

Strategies for Overcoming Poverty and Hunger within the Sustainable Development Goal Agenda in Rural Nigeria

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Abstract

The author worked on strategies for overcoming poverty and hunger within the sustainable development goals agenda in rural Nigeria. We observed that Nigeria has had laudable agricultural programmes for years that would have made poverty and hunger a thing of the past in the rural areas but for many social ills of the society. The paper aimed at bringing out strategies that could be followed to ensure that poverty and hunger were overcome within the sustainable development goal agenda of 2015-2030. The data collected were mainly secondary from completed researches, past history of food production efforts and instances of project failures. The findings included that women who were normally entrusted with farm crops have been neglected by the modern irrigation system of agriculture. The neglect of rural cropping systems occasioned the hunger and poverty of the 1980s and 1990s that led to massive importation of food by Nigeria. The paper recommended a total return to agriculture and made a call on the governments of Nigeria to devote enough money in the yearly budget to food production if the much needed sustainable development could be achieved by 2030 AD.

Keywords:

Strategies, Poverty,
Hunger and
Sustainable
Development.

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Background to the Study

The paper focuses on strategies for overcoming poverty and hunger within the sustainable development goal agenda in rural Nigeria. Poverty and hunger are very prominent among the 17 United Nations Development adopted goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity all achievable within the next 15 years (2015-2030).

Nigeria has never lacked well formulated development plans right from its independence till this democratic era beginning from 1999. Nigeria's development policies and programmes have always been well formulated and the problems that could be traced to implementation were always constraints such as lack of rural infrastructure, and growing corruption. For example Obinna (1990) observed that Nigeria adopted 'planning' at the end of the Second World War as a development approach in an effort to counter some of the negative characteristics of the rural sectors. In 1945, a ten-year plan of development and welfare fund was established and in 1951, it was revised and renamed five year. Development plan 1951-1956. A post-independence N2.2 billion Naira plan tagged, First National Development Plan 1962-1968 was later extended to 1970. This was followed by a N3.0 billion Naira Second National Development Plan 1971-1974, and then came the Third National Development Plan 1975-1980; initially estimated to cost N30 billion Naira but later gulped N43.3 billion Naira. An N82.0 billion Fourth National Development Plan 1981-1985 came following after while an expected, fifth National Development Plan remained in the making. Ahannusi (1988) observed an obvious oversight in the structure of each successive National Development Plan. In most of them no specific mention was made of rural development, even on paper. The development plans were in the main, urban modernization plans.

Obinna (1990) observed that the establishment of Integrated Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) was about the first specific measure directed towards Rural Development. ADP came into effect in the mid 1970s (1975) beginning with Kaduna, Sokoto and Bauchi States to the establishment of ADP (1985) in Anambra, Imo, Bendel (Edo and Delta) and Cross River States. Comments from the media and others (Ahannusi 1988) have talked about the success of ADPs. If that was the popular opinion, why did the rural populace remain poor and down trodden?

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that every incoming government of Nigeria since the early 1990s had had one rural agricultural slogan or the other to encourage rural development in Nigeria. For example, in May 1976 General Obasanjo launched the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) with the key objective of helping to stem the rural urban migration and reduce massive food importation into the country (Ojie 2005). Nzimiro (1985:28) observed that "the OFN suffered the same ineffectiveness of the Utopian programmes of the First Republic. The rate of food importation did not reduce. In 1980 President Shehu Shagari launched Green Revolution which was a strategy for the transformation of the rural people. Its objectives were the boosting of food production and rural development. In 1986 the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was again inaugurated by the Federal Government led General Babangida. Its main objective was that of alleviation of rural poverty and enhancement of quality of rural life. Omale and Molem (2003) observed that this rural development policy was eroded by governmental instability and policy discontinuity

endemic in Nigeria. Another effort at improving the life of the rural people was the Better Life Programme for rural women in 1987. The programme was believed to be hijacked by urban women; subsequent efforts went the same way while the rural communities remained in poverty and want. The researcher probes into why rural poverty continues in rural Nigeria inspite of sloganeering and the modern capitalist equipment mobilized into agricultural development in River Basin Development settings, (RBDA) and Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) settings.

Research Questions

The following research questions are very pertinent in this work:

1. What is responsible for food insufficiency in rural communities of Nigeria inspite of the capitalist equipment deployed into rural agriculture?
2. What role can indigenious knowledge system play in alleviating rural poverty in Nigeria?
3. How much is the issue of corruption affecting the rural poverty level in Nigeria?

Conceptual Issues

Poverty

Poverty is to many a concept difficult to define mainly because of absence of adequate statistics Frank (2010) attributed poverty to the collapse of the traditional African economic system caused by industrial revolution; its application to Africa provided the onset of poverty in all its forms in the continent. Ordinarily poverty can be measured by the income and expenditure level that can sustain a bare minimum standard of living. It can be measured in relative or absolute terms. There are other indicators that could be used to measure poverty. We feel that health, life expectancy, access to clean water and roof above one's head are important indicators. The World Bank Glossary of Poverty and Human Development (1997) divided poverty into poverty line or threshold. It is based on the lowest amount of money an individual needs to survive a day. In 1985 the World Bank set an international poverty line at US\$1 per person per day. Ekong (1986) suggested that poverty line should be based not only on the cost of balanced diet but other expenses like clothing, housing, medical costs and transportations.

Hunger

Hunger is concerned with one being unable to take on balanced meal daily. In real term a non-hungry individual should have the three square meals a day. Poverty is linked to hunger in the sense that a poor person cannot afford daily balanced meal.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development as a term was brought into common use by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in 1987. It ushers in a development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generation. This Brundtland Commissions report "Our common future" highlights the need to simultaneously address developmental and environmental imperatives.

Taking the bearing from the term sustainable development, the United Nations in September, 2015 adopted 17 goals aimed at eliminating poverty, hunger, protection of planet to be met within the ambit of sustainable development from 2015-2030. The key concept in this work is sustainable development.

Review of Relevant Literature

Mink (1994) argued that the poor cannot easily vacate their status especially as poverty affects environment. He observed that the poor struggling at the age of subsistence levels of consumption and preoccupied with day to day survival have limited scope to plan ahead and make natural resource investment for example, soil conservation that gives positive return after several years. Again the poor's use of natural resources is affected by their facing greater risks ranging from misguided policy interventions in input and output markets to evolving land tenure systems that favour those with greater political clout. The rich's traditional means of coping with crises are not available to the poor farmers, who are on the majority. This is the lot of rural Nigerian farmers and the gap that must be filled if rural poverty is to be alleviated for development to reach them.

Hunter (1904) observed the relationship of industrialization in Africa and poverty of the indigenous people. He saw much of poverty in Africa as caused by a whole series of economic disorder. It is a wrong alignment between how industry is organized and the present ownership of the means and materials of production. Unemployment which Hunter (1904) saw as the outcome of the confrontation between the old African cultural norm and the industrial society has become the purveyor of poverty (Frank 2010). Poverty will continue to trail African societies because of the way they were absorbed by the industrial colonial masters and the traditional citizenry (Ake 1981, Nabudere, 1977).

Again Bamgboye (2014) observed that Nigerian authorities by commission, deliberately neglected Agriculture for various reasons including undue concentration on oil boom of the 1970s. This created abject poverty of the rural men and women whose livelihood depended on agriculture. It also led to massive food importation to the benefit of food merchants.

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge System in Alleviating Rural Poverty in Nigeria

Serageldin (1994) in his people-centred development warned that local knowledge could be better used in the design and implementation of programmes. Modo (1986) reported the outcome of a research at the Bakolori irrigation dam Talata Mafara (BIP). The local farmers before the new irrigation system of modern equipment in 1980 were producing yearly about a thousand bags of local rice called Yar-Maradun. When the Fadama rice farmers were replaced with modern sprinkler and other surface irrigation agriculture each of the modern farmers admitted into the Bakolori dam irrigation system could not produce fifty (50) bags a year. The researcher is calling attention to the good old days of indigenous knowledge that were abrogated, rejected and put aside. When the irrigation authorities introduced a new breed of rice FIIRO 15 to increase rice yield in their Bakolori dam site; the farmers cited the green leaves and the growth rate but they later found that the new rice was inferior to the Yar-maradun. First of all, the rice was slimy and could not serve the purpose of rice i.e. when pounded into rice meal as "tuwo shinkafa" for marriage and burial food (Modo, 1986). The farmers have been calling for the good old days of Yar-maradun.

The World Bank (1989) reported a research outcome where local knowledge among farmers in Chad provided an improved approach to managing natural resources than modern project technology.

Chad authorities see irrigation as a means of meeting its national objective of food self sufficiency. Farmers, on the other hand have usually sought to include irrigation in a mixed survival strategy, blending recession, food or small-scale localized opportunities with rained farming and livestock or off-farm work depending on local circumstances (World Bank 1982:26). A financial and economic rate of return analysis indicated that cultivation of rice, wheat, and sorghum is most economically viable under the traditional rained irrigation system. Four models were examined (1) water control based only on pumping with a diesel engine (2) controlled flooding based on gravity based perimeter partial water control (3) improved rained agriculture based on bottom land cultivation and (4) traditional rained irrigation which accounts for 90% of the rice production in Chad. World Bank (1989:25) held that 'the relatively greater profitability of the improved traditional polders is confirmed by the economic analysis which showed that cereals cultivation, particularly wheat and sorghum had an acceptable holding for the traditional polder where as it was negative for the modern polder”.

Government and donors have tended to assume that farmers were interested in irrigation agriculture while they failed to develop an understanding of how irrigation fits into the farmers economic strategy (World Bank 1989:26). Cultivation of traditional cereals on the traditional polders is economically viable, whereas this is not the case for the modern polders. Government and donors need to seriously re-examine the decision to invest heavily in modern polders on Lake Chad which is extremely costly in terms of both investment and operating costs (World Bank 1989:28).

Again rural development suffers a set back with women playing the second fiddle. Fasola (2003) has observed that women in Nigeria have great potentials toward sustainable forest conservation. In the case of most products it is often women who know which trees are suitable and which are not and who oversee the final product. Nigerian women in particular have so developed a reservoir of knowledge of the different species of firewood to the extent that they believe that certain traditional menu can only be cooked with specific types of firewood. For rural African women duties such as providing fuel-wood and cooking ingredients for the household put them in close contact with the use of management of natural resources. It has been argued that even though women gather 60% - 80% of domestic fuel in each household, countless programme aimed at reversing deforestation never consulted village women. This is a great cultural blunder and a gap in rural food build-up. This is why some writers such as Savane (1986) argued that African planners forget women.

It has also been observed that exchange of forest products and their utilization have brought women together inspite of wide cultural differences. This non availability of some of these forest products in some localities has brought absolute buying and selling among different communities thus encouraging interaction, unity and co-existence (Fasola 2003). Fasola (2003) cited *Irvingia Gabonensis* (Agbono) seeds used for soup by Ibo women which is now popular in other Nigerian communities. Again the popular Nigerian kolanut (*cuminata*)

grows in the southern part of Nigeria, Yoruba, Edo Delta and Igbo land) but consumed mainly in the North and largely consumed by Northern Nigerian men and women (Modo, n. d.)

Akpomuvie (2006) on the contrary accused successive governments in Nigeria of general neglect of agriculture (see Appendix 1) and continued to also encourage the decline of indigenous technology through uninhibited importation of all forms of foreign technology, not suitable to the Nigerian environment. He also observed that majority of the rural dwellers are marginalized in policy formulation and implementation process. He gave examples of the indigenous (endogenous) textile industry, the ceramic industry and the blacksmithing industry of the Etsako people of Edo state which till today constitute the rich culture of the people but which have been looked down upon by succeeding governments in Edo State of Nigeria and Nigeria in general.

How Corruption in high places has held back Sustainable Development efforts in rural Nigeria

Adawo (2008) argued strongly that industrialization in the urban and rural communities is unattainable for now because of the failure of government in its obligation to provide infrastructures needed for the people's sustainable development. The other reference he made was that of Nigerian factor. This is part of human factor problem. Human factor has different representations such as patriotism, hard work and moral uprightness; while negative aspects or factors in human factor analysis, such as Betrayal Absenteeism in industrial set up and ethnic consideration in a multi-ethnic country such as Nigeria with 372 ethnic groups (Otite 1990) Ajibolosoo (1993) observed that human factor consideration could promote development especially in rural settings if taken into consideration in development. Its negative aspects could lead to the underdevelopment of a country. This happened in Nigeria as the military came ruling by decrees, and promoted ethnicity and corruption for over four decades of Nigeria's independence. (Achebe, 1983).

Tom (2013) identified corruption and insensitive leadership in Nigeria as the cause of rural and urban underdevelopment in Nigeria. Umoh (1981:12) said ethics and morally are for the dogs. Those who amass wealth by 'thievery', cheating, trickery, robbery, burglary, bribery, embezzlement and all sorts of traditionally un approved or corrupt means are accorded the greatest respect in our society." Those people are among the first to be chosen as leaders and representatives of the people. This could be seen in the case of Nigerian Ex-military Head of State, General Sani Abacha who stole \$20 billion of Nigerian money into Switzerland Bank and up till now the money is slowly being returned to Nigeria (Nation Newspaper Editorial 2016, Jan.21).

The Ex-Governors of Delta State, Nigeria stole over \$300,00.00 of Delta State money into Britain, but while Nigerian courts said he was not guilty of money laundry, Britain caught him and jailed him, (Nation 2016). The monies stolen were from oil and the victims who are the rural inhabitants of the places only experience oil spillage and diseases while corrupt leaders and administration feed on the people's natural resources.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts two main theories as its platform or point of departure for further analysis. They are structural theory, and endogenous development model.

Structural Theory

There are many proponents of this theory including Myrdal (1964). The theory sees poverty as an economic condition stemming from blocked opportunities. Myrdal (1964) used the word exclusion, signifying the class of excluded ones i.e. those in the poverty pockets who live precarious life and are excluded from having the necessities of life (Frank 2010). The exclusion of a group from the social benefit of public policy, naturally impoverishes, the group that has been blocked out. The way out is that the anti-poverty policy should be such as to ensure income of a matter of right amount sufficient to maintain all persons through out the nation at a uniform adequate level of living.

Another structural theory is that of McClelland, (1961) who in his book, *The Achieving Society*, holds that a nation with a high level of achievement would produce energetic entrepreneur who will in turn produce rapid economic development. The theory holds values, not motives of psychological forces as the determinants of the rate of economic and social development. The theory holds strongly to the point that African societies have low achievement orientation which culminates in poverty. All these theories or approaches offer reason for African poverty but Africans were not poor before the colonial imposed economy dominated their psyche, vision and focus.

Endogenous Development Model

This development model is indigenous in outlook. Many scholars in Africa and abroad have advocated this growth model. Pitt (1976) saw it as development from below. Schumacher (1973) and small is beautiful, while Samir (1974) critiqued accumulation on a world scale. Endogenous development model is based on local peoples own criteria of development and takes into account-the material, socio-cultural and spiritual well being of peoples (Okoye, 2016). The theory empowers local communities to take control of their own developmental process. The process allows people to use both internally generated resources and imported ones to produce new things in a form of intermediate technology etc. The local people of the Bakolori dam (Northwest, Nigeria) utilized their indigenous technology to produce over 1,000 bags of long grain rice – Yar-Maradun in the 1970s but the modern irrigation process of the 1990s in the same zone could not yield 300 bags a farmer. Both the structural theory and the endogenous theory are both useful in this work since both point to an articulation of production arising from consciousness of early blocked opportunity of a community charting their own new course.

Methodology

This research takes the form of assemblage of works on poverty and hunger problems by scholars of Africa origin and others; including the researchers. It is a survey design with analysis being descriptive narratives employing excerpts and dialogue when necessary.

Findings and Discussion

This assemblage has created the imagery of unsustainable agricultural effort in Nigeria. The agricultural endeavors were halfheartedly undertaken from the colonial days in Nigeria till date. The image created by past Nigerian leaders was that of neglect and sidelining of the so called traditional illiterate farmers and women in agriculture in rural areas of Nigeria. Indigenous irrigation agriculture such as that of the old Maradun that caused each farmer to produce over 1,000 bags of rice –Yar-Maradun (Modo, 1986) was ignored and substituted with the modern Bakolori irrigation sprinkler system that expelled the endogenous farmers and foisted hunger in the populace of the Bakolori irrigation zone in Northwest Nigeria.

The same story all through the country was narrated about the rural agricultural slogans of past regimes. The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and so on. They were hijacked by urban Nouveau Riche Farmer politicians to the extent that failure in agriculture necessitated massive rice and wheat importation, a legacy that has not yet been arrested till date.

No effort has to date been made to study the cultural groups in Nigeria, especially those that still feed the nation with their crude equipment such as farmers of Nassarawa State, Abakaliki rice and Enugu, Kebbi rice farmers to know their ingenuity in their production process. The effort is always to superimpose the high technological imported machinery on their effort which invariably will send the rural farmers away. The link between the indigenous production system and the high farming technology has never been researched into yet Indians middle range technology started with such research (Kapur 1982). African leaders will always replicate isolated agricultural development that favoured export and their exploitation such as the Gezira scheme that worked from colonial industries and underdevelopment of Sudan (Bernett 1975).

What appeared to be the first genuine attempt to improve agriculture at the rural areas in Nigeria, the Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) created in different states of Nigeria were not given the opportunity to interact with rural farmers before eighteen River Basin Development Authorities dominated its environment from 1976. Again Idachaba (1981) had always insisted that in order to meet the basic food needs of rural Nigeria appropriately rural machinery should be developed and applied.

Women who mattered in some cultural food growing areas Northwest, North Central and South East areas of Nigeria were sidelined and made irrelevant. There is need to revisit the issue of indigenous farmers in the rural areas agricultural settings who do not have the collaterals to get the loans that are being floated as agricultural loans. There is the need for Nigeria not to improve but to research into the rural infrastructure suitable for its rural areas. There must therefore be a revisit to the old farm settlements where farmers will be allocated land. The indigenous tools will supplement the ones government will allocate. General enlightenment about return to the land must be genuine on the part of the leaders.

Conclusion

The researcher has undertaken a panoramic view of hunger and poverty in Nigeria using descriptive narratives as a methodology. There is the necessity for Nigeria to rethink its agriculture and especially as it concerns the rural areas the once acclaimed food baskets of Nigeria (Idachaba 1981). The different Nigerian environments are still conducive for growth of cotton, yams, rice, wheat, sorghum and cassava. The appropriate rural infrastructure to exploit the environment should be used or mainly developed from below (Pitt, 1976). The agricultural officials to work with the local producers should be morally and ethically upright and not the ones to divert fertilizers meant for the rural people in the euphoria of 'sloganeering'. Every rural Nigerian farmer is capable of contributing to the food needs of Nigeria if given the opportunity to do so through being given the tools and the land. For sustainable development to be attained there is the need for rural farm system revolution to take place as it happened in India and only then can hunger and want be far away from Nigeria if Nigeria is to attain its sustainable development goals.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Nation has since Independence (fifty six years ago) been struggling to achieve self-sufficiency in basic food production. This effort has not paid off because of so many extraneous variables especially the use of inappropriate technology, ignoring of the rural farmers who are the food producers and substituting them with nouveau riche farmers and military/political overlords who are corrupt. It is expected that with the support of the present government that has zero tolerance for corruption Nigeria should attain the sustainable development area goals by 2030.

Recommendations

1. Rural farmers should be encouraged by government to get the necessary tools and financial support to grow their food crops in every rural and semi-urban areas of Nigeria.
2. Locally fabricated tools should be used along with imported ones as appropriate technologies to enhance productivity.
3. Government should ensure that rural infrastructure especially accessible farm roads, crops evacuating machines etc should be in place at all times as an encouragement to farmers.
4. It is essential for government to encourage local producers by ensuring that there is a ready made market for surplus farm products such as potatoes, rice, yams, fish etc.
5. Fertilizers and other equipment should get to the farmers directly and not through third party contractors.
6. Any hindrance to food production or land use or for forest preservation of farmland cultivation should be nipped at the bud by government if sustainable development goals must be achieved in relation to overcoming poverty and hunger.

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