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THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING RURAL AREAS IN NIGERIA: BEYOND THE INFRASTRUCTURE THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This work aimed at deemphasizing on the provision of infrastructure as the primary basis for the development of rural areas. Pivoted by the Basic Needs Approach as the theoretical drift, the study, which relied mainly on secondary data {library research} and content analysis emanating therefrom acknowledges that infrastructures provided, actually indicate attempts at development and indeed advance the pace of development. However, the study doubts the supposed primacy of the provision of infrastructure and suggests that good quality community leadership, mass participation of the citizenry, and initiation of development projects and programmes by the community are more primary in the challenges for the development of the rural areas in Nigeria than the provision of infrastructure. This is because with good quality community leadership, ideas for development will be promoted and conveyed to the appreciation of the masses who, in turn, will contribute zealously to the process of development. In sum, quality community leadership and mass participation in the process of development are more basic needs than the provision of

infrastructure in the challenge of developing rural areas in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of development have proved that the world is basically an unequal one - rich and poor, developed and developing, modern and traditional, industrialised and agrarian, urban and rural. Thus, with emphasis on the rural-urban differences and inequalities, Das (1979) observes from the historical perspective that the rural areas in developing societies have been neglected. He furthers that whatever average gain was recorded on the initial economic growth in such countries concealed the fact that certain sections of the population prospered more than others. Onayide (1990:51) submit that the urban areas profit over the rural ones with much influence from the public, manufacturing and trading sectors. The rural areas thus lag behind in the process of improving the quality of all human lives which Todaro (1981) views as development.

Arguably, the disadvantaged posture of the rural areas is informed by the non-availability of infrastructure including: electricity, pipe-borne water, mechanised implement for agriculture, dearth of government presence, low literacy level, low per-capita income, non-availability of modern health facilities and ignorance of such, and above all, lack of the awareness of the general population of the need to strive for the development of the area in terms of the provision of the indices of development (Brown, 1997). In the context of our rural communities, therefore, infrastructure emphasis tend to portray secondary issues such as pipe-borne water, electricity, roads, automobile, architectural edifices, etc. These are, however, to the detriment of some issues that are less tangible but more primary.

In spite of this persuasive logic, the bone of contention here is in the perspective of the argument for rural development. Most theses argue for the availability of infrastructure as the basic requirement. Such arguments posit that the building blocks or head starts for development are

seen in the provision of modern medical facilities, access roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, institutions of learning, etc (Brown, 1997). This work seeks to depart beyond this argument; hence, beyond the infrastructure thesis. It seeks to identify other virtues that are of more basic and primacy values to rural development than the provision of infrastructure.

Development Thesis: A Panoramic Survey

Expediency demands that an attempt be made at realising the scope of the concept of development. Thus, Hauchler (1994) begins with the need to broaden the concept of development to include issues and ideas covering cultural, societal, historical, social, and human values. In other words, the concept of development must contribute to the eradication of loss of skills and self-reliance (socio-economic), the plunder over natural resources (agricultural and environmental), the erosion of cultural values (socio-cultural), and the violation of human dignity and rights (socio-political). Scholars have, however, proposed various dimensions including: linear and dialectical explanations for growth vis-à-vis development (Rostow, 1967; Leibenstein, 1957; Higgins, 1957; and Schumpeter, 1934); locational (Mill, 1885); economic (Marx and Engels, 1948); religious (Boulding, 1952); and multi-dimensional (Todaro, 1981; Hauchler, 1994; and Ake, 1996).

While Todaro (1981) implies the raising of the people's living levels; the creating of conducive conditions for the promotion of people's self-esteem, and increasing freedom to choose; Ake (1996) implies the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realise higher levels of civilisation in accordance with their own choices and values. Development must therefore be self-generated with flexibility to accommodate facilities, aids and help from others. To this end, people are undoubtedly seen to be the end point of development (Okigbo, 1987). As submitted by Caincross in Olaopa's "Ake's Unfinished Journey" submits:

...the key to development lies in men's minds, in the institutions in which their thinking finds expression and in the play of opportunity on ideas and institutions (Punch, Tuesday, December 10, 1966:20).

In which case, there is need for development drive to be internally initiated.

In another twist, it is common knowledge that social organisation of advanced regions is based on superficial and contractual relationships, while the developing societies build theirs around personal, and less formal relationships. This claim is, however, debatable as the concept of dualism is brought into focus (Summers and Clemente, 1976; Bluestone et al, 1982; Goldschmidt, 1978; Clout, 1977). Other factors which influence development include scientific technological revolutions (Radoman, 1979); the environment (Hoy and Belisle, 1984 and Islam, 1985); and gender (Aina & Salau, 1992; Izugbara & Ukwai, 2002). Most dispositions, however, tend to support the infrastructure thesis.

Nigerian Rural Areas and Development

The notion of Rural Development is inspired by the fact that rural areas are in dire need of development (Ekong, 1991; Brown, 1997). Instructively, the draft of the National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (1991) views Rural Development as the strategy and the process whereby significant improvements are brought about and sustained in the economic, socio-cultural, and political lives of the rural population. The suggestion here is the Rural Development involves an organic integration of land, economy and society, and the establishment of the enabling conditions for effective local participation in both decision-making processes and the implementation of rural development programmes.

Put differently, Rural Development is concerned with the raising of the quality of low-income population living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through the

transformation of the rural mode of production (Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DFRRI, 1987). It is thus a broad-based re-organisation and mobilisation of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily demands of their lives and with changes resulting from such re-organisation and mobilisation (Mabogunje, 1980). And Ekong (2000) conceptualises Rural Development as a function of group action and inaction with group formation, types, and goals, level of voluntary individual participation as well as quality of group leadership, group co-operation and efficacious communication as the necessary dynamics.

The recorded developmental imbalances and the need to remedy the situation best explains the need for Rural Development whose objectives are found in various forms of details in line with the variety of cultures and national development policies (Ekong, 1991). Currently the strategy which has evolved is the Integrated Rural Development (I.R.D.) as once exemplified in the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) – now relegated to the background, the end products, among others, include the enhancement of the people's productive capacities; expansion of physical infrastructures; improvement of human resources quality and the quality of life of the rural masses; as well as the strengthening of rural organisational and institutional capacities for democratic development.

By extension, Ekong (1991) offers that: the development and increase of productivity of agricultural sector; stemming the tide of migration of youths from rural to urban areas in search of non-existing jobs by creating rural-based employment opportunities; improving the well-being of rural dwellers via the provision of basic needs infrastructure such as: potable water, light, shelter, health, education and communication facilities; reduction of poverty and inequality in rural areas via anti-poverty policies; and amelioration of regional development imbalances through a policy of locating public industries in rural areas (Ekong, 1991; and DFRRI drafts, 1991).

It is worthy to note at this point that the, strategies for Rural Development are influenced by the objectives. But whatever strategies used, efficient co-ordination and honesty are required for goal attainment. To this end, Sam Aluko posits:

...unless the problems of rural development are more effectively co-ordinated and the location of the main actor and catalysts of various programmes and projects is firmly in the rural areas...we will assess the effectiveness of the directorate (instrument for rural development) mainly in terms of huge sums of money spent but less in physical output arising there-from (Focus Magazine, July, 1988:11).

In other words, the syndrome of throwing money at problems is neither advisable nor sufficient. Rather, it is counter-productive. The situation further justifies the need to mobilise the rural masses for the rural development programmes through the use of opinion leaders (Abasiokong, 1985). Any attempt contrary to the above vindicates the thesis that rural development policies will elicit a grudging performance at best (Ake, 1978).

Infrastructure developments have been the hallmark of the development plans in Nigeria (Makinwa, 1981); but they have sadly had urban biases. The result is the rush at implanting infrastructures in the rural areas which inevitably strengthens the argument that people cannot be developed when they are herded like cattle into new ventures and pastures (Boosen, 1981). This informs the position that rural development is necessarily a continuous process of planned social, political and economic development in rural and urban social structures and organisations which provide adequate incentives, production possibilities, and services to help rural peoples achieve higher levels of living, knowledge, and skills (Castle, 1996).

One can therefore argue that local authority is the very heart of rural development and unless the rural areas enjoy some level of autonomy, they had better been allowed to suffer neglect than raised false expectations. Rondenelli & Ruddle (1978) thus emphasise local support components and programmatic inputs. It follows that the vulnerability to failure of the rural development strategies grants the lee way to dare that rural development is a mere theoretical concept (Copp, 1972). This is more pronounced in the Nigerian setting – where several development proposals are implemented without regards to due process and interest of the expected end points and beneficiaries.

History holds that prior to (and upon) independence several attempts have been made in the challenge of rural development. Such include: the National Development Plans; Operation feed the Nation; Green revolution; Integrated Rural Development (institutionalised by the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); the Better Life Programme (for Rural Dwellers); and Poverty Alleviation Programme (Akpan, 2000). Regional attempts including the Willinks Commission prior to the 1960s; the Niger Delta Development Authority; the Oil Mineral Producing area Development Commission (OMPADEC); the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) and currently, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), have also been directed at rural development. But in all, post-mortem studies have shown that they have successively failed (Ukpong, 2004).

Theoretical Space

Though theoretical development has not kept pace with empirical evidence (Lovejoy and Krannich, 1982), the drift of this work demands that emphasis be placed on the Basic Needs Approach whose pedigree is traceable to the International Labour Organisation. Inspired by Abraham Maslow's five classes or categories of human needs, and made popular by Gran (1974 and 1983); Ekejiuba (1983); Abasiokong (1982) and Ekong (1988 and 2003), the theory seeks to explain those essential ingredients for the development of a (rural) society. In which case, the sources

and availability of (quantitative) and (qualitative) aspects of development constitute the principal points of this theoretical approach.

Current arguments (conceptually) emphasise that the needs for: electricity supply of light and power; pipe-borne water, adequate housing and other physical things could explain a society's basic needs. However, the point of departure is here (contextually) provided by the wherewithal of meeting the needs. To this end, Ekejiuba (1983) in an attempt to present an alternative approach to the classical approaches to development emphasises on the total local community mobilisation and popular participation in the identification, definition, promotion, and execution of projects as well as in the defence of values and needs that are directed by the existential conditions of the target group as being essential. The undertone here is the case of self-reliance based on the need for structural transformations that result from mobilisation, participation and even distribution of the benefits of development. This is embellished in the need to accurately understand and analyse the social, political and economic realities of the target group.

Furthermore, development must be spiced with the democratic virtue of mass, local, popular, or citizen participation (Abasiokong, 1982:9). Though with some controversial tendencies, this underlies the idea of playing active roles in society decision-making, being knowledgeable in local issues, attending public meetings; and contributing in various ways toward community programmes (Ekong, 1988, 2003). This active participation would enhance increased learning in the ways of associated living (Abasiokong, 1982:66).

Moreover, the adage: "He who feels it knows it " beckons on the society dwellers to react to their felt needs as well as instigate a process of meeting their collective needs. In other words, those who feel a need for development should necessarily initiate the moves to accomplish such a dream for development. In the absence of this initial step by the society dwellers, imported ideas that are not in tandem with the

people's felt needs may be effected for failure. This concept of initiative leads to self-help, which is here considered a virtue. This is, more so, vital when the State, which is supposed to ignite development is incapable and sometimes unwilling and unprepared to pursue tangible development programmes.

Another crucial issue of any organised group is leadership – a process in which one individual, or sometimes a small group of individuals, influences the efforts of another toward the achievement of goals in a given set of circumstances (Cole, 1996: 193). It is also a position of motivating others toward a specific goal for the purpose of making them feel successful (Baker, 1983:4). More contextually, it is the office or position of one who initiates interaction and moves the group toward the attainment of its goal(s) or solution to its problems (Ekong, 1988:427). Granting a strong academic contribution to the issue of leadership, Bass (1990) advances that leadership is an interaction between members of a group. Leaders are thus agents of change, persons whose acts affect other people more than other people's acts affect them. Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly, and Konopaske (2003:199) add that leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. This implies that leadership involves the use of influence. Put differently, leadership is an attempt to use influence to motivate individuals to accomplish goals.

The variables of quality leadership include: the leader(s); the group members; the goal as tasks; and the external environment (including the structure and culture). Good quality/effective leadership amounts to finding the optimum balance between the above four sets of variables. Any successful Rural Development attempt is predicated on this (Brown, 1997). Leadership therefore is a social process in which one person in a group harnesses the knowledge, skills and motivation of the other members in the attainment of group goals. The process implies the willing or grudging consent of the group. It involves managing the external boundaries of the group, as well as dealing constructively with

the members' internal responsibilities, roles and relationships. Leaders are essentially required to identify the need for change, and to use their influence to redirect the energies of group members accordingly (Cole, 1996:194).

3. METHOD OF STUDY

The theoretical method which relies on library materials, was adopted for this work. As such, data was raised from books, journals and other periodicals constituted the main sources of data for this work. Analyses are done sequel to information from secondary sources. The end points of the analysis constitute the basis for the departure from the emphasis on thesis infrastructure thesis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: BEYOND THE INFRASTRUCTURE

Again the infrastructure thesis emphasises the provision of electricity power supply, pipe borne water, and physical amenities as basis for development. But this paper departs with the view that: the quality of society leadership; the extent to which the society has recognised its felt needs and has initiated steps toward meeting those needs; and the extent to which the masses have participated in the entire process, are more determinative and basic to development than the provision of the earlier mentioned tangible infrastructure or quantitative variables. This position finds support in the argument that with a good quality of leadership, the felt needs of the societies would be identified; thereafter bold steps would be taken initially; and the same leadership will motivate and mobilise the masses to appreciate the development process and benefit there-from (Brown, 1997).

Arguably, some scholars conceptualize of infrastructure to include such vital institutions as education, health and leadership development process. This position is predicated on the premise these are pivotal to the improvement of the quality of the population for effective participation in decision making and the initiation of development projects and programmes based on felt needs. This is ideally right.

However, a people should develop at their pace. In which case, it could be argued that there is an observed underutilization of the few available facilities, on the one hand; and a somewhat unregulated approach to catching up with the demands. This frustrates quality assurance and jeopardizes attempts at maximally utilizing the charms of the said vital institutions.

Consequently, this has somewhat zeroed the impetus for development to the challenges of providing facilities for meeting real needs by merely "throwing money at problems" (Aluko, 1988) to record political achievements without necessarily ensuring the reduction of unemployment and poverty, as well as, narrowing the inequality gap. This thus makes development a mirage in rural Nigeria.

It must be admitted that leadership is necessary for mobilizing the people for active positive participation. The process of raising an enlightened and healthy population is also a necessity. Regarding the fact that leadership is a process, structure, function, and a position; leadership is indeed an intangible infrastructure. However, the interest of the development drivers seem to emphasise on tangible issues like houses, bridges, roads, water supply, electricity power, etc.

Let there be a departure from the infrastructure provision as the point of emphasis, to the emphasis on quality and focused leadership which would understand the dynamics of the society, develop ideas of development, communicate those ideas to the masses and mobilise the masses to participate in the process. Here lies the path to rural development success in Nigeria, for from here, the infrastructure could be easily provided and the people themselves would jealously guard and protect what have emerged from their society in their favour. Thus, in sum, quality leadership; leadership initiatives as to developmental programmes and projects; communication of the ideas to the masses, and the mobilization of the masses to active participation in such programmes are sure seen as more basic to the development of rural centres than placing emphasis first

on the provision of infrastructure. The afore-mentioned variables, indeed, constitute prime variables that are beyond the infrastructure thesis.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This work, in the main, surveyed the challenges of developing the rural areas in Nigeria. It appraised various development paradigms from multiple climes as well as those adopted by various governments in Nigeria. The perception of the concept of infrastructure was pivotal to the work. Basically, an infrastructure is elementary and fundamental to the bringing to bear of other structures. The probe hinges on what constitute infrastructure in the first place.

Evidence from this study suggests that drivers of development in rural Nigeria have overbearingly placed emphasis on provision of roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, health cottages, classroom blocks, and transportation facilities as the primary basis for development. This work, while not necessarily disregarding the potency of the afore-mentioned provisions, however, contends that good quality leadership, active involvement of the citizenry-at-large, and the initiation of development programmes based on real needs of the rural communities deserve greater acknowledgement as infrastructure upon which the earlier-enumerated provisions would be more successfully built. Hence the submission that they are more primary than the provisions in the hierarchy of infrastructure ranking. This submission necessitates the recommendation for the need to switch emphasis from the provision of development projects to investment on human capital and people-oriented programmes.

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