. The meaningful formulation of a plan to meet the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian people must inevitably be from bottom to top as opposed to from top to bottom. In this way, the needs and problems of the people would be identified and appropriate measures for resolving them selected, after which targets will be set, followed by the formulation of plans. This approach allows for effective mobilization of the communities, the various interest groups, and the masses for local participation. The present practice of conceiving planning as a purely technical process of aggregating projects and programs from the top will only benefit a few individuals at the expense of rural development.

#### **Environmental Situation in Rural Areas**

Having reviewed the institutions, agencies, policies, and strategies of the National Development Plans, the resultant environmental situation is ascertained.

Though it is government's responsibility to create enabling environment for rural development, the corruption, greed, and mismanagement associated with the institutions and agencies have precluded the achievement of desired objectives. In this regard, O. Okpaga (personal communication, February 1, 2004) asserts that the supposed institutions for rural transformation have become conduit pipes to siphon public funds into private pockets. The urban-based nature of Nigeria's development process characterized by the concentration of amenities including good roads, health facilities, potable water, electricity, etc. only in urban areas has led to a gradual deterioration in the quality of life in rural areas, thus stimulating rural-urban migration on a massive scale (Oghoghujie & Jerry-Eze, 2011), especially since crude oil overtook agriculture as the mainstay of the economy. Rural agriculture which used to be the major source of food production in Nigeria and of which the majority of rural dwellers engage in, is now for only the old and weak as the youths and able-bodied men have migrated to urban areas in search of greener pastures resulting in low agricultural yields because the old and weak can only grow enough to feed their families and not the nation. Moreover, the lack of incentives to farmers, use of antiquated farming techniques, lack of storage

facilities, poor transportation network, etc. has hastened the decline in agriculture (Nnadozie, 1986).

Rural dwellers and farmers are also marginalized in the area of big agricultural projects and schemes. Since the mid-1970s, Nigerian government has pursued policies to boost agriculture starting with Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched in 1976, the Green Revolution in 1980 and various budgetary incentives in large-scale agriculture, Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) and big irrigation dam schemes. These projects scattered in different part of the country and jointly financed by the World Bank and Nigerian government did not improve the living standards of the rural populace (Okhankhuele & Opafunso, 2013). Rather, it worsened the plight of peasants by depriving them of their lands as was the case in Bakolori project in Sokoto state. The beneficiaries of these capital intensive agricultural programs and schemes are the big barons who live in urban areas. The monies received as loans never went to agriculture but to other businesses. This has led to faster decline in agricultural production with attendant negative consequences for rural development.

In the area of investment and government provision of amenities, urban areas are more favoured than rural areas. Studies by Diejomaoh (1973) have shown that over the years the beneficiaries of government expenditure on education, health, water supply, electricity, industries and road construction are mainly urban dwellers with less than 30% of total government development expenditure benefitting rural areas. Notwithstanding the importance and potentials of the rural sector in terms of workforce and contribution to GDP, of the estimated private sector investment amounting to about ₦1.632 billion in the Second National Development Plan period of 1970-1974, only ₦246 million or 15% was spent on rural areas. This pattern was basically the same in the Third and Fourth National Development Plan periods of 1975-1985. The point is that rural areas of Nigeria are much neglected in the various spheres of human endeavour. They lack the basic needs of life, they are deprived and exploited, and hence, rural development has remained an illusion. Projects such as construction of roads, bridges, schools, railway lines, air strip, ports and marketing boards, among others are aimed at opening the rural areas as a link for easy exploitation and export of raw materials.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The institutions, agencies, policies, and strategies for rural development have not lived up to

expectations. Despite the numerous natural resources present in rural areas, about 70% of Nigerians who live below the poverty line reside there (Nwuke, 2004). The following recommendations are offered as solution to the lingering problem of rural underdevelopment:

1. Since rural areas are home to half of Nigeria's population and major sources of national wealth, they should be accorded recognition in terms of more budgetary allocation and socio-economic amenities.
2. The agricultural needs of rural farmers centre on poor infrastructures, inadequate extension services, and lack of financial credit. Therefore, feeder roads are needed to effectively link rural farmers scattered all over the country with the urban centers to transport their products from the farms to the point of sale. They also need adequate water supply for drinking and irrigation, especially in the arid parts of the country.
3. Government should provide enabling environment to foster rural development in Nigeria through improved education, health services, electricity, roads, etc. to increase the quality of life in rural areas.
4. Adequate training of peasant farmers in the use of modern farming techniques and provision of tractors, fertilizers and pesticides at subsidized prices. The practice of absentee farmers living in urban areas trading in fertilizers meant for real farmers should be stopped. Government should endeavour to deal directly with the real farmers in the rural areas if rural development is to be achieved.
5. The 'agricultural credit guarantee scheme' under which commercial banks are encouraged to offer peasant farmers loans guaranteed by the Federal Government through the Central Bank needs review because the processes involved, including feasibility studies required to secure these loans are beyond the ability of peasant farmers. The fact is that agricultural credit facilities in Nigeria are designed for big capitalist farmers. This policy should be reviewed to favour peasant farmers.
6. The corruption, greed, and mismanagement associated with institutions for rural development should be curbed. This is achievable through intensification of the crusade against these vices by government and her agencies like EFCC and ICPC among others.
7. Nigeria should break away from the neocolonial and dependent nature of economic and social systems. As long as we operate an economic and social system of dependence, the long run result is continued exploitation and domination by western and foreign powers, while development in the real sense remains a mirage.

8. Rural development is not the concern of Federal, State and Local government alone. It is important that individuals, communities, corporate organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies are involved.

## CONCLUSION

Mass poverty exists as a result of the lopsided and urban-based development process which successive governments in Nigeria have pursued till date. The various World Bank, IMF and other international agency-sponsored large-scale agricultural projects were not intended to better the lot of the rural dwellers. These projects and schemes are based on obsolete trickle-down theory by which the main beneficiaries are supposed to diffuse information and motivate the peasant farmers, who would then follow their example. This situation revolves around the neocolonial and dependent nature of Nigerian economy and society. As long as we continue to operate the economic and social system of dependency, development in the real sense of the word will remain a mirage. To achieve real development, government must adopt a rural-based and bottom-up approach to development.

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