

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS AN AGENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

One of the objectives of Local Government Administration in Nigeria is to encourage development at grassroots level. It is important to recognise that in Nigeria Local Government Institutions are not accorded exclusive responsibility for rural development. The development of the rural areas is a shared responsibility of the Federal, State and Local Structures of Government. Economic planning experts have tended to narrow interpretation of development, in terms of gross national products without due recognition of the net welfare values it generates. It is assumed that if there is expansion in agricultural production, the quality of life of the rural sector will improve yet growth in agricultural productivity does not necessarily lead to improved rural welfare. Thus, the expropriation of the surplus values of the farmers' labour rather than the enhancement of rural welfare has been one major outcome of contemporary development model. This paper will address the synergy of these efforts, their shortcomings and proffer solutions to how to make it responsive to the needs of the rural communities it is meant to serve.

INTRODUCTION

One of the objectives of the recent local government reorganization in Nigeria is the desire by the Government to maximize development at the grass-roots level; Grass-roots development here is equated with rural development. It is important to recognize however, that in Nigeria the local government institution is not accorded exclusive responsibility for rural development. The development of the rural sector is a shared responsibility of the Federal, the State and the local structures of government¹. Economic planning experts have tended to a narrow interpretation of development in terms of gross national products, without due reorganization of the net national welfare it generates. Accordingly, certain development efforts capable of enhancing the distributive capability of a political system are not given prominence. It is for this reason that the necessary precondition for rural development is seen to lie with increased agricultural productivity, rather than in the provision of social and welfare amenities in the rural sector. This increase is to be brought about by the utilization of mechanized agricultural techniques. It is assumed that if there is an

expansion in agricultural production, the quality of life in the rural sector will be improved. Yet growth in agricultural productivity does not necessarily lead to improved rural welfare, it simply guarantees food to the urban consumers and primary conditions to the world capitalist markets.

Thus, the expropriation of the surplus value of the farmers labour, rather than the enhancement of rural welfare has been one major outcome of the contemporary development model. The mobilization model of grassroot development insists on popular participation in the development effort; it also tends to restrict the role of public officials in the policy making process of the state. The bureaucracy will accordingly be reduced to a subordinate status and expected to respond to popular aggregate demands. Popular participation in the mobilization model is assigned a crucial instrumental value which is intended ultimately to lead to the equalization of power and the efficacy of public institution. The Tanzanian² development strategy is an example of the mobilization model. Reorganization of local government in Nigeria places more emphasis on

¹Guidelines for Local Government Reform (Kaduna: Government Printer) P.3

²James R. Finacure, Rural Development and Bureaucracy in Tanzania: The case of Mwanza Region (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974), P. 16

the desirability of enhancing the management capabilities of local government. Consequently, adequate financial resources were guaranteed, conditions of service of local government employees were harmonized with those of the civil service, and there was a conscious attempt to distinguish the role of the political actors from that of the administrative personnel in local government. Members of the local council and supervisory councilors of the administrative machinery of local government were assigned political roles. Although in theory the political actors were given a higher status, the political issues in the local government system were not given serious attention. For instance, the electoral procedure for the political recruitment of representatives into the council was not uniform throughout the country and each state was allowed to adopt a direct or indirect electoral system. Management facilities on the other hand, such as conditions of service, were harmonized for all the local councils. Nevertheless, an enhanced management capability has to be supplemented with a viable political structure. An efficient management cadre can be effective if it is responsive to, and guided and controlled by, a politically active community. It is here that the effectiveness of local government in grassroots development – and indeed in rural development – is dependent on community involvement in the transformation process.

THE NEGLECT OF THE RURAL SECTOR: Rural development has not featured prominently in the attempt by policy makers to transform the social and economic structure of the country. Indeed, rural development as a conscious and well articulated development programme is a relatively new development strategy in Africa³. A number of African countries have accorded rural development a high priority and have reoriented their development philosophy to that of transforming the rural sector. Many social and political problems can be solved if rural development is given the attention it deserves.

³Rural development policy was for instance adopted by the Kenyan Government after the 1966 Ketiho Conference recommended that the Government should adopt a co-ordinated approach to rural development. Another conference on the Integrated Approach to Rural Development sponsored by the UN was held in Arusha, Tanzania in 1967. See United National, *Integrated Approach to Rural Development in Africa* (New York: UN Publications 1971) No. 17, July, 1977, P. 23.

For instance, the disruptive feature of cultural pluralism in a country such as Nigeria largely survives because the rural sector is neglected. All Nigerians in the rural sector have the same economic and social problems irrespective of whether one is a Hausa groundnut farmer, or a kalabari fisherman, or a Yoruba cocoa farmer. This contention implies that the major source of conflict within the country is the urban-rural gap in social and economic progress.

The ethnic domination theory as the basis of cleavage in the Nigerian Political System is not an objective interpretation of the social and economic reality of the Nigerian society. Underdevelopment, poverty, and the absence of basic infrastructures is not derived from the ethnic background of a community. These are social economic factors prevalent in essentially rural communities. All urban centres, irrespective of their ethnic composition, are relatively better off than rural areas. Thus urban centres like Port-Harcourt, Kano, Jos, Ibadan, Lagos and Calabar are all growth centres even though they are the settlements of different ethnic groups in the country. Hence the disparity of development in Nigeria can be more meaningfully appreciated if seen along urban-rural lines rather than on the basis of ethnicity. The whole rural sector of every ethnic group is underdeveloped and all urban centres of every ethnic group are relatively developed.

The efforts of Government, by the apparent neglect of the rural sector, have produced a condition of social injustice. A government committed to ensuring social justice in its development can be expected to give high priority to rural development, especially in a society where a substantial number of the population resides in the rural sector. According to the 1963 census, 3.6 million people lived in the rural sector and only 496,000 in the urban centres in Kaduna State⁴. In 1975, the estimated population distribution in Kaduna State revealed that out of a total population of about 5.5 million⁵, only 548,000 people lived in the urban centres of Katsina, Zaria, and Kaduna. This

⁴North Central State of Nigeria, *Statistical Yearbook 1972* (Kaduna: Obadaki Press), P. 15.

⁵Calculated from the estimated figures provided in *Ibid.*, P. 14.

indicates that only 10% lived in the urban centres. The urban population hereby exceeds 20% of the total population in the country as a whole. Furthermore, an examination of the labour force in Kaduna State revealed a significant proportion to be engaged in agriculture and related occupations, of which by far the large number occupied the rural sector.

In 1972, out of the total labour force, 162,400 were in the urban centre and 896,100 in the rural sector. Those engaged in farming and related occupations represented 74% of the total labour force. Moreover, over 80% of the total labour force in 1972 lived in the rural sector⁶. Yet the provision of rural social and welfare facilities has not been assigned the priority it deserves in terms of resources allocation and political attention. For instance, in the revised 1975 - 80 Plan approximately N118 million was allocated to State Governments by the Federal Government for improving urban roads. No such allocation was made for rural roads. The Federal Government also allocated N102 million for sewerage and drainage schemes in major urban centres but they allocated nothing to rural areas. Furthermore, the estimated expenditure on rural water supply was about 496 million while that of urban water supply was about N412 million. The classification of urban in respect of water supply projects is based on the size, the cosmopolitan outlook, and the urban indices in a town. Only a few towns are classified as urban in most of the state. In the old Anambra, for instance, Enugu, Onitsha, Abakaliki, Nsukka and Awaka, water supply projects were classified as urban⁷. N29.2 million was allocated to rural projects.

The political cost to the policy formulators is less if the rural society is ignored. There is no pressures on the Government to transform the rural sector because governmental presence in this sector is very slight, neither is it politically organized to make demands on Government. Government is heavily represented in the urban centre and the spokesman for urban interest are strongly represented in the government.

The neglect of the rural sector can be attributed to the management model of development adopted by this country. This model was characterized by a central planning organization, to which was assigned the responsibility for the control and coordination of the national development effort. The central planning organization enjoyed an eminent status and operated like an institutional 'boss' by issuing directives to all the associated structures with responsibility for development. It is essentially not a forum for popular participation in the plan formulation process but an abode of technical experts. The planning organization is given prominence in some countries because it is located within the office of the political leader of the state or the government.

This planning model also encouraged the acceptance of assistance from foreign industrialized countries⁸. In terms of capital funds, the transfer of technology and foreign 'expertise'. Foreign experts are inclined to recommend the adoption of the modernization approach to the transformation of society, an approach largely derived from the values of a Western technological society which the experts know well. In agriculture for instance, the availability of agricultural extension service and of chemical fertilizers will be regarded as the recipe for agricultural productivity. Inevitably, the structure of foreign aid led to considerable dependence on external interests and the loss of autonomy. The effect of such external dependence on resources for development was to restrict the determination of these states to mobilize their own resources through self-reliance. Dependence rather than self-reliance was a dominant feature of the management development mode.

The industrialization of the economy, with an emphasis on industrial expansion rather than industrial development, is regarded as one prerequisite of an economic take-off for sustained growth⁹. An aspect of the industrial expansion policy is the import substitution strategy which is responsible for the production of consumer items

⁶ Calculated from *Ibid.*, P. 18
⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 384.

⁸ 'A Quarter Century of (Anti-) Rural Development' in *Development Dialogue* (Uppsala: Swedish International Development Authority), P.11 - 2011
⁹ *New Nigerian Newspaper*, 10th February, 1979.

instead of capital goods. Inevitably, industrialization is heavily dependent on the existence of essential infrastructure. Infrastructural inputs such as power, water supply, accessible roads, transport and skilled labour are concentrated in the urban centres which have been provided with these facilities because they had grown as the geographical location of government presence. This initial advantage of the urban centres enabled them to attract enormous public and private capital spending at the expense of the rural surrounding. This pattern of development led to an unequal distribution of social and welfare amenities between the urban and rural sector, and inequality which increased to the extent that the primary beneficiaries of the early development effort were the urban dwellers. This observation is validated by the fact that in Nigeria today the most economically prosperous individuals are those engaged in urban based occupations.

A nation committed to the ideal of social justice cannot allow the rural sector to remain neglected, unattractive for habitation, and underdeveloped. The relationship between the rural sector and urban centres needs to be modified so that the continued exploitation of the rural by the urban sector is minimized. Rural development should not be narrowly interpreted in terms of the provision of facilities for enhancing agricultural productivity, but should be seen as an attempt to provide an integrated development programme for the rural sector.

This necessarily means that the objects of rural development should not only be increased agricultural production but also the provision of basic socio-economic infrastructures that will make life worth living in the rural sector and provided employment opportunities so that the underemployed labour resources of the area can be productively utilized.

OBJECTIVE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE RURAL SECTOR

The neglect of the rural area was a policy that can be attributed to the widely held belief that the attitude of rural inhabitants is antagonistic to 'modern' ideas. Social science literature is replete

with the characterization of the rural scene as traditional, unresponsive to modern economic motivations, and fatalistic, in which members are unwilling to transform the social and political conditions which they inherited¹⁰. In short, the rural sector is said to be inhabited by people whose value system is antagonistic to the will to develop. This point is based on the modernization theory which had considerable influence on the thoughts and orientation of policy makers in the 1960s. Modernization theory is seriously challenged today, especially the assertion of the pre-eminence of the Western value system. It can be argued that the need for rural development is gaining widespread acceptance because the modernization theory has been convincingly challenged.

Certain Social values held by the inhabitants of the rural sector are capable of supporting a development policy; such social values are objective conditions capable of enhancing a development effort if they can be rationally mobilized. These places a high premium on mutual dependence, recognize the value of collective ownership, endow labour with dignity, and honour men of knowledge and rectitude.

The mutual dependence prevalent in the rural society enable members to cope with the hazards of life in the absence of Government facilities; it is also a prominent feature in the rural mode of production.

The Example of gayy in an emirate region can be cited as a collective productive enterprise based on the principle of mutual dependence. Gandu is a system of agricultural production based on the family unit which gives cognizance to the mutual dependence of the rural population. This value orientation among the rural populace is a condition favourable to the support of a massive development effort. The collective ownership of resources does not imply non- recognition of individual ownership but, that what is owned individually is available for the use of many¹¹. Excessive individualism is foreign to the rural

¹⁰Claude E. Welch, *Political Modernization: A Reader in Comparative Political Change* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company Inc. 1969).

¹¹J.K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism/Uhuru Na Ujamaa* (London: Oxford University Press 1969), P. 338

community and in such societies it is normal to find natural resources such as land, water and economy trees, held in common. Obviously, in a rural society heavily dependant on agriculture, land is the most important resource and in the emirate areas it is commonly held and one's homeland is defined in territorial reference to one's region.

The collective ownership of major factors of production does not guarantee equality among all the rural people. Some individuals have more personal possessions than others, but these are available for general allocation or distribution in times of need. It is inconceivable for a person to go hungry in a rural area while some members of the community have food in abundance, rural people do not hoard food and leave others to go hungry. Indeed, both food and shelter are usually available for those who lack them. Thus, despite a factor of inequality in the rural sector, the dispossessed are not abandoned to fend for themselves.

Collective ownership in rural society is facilitated by the strong community consciousness which pervades the society. Community interest generally outweighs individual interest, which was why such rural development strategy as community development is accepted without serious resistance. Countries such as India opted for a community development programme as self-help movement designed to transform the rural sector. Community development is heavily dependant on those qualities of rural life which naturally find the mobilization of personal energies, resources, and labour for the common welfare of all acceptable. Thus, life in the rural sector can be said to be based on community solidarity instead of individual parochialism. It is unlikely that labour will be in short supply in the rural area with the exception of technical skilled labour. Thus labour intensive operations can more easily be executed than capital intensive projects. Labour is highly honoured, and hardworking people enjoy the respect and deference of the community. The dignity of labour is revealed in literacy studies of the conditions of people in the rural sector. For

example, Okonkwo, the hero of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, was respected in society because of his hard work. In the Hausa novel, *Nagari na Kowa* by Jabiru Abdullahi, a hardworking peasant was honoured by a wealthy man. The indolent man is socially despised and will derive hardly any benefit from his society. The compassionate instinct of the rural society notwithstanding, idle people may be neglected and suffer accordingly.

Scholars and men of wisdom have a high standing in rural communities. Whilst wisdom may be associated with old age, scholarship is recognized in individuals who are learned in their particular field of studies. It should not be assumed that scholars do not exist in the rural sector.

This may be so in the context of Western type education, but members of the rural community acquire a great deal of knowledge through non-Western form of education. In emirate society, where a tradition of scholarship exists, learned people enjoy an even higher status than farmers, or equal to, or higher status than rich businessmen. Polly Hill, following Smith's identification of status groups in Hausa land, classified scholars next to the upper class which is composed of members of the ruling and political elite¹².

This analysis of rural value orientation clearly indicates that rural society cannot be regarded as antagonistic to development effort. Rather there is a strong indication that if rural society is mobilized there will be no resistance to change and that Government will receive cooperation in its development programme.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The new local government system has been structured to render it efficient and effective in the implementation of programme. It is envisaged that this institution of government is capable of providing the basic needs of the community. The strategic location of local government within the political system

¹²Polly Hill, *Rural Hausa* (London: Cambridge University Press 1972) p. 176.

encourages policy makers to have high hopes for its effectiveness. Its responsibility extends over a relatively limited area and elected members who are socially integrated with the people, represent a relatively smaller number. For instance, 23 people were elected to the Zaria Local Government Council but only one representative is allocated to the whole of Zaria Local Government Council Area in the Constituent Assembly, which means that the relationship between the local government representative and his electorate is expected to be close and intimate.

The relatively small size of Local Government units may enable elected representatives to be more responsive to the demands of the people. It is therefore, politically desirable for the electoral system to be widely accepted as free and fair. However, the local government system with popularly elected councilors, is only partially equipped for the fulfillment of its obligation to the society. A careful analysis of the functions allocated to local government will reveal that the system exists more as a structure of control than as an instrument of rural transformation. One can therefore draw attention to the fact that the local government structures and processes were not significantly modified to reorient the system towards rural development. The functions of local government do not differ essentially from those assigned to it in the 1950s. A major change is the transfer of law and order functions to the federal and state government.

The functions allocated to Local government under this scheme can be classified into three groups. The first and most important set out the extractive, regulatory and controlling functions. The second covers the power of local government to provide transport services, to participate in industrial ventures and to organize trading and commercial activities. The third deals with the services that local government is to render to the people. Some of these services are the exclusive responsibility of the Local Government Authority, while others are a responsibility they share with the state government. Thus it is possible to divide local government functions into exclusive and

concurrent lists.

The functions allocated to local government tend to emphasize the regulatory role of local government rather than its distributive function. A large number of functions appearing in the exclusive list are those of control or collection of rates.

This implies that the operational basis of local government has not fundamentally deviated from that in the past. Local Government, as presently organized, is therefore basically structured to be extractive and to undertake the control and regulation of people rather than towards the enhancement of rural development.

The adequate financial resources allocated to local government were reinforced by attractive service conditions which would enable the local council to employ and retain highly skilled personnel. The salary and conditions of service of all local government staff are today identical with those of government officials. The harmonization of conditions of service is seen as a major break-through because the Government expects that constraints on executive capacity will no longer seriously undermine the effectiveness of local government. Poor local government performance, which had been attributed to inadequate finance and poor quality personnel, inevitably led the government to take over local government functions in some states; yet the provision of these necessary facilities does not mean that local government can now be expected to dramatically improve its service. Official complaints are still made about local government ineffectiveness while other councils have been suspended and some were probed. It is therefore important to recognize that the weakness of local government are not solely due to shortage of executive capacity and inadequate finance but also lack of harmonized and proper planning.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

Government prescription for the reorganization of local government for the purpose of enhancing grass-roots development was seen officially in

terms of the renovation of the management capabilities of the local government. Thus the provision of management facilities is regarded as the solution to the ineffectiveness of local government. Accordingly, facilities such as manpower, equipment, and finance are officially regarded as some of the pre-requisites for enhancing local government performance. The availability of these management facilities is also dependent on the modification of the existing structure. Local Government was restructured by way of the provision of an elected policy-making organ, by the allocation of statutory financial resources, and by a clearly defined list of functions. And emphasis on structural renovation is consistent with a management model of development. Yet this structural reorganization may be an inadequate solution to rural neglect.

It is becoming apparent that unless it is reinforced by popular involvement in the decision-making process of local government and enhanced management capacity may be dysfunctional. Popular involvement is related to the social and political mobilization of the people. It is not enough to provide a procedure for political recruitment into the decision-making cadres of local government councilors, to be held every three years. It is expected that the necessity for elected councilors periodically to seek a new mandate may induce them to be responsive to popular demands; nevertheless, the unsatisfactory performance of these councils has led to Government intervention. Thus, popular participation should not be limited to the contribution of elected councilors, structures should be created to enable the people to participate in the decision-making process.

The social and political mobilization of the people can be successfully undertaken if a conducive environment is created. This can be achieved by the political class in the state and the elected representatives of the people in the local councils. The crucial role of the political group will be associated with the articulation of a rural development philosophy which accords a high priority to rural development as an aspect of grassroots development. The mobilization of the people will therefore lead to the necessary

psychological preparedness for a massive rural development effort. One classic example of a Government policy programme which received the enthusiastic support of the political leadership group is the then operation feed the nation. Structures and facilities for the implementation of the programme were provided, but of greater significance is the generation of a popular will to expand agricultural production.

A mobilization scheme is considered necessary because a rural development programme cannot be seen solely as a State activity; it needs support and community initiative to be contributed by the people. The support of the community is essential and can be positively realized if local representatives are assigned the responsibility of inducing the rural population to support the rural development policy. This function cannot be assigned to bureaucratic officials of either the state or local government, because these officials are usually unable to relate intimately with the rural community.

If a conducive environment for rural development is established by the mobilization of the population, attention can then be drawn to the structural requisite for implementing a rural development policy. It should be emphasized that the mere provision of funds without modification of the existing structure is an unsatisfactory method of facilitating rural development. Of key importance is a coordinating organizations with a role in rural development. Such an organization will integrate the functions of all other rural development agencies into an overall state rural development programme. Some state government established rural development institutions which could conveniently have been assigned the powers of coordination. As far back as 1972, Kaduna State had a Rural Development Bureau, and Rivers State created a Ministry of Rural Development and Social Services. Other states with rural development institutions include Bauchi and Kano. These institutions have been abolished and their functions distributed to Government Ministries. The decision to dissolve them is politically unwise, especially in view of the fact that the urban development agencies are

retained and allocated substantial funds.

A co-ordinating agency for rural development could not function satisfactorily unless the officials of such an agency undergo a process of socialization to ensure that they thoroughly imbibe a rural development philosophy; such a process would be expected to modify the existing norms of the civil service.

Some influence inherited from the colonial service such as the political neutrality, and the non-policy formulation responsibility of the service may give way to a new philosophy of operation which will sustain a rural development effort. The tendency to avoid making mistakes, or taking initiatives, are attitude which should give way to more creative behaviour. It is only at this state that officials can be expected to teach, advise, perused, lead and encourage the rural peasantry

The need for reorientation of the local government service may require the transfer of control from the State Ministry of Local Government to the Coordinating agency. If control and supervision of local government was transferred to such an agency, this should be located in the Governor's office in order to achieve adequate status and influence to enable it to carry out its responsibilities. The high priority for rural development would probably require participation by the Governor himself in the policy making process of this agency, thus ensuring that the agency would be directed by highly placed and respect political officials in the state. The implication is that the agency must be sufficiently politicized to enable the rural development programme to be accepted as a political cause.

The Local Government System can related to the scheme by providing the necessary support and making demands on the system. Rural demands can be made if local government is integrated into the state planning process. Structures for the aggregation of such demands would need to be provided at the level of local government. One such structure that comes to mind is the development committee which should be assigned to local administrative units. Members

of such development committees should be drawn from outside the local bureaucracy and the local leaders of opinion in the locality. A development committee should be established for each local government administrative unit such as the district and the village, which means that each local government area will have a village development committee, a district development committee and a local government development committee. These committees should have the functions of plan formulation, the supervision and review of planning and should assist in finding remedies to existing identifiable constraints to the implementation of plans. The establishment of these committees may institutionalize participation of the peasantry in the formulation of the national plan and in rural development; such participation is an essential ingredient of any development effort.

Local government can participate in the mobilization function if certain offices are provided. At the village level one such office would be a politicized village executive officer, one of whose important functions would be communication. Such as officer would not only disseminate government policies and directive, but also keep local government and government officials aware of conditions in the village. This function was previously undertaken by the traditional authorities but since they have been excluded from executive responsibility in local government, a new office to fulfill this role should be created.

CONCLUSION

Local government is strategically located to participate in a rural development scheme. However, a structural reorganization and a reorientation of the role of local government are necessary if this scheme is to succeed. A central organizing agency and local development committee need to be established, the former should replace the existing ministry of local government. Furthermore, a new operating philosophy will need to be evolved in local government, in which the prominence accorded to extractive, and law and order functions is negated. Local government functionaries will thus be seen as agents of rural development and

as partners in progress. An important requirement is that there should be development within the national political culture, through a system of political education, an ethos of rural development rather. The point being stressed in this paper is that rural development cannot be adequately implemented by mere availability of finance and technically skilled personnel. The functions of local government need to be reoriented for the attainment of rural development objectives. Above all, it should be recognized that the active support and the participation of the rural peasant are essential, in any Local Government Development structure for all round development.

CONCLUSION

Local government is strategically located to participate in rural development schemes. However, a national government and a reorientation of the role of local government is necessary if the scheme is to be successful. A central government agency and local government agencies need to be established. The scheme should address the existing reality of local government. Furthermore, a new system of government will need to be created in order to establish the law and order required to ensure local government development. This is a major goal of rural development.