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The Challenges of Agriculture and Rural Development in Africa: The Case of Nigeria

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Abstract

Agriculture contributes immensely to the African economy in various ways; namely, in the provision of food for the increasing population; supply of adequate raw materials to a growing industrial sector; a major source of employment; generation of foreign exchange earnings; and, provision of a market for the products of the industrial sector among others. This paper argues that the agrarian sector has a strong rural base; hence, concern for agriculture and rural development become synonymous, with a common root and that the bedrock of agriculture and agricultural development in Africa is rural development, without which all efforts at agricultural development will be futile. It observes that African agriculture remains largely traditional and concentrated in the hands of smallholders and pastoralists, and the neglect of agriculture has resulted to the mass exodus of rural dwellers and in turn has made the rural area qualitatively and quantitatively depopulated, and progressively less attractive for socio-economic investment. It discusses the problems and challenges posed by this and government responses to the rural infrastructural needs of the people in the rural areas. It therefore recommends that for the government(s) agricultural policies to achieve its target, there is need for an adequate level of strategically targeted investment in agriculture, upgrade rural infrastructure, boost productivity, and increase competitiveness of the farm output, in addition to fighting corruption. It is the view of the paper that in order to facilitate agricultural development, government should adopt an integrated rural development approach which is a multidimensional strategy for improving the quality of the life of the rural people. It concludes that rural development is imperative for improved of agricultural growth and development in Africa.

Keywords: Agriculture, Agricultural development, Rural Development and Integrated Rural Development

Introduction

Contemporary events around the world have shown increasing concerns for the 75 percent or more people inhabiting the rural areas. This is justified by the high correlation that exists between rural living and poverty with this situation particularly exacerbated in developing countries (World Bank, 1994). Poverty can be said to be determined by a number of factors including the level of economic growth, the way growth affects the poor, the pattern of government spending and the initial distribution of income. Agriculture employs nearly one-half of the labor force in developing countries. Indeed, a high share of rural communities and especially the rural poor are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture through farming, food processing, fishing, forestry, and trade (Muhammed, 2007).

Agriculture is the backbone of Africa's economy. About 70% of Africans and roughly 80% of the continent's poor live in the rural areas and depend mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. The sector accounts for about 20% of Africa's GDP (ECA, 2004), 60% of its labor force and 20% of the total merchandise exports. Agriculture is the main source of income for 90% of rural population in Africa. Agriculture represents a great part of the Africa's share in world trade. On the list of 20 top agricultural and food commodity importers in 2004, 60% are from Sub-Saharan Africa. African countries represent also 50% of top 20 countries, in terms of the Share of total agriculture/ total exported merchandise in the world (ECA, 2007).

Agriculture is faced with fundamental changes. Human population growth, improved incomes and shifting dietary patterns are increasing the demand for food and other agricultural products. At the same time, however, the natural resource base underpinning agricultural production is under threat, with growing threats to genetic diversity and the degradation of land and water resources. Agriculture improves food security in many ways, most fundamentally by increasing the amount of food but also by providing the means to purchase food. Through growth in agricultural productivity and higher farm profits, the rural poor can generate additional income to purchase more food, including more diverse kinds of food.

Despite the strategies adopted by various governments in Nigeria to address agriculture and rural underdevelopment problem, the story remains the same. There are still inequality and poverty particularly in the rural areas. There are a lot of public complaints on the underdevelopment situations of many rural areas which constitutes a threat to Nigeria's vision of becoming one of the twenty strongest economies by the year 2020 (vision 2020). A lot of resources (financial) have been injected, but all in vain (Yakubu, 2009).

Agriculture And Rural Development: Conceptual Issues

The definition of agriculture changes over time. Agriculture is the cultivation of plants and husbandry of animals, that is, the management of living things and ecosystems to produce goods and services for the people. Agriculture includes farming; ranching; aquaculture; apiculture; horticulture; viticulture; animal husbandry, including, but not limited to, the care

and raising of livestock, equine, and fur-bearing animals; poultry husbandry and the production of poultry and poultry products; dairy production; the production of field crops, tobacco, fruits, vegetables, nursery stock, ornamental shrubs, ornamental trees, flowers, sod, or mushrooms; timber; pasturage; any combination of the foregoing; the processing, drying, storage, and marketing of agricultural products when those activities are conducted in conjunction with, but are secondary to, such husbandry or production.

The sustainability of agriculture in African region cannot be isolated from the sustainability of development in the region and beyond. A number of other related definitions are also in common usage. The American Society of Agronomy, for example, defines sustainable agriculture as:

one that, over the long term, enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which agriculture depends, provides for basic human food and fiber needs, is economically viable, and enhances the quality of life of farmers and society as a whole (Uptal, 2001).

Another definition by MacRae et al. (1990) posits that:

Sustainable agriculture is both a philosophy and a system of farming. It is rooted in a set of values that reflects an awareness of both ecological and social realities and a commitment to respond appropriately to that awareness. It emphasizes design and management procedures that work with natural processes to conserve all resources and minimize waste and environmental damage, while maintaining and improving farm profitability.

Agricultural development, a subset of economic development, implies a sustained increase in the level of production and productivity over a reasonable length of time and the subsequent improved wellbeing of farmers as reflected in their higher per capita income and standard of living. Rural development relates not only to a sustained increase in the level of production and productivity of all rural dwellers, including farmers, and a sustained improvement in their wellbeing, manifested by increasing per capita income and standard of living, but also leads to a sustained physical, social and economic improvement of rural communities.

Another concept central to our discourse in this paper is rural development. An understanding of the concept of development will give a clearer picture of rural development. Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) in both quantitative terms. He opines that development must be seen as actually and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society, and culture. Development is the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc; the process of producing or creating something new (Hornby, 2001). This definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes.

The meaning of rural development has been the subject of much debate and little agreement. The definition of rural development varies from one point of view to the other. The definition of rural development has evolved through time as a result of changes in the perceived mechanisms and/or goals of development. A reasonable definition of rural development would be: development that benefits rural populations; where development is understood as the *sustained* improvement of the population's standards of living or welfare. *Rural development* can be seen as not an outside intervention, but the aspiration of local people living in rural areas for taking the challenge themselves and improving their life circumstances and their immediate environment.

Olayide et al. (1981) see rural development as a process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increase in rural resources productivity with the central objective of enhancing rural income and creating employment opportunity in rural communities for rural dwellers to remain in the area. It is also an integrated approach to food production, provision of physical, social and institutional infrastructures with an ultimate goal of bringing about good healthcare delivery system, affordable and quality education, improved and sustainable agriculture etc. According to Van der Ploeg et al. (2000), rural development is reconstructing the eroded economic base of both the rural economy and the farm enterprise... (and) represents the well understood self-interest of increasing sections of rural population.

Rural development ensures the modernization of the rural society and the transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. It is essential so as to generate foreign exchange, and to attract revenue to finance public and private consumption and investment. Rural development may also be seen as an ideology and a practice. It may mean planned change by public agencies based outside the rural areas such as the National Government and International organizations. It may also be the bringing of the countryside into an active state, as well as the transformation of the inferior nature of the country side into something more superior in terms of activities. According to the World Bank (1975) rural development must be clearly designed to increase production. It recognizes that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services, such as health and education, not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy.

Rural development can be distinguished from Agricultural Development which it entails and transcends. There is this erroneous misconception by successive governments that rural development is synonymous with agricultural development only. Efforts by such governments to pump money into agricultural development did not yield the meaningful change desired hence efforts should be made to include provision of modern infrastructure, primary health care, food and shelter, employment opportunities, recreational facilities, affordable and compulsory primary and secondary education, loans and other incentives, to be part of rural development for the benefits of rural dwellers (Ogidefa, 2010).

In essence, rural development may imply a broad based re-organization and mobilization of the rural masses in order to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with changes consequent upon this (Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). From the foregoing, it is obvious that rural development is not a one-off thing or an immediate and snap phenomenon. Rather, it is a gradual and progressive towards perfection having a set standard in mind.

Agriculture And Rural Development In Africa

Africa has abundant arable land and labor which, with sound policies, could be translated into increased production, incomes and food security. This has not materialized because of lack of consistent policies and/or effective implementation strategies. Thus, despite agriculture accounting for 70 per cent of the labor force, over 25 per cent of GDP and 20 per cent of agribusinesses in most countries, it continues to be given low priority. Agriculture also has a high multiplier effect, which means that agricultural investment can generate high economic and social returns and enhance economic diversification as well as social development.

The bedrock of agriculture and agricultural development in developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa is rural development, without which all efforts at agricultural development will be futile. A large majority of the farmers operate at the subsistence, smallholder level, with intensive agriculture being uncommon. A characteristic feature of the agricultural production system in such countries, Nigeria inclusive, is that a disproportionately large fraction of the agricultural output is in the hands of these smallholder farmers whose average holding is about 1-3 hectares. Also, there is very limited access to modern improved technologies and their general circumstance does not always merit tangible investments in capital, inputs and labor (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009).

Agriculture and rural development in Africa has been neglected for many reasons, but three stands out as critical: poor commitment and capacities in partner countries, international interest in rural issues, and poor commitment and weak past performance in the bank. Actions to address these causes of poor commitment represent the key components of this rural sector strategy (Muhammed, 2007). Yet, despite the importance of the rural areas, they have been neglected for long. Usually, there is absence of infrastructures (water, electricity supply and motor able roads) which improve quality of life. The rural areas have low purchasing power. Indeed, the ongoing neglect of rural areas continues to widen the gaps between the rural and urban areas regarding the levels of social and economic opportunities, physical development and available infrastructural services (Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005).

According to Muhammed (2007), countries in Africa frequently assign low priority to agricultural growth and rural development because; they view agriculture as a declining sector. As countries develop the share of the rural and agricultural sectors in production (GDP) and employment shrinks relative to the industrial and service sectors. Many developing countries have focused resources on the urban and industrial sectors, often at the expense of the rural

sector. They failed to recognize the critical importance of productivity improvements and growth in the rural sector in the long transition from an agrarian to an urban-industrial society. Falling real food prices over the last two decades have led to complacency toward the agricultural sector. Over the past two decades real cereal prices have declined, reducing the returns to irrigation and other investments in agriculture. While much of the decline in prices has been due to technological improvements, some of it results from the protectionist agricultural policies pursued in most African countries. The rural poor have little political power. Because rural populations are geographically dispersed, and because rural communications and transportation infrastructure is often poor, rural people have great difficulty organizing and expressing their preferences through political processes. The rural poor, women in particular, have little political voice. Urban elites pursue policies that disadvantage the agricultural sector. These policies include excessive taxation through overvalued exchange rates, industrial protection, export taxes, and low urban food price policies. This policy set, often identified as urban bias, has been pervasive in many countries. Rural elites are often able to obtain some compensation, but this amount is insufficient to offset urban bias, and often aggravates the impacts of urban bias on the rural poor.

In Africa the factors hampering rural development according to Muhammed (2007) include:

- ❖ The roles of the state and traditional public in agriculture and rural development have been unclear. In many countries public institutions or parastatals have dominated the agricultural sector by controlling input and output markets, land markets, and access to finance. These institutions have often been highly inefficient and unresponsive to changes in market conditions, and provided privileges and rents to a favored few.
- ❖ Resources have been concentrated in the hands of a few. In some countries resources, such as land, capital, and access to knowledge and technology, have been concentrated in the hands of elites. This distribution has sometimes led to high unemployment and low - productivity among rural inhabitants, combined with overcapitalization of agriculture and poor utilization of productive land.
- ❖ Designing incentive systems to deal with common property resources is inherently difficult. Natural resources, such as water, pastures, forests, and fisheries, are being overused and degraded in many countries because they are often treated as open access resources with few restrictions on who may use them. Designing and implementing effective community-based systems for managing these resources is difficult and only just starting in many countries.

Onibokun (1987) sees agriculture and rural development in Africa to be faced with the paradox that the production oriented rural economy relies heavily on non-productive people who are ill-equipped with outdated tools, technical information, scientific and cultural training and whose traditional roles and access to resources pose problems for their effective incorporation into modern economic systems, whereas the consumption oriented urban economy is flooded which make (people) many of who are either unemployed or unemployable, or marginally employed or underemployed in the urban centers where they choose to live. As a result of this

mass exodus, the rural areas have become qualitatively depopulated and are progressively less attractive for social and economic investments while the urban areas are becoming physically congested, socially unhealthy and generally uneconomic to maintain.

Challenges Of Agriculture And Rural Development In Nigeria

Agriculture is an important component of most rural economies especially in the developing countries. It was shown above that the size of agriculture within the local economy is sometimes used to define rurality. Therefore, any successful rural development strategy will contain an agricultural development component; but they are not the same thing. While agricultural development aims at improving the welfare of populations through sustained improvements in the productivity of the agricultural sector, rural development aims at the improvement of welfare of rural populations through the sustained growth of the rural economy, which includes agriculture, but may not be its only component and not necessarily the most dynamic (Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007).

Agriculture in Nigeria is the most important sector of the economy from the standpoint of rural employment, sufficiency in food and fiber, and export earning prior to the discovery of oil. The above assertion is based on the fact that as at independence in 1960, little was known of petroleum as a source of revenue for the Nigerian economy. There was sustained emphasis on agriculture to the extent that Nigeria was a major exporter of such agricultural products as palm produce, cocoa, groundnut, cotton and rubber. In addition to these cash crops, the national agricultural system was able to produce enough of food crops like yam, cassava, maize, millet, sorghum and soya beans to the extent that there was almost no need for food importation. Hitherto, agriculture accounted for over 60% of the Nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, with the advent of petroleum in the early 1970s, petroleum became the country's major foreign exchange earner and agriculture became grossly neglected (Oni, 2008a).

Anazodo (1982) identified the characteristics of rural dwellers in Nigeria to include;

- ❖ Their standard of living is static and declining
- ❖ They are generally engaged in agriculture, working small plots of land with traditional hand tools.
- ❖ Most are engaged in subsistence farming or generate only small marketable surpluses
- ❖ They are mostly located in areas poorly served by almost all public utilities.
- ❖ Their family incomes are unlikely to exceed more than a few tens of naira a year.

The objective of the National Policy on Rural Development encapsulates an ideal situation of an acceptable level of development in the rural area. These objectives can be paraphrased to include; promotion of the social, cultural, educational and economic well being of the rural population; promotion of sustained and orderly development of the vast resources in the rural areas for the benefit of the rural people, increase in and diversification of job opportunities

and improvement of income in the rural areas, mobilization of the rural population for self-help and self-sustaining programme of development, and up-lifting of the technological based industries in the rural area (Ogbazi, 1992).

Agriculture contributes immensely to the Nigerian economy in various ways, namely, in the provision of food for the increasing population; supply of adequate raw materials to a growing industrial sector; a major source of employment; generation of foreign exchange earnings; and, provision of a market for the products of the industrial sector (Okumadewa, 1997; World Bank, 1998). The agrarian sector has a strong rural base; hence, concern for agriculture and rural development become synonymous, with a common root.

The major problems of rural areas in Nigeria are summarized as, inadequate levels of agriculture productivity particular in food crop; high levels of absolute and rural poverty; and poor level of infrastructure facilities (Shiru, 2008). The fundamental problems facing agricultural mechanization in Nigeria include adoption of mechanization strategies which are often proffered by government and international agencies that do not pay sufficient attention to the interests of the local farmers and to the processes of technological change (Kutte and Tya, 2001).

Since independence, Nigeria has spent, billions of naira on agricultural development. An assessment of different development plans and annual budget shows that there is no corresponding evidence of what the huge sums of money were spent on especially when we critically look at human development. Nigeria has essentially remained a poor country (Onwalu, 2003).

Budgetary Allocation to Agriculture in Nigeria (N Billion), 1990-2002

YEAR	TOTAL BUDGET	ALLOCATION TO AGRICULTURE	% OF AGRIC TO TOTAL
1990	39.76	1.96	4.95
1991	38.66	0.67	1.74
1992	52.03	0.92	1.78
1993	112.10	2.83	2.53
1994	110.20	3.71	3.37
1995	153.49	6.92	4.51
1996	337.21	5.71	1.69
1997	428.21	8.66	2.02
1998	487.11	9.04	1.86
1999	947.69	12.15	1.28
2000	701.05	13.60	1.94
2001	1,018.02	64.94	6.38
2002	1,018.15	44.80	4.40

Sources: CBN Statistical Bulletin and Annual Report

The picture of budgetary allocations and actual expenditures for the period covered showed that though the government put up ambitious policies their financial commitment and consideration has been inadequate. It is therefore not surprising that these policies have not achieved the food self sufficient, self reliance, reduction in poverty and rural development goal. The Nigeria Agriculture Public Expenditure Review (NAGPER), a collaborative study carried out by a research team from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the World Bank (2008), showed that public spending on agriculture in Nigeria is less than 2 percent of total federal expenditure during 2001 to 2005 (Christopher et al., 2010).

Inadequate funding of agriculture in Nigeria has aggravated rural poverty in Nigeria. Some social indicators can be used to emphasis this point. These include population growth rate (3.5%), life expectancy (50years), adult literacy rate (45%), human development index (0.2%), and percentage of labor force in agriculture (60%) (Shiru, 2008). The values of these indices show that Nigeria among the least developed countries of the world.

In order to achieve the broad goals of agricultural and rural development, the Nigerian government usually focuses on specific objectives. While the attainment of specific agricultural goals encompasses the provision of adequate food, fibers and industrial raw materials, employment and foreign exchange generation, the goals of rural development embrace in addition a systematic improvement of the other institutional, physical and social infrastructures in such rural communities (Titilola, 2008).

The Nigerian agricultural sector is predominantly dominated by resource-poor farmers who still practice the traditional or subsistence agriculture in which simplest traditional tools are being used, output and productivity are low, capital investment is minimal while land and labor constitute principal factors, thus culminating in the "law of diminishing return" – high labor and input applications but low returns. In order to reverse this trend, agriculture in Nigeria needs to be practiced and managed on a sustainable basis (Titilola, 2008).

Umebali and Akuibilo (2006) note that oil exploration and agricultural activities are carried out in rural areas and both yield the highest revenue for the nation. Interestingly, as revealed by Umebali (2006), literature shows that greater percentage of the total population live in rural areas and most of them are enhanced in agriculture. If we must make the rural areas attractive to live, then meaningful effort geared towards sustainable rural development must be aggressively and vigorously pursued as this will alter the certainty of poor quality of life in the rural areas It is universally acknowledged that rural areas are very important to the nation. They serve as the base for the production of food and fiber. They are also the major sources of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufactures (Olatunbosun, 1975). The neglect has resulted to the mass exodus of rural dwellers and in turn has made the rural area qualitatively and quantitatively depopulated, and progressively less

attractive for socio-economic investment. The rural areas are usually grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructure are concerned. As a result of the relative underdevelopment of the rural areas when compared with the urban centers, rural areas are usually zones of high propensity for our-migration (Ogidefa, 2010). Stock (2005) laments that as a result of the neglect of agriculture and the rural areas; Nigeria now imports farm products to feed its (her) people with untold hardship on the rural people. He continues that Nigeria remains one of the world's poorest countries in terms of per capita income and rural development.

There is an overwhelming need to accord rural development a priority on the 'must-do-list' of government at different levels if the rural communities must contribute meaningfully to the social, cultural and economic development of Nigeria. The challenges and prospects of rural development in Nigeria have been of great concern to the different tiers of government due to the rate of rural-urban migration.

It is pertinent to note that rural development plays an important role in the Nigerian economic development both at the micro and macro level. Overtime, successive government have embarked on several programmes targeted at rural development. Other approaches have been by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), cooperatives, individuals through private initiatives, corporate bodies as well as International Organizations (Ogidefa, 2010). The various programmes initiated and chiefly targeted at the rural sector by government according to him include the following:

- National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)
- River-Basin Development Authority (RBDA)
- Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
- Operation Feed the Nation
- The Green Revolution
- Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)
- Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)
- Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BETTER LIFE)
- National Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC)
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
- National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)
- National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)
- National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF)
- Rural Banking Scheme (RBS)
- Family Support Programme (FSP)
- Universal Basic Education (UBE)
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)

A cursory look at the introduction, establishment, implementation and the objectives of majority of the above programmes will reveal that they are mainly targeted at rural

development in an attempt to better the lives of rural dwellers, stimulate and enhance economic growth, as well as get the rural sector to contribute meaningfully to the national economic and social development.

The various policies of the Nigerian government on rural development are to improve the living condition in the rural areas with a view to curbing the streaming rural-urban migration. These policies show the zeal of different governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) which has led to the proliferation of development agencies. Despite the countless numbers of rural development policies introduced at different times by successive governments coupled with the huge financial and material resources employed, little or nothing is felt at the rural level as each policy has often died with the government that initiated it before it starts to yield dividends for the rural dwellers (Ogidefa, 2010).

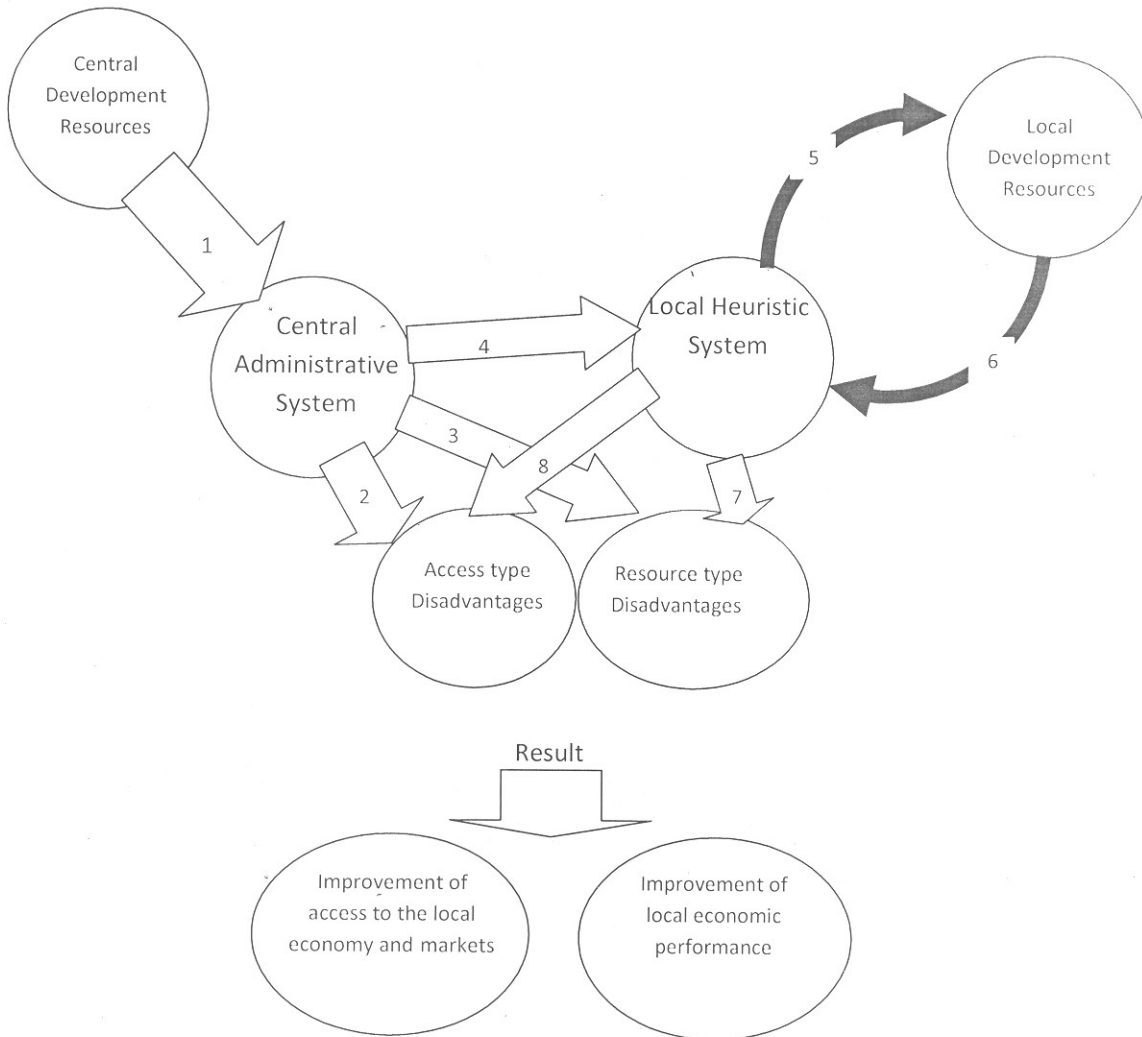
In Nigeria, past rural development efforts have taken many forms including agricultural development, rural-based industrialization, infrastructural development and integrated schemes combining all the elements of agriculture, industry and infrastructure. A search of literature (Oladipo, 2004) indicates that a higher level of success has been achieved through the planning of rural projects conceived and implemented in an integrated manner. Recent experiences of private business organizations such as Presco Plc, Okitipupa oil and Okomu Oil engaged in agroindustry processing have opened our eyes to more possibilities. This has a natural inclination in Nigeria because of the existence of variations in ecological conditions offering a wide range of opportunities for agro-based industries.

Integrated Rural Development Model

The most realistic approach to effective rural development in Nigeria is the integrated development strategy. This according to Shiru (2008) seeks to develop all sectors of the rural economy and link them up effectively with their urban components. Integration in rural development can be discussed in various ways. It's most common understanding concerns the integration of various economic sectors - agriculture, industry, services. Another frequently mentioned aspect is the integration of those disadvantaged social groups in the development process (women, elderly people, national and ethnic minorities, etc.), which could suffer even more if left out of improvements (Gusztáv, 2006).

In order words, this approach seeks to promote spatial, social economic and even psychological linkage not only among the various sector of the economy but also among different re of the national economy. Therefore programmes of agriculture, education, health and nutrition, rural electrification cooperatives and the likes must not be conceived in isolation. Each programme must be considered in connection with other. This approach is integral in the sense that all of its components are important and related in the part that they play both individually and collectively.

The Integrated System of rural Development



In an *integrated system*, according to Gusztáv (2006) local and central development systems should work in a dynamic cooperation with each other. Control, resources and responsibilities should be dispersed throughout different levels of the system. The existence of advanced local development institutions is a necessary condition in this model. *Redistributed resources (1)* are still channeled through the *central system*, although their allocation is quite different. A significant share of resources (2) is still directly spent on tackling *access type* (mainly physical) disadvantages. However, those resources, allocated for supporting local economic development directly from central sources (3) represent a much smaller share of the budget. They are still normative payments, but rather aiming at the maintenance of public goods (agri-environmental schemes, for example) than simply subsidizing conventional agricultural

production. A significant part of central resources (4) is devoted to the reinforcement of the local development institutions and the unlocking of local resources. As a result, the *local development system* is well advanced and institutionalized. It is able to invest (5) in the protection of rural values and their utilization in the development process. Like this, *local resources* can be exploited and can contribute with considerable added value to the development process (6). This value flows into the economic resource base of the local area (7), creating marketable products and greatly reducing *resource-type disadvantages*. At the same time, the local development system can also make a significant contribution against *access-type disadvantages* (8), primarily improving business and policy access, for the benefit of the local area. All this can lead to a much more balanced development.

In an integrated model, a significant part of the budget is not delivered directly by central policies, but channeled through the local development system. This strengthens this system and allows for the reinforcement of local institutions and social networks, etc. It can also directly provide financial aid for the exploration and exploitation of local resources for local economic development. All this can result in the rapid growth of local added value and the expansion of available development resources, for the development system as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

Sustainable national development through agricultural and rural development are generally concerned with the need for agricultural and rural development practices to be economically viable, their adaptability and flexibility over time to respond to the demands for food and fiber (both high and low). This goal requires an efficient use of technology in a manner conducive to sustainability, its demand on natural resources for production, and its abilities to protect the soil and the resources. Because agriculture is affected by changes in market and resource decision in other sectors and regions, it is important that these changes do not provide a rationale for depleting the agricultural and rural resource base locally (Oni, 2008b).

Agricultural production certainly occupies a prominent position in every economy that is aimed at alleviating poverty. However, maximum agricultural productivity can only be achieved when the productive forces are adequately equipped with modern techniques and skills. The following conditions according to Újo (2005) are necessary for agriculture and rural development; More equitable distribution of land and other rural resources in order to give greater opportunity to the poorest segment of the rural population to met their basic needs; Organization of rural producers and rural economies activities on cooperative or communal basis in order to ensure a further reutilization of available physical and human resources; An active policy of social services and the improvement of social relations, and political and administrative capacity for the planning and aid implementation of community development strategy to provide linkages with the rest of the economy and protect the legitimate interest of the rural population.

The Nigerian government has over the years formulated good agricultural policies meant to encourage food production but such policies have been found inefficient and ineffective since the intended results were not realized. To reach the Millennium Goals of cutting hunger and poverty, agricultural growth must be put back on top of the development agenda-but 'business as usual' will not suffice. The dynamic changes now influencing agricultural production, diversification-and competitiveness require a through re-analysis to develop better ways to support tomorrow's agriculture.

A resolution of the problem should appropriately begin with an understanding of the meaning of rural development. For rural development to occur and endure, there has to be enhanced rural income, reduced poverty and unemployment, reduced inequalities, increased rural value added production, enhanced good health and education, enhanced quality of life through potable water, electricity and good roads, greater integration of rural people into the political and economic process and good telecommunication services (Oladipo, 2008).

Strategies for transforming African agriculture have to address such challenges as low investment and productivity, poor infrastructure, lack of funding for agricultural research, inadequate use of yield-enhancing technologies, weak linkages between agriculture and other sectors, unfavorable policy and regulatory environments, and climate change.

Significant achievements can be made in agricultural development by creating a favorable economic environment and investing in the 'prime movers' of agricultural development: human capital, agricultural research, biophysical capital formation, and rural institutions (Eicher, 1994). Asia's experience of changing the long-term comparative advantage in export commodities clearly indicates that major achievements in smallholder agriculture can be made by investing in the above areas.

It is also the view of this paper that in order to facilitate rural development, government should adopt an integrated rural development approach which is a multidimensional strategy for improving the quality of the life for rural people. It is based on the assumption that the socio-economic fragment of the traditional rural system is obsolete, so integrated rural development strategies should be designed to change this framework and promote structural changes.

The rural people should be deeply involved. To this end, the rural people should be encouraged to come together to form cooperatives for the purpose of sourcing loans for establishing small scale industries. There is the need for training and retraining of the rural people to enhance the dissemination of new skills and ideas on the establishment, management and skills of small scale industries.

Strategies for rural development have come in various shapes and sizes over time. There appears to be no definitive answer to a most plausible and effective way of improving the lives and conditions of rural people. Going by the ecological conditions of the tropics, the production and processing of biological raw materials in form of agro-industries has, in recent times,

become a very important focus of rural development (Oladipo, 2008). A broad perspective on the agricultural sector and rural development is crucial for sustainable development in Africa.

The best way to empower rural dwellers is to empower them through their occupations. Agriculture is the major occupation of our rural dwellers and it must be sustained. Agricultural development increase agricultural production improves productivity and income of rural population and attracts industries to rural area. The government must provide all the necessary incentive for the extension workers to enable them perform their work effectively.

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