

PARTICIPATORY RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ONDO STATE

Tolu Lawal

Department of public Administration, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State , Nigeria

Abe Oluwatoyin

Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. Ekiti State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The genuine development of the grassroots particularly in the developing societies depends largely on the participation of the rural populace in policy conception and implementation, especially in the area of development policies; fundamentally the rural people play a vital and significant role in economic and political development of the nation. This is because the bulk of economic produce as well as votes come from these areas. However, the much needed development has continued to elude the rural communities in spite of the various development policies carried out by successive governments in the state. This paper therefore critically assessed the 31s initiative of the present government in Ondo State with a view to know its impact on rural development. The paper relied on both primary and secondary data to source its information. The paper submitted that 31s initiative has impacted positively on the lives of rural dwellers in Ondo State, most especially in the areas of infrastructure, integrated development, participatory skills e.t.c. And therefore needed to be sustained and replicated in other communities yet to benefit.

Keywords: Development, Rural Development, Infrastructure, Democracy, Participation.

Introduction

The rural areas of Nigeria are characterized by low level of socio-economic activities, low purchasing power and lack of infrastructure and social amenities (Abdulraham 1999:18). In most rural areas in Nigeria, like any other rural setting in the developing nations, basic infrastructure, where they exist at all,

are too inadequate for any meaningful development. Obaianigwe (1999:10) captures the situation in the following words;

Rural dwellers often depend on shallow wells and untreated waters. The villagers, most of whom are farmers, work on the land from sunrise to sunset only to produce food for the uncontrollably teeming city population. In and around the villages, one readily comes across children with distended tummies and spindly legs who are found wanting of a complete diet, formal education, and a technical sense of belonging. Most rural communities in Nigeria have built schools through self help but most of the schools lack necessary academic aids. Qualified teachers refuse to work in most of them because of dearth of facilities.

This is a clear and pitiable picture of underdevelopment, poverty and outright negligence. In spite of the fact that these rural areas serve as the source of food and raw materials for the urban areas, yet they have continued to witness the increasing poverty and marginalization. Despite the numerous development policies and programmes by the previous governments not much was achieved in terms of rural development, the basic needs of the rural inhabitants were neither addressed nor fulfilled. Based on this, the paper aims at assessing critically the performance of 31S initiative programme of Olusegun Mimiko regime in the last four years in Ondo State and its impacts on local governance and rural development. The paper is also set to identify reasons why the previous attempts at rural development were unable to yield positive result.

Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual explanation is a tradition borne out of enhancement of the deeper and efficient understanding of the concepts under study. It constitutes the intellectual validity and clarity of any discussion as it serves as a source of

strength for further intellectual discourse, inquiry and research. Therefore, the need to put some relevant concepts into perspectives becomes inevitable.

Concept of Development

The concept of development includes not only social, economic and political changes, but a broad and all embracing transformation of the society. It connotes the totality of societal improvement, which of course starts in man himself. Development involves the structuring of society in such a way that will improve the quality of lives as well as the satisfaction of psychological wants of members of any given society. (Ugwu, 2003:133).

According to Gboyega (2003) development implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, but everybody in the society. It demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

Development has been referred to as an overall process of transforming men and societies leading to a social order in which every human being can achieve moral and material well being (FAO).

According to FAO, the ultimate purpose of development is to provide every one with ever increasing opportunities for a better life. It therefore, requires an equitable distribution of income and other social resources in order to promote justice and efficient production, to raise levels of employment, substantially, to expand and improve facilities for education, health, nutrition, housing and social and cultural wellbeing.

Concept of Rural Development

Rural development is defined as an overall improvement in the economic and social wellbeing of rural residents and in the institutional and physical environment in which they live (Shortall, 1994).

Wright (1992) described rural development as an ongoing and essentially interventionist process of qualitative, quantitative and or distributional change leading to some degree of betterment for rural groups of people. It is about improving living standards of the masses of the low income population residing in rural areas.

Copp (1972) defined rural development as a process aimed at improving the wellbeing and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through collective efforts.

These definitions clearly show rural development as an overall improvement in the economic and social wellbeing of rural residents. The focus in rural development is on the poor. The central concept of rural development is of a process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low-income workers and households.

The Concept of Participatory Rural Development

Since development is about people, planners and development initiators now appreciate that it is the involvement of people in the development process that ensures sustainable development. The whole purpose of development is being redefined so as to bring people to the central stage. Participatory Rural Development (PRD) also called Community Driven Development. Community participatory development initiatives aim to foster a decentralized, participatory and equitable development process in poor rural communities (Mansori and Rao 2004). According to the advocates of PRD (Mansori and Rao, 2004),

participatory development aims at accomplishing certain specific functions which includes but not limited to;

- Identifying and eliciting development priorities by the target community itself.
- Strengthening the civic skills of the poor by nurturing community organizations
- And enabling communities to work together for the common good.

Such efforts are expected to ensure that resources are allocated in a manner that is responsive to the needs of the poor; that investment in community infrastructure can be used and maintained by recipient communities in a sustainable fashion; that private benefit, such as welfare or relief are better targeted; that governments local or national are made accountable and responsive in the provision of public goods and services; that local elites are prevented from capturing the benefits of development programs, and that the most disadvantaged in the community are able to participate in decision making process, reducing social exclusion within poor communities (Ibid).

A Brief History of Ondo State

The Ondo State of Nigeria is one of the seven states created on February 3, 1976. Carved from the old Western State of Nigeria, Ondo State corresponds exactly to the original Ondo Province created in July 1915 with Akure as the provincial headquarter and whose different components have been administered collectively ever since (Smith, 1980).

The creation of Ekiti State out of old Ondo on 1st October, 1996 reduced the number of Ondo's Local Council from 26 to 18. The state retained Akure as its capital. Ondo State lies between longitudes 4⁰30" and 60 East of the Greenwich Meridian, 5⁰45" and 8⁰15" North of the Equator. The state is bounded in the North by Ekiti and Kogi States, in the East by Edo State, in the West by Osun and Ogun States and in the South by Atlantic ocean.

The people of the area are predominantly Yorubas and can be broadly put into the following dialectical groups; Akoko, Owo, Ondo, Ikale, Ilaje and Akure. The Ijaw-Arogbo and the Ijaw-Apoi who inhabit some part of the riverine areas of the state are not of Yoruba origin. The major towns in Ondo State are; Akure, Owo, Ondo, Oka, Ikare, Idanre, Ilutitun, Ilara, Ijare, Okitipupa, Ode-aye, Irele, Ile-Oluji, Ifon, Oke-Agbe, Igbara-Oke, Igbokoda, Ore, Isua, Iju, Idoani, Itaogbolu, Bolorunduro, Igbekebo and Owena.

Overview of 3Is Initiatives in Ondo State

The unprecedented change in the mantle of leadership in Ondo State, precisely February 23, 2009, brought Olusegun Mimiko to power as the Executive Governor of the state. With his assumption in office, the governor, rather than designing road map to progress quickly swung into action by launching a development initiative aptly termed *3Is* initiative, which means infrastructure, Institution and Industry. The Governor, having observed the long neglect and the fundamental disconnect of rural people from governance decided to recognize and create space for those people to participate in governance process.

3Is initiative is a programme designed to engender development in the rural communities. It is the first of its kind in the state in particular, and in Nigeria in general. The initiative allows the rural people to participate and decide the project of their choice. It does not give room for imposition of projects on the people, the people themselves prioritize their needs via needs assessment procedures and thus enable them to claim ownership of the projects. Consequently, they are willing to protect, maintain and sustain such projects.

Meaning of 3Is

The first 'I' represents Infrastructure, which deals with assessment of needs and the subsequent provision of infrastructure. The second 'I' represent Institutions, which deals with the setting up of community representatives and their capacity building training for the representatives so as to monitor and safeguard the projects. The third 'I' which represent Industry stands to empower the rural people financially to ensure the growth of SMES i.e., small and medium enterprises.

Following from the foregoing, it can be reasonably deduced that *3Is* initiative is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is all encompassing and embracing.

Participatory Rural Governance and 3Is Initiative in Ondo State: A Critical Assessment

The notion of participatory rural development as conceived by the state governor, Olusegun Mimiko is expressed as; development of the people, development for the people and development by the people. The inadequacy of (top-down model), which has a pattern of centralized control and administration by which the objectives and means of implementation are determined by government or international agencies led to introduction of (bottom-up approach) otherwise known as *3Is* initiative in Ondo State.

By 2009, most of the projects put in place in rural areas by the previous governments were moribund and non-functional. This is because most of the projects were imposed on the people and were not basic to their needs at that material time they were given to them. Consequently the people did not see those projects as theirs, as the need to protect and maintain them became unimportant to them.

In July, 2009, the first phase of the *3Is* initiative kicked off in three local governments of the state; namely Owo, Odigbo and Ifedore local governments. About 80 communities were visited by the change agents in these three local governments to assess the needs of the people. Some of these communities are:

| Owo L.G. | Ifedore L.G. | Odigbo L.G. |
|------------|--------------|-------------|
| Iyere | Ibule | Araromi Obu |
| Emure ile | Ijare | Asejiyere |
| Isuwada | Ipogun | Ajebamidele |
| Ipele | Igbara Oke | Mile 10 |
| Ijebu I | Ajebamidele | Mile 12 |
| Ijebu II | Ibuji | Mile 13 |
| Ago Igbira | Ilara | Ajue |
| Uso | Owena | Bolorunduro |
| Elegbeka | Ibule | Olokuta |
| Eyin ogbe | Isarun | Asewele Oja |
| Amurin | Ero | Onitea |
| Odofin | Aye | Mulekangbo |
| Isaipe | Onijaka | Odigbo |
| Obasoto | | Ore |
| Ilale keji | | Ago Alaye |
| Sajiyan | | |

Source: Ministry of Community Development and Cooperatives Ondo State. July, 2012.

Immediately the needs of these people were assessed, government responded to those needs and provided infrastructure of various kind to the affected communities ranging from provision of clean and portable water, electricity, construction of lockup shops and open markets, health centres, building of

town halls, renovation of schools to establishment of cottage industries. It is to be noted that those projects are termed quick win projects, that is, projects that can be executed within three month of conception.

Subsequently, this exercise was carried out and replicated in all the 18 local governments and over 300 communities in the state have benefited tremendously from this exercise. These projects are being protected, safeguarded and maintained by these various Communities (Ministry of Community Development 2012). However, there have been complaints and grievances from different communities in the state that the programme is limited to selected areas of the state.

Impact of these Projects on Rural People

The people got the opportunity to participate in governance and development process. The hitherto neglected people now have sense of belonging in governance process. People at their own level can identify their own development needs and priorities without any form of imposition. This is equated to empowerment approach. The implication of this is that citizens are not mere passive recipients of the development process but also active participants. And development works better for them if done “bottom up” rather than from the top down.

According to Sharma *et al* (2011) participation enables the citizen to influence government to develop responsive policies and implement responsive programmes and services that can affect their lives positively.

Aside this participatory opportunity, the programme also impacted positively on the lives of the people of these various communities in different areas of life. In the area of Health, death rate particularly, maternal death has been greatly reduced. The sick people and the pregnant women now have health

centres, clinics and maternity close to them. At any period of the day, they can easily walk to these health centres to solve their various health problems.

The establishment of cottage industries, installation of electricity and construction of market has also improved the economic life of the rural people.

Conclusion

One of the most critical elements in service delivery is the human factor. That is, the people for whom a project is being designed constitute the focus of the exercise. These people who are going to be the end users or consumers of such services must first of all be consulted and involved in the planning of such projects, as this will enable the people to claim the ownership of the projects and consequently be ready at all time to maintain and protects the projects.

It is an indisputable fact that *3Is* initiative in Ondo State has impacted positively on the lives of rural people via its various strategies for sustainable livelihood. Based on this, it is therefore canvassed that the programme be replicated in the communities that are yet to benefit. And government should ensure the continuity and sustenance of this laudable programme so as to serve as rural development model for other states in Nigeria.

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