

# RURAL AGRICULTURE POLICY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DIRECTORATE OF FOOD, ROAD AND RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE (DFRRI)

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## Abstract

*The prospects of DFRRI changing the pattern of rural landscape were very bright. However, the policy had a very short life span as the succeeding government did not give it a chance.*

*The problems highlighted under DFRRI are not peculiar to it alone. Other past and present rural agricultural development policies face similar constraints that hardly allow them to make significant contributions to national development. To reverse this, the following recommendations are made here. First, we agree with Daneji (2011) that the design and management of rural development and agricultural programmes in Nigeria can only move forward if the present practice is adjusted to the social and economic realities and progressive strategies and ideas are given a chance. This is with due acknowledgement of existing shortcomings which this paper has earlier highlighted. Secondly, to achieve the most outstanding results in this direction, design and implementation of rural development programmes should be a collective venture, where all the stakeholders will make input. The targets of the policy/programme should be fully and actively involved at all stages of the policy. Funds for rural and agricultural development programmes and policies should be stepped up. This will enable agencies responsible for implementing rural and agricultural development policies to meet up with their recurrent and capital expenditures. Finally, corruption must be fought to a stand-still if rural agricultural development policies were to succeed. Most past rural agricultural development policies became ineffective due to large scale corruption. Sometimes government officials sell to rural farmers, fertilizers that were meant to be given to them free of charge. Those paid to give extension services to farmers hardly do the job for which they are paid while funds meant for rural projects are often diverted to private bank accounts. If this trend continues, no rural development policy will succeed and contribute towards national development. It is our hope that if the federal and state governments adhere to these recommendations, our agricultural policies will become more effective and will contribute its quota to national development.*

## Introduction

Rural agricultural development policies, is one of the most important factors in the practice and process of Nigeria's governments; as they often rationalize it as a means of bringing development at a quicker pace, in terms of socio-economic well-beings of not only the rural dwellers but also, its intended impact in overall national development.

Since agriculture is the main occupation of rural dwellers, agricultural development policies have been tied to rural development policies. This is the reason why often time agricultural development policies are, used interchangeably with rural development policies. Again the contribution of agriculture to national development cannot be over emphasized. At independence, it contributed over 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 74% of

employment generation. Even though this has changed due to the emergence of oil as the dominant player in the Nigerian economy, agriculture still provides most of the food eaten, especially in the rural areas and provides employment for a majority of the rural dwellers. There is therefore the need for effective rural agricultural policies that will enhance food production, provide employment for the rural populace and stem the rural urban migration which has become a necessary feature in the development of third world countries like Nigeria. This is the brain behind several rural agricultural policies in Nigeria. However, the question that is begging for answer is; has these policies achieved the purpose for which they were conceived and implemented? In other words to what extent have they been able to contribute towards national development, nay, rural development in Nigeria.

If they have not substantially contributed to national development, what factors could be responsible for their inability to so contribute to national development? What could be done to ensure that on-going rural agricultural policies or future policies that will be conceived now after will be effective in contributing significantly towards national development in Nigeria. These and other related questions are what this paper will be devoted to providing answers to.

In doing this we have chosen to concentrate on the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI) as the rural agricultural development policy, of our focus. We will thus, look at the background of the emergence of this policy, the objectives of the policy, its implementation and a general appraisal of the effectiveness or other wise of the policy with a view to proffering recommendations that will make future policies more effective and result oriented.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Policy:** Chaturvedi (2006) defines policy simply as any course of action designed to promote, maintain or prevent some state of affairs. Roberts and Edwards (1991) view policy as a set of decisions taken by a political actor or group, concerning the selection of goals and the methods of attaining them, relating to a specified situation".

From the above definitions of policy, we can see a policy as principles or rules that guide decision and national outcome. It can also be considered as a statement of intent or a commitment. Rural Agricultural policy development will therefore mean a course of action designed to promote, maintain or prevent some state of affairs, as it regards rural and agricultural development.

**Rural Development:** According to Olisa and Obiekwu (eds) (1992); rural development is a "strategy designed to improve the economic and social conditions (life) of the people in the rural areas" To them the main concern in rural development is supposed to be the modernization of rural society through a transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy for equitable and balance development of the nation. Ajala (1995), sees rural development as part of general development that embraces a large segment of those in great need in the rural sector, To Hunter (1964), rural development is the "starting point of development". The World Bank conceptualizes rural development as a process through which poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low-income rural dwellers and households.

The World Bank definition is criticized for dwelling majorly on economic growth to the neglect of other aspects of growth. To make up for this deficiency, Ijere (1990) regarded rural development, as the process of increasing the per-capita income and the quality of life of the rural dweller to enable them become prime movers of their destiny.

Krom the above conceptualization of rural development, we can infer or describe rural development as the integrated approach to food production as well as physical, social and institutional infrastructural provisions with the ultimate aim of bringing about both qualitative and quantitative changes which result in improved living standard of the rural population. This definitely infers that agricultural production (development) is a component of rural development as more than 65% of Nigeria's over 160 million citizens are farmers, nay rural farmers.

**National Development:** The term is very comprehensive and includes all shades of the life of individuals and the nations. It is a process of reconstruction and development in various dimensions of a nation and development of the citizens. National development thus includes full-growth and expansion of our industries, agriculture, educational, social, religious and cultural institutions. Moreover, and very importantly, national development implies development of a nation as a whole. It can thus be viewed as all-round and balanced development of different aspects of the nation, viz; political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and material. From the conceptualization of national development, it can be inferred that without rural agricultural development, Nigeria cannot achieve a holistic national development. This is because in Nigeria, over 65% of the population not only live in the rural areas but are also engaged in agricultural production and activities.

**Theoretical Frame Work:** The work will be based on the Elite theory. The theory, briefly stated, posits that a small minority consisting of members of the economic elite and policy planning network holds the most power. This power is irrespective of democratic elections or the system of Government that is operational in a given country. In political science, as well as in sociology, the theory is a theory of the state that seeks to explain and describe power relationship in contemporary society. The basic assumption of this theory is that a community's affairs are best handled by small subset of its members and that in modern societies such an arrangement has in fact become inevitable. Elite theory's origins and popularity came most clearly in the thoughts of Gaetarro Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1846-1923) and Robert Michels (1876-1936).

We are of the view that the theory is best suited to analyze rural agricultural development policies as it will bring to light why most of these policies fail and do not achieve their objectives. Most of the rural agricultural policies in Nigeria (as we will see in later sections of this paper) are conceived and formulated by a tiny minority of power cartel (elites). The people for which the policies are directed towards hardly make an input and in most cases are not part of the implementation.

### **Rural and Agricultural Development Policies in Nigeria: The Experience of the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)**

DFRRI was the brain child of the Ibrahim Babangida's administration. The Babangida's administration while taking a holistic appraisal of rural development problems thought that, with an appropriate directing institution, rural development problems can be frontally attacked. Accordingly, the regime set up a seven-man directorate of food, road and rural

infrastructure (DFFR1) in 1986 to the problem of rural development. DFRRRI was a novel programme in several ways. First it was unarguably the first implemented national integrated rural development programme. Second, it possessed the first national machinery for the effective planning, co-ordination and implantation of rural development programmes and finally, it was a multifaceted and a most integrated programme, involving infrastructures; grassroots development and mobilization, housing, health, industries, education and agriculture (Ikelegbe, 1996).

**The Aims, Objectives and Functions of the Directorate** included the following:

- I. To identify, involve and support viable local community organization in the effective mobilization of the rural populace for sustainable rural development;
- II. To identify and support the production of food and cash crops;
- III. To construct, rehabilitate and maintain rural sector roads to facilitate food production and rural development (about 90,000km of rural feeder roads)
- IV. To support rural water supply and on-farm storage in cooperation with that local people;
- V. To identify and promote other programmes for improving the quality of life of rural People;
- VI. To encourage contributions of labour, time and material from local community, to be complemented with grants from the Directorate, local and state Governments.
- VII. To substantially improve the quality and nutritional balance of food intake of the rural people;
- VIII. To raise the quality of rural housing as well as general living and working environment in the rural areas;
- IX. To create greater opportunities for human development and employment, particularly self-employment and thereby enhancing their income level;
- X. To use enormous resources of rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the security, social cultural, political and economic growth and development of the nation by linking the growth and development activities of the areas to those of the local Government areas, the state and the nation;
- XI. To mount a virile programme of development, monitoring and performance evaluation;
- XI. To embark on education and manpower development for rural development (Olisa & Obiukwu, (eds) (1992). The editor of the online Business Day Media put the objectives at eighteen (18). This makes it a very ambitious programme at the time. It is obvious that the objectives are centered on poverty alleviation, nutrition, health, and the development of infrastructure, (electricity, feeder roads, boreholes, water ways etc), It is true that past policies before DFRRRI had emphasized rural development, what appears to be unique about DFRRRI was its emphasis on rural infrastructure as the key to forestalling future development challenges and the most expedient course of action Nigeria could take in its development history.

An examination of the above responsibility schedule indicates that the functions of DFRRRI cut across those of already existing federal and state ministries, agencies and departments (MDAs) and later task forces. Never the less, one immediate implication is that their handling by a single directorate can allow the directorate opportunity to study the linkage implications of

any particular project and provide for them so as to achieve maximum functioning (Muogbalu, 1992 in Olisa Obukwu(eds) (1992).

### **Proposal of the Directorate**

The directorate laid emphasis on road in its proposal. This emphasis on roads was derived from the fact that transport is a formative sector of economic growth and even national integration.

Rural roads construction will facilitate the evacuation of farm outputs, through increased accessibility and reduce soaring food prices in the urban centers. Again roads would ensure rural access to productive and consumptive opportunities.

As regards water supply, DRFFI proposed to drill 250 thousand boreholes in each of the then 21 States of the federation and Abuja in 1987. The implication is that 5,000 rural communities would have access to potable water in 1987 at an estimated cost of #100 Million. The Directorate was expected to do this by seeking assistance from state water boards as well as from the River basin and Rural development Authorities (RBRDAs).

There was no doubt that it was to the area of agriculture that the directorate had the most ambitious scheme apart from road construction and rehabilitation, its proposal in this area includes the cultivation nationwide in 1987 of 50million fruits trees at a cost of #37 million.

The fruits include good varieties of mangoes, pineapples, pawpaw, plantain, banana, pepper, tomatoes, onions; okro and melon, all of which are meant to ensure balance diet for Nigerians. Accordingly, a seed multiplication and supply scheme costing N23.6 Million was envisaged, while #40 million was proposed to go into livestock improvement.

As a panacea to the great loss caused by poor food storage about 30% of total farm produce or some #400 Million worth of food is lost annually, (Muogbalu, 1992). DFRRI proposed to embark on a national food security and storage system capable of creating 0.5 million metric tones of on-farm storage capacity. It was intended to be a decentralized network of small-scale and medium-scale storage facilities operated by small farmers groups and private individuals, as against large-scale integrated silo complexes.

In order to provide seasonal credit facilities to the grass root farmers for production and post-harvest periods, a small fanners' credit scheme and food market information service would be launched. This was aimed at alleviating their cash flow squeeze that frequently compels farmers to dispose of harvested and non-harvested farm products at cheap prices.

Recognizing the role of research in agricultural development. #126 million was earmarked for research and development.

Department of fisheries are expected to reach a target production figure of 260 million high quality fish fingerlings between 1987 and 1990. About five cultural species of fish which include; Tilepia, Clarias, Common Carp, Catfish and Heterotis was targeted to be produced and would be sold at 10 kobo for Tilapia and 40k for the four other species. 'While the state and the federal capital were expected to produce 196 million fish fmggerlings, the research institutes would produce 59.49 million fingerlings and 31,150 metric tosnes of fish feeds in four years (Opp. Cit).

The Directorate also mapped out three areas crucial to rural industrialization. These include:

- a) Imparting vocational and technical skills required in the rural areas. It proposed that each rural community should have its own complement of technicians and artisans such as blacksmiths, carpenters, electricians, etc., with full accompaniment of relevant tools;
- b) The promotion of handicrafts which have potential of not only projecting our culture; but also earning some foreign exchange exploits; and
- c) The enhancement of cottage and small-scale industries in which indigenous expertise, local raw materials and domestically fabricated technology will be used.

In physical planning the Directorate, in addition to linking communities to themselves and their local government headquarters through the construction of roads, intended to identify rural growth points that have the potentials to energize and galvanized development in lower order rural central places. To actualize these, rural communities in each of the 301 local government areas would be planned physically.

Lastly, recognizing that its rural development proposals would hardly be realized without carrying the mass of the rural dwellers along, the Directorate thus saw mass rural mobilization as a necessary task. To ensure it succeed in this task, it targeted on three major areas to ensure rural mobilization. These areas include:

- a) Promotion of rural development awareness.
- b) The identification of rural development committees for the purpose of mobilizing them for rural development, and
- c) The identification, listing and mapping of rural communities in Nigeria.

### **Achievements of DFRR/ Its Contribution to National Development**

In trying to discuss the achievement (or lack of it) of DFRR, we will try to find out if it was able to significantly fulfill its objectives. DFRR was able to make modest achievements in some sectors. One of such sectors of achievement is rural road development with which it preoccupied itself in 1986. By November 1987 reports had it that of the 90,000 km of roads it proposed to develop by 1990, 29,000 kms, representing almost 30% had been accomplished. For example, in 1986 DFRR had constructed 614km of rural roads in the various local government areas of Borno State. Oyo State benefited 1,725km of roads, while Anambra State had about 3,000kms of rural roads that were either constructed or rehabilitated. The directorate made an impressive record in Imo State as it exceeded its target of 945km by 735kms. This success in rural road development spread across the States of the nation as many state contributed resources to assist DFRR whose major finance came from the federal government.

The Directorate was also said to have fared well in the area of water supply to the rural areas. Shallow hand-drawn wells were sunk in the communities mapped out for them. In Sokoto State, for instance, the directorate drilled over 57 boreholes with hand prisms.

In the area of agriculture the directorate was making tremendous progress. It broke the food problems of the nation into its component bits for necessary action. These include:

- i) Extending the proportion of cultivable land and water,
- ii) Improving yield from land water
- iii) Storage, preservation, utilization of all agricultural products and
- iv) Efficiency of distributive and marketing systems.

The directorate had in accordance setup four different panels to examine the four identified problem areas. It is to the credit of the directorate that by November, 1987, it had setup about 113 farms in Benue State. Also it doled out N7.9 million to the States and Abuja at the rate of N480.000 to State and N236, 800 to Abuja for the establishment of fish hatcheries, mobility of fish ponds chemicals for sale to farmers. Again, it made available N3.00million for the establishment of 39 hatcheries nationwide, except Lagos. Many of the States commenced their operation for the provision of fingerlings in 1988. Furthermore, the research department also came up with rice and sorghum capable of maturing in two months and Cassava sticks capable of maturing in six months (Mougbalu, 1992).

In the area of rural mobilization for self-help project and to support the directorates programmes, the directorate identified and listed 97,000 rural communities in Nigeria. The communities were mapped by high ranking professional geographers in each state of the federation. As at June 1987. the directorate had on request of the names of all the community development unions. The communities were therefore asked to identify and execute project before the end of 1987, no matter how small. Here very little was achieved as the directorate did not spell out the pattern of assistance to these communities neither did it border to study the problems of self-help in rural communities; It also did not give an indication of the direction or type of project of national concern.

Having highlighted the achievements made by DFFRI as a rural agricultural development policy, the question to address now- is; how have these so called achievements contributed to national development? From the achievements discussed above, it will be an uphill task for anyone to say that DFRR1 did not contribute anything to national development.

The construction of rural roads embarked upon by DFRR1 was unprecedented in the history of rural development in Nigeria. This reduced the difficulty of transportation from the rural areas to the urban centers (Local Government headquarters and state Capitals). This is more so in the transportation of agricultural produce to market outlets. This made farmers' produce to appreciate in price and put more income in their pockets. Also the provision of rural water scheme (hand drilled borehole) to water staved rural communities helped in not only satisfying the water need of such rural communities but also assisted in reducing water borne diseases (like cholera) in such areas.

There was also an increase in agricultural output due to DFRR1 provision of better yielding seed and extension services to local farmers. This brought down (though not significantly) the prices of agricultural products in the country.

In the area of mass mobilization and Participation in rural development programmes, DFFRI, more than any other policy implemented before and after it, fared better. Through its cooperation with community unions, the rural dwellers became "part" of the programme as they embraced it with enthusiasm.

Having said that, it is worthy to also state that, its contribution to national development was not significant. This is more so the fact that the policy was not continued after the Bubangida's government stepped aside in the aftermath of the "June 12" political crisis. The boreholes were not maintained; most of the constructed rural roads became non motor able as subsequent governments did not maintain them. The little gains made by the directorate could not stand the test of time and became unsustainable.

At this juncture, it suffices to look at some of the factors that hindered DFFR1 from making significant and sustainable contribution to national (including rural) development.

First, is the inadequacy of fund to execute the enormous task of rural development? The finance made available was never commensurate with the enormity of its role and assignments. For instance, in 1986, only a budgetary allocation of N433m was made for the directorate. This is a paltry amount considering their responsibility portfolio and the urgency and magnitude of rural development.

Second, there was also the problem of insufficient supply of the caliber of personnel required in all segments of the agencies activities. Critics also argue that there was inadequate involvement of rural people in the implementation of the policy. There was also the misapplication of the federal character principles to rural development problems.

Again there were allegations of corruption levelled against the agency. For example, some resident monitoring directors of DFFRI commented in 1987 that roads purported to have been constructed by the directorate could not be located on ground where they were said to have constructed them. Others which the directorate had certified completed have only really been half- completed. There were allegations that money that are meant for projects found their ways into bank account of some officers of the directorate.

Another important inhibitive factor was the multiplicity of rural development agencies/institutions. The work of DFFRI overlapped with several miniseries, agencies, parastatals. boards etc. It was expected that DFFRI will work cooperatively with all of these bodies to bring about mutual development.

However, the reverse became the case as there became unhealthy rivalries among these agencies which had negative effect on the performance of DFFRI. For instance, they duplicate each other's function. They all got a slice of the insufficient federal and state budgets for rural development. Again there is no legislation for their mutual relationship and resolution of conflict. Finally, the short duration of rural and agricultural development policies in Nigeria had it tolls on DFFRI. Like we have stated earlier, sooner than the Babangida's government left office, the programme died a natural death due to lack of continuity of government rural and agricultural development policies.

These and many more limiting factors like them were what hindered DFFR1 from making very significant contribution to national development and worse still, killed it after the demise of the Government that initiated it.

## **Conclusion**

The prospects of DFFRI changing the pattern of rural landscape were very bright. However, the policy had a very short life span as the succeeding government did not give it a chance.

The problems highlighted under DFFRI are not peculiar to it alone. Other past and present rural agricultural development policies face similar constraints that hardly allow them to make significant contributions to national development. To reverse this, the following recommendations are made here.

First, we agree with Daneji (2011) that the design and management of rural development and agricultural programmes in Nigeria can only move forward if the present practice is adjusted to the social and economic realities and progressive strategies and ideas are



given a chance. This is with due acknowledgement of existing short comings which this paper has earlier highlighted.

Secondly, to achieve the most outstanding results in this direction, design and implementation of rural development programmes should be a collective venture, where all the stakeholders will make input. The targets of the policy/programme should be fully and actively involved at all stages of the policy.

Funds for rural and agricultural development programmes and policies should be stepped up. This will enable agencies responsible for implementing rural and agricultural development policies to meet up with their recurrent and capital expenditures.

Finally, corruption must be fought to a stand-still if rural agricultural development policies were to succeed. Most past rural agricultural development policies became ineffective due to large scale corruption. Sometimes government officials sell to rural farmers, fertilizers that were meant to be given to them free of charge. Those paid to give extension services to farmers hardly do the job for which they are paid while funds meant for rural projects are often diverted to private bank accounts. If this trend continues, no rural development policy will succeed and contribute towards national development.

It is our hope that if the federal and state governments adhere to these recommendations, our agricultural policies will become more effective and will contribute its quota to national development.

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