

A Template for the Rural Development of Imo State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The Research Problem that necessitated the prosecution of this study was the lop-sided development of the state. The rural areas of Imo State of Nigeria have been criminally excluded from the states developmental programmes since 1976 when the state was created. The consequence of the exclusive development is a consistent Rural-Urban migration of population with concomitant socio-economic problems such as excessive pressure on social amenities and infrastructure, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution and so on. The Research Objective, therefore, was to find out if the marginalization and exclusiveness of the rural population was due to lack of funds or due to some other extraneous variable such as corruption in high places so that a solution can be prescribed. In terms of Methodology the paper is a theoretical paper based on the normative and prescriptive dimensions of theory. Although no rural development theory is the “one best way” this paper leans heavily on the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) model. It made use of Documentary Content Analysis, specifically of the Gujarat, Indian Model and Kwaku Opon Tutu's Approaches to Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Ghana. In applying the Kingsbury et al analysis of levels of poverty the paper came out with the following findings. The rural areas of Imo State have all the levels of poverty below the poverty line due to exclusion from developmental programme, not because of lack of funds but because of criminal diversion of funds meant for rural development by the various State Governments. The conclusion is that the rural areas of Imo State have been marginalized and impoverished by developmental programmes that have not been sustainable, inclusive and integrated. The paper, finally, recommends that the local government funds from the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) in Abuja be used explicitly and specifically for rural development using the prescribed template encapsulated with 4 cardinal points and based on the integrated approach as follows: Infrastructural development, Housing development, Population management and Production (industrialization) and Market management. With this there will be urban-rural migration of population and solution to the socio-economic problems of urbanization in Imo State of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Rural Development, Urban Development, Infrastructural Development, Population, Management, Production Management, Rural, Poverty, Market Development*

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Background to the Study

The concept of balanced, sustainable, inclusive and integrated development demands that both the urban and the rural areas of a place should be developed *pari pasu* (Meir, 1968). However, this has not been the case in the Imo State of Nigeria as a federating unit. From 1976 when the state was created out of the former East Central State of Nigeria, the development programmes of the successive state governments have been concentrated on the urban areas at the expense of the rural areas. The consequence of the lop-sided and exclusive development is an endless migration of the rural population to the urban areas of Owerri, the state capital, Orlu and Okigwe, the two other urban areas of the state.

The concomitant problems of the migration include excessive pressure on the social and economic infrastructure of the urban areas, housing deficit, development of illegal structures, slums and charities alongside with approved buildings giving rise to what Meier (1968) calls “dualistic development”. Not to be forgotten is the increase in crime waves such as armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution, ritual murder for money (*Ogwu ego or Otokoto*) and other vices associated with uncoordinated urbanization.

The solution to this social problem is a proactive programme of rural development adopting the Gujarat Model of rural development of a heavily populated area in India. The thesis of this paper is that unless the rural areas of Imo State are developed to revise the rural-urban migration of population there will continue to be congestion of the roads no matter how many lanes are constructed and buildings pulled down to provide boulevards in the urban areas of Imo State of Nigeria. Also, if a new administration who do not share the vision of the current administration take over government, the poor masses who live in illegal structures and uncompleted houses in the urban areas will rebuild their shanties and slums and continue to live in urban poverty.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that underscored the need for this study was the glaring exclusiveness of the rural areas of Imo State in the development of the state; it is the lop-sided development of the State. The rural areas of Imo State have been criminally excluded from developmental programmes since 1976. The consequence of this is a consistent rural-urban migration of population with concomitant socio-economic problems such as excessive pressure on social amenities and infrastructure traffic congestion, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution, ritual murder to make *juju* money otherwise called *Otokoto*.

Statement of the Objective

The objective the study intended to achieve was to find out if the marginalization and exclusiveness of the rural areas of Imo State was due to lack of funds or due to some other extraneous variable so we can proffer solutions.

Research Question

To operationalize and guide the study, we asked the following question: Is the marginalization and exclusiveness of the rural areas of Imo State due to lack of funds or due to some other extraneous variables?.

The answer to this question was expected to provide solution to the problem and a template for rural development?.

The Location of Imo State of Nigeria

Imo State is one of the 36 States of Nigerian Federation. It is located in the South-East Geo-Political zone of Nigeria with Owerri City as the State Capital and seat of government. The other urban areas are Orlu and Okigwe. The state is divided into three senatorial districts that take their names from the three urban areas namely Owerri senatorial district Orlu senatorial districts and Okigwe senatorial district. These senatorial districts elect representatives at the Nigerian House of Senate and House of Representatives for democratic governance. According to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ImoState>, the geographical location of the state is approximately the land area between the lower Niger River and the upper and middle Imo River from which the state took its name.

The State is boarded by other states namely, Abia State to the east, Rivers and Delta States to the west, Anambra State to the North and Rivers State to the South. The State lies within latitude 4.45 North and latitude 7.15 North. It also lies between longitude 6.50 East and 7.25 East. The State is land locked with a total area of 5.530km² (2.140sq miles). It is ranked 34th out of 36 states and the Federal capital Abuja. In terms of landmass the population by 2006 census according to Wikipedia cited above was 3927560 people and ranked 13th. Going by the population and the land mass it is obvious the State has one of the highest population densities in Nigeria. The Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) by 2007 was approximately \$14.21 billion. It has a per capita income of \$3.527 which means the State is relatively poor compared with states like Lagos State and Rivers State. As made manifest by Isa (2018:4), the Internally Generated Revenue (I.G.R) of the State by March 2018 was N6.8 billion and this placed the State at number 16 from the bottom occupied by Yobe State in category of poorest States. In terms of debt profile the State took the 15th position with total domestic debt of N80,785,160,471.66 and external debt of N62,848,234.69. Going by the GDP the State is debt ridden.

The Concept of Rural Development

Simply stated rural development is the opposite of urban development. It is the socio-economic development that takes place in the rural areas of a particular place. A rural area is defined by relative poverty sustained by subsistence living particularly subsistence agriculture and petty trading. Rural development, *ipso facto*, is the process of improving continually the living standards of rural dwellers and poverty alleviation. The key word is quality of life, taking quality as a moving average. It encompasses economic, sociological technological and political variables (Mbaegbu, 2016:125). Generally several variables are used as parameters for measuring the level of development. It includes the level of GDP which tells only half of the story by giving an insight into the level of consumption of goods and services, baring inequality. Human Development Index (HDI) measures the level of human dignity: access to health care delivery, education, portable clean water and ease of movement. As stated by Tutu (2011:122), the standard of World Bank and the United Nations is that every citizen of a country that is developing

should not live more than 2 kilometers from a road that is accessible by non 4-wheel drive vehicle under all weather conditions whether dry season or rainy season. In other words, people living outside this perimeter to access tarred road like the rural people of Imo State should be considered undeveloped, isolated or even “forgotten” until politicians start canvassing for votes and making promises they will not fulfill.

Analysts including Mbaegbu (2016:25), Emariwe (2016: 31-36), Ekpo (2015:43) differentiate between sustainable, inclusive and integrated development. Development is sustainable if it is increasing at an increasing rate such that the needs for the wellbeing of the present and future generations are not impaired. It is inclusive where no part of the population is neglected or marginalized like Imo State rural areas. It is integrated when all the key sectors of the economy such as agriculture, industry, trade and services etc are taken into calculations during the process of planning and execution of a development programme.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of rural development is part of the general theory of Economic Development and Improvement in people's wellbeing. From the classical theory of David Ricardo, J.S. Mill etc to the Monetarist theory of John Maynard Keynes and post Keynesians, to the Neo-Classical theory of later days philosophers espoused by Solow, Perkins etc the objectives are the same – improvement in the standard of living of the people (Jhingan, 2010).

All the theories of rural development aim at eradicating or alleviating rural poverty and this is the underpinning of this paper. There are many theories of rural development because there is no *one best way* approach (Anam, 2014: 154-173). However, this paper leans heavily on the *Integrated Rural Development (IRD) Model* exemplified by the Gujarat (India) Model of rural development. With integrated, inclusive and sustainable development of the environment of rural dwellers employment will be generated for them to contribute meaningfully to the increase of G.D.P and also check rural-urban migration and its concomitant social evils (Tutu, 2011).

The Profile of Urban Development of Imo State of Nigeria

From the time the State was created in 1976, all development programmes have been on urban development with concentration on Owerri Capital Territory. Before Owerri assumed the status of State Capital, it was but a big village centrally located with roads linking it and major cities in Eastern Nigeria.

However, the importance of Owerri as seat of power predates the amalgamation of Nigeria. It had been district headquarters in the Southern protectorate as well as provincial headquarters in Eastern Nigeria following the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates to form one united Nigeria (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu & Nwaubani, 1988). As provincial capital, its jurisdiction covered Aba, Umuahia, Port-Harcourt, Okigwe and Orlu. It was this historical role that made Owerri to be preferred to

Umuahia as State Capital in 1976. The nodality of Owerri made it easily accessible by road from Port Harcourt, Aba, Umuahia, Okigwe and Onitsha.

The urban development of Owerri all this while had centered on the construction, reconstruction and dualization of the major roads linking Owerri and the cities named above. It also has a cargo airport as part of its infrastructural development. What the city lacks in industrialization. It makes up as an educational centre with two universities; two polytechnics, college of education and so on. There is also a tertiary hospital, the Federal Medical Centre which relates with the State University Teaching Hospital Located at Orlu.

The other two major cities namely Orlu and Okigwe have not been as favoured as Owerri in terms of urban development. Infrastructural development, healthcare delivery educational institutions, production management markets management and portable water supply are still below acceptable human standards in these urban areas. Currently, the State government has embarked on what it calls Urban Renewal Programmes. The urban renewal programmes basically center on expansion and dualization of existing urban roads particularly the major roads in Owerri, the State Capital.

In pursuance of the programme all major roads have been upgraded to eight (8) lanes with four (4) lanes on each side of the divide or median. In consequence of this all unapproved structures on the roads have been pulled down. Roundabouts have been constructed at strategic road junctions. Five link roads, the first, second, third, fourth and fifth inland roads have been constructed to link old Owerri and New Owerri. The dilapidated school buildings that were neglected by previous administrations have been reconstructed and upgraded into storey buildings with the pupils granted fee free education. Also 27 new hospitals, one for each local government area have been constructed. All vehicles now have "Motor parks" to create rooms for the free movement of people and traffic. The markets that caused congestion in the old Owerri business district have been relocated to the sub urban areas so that movement from the airport through the city centre to the government secretariat and the posh hotels springing up in new Owerri will be unimpaired. Flyovers and tunnels have been constructed at strategic places. This is perhaps one of the ways to enhance ease of doing business in the State capital. No doubt, the administration has made such an impact that history will always remember.

However, the suburban areas on the periphery of Owerri Municipal have not been favoured with the Urban Renewal Programs. These suburbs have no intra city roads and drainage systems. When it rains life becomes hard for the sub-urban dwellers. The suburbs include the following:

- 1) Uratta layouts and town including Orji town
- 2) Mbieri – Akwakuma Layout
- 3) Irete – Orogwe Suburb
- 4) Avu - Umuguma - Nekede - Suburb
- 5) Naze Egbu sub-urban area

These suburbs would perhaps be considered during the next phase of the urban renewal programme. Single lane roads in these areas are sufficient for connectivity. They do not need boulevards like the business district.

The State of Rural Development of Imo State of Nigeria

Taking the concept of development as espoused above into consideration. It is plausible to say that, the rural areas of Imo State of Nigeria have had no sustainable inclusive or integrated development programmes since the State was created in 1976. The development of the state as an entity has been lop-sided with efforts concentrated on the urban areas to the neglect and exclusion of the rural areas where the majority of the people live (Anam, 2014). There is also no integrated development because the successive governments pay lip service to industrialization while agriculture is still rain fed and not mechanized. The rural areas of Imo State, therefore, have all the attributes of a forgotten and undeveloping area.

The cause of the undeveloping status of the state's rural areas has nothing to do with funds or the often repeated mantra of the marginalization of the South-East. As a matter of fact the state governors control at least four sources of funding, namely:

- 1) Revenue from the Federation Account Allocation Commission, FAAC accruing to the State governments.
- 2) Revenue for the local government area from FAAC which is specifically meant for rural development but usurped by the State governments.
- 3) The internally generated revenue (IGR)
- 4) Funds from the 13% derivation for the oil producing states. There are also funding from donor agencies like the World Bank, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), etc.

The main cause of the exclusive development of the state is basically corruption. Those in government corrupt their elected positions to loot public funds. As reported by Uzochi (2018:3), the people of Ideato in Imo State have accused successive state governments of neglect (exclusion) in spite of the sum of N19.8 billion allocation from the Federal government to the Ideato North Council Area since 1999. What the people of Ideato are crying for is what has happened in all the 27 local government areas of the state – neglect and increase in poverty level. There are basically no tarred roads, no productive activities apart from subsistence agriculture and petty trading in the rural areas of Imo State.

The sorry state of the rural areas is such that if no integrated rural development is embarked upon there will continue to be congestion (traffic jam or *go-slow* and street trading) on the urban roads no matter how many lanes are created for dualization. In other words, rural-urban migration will continue if people are not moved back to the rural areas where they belong through pragmatic rural development.

The Gujarat Model of Rural Development

Gujarat is a state in Western India with much of its land mass in the Katiawar Peninsula. It has a population of more than 60 million people. The State Capital city is Gandhinagar

while the largest commercial city is Ahmedabad (See <https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Gujarat>).

Gujarat has a beautiful rural development strategy that tends to confine the rural population away from the urban areas. To this researcher it provides a model for the integrated rural development of a place with heavy population density like Imo State of Nigeria. Its infrastructural development includes network of roads, railways airports and seaports to ease transportation by providing inter connectivity between the rural areas and the urban areas. As sourced from Wikipedia cited *supra* Gujarat has 85% village connectivity with all-weather roads. Nearly 100% of Gujarat's 18,000 villages have been connected to the electrical grid for 24 hour power to the households and 8 hours of power to farms. Electricity generation includes gas powered thermal electrical generation, coal and nuclear electricity generation. Industries based on availability of raw materials e.g. marble tiles, agro-allied industries provide jobs for rural dwellers. All villages are connected with broadband internet. With these facilities what will make a villager migrate to the cities? Any wonder Gujarat has the lowest unemployment rate of 1% against the National average of 3.8% (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gujarat>).

Methodology

This is a theoretical paper making use of documentary content analysis. The main documents are: (1) The profile of the Gujarat State of India (2) Kwaku Opon Tutu's *Approaches to Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Ghana*. A strategy of rural development and a strategy of poverty reduction are two sides of a coin. An action programme for sustainable inclusive and integrated rural development results in the reduction of rural poverty. Kingsbury et al cited in Tutu (2011) have given us six levels for analyzing poverty and development. The six levels are shown in figure 1.

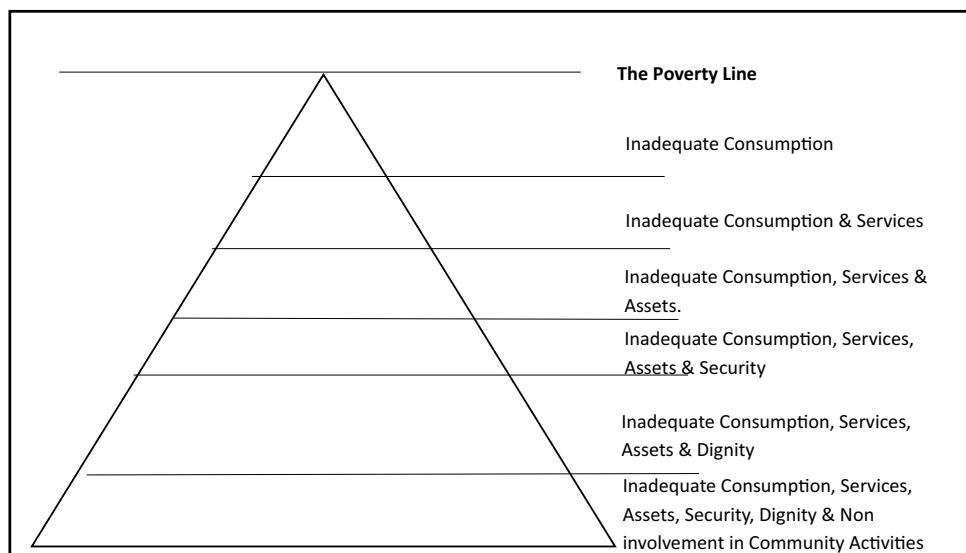


Fig 1.

Source: Kingsbury's levels of poverty in Tutu, K.O. (2011) *Approaches to Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Ghana*. Accra: Smart line Publishing Ltd, page 7

Using Kingsbury's analysis to analyze the current state of rural development in Imo State (Section 5) we can plausibly claim that much of the rural areas are operating below poverty line, at various levels and are excluded from development or even forgotten. Besides low per capita income of \$3.627 only, the areas have inadequate consumption, services, assets, security, dignity and non-involvement in community activities. Consumption here is defined by subsistence, rain fed agriculture and petty trading. Services are defined by lack of connectivity, electricity supply, availability of portable water etc. Lack of dignity is defined by quality of education, healthcare delivery, clothing and so on. What dignity has a person who cannot afford new clothes and relies on *Okirika* (second hand clothing). All these are characteristics of the rural areas of Imo State as stated under section 5.0.

Findings

The rural areas of Imo State have lacked inclusive, sustainable and integrated development for 42 years. The marginalization is not due to lack of funds. It is due to the fact that funds provided for the local government areas by Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) for rural development are usurped by the State governments in addition to other sources of funds. A case in point is the funding of Idea to Local Government which has been diverted.

Conclusion

Imo State rural areas lack inclusive sustainable and integrated development. They have all levels of poverty due to exclusive development caused by criminal diversion of funds by the successive governments.

Policy Recommendation

The lop-sided exclusive development at the expense of the rural areas should be redressed with a paradigm shift. This paper, therefore prescribes a new template for the rural development of Imo State. This template is encapsulated with 4 cardinal points namely:

- 1) Infrastructural Development
- 2) Housing Development
- 3) Population Management
- 4) Production Management and Market Management

The 4-point agenda could be supervised by an Imo State Rural Development Agency (ISRDA) to make it integrative and holistic.

Infrastructural Development

All the local government areas should have network of internal roads connecting all the villages as in Gujarat State of India. There should also be connectivity between the local government and the urban areas in Owerri Senatorial District for example the local governments are: Abo Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbaise, Ikeduru Mbaitoli and Ngor Okpala infrastructural development should include social and economic

infrastructure. Good roads will attract tricycle and bus services for teeming rural population.

Housing Development

A programme of rural housing should be mapped out. Fortunately many of the rural dwellers are enterprising and can provide their own houses.

Population Management

Population management does not involve much policy action. Once the rural areas are interconnected with roads, electricity, water etc. there will be a natural reversal of migration back to the rural areas.

Production (industrialization) and Market Management

What brings the rural people to the cities is mainly job hunting. If the rural people have employment centres by way of cottage industries – Palm oil mills, petro-chemical industries, mechanized agriculture, farm firms and agro based enterprises they will stay in their villages and earn their living. The state has petroleum deposits and solid minerals that can create entrepreneurship, Small and Medium Enterprises(SMEs) and employment. Market management should involve empowerment of the rural people to modernizes their markets with corrugated iron sheets and fence them away from the tarred roads and police them so that no traders will place their wares close to the roads. The infrastructural development and population management will naturally attract banks, mercantile houses, shops etc and offer other jobs to rural dwellers in addition.

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