



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 therefore, examines how the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (LUBRBRDAs) have developed their host communities. As an empirical research which draws its population from rural dwellers and officials of the LUBRBRDAs, primary and secondary data were used as methodology for the study. Findings of the study revealed that the agencies under-performed because of large-scale irrigation method of River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs), and inadequate consultation/involvement of beneficiaries of rural development programmes, etc. However, the Lower Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authority (LBRBRDA) provided more farm projects in its host communities more than the Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authority (UBRBRDA); the UBRBRDA fared better than the LBRBRDA in irrigation agriculture and the provision of portable water to their host communities. It was therefore recommended that the 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 activities of the River Basin Authorities to facilitate their success in rural development.

Keywords: Development, Farming, Host Communities, Irrigation, Portable water, RBRDAs.

Introduction

Rural Development has been the preoccupation of many developing countries for a long time because the overwhelming majority of the people in these countries live and find their livelihood in the rural areas. Thus, out of the total estimated population of about 140 million people in Nigeria (NPC, 2006), the World Bank Report (2010) puts about 79,524,370 representing about 60% of the population residing in rural areas. A considerable proportion of the national income is also derived from rural areas as a result of direct economic activities of the rural populace. The contribution this rural majority has been making to the economy of the developing nations is too enormous to be neglected. These have, therefore necessitated policies geared towards the development of the rural areas in Nigeria and other developing countries.

Utaan (2013) had stressed on the importance of developing the rural areas in the underdeveloped countries and Nigeria in particular. According to him, this would enhance productivity in the rural areas and as well raise the incomes of the rural majority. The importance of developing the rural areas in the developing countries has also been stressed by some eminent leaders in Africa. Kenneth Kaunda, a one time president of Zambia, introducing the Second National Development Plan, 1972 to 1976 opined that: “For us, developing the rural areas is a matter of life and death; though we do not underestimate the problems involved ... we must first of all succeed in developing the rural areas no matter our performance in other sectors” (Chambers, 1974:11). In a similar vein, Sir Seretse Khama, the late President of the Republic of Botswana, while introducing the first National Development Plan, 1970 to 1975 said: “The greatest challenge ahead of us is undoubtedly that of rural development. The transformation of the rural communities everywhere presents an intractable problem...yet if majority of the people of Botswana are to benefit from the dramatic increase in the pace of development, the problem must be solved” (Chambers, 1974:11).

Supporting the above views on the importance of developing the rural areas, President Babangida of Nigeria, in his 1986 budget speech stated that: Rural Development will move away from past narrow sectoral pre-occupation with the generation of food and fibre resources to the over-all formulation of a national rural development strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural poverty and enhancement of the quality of rural life (Babangida, 1986:14). Several efforts have thus been made over the years by successive governments in Nigeria to bring transformation to the rural areas (eg, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP-1973), the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs-1975), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN-1976) and the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs), etc.) so as to attract the attention of rural dwellers to their communities. The Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (LUBRBRDAs), 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 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.

In spite of the organizations' importance in developing the rural areas, not much is known about their impact on the rural transformation of 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 contained in the enabling decrees have not been actualized. As a result of the failure of the LUBRBRDAs to develop the rural areas, a great number of the rural dwellers especially the youth migrate to urban areas in search of better life (Forest, 1985), (Ebong, 2000). Why have the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities not developed their host communities despite their numerous years of existence? This is the major problem the paper has attempted to provide solutions to. The main objective of the research is to assess the contribution of the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities to rural development in their host communities. Specific objectives of the study are to: find out if the LUBRBRDAs have been able to provide adequate rural infrastructure in their host communities; ascertain if shortage of trained manpower negatively affected the LUBRBRDAs in carrying out their functions; compare the rural development efforts of the Lower Benue River Basin Authority with the Upper Benue River Basin Authority.

The study covered the rural development efforts of the Lower and Upper Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authorities in such areas as land clearing and preparation, irrigation agriculture, and the drilling of boreholes for supply of portable water to the rural dwellers. The execution of these functions by the respective agencies in the Benue and Nassarawa states were comparatively studied with that of Bauchi and Gombe States of Nigeria between 1979-1988. The Naka Dam in Benue state and the Doma Dam in Nassarawa state was comparatively studied with the Waya Dam in Bauchi state and the Dadin Kowa Dam in Gombe state; most especially as they have assisted in the supply of water for irrigation. The States covered by the study are some of the catchments states of the two River Basins under study.

Methodology

Both primary and secondary data formed the sources of information for the paper. The primary sources of information for the paper were obtained through survey research design (observation and oral interview). While the secondary data were gotten from official documents and project files of the agencies, the internet, journal publications, government reports and theses/dissertations on River Basin Authorities. Applying random and purposive sampling techniques, staff and farmers in the host communities of the LUBRBRDAs who had benefited, or were said to have benefited from the programmes of the

agency were interviewed for the paper. The data were analyzed using views of respondents in the host communities of the LUBRBRDAs.

Review of related literature

Quite a lot has been and is being documented on both rural development and the strategies for its execution. This section of the study reviewed related literature and adopted an appropriate theoretical framework for the paper. 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 in his work. The World Bank in Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995), on the other hand defined rural development as a process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low-income rural dwellers and households. This definition is also defective as it dwelt majorly on the economic growth, which is just an aspect of development.

Taking into cognizance, the economic growth and social upliftment as aspects of development, Ijere (1990), regarded rural development as the process of increasing the per capita 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. Obinne in Ogbidefa (2010), on his part, perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potential through education and share in decision and action which affect their lives. He has however, omitted the provision of amenities such as roads, good water supply and a host of others in his definition of the concept. 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 (Umebali 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. From all the aforementioned varied definitions and arguments, the basic variables that stand out and are common to all is that rural development is about creating opportunities and enlarging the capabilities of rural dwellers through well designed programmes and mobilization to achieve an improvement in economic, social and infrastructural needs of the rural dwellers.

Rural Development Strategies in Nigeria

Many rural development strategies or approaches have been adopted by the governments of the developing countries in order to achieve development in the rural areas. In Nigeria, the strategies adopted to bring development to the rural areas 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.

The Green Revolution was one of the earliest agricultural programmes launched in 1980 by Alhaji Shehu Shagari's Administration. It was aimed at boosting food production in a bid to provide food for 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.

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.

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established 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 agency (NDE) 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. Following the outcome of Beijing Conference of 1985, Chief (Mrs.) Maryam Babangida initiated the Better Life Programme for Rural Women in September 1987. The objectives of the programme, according to Obasi and Oguche (1995:74-75), included:

To stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, and sensitize the rest of Nigerians to their problems; to educate rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child-care and increased literacy rates; to mobilize women collectively in order to improve their general lot and for them to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society; to raise consciousness about their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, their social, political and economic responsibilities; to encourage recreation and enrich family life; and to inculcate the spirit of self-development particularly in the fields of education, business, the arts, crafts and agriculture.

The activities of the Better Life Programme were remarkable to the extent that its impact were felt throughout the length and breadth of the country. However, the authors felt to show how the rural women were affected by the programme.

Some of the achievements of Better Life Programme included that:

- i. It exposed the potentials of women in creativity and management.
- ii. Women became actively involved in all government programmes from the grassroots.
- iii. Credit and other inputs now flow to rural organizations more than ever before
- iv. It had the establishment of ministries of women affairs in all the states of the federation (Ijere, 1990:59).

A thorough review of the activities of the programme across Nigeria shows that its impacts were more felt by urban women than the rural women, which the author did not mention.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the Evaluation Theory to serve as guide and direction for data collection and analyses. The theory is concerned with making of judgments of worth about projects or programmes. It posits that projects/programmes should be evaluated in relation to their practical setting. For this reason, Suchman (1967) suggested specific criteria (efforts, performance, adequacy of performance, efficiency, and process) for assessing of programmes.

Edward Suchman also sees evaluation as a continuous process, inherently involving a combination of basic assumptions underlying the activity being evaluated and of the personal values of the study participants as well as of the evaluator. Evaluation, he maintained, must necessarily become a scientific process to account for this intrinsic subjectivity since it cannot be eliminated. The success or otherwise of the LUBRBRDAs had been assessed in the paper based on their set objectives.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The data presented and analyzed in this part of the study were generated from personal observation and interview conducted in the hosts communities of LUBRBRDAs. In order to generate information for achievement of the objectives of the study, some questions were raised in harmony with the objectives of the study. Therefore, staff and farmers in the

host communities of the LUBRBRDAs who had benefited, or were said to have benefited from programmes of the agencies were interviewed and their views cross-fertilized through observation of programmes and facilities available in the host communities of the two River Basin Authorizes under study.

Has the LUBRBRDAs provided adequate rural infrastructures in their host communities?

The respondents were asked to say if the indices of rural development (Land clearing and preparation, irrigation agriculture, provision of portable water) for the study had improved (increased) as a result of the intervention of the LUBRBRDAs or not. Responding, most of the rural farmers interviewed at the LBRBRDA agreed that they had larger farm sizes, bounty harvests, and more boreholes in their communities as a result of the intervention of the authority. Similarly, majority of the respondents at the UBRBRDA who were interviewed also agreed that the indices of rural development for the study increased during the period of study as a result of the intervention of the UBRBRDA. Information gathered through observation in the host communities of the agencies under study also show that the indices of rural development improved during 1979-1988 period.

To what extent have shortage of trained manpower affected LUBRBRDAs in carrying out their functions?

Responding to the above question, an anonymous Director (informant) at the headquarters of LBRBRDA said that experts and professionals in climatology, hydrology and soil science were lacking in the employment of the authority. The situation, according to him was worsened by staff retrenchment during the period of study. The informants at the UBRBRDA also told the researcher same stories. The official records on tables 1 and 2 below shows that staff strength at the LUBRBRDAs was skewed towards the preponderance of non – technical and non –engineering staff such as finance and administration. This thwarted smooth carriage of functions by the authorities.

Table 1: LBRBRDA Staff Distribution according to Departments and Sections, 1983

S/N	DEPTS/SECTION	NUMBER OF STAFF	%
1.	MD's office	19	4.60
2.	Finance and Administration	110	26.63
3.	Construction, Operation and Maintenance	65	15
4.	Planning, Investigation and Design	30	7.26
5.	Project areas (Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Kogi States)	189	45.76
	Total	413	100

Source: Personnel data extracted from establishment records at LBRBRDA headquarters, Makurdi, 2014.

Table 2: UBRBRDA Staff Distribution according to Departments and Sections, 1983

S/N	DEPTS/SECTIONS	NUMBER OF STAFF	%
6.	MD's office	21	6.80
7.	Finance and Administration	103	33.33
8.	Construction, Operation and Maintenance	58	18.77
9.	Planning, Investigation and Design	27	8.74
10.	Project areas (Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Kogi States)	100	32.36
	Total	309	100

Source: Personnel data extracted from establishment records at UBRBRDA headquarters, Yola, 2014.

To what extent have the LUBRBRDAs programme/projects impacted on lives of the rural people in their host communities?

The information gather during interview showed that the agencies did not perform in the land clearing and preparation, irrigation agriculture, and the provision of portable water. This is because the facilities (indices of rural development) provided were far below needs of the rural people. The authorities would be assumed to have made appreciable impact on lives of the people in their catchment areas through agricultural development if there were enough food for the people and marketable surplus to increase incomes of the peasants. The revenues generated would have provided means for them to purchase other necessities of life, which they could not produce themselves. By this means, their standard of living would increase and poverty/underdevelopment would have been reduced. Information obtained during field observation and on empirical data on crops production by the agencies only show marginal increase in output of staple food crops during the

period of study. The factors responsible for the poor performance of the LUBRBRDAs, as gathered through the informants for the study included: corruption and mismanagement of resources, shortage of trained manpower, lack of consultation/participation, and unwieldy statutory functions of RBRDAs, among others.

Summary of Findings

The host communities of LUBRBRDAs had the indices of rural development for the study in their domains before the LUBRBRDAs were established. However, more of these infrastructures were provided for the rural people during the period under study. Lack of qualified personnel such as climatologist, hydrologists, soil scientist stunted efforts of the LUBRBRDAs during the period of study in rural development. The large – scale irrigation agriculture was alien to the host communities of LUBRBRDAs. It came from another economy and was disrupting the simple rural economy to turn same into a market economy for its machines, herbicides and pesticides, among others. The LUBRBRDAs 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 activities of LUBRBRDAs impacted low on lives of the rural people as a result of

- Inadequate and untimely release of funds by the government to LUBRBRDAs
- Corruption and mismanagement of resources
- Inadequate consultation/involvement of the beneficiaries of rural development programmes in the host communities of the authorities
- Complexity of modern farming (irrigation) techniques
- Effect of commercialization decree of 1988
- Inadequate compensation

Conclusions

The LUBRBRDAs have underperformed in their mandate of developing the rural areas. To buttress this point, the study generated empirical data through oral interview and observation, and these proved the assertion right. There is 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. The LUBRBRDAs have high potentials to stimulate improved agricultural productivity and provide development at the local levels. Therefore, if the authorities are properly repositioned and managed, the vicious cycle of underdevelopment in their host communities will be a thing of the past. Most government activities are rural development based. For instance, each ministry (state or federal) has elements of rural development embedded in their programme/projects. Therefore, if these ministries are empowered and well monitored, there may have been no need to establish any special agency for rural development

Recommendations

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. Corruption and mismanagement of resources of the LUBRBDAs (or RBDAs at large) should be rooted out if the authorities will have to succeed in rural development of their rural communities. To achieve this, anti-corruption authorities (Code of Conduct Bureau, Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Public Complaint Commissions and Tribunals, etc) should live above board by discharging their duties without fear or favour.

The River Basin Development Authorities should be staffed with required professionals and expertise that could make a more forceful contribution to the evolution of grassroots development of the rural areas. There should also be provision for training of staff to catch with new trends in agriculture and administration. This should be backed up with improved conditions of service, which would guarantee job satisfaction and the realization of competence. The annual subventions to the RBDAs should be regular and adequate to enable the authorities to carry out functions. The late release of funds to the RBDAs, as gathered during field survey, made it difficult for land clearing and planting targets to be met. Above all, there

is need for visionary leaders who should be able to lead transformation in all spheres of life and to de-emphasis materialism, and be able to articulate values and misplaced priorities of RBDAs in rural development. The leadership should play prominent role in the rebirth, reformation and reconstruction of RBDAs through sound morality, code of conduct, discipline; find expression to the feeling of the people, secure compliance or obedience without the application of force and to live/lead by personal example.

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