



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A FACTOR IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The neglect, deprivation and disparities that characterizes the rural areas in Nigeria gave vent to the local government reforms of 1976 thus, the 1976 Nigeria constitution section 7 article I and II saddled the local government with the responsibilities of providing limited essential social service to the rural dwellers. Hence, this article sets out to x-rays the meaning and reason for the creation of the local governments, the operational definitions of term of some major concept and the theoretical base of the subjects under discussion. It equally had a cursory look at the functions of the local government and local government as a factor in sustainable development. Conclusions were drawn with some tentative recommendations on ways of improving on the already existing status quo. Thus Government to partner with private and non-governmental agencies in the provision of social amenities and the adoption of a working frame work for the development of the rural areas.

Keywords: Local Government and Rural Development.

Introduction

The neglect, deprivation and disparity which characterized the rural area in Nigeria over the years especially in the development process provided a fertile ground for the local government reform of 1976, which ab initio marked a turning point in local government administration despite opposition from various quarters. Hence, the 1976 Nigeria constitution section 7 article I and II recognized the local government in Nigeria and saddled it with the responsibility of providing limited essential social services to the rural dwellers, precisely for administrative convenience and rapid development of the rural area.

The way to have a good and safe government is not to trust it all to one but, to divide it among the many distributing to everyone exactly the function he is competent to perform. Commenting on the new trend in rural development Oyaide (1988) asserted that in the past, the concentration of development in the urban centre in Nigeria and the

huge reconstruction and development efforts which followed the end of the civil war, coupled with the upsurge in the flow of revenue from petroleum product in the seventies created a big vacuum between the urban and rural areas. But today the concept of development in the rural areas has witnessed rapid change over the years, from the very simple and basic, to the complex and luxurious. This development no doubt remains a significant theme for sustainable development in Nigeria. Nwanekwe (2010).

This article is divided into seven sections, the first serves as an introduction to the subject; the second is the theoretical framework, operational definitions of major concepts used in the work; section four takes a cursory look at the functions of the local government. The fifth section discussed the local government, rural and national Development while the sixth and seventh sections highlighted the local government as a factor in sustainable national development.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The structural functional approach:- This approach was popular among political scientist and sociologist who analyzed society in terms of the various structures and function they perform respectively. In the same perspective views the individuals as fulfilling the requirement for society survival and human nature as plastic molded by society into any useful form. Those associated with these approaches include: Talcoth Parson, Marx, Weber etc.

In the same perspective the local government is seen as a third tier of government with structures and individuals performing various functions. Thus, the importance of the theory as the basis of our present analysis is therefore most desirable.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TEAMS

The following terms as used in this articles are defined thus:

1. Local government: A local government is the third tier of government created for the purpose of efficient and effective administration of the localities through the provision of limited essential social services in Nigeria. Odenigwe (1977) sees it as the system of local administration under which the local communities are organized to maintain law and order, provide limited range of social services and public amenities and improved condition of living.
2. Development: Development is self-perpetuating and generating improvement of the citizen's potentials, machinery of government and productive institutions to meet the rising freedom from bondage and elimination of exploitation including a fair of equitable distribution of social wealth. Okoye (1985).
3. Rural development: Rural development is the transformation of the rural character of a given society for the improvement of the lots of its inhabitants. Oyaide (1985) defined rural development as to change the rural development in order to improve the social and economic well being of the rural population.
4. Sustainable Development: This is defined as the maintenance of a steady and improvement in the people, the ability and

capacity for a greater freedom, creativity, responsibility, discipline and overall well being and the elimination of exploitation, guaranteed with an existing machinery of government and productive institutions to meet the demands of the people. Nwanekwe (2011).

FUNCTION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Nmenme (2011) and Onwe (2011) in Nigeria the local governments are created to provide limited essential social services to the rural dwellers. The functions are obviously enormous.

According to 1997 decree no. 7, the functions of the local councils are:

- i. Debating, approving and amending the annual budget of the local government council.
- ii. Formulation of economic plans and development scheme for the local government area council.
- iii. Collection of rates and the insurance of Radio and Television licenses.
- iv. Provision and maintenance of burial grounds and homes for the destitute.
- v. Issuance of licenses for bicycles, canoes, wheelbarrows, carts including all other mechanically operated trucks.
- vi. Issuance of roads, parks, gardens, open spaces and other social amenities.
- vii. Numbering and naming of streets and houses.
- viii. Building and maintenance of public sewage and refuse disposal.
- ix. Assessment of privately owned houses for the purposes of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the administrator or the House of Assembly.
- x. The control and regulation of:
 - Outdoor advertising and boarding.
 - Shops and kiosks.
 - Restaurants, bakeries and other places for the sale of food to the public.
 - Laundries.
 - Licenses, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

Consequently, section 27 of the same decree stipulated other functions of local government to include, participation in the state government with respect to:



- The establishment and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.
- To develop agriculture and natural resources other than the exploitation of minerals.
- Provision and maintenance of health facilities.
- And such other functions as may be direct by the state House of Assembly.

All these function as enumerated are all geared towards the achievement of meaningful and sustainable development. Williams (1978) and Okeke (2011) points these out when they posited that, without sound, rural development, there cannot be any balanced and sustainable development. Sustainable Development has thus become a major priority of successive government. See Agba, Akwara and Idu (2013).

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (RURAL AREAS) AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The local government and rural development as a necessary and of course indispensable component of national development has been recognized by development planners at the federal level for quite a long time. The third national development plan 1977-1980 admitted that in the past, the rural areas have lagged behind the urban areas between standard of life. Thus, the need to develop the rural areas because of utmost importance. Onwe, (2011) and Onyeukwu (2011).

Consequently, the fourth National Development plan 1980-1985 proposed a policy to promote a more rapid development of the rural areas through a sustainable effort to raise agricultural productivity and to provide basic human needs as hygienic water supply, health facilities, access roads, electricity etc, this strategies if stressed will not doubt help to provide a basis for even more geographic spread of physical development throughout the country.

Oyaide (1988), asserted that in the past the concentration of development in the urban centres in Nigeria and the huge reconstruction and development efforts which followed the end of the civil war, coupled with the upsurge in the flow of revenue from petroleum products in the seventies. But today, the concept of development in the rural areas has witness rapid changes over the years, from the very simple and basic, to the complex and luxurious. He emphasized that in the pre-colonial

time and even many year after, the communal quest for development did not go much beyond the construction of an elder's pavilion and there is no gain saying that, no country can achieve even and sustainable development without investing heavily on the rural areas.

According to Umebali and Mgbada (2000) no matter the level of a nation's socio-economic, political and of course technological advancement, the rural sector no doubt still plays a significant role in its overall growth and development. Thus, development of the rural areas remains an important factor in national development.

In support of the above view point, Chukwuemeka (2000) and Nmenme (2011) opined that the development policies during the 1970s and early 1980 shifted from mere economic growth to the promotion of equitable distribution of benefit of development thereby reducing the disparity in income and wealth between urban and rural areas, and increasing the productivity and income of the poor.

The cardinal function of the Local Government is to ensure rural development which is precisely meant to improve the life of the rural dwellers. In doing this some scholars have emphasizes the important of women in bringing about he desired change in the life of the average villager.

Umebali and Magbada (2000) suggested that in carrying out development programs for rural welfare, that women should be mobilized through co-operative and other formal association. In deed their effective participation remains of utmost significance.

Deducing from the above dictum one might rightly come to the conclusion that the participation of the beneficiaries of a programme in their various communities which end point remains national development becomes imperative. There is no gain saying therefore that it is a welcome development.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS A FACTOR IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Nwanekwe (2011) and Okeke (2011) Local Government and Rural Development as a factor in sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. It is important to note that the rural areas or local government is an integral part of a nation or national government. Suffice to say



therefore that rural development is only an action taking place in a national development of a nation. It is equally stating the obvious that all urban area passed through the characteristics of a rural area before metamorphosing into an urban area. The priority of any government is to make life more meaningful for its citizens by the provision of such life easing projects mostly referred to as basic infrastructural facilities.

The development of the rural areas remains the only panacea to even sustainable development of any country. The reason for this is by no means far fetched. The bulk of our population, at least 65% eke out a living within the rural environment. Nwanekwe (2009).

Ugwu (2000) the Local Government provider the greatest scope of grass root development. In order to attain the mutual goal of even and sustainable development in Nigeria polity, the rural area remains the first ports of call.

According to Onyeishi (2000), conceptualization of development and scanty political will combine to afflict rural development process in Nigeria. A nation of rural development which excludes the centrality of the people is gross inadequate. As the democratic axiom goes: development is insufficient if it does not involve the beneficiaries as active participants. This is why no other tier of government is as strategic as the local government in this connection in order to ensure sustainable and integrated rural development whose central catechism will be egalitarian framework for rural development with equity...

In support of the above view point, Chukwuemeka (2000) stated that when the people in the rural areas are directly involved both in the development planning and implementation including the decision making process that the desired result will be achieved. This idea is held by many scholars. Idode (1989) equally observed that the role of the bureaucracy in rural development with reference to agriculture, centres and on co-operative movement and self help efforts of the various communities cannot be overemphasized, he equally examined government credit schemes as the collective involvement of the bureaucratic approach to rural development which will lead to a just employment opportunities and qualitative improvement in the nature of rural life. He then posited that meaningful rural development process

which can lead to sustainable development must emphasized mass participation rather than bureaucratic control as key to effective rural development.

In the words of Umeabali (2000) Without sound rural development there can't be balanced national economic development. This suffices to say that economic development of a nation requires the growth and modernization of both rural and urban sectors. Furthermore, since a very large proportion of the total population live in rural area, no national development effort can claim to be successful.

In the same perspective, Oyaide (1976) reiterated the fact that rural development is significant. He said that it is a process whereby all effort is geared towards the facilitation increase in rural resources and productivity with the overall goal and objective of enhancing in its totality, the rural income and increasing employment opportunities in rural communities.

In support of the above assertion, Umeabali and Madu (2000) and Onyeukwu (2011) stated that: the ambit of rural development is very wide. It connotes efforts to increase production, to root out fundamental causes of poverty, disease and ignorance. The paramount objective of rural development is to ensure improved conditions of life and opportunity to remain there. However, the goals/objectives pursued through rural development programme can be itemized as follow:

- Enhanced incomes of rural people engaged in agriculture and rural non-farming activities, including agro industries.
- Reduction in the level of rural poverty and rural unemployment.
- Reduction in inequalities in the distribution of wealth and personal income including a more even distribution of resources.
- Increase in rural value added products.
- Enhanced good health for rural people and the reduction in ignorance through mass literacy and education.
- Enhance quality of life from provision of potable water, electricity, and other basic needs; and
- Integration of rural people into the nation's political and economic process through enhanced political awareness and consciousness and the recognition of the rural resident first and foremost as an



- individual citizen entitled like his urban counterparts, to all good things of life.

Onyeukwu (2011), the strong resolve to attain sustainable development begins and ends with the pattern of life in the rural areas which should be comparatively akin to what is obtainable in the modern Nigeria urban areas. This must have informed the sensibility of the custodian of state powers in Nigeria. Thus, successive regimes in Nigeria. has been aware of this singular and obvious fact and had made several and serious attempts at transforming the rural area in an attempt at attaining sustainable development by the establishment of certain departments, agencies and directorate. Some of such attempt includes, the introduction of Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) by Olusegun Obasanjo administration (1978-1979); Green Revolution (GR) of Shehu Shagari Administration (1979-1983); The Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DEFRI) and Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) Better life for Rural Women of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1998); Poverty Alleviation Programme of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and the 7-point Agenda of President Umaru Musa Yaradua and Ebele Jonathan. See Emejo (2014) and Fajonyomi and Olu-Owolabi (2013).

Significantly, all these programme were designed to make life more meaningful to the rural dwellers as a panacea to the achievement of even and sustainable development. Hence, the government of ousted General Ibrahim Babangida had earlier on granted autonomy to the local government areas of the federation. The intention was to take development to the people at the grassroots. The believe is that when the newly appointed local administrator put up project in the areas, it will help ease the problem that characterized the rural areas which include the maintenance of bridges, culverts, electricity and good drinking water to mention but a few Nwanekwe (2009) and Onyeukwu (2011). See Ajibulu (2012).

It was predicated upon the fact that the provision of social amenities in the rural areas will drastically reduce rural migration, help in population decongestion of and crime reduction in the urban areas, create a sense of belonging in the achievement of even and sustainable development in Nigeria, with it's characteristics Oyishi (2000), Olisa and Obiukwu (1992), and, Onwe (2011).

CONCLUSION

The central idea which should form the nucleus of policy orientation in Nigeria is the aggressive declaration of unallowed support for rural development and transformation. Thus without rural development there cannot be any balanced and national sustainable development. Thus, in carrying out development effort in the rural areas, there is need for effective in co-operation and participation of the beneficiaries of the programme. The current effort of the government is not enough, rather a comprehensive approach to the development of the rural areas should be encouraged in all it's ramification.

Recommendation

In lieu of the prevailing circumstance and trend in sustainable development of the country, this article recommends that:

- i. The provision and maintenance of public amenities should be pursued aggressively.
- ii. Government should partner with private and non-government agencies in the provision and maintenance of public amenities.
- iii. To ensure sustainable and hyper integrated rural development, the government at all levels should build an egalitarian framework for rural development whose major focus should be peoples empowerment and development base on equity.

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