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Author

Nwosu, Nereus I.A.

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THE STATE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

by Nereus I. A. Nwosu

Nigerian governments to date have been biting off more than they can chew. The level and structure of successive development plans and annual budgets attest to this. So does the persistent tendency of higher levels of government to take over or duplicate the functions of lower levels. The result of all this is that permanent success and achievements are not being recorded in any single sector. It has all along been a case of one step forward and two steps backwards in virtually all sectors of the economy, and this has led to a situation in which Nigeria today cannot boast of a single sector where development problems have by and large been solved and where dynamic, self-sustaining growth has been assured. The matter is complicated by the fact that over several years, government has continuously raised the expectation of the people in respect of the benefits to come from government policies. Unfortunately, these expectations have always remained unfulfilled.¹

Since the mid 1970s, rural development has become an important issue in Nigeria's development policy. Before this period attention was mostly concentrated on the development of the few urban towns where the elite who constitute the vocal minority reside. The main interest of the policy makers in connection with the rural areas was how to transport rural products such as food, handicraft, and pottery to the urban dwellers who use most of these products.

The first real attention to rural development paid by the Nigerian State was in the preparation of the *Guidelines To The Third National Development Plan*. Here, it was conceived that rural development tactics during the period would devote attention to:

- (i) raising productivity in agriculture, the predominant occupation of the rural areas;
- (ii) providing basic social amenities such as water, medical services, schools, and electricity.

Similar objectives were also articulated in the *Guidelines to the Fourth National Development Plan*. This new focus on rural development by the government becomes very evident in this statement by President Babangida:

Rural development policy will move away from the past narrow sectorial preoccupation with the generation of food and fibre

surpluses to overall formation of a national development strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural poverty and the enhancement of the quality of rural life.²

It is also pertinent to say that this recent vogue led to the inclusion of rural development in the manifestos of the two "grassroots" parties—the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention—formed by the government for the Third Republic. It is, therefore, important to state from the onset that, like most developing countries, the Nigerian State intervenes decisively in the development process. However, whether this intervention leads to success or failure is another matter which forms the major focus of this study. In attempting to uncover this, the study undertakes a review of four government projects—"Operation Feed the Nation" (OFN), "The Green Revolution," the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and "Better Life for Rural Women—that have the ability to uplift the standard of living of rural Nigerians. However, a discussion of the concept of rural development will be given before the review in order to avoid any methodological problem that might arise from a misconception of terms.

The Concept of Rural Development

Rural development as a concept poses a problem of definition due to the absence of standard usage. It thus assumes different meanings depending on the perception of the analyst. The various arguments on what rural development is will be found in the works of Kocher, Waters, Hewes, Lele, Brown, Omari, Williams, Mabogunje, and Phillips.³

The different views on what constitutes rural development notwithstanding, all seem to agree that certain factors must exist before rural development can be said to exist. The most significant is that there must be an improvement in the standard of living of the rural people in such a way that they will feel the impact of development like those in the cities. This paper adopts the definition of rural development put forward by Phillips, which states that "rural development is a process of improving the quality of rural dwellers' social well-being."⁴ According to him, such a process has three major components:

- (i) raising rural people's living standards such as incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, and education;

(ii) creating conditions conducive to the growth of rural people's self-esteem through the establishments of socio-political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect;

(iii) increasing rural people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables.

The analysis of the four government policies in relation to rural development will thus be based on these principles.

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and The Green Revolution

The OFN was one of the attempts made by the Nigerian government to popularize agriculture and to uplift the life of rural dwellers and that of all Nigerians. Its major disciple, General Obasanjo, has the following to say on this point:

The major thrust and focus of our policy on agriculture centered on Operation Feed the Nation. . . . It was meant to dramatize and put in bold relief the danger of inadequate production of food for our population. We sought to bring home vividly. . . to the nation the necessity for involvement of all citizens in food provision not necessarily as farmers, but morally, physically, financially, psychologically, and, of course, politically. Our intent was to demonstrate the multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted nature of the problem of agricultural and food production and similar nature in the approach to the solution. OFN was to demonstrate the commitment to and the co-ordination at the highest political level of the solution to the problem of agricultural and food production. Our concern was to dignify and popularize farming and to provide essential infrastructural base for all categories of farmers and agro-allied industrialists, through the provision of the essential and critical input subsidies which had always been absent. In a nutshell, the OFN was meant to have a demonstration effect by example.⁵

Despite these lofty heights set for the OFN by its originators, little heed was paid to the rural farmers who are directly concerned with agricultural production in Nigeria. Instead, the OFN became a propaganda programme for top government officials in both the electronic and print media. The initiative to use it to uplift not only agricultural production but also the standard of living of rural Nigerians was, therefore, lost from inception. According to Falola and Ihonvbere,

the lack of initiative within the dominant classes, except in the areas of commerce, real estate, contracts, and so on, their corruption and disposition towards importation as against production, inhibited the successful implementation of policy or the equitable allocation of national resources. This was the fate of the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which was initiated and executed on television and bill-boards by well-dressed and rosy-cheeked army generals and top bureaucrats. The public quickly nicknamed the programme Obasanjo Finish Naira (OFN) or Operation Finish Naira (OFN).⁶

This is further supported by Onimode, who states, "The fundamental flaw in both OFN and "The Green Revolution" schemes is that they tried to mobilized everybody but the peasant producers themselves."⁷ In a similar vein, Watts and Lubeck writes:

OFN was a largely propagandistic strategy directed at mass motivation and incentives. Almost 30,000 post-secondary students were paid N£ 96 per month to participate in rural production schemes though with very little effect, and, in view of the minimal logistical and institutional support by the government, there is little evidence to suggest that OFN actually significantly raised food production.⁸

The same accusation of poor execution levelled against the OFN could also be made against The Green Revolution set up by the Shagari regime. According to President Shagari, The Green Revolution policy was

to reverse the declining trend in agricultural production and to achieve self-sufficiency in the major food crops in five years, to restore the pre-eminent position of cash crops to what they were before the advent of petroleum, and substantially to increase beef production, dairy products, and fisheries in the quickest possible time.⁹

Events that followed the launching of The Green Revolution since the Second Republic, however, belie these high-sounding promises. Like its predecessor, the OFN, the programme ended as a campaign by the policy elite to hoodwink Nigerians, particularly the rural population. Instead of the country witnessing a rise in its food production and export, it began to import massively from abroad. In fact, a presidential task force on rice importation under the chairmanship of Umaru Kikko, the then-Minister of Transport, was set up by the

President. The ban placed on the importation of some food items by the previous regime was lifted. Obasanjo speaks of the situation thus:

The succeeding administration lifted the ban on importation of rice and established a task force for rice importation and not for rice production, thereby discouraging farmers, local investors and local production. Poultry and other items of agriculture which were banned for 8 years to ensure sustained and adequate development of the productive capacity of the local producers suffered a similar fate. They were scrapped and the scramble for importation was not just for the sake of importation but as a means of syphoning money out of the country.¹⁰

Talking about this same period, Onimode writes that

. . .the Green Revolution strategy is caught in several contradictions. It seeks national self-reliance and agrarian self-sufficiency, yet it bypasses national human and physical capital and relies on imports. It also neglects the basic requirements of the majority peasants and small farmers. As a result, even though it serves to divert enormous resources to the agricultural sector, these do not benefit the rural majority.¹¹

This deviation from the objectives of these two programmes undermined the lives of many rural Nigerians whom they were principally meant to help. Under the programmes, especially The Green Revolution, the importation of food items became very attractive and made some Nigerians rich with little or no effort. This picture, despite government propaganda, led the Political Bureau to point out that, in spite of several agricultural schemes launched by the Nigerian governments between 1972 and 1982, the country failed to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. According to the Bureau, the various agricultural programmes only helped in "laying the foundation for the emergence of a class of capitalist farmers across the country."¹²

The wide gap between government proposals and what actually obtains means that "the distributional effects of these policies have not radically altered the pre-civil war rural-urban income balance, and apparently have skewed income distribution within the rural sector."¹³ The reason for this is that

the peasant farmer who is supposed to be the central figure in agricultural planning has not been given adequate attention; the way he farms, the farm input he uses, the enrichment of his soils, the training he receives are yet to be given the attention

they deserve in the agricultural development process. This neglect of the rural farmers is compelling the able-bodied farmers to drift to the urban areas where per capita income levels are higher than what is obtainable in the rural areas.¹⁴

Both the OFN and The Green Revolution failed, therefore, because they neglected the principal actors whose contributions are essential for an agricultural revolution to succeed.

The Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)

DFRRI is the present government's response to the poverty of most Nigerian rural areas. DFRRI's mandates include:

(a) Improving the quality of life and standard of living of the majority of the people in the rural areas by

(i) substantially improving the quality, value, and nutritional balance of their food intake;

(ii) raising the quality of rural housing, as well as the general living and working environment in the rural areas;

(iii) improving the health condition of the rural people;

(iv) creating greater opportunities for human development and employment, particularly self-employment, and, consequently enhancing rural income levels;

(v) making it possible to have a progressively wider range and variety of goods and services to be produced and consumed by the rural people themselves as well as for exchange.

(b) Using the enormous resources of the rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the security, socio-cultural, political, and economic growth and development of the nation by linking the growth and development activities of the rural areas with those of the local government areas, the states, and the nation.

(c) Ensuring a deeply-rooted and self-sustaining development process based on effectively mobilized mass participation,

starting with the grassroots and encompassing the entire nation thereafter.¹⁵

These are all noble ideas designed by the state to improve the living conditions of the rural dwellers. However, the question to be asked is: how far has DFRRRI gone to fulfill these goals? The standard of infrastructures in many Nigerian rural communities does not offer one much cause for hope as regards the successes of DFRRRI's mission. The situation of rural poverty in terms of amenities remains almost as before. Indeed, some people in rural Nigeria claim not to have heard of DFRRRI, and where they have, it seems not to have made much impact on their lives.

The major handicap of DFRRRI seems to be the non-permanence of its staff. This is because most of DFRRRI tasks in the states are given out to state and local governments to implement. This practice breeds double loyalty. Willy nilly, this affects the level of performance of the staff, people who, very often, are more committed to their parent departments than to DFRRRI, which most of them regard as a stop-gap institution. Also, the inclusion of local government chairmen as part of the DFRRRI team creates some problems because some of them often view the directorate as an usurper. Thus, they try to undermine the activities of the body and turn around to accuse it of non-performance.

On its part, DFRRRI embarks on more tasks than it can accomplish. Instead of the directorate trying to construct a few kilometers of solid coal tar roads in a rural community, it tends to build many kilometers of earth roads without any provision for maintenance. Many of these earth roads are often washed away by erosion, or become overgrown with weeds, thereby defeating the very purpose of their construction. DFRRRI's excuse for not maintaining its earth roads is, according to its Vice Chairman, Akin Mabogunje, because its budget does not provide for such.¹⁶ Even the execution of these earth roads is at times very poor. For instance, 2,106 kilometers of roads built in seven states were rejected by the DFRRRI's Final Comprehensive Inspection Team because of their poor quality and their failure to meet specifications.¹⁷ This poor execution of projects by DFRRRI does not seem to be peculiar to earth roads. It appears, rather, to affect most of the directorate's activities, as the assessment below suggests:

Out of the 933 kilometers of feeder roads constructed or rehabilitated in the first phase of DFRRRI's programme in Benue State, only 197 kilometers were approved by the Final Comprehensive Inspection Team (FCIT), and out of the 236 boreholes and shallow wells sunk for the period, 14 short of the targeted 250 per state, 106 are out of use, 30 of the 136 bad ones having been rehabilitated by the DFRRRI team led by

Squadron Leader, Saliu Atawodi. So far, only Ajaka-Idah in Oturkpo Local Council appears to benefit from rural electrification programme.

The Benue state communities are not alone on the list of problem areas for DFRRI. The Chief of General Staff, Vice Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, might be surprised to hear, for example, that the borehole he commissioned on August 29 this year at Adamo Elemo in Oyo State is out use.¹⁸

Despite these statements, DFRRI has achieved a certain proportion of its goals in a state like Kwara. Here the directorate exceeded its target of providing water to 250 communities by 316 towns. It also constructed 2,004 kilometers of feeder roads as well as providing electricity to fourteen rural communities. These achievements encouraged the chairman of the Final Comprehensive Inspection Team on rural electrification, Professor Nduka to say, "I must confess that Kwara State DFRRI has done a remarkable job. It is obviously one of the best in the country, if not the best."¹⁹ This praise does not, however, detract from the fact that most of DFRRI's projects are not durable. For instance, despite the encomium heaped on the directorate in Oyo State by the team led by Saliu Illiasu for building 1,508.7 kilometers (80%) out of 1,874.5 kilometers of road to an accepted DFRRI standard and specification, most of these roads are today deplorable and have returned to their previous state of disrepair. Instances abound in Oshogbo, Ifedapo, Ogbomosho, Oranmiyan, Ijigbo, Irepodun, Oluyole, and Akinyele local government areas where most DFRRI roads have either been overgrown by weeds or destroyed by erosion. Some others like the Oshogbo-Ajenisunwa road, are now full of potholes.²⁰

Problems seem to encircle other DFRRI projects beside roads. Its rural borehole programme is beset by the non-functioning of such amenities mostly due to shoddy jobs done by contractors and the lack of proper education of the rural dwellers on the utility and the use of such amenities. This problem is better captured by Ogunbambo and Ojediran:

Reactions from some communities. . . show that the mechanical operation of the boreholes poses problems to their local users. For instance, while some communities complain about the difficulty of operating the hand pumps, the people of Ilu Aje in Afijio Council still prefer to fetch water from streams instead of DFRRI wells. And in Odo-Oba in Ife Oluwa Council Area, the DFRRI borehole could not be operated after just three months.²¹

These problems replicate themselves in most states of the federation and in all DFRRRI projects such as electricity, housing, hospitals and agriculture.

The impression one gets from the above is that DFRRRI should do more than it is doing at present in order to truly enhance the social, political and economic conditions of the rural dwellers. As of now, it has not actually fulfilled of its objectives. Media propaganda, without concrete facts on the ground, cannot give it the credibility it desperately needs.

Better Life for Rural Women

The central reason that informed the formation of the Better Life for Rural Women by Mrs. Babangida (wife of the president) was the "recognition that national economic development cannot be totally effective without the full and meaningful participation of women."²² It also includes the fact that

women in rural areas deserve our primary attention and consideration, because they indisputably form the backbone of the rural economy in contemporary Nigerian society. In perspective, too, from the pre-colonial economy to contemporary times they have consistently been an indispensable factor—forming an integral, vital and often a dominant part of our peasant and rural economies, firmly establishing themselves in the areas of farming, food production, distribution, marketing, and trading. Accordingly, in this period of accelerating change, it is in the vital interest of us all to explore and consolidate strategies for enhancing their participation and contribution to our economy.²³

However, in spite of these objectives, the programme lacks any legal or administrative status as a government body. It does not therefore have any budgetary vote from the government. The functioning of the programme appears to hinge entirely on the disposition of the first lady and the wives of state governors. Because of this the programme was from the beginning problematic, as the rural women, whose lives it was supposed to better, were not involved in the decision-making process. Decisions on what measures to adopt in improving their welfare were taken by these first ladies and some other members of the elite in the urban centers, most of whom have not tasted rural life. Under such circumstances, little or nothing could be achieved.

It is due to the urban-based nature of the organizers of the Better Life for Rural Women that what is mostly heard about the programme

since its inception is the Better Life Fair. Here, rural products such as mats, pottery and food items are displayed for sale. Even here, the dominant participants seem to be urban women who dress like "a Roman empress on a throne, regal and resplendent,"²⁴ with a few poorly-dressed rural women in attendance. It was this phenomenon that partly forced Ogunrinade to say,

From the Second Better Life Fair in Lagos, the success of the movement as listed, consists of arrangement of fairs. . . , provision of boreholes, garri and oil-palm processing plants, arrangements of loans for rural women from the Peoples Bank and various other acts of meddling in functions of established government agencies such as DFRRRI, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development and other Social and Philanthropic women groups. . . .

Indeed, many people. . . perceive Better Life movement as revolving around the personality of the First Lady, an assortment of governors' wives, women commissioners and their hangers-on in what some people mischievously dub a Maryam Babangida and Company Limited. There is the dance routine, the speeches from the husband governors on state days, there is the dressing and comportment of the officialdom which are at great variance with the quiet, hard-working life of the rural woman. Furthermore, the idea of a romantic past with a display of earthenware, pots, beads and wooden dolls is as revolting to the government policy of improving technological awareness as it is a celebration of primitivity in an age of plastics, robotics, and electronic chips. Indeed, most of the artefacts on display at Better Life fairs rightly belong to the museum of arts and antiquities or in the farmers' markets agricultural shows.²⁵

This view, supported by Ngozi Ojidoh²⁶, is also shared by this author. Many a time, due to the wide gulf between life in the urban and the rural areas, the few rural women brought into Lagos for these fairs find adjustment in the cosy comfort of their hotel rooms difficult. This was typified by the statements of these two rural women who attended the Second Lagos Better Life Fair. According to Mrs. Celina Isong from Cross River State, the Federal Palace Hotel where they were accommodated seemed like paradise because everything was in good working condition. This was in contradistinction to what obtains in Idom where she resides.²⁷ Another participant from a rural area in Bauchi State, Mrs. Zanu Ibrahim, said,

the hotel accommodation is too far removed from our native homes, too artificial and some of us could not use the facilities. The food is completely alien. Some of us vomited at the sight and smell of the food. Others had running stomachs after the first meal, and so rejected further food.²⁸

The reason for these happenings is the disparity in life between their rural abode and their temporary location during the fair. This is a priority area which the programme should address instead of convening at Lagos a yearly assembly of many well-dressed and a few tattered-looking women to display rural products. Life in rural Nigeria has remained at the same subsistence level mainly because the organizers of this programme seem to delude themselves that the production of these traditional artifacts and agricultural goods will make life more comfortable for rural women. Nothing definite appears to have been done to either reduce or to stop the exploitation of the rural women who still play a second-fiddle role. In spite of all the media propaganda about the Better Life For Rural Women, girls of primary and secondary school ages (between 9 and 16 years) are still being forced into marriage with men of their fathers' ages in several rural Nigerian communities. In some other places, women are still subjected to the position of mere organs of sexual satisfaction for their husbands.

These enduring problems notwithstanding, the organizers of Better Life for Rural Women have tried to provide such facilities as: loans to recognized women cooperative societies to assist them in their occupations; machines and tools while repayments would be made on installment basis; advice to women engaged in production of pottery, local soap making, palm oil and cloth weaving by experts from state ministries of trade on how to improve their trade; health education and health teaching in relation to oral rehydration therapy, expanded programme on immunization, maternal and child health, family planning, environmental sanitation, nutrition, and food hygiene; basic training on hygiene to traditional birth attendants as well as provision of some kits, beds, and baby cots for use by their patients; adult literacy classes; hulling, threshing, and milling machines in addition to tractors and other farm implements to facilitate farming and processing of their crops; teaching skills essential for self-reliance such as pomade and candle making; and micro-water schemes.²⁹ The question, however, is: how far do these facilities go? Our answer is that they do not go far enough to make any serious impact on the lives of these rural women. Only few of them benefit from these facilities.

The problem faced generally by these four programmes is the lack of serious consideration on the part of government of the political

and administrative preconditions necessary for their successful implementation.³⁰

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis of rural development by the Nigerian State has yielded a conclusion for this study. This is that, in conception and in execution, especially in the latter, the entire rural development programme of the government does not pay much attention to the needs of the people it is supposed to serve. It is mostly urban. As a result, most of these programmes have not positively affected the lives of the Nigerian rural communities. Their lives remain almost what it was before the inception of these programmes with little or nothing to cheer about.

This paper posits that rural poverty persists in Nigeria because there is no serious commitment on the part of the political elite to change. There is also the absence of administrative structure for an expansive participation of the rural poor in economic activity. It is, therefore, important to state that mere decorative titles and high sounding ideas are not enough to transform rural Nigeria from its past neglect. It is only true political and administrative action on the part of the government that can do the magic. The inhabitants of these rural areas must be incorporated at all stages of the decision-making process, not just as appendages, but as true contributors to policy input. If this is done, then we can look forward to the dawn of a true rural development in Nigeria.

Finally, the duplication of government agencies under different names impedes the achievements of these organizations. There is simply no reason for the duplication of rural development agencies such as DFRI and the Better Life for Rural Women. These two bodies should be merged for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Certainly their merger will help reduce the resources usually spent on an overbloated number of officials. The co-ordination of their activities will also become easier in light of the present trend where different voices expressing, at times, varied opinions are heard.

Notes

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¹⁰Obasanjo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 80.

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¹²*Report of the Political Bureau*, March (Lagos: The Federal Government Printer, 1987), p. 36.

¹³Watts & Lubeck, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 126 & 127.

¹⁴Political Bureau, *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁵Central Bank of Nigeria, *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts For the Year Ended 31st December 1986*, p. 28.

¹⁶*Nigerian Tribune*, Ibadan, May 5, 1988, p. 7.

¹⁷*The Guardian*, Lagos, May 13, 1988, p. 10.

¹⁸S. Ogunbambo & B. Ojediran, "DFRRI...making some presence felt," in *The Guardian*, Lagos, October 30, 1989, p. 7.

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²⁰S. A. Ojo, "The Administration of Rural Development Programmes in Nigeria: an evaluation of the performances of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures in Oyo State," an M.Sc. thesis in the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, 1988, p. 148.

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