

The Impact and Sustainability of the Ward Development Projects in Niger State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Key Words: Community, Development, Driven, Project, Rural, Ward

Rural areas are faced with problems ranging from lack of social amenities and other infrastructural facilities, different strategies ranging from mobilizing the community under the government direction to get both human and material resources to develop the host community, Integrated Rural Development Approach introduced in the 1980s. Despite all these strategies the quality of lives of the rural people has not significantly improved, none of these strategies have been utilised. This study has critically looked at the Ward Development Projects as a rural development strategy introduced in Niger State in 2007. The Community Driven Development Approach was adopted in the course of the study. The study adopted the primary (interview, focused group discussion and observation) and secondary sources (journals, books, newspapers, government documents, internet materials and magazines) of data collection. After a critical examination, the study discovered that the programme faced a lot of problems such as inadequate and inconsistent disbursement of funds, corrupt practices at different levels, lack of proper project monitoring, politicization of the programme and lack of continuation by the present administration. The paper suggested that the present administration should revive the programme, the disbursement of fund should be consistent, The State Government should set up a body that will closely monitor the ward committees in the course of project execution, this will encourage transparency in the handling of funds; and politics should not be attached to the programme, that is, the committee members should be people of unquestionable characters irrespective of their political affiliation.

1. Introduction

Since independence infrastructural development continue to be the bane of Nigeria. Rural development has been given various interpretations based on various different identifiable leanings. According to Maikasuwa, (2002) rural development is a process embracing a host of economic, social and political activities, whose ultimate objective is the enhancement of human welfare, societal transformation and progress.

Abdullahi,(2008:11) sees rural development as a self-generating process of socioeconomic and political improvement in which the masses are

meaningful participants as well as sharers in the costs and benefits because welfare and progress have several dimensions, the development process should serve a number of purposes, which include: Reduction of poverty, Raising people's standard of living, Expanding the range of choice open to people so that they chose for themselves more satisfying lives, Enhancing the capabilities of people so that they may come closest to fulfilling their potentials, Enhancing the participation of the people in policy making and execution. From the aforementioned facets of rural development, it could be seen that rural development covers all aspects of development. The principal justification for the

existence of government at any level is the promotion and advancement of the common good of the larger society is more important and takes precedence over interest of any individual or section of the society. It is a known fact that no government, no matter its good intentions, resources and manpower, can provide all the services, infrastructure and facilities that will transform the society and eliminate poverty in its entirety. Government must allow, encourage and energise the people to organize to organise themselves so as to complement the effort of government through identifying their own problems, devising solutions to these problems, and mobilising their resources, talents and creativity to pursue those actions which will improve their own situations.

Development according to Gauba, (2007:488) is primarily a positive phenomenon, it stands for improvement of human life in all spheres. But in the case of rural areas in Niger State, they are generally characterised by lack of health facilities, potable drinking water, access roads, electricity, functional schools and other infrastructural facilities. This has led to high mortality rate, the rural dwellers are exposed to diseases, increase illiteracy and absence of economic activities. The nutritional level of what is consumed in the rural areas is low and the rate of poverty is very high. Although, it is the rural areas that produce food for the nation, regrettably, the quantity of food products they produce are sold to earn meagre income while they consume the unmarketable ones.

The National Bureau of Statistics observed that the poverty rate of Niger State as at 2013 stood at 49.6 percent (NBS,2014) and increased to 66.11percent in 2019. Poverty is more in the rural areas of the state, the rural dwellers who are predominantly farmers complain of lack of fund to purchase fertilizer, herbicides and other farm inputs, most rural dwellers in the state are living in abject poverty, characterized with the inability to participate in socio-economic activities coupled with complains on the implementation of the ward development project in Niger State. Most of these rural dwellers also cry of challenges they encounter in the course of the programme living in thatched houses, prone to

diseases due to lack of medical services and other social amenities. The same period when poverty among rural dwellers in Niger State jumped to the extreme is the same period when the ward development project was initiated. The programme was aimed at alleviating poverty by improving the living conditions of the rural poor through the provision of social amenities.

2. Objectives of the Study

- i. This study seeks to determine the performance of the ward development projects in Niger state in regards to rural development;
- ii. Identify the problems faced by the ward development programme in Niger state, in its rural development strategies;
- iii. Examine the measures that need to be taken in order to address the problems faced in the process of executing the ward development projects in Niger state.

Conceptual Clarifications

Rural Development

The concept of rural development seems to be multi-dimensional in nature, the problem may not even be with its definition. In Nigeria, it is the way the various strategies and policies usually enunciated for achieving it that seem to be problematic. One of the commonest and oldest strategies for achieving rural development has been what Ijere, (1992:19) describe as “the authoritarian handouts form of administration.” This strictly was employed during the colonial era and is still in practice even today. It involves the provision of basic facilities, usually contained in government plans and budgets for a given period or year, to both the urban and rural areas.

According to Abdullahi, (2008) other strategies for rural development includes:

The mobilization of communities under the government direction for specific and general development. Under this strategy, human and material resources in the rural areas are mobilized for the provision of specific facilities aimed at impr-



oving the living conditions of rural people. This is usually done under the direction of the government or with the government providing some form of financial assistance. Nowadays, there are government agencies established specially for rural development through which government assistance other than finance are made available for rural development.

Another strategy for developing rural areas is exemplified in the concept of community development. With this strategy, government, through local leaders, development associations and agencies, is able to make fund available for specific and general development purposes within given communities are usually fully mobilized in terms of both human and material resources, but projects that are undertaken in this regard are usually decided upon by the respective leaders of the various communities.

Apart from the strategies mentioned herein, government over the years in Nigeria is also involved in the development of rural areas through the Integrated Rural Development Approach. Programmes under this strategy entail comprehensive packages in specific areas aimed at developing the rural areas. A few examples of these approaches are the Agricultural Development Projects, (ADPs) which were introduced in the 1980s to serve specially the rural areas. The objectives of these projects included the need to provide farm extension, credit and marketing services as well as equipment and vehicles, the provision of feeder roads for easy evacuation of farm products and also the provision of water for irrigation and human consumption.

In spite of these strategies, the quality of life of the rural people has not significantly improved considering the resources that have been mustered towards this purpose, one major reason for the failure of these strategies to adequately tackle the problems of the rural people has been the fact that they are administered from the centre. Sorkaa (1998) and Oladosu (1980) maintain that in a vast country like Nigeria where rural areas have enormous development needs ranging from lack of basic

infrastructure like transport and communication there is bound to be serious and administrative and political difficulties for any government that undertakes a wide variety of services and utilities from the centre.

Abdullahi (2008) in another development asserts that decentralization in the form of devolution of authority has been seen as one strategy that is suitable for the development of rural areas. With devolution, the central government gives legal powers to sub-national units to carry out specified functions on its behalf. This tends to decongest government at the centre and in the long run, brings government closer to the people as well as hastens up development in the rural areas. This leads to the consideration of local government as another strategy for rural development, which is development from the below strategy.

Ward Development Projects

The idea of wards development projects emanated from the Niger state governments drive to reach the door steps of the people with regularly satisfactory development projects and programmes which will serve to transform their lives, and provide their interest in the affairs of government of the day. Wards are divisions within the local government system. Each local government area is made up of several wards, and these wards actually have their peculiar leaders and specific areas of interest. According to Strategies and Methods (2009), Sometimes the people of a particular ward might want to have regular electricity and water supply, in another ward, the people might be more interested in security issue that is the protection of lives and property in some others, the provision of jobs for the young as well as social infrastructure might be of utmost interest. These diversities actually tell of people's diverse interest to which they often seek government direct intervention. Especially in a democracy such interest are often numerous, yet governments do not often have the essential funds with which to meet all expectations, especially in our type of rural-oriented society where development is quite low and where development indices are almost nil. According to Strategies and Methods (2009). It

was discovered that in the years past, development proposals and programmes were far from the people.

According to Strategies and Methods 2009:122 the idea of ward development projects (WDPs) emanated from the Niger State Governments drive to reach the door steps of the people with peculiarly satisfactory development projects and programmes which will serve to transform their lives, and provide their interest in the affairs of the government of the day. It was recognised that in the years past, development proposals and programmes were far from the people because: Most thoughts and actions were centred either state or local Government Area level, in which requests and demands would be two money to address; There was absence of the spirit of accountability and transposition; The peoples peculiar interest especially at the wards levels were never taken into consideration; A lot of political mischief and marginalization was in place; Most leaders were grossly, insensitive to the actual need of the people, and were rather obsessed with the quest for self-actualization at the expense of social growth, and Development programmes were often mistakenly centred only on states and local government area headquarters.

The ward development projects concentrated on construction of overhead tanks, new classrooms and renovation, clinics, markets, drilling of boreholes and extension of electricity to villages where there is none. The Ward Development committees work through the ministry for local government, community development and chieftaincy affairs. The communities appoint members of the project committee. These are made up of one female, a village representative and an experienced retired civil servant. Political party membership does not influence such a choice. The communities determine the nature, growth and physical completion of the projects. The ministry also constitutes implementation committees headed by the highest political office holders and seasoned administrators (Monitoring Committees) and The local government monitoring committee meet with the honourable commissioner once every month to review the projects.

The Ward Development Project is a project implementation concept introduced by the Niger State Government in 2007 under the leadership of Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu. In this initiative, each of the 274 wards in the state are given Five Hundred Thousand Naira (N 500,000:00) monthly. The amount was later increased to one million Naira (N1,000,000:00). In an interview with Abu Nmadu, the Commissioner of Local Government, Community Development and Chieftaincy Affairs, Garba Yusuf Tagwai said 'let me say without fear of contradiction that the Ward Development Projects initiative gives each of the State's 274 Wards one Million Naira Monthly (N1, 000,000:00) for the execution of capital projects that are considered relevant to the socio-economic life of the ward (www.thenigerianvoice.com).

In another development the commissioner asserted that 'we have just spent about a billion Naira for the sake of making the lives of our grassroots people better'. Giving the breakdown of how the One Billion Naira was disbursed, the Commissioner said 'each of the 274 wards received Three Million (N3,000,000:00) bringing the figure to Eight Hundred and Twenty-Two Million Naira (N822,000,000:00). He said the allowance for each of the seven members of the ward development committee has been increased from Five to Seven Thousand Naira (N5,000:00 to N7,000:00) per disbursement in addition to purchase of 25 pickup vans (one per local government for monitoring).

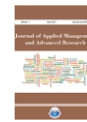
Programmes of rural development in Nigeria

Since colonial periods, the following programmes have been formulated and implemented aimed at developing the rural areas.

Table: 1.1

Programmes	Objectives
Farm settlement scheme	Aimed at creating a conducive atmosphere for development at the grassroots and providing infrastructure such as potable water supply, road construction, dispensaries etc.
Agricultural development project (ADP)	The primary purpose of ADP is to stimulate increased food production and enhance the income of the rural population.
River basin development authority (RBDA)	The principal objective is to raise agricultural productivity and living standards in rural areas.
Directorate of foods, road and rural infrastructure (DFRRI)	Responsible for financing construction and rehabilitation of infrastructures such as roads, water supply, earth dams, and rural electrification.
Better life programme/family support programmes, people bank and community banks programmes.	Aimed at alleviating rural poverty, particularly among women. Designed to make banking services more accessible and extend credit to the poor.
Mass mobilization for social and economic reconstruction (MAMSER)	A micro approach at mobilization aims to encourage rural people's participation in their development through active political participation.
The nomadic programme	Aims to make education available to nomadic children without endangering the sustainability of pastoralism – a very prominent occupation among the Fulani ethnic group.
Oil and mineral producing areas development commission (OMPADEC)	Responsible for providing aid, special to the oil-producing areas.
Primary health care scheme	Aims to provide at least one health centre in every local government.
National agriculture land development authority (NALDA)	To encourage small-holder farmers to bring more land under cultivation and thereby improve agricultural output.
Strategic grain reserves programme (SGRP)	The objective is to achieve a stable process for grains by buying large quantities during the harvest period, storing them, and releasing thereof during the off-season period when prices are high because of scarcity. SGRP is also used for providing emergency assistance where ever it may be.
National direction of employment (NDE)	Responsible for vocational skill development and small-scale enterprise programmes designed to combat unemployment.
National economic reconstruction fund (NERF)	Provides long-term loans at interest rates to promote small and medium-scale, industrial projects.
Community action programme for the poverty alleviation programme (CAPP)	The objectives include: Improving living conditions of the poor through targeted, cost-effective, demand driven and promptly delivered programmes, and enhancing the productivity of the poor through skill improvement and empowerment of the nutritional status of the poor through improving household, food security, and health practices.
Family economic advancement programme (FEAP)	Established to complement CAPP
Expanded programme on immunization	Two types of immunization as advocated by WHO and UNICEF – infants below the age of one year being provided immunization BCG, diphtheria-per two types of immunization as Ossid-tetanus, third dose (DPT3), Oral poliovirus, fourth dose (OPV3), and measles; Immunization of pregnant women with two or more dose of tetanus toxoid.
Programme under the social development policy for disadvantaged group	These are rehabilitation programmes for the disabled, beggars, children, the aged and juvenile delinquents.

Source: Yagup, N (February, 1993)



Theoretical framework

This study adopted the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach, placing beneficiaries in the driver's seat. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD2009) refers to CDD as “the way a policy or a project is designed and implemented than to the content of a policy or to the component of an investment project or programme “the Community Driven Development evolved as a response to the failures of earlier programmes targeted towards poverty alleviation such as lending to agricultural institutions and integrated development programmes for a geographical area. It is an approach that gives control of development decisions and control to community groups.

Ejiofor (2007) explained that the Community Driven Development (CDD) strategy makes it possible for beneficiaries to play leading roles in: Identification and prioritization of their needs; Deciding and preparing of micro-projects required to address the identified needs; Co-financing the micro-projects; Continue to operate and maintain the micro-projects thereby ensuring capability; Learn to do things for themselves and in so doing their capabilities are built; and Ownership of the micro-projects is guaranteed by active participation of beneficiaries in all the phases of the micro-projects cycle (identification, planning, prioritization and designation measures).

The community Driven Development (CDD) approach has been embraced as an effective Programme Based Approach (PBA) to delivering International Development Aid, Kwadwo and Peter (2012). The World Bank defines CDD as a Development Approach that gives control over planning decisions and investment resources to community groups and Local Governments Dongier (2003). This is because the CDD provides communities with a voice and control over all project stages, according to Dongier et al (2012) it is believed to enhance sustainability, improve efficiency and effectiveness allow poverty reduction efforts to be taken to scale; make development more inclusive; empower poor people build social capital,

and strengthen government; and Complement market and public sector activities.

The core belief of CDD proponents, according to Binswanger, et al (2012) is that the poor can become the most important actors in their own development. Communities can analyse their own problems, opportunities, and constraints and develop a list of projects and activities they would like to undertake, thereby changing from passive recipients to active managers of their destiny. Owing to the many advantages of this approach the World Bank investment in Community Driven Development (CDD) in 2000-2010 according to Binswanger et al (2010) has been enormous averaging almost USD 2 billion a year. For example, an independent Evaluation Group review of sixty-two countries (including Nigeria) assistance strategies found that CDD operations are an important part of the World Bank's strategy in more than 74% of relevant countries. According to World Bank (2010), in 2008, the International Development Association's (IDAs) lending for CDD related programmes average 17% of its total lending; while the number of CDD Programmes active at the IDA for the 2007 – 2009 period averaged over seventy – two.

Strength and Weaknesses of the Community Driven Development Approach

The main criticism challenging CDD is the lack of information regarding community participation and its role in CDD success.

“Elite capture” is another potential pitfall of CDD. This is the phenomenon that occurs when a small group of those in power within a community receive the majority of resources devoted toward a specific CDD project. Others have pointed out that in heterogeneous communities, it is often difficult to target the poor segment of society. This contributes to elite capture as those who are not among the lowest socioeconomic levels are benefiting the most. Several methods for combating elite capture have been suggested, such as sequential or conditional disbursement of funds for these projects. Other policy papers discuss the different effects of universal programs as opposed to programs that target recipients.

Methodology

This explains the justification for the methods and materials used in data collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation. In data collection, both primary and secondary sources were adopted. Under the primary sources oral interviews and focused group discussions were conducted, a total number of eleven people were interviewed these interviews focused on some ward development committee members in Munya Local Government Area in Niger State, people resident in each of the eleven wards were also randomly selected and interviewed on the impact of the ward development projects, focused group discussion were also

conducted, respondents were drawn from the committee members in each of the eleven wards. the researcher also went round to see to himself some of the projects embarked upon. Secondary data were sourced from books, government documents, journals and internet materials.

Results

The purpose of this study is to assess the extent of the performance of the ward development projects in rural development. The table below shows the summary of projects embarked upon by the ward development projects in Munya Local Government Area of Niger State.

Table 1: Summary of Projects Executed by Ward Development Projects Committee in Munya Local Government Area in Niger State.

S/N	TITLE OF PROJECT	LOCATION	YEAR	AMOUNT (N)	REMARK
1.	Construction of clinic.	Fuka-Kadara	2011-2012	3.2 million	completed
2.	Renovation of 2 class rooms block	Fuka	2010	1.5 million	Completed
3.	Completion of 4 classrooms block	D.S.S. Fuka	2010-2011	3.5 million	Completed
4.	Drilling of Boreholes	Juru	2013	650, 000	Completed
5.	Drilling of Boreholes	Yampana	2013	650, 000	Completed
6.	Drilling of Boreholes	Gbegbednapa	2014	650, 000	Completed
7.	Drilling of Boreholes	Tanu	2013	650, 000	Completed
8.	Repairing of Boreholes	Kukpna and Yampana	2014	No Record	
9.	Construction of Clinic	Yampana	2013-2014		uncompleted

Source: Field work, June 2019

Table 2: Summary of Projects Executed Through Ward Development Scheme in Niger State

S/N	Local Government	No. of Projects	Amount (N)	Status
1.	Bida	21	14, 500,000	Completed
2.	Borgu	36	16, 257, 000	Completed
3.	Chanchaga	14	15, 667,000	Completed
4.	Edati	48	14, 219, 182	Completed
5.	Gbako	20	13, 823, 000	Completed
6.	Gurara	39	32, 952, 000	Completed
7.	Katcha	50	27, 130, 000	Completed
8.	Lapai	44	21, 251, 000	Completed
9.	Lavun	84	13, 456, 000	Completed
10.	Magama	36	23, 709, 000	Completed

11.	Mariga	38	35, 719, 000	Completed
12.	Mashegu	30	19, 484, 000	Completed
13.	Mokwa	21	16, 550, 000	Completed
14.	Munya	21	7, 047, 000	Completed
15.	Paikoro	17	15, 194, 000	Completed
16.	Rafi	144	35, 665, 000	Completed
17.	Rijau	60	5, 965, 596	Completed
18.	Suleja	14	31, 099, 000	Completed
19.	Tafa	14	20, 485, 000	Completed
20.	Shiroro	20	15, 000, 000	Completed
21.	Agai	21	16, 500, 000	Completed
22.	Bosso	10	10, 000, 000	Completed
23.	Kontagora	13	19, 500, 000	Completed
24.	Wushishi	21	16, 500, 000	Completed
25.	Agwara	21	10, 000, 000	Completed

Projects types include boreholes, concrete wells, schools, furniture, and renovation of community schools, health centers, electricity supply and improvement, religious services and other purposes.

Source: Strategies and Methods (2009: 145).

Rural Development could be seen as 'a process embracing a host of economic, social and political activities, whose ultimate objective is the enhancement and process of human welfare' (Maikasuwa, 2002). The data gathered shows that Niger State Government has made an effort towards rural transformation through the Ward Development Projects. From the interview had with the secretary of Fuka Ward Development project committee, it can be deduced that Niger State Government began with the disbursement of Five Hundred Thousand Naira (N 500,000:00) monthly in 2007, which was later increased to one Million Naira (N1, 000,000:00) he stated that

'one of the major problem we faced was the inconsistency in the disbursement of the money to be used to embark on development projects'

he continued by saying that:

'at times it takes many months before the state government releases the money to the ward

committee'.

His response coincided with the response of one of the committee members who spoke in Hausa Language that:

"sometimes we take months before the state government releases the money without considering the past months"

The above responses are in agreement with the response of one of the respondents resident in Rumpa, Fuka ward he stated that:

"some of the projects take much time before they are completed and the problem is said to be lack of finance and has led to some projects being abandoned".

From the above, it is evident in Table 1 (project serial number 9) uncompleted clinic in Yampana which is as a result of insufficient finance, this is in line with a similar study by Bello 2004:12 which stated that "the failure of some state governments to give ten percent of the states internally generated revenue as and when due to local government to meet their objectives and set targets to their appreciable level" this has contributed to the underdevelopment of the rural areas. Table 2 is in line with the above author, it is clearly indicated that from the year 2007 to 2009

the total amount of fund disbursed to the 274 wards in Niger State N467,672, 778: 00, dividing this amount by the number of wards in the state one will discover that each ward got only N 1,706,835:00 this has clearly indicated that the fund is not consistently disbursed to the wards, this has also contributed to the ineffectiveness of the programme.

On the issue of the quality of projects, some of the rural dwellers in the focused group discussion lamented that the materials used are sub-standard, thereby leading to the structures not lasting long. It was also observed that really some of the projects are sub-standard, some of the rural dwellers interviewed in Gbegbednapa village lamented that the borehole drilled in their community stopped functioning not quiet long from when it was drilled, one of them stated that *“we face a serious problem of drinking water in the dry season we have made a lot of effort to put the borehole in order but all our effort proved abortive”* this also applies to other projects embarked up on by the scheme, it was observed that some are appearing as if they have lasted for more than three decades.

On the issues of proper record keeping by the Ward Development Committees, it was discovered that there was no record on the repairs of the boreholes in Kukpna and Yampana Communities in 2014 (table 1, project serial number 8). The absence of proper record keeping can be as a result of lack of transparency and accountability. In a similar study by Abdullahi, (2008:127) who asserted that financial accountability is enhanced where there is orderly and accurate recording of financial transactions. Alice, (2001:39) in a similar study stated that: 'Good economy cannot exist without good management of resources. Good management is impossible without a commitment to transparency and accountability'. This is also supported by Samuel, (2012:57) who asserted that lack of transparency and accountability in any human community is underdevelopment and backwardness. This lack of accountability and transparency can be attributed to corruption, this is in line with the statement of the CLCN cited in Efeturi, (2001:418), that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society.

On the membership of the committee of the Ward Development Projects the secretary of Fuka Ward Committee in an interview stressed that membership was only for registered members of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), he also stressed that it was a directive given from above, this contradicts the statement in a Government Publication 'Strategies and Methods (2009:128)' item (b) that “the communities appoint members of the project committees. These are made up of one female, a village representative and an experienced civil servant, political party membership does not influence such a choice. From the above it can be seen that in practice the scheme has been politicized and this can lead to its failure.

During the interview with the members of Kazai Ward Development Projects Committee some of them responded that 'since the present government came on board we have not heard anything in respect to the ward development scheme. Another respondent reiterated that 'we stopped receiving fund from the state government since 2014'. This is a clear indication that even the administration in power that brought about this initiative did not take it to the end.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study provided an evident ground for empirical conclusion that the government still have some major roles to play in improving the standard of living of the rural dwellers. However, the transformation of the rural areas has not been achieved because of inadequacy of funds, corrupt practices at different levels, lack of proper project monitoring which has led to lack of accountability and transparency, politicization of rural development strategies, lack of continuation of the programme by the present administration etc. The Ward Development Projects Scheme is a very good strategy for rural development, but it is affected by the above factors.

Based on the findings the study recommended that: The present administration should revive the programme, this will lead total transformation of the rural areas thereby leading to amelioration of the



sufferings of the rural dwellers;

There should be adequate and consistent disbursement of funds to the respective wards, this will enable the committees to complete all projects;

The State Government should set up a body that will closely monitor the ward committees in the course of project execution, this will encourage transparency in the handling of funds;

Politics should not be attached to the programme, that is, the committee members should be people of unquestionable characters irrespective of their political affiliation.

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