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Impact of Rural Development Programmes on the Social and Economic Welfare of Rural Dwellers in Nigeria

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Abstract

There cannot be genuine national development in Nigeria if the vast rural areas of the country remain largely under-developed with poor access roads, poor health facilities, high unemployment and inadequacy of other social amenities. This study seeks to examine rural development programmes of government and their impact on the social and economic welfare of rural dwellers, using some rural communities in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria as case study. The survey research design was adopted in this study. Questionnaires as well as other primary data sources were used in data collection. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive methods involving tables and percentages. The findings of this study reveals that rural development programmes of government are not adequately implemented and as a result, have not impacted significantly on the well-being of rural dwellers as social amenities such as rural feeder roads, portable water and health care centre are not visible in most communities under study. The paper therefore, recommended amongst others that government should improve access to social amenities such as electricity, roads and water through effective implementation of its project. Also, all state governments should establish rural Development Agencies to specifically tackle the development problems of rural communities.

Keywords: Government, Social Amenities, Rural Communities, Rural Development Programmes.

1.0 Introduction

The challenges of rural communities in Nigeria include lack of basic infrastructures, poor access to roads, poor educational facilities, lack of portable water, low per capita income, high unemployment and inadequate power supply. Esema (2010) as cited in Bassey (2011), affirmed that rural communities are usually characterized by poor health, lack of basic nutrition, inadequate housing, are socially discriminated against and have no channels through which to voice their concerns.

Rural development is part of general development that embraces a large segment of those in great need in the rural sector. Hunter (1964) considers rural development as the starting point of development. Ogidefa (2010) sees rural development as creating and widening opportunities for

rural people to realize their full potential through education and share in decisions and actions which affect their lives. He further asserted that rural development involves efforts to increase rural output and create employment opportunities and root out fundamental causes of poverty, diseases and ignorance. On a general note, development is seen as a process by which man increases or maximizes his control and use of the material resources with which nature has endowed him and his environment. According to Afigbo (1991), development consists of five major ingredients: increase in material wealth for the use of individuals and the modern collectivity known as the nation; eliminating unemployment; eliminating poverty and want; eliminating inequality and increasing the general availability of labour-saving devices.

There cannot be genuine national development in Nigeria if the vast rural areas of the country remain largely under-developed with poor access roads, poor health facilities, high unemployment and inadequacy of other social amenities. To deal with these numerous problems facing our rural communities, government at various levels have instituted a lot of programmes and projects aimed at transforming them into the mainstream of national development. Some of these programmes include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) 1976, the Green Revolution (GR) 1985, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) 1985, Better Life Programme (BLP) 1986, Family Support Programme (FSP) 1987, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) 1988 and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) 1999, to mention but a few, (Nwaeze, 2014).

In spite of the above mentioned programmes and projects, our rural communities remain under-developed, lack basic amenities such as good roads, power supply, healthcare facilities and at the same time, rural poverty persists. It is in realization of the above fact that the researcher is motivated to examine some of the government rural development programmes as well as their impact on the welfare of rural dwellers in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

The following rural development programmes of government, aimed at enhancing productivity and welfare of rural dwellers are x-rayed below:

2.1 Directorate of Food and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)

This directorate was among the numerous programmes instituted by the then Military President of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babaginda in 1985. It adopted the integrated approach to rural development which recognized that the development of rural economic infrastructures is instrumental to increased food production in an economy. The major activities of DFRRI include: provision of economic and social infrastructures, mobilization for mass participation in rural development, production of agricultural inputs and the development and dissemination of improved technology to enhance agricultural and rural housing.

According to Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995), DFRRI has the following objectives:

- i. To improve the quality of life and standard of living of majority of the people in the rural areas.

ii. To utilize the enormous resources of the rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the security, socio-cultural, political and economic growth and development activities of the rural areas.

iii. To ensure a deeply rooted self sustaining development process based on effectively mobilized mass production, beginning from the grass roots and spreading thereafter to the wider economy.

However, the major problems faced by DFRRRI in its operations were poor staff strength, logistic support, and ineffective monitoring and follow-up of activities as a result of the large number of rural areas to be covered.

2.2 Nigerian Agricultural Co-Operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB)

NACRDB is the nation's apex agricultural and rural development finance institution. The bank is jointly owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Central Bank of Nigeria in the ratio of 60:40 and supervised by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. The bank was incorporated as Nigerian Agricultural Bank (NACB) in 1973 and in 1978, was renamed Nigeria Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB). Subsequently in 2000, it was merged with the Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) and took over the risk assets of Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) to become Nigerian Co-operative and Rural Development Bank Limited.

The bank aims at granting loans for agricultural production for the purpose of storage, distribution and marketing connected with such production to any state or group of states or any institution for on-lending to farmers and groups of farmers or corporate bodies subject to the states or groups of states or state institution guaranteeing repayment of the loan. According to Nwaeze and Ujah (2007), NACRDB as a development bank is aimed at contributing to the overall growth and development of the Nigerian economy through the promotion of agricultural production, rural development and the improvement of income and quality of life of rural dwellers and making the nation self-reliant in primary production.

NACRDB seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To promote the overall growth and development of the Nigerian economy through the promotion of agriculture and rural development.
- ii. To improve incomes and quality of rural life.
- iii. To provide finance for the processing and marketing of agricultural products.
- iv. To provide technical and managerial services to farmers
- v. To provide micro-credit to farmers
- vi. To encourage the mobilization of savings and advances such as savings to small scale business financing.

NACRDB has not lived up to expectation due to a lot of challenges such as poor funding as well as low loan recovery rate and poor patronage on the part of farmers etc. Amah and Park (1998) posits that unless substantial recoveries are made from overdue debts, not only will lending institutions be unable to issue out more loans, there might also be difficulties in meeting legal obligations as they may become crystallized. Currently, the bank is known as Bank of Agriculture.

2.3 Green Revolution Programme

This programme was launched in 1980 under the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Like other programmes of government, its intension is to boost food production in Nigeria. According to Eze et al (2010), Green Revolution Programme aimed at wiping away hunger through credit supply to farmers, encourage and intensify cooperative education, mobilizing the local people to actively participate in agriculture, application of research on food and fibre to enhance abundance in food production, processing and distribution in Nigeria.

The good intensions of the programme failed as the same government that instituted it with the aim of making Nigeria self-reliant as at 1985 embarked on a large-scale importation of rice from India and America and other essential food items for survival and sustenance (Otoghagua, 1999).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, we adopted the survey research method in which structured questionnaires and interviews were used.

3.2 Sources of Data Collection

The data used in this work were mainly collected from primary data sources, structured questionnaires and interviews.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics – tables and simple percentage were used in data presentation and analysis respectively. Inferences were drawn based on the analysis as to whether or not government rural development programmes have impacted significantly on the wellbeing of rural dwellers.

4.0 Data Analysis and Results

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the responses of the respondents on the questions raised in the questionnaires were presented and analyzed as below:

Table 1: Awareness of government rural development programmes

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	1050	88
No	150	12
Total	1200	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 1 above shows that 88% of the respondents are not aware of the existence of the various government rural development programmes while 12% of them are fully aware of the programmes. This situation may not be unconnected to the fact that most rural dwellers are not adequately educated and therefore lack knowledge or information about the activities of government.

Table 2: Expected projects or programmes from government

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Healthcare Facilities	250	21
Schools	100	8
Agricultural Inputs	200	17
Rural Roads and Water	390	32
Electricity (Rural)	200	18
Postal Services	50	4
Total	1200	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

An analysis of the projects expected of government by rural dwellers include the provision of rural roads and water (32%), health facilities such as maternities and health centres (21%), rural electricity (18%) and agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, seeds and seedlings etc (17%). Others are schools (8%) and postal services (4%).

Table 3: Existence of government programmes/projects

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	100	8
No	1100	92
Total	1200	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 3 above shows that 92% of the respondents are of the opinion that government rural development projects are not found in their communities while 8% have a contrary view.

Table 4: Effects of non-existence of government rural development programmes

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Rural-Urban Migration	400	33
Rural Poverty	350	21
Poor Agricultural Productivity	300	25
Poor Living Standards	250	21
Total	1200	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

The non-existence of government rural development programmes in the communities under study according to the responses of the respondents exert various adverse effects on the rural dwellers. Chief among them is the issue of rural-urban migration (33%), poor agricultural productivity (25%), rural poverty (21%) and poor living standards of rural dwellers (21%). This situation portends danger for our rural communities.

Table 5: Impact on welfare of rural dwellers

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Significant	10	1
Fairly Significant	50	4
Not Significant	1140	95
Total	1200	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 5 shows that government rural development programmes have not made a significant impact on the welfare of rural dwellers as 95% of the respondents are of this opinion. The major reason being that these programmes and projects are non-existent in the government under study.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

There can be no true national development if our vast rural areas where a good number of Nigerians live remains largely without basic amenities and social services – such as portable water, electricity good roads, networks and healthcare services.

The results of this analysis show that most rural dwellers are not aware of government rural development programmes mainly as a result of lack of good education among them. Again, these

programmes do not also exist in the rural communities under study and therefore have not impacted significantly on the welfare of the rural dwellers.

In line with the above, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should improve access to social amenities such as electricity, roads and water by rural dwellers.
2. State government should establish Rural Development Agencies to specifically tackle the development programmes of rural communities.
3. Rural community governments should endeavour to guard and protect government facilities meant to enhance their welfare, where these facilities are in existence.
4. Communities should form development associations or unions and also embark on meaningful projects and programmes to support government efforts.

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