

## COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS (CBOs) AS AN ALTERNATIVE VEHICLES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The rural areas of Benue State are inhabited by the bulk of the population. They serve as the base for the production of food and fiber and principal market for domestic manufactures. This relevance informed the government to adopt several strategies in the past to transform the sector. This paper examines the series of efforts made by successive administrations to develop the rural areas. The rural people have decided to form community based organizations (CBOs) as a strategy for survival. This paper therefore examines the nature, activities and impact of the CBOs on rural life and environment. The author advocates that; the government should adopt and utilize the CBOs as a national strategy for rural development since they have worked well for the rural populace but failed to develop the sector due to certain constraints.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the rural areas are very important to the nation of Nigeria. Over 75% of the population resides there. The rural areas serve as the base for the production of food and fibre. Agriculture which is the back bone of the economy is rooted there. They are also major sources of capital formation for the country and principal markets for domestic manufactures (Famoriyo, 1996).

Despite this relevance, the rural areas are yet to experience development. This does not mean that the rural areas have been totally neglected by previous administrations in Nigeria in their planning efforts and programmes. Several efforts in the past were made to develop the rural areas. These efforts started even before independence to date but the aim is yet to be achieved. All the programmes were formulated and implemented by the government using top-bottom approach. This paper advocates government's adoption and utilization of CBOs as an alternative strategy. This is because CBOs are grassroot-based, formed by the rural people themselves based on their felt needs, CBOs' programmes or projects are identified, established, implemented,

coordinated, maintained and supervised by the people themselves. Also, most existing CBOs in the country have succeeded in their own little way in programmes implementation but with constraints. They are capable of transforming the rural areas if those constraints are mitigated by government.

### Concepts Clarification

The two basic concepts that deserve clarification in this paper are Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and rural development strategy. CBOs are known by different names in different communities. They are known as Community Development Associations, Community Development Council, Self help Organizations or Local Organizations among others. By whatever name they are known, they are formed for the selfless services they offer either for the benefit of their members or the community in general. Arrossi (1994) conceived CBOs to mean non-governmental, voluntary and membership-based organizations which are located and actively engaged in communities, whose concerns are essentially with grassroots issues pertaining

to social welfare services, development projects execution and so on. Relatedly, Wilson et al (1990) conceptualize CBOs as more or less private non-profit organizations which are representative of community or significant segments of a community and which provide relative services to individuals in the community or to the entire community.

It can be deduced by the above conceptualizations of CBOs that they are rural or grassroots- based, formed, funded and managed by community members themselves based on their felt needs. CBOs are therefore voluntary, autonomous and democratically controlled institutions with primary aim of meeting members' social and economic needs.

#### **Rural Development Strategy:**

This is seen as a plan designed to improve the economic and social life of the people in the rural areas. It constitutes a process of planned change in which one approach or the other is adopted for improvement and or transformation of the lot of the rural populace (Idike, 1992, Lele 1995). The World Bank quoted by Akeredolu Ale (1995) considered rural development as a strategy designed to improve the entire life of specific group of people the rural sector. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless. Rural development strategy is a means of ensuring that the poorer sections of the population have some share in the fruits of economic activity. It is the means by which provision of social services for the rural population should be combined with the promotion of economic growth( Elekwa 1992, Chambers 1983). The objective of rural development in Nigeria encompasses improved productivity, increased employment, education and thus high basic needs of life which include adequate food, shelter, job opportunity, health services, water sanitation and improved attitudes (Ekong 2003).

#### **Review of Strategies for Rural Development in Nigeria**

Attempts by governments to develop the rural areas in Nigeria is not new. It started since the colonial era. From the colonial period up to the end of the Second National Development Plan in 1974, rural development was pursued but solely through agricultural modernization approach which was in keeping with the prescription of the modernization perspective of development (Idike, 1992 & Ijere 1991). Because of the vital role of agriculture, its development still remained the principal component of rural development package after 1974. The idea of rural development in Nigeria during the colonial era (1990-1960) was characterized by agricultural production in response to external stimuli (i.e. demand from European countries to feed their industries with raw materials) and lacked focus on the well-being of the rural people (Idike, 1992 & Long, 1997).

The response of the first civilian government after independence to the challenges of rural development as summarized in the First and Second Development Plans (1962-1968 & 1970-1974) with regard to rural areas were a carry over from the colonial period i.e. rural development remained equated with agricultural development. All the strategies then were targeted at improving agriculture.

During the Third National Development Plan period (1975-1980), the government formulated a more broad-based rural development strategy with objectives of increasing rural productivity and income, diversifying the rural economy generally and enhancing the quality of rural life through provision of basic social amenities (Igbozurike, 1989).

The policy nevertheless still remained emphasis on agricultural production and related activities. This was shown through the type of programmes established. For instance, Operation Feed The Nation (OFN)

programme was established in 1976 to replace National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) of 1972 and the Green Revolution in 1980 to replace OFN.

The period of the Fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985) witnessed major changes in rural development strategies due to re-conceptualization of rural development by such agencies of change like World Bank, International Labour Organization, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) etc. the strategies were integrated Rural Development Programme, River Basin Development Approach, the Basic Needs Strategy and the instrument of local government. The approaches of integrated Rural Development through Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) and Accelerated Development Areas (ADA), and the River Basins Development Authorities had agriculture as their principal component. The Basic Needs Strategy was basically social with agriculture as the base. The military regime of President Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) created the National Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) for rural development. It was a multi-sectoral programme with emphasis on alleviation of rural poverty and enhanced quality of rural life. As well designed as the programme was, it could not achieve the desired objectives because it was highly politicized. The Better Life for Rural Women was established by the same regime targeted at caring for the rural poor Nigerians but also failed because it became a business venture for the ruling class (Igbozurike, 1989 & Ekong 2003).

In 2001, the democratic regime of Obasanjo initiated the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the strategy to be adopted for coordinating, monitoring and implementing the programme was classified into four stages. The second strategy of NAPEP was Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS). This scheme was aimed at developing the rural areas in

partnership with the electricity agencies, the existing communication networks and relevant water providing agencies through the Rural Transformation Programmes (RTP), Rural Energy Programme (REP), the rural Water Programme (RWP), and the Rural Communication Programme (RCP). The third scheme also was the social welfare service scheme for the provision of social services to alleviate both rural and urban poverty with the use of four programmes. These include the Qualitative Education Programme (QEP), the Primary Health Programme (PHP), the Social Service Programme (SSP) and the farmers were targeted at the rural area which was the National Resources Development Scheme (NRDS). This was to ensure the conservation, harnessing and development of agricultural and other mineral resources found in the country through the Agricultural Resources Programme (ARP), the Water Resources Programme (WRP), Solid Minerals Programme (SMP) and Environmental Protection programme (EPP). The entire NAPEP programme targeted to reduce unemployment by 50% by 2003, attain access to drinking water in rural and urban areas by 85% and rural infrastructure by 50% in 2003. One out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and one of the seven-point agenda of Yar'Adua's regime was to develop the rural areas through agriculture. But the overall summary of impact is that non of these strategies have been able to lift the rural areas to the level of development.

### **Reasons why CBOs Should be Utilized as a Strategy for Rural Development in Nigeria**

This paper considers the following highlighted reasons as necessitating the need for government to utilize CBOs as a strategy for rural development. From colonial period to date, all the rural development strategies were formulated by the government and taken down to the people. Government also assumed to know both the needs and wants of the rural people

and feels that the problems of all rural people in different parts of the country are the same. This idea was responsible for the failure of some programmes in some rural areas and the refusal of some communities to accept some programmes. Some projects were sited in areas considered as culturally unacceptable based either on cultural belief or sentiment within or between communities. For instance, a bore hole provided by Benue Rural Water and Sanitation Agency in Itakpa area of Obi Local Government Area of Benue State has not been put to use since it was commissioned because it is sited on a plot of land considered to be a meeting ground for witches and wizards. Poor implementation, monitoring, coordination, maintenance, sustainability, funding and corruption and major factors that accounted for the failure of all the rural development strategies in Nigeria (Ijere, 1991 & Igbozurike, 1989). Since CBOs are founded by grassroots people within each community, members are known to each other, projects or programmes implementation can better be ensured. Every community or group of communities can insist and ensure the monitoring, coordination, maintenance and sustainability of its or their own projects. Election of leaders can be based on character tendencies and corruption can easily be checked.

The content of CBOs in Nigeria are broad based leaving no aspect of rural life out. There are single and multi-purpose CBOs involved in various aspects of rural life. For instance, a study of CBOs in Benue State conducted by Akpehe (2006) shows CBOs categorization into ten. These are listed as:

- Community development organization (concerned with mobilization and utilization of community-based resources for sustainable development of rural communities).
- Charity organizations (formed for humanitarian purposes).
- Self-help (concerned with general well-being and development of communities).

- Producer organizations (engaged in a wide range of agricultural activities).
- Youth development organizations (aimed at mobilizing and encouraging youth participation in community development).
- Capacity building organizations (aimed at helping the very poor people to develop a clearer understanding of the social, political and economic factors that affect their lives).
- Women organizations (formed by women) determined to render services that can improve their socio-economic status in particular and communities within which they operate in general).
- Service provision organizations (formed to offer essential development services that could be difficult if left for government or individuals alone).
- Market/enterprise organizations (carry out various commercial activities) and
- Micro-credit organizations (encourage community savings and small-scale loaning scheme).

Aggregate nature of CBOs is comprehensive as no aspect of rural need is left out. Examples abound of CBOs across all geopolitical zones of the country that have impacted positively on the well-being of their members. For instance, some rural communities in South-Western Nigeria through self-organized arrangements, mutual agreements and shared understanding, planned and executed public goods and services that directly touched on the lives of their people at the cost of ₦26,204,000.00. Oriokuta community spent ₦70,000.00 on road maintenance in 1995, Famia community contributed for the Famia-Modakeke road project and Elerole community spent ₦50,000.00 in 1995 for their road construction. In the area of the construction of culverts, Aponmode, Isale-Amero and Alabata communities in Akinyele local government area spent ₦1.4 million on construction of culverts between 1996 and 2000. Igbope community in Oorelope local government spent ₦85,000.00 to open new roads at the outskirts of the community. Ara

Joshua community in Ife South Local Government Area also resorted to self-help efforts for road maintenance (Akinola, 2007).

In the area of health facilities, nine health clinics were provided in Ife region but the clinics suffered from lack of staff and inadequate drugs supply. In the same manner, Alabata, Ile-ogbo and Igbope communities contributed ₦250,000.00, ₦410,000.00 and ₦2.5 million to building of maternity centre in 1983-1987, 1992 and 2000 respectively (Akinola, 2007).

Educational sector was not left out by these communities. Emure community spent ₦1.8 million for the building of a model secondary school from 2001-2005. The people of Iwo-Ate in Ogo-Oluwa Local Government constructed a block of six classrooms with a staff room and one workshop in 1985. Aseri and Akarakum communities in Badagry local government area renovated a primary school at the cost of ₦300,000.00 in 1995, Igare community disbursed money to students in various tertiary institutions as bursary awards at ₦10,000.00 per student. All the communities in Ife region spent ₦190,000.00 for provision of electricity in 1995.

A study of the contributions of CBOs to community development in Lagos State was carried out by Akinsorotan and Olujide in 2005. They discovered that CBOs in Lagos State exist under different names and varying sizes scattered over the state. They supplied labour and contributed money to execute their felt-needs projects with little or no interference from external bodies. Their projects empowered the beneficiaries to break the cycle of poverty. Some of the executed projects were provision of health facilities (health centers, maternity homes and dispensaries), market stalls, roads, schools, post office, wells, bore holes, pipe borne water and electricity.

In the North-Central Zone of Nigeria CBOs in Benue State were not left out. For instance, Shangev-Ya Development Association in

Kwande Local Government Area established Shangev-Ya Community Secondary School which facilitated capacity building and skill acquisition. The same association established a Health care centre for improvement of health status of the community members. It further procured two milling machines and rehabilitated 23 kilometres of road as well as eight culverts. It also had small scale loan scheme (Akpeher, 2006).

Gbatse Youth Association in Vandeikya Local Government in Benue State is credited for her recorded achievement. In 1992, it rehabilitated a 37 kilometre road, constructed local bridges across the Ugungu, uavande and Ukyaagu streams, constructed a public well in Ahilejime market area and formed a vigilante group for community policing and dispute settling (Akpehe, 2006).

In South-South Zone of Nigeria, a similar thing happened in Bayelsa State in 2006. Fourteen communities within Kolo Creek Local Government Area founded a foundation known as Kolo Creek Foundation. Some communities participating in the foundation mobilized themselves to undertake significant self-help projects. For instance, Amorokeni community built toilets, Kolo one, two and three communities came together and built a weekly market to enhance commercial activities in their area and Yiba-Ama community rewired the electricity project in their area (Ebeleke, 2007).

In South Eastern zone, Ihiagwa community based organization in Imo State communally established a maternity home, a postal agency, a Baptist Secondary School and a residential building for the Catholic Mission. It offered scholarship to its deserving children. One of the students who enjoyed scholarship (Dr. Kennedy Okeke) founded an NGO in 1991 known as Horizon International Medical Mission (HIMM) in USA. This organization came to Nigeria in 2000 on its medical mission to provide

medical support to the less fortunate people (World Bank, 1996).

A community based organization known as, Farmers Development Union (FADU) was established in 1989 as organization of low-income rural and sub-urban peasants in Nigeria. FADU operates a credit and savings scheme, provides training to beneficiaries in areas of equipment maintenance, marketing, enterprises, environmental preservation dissemination of new and appropriate technologies and supply of inputs to farmers on credit at subsidized rate. It engage in socio-economic transformation of rural areas by operating community targeted programmes in the areas of health, environment, adult literacy and water supply (Adedoja, 1996).

Cases of CBOs' performances in Nigeria abound but their achievements have not been able to transform the rural areas significantly because they are bedeviled with problems of funding, mismanagement of their resources, illiteracy, cultural beliefs, politicization and corrupt leaders etc (Famoriyo, 1995; Akinsorotan and Olujide, 2007; Adedoja, 1996; and Akpehe, 2006).

### The Way Forward

Based on the discussion above, this paper opines that government should adopt and utilize CBOs as a strategy for rural development. As a further step, government will ensure that CBOs are formed in every community and increase their number where they are inadequate, make sure that they are broad based in content (i.e. cover every aspect of rural life), sensitize people, train their leaders, properly fund them and manage them through a ministry that can possibly be created solely for that purpose. This strategy will ease the task of transforming the rural areas in Nigeria.

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