

AGRICULTURAL INTERVENTION POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF NIGERIAN RURAL AREA: A STUDY OF EDO STATE

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**Abstract**

*The wealth which built modern Nigeria whether in the era of dominance of agricultural commodities, or petroleum, was derived from the rural areas. Given the relative importance of rural areas in Nigeria, as the major economic base, this study examines the agricultural intervention policies/programmes on rural development in Edo State. The study adopted mixed method using questionnaire and oral interviews. The data were analyzed using simple percentage statistical tools. The finding reveals that the exclusion of the rural farmers from participating in the agricultural intervention programmes is among other factors that contributed to the failure of the policy/programmes vis-à-vis underdevelopment of rural areas. Consequently, the study recommended that Government should leapfrog rural development philosophy from the present abyss to a front burner position, by constitutionalizing an extra-ministerial agency, such as the National Population Commission and Federal Civil Service Commission, among others, with specific responsibility of rural development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Agriculture development, rural areas, rural development, policy initiatives Programmes

**Introduction**

The introduction is weak and the statement of problem is not clearly and convincingly stated. Introduction supposes to be an overview of the problem under investigation from general to specific (Global to local perspective). Six decades of pre-occupation with rural and community development in Nigeria have yielded insignificant returns; instead, the rural economies have suffered severe regression. Many of the development indices: real incomes, healthcare, infrastructural facilities and institutions were in worse conditions in 2001 than they were in the 1960s (Ake, 2001).

In explaining the failure of development effort, several factors have been identified, major of which included poor colonial legacy, social pluralism, corruption, bad leadership, poor planning, inappropriate policies, and lack of entrepreneurial skills, among the myriad (Ake, 2001). To be sure, the identified factors were of such direct relevance that either singly or collectively, the factors posed serious obstacles to development.

Notwithstanding the obstacles posed to development by the factors, it is the contention that dating back from colonial era, to modern day Nigeria, rural and community development had not been on the developmental agenda, *ab initio*. It is contended instead, that political factors or conditions have posed greater "blockage" to rural development than the identified socio-economic factors. In any case, successive governments, whether military or civilian, have expressed intention, or "commitment" to rural development, given that the larger proportion of the population resides in the rural areas, where subsistence agriculture, the main stay of Nigeria's economy, is predominant.

Unfortunately, post-colonial Nigeria and successive leaders have failed to reverse the observed inertia in the pattern of rural development. This dereliction has created copious dualism in socio-economic and political structure, characterised by urban and rural typologies. In the circumstance, and orientation, all developmental efforts, however meagre, have been concentrated in the urban areas, to the deprivation of the rural counterparts. Thus, social amenities: motorable roads, model schools complete with equipment, railway and air transport facilities, electricity, hospitals, sea ports, recreational facilities, telecommunication facilities and industrial estates, among others, are only available in the urban centres, where the bourgeoisie and elite reside. Where transport facilities such as railway lines were provided in the rural areas, the major aim was to facilitate the evacuation of cash crops and raw materials produced in the areas to the sea ports, for export, by the colonialists.

It may therefore be discernable that government's intentions toward the development of the rural areas was as good as political grandstanding, designed to gain and retain favourable public perception and acceptance. Critics of government's political rhetorics posit that it is detrimental to overall national development of Nigeria, the situation in which the rural areas, which accommodate about 70 per cent of

the country's labour force, and where over 80 per cent of the domestic food supply is generated, are largely neglected (Ake, 2001). The findings of studies conducted by Inji (2010), Egbe (2014) and Odoney and Abimiku (2016) corroborate Ake (2001)'s assertion.

In the light of the perceived low efficacy of public policy in rural development in Nigeria, government enunciated several policies and programmes, packaged to deliver semblance of developmental governance in the rural areas, post-independence. The programmes included Operation Feed the Nation, River Basin Development and Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, among others. This paper is motivated by the desire to examine the efficacy and impact or otherwise of rural development policies and programme initiatives of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), under the various rural development policies and programmes during the period 1976-2018, with particular reference to agriculture as a veritable tool of rural transformation

### **Statement of the Research Problem and Objectives**

The attitude of government towards rural and community development in Nigeria had only found expression in programme and policy initiatives that largely exhibited symbolic grandstanding. Consequently, most of the programmes and policies: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Agricultural Development Projects (ADP), Green Revolution (GRN), River Basin Development Projects (RBDP), Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Achor Borrower Scheme (ABS), and the myriad of related initiatives have exhibited the texture of inflated balloons, with little resilience or enduring legacy.

Rather than build on the weak colonial policy foundation, by continually and constantly pushing new and more pragmatic policies, post-colonial Nigerian governments have remained unmindful of the fundamental issues inherent in policy failure, by not properly re-assessing the role and interplay of the forces noted by Ake (2001), afore stated. The central problem of this study therefore is that the forces or factors which militated largely against the success of agricultural intervention programs on rural development, in Nigeria. The circumstance providing an appropriate policy framework for rural development in Nigeria has remained elusive.

As a corollary to the problem, the major objective of this study is to examine the impact of agricultural intervention policies on rural development. The study intend to analyze the nature and causes of policy failure; and to propose options for improvement, in order to achieve the desired goal of rural and community development, as a veritable strategy for counter-urbanization in Nigeria

Arising from the problem statement and objective, the key question is: does an agricultural intervention policy impact on rural development in Edo State? Furthermore, what were the critical policy challenges in rural development of the selected communities of study? Answers to the questions provided the guide in the analysis.

### **Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework**

In this section, the key concepts employed are clarified. The concepts include rural areas, development and underdevelopment, rural and community development and rural agriculture.

#### **Rural Areas**

Several scholars and institutions have provided diverse definitions of a rural area. Itodo (2017) defined a rural area as one characterised by poor infrastructural facilities and social amenities, inadequate capital and grossly reduced access to credit facilities. Sule (2016) corroborated Itodo (2017)'s definition by asserting that rural areas are noted for the degree of poverty; and that in most less developed countries (LDCs), the larger proportion of poor people live in the rural areas.

According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2004), rural areas are the most vulnerable groups, with pervasive poverty and infrastructural deficits. A convergence of the diverse views about the characteristics of rural areas is available in literature and in reality. Among the common characteristics, deficit in social amenities and infrastructure and heavy presence of agrarian economy are easily noticeable (Anyanwu, Oaikhenan, Oyefusi and Dimowo, 1997).

#### **Development**

Development is a multidisciplinary concept traversing economic, social and political parlances, although the concept is often narrowed to the economic sense when ordinarily used. Jhingan (2006), Todaro (1982), Seers (1969), Gana (1986), and Rodney (1972) provide varying definitions of development. However, the convergence of the positions is that development is a process aimed at eliminating poverty, disease, malnutrition, unemployment, illiteracy and ignorance and low self-esteem by empowering individuals to attain basic need statuses of food, clothing, housing, social amenities (education, healthcare, transportation, etc), poverty amelioration and participation in community, social and political activities, among others (Ujo, 2008).

### **Rural and Community Development**

Although the terms 'rural development' and 'rural community development' are often used interchangeably, they nonetheless differ in the strict technical usage. The practice of interchangeability of the terms is adopted in this report.

Itodo (2017) defined community development as a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions affecting their lives. Because a community is a social system premised on the recognition of relations and areas of common concerns with other members, community development works at the level of local groups and organizations, rather than with individuals and families (Elekwa, 1987). In this regard, rural and community development refers to development efforts in the rural and local communities.

In the respective views of Aziz (1999) and Mabogunje (1981), rural development is a complex problem involving interaction among social, political, cultural, technological and economic variables. It also refers to self-sustaining improvement of rural areas, and entails that all the resources should be mobilized for the improvement of rural dwellers. In Nigeria therefore, where majority of the population resides, the importance of rural development cannot be overstressed, particularly because national development must ground a solid foundation in rural development (Gana, 1996).

### **Agricultural Policies and Rural Development**

Anyanwu, et al. (1997) described rural agriculture as a sub-sector of the primary industry which includes farming, fishing and forestry. In the subsector, activities are confined to the rural areas, where infrastructural facilities are in considerable deficit. Consequently, productivity remains very low, due to inadequate employment of modern implements.

The practice of obsolete shifting cultivation is widely engaged by peasant farmers with output largely at subsistence level, because of fragmentation of farm holdings, ascribable to land tenure system, among other factors. Consequently, agricultural practice is labour-intensive and poorly remunerative. Worse still, access to financial support in the form of bank credit is onerous, particularly because of individualism and disregard for cooperative movement (Anyanwu, et al, 1997).

### **Rural Development Initiatives in Nigeria**

Because of the expansive scope of rural development, dealing with the gamut of a comprehensive approach which the subject matter requires might be Herculean and clumpy, given the limitation imposed here by space and time. This is because a wide approach should ordinarily cover policies and strategies for equitable distribution of income, considerable improvement in healthcare, housing, generation of additional employment, better nutrition, increase opportunities for individuals to realize their full potentials through education and decision-making process, increased access to communication and improvement in the welfare of individuals and communities, among others (Egbe, 2014). For the reason, this study focuses on rural agricultural policies and programmes.

Given that the important function of rural and community development has been identified and recognized as critical to national development, a review of the institutional and strategic framework adopted in realizing the objective of rural development, as embedded in the various National Development Plans (NDP), is undertaken.

The first attempt at rural development was evident in the 1946's ten-year Development Plan and Welfare for Nigeria, contained in the National Paper No.24, 1945 (Egbe, 2014). Colonial administration's focus on agricultural development was in establishing research institutes: Nigerian Agricultural Project at Moluwa in 1949, West African Research Institute in 1951, the Regional Development Board and the Marketing Boards in the 1950s up to the early 1970s. Unfortunately, the policies during the period focused mainly on generating agricultural exports for British overseas industries, with little consideration for developing the rural areas where the produce were cultivated (Egbe, 2014, Anyanwu, et. al, 1997).

In the 1956-1960 Plan, the intention was to increase agricultural and industrial output and to enhance the incomes and standard of living of farmers. Again, irrespective of the intention, no specific programmes were enunciated with the rural areas as key targets. Critics of the anti-rural development and rural farmers Policy: Nkoli (1977), Cannon (1982) and Onimode (1982) posited, in agreement, that through the so-called Plan, the British overlords merely established a colonial economy consistent with the desire to underdevelop the colonies via tacit appropriation of economic surplus for the development of the colonialists and their nations. Without doubt, the discriminatory practice stagnated rural agriculture and development of manufacturing. In effect, the practice amounted to mobilizing Nigerian resources for British capital accumulation' (Cannon, 1982).

The assertions are an indication that the colonial Policies and Plans had no significant impact on the development of rural agriculture, and indeed the rural areas. This conclusion corroborates the position of

Ake (2001) that the colonialists underdeveloped the colonies not because their policies were inappropriate, but because development was, in the first place, not in their agenda. Unfortunately, this policy position and attitude were carried forward to post-colonial era (Ake, 2001).

In 1960, the Western Regional Government established farm settlements, to herald an era of true rural agricultural development, goaded by the increasing rate of unemployment among primary school leavers who possessed no technical skills. Besides, the Region was desirous of scoring additional 'first' in development, by establishing farms, in which more modern techniques were deployed, with the support of official credit facilities. Similar, farm settlements of oil palm plantation were established by Eastern Regional Government. Because of the inefficient operationalization, the agricultural policy in Western Region failed to achieve the desired objectives, particularly because of low profitability. The returns were so low that school leavers found no attraction in the Scheme. Even the attitude of the Marketing Boards (MBs) was discouraging. In 1969, in Western Region, the "take-it-or-leave-it" stance of the Boards deteriorated into a grievance situation in what became widely referred to as 'Agbekoya Uprising' (Derrick, 1986). Derrick (1986) also reported that the situation was sustained following which farmers accepted the position as given.

In the regional foray, Northern Region established several agricultural institutes where training of junior and medium cadre farm workers was provided. Upon the establishment of Ahmadu Bello University at Zaria in 1962, some of the institutes were acquired as the University's foundation units of the Institute of Agriculture (Egbe, 2014).

Nigeria's indigenous and First National Development Plan (NDP), 1962-1968, although recognized rural development as a cardinal objective of national development, nonetheless made no significant impact on the sector, in terms of priority allocation. The situation was similar in the Second, 1970-1974 NDP, which specifically prioritized agricultural development in policy intent, ahead of industry, transportation and manpower development. The overall Plan objective to build a just and egalitarian society became more of a political statement than reality, particularly because in the budgetary allocation, the Plan accentuated the observed deplorable neglect of agriculture and the rural-urban dualism. (Anyanwu, et.al, 1997).

Interestingly, concrete attention was accorded agricultural development in the Third NDP, 1975-1980, when Government expressed semblance of strong intention in the draft guidelines. To be sure, the guidelines showed that rural development, targeted at raising the incomes and standard of living of the rural areas, through increased agricultural productivity, more even distribution of income, reduction in the rate of unemployment and diversification of the productive base of the economy, among others, were prioritized. To support the Policy, several initiatives were pursued, major of which included semblance of provision of social amenities in the rural areas, balanced development and indigenization of economic activities, e.t.c (Anyanwu, et al., 1997).

Various agricultural research projects were also initiated to provide the needed support for rural development. Examples included Badeku Project by University of Ibadan (UI), Uboma Project and Ishoya Rural Development Project by University of Ife; Guided Change Project by Institute of Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; and Rural Development Project of University of Nigeria at Nsukka (UNN). Although the Projects were semblances of what was intended to stimulate rural agricultural development, they unfortunately, made no significant impact on the welfare of the rural people (Egbe, 2014).

In 1976, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) established Department of Rural Development (DRP) in Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, with the responsibility of coordinating and monitoring projects under the integrated agricultural development. The policy objective of DRP was to increase agricultural productivity, enhance the incomes of the rural populace and thereby raise the standard of living of the rural inhabitants. DRP was also to complement the 1976 Local Government Reform in mobilizing the resources at the grass root for effective participation in development of the rural areas. Without doubt, the synergy between DRP and the Local Government Reform was intended to further the emergent participatory democracy in Nigeria (Gana, 1986).

With regard to policy intention, the Fourth National Development Plan (1987-1985) was same as the Third Plan, and indeed previous Plans: to bring improvement in the standard of living of the rural areas. Programmes including the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), initiated during the period to further the objective of rural development, promising and laudable as they were, however failed to make significant impact on the conditions of the rural areas, because of poor conception and shoddy execution (Egbe, 2014).

In the view of Eteng (1982) cited in Egbe (2014), the National Development Plans of post-independence era were replicas of the colonial legacies, particularly because:

*The orientation of the post-colonial planning is probably the most decisive in its perpetuation of underdevelopment. First, the post-colonial environment, which essentially defines the problem of development, is taken as the earlier colonial environment. No serious effort is made for example to terminate the stifling post (neo) colonial domination and exploitation that is the basic generating force of contemporary underdevelopment.*

Besides domestic governmental efforts, several international collaborations and support have been of tremendous assistance. In this regard, NGOs and international agencies including the UN, DFID, IMF, World Bank and USAID, etc, are notable. Furthermore, Africa's Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) represent examples of African Union-motivated initiatives aimed at improving the standard of living of Nigerians, particularly in the rural areas.

Specifically, NEPAD as a developmental policy was enunciated in response to the pervasive problems of poverty plaguing Africa, Nigeria inclusive. To be sure, Africa with a population in excess of 340 million people suffered acute poverty, living on below one dollar per day; while the mortality rate, particularly for children, was as high as 140 for every 1,000. Similarly, life expectancy was 54 years; while about 58 per cent of the population had access to potable water (Kamar, Lawal & Jahun, 2014).

Programmes such as Sustainable Development Goals (formally Millennium Development Goals - MDG), under the auspices of UN, were initiated to eradicate poverty in 189 member countries, Nigeria inclusive, within a target period of ten years, to 2015. Nigeria's home-grown initiatives directed at MDG Policy implementation included the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the national level, while State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDs) was enunciated at the sub-national level. Critical among the poverty-eradication agencies, pursuant to the objectives of NEEDs and SEEDs, were the National Poverty Eradication Agency (NAPEA) and the various skills acquisition agencies of the state governments. But what legacy did all and sundry leave?

With respect to the success of the policies aimed at poverty alleviation across Africa, including Nigeria, analysts are of the view that not much has been achieved. In this regard, Dahid (2008) posited that the dream of great African renaissance for social, economic and political realities, of the continent defined thirty seven development plans. The plans were which were considered as either alien to Africa or were drafted by experts and institutions that failed to appreciate the peculiarities of the continent. Put otherwise, the failed post-colonial era was not different from colonial era (Egbe, 2014).

Enyi (2010) also held the view that the post-colonial policies in Nigeria were not different from those of the colonial era; both policies lacked effectiveness and urgency. Plan indiscipline, superimposition of self-interest by the bourgeoisie over national interest and derailment in, or abandonment of plan execution disrupted effective rural development. In the final analysis, Enyi (2010) noted that "it is not only that Plans for rural development are faulty, they are never in the interest of the ruling class to implement".

#### **Assessing the Impact of Agricultural Intervention Schemes on Rural Development**

As a prelude to assessment of the effectiveness or otherwise of rural development policy in Nigeria, it is necessary to outline the basic measures of sustainable rural development. Various scholars (Kamar, Lawal, Babangida & Jahun, 2014) have reported on the essential indices against which sustainable rural development can be measured: increasing state and people's participation in decision-making regarding rural development projects (Hall & Midley, 1988); voluntary community organisations (Esenjor, 1990); mobilizing women group (William, 1998); manpower development (Shehu, 2011; Solomon & Adeyemi, 2005); establishment of coordinating rural development directorate (Okeh, 2010; Esenjor, 1991); effective rural community banking and financial system (Madukwe & Anyanwu, 200; UNO, 2004); establishment of community viewing centres (Esenjor, 1991), establishment of rural development centres (RDC); and, promoting rural cooperatives (Ladde, 1991; Zinnah, 1997), among others.

The impact of the policies and programmes on rural development in Nigeria can be appropriately situated against the practical results in the development of the rural communities attributable to implementation of the policies and programmes, and how the results assist in resolving the challenges of rural underdevelopment.

Institutions and agencies charged with the responsibility of developing the rural areas were allegedly overwhelmed by widespread greed, corruption and outright mismanagement. Okpaga (2004)'s comment related to the sad experience in which institutions established to utilize the available funds to transform the rural areas "instead transferred the funds to their personal accounts". While the elite class which inherited the colonial administrative and political legacies lived in the posh government reserved areas, the masses who produced the wealth and who constituted the larger population were cast into the

impoverished and amenity-deficient rural areas. Rural dwellers were only remembered during periods of multiple tax collection. Onimode (1982) thus expressed disgust at the unfair treatment of the peasant farmers by the colonial overlords, who denied the rural inhabitants access to education, healthcare and other basic social amenities.

The situation had not changed considerably even in post-colonial Nigeria, due to the attitude of the ruling class. To perpetuate rural dependence, the various agricultural policies have emphasized cash crops, which were better and more profitably cultivated in large plantations. With such emphasis, rural agriculture was targeted for relegation, neglect or outright failure. The resultant mass importation of food created dependence on foreign suppliers. Even the pleasant farmers depended on imported food. As the rural economy deteriorated, the youth found alternative in urbanization. Nnadozie (1986), referring to the major problems of agriculture earlier highlighted, noted that lack of incentives to farmers and outmoded farming techniques, among others, accelerated the decline in the fortunes of agriculture, as a mainstay in the rural areas.

With regard to the specific agricultural programmes: OFN (1976) Green Revolution (1980), NALDA, River Basin Authorities, National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP), Provision of Credit Facilities (NACB, ACGIS), Land Use Decree (1978/1979), Commodity Boards (1977), etc, which one of them was rural-targeted? Answer to this question can be found in the negative. The various policy initiatives robbed the rural areas of the available land, forcefully acquired by governments for irrigation and capital intensive projects, which benefits were beyond the reach of the rural farmers. Even the credit schemes were mere kite-flying, particularly because the loans were packaged and extended to the elite who wielded the political and economic power and influence. Indeed, many peasant farmers who formed the target credit beneficiaries did not know of the existence of such facilities, because of illiteracy and lack of access to information and even if they were informed, they could not afford the collaterals.

The structure of government's spending showed, on a persistent basis, a strong bias for urban development in infrastructure and social amenities. In the report, a study conducted by Diejomoah (1973) reported that the beneficiaries of government expenditure on education, health, water supply, electricity, industries and roads were mainly urban dwellers; while less than 30% of government's total expenditure on development was designed for the benefit of rural communities.

Also disheartening was the alleged diversion of the substantial proportion of assistance from international organizations and institutions, including DFID, WHO, UNO, USAID, etc, to urban development, although such aids were labeled as provision for rural development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Frank (1979)'s typology of Mobilization Theory, widely adopted in the analysis of modern development process, is adopted in this study. The theory was propounded by Frank (1979) under two critical assumptions: individual communal awareness of all available resources; and collective mobilization of the community for participation in the development process for the wellbeing of the community. Central in the thesis of Frank (1979)'s Mobilization Theory, which gained prominence from the late 1970s, is a process which pools, harnesses and utilizes human and material resources in development process (Odney & Abimiku, 2016, 62). Thus, Obanure (1988) viewed mobilization as dealing with the process in which human beings are stimulated to gain awareness of available resources; and are motivated, activated or energized to, through collective effort, utilize the resources, for the improvement of their material well-being.

Although critics of the alternative management approach to rural development, including Ujo (2008), believe that modernization model of rural development is central to the failure of rural development programmes, the critics nonetheless suggest that mobilization model is a better approach to rural development. Thus, Frank (1979) as cited in Ujo (2008), wrote that:

*For planning to be successful, it must be bottom-up with negligible contribution from bureaucracy. The technical aspects, which under the supervision of a state coordinating agency, must take into cognizance existing local skills and technology; the use of appropriate technology must be emphasized by the coordinating agency as that is required from contributions or stakeholders in community development.*

Goulbourne (1979), cited in Ajayi and Ogara (2000), noted that mobilization theory places considerable emphasis on the important role of community participation. Implicit in the foregoing, it is discernable that the success or failure of a rural development programme depends largely on the inclusion or participation of the community, through effective mobilization.

The relevance of mobilization theory lies in the potency in providing insights into the appropriateness or otherwise of rural development policy initiatives in Nigeria, given that the target-rural dwellers were largely excluded in policy formulation and execution.

**Methodology**

Given the objectives of the study, primary survey method was adopted. Data were obtained from respondents made up of stakeholders from the selected 15 out of the 18 Local Government Councils in the state. The questionnaire was physically administered through appointed field research assistants resident in the communities, in view of the relatively low level of electronic communication in the target communities, for which reason e-survey was ineffective. Besides, sample of 750 respondents made up of 50 prominent residents purposively selected from communities in each of the selected 15 Local Government Areas, and 5 youths participated in the oral interview exercise. In all therefore, a sample of 770 respondents was engaged, from a population of 1,250,000 (National Population Commission). The sample was drawn using purposive sampling technique in view of the homogeneity of the respondents, either as council executives, or as residents of the rural communities which possessed similar development characteristics.

Data were analyzed using simple percentage statistical tool and presented in frequency tables, as widely adopted in empirical research procedures in Social and Management Sciences. Ezennia (1986), Modibbo (2017) and Mahmud and Ogwuzebe (2019) employed the tool in various empirical studies.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

Table 1 presents a summary of the salient responses on the respondent-council managements' awareness of project implementation in the respective communities.

**Table 1: Responses by Local Government Council Managements on Projects Implemented in Selected Communities.**

S/No	Variable	Percentage (%) Frequency of Responses			
		Yes	%	No	%
1	Were there projects executed in the community under FGNs Rural Development Programmes (RDP) for the period 1976 -2018 known to you?	0	0	15	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

From the responses in Table 1, it is observable that out of the 15 LGA managements, all (100%) were unaware of rural development executed in the communities during the period. Thus, it could be inferred that none of the programmes were sighted in any of the LGAs; and therefore, project had no impact on the selected communities and LGAs.

In Table 2, a summary of the responses obtained from the oral interviews held with political and opinion leaders' residents in the selected communities is presented. The aim was to illicit the perceptions and views of the respondents about the 'exclusion' of the communities in the rural development programmes.

**Table 2: Responses on the Perceptions of Resident Opinion Leaders from Selected Communities in the Selected Local Government Areas.**

S/No	Question	Percentage (%) Frequency of Responses			
		Yes	%	No	%
1	For how long have you lived in your community?				
	10-20years				
	Above 20years	770	100	0	0
		770	100	0	0
2	Are there projects executed in your community under FGNSRDP, such as DFRRI, Irrigation Programmes etc, known to you?	0	0	770	0
3	If no project is known, what in your view is responsible?				
	i. Neglect				
	ii. Exclusion				
	iii. Marginalisation	770	100	0	0
		770	100	0	0
		770	100	0	0
5	From records, were there invitations or arrangements for the Councils or Communities to participate directly or through suggestions at any stage in the planning and implementation of projects?	0	0	770	100
6	Did Councils or communities send representations to FGN requesting to participate in programme or project planning or execution executes? If 'No' why? Please enumerate your reasons in the space provided	0	0	770	100
5	In which of the following areas did the community experience any form of development?				
	i. Agriculture, including training, extension services, provision of inputs, etc				
	ii. Cottage industrialization				
	iii. Roads				
	iv. Schools				

From Table 2, it could be observed that all respondents attested to the non-inclusion of rural dwellers in planning and execution of the various rural and community development programmes and projects purported to have been delivered to rural communities. In effect, the communities were not mobilized; an approach which many respondents believed was typical of higher Government's attitude, particularly towards lower tiers of government and the rural communities. On why the Local Government Councils failed to approach policy-initiating higher tiers of government for participation, respondents were of the view that such efforts were often futile, given the subservient position of local governments in relation to the 'superior' tier. Under such relations, any observation or pressure from the local governments was viewed as insubordination or affront by the sub-national or central government. Across board thus,



respondents were of the view that the policies and programmes were of insignificant impact on the rural dwellers, as expressed in the zero percentage frequency responses at Table 2.

### Findings

Arising from the review and analysis, some salient findings were made. First, Rural development in Nigeria has suffered considerable neglect dating back to colonial era, with the major reason for the initial (colonial) and subsequent (post-independence) neglect ascribable to the 'planned exclusion' of rural areas in the development agenda of the colonialists and the succeeding Nigerian political leaders. Besides, the numerous Policies, and Programmes, tagged as "rural development" were intended for and focused at urban development.

Second, because the requirements for accessing the benefits of Programmes were largely elitist, they were beyond the reach of the peasant rural dwellers. Practically, most of the projects purported to have been implemented in the rural areas were either unknown to the dwellers or were 'invisible'.

Third, the major causes of the pervasive failure of the policies included absence of intention and commitment of leaders to rural and community development exhibited in the pursuit of elitist programmes which alienated the rural communities from the benefits of the urban project.

Due to the nature, the policies and programmes only served to incapacitate the communities by exacerbating the deplorable conditions. In this regard, the Policies aggravated and institutionalized the dependency of rural areas on exogenous support from government and the urban economy, instead of promoting self-sufficiency.

Rural development is widely recognized as the potent instrument for national development. For one reason, the rural areas are hosts to over 70 per cent of the population; and for another reason, the areas provide the sources of food, raw materials for industrial production, export produce for non-oil foreign exchange earnings; and very importantly, employment for the teeming population, among others.

It is therefore curious that in spite of the relative importance of the rural areas, successive government had covertly neglected to develop much needed infrastructure, through relevant and policies and programmes. Even the little that was available to the rural dwellers was taken away through exploitative programmes such as River Basins Development, which 'seized' fertile lands and navigable rivers, hitherto employed in agriculture, as reported by Diejamoah (1973) in his study.

As for the exclusion of the rural areas in the 'development agenda', the attitude was aptly reported by Diejamoah (1973). Development policies mainly favoured the urban areas where the 'big men' had interest. Expenditure after such interest went into private pockets, as noted by Okpaga (2004). Thus, while budgets provided for agricultural and other Programmes, the 'target' rural areas were largely 'omitted' during implementation.

Unfortunately also, due to 'conspiracy' of illiteracy and corruption, the rural dwellers were shielded from access to information. The weak position further alienated the dwellers from knowledge of what obtained in the metropolitan areas where the headquarters of government are located. To be sure, therefore, the rural dwellers were unaware of the existence of the Policies and Programmes, because they did not witness project execution in the communities. On a general note, the Programmes, noted Egbe (2014), failed massively because of disarticulation and corruption, all traceable to the original absence of development intentions and political will by Nigeria's leaders during colonial and independence eras, as noted by Ake (2001).

The overall consequence of the actions and inactions of governments was pervasive underdevelopment and dependence of the rural areas on external economies, instead of acting as spring boards for national development, as reported in literature and empirical studies.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Rural development policy in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, has been shambolic. The unfortunate situation is not surprising because, development in general and indeed rural development in particular, has been out of development agenda. Accordingly, development policies have been largely inappropriate and inefficacious. Therefore, policies which were targeted at rural development largely excluded rural communities, and thus exacerbated rural underdevelopment and dependency. To ameliorate the situation, policy options for redressing the undesirable anomaly are of high imperative, and are offered subsequently.

Of cardinal importance is the prevailing poor philosophical orientation of government towards rural development in Nigeria. Accordingly, government should leapfrog the philosophy of rural development from the current abyss to the front burner, by prioritizing and constitutionalizing an agency, of the status of National Population Commission or Federal Character Commission, to attain the requisite agenda status.

With a new paradigm shift towards top agenda status, government should prioritize massive rural infrastructural development in budgetary appropriation, in order to transform the peasant agrarian economy into a more modern, productive and self-reliant economy. This will enable the rural areas to play the expected role of government's counter-urbanization policy among others. Adopting the 'Big Push' approach to development is a sine-qua-non to aggressive rural development.

All efforts will amount to zero, unless and until corruption, a potent vice of policy sabotage, is tackled to the barest and inconsequential level. Government at all tiers in should therefore intensify the fight against corruption. Otherwise, the alleged scam associated with fertilizer distribution, agricultural credit schemes, etc, will persist, to deny the rural areas of the benefits of rural agricultural development programmes.

#### Limitation of the Study

The major limitations of this study include its generic nature and the restriction to one State, Edo, out of thirty six States in Nigeria. While the generic nature imposed limitation with regard to specificity, the limited scope has implications for wide applicability of the findings to the generality of Nigeria.

Further studies with focus on specific rural agricultural intervention or programme, covering many States should therefore be undertaken, to improve the results, and for wider applicability.

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