

A Comparative Study Of The Contribution Of Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Development Authorities To Rural Development

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Abstract

The development of rural areas in Nigeria as a cornerstone for the overall development of the nation has become both a problem and challenge to leaders of the country. The study is therefore, set out to assess how the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (LUBRBRDAs) have developed their host communities. The study was an empirical research which has population drawn from rural dwellers and officials of Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities. Both primary and secondary data were used as methodology for the study. These were obtained using observation, structured interview and official documents respectively. The analyses in the study were done with the use of comments of informants on relevant questions during interview, as well as from observation and documentary evidence. It was revealed that large-scale irrigation method of RBRDAs and inadequate consultation/involvement of beneficiaries of rural development programmes, among other factors, marred the success of LUBRBRDAs in developing their host communities. It was therefore recommended that the LUBRBRDAs should be independent in the discharge of their functions, large-scale irrigation

method of RBRDAs should be de-emphasized in favour of small-scale irrigation system, and that beneficiaries of rural development programmes should be adequately involved at the initiation, implementation and evaluation of rural development projects. Above all, the government and host communities of the organizations should support and be committed to the activities of the River Basin Authorities to facilitate their success in rural development.

Introduction

Rural Development has been the concern of many developing countries for a long time because there have been heavy dependence of the urban centres on the rural sectors (Nwosu, 1981). The growth of the National economy and its inherent strength are therefore, dependent on the performance of the rural sectors. He further stated that the Nigerian Economy had once performed well under the agricultural sector which is predominantly peasant; meaning their involvement and integration in the development process is important for the development of the entire nation.

The desire to avert national starvation and erosion of political independence also formed part of the antecedent rationale for the creation of RBRDAs (Akindele and Adebo, 2004). Thus, in 1976 the Obasanjo regime promulgated the River Basin and Rural Development Authority Decree, creating eleven River Basin Authorities distributed all over the country to provide water for irrigation and domestic water supply, improve navigation, hydro-electric power generation, recreation facilities and fishery projects etc.; and they are:

- (a) the Sokoto – Rima River Basin Development Authority, Sokoto;
- (b) the Hadeja – Jama'are River Basin Development Authority, Kano;
- (c) the Lake Chad Basin Development Authority, Maiduguri;
- (d) the Upper Benue River Basin Development Authority, Yola;
- (e) the Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority, Makurdi;
- (f) the Cross River Basin Development Authority, Calabar;

- (g) the Anambra - Imo River Basin Development Authority, Owerri;
- (h) the Niger River Basin Development Authority, Ilorin;
- (i) the Ogun-Oshun River Basin Development Authority, Abeokuta;
- (j) the Benin-Owena River Basin Development Authority, Benin City; and
- (k) the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority, Port – Harcourt. (FGN, 1976).

The detail on their establishment, composition, and functions are as contained on Appendix “B”

The Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities, just like the other River Basins in the nation were established by the Federal Government of Nigeria by decree No. 25 and 31 of the 1976 and 1977 respectively, and amended by decree No. 87 of 1979 (which supersedes all (previous) Decrees and Acts in respect of RBRDAs) to bring development to their host communities through the creation of employment opportunities, augmenting income of rural dwellers and the provision of social amenities. The organizations have thus embarked on programmes and projects to boost agricultural production through mechanization and the development of water resources potentials of the nation. Specifically, the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities, just like the other RBRDAs have the following as their functions:

- a. to undertake comprehensive development of both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use;
- b. to undertake schemes for the control of floods and erosion, and for water-shed management;
- c. to construct and maintain dams, dykes, polders, wells, boreholes, irrigation and drainage systems and other works necessary for the achievement of the authorities functions;
- d. to develop irrigation schemes for the production of crops and livestock and to lease the irrigated land to farmers or recognized associations in the locality of the area

- concerned for a fee to be determined by the authority concerned with the approval of the commissioner;
- e. to resettle persons affected by the works in paragraphs 'c' and 'd' above;
 - f. to control pollution in rivers and lakes in the authority's area in accordance with nationally laid down standards; and
 - g. to provide water from reservoirs, wells and boreholes, under the control of the authority concerned for rural and urban water supply schemes (FGN, 1976).

These functions entailed direct agricultural production, construction of dams, dykes, polders, drilling of boreholes for potable water supply and construction of rural roads, bridges etc to link project sites. In fact, agriculture remains the largest employer of labour in Nigeria as it employs 65% of the total labour force, and also a major contributor of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is the main source of food for most of the population, a major source of raw materials for Agro allied industries and a much potent source of the much needed foreign exchange (Ortese, 1997). The agricultural sector is also expected to supply adequate food for the people and as well empower them to boost their social, political and economic aspects of life. Therefore, it (agricultural sector) deserves proper attention through the activities and functions of River Basin Development Authorities so

as to address problems of dwelling food production in the country and as well serves as a strategy of rural development.

The Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities stand distinctly as agents of rural transformation because of the activities and programmes they have to carry out. This is because most of their activities are rural based. In spite of the organizations importance in this regard not much is known about their impact on rural transformation in their

host communities. In fact, whether or not the agencies have made any positive impact of developing the rural areas is still open to debate. This is because, most, if not all of their set targets earlier mentioned, have not been actualized. The extent to which the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin Authorities have comparatively realized their set objectives in their host communities is the focus of the research work.

Statement of the Problem

Rural development, as earlier mentioned has been an issue of concern in Nigeria. Thus, successive governments in the nation have embarked on different strategies at transforming rural areas where bulk of the population reside, and where much of the national wealth is derived. However, no appreciable success has been achieved in developing the rural areas in the nation (Nnamdi and Ogunrinde, 1988), Esho (1987), Lyam (1990), Omale (2002), Akindele and Adebo (2004); nor has the country become self-sufficient in food production. It was expected that the establishment and operations of the River Basin Authorities would result in enhanced agricultural productivity and provision of basic rural infrastructure for rural development. The successful implementation of the RBDAs objectives would have therefore, stimulated social and economic growth and as well improved the quality and quantity of rural life across the nation.

Rural Area

The Health Resources and Service Administration of the United States (2013) define rural area as a place encompassing all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. Whatever, according to this definition that is not urban is considered rural. This definition is defective because it is not exact and specific as per the features of urban areas.

The UNDP (2004) report, however defines rural area as an area of the most vulnerable groups. There are those who have remained poor as part of social stratification or immigration. These include ethnic minorities, the disabled, rural villagers and disproportionately, women and

children. There are also “new poor” groups being created through wars, socio-political changes and unemployment.

Apart from the above, the report added that, there are now approximately 25 million refugees and 30 million displaced persons living in the world. Millions of poor children in rural areas do not attend school; participation and retention rates vary greatly both between and within countries. The author failed to know that many children in towns/cities abandon schools in search for economic gains.

Rural Development

Rural Development is part of the general development that embraces a large segment of those in great need in the rural sector. Hunter (1964) was among the earliest to use the expression Rural Development which he considered as the “starting point of development” characterized by subsistence. He did not however, state how rural development could progress from subsistence.

Taking into cognizance, the economic and social upliftment as aspects of development, Ijere (1990), regarded rural development as the process of increasing the per capital income and quality of life of the rural dwellers to enable them become prime movers of their destiny. This definition has left out the political and technological aspects of development that are very crucial, especially in the modern times.

The major concern in rural development is to bring about the modernization of rural society through a transition from traditional isolation to integration with the nation (Umehali 2008). It constitutes a process of planned change for which one approach or the other is adopted for improvement of the lot of the rural populace. It is concerned with the improvement of the lives of those living in rural areas so as to achieve a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio spatial structure of their productive activities. This definition

is however silent on the educational development of the rural dwellers which could enhance the other aspects of rural development that have been stressed.

Rural Development Efforts in Nigeria

There are many rural development strategies or approaches adopted by the governments of the developing countries in order to achieve development in the rural areas. However, various studies on rural development efforts in the nation have observed that rural underdevelopment in Nigeria is mainly due to neglect in the rural areas, and where programmes are designed for the development of the rural areas they are largely meant to produce more food for the urban sector and for export. In the words of Oluwasanmi (1966), the policy makers only saw the rural areas as a sector from which resources were to be diverted to develop other sectors of the economy. Nze (1987) on the other hand argued that the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR) and Bakolori Irrigation Project (BIP) were ostensibly designed to revitalize the rural economy through improved agriculture. To him, these programmes had most of the characteristics of programmes and projects which fall in to “difficult to implement” category. For example the programmes and projects entails the adoption and major system changes. The affected multiple groups and sector, and to a significant extent, demanded from the target population, a shift from known and existing technological traditions.

The strategies adopted to bring development to the rural areas in Nigeria have been largely agriculturally oriented. This could be explained by the fact that agriculture constitutes the single most important pre-occupation of the rural dwellers. Increased agricultural output has always been associated with economic growth which is the bedrock of development. Among the strategies adopted in order to develop the rural areas by the various Nigerian governments are/were: The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP-1973), Agricultural Development projects (ADPs-1975), and Operation Feed the Nation

(OFN-1976), which have been discussed earlier. Other rural development strategies are/were: River Basin and Rural Development Authority (RBRDA-1976), Green Revolution (1980), National Directorate of Employment (NDE-1986), Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI-1986), Better Life for Rural Women (1987),

The River Basin and Rural Development Authority

The authority was first launched in 1962, expanded in 1976 and further expanded in 1983. However, it was revised and curtailed between 1984 and 1986. The declared aim of the authority was to make the nation self-sufficient in food production and to uplift the socio-economic standard of the rural dwellers. Accordingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria (1981) reported that government provided in the Third National Development Plan huge sum of money to develop the main rivers of the country to benefit agriculture and rural development.

The authority had constructed dams (which have aided irrigation agriculture), roads and drilled boreholes and host of others across the country as its achievements. However, The RBRDAs have tended to divert from their traditional roles to that of food production. Moreover, the increasing cost of running them due to huge capital investment led to several policy adjustments. A closer look at the activities of the authority showed that the development philosophy was still the trickle down approach as rural development was not a serious issue in the objectives of the River Basin Development Authority, which included:

- i. to undertake comprehensive development, both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use.
- ii. to undertake scheme for the control of flood, and erosion, and for the water-shed management .
- iii. to construct and maintain dams, dykes, wells, bore-holes, irrigations and drainage systems.

- iv. to provide water from reservoir and lakes for irrigation purposes to farmers and recognized associations, as well as for urban water supply scheme.
- v. to control pollution in rivers, lakes, lagoons, and creeks (FGN, 1976).

In fact, all the activities of the authorities were geared at the development of material things, objects and gadgets, and not at the development of the people as persons. The activities were only done for the people, not with the people and by the people. Also, the impact of the RBAs was limited due to conflicting policy changes and lack of management know-how. These have negatively impacted on their success in rural development.

Green Revolution

The Green Revolution was a crash programme launched in 1980 by Alhaji Shehu Shagari's Administration. It was aimed at boosting food production in a bid to provide food to every Nigerian. The objectives of Green Revolution included:

- a. to make the country self-sufficient in food production within 5 years, and
- b. to return the country to its pre-eminent crop production stage within 7 years (FGN, 1981).

Unfortunately, it failed because the same government that instituted Green Revolution with the aim of making Nigeria self-sufficient as at 1985, embarked on a large-scale importation of rice from India and America, and essential food items for survival and sustenance (Otoghagua, 1999). Again, the sole intention of the programme was food and crop production so that the physical hunger of urban areas and the impoverished foreign exchange account of the government might be replenished. The presumption was that once agriculture was improved, and the yields per acre were increased, the peasant farmers who constitute the major bulk of the producers would automatically have their economic and social standard improved. It is however very clear that there was no mention of how to channel the money back, extracted

from the rural areas to develop the area.

National Directorate of Employment

Decree number 24 of October 19, 1986 established this Directorate, which commenced operations in January 1987 with the primary role of promoting skill acquisition, self-employment and labour intensive work schemes. It was also concerned with the collection and maintenance of data bank on unemployment and vacancies in the country, and the designing of employment programmes such as school leaver apprentice scheme, entrepreneurs training programmes for graduates, labour-based work programmes, and resettlement of trained beneficiaries. The NDE had trained more than 2 million unemployed Nigerians, provided business training for not less than 400,000 people, vocational training in up to 90 different trades, assistance to more than 40,000 unemployed to set up their own businesses, and had also organized labour-based groups through which 160,000 people benefited (Ezekiel, 2003).

The NDE suffered from inadequate funding from the Federal Government. Its predicament was worsened by the fact that it had over stretched itself by engaging in skills acquisition, granting of loans, procuring and selling agricultural inputs such as fertilizers. It also had problem in the recovery of its loans. There was also the problem of duplication of efforts with the statutory roles of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity in the area of compilation of statistics on the unemployed in the country and claims to maintain a data bank of these as well as matching applicants with vacancies. The hue and cry of NDE, as observed by the

researcher was that political considerations, which the above author omitted, were emphasized at the selection of candidates for the programme.

Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures

In realization of the failure of the past approaches to rural development, the Babangida regime evolved a new strategy of rural development which was implemented by an authority called the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures. A seven man committee was set up by the federal government of the country which implemented the rural development programmes of the authority (DFRRI).

To facilitate the implementation of the programmes, the federal government allocated the sum of N1.1 billion in 1986 budget. The money was also to take care of the expenses of the national programme for college graduates and school leavers' self-employment. The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures, in its numerous publications defined its goals as that of improving "the quality of life and standard of living of the majority of the people in the rural areas ... and the inducing of a vastly increased and sustained rural productivity" (Abdullahi et al, 1987:9). The authors did not however, state how far the authority had actualized its mandates in their study.

Among the programmes of the Directorate, the one widely known and noticeable was the construction of the feeder roads programme. In this programme, the Directorate, as announced by the President of Nigeria during the 1986 budget speech was to construct and rehabilitate 60,000 kilometers of rural feeder roads throughout the country. The feeder roads project was broken into two phases: the first phase covering 30,000 kilometers of roads to be constructed in all the states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

To undertake the above task, the sum of N200 million was earmarked. The criteria used for allocating the money included, equality of states (49.14%), number of Local Government Areas (22.64%), land mass (15.36%) and ecological special problem (12.64%) (Nnamdi and Ogunrinde, 1988). The authors did not state whether the actual disbursement of the funds agreed with the above stated criteria.

In a progress report released by the Directorate on the construction of the 30,000 kilometers roads first phase nationwide, only three states (Bauchi, Lagos and Rivers) out of the ten visited by inspectors of the roads met the specification set for them (Nnamdi and Ogunrinde, 1988). The authors did not however, quantify the level of success recorded in the states mentioned above in their study.

The report of the final comprehensive inspection of the rural feeder roads programme in Borno state, for instance was a good representation of the condition of such roads and the manner of their construction throughout the country. Out of the 1,500 kilometers spread in 46 different roads claimed to have been built, only 942.4 kilometers or 62.8% of varying quality were accepted by the monitoring team (Anonymous, 1988). The team observed that the people have not been involved at all in the construction of the feeder roads. Consequently, it opined that:-

Although the people are happy with the roads which link them to major roads and population centers, they see the roads as another set of government roads. In some cases the people's resentment of the roads is clearly expressed. In one case, a farmer constructed his farm across the road rendering it impassable. In another, the people planted their crops on the road, . . . in yet two others even the chairman of the local government council does not believe they are priority in his area (Anonymous, 1988:11).

The above author had failed to note that 62.8% of success (as stated above) meant that the authority's impact was reasonably felt by the communities concerned. He further observed that, the local government chairmen were not involved in the selection of roads. The same thing went for other DFRRRI programmes. The monitoring team observed that most of the roads were constructed without the erection of bridges and culverts; and thus making the roads not useful to the communities. Consequently, the committee concluded that "the roads have made little

or no impact on the standards of living of the people” (Anonymous, 1988). A closer look at the authority’s activities across the country, however shows that its impact, compared with other agencies that existed before it, was felt nation-wide

Summary of Findings

The host communities of LUBRBRDAs had indices of rural development in their domains before the authorities were established. However, as discovered during the course of study, after the intervention of the authorities, more infrastructures were provided for the rural dwellers during the period under study. They (authorities) cleared, prepared and allocated farm plots to the rural dwellers, constructed dams for irrigation agriculture and also provided portable water through bore holes for the betterment of rural lives.

Lack of qualified manpower stunted efforts of LUBRBRDAs in developing their host communities. The information gathered from official documents of the authorities under study shows that trained personnel such as climatologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, etc. were lacking in the services of the authorities during the period under study.

Activities of LUBRBRDAs impacted low on the rural development of their host communities. The factors responsible for the low performance of the RBRDA have already been discussed in the work.

The functions of RBRDA are relevant and appropriate to needs of the rural people. However, the execution of functions by the authorities in their respective catchment states resulted to unintended consequences which further underdeveloped same (rural areas). As gathered during interview and field observation, the large-scale irrigation projects was alien; it came from another economy and was disrupting the simple rural economy to turn same into a market economy for its machines, fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides, among others.

The host communities of LUBRBRDAs also complained bitterly that the authorities destroyed their ecosystem; indiscriminately uprooted their plants and deforested their domains. These resulted to siltation, damage to land, and the land tenure system and a host of other associated problems. As gathered, this resulted to resentment of the activities of the authorities in some quarters.

Inadequate and untimely release of funds by the government to LUBRBRDA negatively affected the execution of their functions during the period of the study. In fact, inadequate funding of rural development projects of the authorities stalemated their success as most of the projects were left uncompleted as a result of dwindling revenue accruing to the government, withdrawal of subsidy on irrigation as a result of commercialization policy, and diversion of government funds to other functions that were not related to the mandate of RBRDAs. It was also gathered that, non-availability of funds to the rural farmers to fully and actively participate in the modern farming techniques of irrigation that is capital intensive stalemated the success of RBRDAs.

The rural people (i.e. peasant farmers, petty traders, palm wine tappers, the local carpenter, the blacksmith, the fishermen etc) in most of the communities studied had no access to portable water (boreholes) supply and were also underemployed in the agricultural sector due to lack of facilities (farm machineries, pesticides, herbicides, irrigation facilities, improved seedlings etc). Most of them could not afford the cost of mechanized agricultural which led to their low yield before and after the intervention of the authorities (LUBRBRDAs). Consequently, these had far reaching effect on the rural development abilities of the LUBRBRDAs.

It is also discernable from the evidence during oral interview that large-scale irrigation agriculture through large-scale dams had not ameliorated rural development

problems of the host communities of the LUBRBRDAs. On the contrary, projects benefited large scale farmers more than the peasantry because the rich farmers possessed the means to avail themselves of the services and facilities offered by the authorities' projects. The unintended effects of the large-scale dams (through siltation and enclavement) had also made the local farmers in the catchment states of the authorities poorer than they were before the introduction of the RBRDAs schemes. This explains why the World Bank was quite critical of the large-scale irrigation projects of the RBRDAs scheme because the practice, according to the Bank, undermined the objective of promoting economic and social equality within the rural economy since vast majority of the peasant farmers could not benefit substantially from the projects.

Corruption and mismanagement of resources had also played significant role in the poor performance of the LUBRBRDAs. This had manifested in the appointments of staff of the authorities, mismanagement of machines and funds as well as the dubious interests of the officials of the authorities on contracts for feasibility studies, construction, and equipment supplies, among others, and hence impacting negatively on the performances of LUBRBRDAs.

Inadequate consultation and involvement of the beneficiaries of the rural development programmes in the host communities of the authorities was also discovered to have downplayed the abilities of the authorities in rural development. Most of the projects/programmes of the RBRDAs were conceived without input from the benefiting communities, and also implemented behind them thereby leaving a lots of questions unanswered. Thus, the World Bank President, Namara (1973) opined that development will be of no help to the rural poor if it is designed by those who have no knowledge of their problems and operated by those who have no interest in their future.

Policy inconsistency and poor governance occasioned by proliferation of RBRDAs in the country and the merging of same from one government to the other as well as the rationalization of the functions of the authorities due to privatization and commercialization policies affected the performance of the authorities under study.

Conclusions

The general perception people have had on RBRDAs is that the authorities have underperformed in their mandate of developing the rural areas. To buttress this point, the study generated empirical data through field survey which proved that the LUBRBRDAs have not developed their rural communities during the period under study.

The study upheld the need to restructure RBRDAs to focus on small-scale irrigation projects, which would create accessibility for the peasant farmers to participate actively in crops production. It is therefore, hoped that if the recommendations of the study are faithfully implemented, rural development will not elude the host communities of the LUBRBRDAs.

The LUBRBRDAs, just like the other authorities have high potentials to stimulate improved agricultural productivity and provide development at the local levels. Therefore, if these authorities are properly repositioned and properly managed, the vicious cycle of rural underdevelopment in the host communities of the LUBRBRDAs, and the nation at large will be a thing of the past.

Rural development institutions of government in Nigeria should be seen as integral part of authorities responsible for the realization of good governance and provision of basic social amenities to cushion vulnerability of citizens to external and mostly uncontrollable events such as economic stocks, natural disasters etc.

Most government activities are rural development based. For instance, each ministry

(state or federal) has elements of rural development embedded in their programmes/projects. Therefore, if these government ministries are empowered and are well monitored, there may not have been any need to establish any special authority for rural development.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study, it is pertinent to offer suggestions that if implemented, would go a long way in improving the performance of the LUBRBRDAs in the rural development of their host communities.

First and foremost, the RBRDAs as agents of rural development should be restructured to focus on small-scale irrigation projects to create accessibility for the peasant farmers into the agricultural revolution expected of the RBRDAs. Where this, the great potentials in the rural areas will be tapped, and sustainable development of the host communities of the authorities under study would be achieved. The small-scale irrigation system, according to Odo (2010)

would provide adequate and satisfactory solution for socio-economic challenges of the rural areas, based on the following conditions:

- i. The small-scale irrigation system of about 10 - 40 hectares would attract low development costs, use of inputs, and generate employment. They are therefore, likely to be more attractive to the rural farmers.
- ii. Most RBRDAs large-scale irrigation projects were inefficient both technologically and economically with many undesirable environmental, social and economic consequences. The scheme, according to the above author was a technical failure because of engineering inadequacies and unsuitability of technologies for the local ecologies.

- iii. The small-scale irrigation system has high potentials for creating employment for the unemployed youths, which would curtail the tide of rural-urban migration.
- iv. The implementation of the small-scale irrigation system would bring about an enduring rural development process in Nigeria. More so, it is in tune with the thinking in the government cycle towards the promotion of micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSME) as a national development strategy.

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