

GOVERNMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF THE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN RIVERS STATE (2000-2014)

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Abstract

Poverty is a serious challenge to all levels of government in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, over two-third of the country's population are poverty-challenged and reside in the rural areas. They are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture which is assumed to play supportive roles in income generation, and in the provision of sufficient low-priced food. This study explores the role of Rivers state government in tackling poverty challenges in the state through the introduction of some agricultural development programmes aimed at increasing output, as well as increasing the standard of living and the reduction of poverty. Using content analysis method, the study discusses the state's intervention in poverty reduction, through the introduction of various agricultural development programmes from 2000 to 2014. The study recommends for increased funding and proper monitoring of ongoing agricultural development programmes in the state.

Keywords. Poverty, Government, Programmes, Agriculture, Rivers State

Introduction

Poverty has become a major problem recognized internationally as deserving urgent attention, especially in the developing countries which includes Nigeria. Poverty has become an overwhelming issue since it affects majority of the population. Poverty in Nigeria, a country with over 180 million people is all encompassing. It has shown a rising tendency in the past decades, accounting for the nations low development indicators and its ranking alongside the poorest nations in the world. Anger (2010:14) explains that majority of Nigeria's population live in poverty with insufficient income to cover minimum standard of food, water, shelter, medical care and schooling. Reduction of poverty is regarded as the most important goal of human development. Indeed, it is now widely believed that at its core, development must be about improvement of human well-being, removal of hunger, disease and promotion of productive employment for all because those factors can bring about the reduction of poverty. To this effect, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015) was targeted at eradication of extreme hunger and poverty in the 189 member countries of the United Nations, which Nigeria is a member. Bello (2007:49) notes that the year 2000 has increasingly being recognized by

the United Nations, governments and concerned citizens alike, as the year when the world has an unprecedented opportunity to fight global poverty through the Millennium Development Goals. In 1979, General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a programme called Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). The programme had the specific focus of increasing food production on the promise that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and invariably, lead to national growth and development. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), lasted until Shehu Shagari's government took over (1979–1983). The government (Shagari's) through the Green Revolution programme shared almost the same poverty reduction approach with his predecessor, which emphasized on food production. According to Ohize and Adamu (2009:48) perhaps the regime with the widest approach to poverty reduction is the Babangida's regime through the introduction of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986. Under the civilian administration from 1999 to date, government has set out poverty reduction as one of its area of focus. There was National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), under Obasanjo's civilian government, after his first attempt to eradicate poverty through the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in the year 2000. Other schemes include Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS), and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Rivers state under the administration of Dr. Peter Odili (1999–2007) engaged the New Nigeria Foundation (NNF) and Citizens International (CI) as an advisory team. This organization however, is noted as a non-governmental development organization, locally managed and head-quartered in Lagos, that supports the efforts of the Nigerian government in its poverty reduction programmes by building partnership between the public and private sectors. Under the succeeding administration of Rotimi Amechi (2007-2014) the government pursued some Agricultural development Programmes. The programmes were pursued through the ministry of Agriculture for purposes of poverty reduction. These agricultural development programmes include:

- National Programme of Food Security (NPFS). Its activities started nationally in March 2002 and was later adopted in Rivers state in 2007.
- Root and Tuber Expansion Programmes (RTEP). It was launched in December 2000 at the federal level and was later adopted in 2008 in Rivers state.
- Community-Based Natural Resources Management Programme (CBNRMP). It became effective on July, 2005 and was adopted 2007 in Rivers state, and
- National Fadama Development Programme (FADAMA III) which was adopted in 2008/2009.

Objectives of study

The general objective of study is to examine government role in poverty reduction through the Agricultural Development Programmes adopted in Rivers state from 2000–2014. The specific objectives include:

- to examine the level of government's commitment to poverty reduction,
- to examine the extent these agricultural development programmes have contributed to poverty reduction in the State,
- to examine the challenges in the implementation of these programmes.

Understanding poverty

Poverty as a term or a concept like every other in the social sciences is not easily amenable to a straight forward definition since it is defined by various authors and scholars in different ways depending on their understanding and background. However, Anikpo (1995) opines that it is imperative to make a clear distinction between that state in which there are helpless pawns at the mercy of nature itself, and

that in which men are reduced to penury or poverty by the actions of men. In similar context, Eze (2014:3) notes that poverty is the most prevalent social phenomena in human history. To Marshal (1998:516) poverty is a state in which resources, usually materials, but sometimes cultural, are lacking and could be delineated into two broad categories of absolute and relative terms. Accordingly, absolute poverty refers to a state in which an individual lacks the resources necessary for subsistence, while the relative refers to the individuals or groups lack of recourses when compared with that of other members of the society. On the other hand, Onuoha (2009:9) defines poverty as the inability to satisfy basic needs of human life, such as food, clothing, and shelter due to lack of income or opportunity to generate such situation. Innocent et al. (2014:99) views poverty as a condition in which an individual or a group of individuals or community are unable to meet their basic material needs, such as food, potable water, cloth, shelter, basic health care, education, lack of participation in the prevailing social standard of living, dignity and having limited chance of advancing their welfare just to the limit of their capacity. Buwai (2004:3) notes that poverty may mean a lot of things, but in the traditional content, it literally refers to an unacceptable situation of living. From these, it can therefore, be deduced that poverty is a human state or condition, characterized by lack of means of existence, availability of shortage or insufficient amount especially food and other necessities of life, with attendant pervasive negative consequences on human development.

Dimensions of poverty in nigeria

According to Ojiakor (2007:273) poverty is a state of being. This is a condition of material, cognitive, social and psychological deprivation. Ijioma (2002:149) views that each of the three main components such as low income, limited education and poor health (the famous triad of poverty, ignorance and disease) is strongly influenced by outside forces. Poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs. Ojiakor (2007:254-255) further distinguishes the various types of poverty as cyclical poverty and collective poverty. The cyclical poverty refers to poverty which may be widespread or throughout the population but the occurrence itself is of limited duration. The author further points out that this sort of inability to provide for one's basic need rests mainly upon temporary focus shortage caused by poor agricultural planning. Collective poverty on the other hand involves a relatively permanent insufficiency of means to secure basic needs. Again, Dolan (2007:461) opines that poverty implies a lack of means to provide for basic material needs. The author explains that at the same time, it tends to be associated not just with low earning but with loose attachment to the labour market, and not only with lack of means but with dependence on others to meet basic needs. According to Nwokedi (2016:74) Nigeria ranks among the 25 poorest countries in the world. As a matter of fact, most Nigerians live on less than 1 US dollar per day. They suffer from near total absence of basic tools of development such as education, health, water, roads, power and other infrastructural facilities, most evident in the rural areas. The author further maintains that they lack essential economic factors that will empower them towards gainful employment and productivity. Poverty is endemic in Nigeria. Its ugly face is manifested everywhere. However, it is a predominantly rural phenomenon in the sense that it's most glaring and several indicators manifest its prevalence in the rural areas where most people live. As such it is pertinent to note that the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) have identified poverty as one of the major challenges to development in the country and requires urgent attention. The World Bank report of 2014 collaborates the high poverty incidence in Nigeria. This was further identified through MDG and NEEDS framework geared towards addressing poverty issues. Theses dimensions manifest in the high unemployment level especially at the rural areas, low household expenditure on food, poor nutrition, lack of access to basic amenities etc.

The role of government in poverty reduction

The issue of poverty reduction needs to be taken with all amount of seriousness it deserves and not ordinarily paying lip-service to it as has been the case. Pointing specifically on the role of government in poverty reduction is to the fact that it (government) possesses every means, influences and machinery to carry out this function. According to Hassan et al. (2006:100) the Nigerian state needs to foster a peaceful expression of people's priority. Thus, it needs to promote participation and encourage private and public participation or partnership in this regard. Ijiomah (2002:113) points out that it is expected that the emergence of a democratically elected government would bring about a reversal in the form, content and style of education. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, provides in chapter two (Fundamental Objective and Directive Principles of State Policy) Section 14 Sub-section 2 (b) "that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government"

Again in Section 16, sub-section 2, "the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring:-

- the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development;
- that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good;
- that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individual or of a group; and
- that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, aid age care and pensions and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

As regards to the provision of sub-section 2(d) this study brings into view the submissions of Doland (2007:466) that unemployment compensation, temporarily replaces the loss of income of unemployed people and keeps them out of poverty until they can find a job. This is a task that can only fall within the capacity of government.

Poverty challenges in rivers state

Rivers state has always occupied a strategic position nationally and internationally. It contributes immensely towards the wealth of the Nigerian nation. The area was formally known as the Oil Rivers and played a vital role in the oil industrial revolution of the 19th century in England by providing vegetable oil which served multiple purposes as raw material and lubricant for industries mainstay of modern technology. Rivers State continues to supply in same way, crude oil to the world community. More than 50% of Nigeria crude oil comes from the state (Strategic Health Development Plan Rivers State, 2010-2015). In pursuit of better and a poverty-free state, every measure taken have proved abortive or futile to an extent with little or no change. The challenges are outcomes of the various activities in the state which ranges from the nature of the economy, state and Individuals, to the government and its system of administration.

The socio-economic context

There has been steady production decline in agriculture and fishery due to population pressure, the swamp nature of the terrain and the deleterious impact of oil exploration activities. Modern economic activities which are concentrated in Port Harcourt and other parts of Rivers state, including manufacturing, commerce, utilities, and infrastructural development, are largely dominated by non-indigenes of the state.

According to The Tide (2016) nevertheless, the oil industry remains the most fundamental element in modern economic activities of the state. Rivers state is Nigeria premier oil producing state accounting for well over 50 percent of crude oil output in the country. However, exploration activities have had disastrous environmental and ecological implications for the various communities that make up Rivers

state. Of course only a fraction of the oil proceeds from Rivers state would have been enough to check both the natural and man-made environmental and ecological disaster that defined the state. Rather, the oil proceeds have been used to massively develop infrastructure in other parts of the country to the neglect of the state.

The consequences is environmental pollution, causing sicknesses and environmental disaster which destroys plants and most often aquatic organisms. This also breeds environmental degradation and causes harm to man and nature (environment). The provision for a better life, healthy living and a poverty-free state cannot have a good base to flourish if these problems or challenges are not taken care of.

Agricultural development programmes

Traditionally, in economic development agriculture is assumed to play a passive and supportive role. The main thrust of agricultural development efforts has been to enhance and sustain capacity of the sector to play this assigned role with particular emphasis on the attainment of a sustainable level in the production of basic food commodities and others (Grace, et al., 2003:185). Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) has not been a recent means of poverty reduction in the State. From the early post-independence era, the government from time to time has initiated and adopted series of agricultural programmes with the aim of increasing food production and reducing hunger in the country. These steps were also taken by the states governments and Rivers State government has not been left out.

The administration of Governor Rotimi Amaechi since inception has introduced several programmes to revamp the agricultural sector and encourage people to go back to farming. The administration has established the Songhai Centre, Fish Farms and Banana plantation as well as revived the Rison palm in addition to other initiatives to improve agricultural growth and output in the state. (Rivers State ADP, 2014). The government worked with the following Agricultural Development Programmes.

National Programme of Food Security (NPFS) (2007). The programme took effect from 2007. The immediate objective of this programme was to assist farmers increase output of major crops, productivity, profitability and house hold income. The state ADP is the implementing agency at state level and the programme first phase lasted for three years. The sites were selected, one per senatorial district i.e. Atali/Elimgbu/Eneka in Obio/Akpor LGA, Okohah in Abua/Odual LGA and Oyorokoto in Andoni LGA. The expansion phase includes extension of the NPFS sites to cover additional 6 sites (i.e. 2 sites per senatorial district) i.e. Idoke Ijhuaba in Ahoada East LGA; Opiro in Etche LGA, Rumu-Ada in Emohua LGA, AKabuka in Ogba/Ebema/Ndoni LGA and Umuagbai in Oyibo LGA (ADP, 2010).

Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) (2008). This programme was formulated by the food Centre in 1995 and appraised by the World Bank, the same year. It was negotiated by the International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD) executive Board and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 1999 and launched in December 2000. The major objective of RTEP is to significantly improve food security, income and livelihood of the rural poor through importuned root and tuber crops production, processing and marketing (Agricultural Development Programme, 2014). It was later adopted in Rivers State in 2008. The first three-term of the programme started in 2001 and was state-wide in approach and ended in 2006. The second three-term (2007–2009) is ongoing.

Community–Based National Resources Management Programme (CBNRMP). The CBNRMP is an International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD). It is a Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN)/ Niger Delta Development Commission NDDC/ State-Funded Programme aimed at rural poverty reduction in the nine Niger Delta states i.e. Abia, Akwa – Ibom, Bayesla, Cross-river, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. The target groups are the rural poor in the programme areas with emphasis on women and youth. The goal of the programme is to improve the standard of living and quality of life

of at least 400,000 poor rural people of the Niger Delta states. The programme became effective on 6th July, 2005. The programme is being implemented in 9 Local Government Areas and 27 communities in the state in partnership with (IFAD) International Fund for Agricultural Development. **National Fadama Development Programme (FADAMA III).** The third national FADAMA programme (FADAMA III) is an initiative of the federal government for the development of Agriculture sub-sector of the economy to improve food production, rural income and well-being of the rural dwellers. The project development objective is to sustainably increase food security and create employment opportunities. The National FADAMA Development Programme III is a World Bank and Federal Government assisted programme to improve income and livelihood of the rural populace (Ministry of Agriculture 2010:13).

Review of programmes

Under the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the government assisted farmers with credit facilities, subsidies and incentives to boost their output and develop agriculture in the state. The major aim of the government under the Agricultural Development Programme is to diversify the economy of Rivers State by moving away from total dependence on oil and gas, encourage export and serve as a model for developing rural cities in the state.

Community-Based Natural Resource Management Programme. This programme is for the empowerment and development of rural communities through community driven approach in partnership with IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development). The programme is being implemented as for now in five local government areas, funding by Rivers State government. The programme made achievement during the year in natural resource management programme with one hectare of yam farm established at Ubima in Ikwere local Government Area, one hectare of cassava farm established at Apani Ikwere; restocked a fish farm at Ozuaha; and established a rabbitry at Ozuaha. In livelihood improvement, it distributed fishing inputs (canoes, net, hooks, out-board engines etc.) to artisan fishing groups in Burukiri, Isheligono and Ikuruma all in Bonny Local Government Area; Fishing imputer were also distributed to fishing groups in Iwoma/Nkoro, Opobo/Nkoro L.G. A. Under the Third National Fadama Development Programme (FADAMA III) the following has been achieved: establishment of three new farm villages for the cultivation of various crops, with major in cocoa. The project comes with a central processing centre to achieve value addition. The government took necessary steps to ensure that they need the legibility criteria set out by the federal government and World Bank. They embarked on capacity-building through participation in training and workshops as well as organizing same at the state and local levels, in order to acquire the necessary skills for effective take-off.

About twenty local government areas participated in the project. The number of sub-project is 1,860 (one thousand, eight hundred and sixty) with 1,440 (one thousand, four hundred and forty) approved. The sum of about N35,374,950.00m (Thirty five million, three hundred and seventy four thousand, nine hundred and fifty naira) has been disbursed to 75 (seventy five) Fadama User Groups (FUGs) and 468 (Four hundred and Sixty eight) sub projects have been completed and 45 (forty five) ongoing. Memorandum of understanding has been signed with LR Group of Israel who are investors/partners. The project is expected to employ up to 4,000 (four thousand) people; 5,000 hectare is being acquired for the project which is being acquired for the project which is supervised by the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA), with the involvement of the state Ministry of Agriculture. The value of the project is about 140m (one hundred and forty million) dollars.

The National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) is implemented in 3 sites per senatorial districts. Rivers West Senatorial District Sites: (Okoboh in Abua/Odual; Ihuaba/Idoke in Ahoada East L.G.A and Akabuka in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni). Rivers East Senatorial District site: (Atali/Elimgbu/Eneka in

Obio/ Akpor lga; Opio in Etche and Rumuada in Emohua). Rivers South Senatorial District sites: (Oyorokoto in Andoni, Apean/ Baen in Khana and Umuagbari in Oyigbo. The present nine sites were selected from nine local government areas that met the stipulated eligibility criteria.

Groups and cooperatives are used as vehicles for implementation at the site level. The capacity of staff and farmers in technically knowledge and community-based approach enhanced using farmers field school extension method. Funding is tripartite (Federal Government of Nigeria, Rivers State Government and participating Local Government Areas which is not yet feasible in Rivers State). The Federal Government provides marching grants to the state technical support and overall coordination, the state and local governments provide counterparts funds. However, during 2012, there was no fund released from the state and local government for the National programme for Food security (NPFS) Headquarters Abuja, to carry out the implementation of approved activities in some sites.

The Root and Tuber Expansion Programme aims at providing grants to farmers in the state to achieve sustainable increase in the production of root crops e.g. Cassava, Yam, Cocoyam and sweet potato. Focus is centred on the production and processing of cassava. Funding is by IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), Federal Government of Nigeria and Rivers State Government. Twenty five farmers' cooperative societies in the state have received grants for this programme. Rivers State Government counterparts funding since 2008 is N23m (twenty three million naira). The beneficiaries of this programme are poor rural farmers for the enhancement of national and state food self-sufficiency, improvement of 'rural households' food security and income for poor farmers within the cassava belt.

The Amaechi-led administration under the Agriculture Development Programme (ADP) in collaboration with RSSDA - Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency, had come up with a massive policy and expectation of the progress and success of those set projects. But the irony of it all is that, since most of the programmes began full operation from 2009 and 2010, three to four years has not been enough for a total transformation of the state of the economy of Rivers state, to the extent of impacting on the lives of people as expected. As such the study finds that the various efforts of the government under its programmes and projects have not fully achieved the expected outcomes. This is because the number of beneficiaries are less than one-quarter of the expected number

Conclusion

The role of government in poverty reduction through agricultural development programme, has been an important area of focus for Rivers State government. The agricultural development programmes gained attention through Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi's administration which initiated the various programmes as the major area of focus in increasing the standard of living and to reduce the high incidence of poverty in the state. The findings in the two major reports from the Naira land Forum (NF) Report in 2014 and the Agricultural Development Programme Extension Service Report of 2012 and 2013 show that these programmes have a positive impact on the various local government areas that participated in the programmes. However, some constraints were identified, that can make the study conclude that Rivers state would emerge as poverty reduced state, time will tell, and the new government in power would as well determine that. As for this period in study, Rivers State has only gone partly the aim of reducing poverty. For me, Rivers State has only 'began the dance!' with the advent of a new government, we hope for the continuity of these programmes to achieve its purpose of establishment.

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