
COMMUNITY AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Pre-colonial Nigeria economy was dominated by agriculture, and even after decolonization, agriculture continued to thrive, and accounted for over 65% of the country's Gross Domestic Product providing employment for virtually over 85% of the entire population. Agriculture's relevance in Nigeria's economy began to take the back seat in the development equation in late 70's and 80's regardless of the numerous agro-policies instituted by the government. Today, as the contributions of agriculture recedes; no fewer than 55% of the populations are employed in the sector. As a result, food production and food sufficiency has continuously become a critical challenge, leading to dependence on food import. Thus, the paper examines the interface between community development and agricultural development in Nigeria, taking into consideration two agricultural policies of the Federal Government, viz; Green Revolution and the New Nigerian Agricultural Policy. It is argued here that poor agricultural development and the failure of agricultural programmes in Nigeria simply lies in the bosom of the neglect of the rural community in agricultural development decision – making. The study relies heavily on the utilization of extant literature. The study has shown that community participation in decision making with regards to crops production and location is quintessential to boost food self – sufficiency. Amongst others, the study recommends that a dynamic approach of community participation should be encouraged in the community based agricultural and rural development programme (CBARDP) to enhance as well as boost the development of agriculture and food production in Nigeria.

Key Words: *Community, Agriculture, Community development, Nigeria, food import, food sufficiency.*

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture was the main stay of the Nigerian pre – colonial economy; and when the country transited from colonial rule to an independent State, agricultural production intensified. In the early 1960's the Nigerian economy could possibly or clearly be described as an agricultural based-economy, accounting for over 65% of the country's Gross domestic Product and provided employment for well over 85% of the entire population (FDA/FMARD, 2005; Mohammed – Lawal and Atte, 2006). In recent times however, agriculture's contribution to the GDP of Nigeria is particularly stable at 40% and employs no fewer than 55% of the population (Philips et al, 2009; FDA/FMARD, 2005). Agriculture plays a predominant role in economic development. According to Timmer (2003) the contribution of agriculture to poverty reduction cannot be overemphasized. Hence, it becomes pertinent to

state that rising agricultural productivity or development as it were is associated with industrialization. But the possibility of such is an understanding of the fact that the centre for agricultural development is the rural areas. Thus, there is glory in saying further that the rural areas must essentially be equipped so as to harness a decent agricultural advancement. Nigeria as a country has opted to be an agriculturally developed nation, but it's still far from it. There were a number of agricultural development intervention experiments which eventually ended up in fiasco. Notably are Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which was launched in 1976 and the Green Revolution Programme of 1980, just to mention a few. To this end, this work is an investigation of the interface between community development and agricultural development in Nigeria. It is aimed at understanding the rationale behind poor agricultural development in Nigeria. To do this we take a critical view at two agricultural policies in Nigeria, in a view to understanding why these policies actually failed. These policies are: the Green Revolution Programme of 1980 and the New Agricultural Policy of Nigeria of 2001. The work is divided into five sections. The first is the introductory aspect, while the second and third deals with the concepts of development and community development respectively. The fourth section discusses agricultural development in Nigeria, while the last section is the concluding remarks.

DEVELOPMENT AS A CONCEPT

The concept of development to many scholars is a deceptive one. This means that there is a barrage of confusion as to the meaning of the concept. In many ways, attempts to define development have more and more become problematic than the very issues for which it connotes (Anikpo, 1984). Development according to Rodney (1972:10) is an attempt by a group to increase jointly their capacity for dealing with their environment, dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature. This according to Anikpo means the potential for development is inherent in all human societies, and the only disparity is in the degree of their technology. In other words, to Anikpo, the concept of development clearly means:

"the continuous effort to improve living standards and conditions through application of groups cultural means, which includes their productive forces in the widest sense" (Anikpo, 1984:35).

Okodudu's(1998) definition of development seems not to vary with that of Anikpo. However, according to him, development refers to a fundamental effort by people or a society to come to grip with the imperatives of their environment. Thus a basic perspective equates development with economic growth, and in this sense agriculture is seen as the driving force of this growth (Ogen, 2007). On the other hand, the United Nations views development differently. According to them, development is:

"To lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community" (Development Workers, 2008).

Development involves change, improvement and vitality – a directed attempt to improve participation, flexibility, equity, attitudes, the function of institutions and the quality of life. It is the creation of wealth – wealth meaning the things people value, not just dollars (Shaffer, 1989). Therefore to us, development is all about empowerment. It is about the local people taking control of their own lives, expressing their own demands and finding their own solutions to existing problems. Development cannot be developed therefore, unless the people are involved in freeing themselves from obstacles that affect their ability and their own communities.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

We begin this section first by briefly explaining the meaning of a community, so as to really comprehend the concept of community development. A community is an aggregation of families habitually living together within a definite geographical location, more or less rooted on the soil they occupy, living in a state of mutual interdependence, supporting some basic social institutions and having some measures of political autonomy in relation to other communities. The term "community" has been used equally to denote something both psychological and geographical. Psychologically, it implies shared interests, characteristics or association as in the expression "Community of interests", "the business community", "the academic community" or "a farming community". Geographically, it denotes a specific area where people cluster. However, the sociological definition of a community combines the two meanings and denotes a people within a common locality having shared values, interests and behavioural patterns. Such shared interests' and behavioral patterns show mainly in the areas of: production, distribution and even consumption, as well as social participation.

Community development according to Okodudu (1998) constitutes a conscious response to the notion of rural development. It emphasizes the direct participation of those who stand as critical stakeholders in development programmes, thereby putting people first in development effort. Community development can also be seen to mean a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over their lives. The understanding here is that communities cannot be helped in the realm of development, unless they themselves are part and agree to this process. Again, Community development includes all strategies, interventions or coordinated activities at the community level aimed at bringing about social and economic development. Hence, it means community development must be participatory, thereby enabling the people to undertake initiatives of their own to combat social, economic, political and environmental problems in a truly democratic process (Kingslow, 1998; Kenny, 2002). Peasant communities are the centre of agricultural activities. Yet they are characterized by poor quality of life and low amenities. As such, the need to mention the term "rural". As the name applies, efforts at rural development have been external. Little

wonder Mabogunje (1980) defined the concept "rural" as "an improvement of the living standards of rural people on a self – sustaining basis through the transformation of the socio – spatial structure of the productive activities". This portends that the rural people or the community where such development would take place are never involved in the process. This further means that such development programmes are generally not meant for the people but for vested stakeholders. Such development efforts as DFFRI and Better Life Programmes (BLP) where the concern of the developers and not exactly what the community wanted, given the fact that these communities were not party to the decision - making.

However, as a new framework, community development is a reversal of all the approaches of rural development (Kenny, 2009). Community development places prior emphasis on community self – help. That is, the people determine what they want, how they want it and where they want it. When the community is involved in development projects or programmes, especially in terms of decision participation, such a development attempt is given priority attention and thus protected with community based policies. The essence of course is that, with community's participation and enthusiasm in such projects, the community would not want such a project to go down the drain but stand the test of time. Thus, emphasizing sustainable development of programmes and projects in the community (Lawson, 2007).

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

In this section we attempt a critical review of the Green Revolution and the New Policy on Agriculture to understand their failure which however led to the poor agricultural development in Nigeria. In a bid to bring about agricultural prosperity in Nigeria, the Federal government had adopted various agricultural policies, for which the duo mentioned earlier is part of. The Green Revolution Policy was formulated in 1980; it was basically meant to modernize agriculture and drive Nigeria to food self-sufficiency. Yet food production as well as food self – sufficiency remains a mirage if not an impaired vision for the country. The question is, why did the programme fail? The main contextual reason is the fact that, the political elite in Nigeria had no clear-cut understanding of the concept of modernizing agriculture. They were concerned with personal issues, and never comprehended the need to sustainably finance and fund agricultural research to further the development of food security and export. Again the tight policy system of the government also triggered its downfall. The Green Revolution Programme initiated by the Federal Government according to Ovwigho (1985) could not achieve the desired goal of self-sufficiency in food production. Hence, the programme was short-lived and lacked strength for consistency, effective planning and even execution. Akinsanmi (1994) remarked that the Green Revolution Programme failed because of tight administrative procedures. Such tight administrative procedure boils down to the fact that many hectares of land were cleared without been cultivated and there was a lack of machinery and the untimely arrival and arbitrary distribution of farm input. Aderibigbe (2001) is however of the view that the discovery and emergence of crude oil has continually undermined agricultural development in Nigeria. He

added that instead of adding crude as an additional source of income, agriculture and other natural resources were relegated to the background. By summation, Aderibigbe's position is that the Green Revolution Programme was circumstantially a victim of the discovery of crude oil.

Another reason is the complex traditional farming systems and particularly the traditional shifting cultivation system. Here cultivation takes place may be for 2 or 4 years and when the soils are worn out the farmer moves to another land. Such practices are incongruous, and not in conformity with Green Revolution principles. Indeed the issue of mixed cropping which farming systems in Nigeria consists of equally contributed to the failure. The government did not take cognizance of the traditional farming system before take-off, as was observed in Asia, where, according to Webster and Wilson (1989) mono cropping was the practiced system. This further shows that the community was totally sidelined. This policy was to be practiced in the rural communities, but there was no clear-cut information to them as to what was actually required and the role they should play in the scheme of things.

Furthermore, another reason was and is still the constraint of the poor state of the infrastructural network. Although Nigeria spends 7% of her GDP financing infrastructural development, significant improvements is not noticeable, and as of today, still requires an annual \$15 billion to fund infrastructure (ThisDayLive, 2012). The poor state of roads and inaccessibility to certain rural areas due to inadequate or lack of feeder roads make transportation costs in Nigeria very high and equally undermines the efforts of the rural people. Most rural farmers are unable to market their farm produce, and whatever they can sell is bought at prices close to or below the production cost. Such people could not adopt new crop varieties. The Green Revolution was supposed to involve the communities in all facets so as to make the programme a success.

The next policy we consider is the New Nigerian Agricultural Policy. It was launched in 2001, in a broad sense the objectives of the new policy just to mention a few, are thus:

- The achievement of self-sufficiency in basic food supply and attainment of food security;
 - Increased production of agricultural raw materials for industries;
 - Generating gainful employment, improvement in the quality of life of rural dwellers, etc.
- Briefly, the strategy for the achievement of the policy includes
- Creating a more conducive macro-environment to stimulate greater private sector investment,
 - Reorganizing institutional framework for government intervention as well as the private sector, etc.

From the year 2001 till date, the essence of the policy has not been felt, neither has it molested the negative atmosphere of food insufficiency. Food production is still low, while food importation; especially rice importation into the country remains astronomically high. Anako (2012) writes that Nigerians spends a billion naira daily on rice importation. Generally,

food importation in the country has continued to soar high. (The table below shows the progression of food shortfall and level of dependence on food importation since 1994). According to Ayoola (2011), total food import into the country increased from N513.7 billion in 2006 to N802.6 billion in 2007. With such figure, the hope of the Federal Government divorcing from rice importation by 2015 stands, and definitely appears precarious.

Food Shortfall and Import, Million Mt (1994 – 2001)

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Shortfall (Deficit)	0.53	0.30	2.91	3.34	3.13	4.22	5.34	6.51
Food Import	0.67	0.58	2.95	3.47	3.24	4.48	5.59	6.91

The policy has however failed to accomplish its objectives. The reasons for this failure are in fact almost synonymous with that of the previous. The rural communities are still left out in this policy. Again the social infrastructures of the rural communities are not there, and these are the critical factors that determine the success of the policy. Poor and weak monitoring cum evaluation of projects is just another rational. Most of the farms in this programme are non-existent and are ghost farms, yet huge sums of money are being pumped into it. This is basically because the monitoring process is poor or the monitors are accomplices, who in the very sense of it divert necessary funds (Ovwigbo, 2009). Our basic concern here is to comprehend the interface between community development and agricultural development in Nigeria. Thus, the failure of the agricultural programmes simply lies in the bosom of the neglect of the rural community in agricultural development decision – making. Attempts at agricultural development in Nigeria have always been external to the rural community where such programmes actually take place. By external we mean that agricultural development programmes has no proper consideration of the rural community as well as the members, and this is basically in terms of what they want, how and where they wanted what.

It is obvious that peasant farming characterizes agricultural practice in Nigeria. These peasant and farming families engage in subsistence farming and are resident in the rural communities (National Report, 2006). They are basically smallholder farmers who cultivate small plots and use age old methodologies without much control on the yields. The environment is clearly in starvation of infrastructural facilities. Thus, peasant agriculture involves 95% of Nigerian farmers, whereas corporate and government supported large-scale farms account for only 5% (National Report, 2006). This shows that the rural centres necessarily require development in all its ramifications. Significantly, the Government of Nigeria has had lofty ideas of agricultural development. The government became directly involve in the commercial production of food crops. These lofty ideas turned out to be a mirage mainly because of the insincerity in developing the rural centres which are the epi-centre of agricultural development programmes (Ogundipe, 1998). According to Ogundipe, the hallmark of agricultural development is the development of rural infrastructural facilities.

Agricultural development and community development are however two sides of the same coin. It means that the community must be a party to the practice of development. Agricultural development programmes in Nigeria have met its waterloo basically because of the neglect, isolation and the abandoning of the community from the processes of the programmes. Since 1975 when the government became directly involved in agricultural production in the country, the rural communities have not transformed in any way, they have and are still the way they had been – bereft of infrastructural development and participation. In recent times, government has established new processes. For instance, the National Fadama II, which is a follow up of National Fadama development project I is all inclusive. The goal is to empower communities to take charge of their own development agenda. This process gives the community the focus of participation as it were (Ukeje, 2005). But of course, the monitoring aspect of the programme is still problematic, as it still boils down to repetition of same issues of diversion of funds.

CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the pre-eminence of the community in agricultural development in Nigeria. The study further reiterates the need to involve and develop rural communities so as to engender agricultural production. It is obvious from this study that community participation in decision making with regards to crops production and location is a quintessential to boost food self – sufficiency.

It is necessary to disengage from the doctrines of bringing development that is incongruous with the wishes and aspirations of the rural people. The rural community is the epi – centre of 85% indigent Nigerians, yet it employs 75% of the labour force in agriculture of course. Hence, it is ideal to involve the community in every aspect of decision making in terms of community development with a view to agricultural development. In this direction, it is recommended that a dynamic approach of community participation should be encouraged in the community based agricultural and rural development programme (CBARDP) to enhance as well as boost the development of agriculture and food production in Nigeria. There is need to link and introduce the communities into the value chain of food production, especially in the dimension of staple foods production. Nonetheless, there is also the need to develop a machinery to supply the rural communities' necessary infrastructural base for proper agricultural development. Government policies should target expansion of agricultural production to undermine food importation. Hence, the rural communities must be furnished with infrastructural facilities to progress agricultural development as Nigeria journeys to be amongst the 20th largest economies in the world by 2020.

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