

# Rural Development in Nigeria: A Review of Pre- and Post-independence Practice

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## Abstract

Rural development practice in Nigeria has spanned over 10 decades from pre-independence to the current decade. This paper attempts a time-series review on rural development practice in Nigeria to see what has changed over a fairly long period of time. Various development plan periods have been examined in relation to rural development practice. The review shows that the greater part of public efforts on rural development was subsumed under agricultural development which was more exploitative to the rural resources and residents than improve their quality of life. Although relatively improved understanding of rural development manifested among policy makers beginning in the late 1980s, the paper argues that such understanding surprisingly did not translate into corresponding improvement in rural development practice because of several factors including weak institutional arrangements, corruption and absence of coordinated practice among competing agencies. A number of recommendations have been highlighted.

**Keywords:** Rural Development practice, pre- and post-independence, Nigeria

## Introduction

Nigeria's internal disparity between rural and urban areas still remains very high even after several national and regional development efforts (see Onokerhoraye, 1978; Udeh, 1989; Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). Measured in terms of quality of living, social opportunities, physical facilities, human development and standard of living, the overall score for rural areas still stands very low in comparison with its urban counterparts.

Rural population Nigeria have varied over the years in response to rapid urban expansion and accompanying rural-urban migration. Historically, what is known as Nigeria today was dominantly a rural settlement. Although some semblance of city-type settlements existed in parts of the Muslim north and Yoruba, actual urban settlement evolved along the coast in

response to commercial trades. This explains the emergence of such coastal port towns as Lagos, Port Harcourt and Calabar. With very poor access to physical and social infrastructures, there was no systematic effort at recording the actual population of the rural areas beyond estimation. Although the colonial government did some documentation of the Nigerian population, post-independence effort at estimating the number of people residing in the rural areas started in 1963. The 1963 Census recorded 80.7% of the national population residing in the rural areas. This proportion dropped to 70.13% in 1985 and was estimated to further drop to 69% by 1990s (Muoghalu, 1992). In 2005, it was estimated that 53% of the Nigerian populace resided in the rural areas (World Development Reports, 2005) and in 2011, the World Bank reports recorded 51.6% of Nigeria's rural population. These statistics are, however, countered by some recent reports projecting the rural population above 70% of the Nigerian population (see Presidential Report, 1999; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010).

Rural areas in Nigeria have generally been associated with agriculture which still depends on manual and local efforts. The implication is that the rural areas depend on agricultural sector for income, employments and other livelihoods opportunities. Despite its contribution to the national economy and GDP, rural areas in Nigeria remain very poor and deeply neglected (IFAD, 2011). Investments in physical, social and economic infrastructures have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centers, while the highest number of the populace lacks access to safe drinking water. In the Nigerian context, the rural areas are associated with poverty and, as such, not attractive to live.

Developmental dichotomy of this dimension raises important challenges bordering on social security and spatial equity. This background has been the rationale for rural development basically aimed at promoting standards of living and as a pre-condition for minimizing high incidence of rural poverty. How is the practice of rural development in Nigeria oriented towards addressing the various developmental challenges common in the rural areas over the past decades of her existence? The aim of this paper is to attempt a systematic review of rural development practice in Nigeria specifically focusing on the pre-and post-independence rural development processes. The paper is divided into sections. Following the introductory section comes a discussion on the pre-independence rural development practice in Nigeria. The third section attempts a systematic review of rural development practice at post-independence period. The fourth section discusses the general characteristics and challenges of rural development practice in Nigeria. This is followed by concluding remarks.

### **Pre-Independence Rural Development Practice in Nigeria**

Although no clear quantitative data is available, several scholarly literatures suggest that Nigeria at pre-independence was dominantly rural which depended on agricultural practices for subsistence and exchanges. Roger Blench (2003) captured the real state of Nigeria's rural areas in colonial times as follows: 'in colonial times access was so problematic and information systems so underdeveloped that rural citizens were hardly able to articulate even

major issues...’ (p.7). British colonial interest in rural Nigeria was characterized by two-prong exploitation. In the first place, the rural areas were available only as primary resource areas for export of raw materials. The second level of exploitation saw the rural areas as food productive centers for the few urban centers which eventually were to serve the basic food needs of the colonial inhabitants.

The colonial government township ordinance Act promulgated in 1917 dictated the developmental course of the rural areas when it classified settlements into first, second and third class for the purpose of infrastructural provision. The first class settlements were mostly foreignized by the whites Europeans and their workers. Consequently, such settlements were the focus of heavy infrastructural concentration, and Lagos represented the classic example of such discriminatory infrastructural concentration. On the other hand, the second and the third class settlements were not given adequate policy attention in infrastructural provision. The establishment of local government councils in Western Nigeria which were initially seen as avenues for expanding infrastructural facilities to the rural areas could not answer the question of coverage because of insufficient fund allocations (Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). Some scholars have commented on these systems of selective and exploitative relationship. For instance, Abdu and Marshall (1990) described such system as follows: ‘under colonial rule, Nigeria was an outlier of Britain’s economic space and the essentially exploitative relationship was based upon export commodity production...e.g., cocoa, palm oil produce, groundnuts and cotton. Agriculture was, therefore, the mainstay of the colonial economic system although the extraction of tin, using foreign capital, was of some importance’ (p.313). Similarly, Iwuagwu (2006) saw such practice as being in consonance with the British colonial policy, which emphasized the search for less expensive human and material resources to develop and sustain the British colonial empire. This was absolutely a case of using the resources of the rural areas in developing the cities; just as available high tax revenue accruing from the rural communities did not match or correspond with the very low expenditures devoted for its development (Iwuagwu, 2006).

What later passed as rural development initiatives in Nigeria’s colonial period could be located in 1945 during which the colonial development and welfare Act was introduced. This, according to Iwuagwu (2006) came with a ‘Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare’, with the idea being to develop all avenues that could facilitate colonial exploitation of local resources. Consequently, research institutes and marketing boards were established to improve production of crops as well as handle storage and marketing of export crops respectively. The Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Board was established in 1947 while other marketing boards for cotton, groundnuts and oil palm were set up in 1949. As it turned out, these marketing boards were more at the service of the colonial interest of local resource exploitation, which ended up impoverishing the rural sources of economic capital through commodity price distortion and excessive taxation.

The 1946-1956 development plan was regionalized in 1954 when the Littleton constitution was proclaimed. Such regionalization paved way for decentralized planning in which the

various regional political entities were consequently empowered to evolve and implement appropriate development plans within their respective jurisdictional areas. As an outcome, a new development plan period that was to run between 1955 and 1960 was evolved.

One common trend of rural development plans at pre-independence period was a single emphasis on agricultural development and productivity. Indeed, rural development in Nigeria during this period was synonymous with agricultural development while other important channels of development were absolutely ignored. Apart from the visible role of agriculture in livelihoods of the populace, the idea of agricultural-centered development plan for rural areas had much to do with the general orientation of the colonial masters, who saw local resource exploitation as a means of expanding their economic as well as sustaining their livelihoods and commercial interests. Such 'parasitic' relationship laid the initial foundation for the systematic disempowerment of Nigeria's rural areas up to the post-independence period. In contemporary times, it is commonly known fact that while the rural areas are still described as synonymous with peasant and subsistent agriculture (Onokerhoraye, 1978; Udeh, 1989; Abdu and Marshall, 1990; Filani, 1993; Iwuagwu, 2006; Saheed, 2010), it is equally seen as synonymous with absence of basic infrastructural facilities such as sanitation, electricity, pipe-born water, good roads and health care services. How different is the post-independence period? The next section discusses that.

### **Post-Independence Rural Development Practice in Nigeria**

Post-independence rural development strategies in Nigeria were articulated under the various national development plans namely, the first national development plan (1962-1968); second national development plan (1970-1974); the third national development plan (1975-1980); the fourth national development plan (1985-1990).

The major objective of Nigeria's first national development plan was to maintain and, if possible, to surpass the average rate of growth of 4% per year of its gross domestic product at constant prices. To realize the aim, government planned a yearly investment of approximately 15% of Nigeria's gross national product. Given that agriculture was the major strength of Nigeria's economy, and which was largely identified with the rural areas, policy attention and governmental investment in it were seen as direct and indirect avenues of developing the rural areas. Using agriculture to develop the rural areas was, therefore, at the top of Nigeria's first national development plan agenda. According to Saheed (2010), interest in rural development owed much to a number of events which had their origin in the colonial heritage and the unanticipated oil boom of the seventies. The author classified such driving factors to include massive rural-urban drift of able-bodied young men and women, declining productivity in agriculture, increasing food imports, growing unemployment and the widening gap in welfare terms between the urban and rural areas. Despite this policy effort at developing agriculture, and by implication the rural areas, the first national plan was more of an extended colonial policy and practice of exploitation. Abass (1993) argues that under the first national development plan period, peasant farmers were further squeezed to produce

cash crops, at the expense of the subsistence crops, for export. The plan itself did not articulate any clear statement or policy on rural infrastructural development. Rather, emphasis was placed on encouraging the assemblage of agricultural produce for export purpose, without strengthening the real agricultural base of the country by providing necessary infrastructures such as good road network, electricity, agricultural processing facilities, water, among several others.

The second national development plan (1970-1974) came as a post-civil war development initiatives. It was also during this plan period that Nigeria had the ‘phenomenon of oil resource boom’. Fundamentally, the plan was aimed at: a) building a united, strong and self-reliant nation; b) building a great and dynamic economy; c) building a just and egalitarian society; d) building a land of bright and full opportunities and; e) building a free and democratic society. The plan placed high priority on reducing the level of inequality among the social classes and between urban and rural areas. One important feature of the second national development plan as observed by Marcellus (2009) was its democratic content, having emerged from a participatory process that involved stakeholders at every level of governance. Although it’s primary focus was not about rural development, the plan’s intention of building a just and egalitarian society suggested holistic development whereby every segment of the Nigerian space and population were to be covered. These ideals were not realized principally owing to the phenomenon of ‘oil boom’, which ended up diluting every attention and commitment at mobilizing material and human resources for the achievement of the primal objective of building an egalitarian and self-reliant society. ‘Oil boom’ soon translated into struggle for ‘oil rents’ which led to massive corruption at every levels of governance. Huge spending and import of food characterized the state activity while agriculture that served as the mainstay of the economy was relegated to the background. Given the consistent synonymy of agriculture with rural development in Nigeria, government massive dependence on oil revenue during this period meant that all policies on rural development could no longer be on the agenda of government. Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005) argued that although it was stated in the plan that government was committed to spending #500,000 for village regrouping, such projection was perhaps to reduce the cost of providing economic and social infrastructure such as health, electricity, water and educational facilities for the rural areas.

In the third national development plan (1975-1980), rural development was revisited based on government conviction that such investment will contribute in closing the yawning gap between the demand for food and the supply capacity of the home-based industries. Consequently, government developed interest in modernizing agriculture and introducing new initiatives to strengthen the agricultural and food base of the nation. Although the objectives of the plan looked similar to those of the second national development plan, there was a significant and radical approach as the plan emphasized the need to reduce regional disparities in order to foster national unity through the adoption of integrated rural development. Increased budgetary allocations was provided to fund diverse and interrelated rural development sectors as the provision for nationwide rural electrification scheme; the



establishment of agricultural development projects (ADPs); the establishment of nine river basin development authority's (RBDAs); the construction of small dams and boreholes for rural water supply and the clearing of feeder roads for the evacuation of agricultural produce; the supply of electricity to rural areas from large irrigation dams; commitment of resources to large scale mechanized state farming enterprises; the introduction of Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) campaign and the Green Revolution and; public efforts at land reforms through the Land Use Act of 1978.

From the first to the third national development plans, there was observable progressive budgetary improvement to enhance agricultural productivity. Olorunfemi and Adesina (1998) reported increasing financial allocation for agricultural development as follows: first national development plan had a total financial allocation of #30,835,000; second national development plan was allocated a total amount of #71,447,000; while the third national development plan had the highest allocation of #2,201,373,000 for agricultural development. Investment in rural agricultural sector is one component that could catalyze substantive improvement in individual capabilities. However, such lopsided development interest was not enough for transforming rural areas without corresponding investment in rural infrastructures such as roads, electricity, health care, among several others.

The Fourth National Development Plan (1980-1985) came with several distinguishing features. First, it was formulated by a civilian government under a new constitution based on the presidential system of government. Second, it was the first plan in which the local government tier was allowed to participate fully in its own right (FGN, 1981). The plan emphasized among other things the need for balanced development of the different sectors of the economy as well as the various geographical areas of the country. It emphasized the importance of rural infrastructural development as a vehicle for enhancing the quality of rural life. The period saw improved budgeting to the eleven River Basin Development Authorities whose functions include among other things, the construction of boreholes, dams, feeder roads and jetties. In this case the RBDAs was, to a large extent, empowered to develop the rural areas by opening up feeder roads, drilling boreholes and wells, building farm service centers and earth dams, among several others. This period saw increasing participation of all tiers and levels of governments in rural development activities especially in the areas of roads construction, health care services, and electricity provision, water supply etc. According to Filani (1993), 'the 1981-1985 national development plan marked a turning point in rural development efforts in Nigeria because it was the first to recognize the rural sector as a priority area. It made provisions for integrated packages such as the infrastructure, institutional and administrative apparatus to facilitate rapid development of the country's agricultural potential' (p. 250). The author observed that increase of 12% specific allocation to agriculture and rural development over 5% in the 1962-1968 plan represented significant political commitment to rural development practice.

The post-Fourth plan period (1986-1998) did not feature articulated development plan.

However, key programs and policies such the structural adjustment program<sup>1</sup> (SAP) and the vision 2010 were prominent. The structural adjustment program, for instance, witnessed the establishment of the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1985 for the purpose of providing rural infrastructures in the country side. The laws establishing the directorate was promulgated under decree number four of 1987. The core of the Directorate's program was to promote productive activities. Besides, the directorate recognized the provision of rural infrastructure such as feeder roads, water, electricity and housing as essential for the enhancement of the quality of life in the rural areas. The program of the directorate included:

- a. The organization and mobilization of the local people to enhance or facilitate closer interaction between the government and the people. In addition the local communities were asked to form unions or associations for the purpose of providing common facilities for themselves;
- b. the provision of rural infrastructures such as rural feeder roads, rural water and sanitation, rural housing and electrification;
- c. the promotion of productive activities such as food and agriculture, rural industrialization and technology;
- d. The promotion of other extracurricular activities such as socio-cultural and recreational programs, intra and inter community cohesion activities.

The plan for the implementation of DFRRI program was organized into two phases. In phase one, the target was to provide water for 250 communities in each of the states of the federation, to construct 90,000 km of feeder roads, and to promote rural housing, health and agriculture. To facilitate industrial growth, and improve the attractiveness of the rural environment, the directorate planned to commence its rural electrification program in the second phase starting in June 1987. In pursuit of its objectives, DFRRI also planned to co-operate with organizations like Nigerian Building and Road Research Institute (NBRRI) as well as rural water supply and sanitation program (RUWATSAN). The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) was not to be involved in direct implementation of the programs. Rather, for the purpose of the program implementation, the directorate used as its main agents, the states and the local governments, to execute its programs. The funds for the program of the directorate were made available directly to each state government who then saw to the disbursement of such fund to the local governments. The local governments

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<sup>1</sup> The structural adjustment programme which was conceived to stimulate domestic production processes carried the following objectives: a) to restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy in order to reduce dependency on the oil sector and on imports; b) to achieve fiscal and balance of payments viability over the period; c) to lay the basis for a sustainable non-inflationary growth; d) to reduce the dominance of unproductive investment in the public sector, improve that sector's efficiency and enhance the growth and potential of the private sector (Phillips, 1987). The key policies designed to achieve these objectives were: i) strengthening of the hitherto strong and relevant demand management policies; ii) adoption of measures to stimulate domestic production and broaden the supply base of the economy; c) the setting up of a second-tier foreign exchange market (SFEM), as a mechanism of realistic exchange rate and consequently, the alteration of relative prices to enhance efficiency in resource allocation, and to promote domestic-based production and non-oil exports; d) further rationalization and restructuring of tariffs in order to aid industrial diversification; e) the liberalization of the external trade and payments system-dismantling of price, trade and exchange controls; f) the elimination of price controls and commodity boards; g) the decontrol of interest rates and; h) the rationalization and restructuring of public sector enterprises and overhauling of the public sector administrative structure.

in the federation were constituted into rural development committees. These committees comprised of the local government officials and the rural communities. The vision 2010 which came around 1997 and 1998 could not survive following the death of the then General Sani Abacha. On the whole, this period witnessed radical and more holistic intentions towards the development of rural areas.

Subsequent efforts at rural development came in the light of Nigeria's democratic dispensation (1999-to date). A four-year development plan was initially articulated (1999-2003) with the objective of pursuing a strong, virile and broad-based economy that is highly competitive, responsive to incentives, private sector-led, diversified, market-oriented and open, but based on internal momentum for its growth (Marcellus, 2009 cites Donli, 2004). Emphasis on private sector-led growth did not carry sufficient message for rural development. As the prospect of achieving the intended objective of the plan did not materialize, a re-think was therefore necessary. When the ruling party (the People's Democratic Party-PDP) got re-elected in 2003, they came up with a new program namely, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS: 2003-2007). NEEDS was quite comprehensive and ambitious, as it was not only duplicated at all levels of governments (State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy-SEEDS; and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy-LEEDS), it incorporated the private sector, non-governmental organization and the general public in pursuits of its developmental goals. By attempting to empower the rural populace, NEEDS had a substantive vision of eliminating rural poverty and promoting the development of the rural space.

## **Discussions**

Rural development practice in Nigeria can appropriately be said to be driven by three key institutional regimes namely, the colonial regime (pre-independence); the military regimes (the military has ruled Nigeria from 1966 to 1999 with a brief interlude between 1979 and 1982) and; the democratic era (effectively from 1999 to date). From the colonial era to the early 1980s, policy understanding and direction on what should be 'rural areas' and how its development should be catalyzed was narrowly focused on agricultural improvement and productivity. This understanding gave rise to many agriculturally based programs including the Agricultural Marketing Board, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Green Revolution; Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), among other minor ones. Emphasis on agricultural development made some policy and economic sense at that time given the role and importance of agriculture at various levels in the Nigerian economy. During the colonial period, the role of agriculture in sustaining the empires of the colonial masters through commodity exports and cheap labour and capital has been variously acknowledged (Watts and Bassett, 1986; Iwuagwu, 2006; Abdu and Marshall, 1990). In terms of employment, Abba et al (1985, cited in Abdu and Marshall, 1990) noted the role of agriculture as the country's main industry as far as employment was concern with over 65% of the population being dependent on it for livelihood. As early as 1964, Liman



(1982, cited in Abdu and Marshall, 1990) had reported a 70% of GDP contribution from the agricultural sector to Nigerian economy.

Approaches to rural development started receiving some significant conceptualization from the 1980s, when a holistic look was taken of rural development by subsequent policies, programs and regimes. According to Filani (1993), by the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was some improvement in the conception of what constituted rural development. In this case, rural development at policy and practice levels was conceived in a way that transcended mere agricultural development to incorporate the development and expansion of rural infrastructures, emphasis on poverty alleviation and socio-economic empowerment of the rural inhabitants. The concept of integrated river basin development was, therefore, strengthened as a way of using the resources of the river basin for the comprehensive development of the basin areas. The pioneering effort in the change of policy and rural development practice started during the military regime headed by General Ibrahim Babangida when the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) were established. DFRRI was specifically set up to identify, involve and support viable local community organizations in the effective mobilization of rural population for sustained and participatory rural development activities. Its activities and duties included the provision of roads, basic facilities and increased food and industrial raw material output, the encouragement of agricultural activity and other activities that will facilitate improved quality of life in the rural areas. Other complementary agencies include the establishment of the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), better life program for rural women/dwellers, peoples'/community banks and the Directorate of Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). DFRRI was more comprehensive and focused with some appreciable level of achievement in the areas of rural road infrastructure development (Filani, 1993; Abbas, 1993).

Subsequent focus on rural development was more centered on poverty alleviation and employment programs. These approaches dominated the democratic era beginning from 1999 to present. Programmers such as poverty alleviation program (PAP: 1999-2000); National Poverty Eradication program (NAPEP) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS: 2003-2007) were more focused on creating youth employment, providing rural infrastructures and the development and conservation of natural resources. While the rest of the post-1999 democratic poverty alleviation programs could not record serious impact on minimizing incidence of poverty in rural Nigeria (Omah, 2004; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at least, on records, was able to spread its impact across rural areas. Such wide coverage was possible as a result of the commitment of the various tiers of government to duplicate the program within their respective domains. Although it looks a bit statistically difficult at this moment to comprehensively assess the progress recorded by NEEDS in the light of its initial objectives of poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of the people especially in the rural areas, few studies, at least, point to the conclusion that NEEDS was not different from previous public programs in terms of political commitment and

implementation practices. Marcellus (2009) specifically noted that while Nigeria's wealth rose within the period of NEEDS owing to better petroleum oil prices and substantial debt relief by the Paris club, the average Nigerian especially in the rural areas remained disproportionately very poor quite contrary to some official figures from the Central Bank of Nigeria (the author cited CBN, 2005: 76). While Osagie (2007:2) saw poor leadership and uncoordinated action as responsible for program failures (as in NEEDS), Marcellus argued that public policy plans in Nigeria are only seen as perfunctory obligations which hardly receive commensurate action towards goal realization.

The sequence of regimes and associated plans for rural development in Nigeria over the past ten decades highlights a number of interesting dimensions. In the first instance, most public policies were not intentionally directed at rural development, but propelled by interest at sectoral engagements for some reasons of either to enhance the overall national economic growth or serve the interest of the ruling class. Linking the rural areas as productive agricultural centers for the national government and urban centers ensured that over seven decades were devoted to funding agriculture through various governmental schemes without consideration to other issues bordering on general institutional change in land tenure and distribution, rural education and capacity building and rural infrastructural services. Onokerrhoraye (1978) had rightly argued that agricultural production functions that rural areas were most noted for were to tie to other capacity building measures to guarantee sustainable and holistic rural development. The usual practice then had been the establishment of expensive farm settlement schemes which ended up not relevant to general productivity, employment and wealth creation for the rural people. The colonial masters, for instance, were mostly interested in exploiting the land resources of the rural areas to support their empires in Britain and urban local economies in which they resided. However, post-independence rural development practice did not deviate from the colonial-style parasitic agricultural development policies. Rather than empower, such practices and policies only succeeded in keeping the rural populace perpetually disempowered and massively poor at every index of capacity measures and analysis. Despite some seeming little improvements in the overall conceptualization and policy targets for rural development from the late 1980s (based on policy and program objectives), doubts still surround the possibility that policy plans will ever translate to real development impacts for the rural areas. Currently, implementing most of the policy outlines faces challenges of leadership, corruption, lack of coordination, threat of continuity, among several problems. Most rural development programs over the decades are associated with particular regimes and which soon disappear with regime change. With specific regard to vision 2010 of the late General Sani Abacha, Aluko (2006) argued that in spite of the best ideas and intentions encapsulated in the reform agenda, the subsequent regime led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo terminated the plan because of sheer hatred for Abacha. He went on to observe that Obasanjo's tenure elongation program was explicitly premised on guaranteeing the survival of his vision 2020 plan.

Obviously, rural development practice in Nigeria has been driven by the military especially from post-independence period. Of the 51 years of Nigeria's nationhood, the military has had

the greater part of the country's governance for over 35 years leaving few years for the civilian, which was lately consolidated in 1999. Given their lack of professional understanding and skills in political governance, it is no surprise that rural development practices during successive military regimes could not have been properly articulated beyond the normative legacies of the colonial masters. One obvious reason for short-lived development plans and policies relates to a lack of strong institutional arrangements to guarantee policy and plans continuity. The military were not able to create enabling institutional environment given that power revolved around individuals and groups within the military hierarchy. Such instability in governance could not help nurture effective programs and institutions that could sustain rural development. When Nigeria started experiencing democratic governance, the needed institutional foundation was already absent, while available ones were weak in capacity and rule enforcement. The implication is that individuals and leaders still cultivate enormous power and influence over the machinery of government, to the extent that corruption, nepotism and poor leadership have combined to inhibit the proper functioning of public policies and plans that are meant for rural development.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper has attempted a time-series characterization of rural development in Nigeria at the levels of pre-and post-independence practices. Important feature about Nigeria's rural development approach is its association with agricultural development, characterized by various levels of exploitation. Policies and programs often tended more in the use of rural agricultural resources for the sustenance and development of available urban centers. This, more or less, dictated the type of infrastructures that were planned for rural areas, some of which only served the interest of the urban political and administrative elites. Such pattern of exploitative relationship prevailed up to the late 1980s, when improved understanding of rural development began to translate into a more comprehensive and integrated development outlooks. Although rural development conceptualization had seemingly received little hope beginning from the late 1980s to the democratic period beginning from 1999, actual practices have been confronted with challenges of policy and practice inconsistencies as well as the phenomenon of corruption. It is seen that rural development policies still have the imprint of short-lived lifespan, which come and disappear with a specific regime. This trend consistently dominated post-independence rural development practices to present date. While this problem has been explained in relation to weak institutional arrangements, the phenomenon of corruption among public officials and elite groups often ensures that important public policy and rural development agenda of governments do not get directly to the intended beneficiaries by way of unduly influencing project distribution, kickbacks, ethnic and patronage politics, contract inflation and poor job execution. Most of the rural development policies in the present democratic dispensation hardly have clear focus. Some plans carry many ambitious and overlapping objectives while actual implementation is often, in most cases, not related to local needs. Politicization of development benefits and absence of professionalism in planning and implementation have conspired to render most rural

development plans very ineffective.

Against these backdrops, the following outlines are suggested:

1. Rural development activities in Nigeria should clearly be detached from excessive politicization. Although rural development practice in Nigeria have been recognized at various institutional levels (Ministries of Agriculture, Rural Development, Water Resources etc), absence of proper coordination has resulted in many challenges of inefficiency and inter-agency competition. Many of the agencies directly or indirectly in charge of rural development choose to pursue disparate and politically-motivated interests manifesting in a waste of public resources and funds on parallel and most often unrelated projects. Absence of strict and focused institutional arrangements also explains why rural development policies and plans rarely survive regime change as discussions in the paper have clearly illustrated. These problems can only be addressed with strong and well-coordinated institutional arrangements at various levels of governance, in addition to professional and participatory engagements in rural project plan initiatives and implementation practices.
2. Given that Nigeria's rural development practice hardly transcends agricultural development, there is a danger that many social problems of rural development will continue to linger for a very long time. Public policies on rural development should go beyond agricultural development to creating social opportunities through heavy public investment in education, health care, social security and physical infrastructures. Expanding a range of social opportunities for rural dwellers carries the potential for social and economic empowerment as well as improving the quality of life.

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