

REDESIGNING NIGERIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT

The crux of this paper is to examine the impact of Nigeria's rural development initiatives with focus on sustainable development Goals (SDGs) One and Two. The study reviewed relevant literatures. The aim of the study was to reveal the impacts of policies and programmes on rural development in Nigeria with specific focus on redesigning the initiatives toward achieving SDGs. The Public Governance theory was utilised as the theoretical framework for the paper. The paper assumed that rural development initiatives have not be impactful as designed. Secondary source of data was obtained from indexes of scholars' work on relevant literature through journal articles, books, seminars and conference papers. The findings revealed that there has been adequate rural development policies and programmes in Nigeria but they have not been impactful meaningfully due to several factors like paucity of fund, corruption, lack of consultation with rural dwellers, diversification of programmes among others. The paper concluded that Nigeria's rural development policies required redesigning to meet contemporary demands for sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Policy, Rural Development, Rural Development Initiatives, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

There has been focus on rural development in Nigeria over the years through policy initiatives for the fortunes of rural dwellers and to curb rural- urban drift, poverty and hunger. Policies and programmes geared towards development cut across the entire country, urban and rural areas for the purpose of advancing the standard of living and quality of lifestyle for citizens. Since the colonial era, the Nigeria's rural areas have been characterised with socio-economic challenges and exclusiveness in governance unlike the urban areas. Ering et al (2014) observed that the rural - urban gap is alarming resulting in rural-urban drift, increase unemployment, shortage of food, hunger, poverty, inflation, overstretched facilities, etc. (Ering, et al, 2014; Saheed, 2010).

The Nigeria government in attempt to rescue the situation has through policies initiatives directed developmental strides towards rural areas. The impacts of these policies seem not to have ameliorate the rural area challenges in terms of consolidated sustainable development and the efforts on rural dwellers towards national wealth and inclusive governance appears not recognised enough by successive government (Gbadebo, et al 2021). However, Adelabu (2019) argued that these efforts were holistically geared towards the development of the rural areas and as such, they were subsumed into policies, programmes and projects which had great impacts on the citizen and that amounts to inclusive governance. Filani (1993) cited in Adelabu (2019) affirm that the initiatives restored improvement and hope in the rural areas in the 1980s to 1990s.

The level of socio-economic, political and administrative challenges observable in the rural communities has become more alarming due to the persistent issues surrounding rural development such as insecurity, herdsman/farmer conflict, dilapidated road, epileptic power supply, and lack of meaningful development projects in rural areas in Nigeria. This study therefore attempts to concisely examine the impacts of Nigeria's rural development initiatives (RDIs) with focus on the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) One –No Poverty and Two –Zero Hunger, to

identify challenges hindering effectiveness of Nigeria's rural development initiatives implementation and to redesign policy towards self-sustainable development.

Statement of Problem

Development as a global phenomenon requires resources and governmental efforts. Nigeria rural areas had received numerous governmental resources and efforts since independence. These efforts were met to reduce rural-urban gap and challenges (Atairet, et al, 2021). Yet, RDIs had been observed not to have yielded to expectations and certain factors identified seems to hinder their impacts and implementation. Thus, Tom (2015) opined that implementation is a critical step in public policy. The lack of inclusiveness of rural dwellers, resources inefficiency, lack of inclusion of the future generation (Okazie and Baharuddin, 2013) etc are some factors identified as obstacles to effectiveness of rural development initiatives in contemporary Nigeria.

Despite government efforts targeted at improving the rural areas through developmental initiatives and inclusion of the local people in governance, the observable improvement is not commensurate with the efforts. Thus, there is need to redesign, refocus and redirect RDIs towards sustainability of development among rural dwellers in modern day society. This paper therefore seeks to answer the following questions: Are there rural development policies initiatives in Nigeria? If there are, how effective their implementation? Are there challenges obstructing RDIs' implementation? If there are, can they be tackled? Can they be redesigned towards sustainable development?

Objectives of the study

This paper examined Nigeria's RDIs with specific focus on redirecting the initiatives towards sustainable development. Thus, the purpose of the study is to

1. Examine the impacts of Nigeria's rural development initiatives on rural areas
2. Determine factors obstructing effectiveness of policy initiatives on rural development
3. Redesign policies on rural development initiatives for Sustainable Development Goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted methodology is the descriptive method where data were obtained from indexes of scholars' work on relevant literature through textbooks, journals articles, publications, newspapers, papers presented in seminars and conferences. The fourth republic of Nigeria RDIs is the scope of this study with the rural areas as the population.

Theoretical Framework

Public Governance Theory

Public governance theory has evolved over time with various influential scholars in the public governance field. Woodrow Wilson haven laid the foundation of public administration and governance studies in 1887, had other great scholars who propaganda the concept. Mark Moore in 1995 emphasizes on creating public value through strategic management, innovation, initiative and collaboration in public affairs. Geoff Mulgan in 2009 emphasised on the relevance of collaboration, innovation and community engagement in public governance, this is inclusiveness. Moreso, Stephen Osborne in 2010 stressed on networking, partnership and collaboration in public governance. Public governance theory postulated that governance entails collaboration, partnership, inclusive participatory governance, accountability and transparency, performance management and public value creation etc.

The implication of this theory is that Nigeria government policy on rural development requires inclusive leadership that will create value, transparency and quality management through quality collaboration and partnership with the rural dwellers to utilise development initiatives for the advancement of the rural communities within the available resources provided by government. This

further implies that government RDIs formulation and implementations should adopt partnership and inclusive leadership approach.

Conceptual Clarification

Policy: Policy is any government action or inaction in the interest of the people

Rural: Any population, housing or territory not necessarily in an urban area but has the characteristics of underdevelopment

Development: It is the state, act, process or result of advancement, improvement or progress

Initiative: A new plan, programme or activity that help solve a problem or achieve a policy

RDIs: This refers to policy, programme or projects, whether short, middle or long-term basis that is formulated or to be formulated towards pursuing rural development in Nigeria.

Politricking: In this context, it means the act of engaging in tricking politics, the politics of deception or deceiving people (public) politically, so as to attain selfish or personal gain.

Literature Review

Concept of Policy

Policy is a set of rules, principles, guidelines, or framework that is designed and adopted for the achievement of targeted goal(s). In other word, policy is an administrative system guided by interest rather than principles, when such interest is for the good of all members of the society, it is public policy. Policies are denotable as public or private, it is public policy when administrators execute it (Okeke, 2015). Okeke and Ifeagwazi (2018) sees policy as a definite course of action selected from several alternatives to guide and determine present and future decisions.

Rural development

The ideology of rural development has been conceived from several diverse scholar's perspective, however, the process of improving the quality of life of a people dwelling in rural settings is rural development. Atkinson (2017) perceived rural development as social and economic efforts intended to enhance growth and expansion of every sphere of lives in areas outside cities. Nwachukwu (2009) rural development entails the process of improving on the standard of living and maximisation of per capita income of the rural population. Atair et al (2021) further clarified that standard of living depends on several factors such as housing, education, security, food, poverty level, health and economic activities. Eme (2009) perceived rural development as any form of strategy met to improve a specific group of people. A development economist Lele (1975) cited by Atair et al (2021) opined that any improved means of low income population is rural development.

Steiner and Atterton (2015) perceived rural development as any undertaken designed for transformational outcome as occasioned by global and environmental changes. It is a dramatic shift in traditional rural jobs of farming, mining, and manufacturing to a balance employment in construction and services (Irwin et al 2010). In addition, Radhika (2019) buttressed that rural development entail building of lives of people in social, religious, cultural, security, political and economic circumstances. Thus, Tadele (2020) concluded that rural development is mainly economic issue that relates to raising the low levels of rural income through modernisation strategies. It is trite to note that rural development has gone beyond merely economic issues into every sphere of life of the populace with inadequate basic amenities of life. This position was maintained by Sarabu (2018) that rural development is the general improvement of life and well-being of people living in rural areas. Atair et al (2021) conclude that all definitions on rural development have common element that it is the "making rural area comfortable for the rural dwellers".

Rural Development Initiatives (RDIs)

Rural development focus on multi-dimensional concepts thus, the rationale behind initiatives that can advocate for rural development is to foster prospective present and future sustenance of development among rural people (World Bank, 2021). Initiatives are directed programmes that helps achieve development in rural setting, alleviate poverty and hunger, and life challenges in rural areas. The UNDP (2021) observed that the level of poverty and life challenges in rural areas commonly identifiable in the twenty first century is high and has turned so many household hopeless and powerless in rural setting. RDIs are the identifiable programmes enumerated, adopted and directed towards rural development. Thus, Luqman et al (2021) opined that RDIs are required to tackle issues from the grassroots for effective sustainable development. RDIs are policies and programmes centred on rural development to improve basic life amenities, economic and general well-being of people.

Impacts of Nigeria's RDIs on rural development

Nigeria government has implemented numerous RDIs providing a rich context for research and analysis because RDIs is a long phenomenon in Nigeria. Rural development dates back to colonial administration whereby development plans were formulated and implemented but with insignificantly impact on the Nigeria rural areas (Adelabu; 2019). Researches reviewed that these policies and RDIs were designed to extract surpluses from rural areas to meet imperial industries in Europe (Ujo; 1994, Nwaezike; 2009, Akpan; 2012) cited in (Adelabu; 2019). Rural dwellers were excluded from governance and the initiatives. Atairet et al (2021) noted that farm settlement and plantation scheme of 1959/1960 was one of the initiatives. The RDIs during colonial era were tailored towards exploitation of Nigeria's resources to advance Europe course with emphasis on agricultural development and productivities. Onimode (1981), Nnadozie (1986) and Iwuagwu (2006) cited in Adelabu (2019) observed that the effects of the colonial polices on rural dwellers impoverished and exploited the people, with no positive change.

With independence, the hope of rural people yearned towards development. The Nigeria government then was faced with the responsibility of bridging rural-urban development gap by introducing several policy and initiatives at different time. Adelabu (2019) and Atairet et al (2021) noted that most of these RDIs focused mainly on agricultural sector such as the Natural Acceleration Food Production Programme (NAFPP) of 1972, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976, Agricultural Development Programme (ADPs) of 1976, Agriculture Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) of 1973, Green Revolution (GR) of 1980, Directorate for Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) of 1986, Better Life for Rural Women (BLFRW) of 1987, Family Econ9oomic Advancement Programme (FEAP) of 1997, etc. Adelabu (2019) argued that these RDIs were tailored towards achieving development policy and goals. Filani (1993) cited in Adelabu (2019) observed that these initiatives restored the hope of Nigerians in 1980s and 1990s.

The initiatives merely translate agricultural development to incorporation of development and expansion of rural infrastructures, emphasis on poverty alleviation, hunger reduction and socio-economic empowerment in rural communities (Adelabu, 2019, Atairet et al, 2021). Thus, Filani (1993), Muagbalu (1992) and Chuba (1997) cited in Adelabu (2019) observed that the impact of these policies towards rural development was seen practically during General Babangida regime when the provision feeder roads, rural waters and electrification in some rural areas in Nigeria, The BLFRW was designed towards alleviation of poverty and hunger. Most of the policies and RDIs under Babangida regime were observed to have migrated and become political institutions for propaganda (Adelabu, 2019). The aim of some of these initiatives could not yield significant impact on the rural people because of several factors such as government failure to release fund, lack of effective coordination and harmonisation amongst tiers of government, political interference, corruption and unchallenged military might (Haruna, 2000; Adelabu, 2019).

Rural Development in Nigeria Fourth Republic

With the advent of democracy, the fourth republic governments has consciously made efforts towards rural developments through poverty alleviation, decrease hunger and creation of employment opportunities. Adelabu (2019) observed that due to the lingered poverty, hunger and underdevelopment issues in Africa, the World Bank in 1997 consented to take measures in addressing underdevelopment challenges in Africa. Hence, in year 2000, Africa leaders adopted the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) as an initiatives to address poverty, hunger and underdevelopment in Africa. This necessitated the establishment of National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 as a strategic policy to address rural development issues in Nigeria. NAPEP programme was coordinated nationwide through involvement of all tiers of government by State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Government Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS), this was an inclusive leadership. The aim of NAPEP was to train youths in vocational trade, create employment, and provide social welfare scheme for rural people. Adoyi (2010) observed that it was an elaborate structure policy with RDIs to match rural development issues but the programme implementation turned out to be more concentrated in urban areas (Akpan, 2012; Adelabu, 2019). This policy like others became a failure due to poor rural involvement, failure to focus on rural areas which it was initially designed, inconsistency of the programme and poor implementation.

Apart from NAPEP, there are other policies, programmes and projects (RDIs) targeted towards rural development in Nigeria such as the Nigeria Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Development Bank Ltd (NACRDB) of 2000, Agricultural and Rural Transformation programme (ARTP) of 2000, National Special Programme\ on Food Security (NSPFS) of 2002), Root and Tubers Expansion Programme (RTEP) of 2003, Microfinance Bank (MB) of 2005, Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation (WYEF) of 2007), Women for Change Initiative (WFCI) of 2017, Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) of 2012, Community Service Scheme (CSS), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) of 2012, You Win of 2011, NPOWER of 2016, Trader Moni of 2016, etc. These RDIs were targeted to bridge rural-urban developmental gap in Nigeria, alleviate poverty and hunger, create employment, encourage entrepreneurship, advance human basic needs of food, shelter, clothing and health to improve the quality and standard of living and allow inclusive governance especially at the rural level, etc. (Atairret, et al, 2021, Adelabu, 2019, Akpan, 2012). The effects of RDIs were observed to be inadequately felt by the rural dwellers, when compare to urban settlers' benefits. Of these same RDIs implementations. Thus, forsaking the actual target of rural development. Adelabu (2019) pointed out that the Nigeria government placed emphasis on collaboration and complementation from other tiers of government, agencies, NGOs, and local as well as international institutions to ensure that these policies and initiatives are successful yet it has become an avenue for siphoning money (Atairret, et al, 2021).

Factors Obstructing Effectiveness of policies Initiatives on Rural Development in Nigeria

Despite the aforementioned RDIs designed by government towards rural development in Nigeria, the rural dwellers standard of living seems not significantly improved as envisaged as a result of the following factors but not limited to

1. **Top-Down/ Transactional Approach:** Most RDIs are designed by federal government and transmitted to rural areas. Atairret et al, (2021) argued that there is no doubt RDIs emanated from the top and sent down to the rural people, but they should not be imposed on the people, hence failure will be inevitable for lack of conformity, lack of inclusive governance contribute to RDIs failure because it gives room for distrust and opposition . Thus, Onah and Okeke (2009) cited in Atairret, et al, (2021) said:

"...formulation of national policies and programmes is the responsibility of government. However, these policies and programmes should not be imposed by government in any donor, agency but rather should be articulated by the people themselves in conformity with their various needs and aspiration. It is only through this way that development programme can be effectively executed and sustained..."

2. **Paucity of Fund/ Corruption:** Finance is the engine required to drive home successfully any deliberate efforts geared towards rural development. Where funds are not released adequately, implementation of RDIs is impaired and unproductive. Also, where fund is made available, it should be utilised for the purpose it is met for, because introduction of any form of corruption- embezzlement of fund assigned for rural development policies and programmes, deception, diversification and misappropriation of fund, use of sub-standard material etc will thwart the success of the RDIs implementation. In fact, Adelabu (2019) argued that the standard of life of the rural people has not improved due to endemic and incessant manifestation of corruption. The 2020 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) reviewed that most countries are failing to stop corruption. Nigeria was rated the 24th country in the world with the index of failure to curb corruption from the highest ranking. Thus, corruption and inadequate funding has constituted failure to well-designed RDIs.
3. **Lack of continuity of policies/programme:** in Nigeria today, lack of continuity of RDIs has been bane to rural development, because eventually every successive administration/government tends to develop and design its own RDIs to existing issues or problems. Atairet, et al (2021) noted that every government design its own programme and strategies to tackle one common problem. Most new administrations hardly continues with an already existing RDIs to bring same to completion as design, even when the government emanate from the same ruling political party. Thus, Omorede and Ighorhiowunu (2023) depicted that successive government and leaders had made several attempts since independence to undo successive policy just for personal, or party interest, to the detriment of the general public. Thus, Helms (2020) perceived this practice as barbaric and odd to democratic norms in contemporary world because such practice jettison an already existing beautiful or quality RDIs. This factor hinders rural dwellers from benefiting RDIs.
4. **Politricking/leadership problem:** The problem of the rural areas has remained stagnant and worse off despite purported efforts by government to tackle rural development problems. The rationale for the continuous unabated rural underdevelopment is occasioned by political leaders who uses RDIs as means to deceive the people (year in year out) with optimistically designed unattainable RDIs. In fact, most politicians uses the rural areas predicament to play politics with deceptive promises, lack of political will, etc. Hence, Omorede and Ighorhiowunu (2023) stated that both political and administrative leaders in Nigeria play around the gallery of "political rhetorical attempts to proffer solutions to societal (rural) problems; the same problem they created themselves..." politics indeed is the authoritative distribution of available resources within the society (Guy, 2010). Leaders today continue to politrick with RDIs, and the implementation of RDIs are given to unqualified political allies or personnel to handle. The effect of politricking with RDIs is that the political and administrative leaders according to Omorede and Ighorhiowunu (2023) is to continuously keep rural areas undeveloped.
5. **Diversification and inadequate monitoring/evaluation of RDIs:** Well-designed RDIs are often diversified and redirected to urban areas. This is possible due to inadequate monitoring and evaluation of RDIs designated for rural development without inclusiveness of the rural people who lack knowledge of government's RDIs. RDIs and policies made are required to be thoroughly evaluated before, during and after implementation to know the

level of effectiveness it has on the intended beneficiaries and to curb any unpredicted impediment. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation encourages diversification of RDIs resources (Atairet, et al, 2021).

Redesigning RDIs for SDGs

The rationale for redesigning Nigeria's RDIs for SDGs and the solution to the aforementioned RDIs challenges entails multiple scope (Ekong, 2010) to include but not limited to:

1. **Bottom-Up/ Participatory /Inclusive Approach:** For RDIs to foster rural development, they should be redesigned to encourage inclusiveness and participatory to the rural people from policy formulation and implementation. This approach will attract significant change in rural development for actualising SDGs Number One and Two. Mayer et al (2016) collaborated this position that endogenous development approach is characterised by rural control of the development process holistically utilising available resources judiciously. This approach required wide consultation and inclusive governance for SDGs.
2. **Bridging rural-urban linkages and gaps:** Rural-Urban development gap is quite enormous, there is need to redesign RDIs that would close the gap for development course. To achieve this, is to relate the movement of people, goods, and services, information and finances etc between the urban and rural areas (Jamshed, et al 2020). To balance the inequality, Tacolis and Mabala (2010) collaborated that it will results in equal employment opportunity, market and economic advancement, synergy between rural natural resources like food and agricultural products and urban resources such as quality healthcare, education, infrastructure development. Gebre and Gebremedlin, (2019) added that these resources will be adequately made available for quality lifestyle, reduced poverty, hunger, insecurity and social vulnerability rate. Thus, Jamshed, et al (2020) opined that this approach will foster achievement of SDGs One and Two.
3. **Promotion of technology:** To redesign RDIs towards achieving SDGs One and Two, requires embracing modern innovation and technology that can meet present global demand of quality lifestyle. Rahman, et al (2022) opined that technology is the rightful disposal of natural resources for quality advantages, and that its' advancement should be able to redesigned RDIs for Socio-economic growth in contemporary world. The rural dwellers should be trained to acquire technical and technological skills for their own developmental purposes because it will foster rural development.
4. **Adequate funding/implementation/Monitoring and Evaluation:** Resource inefficiency has be bane to RDIs over the years, to resolve these impediments and attain SDGs, resources availability and judicious utilisation of scare allocated resources should be the watchword (Guy, 2010). Redesigning RDIs is fundamental to match modern global socio-economic developmental trends (Tadele, 2020). In addition, Radhike (2019) argued that quality implementation of rural development policies/programme will canvass for quality lifestyle of the rural people in all sphere of life. To achieve effective and impactful RDIs implementation, Omorede and Ighorhiohwunu (2023) depicted that administrative leaders should act professionally and utilise available resources to facilitate results-oriented implementation of policies for good governance and administrative progression. In the opinion of Tom (2015), implementation of policy /programmes remains one fundamental steps in public policy. Atairet, et al (2021) also supported this argument that that those saddle with implementation of policy/programmes should be thorough, monitored and evaluated for efficiency.
5. **Continuity of Existing Polices/ Programmes:** Government and governance is a continuity and therefore, RDIs should be completed once formulated irrespective of the ruling party, individual or administration because abandonment of any existing policy/programme

is a cog to development tactics. Helms (2020) in support said government should at all-times ensure that policy/ programme from formation to completion is not terminated, abrogated or jettisoned to avert waste of resources. Atairet et al (2021) collaborated this point that RDIs should span through incubation stage to execution stage for development to occur.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is crystal clear that Nigeria government made adequate efforts towards rural development over the years through initiation of policies and programmes. However, these initiatives were observed not to have had adequate significant sustainable impact on the rural dwellers because the little impacts RDIs had on rural development had not be adequately felt because most rural communities in Nigeria are still bedevilled with the characteristics of underdevelopment in contemporary world that is set to attain Sustainable Development Goals in 2030, Especially goal One and Two. Responsible identified failure factors were addressed and redesigned towards bridging rural-urban gaps and linkages and achieving SDGs. Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made

1. Wide consultation of all stakeholders and inclusive governance towards bridging rural-urban gap is necessary.
2. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) should ensure that rural dwellers are adequately educated and empowered with modern development technology for digital transformation.
3. RDIs should be well funded, monitored, evaluated and completed irrespective of the administration that initiated or commences it.

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