Abstract

This paper theoretically discusses the concept of rural development in Nigeria. The issues involved, prospects, problems and solutions. The objective of the paper include:

(a) The components of a typical rural area in Nigeria and components of a desirable rural area.
(b) The issues that are involved in rural areas.
(c) Identification of different approaches adopted in developing the rural areas in Nigeria and the effectiveness of the approaches.
(d) Identifying the prospects of developing rural areas and the problems facing rural development.
(e) To make appropriate recommendations for improving the rural area.

The paper tries to analyze the conditions that exist in a typical rural area and what should exist in a developed rural area via a change process. The different approaches used in achieving desirable rural development were also assessed. The paper also looks at the gains and problems affecting rural development and finally brought out likely solutions to rural development efforts.

Introduction

Concept of Rural Development

There is no consensus as to the definition of rural development and this constitutes its initial problems.

Different schools of thought had given different definitions to rural development.

Diejomah (1973) defined it as a process of increasing the level of living of rural population, measured by food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security.

Adegboye (1973) defines it as the development of the rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to most effectively and efficiently utilize their intellect, technology and other resources for further development of both themselves and their resources.

Uwakah, (1985) sees it as a change process which involves moving the rural people from what is to what ought to be.

From the definitions above, it is clear that the object of rural development is the rural people who Olatunbosun (1973) called Nigeria’s neglected majority and Anthoni (1981) called them the stagnant sector in the Nigerian economy while Ijere (1981) called them the other Nigeria with poverty linked characteristics.

According to Williams (1978) the ambit of rural development is very wide and includes generation of new employment, more equitable access to arable land, equitable distribution of income, wide spread improvement in health, nutrition and housing, maintenance of law and order, creation of incentives and opportunity for saving, credit and investment. It also involves creating wider opportunities for individuals to realize their full potential through education and sharing in decisions and actions which affect their lives.

All said and done, the salient point in the definition of rural development is raising the standard of living of the rural people through their own efforts coupled with government assistance.

Issues Involved in Rural Development

To appreciate fully why rural areas should be improved, it becomes necessary to consider what is obtained in a typical rural set up and desirable condition in a changed rural setup.

This could be represented in a cycle as shown in the next page.
Actually what obtains in cycle B is what we love the rural area to be, therefore the effort or process of moving people from A to B is called Rural Development. This means that rural development does not start and stop with one aspect of people’s way of life like agriculture, health or education. It involves a multi dimensional/disciplinary approach.

It could be visualized as an umbrella housing different components and should any part thereof get spoilt or cut off, the umbrella becomes destroyed and can therefore serve no further useful purpose.

It therefore means that for a meaningful rural development to occur, every aspect of human endeavour must be respected and attended to. This shows further that agriculture is as important to people the way education is as well as health and rural electrification and rural water supply.

**Sources:** Adapted from Uwakah C.C. Lecture on Agric. Extension Education UNN 1985 (Unpublished)

**Approaches/Strategies for Rural Development**

Increased attention has been given to rural development in Nigeria. The attention is justified because rural transformation is a requisite foundation for social and economic progress. Nigeria has...
adopted several approaches/strategies towards improving the well being of the rural dwellers. Such strategies include:-

- Community Development
- Agricultural Extension
- Coordinated Rural Development
- Integrated Rural Development.

(a) **Community Development**

This is designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and initiative of the people. It works primarily through the enlistment and organization of self-help and cooperative efforts on the part of the community but with technical assistance from government or voluntary agencies. It emphasizes group action in improving rural conditions. This means that the welfare of the group supercedes the welfare of an individual.

The term connotes that people themselves exert their own effort joining with government authorities to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions. It is not concerned with any one aspect of life such as agriculture, business, health or education. Here people work together to shape their own future. The effectiveness of this strategy will depend largely on the extent to which government encourages local planning and participation.

(b) **Agricultural Extension**

This is essentially the education of the farming community on ways of raising their standard of living. It grew out of the need to extend the benefits of new knowledge, facts and ideas arising out of intensive research to all the people. Maunder (1972:3) defined Extension as “A science which deals with the creation, transmission and application of knowledge designed to bring about planned changes in the behaviour complex of people with a view to helping them live a better life through learning new ways of improving their vocation, enterprises and institutions”. Williams (1978) summed up Extension in three basic task comprising:

a. Disseminating useful information
b. Applying it to analysis of practical problem
c. Helping people to use it to help themselves.

Extension concentrated on the development of agriculture as the economic foundation for rural progress but it is also indirectly concerned with other rural problems such as health, nutrition, cooperatives and cooperates with other agencies directly responsible for promoting and facilitating these services which are not exclusively agriculture. The success of this approach depends on the competence and morale of the staff as well as taking the farmers into confidence and the effectiveness of Extension is measured by its ability to change a static situation into a dynamic one.

(c) **Integrated Rural Development**

This appears to offer the best solution to our rural development efforts. It is based on the understanding that a combination of factors not only the right technology and education, but also access to physical inputs, attractive market, provision of infrastructure are essential to get our rural areas moving. It is a multipurpose approach in which case, programmes of agriculture, education, health, rural electrification, cooperatives etc are considered in connection with each other rather than being treated in isolation. This approach is integral because all of its components are important and appreciated for the part they played both individual and collectively. The primary objective of this approach is the mobilization of human and material resources for the creation of a healthy national economy whose benefits will be fairly shared among all the rural people. It combines active participation of the people concerned with establishment of an efficient institution and administrative facilities supplying effective communication at all levels. E.g. like what is supposed to obtain in ADPS (Agriculture Development Programmes) in Nigeria.

(d) **Co-Ordinate Rural Development**

This is more or less in line with integrated rural development. It is the efforts of universities to help in rural development. The Universities have recognized their responsibilities to extend practical knowledge acquired from research to surrounding rural community within the universities’ environments. It is in line with this that University of Ife established the Isoya rural development project, UNN established Okpuje Pilot Project 16km away from the campus while the ABU Zaria established AERLS. (Agric. Extension research liaison services).

In this Okpuje Project in UNN, for example Home Economists, Geographers, Agric. Economists, Extensionist, Animal, Crop and Soil Scientists all work towards a common goal. The geographer takes
cares of weather forecast, the extensionist teaches the farmers how to tackle farm problems, agricultural economist formulates policy leading to solution of farmers’ problems while soil scientists tests the soil.

**Prospects of Rural Development**

A lot of prospects would be derived from developing the rural areas if properly done. Such prospects include:

a. Employment would be enhanced because there would be job opportunities.

b. There would be reduction in rural-urban migration resulting to healthier urban environment.

c. There would be increase in agricultural productivity thus bringing about generation and conservation of scarce foreign exchange. E.g. generation in the sale of cash crops and surplus food grains and conservation in the stoppage of importation of foodstuff. It is clear that a country that is self-sufficient in food production enjoys a reasonable measure of power status to a certain degree in the world and can be use food effectively as a powerful weapon of foreign policy.

d. There would be an increase in the living standard of people through better food and nutritional level, better health, education, housing, better roads, provision of infrastructure, recreation and security.

e. Bridge income gap between the urban dwellers and rural dwellers (income parity).

f. Bring about changes in attitude (behaviour), skill and knowledge through better education.

g. Rural development is a sine qua non/conditions for proper take off of industrial, agricultural and economic development since it allows both urban and rural sector to grow in harmony.

**Problems**

Although a lot of a better prospects exist from rural development programmes but it has not been easy to fully tap all these prospects. This is because there are different problems weighing down the progress of these rural development programmes. Such problems include:

1. There is high rate of rural/urban migration and this continuously depleted the rural work force.

2. Most of the programmes planned are not being executed from the rural area rather from the cities. More often than not, programme meant for an area are planned in the cities without taking into consideration the actual need of the community or the participation of the local people themselves. That is national plans are often creations of federal and state technocrats located in urban areas, who assume away the needs and expectations of the local communities.

3. There is problem of misapproportion of fund meant for the programmes. The man at the top and virtually all the participants in the programme are interested in the budget and the money. Most often money is not released at all and when released, it comes very late and this hampers the programme so planned.

4. There is problem of distrust and in-fighting among the officials in top hierarchy. People are victimized and oppressed at will to the extent that often merit and hard-work are sacrificed at the altar of laziness and dishonesty.

5. Political set-up of the country has dealt a big blow on the programmes. Most of our programmes are crash programmes and none has ever reached to zenith before being nipped in the bud. This constant change and replacement of the same programme with different name tends to frustrate the people e.g. before our people could understand what NAFPP was, it was replaced with OFN and before OFN could get underway, it was replace with G/R etc.

6. All the programmes are met with conflict of interest. People find it difficult to appreciate the role of each other. E.g. it is confusing on what are the roles of ADP, DFRRI, NALDA and how they co-relate. Even in ADP itself, there is a problem of where to concentrate. Is it extension or engineering where there is contract?

7. There is lack of incentives for the programme staff, inadequate moral support from the top e.g. in ADP, most of the Extension staff remained on one salary grade for too long. Majority are not mobile and their milage claims as well as leave allowances are hardly paid. While the top hierarchy enjoy overseas trips, the subordinates are left to rot away. How would one expect wonders from this group of workers? The truth is that the rural villagers will continue to miss the opportunity of gaining their training and education.

8. There is problem of manpower. Experts and qualified men are lacking. This is because of the fact that experts are often lost to private sectors which offer something more lucrative and also where there is attraction of working from the cities. Therefore the greatest problems with rural development lie with the attitude, dedication, and competence of personnel involved. Inadequate training and misuse of the trained staff as well as inadequate staffing.
9. Inadequate financing and lack of honest commitments on the part of the government and the policy makers. In most cases, there is lack of full understanding of the programmes’ objectives by the states resulting to gradual decline of the logistic and financial support as the programme progresses.

10. The programmes have always been faced with inability to devise means of implementing them, supervising, co-ordinating and monitoring them. The programmes were hardly given honest evaluation if there were evaluated at all.

Solutions
Having worked on this topic extensively, there is need to suggest some recommendations which the writer hopes will be of help to rural development. The following are recommended:

1. Rural development agencies like Agricultural Extension, Rural Health, Cooperative etc should be made more attractive. In fact there is need to borrow a leaf from Oil Industries, Marketing and Banking Institutions medical and legal institutions. This will help reduce the flow of trained staff/experts from the rural development agencies to other institutions which appear more rewarding.

2. There should exist a data bank from where data will always be collected to evaluate and equate past with present so as to know whether we are making progress or not. This means that there is need for both terminal and mean evaluation of our programmes.

3. There should be adequate fund and environmental conditions such as economic situation, political system and what obtains in the system should be favourable and conducive.

4. Programmes should be planned in line with people’s need and involve participation of the local people. The success of any development project depends on the participation and cooperation of the local people who are also the beneficiaries. Indigenous knowledge of the local people should be taken into consideration. That is there is need to know where the people are, what they do and why they do them. Our development planners often fail to appreciate the indigenous knowledge of the local people and as a result their programme may fail e.g. N.S.I. Maize introduced in the early sixties to solve the problem of low productivity of local maize in Nigeria was not adopted by the farmers because consumers did not accept it due to its colour and the hardiness of the kernel.

5. Most rural adults have many other priorities, needs and problems competing for their time and attention. Whatever the kind of educational or rural development programme planned, rural people need to understand fully the necessity, meaning and value of such programme so that they will regard them as real need and not imposed need.

6. There should be proper and adequate training for staff so as to meet the training needs of the staff.

7. There is equally need for provision of rural infrastructure such as electricity, pipe borne water, feeder roads etc so as to make life worth living in the rural area.

8. Since most of our development programmes suffer lack of co-ordination and implementation, there is need for cordial relationship and mutual understanding of one another in the programme, need for spirit of give and take rather than in-fighting, distrust, victimization, suppression and oppression. E.g., in ADP, it is reasonable that the Chief Engineer should see the Chief Technical officer as a working colleague rather than as an opponent.

9. There is serious need to motivate positively staff of the various rural development agencies especially the field staff so that they would have sense of belonging which will then spur them into appreciating their jobs and doing them well.

10. Finally, the most viable solution to our rural development problems is complete change of attitude by our people and honest commitment by all so as to correct the notion that an average Nigerian is very dishonest and selfishly too greedy.

Summary and Conclusion
This paper has tried to discuss the concept of rural development, its anticipated gains and its inherent problems as well as the solutions to the problems. The major goals of rural development were found to include:

- Increased productivity of ruralities and rural employment opportunities
- The full participation of all rural people in the process of development.
- Equitable distribution of its benefits.
- The provision of basic needs and amenities.

Rural development should rather be seen as a comprehensive mode of social transformation which
would recognize that national development must involve all elements of the population and seeks to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources and incomes within a society. People should be helped to develop themselves by participation in decision and co-operative activities which affect their well-being. They should not be herded like animals into new ventures they do not understand the benefits. Rural development should therefore be accorded the highest and honest priority in all future development efforts.

In conclusion, there is need for a rural development strategy that will make the rural dweller the centre piece of our future development by provision of progressive rural infrastructural facilities in an integral rather than sectorial fashion. It is therefore a big challenge to our rural development experts/agencies including Agric. Extension experts to evolve a better and result oriented approach towards the problems of rural development. It is certain that unless we give honest attention to our rural development strategies and change our behavioural attitudes, we will remain unproductive and unable to contribute to our economic development.

References


