

Full Length Research Paper

Situational assessment of rural and agricultural development projects of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi and its host community

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Accepted 2 January, 2015

A survey was conducted to assess the present status of rural and agricultural development projects of the University of Agriculture Makurdi and its host community. The population of this study consisted of all students, staffs and members of the host community. Due to the enormity of this population, 150 respondents were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected with the use of a well structured questionnaire alongside interview techniques. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean as well as, inferential statistics such as factor analysis. The results obtained revealed that there were two major categories of factors affecting rural and agricultural development in the study area, namely, socio-economic cum cultural factors (Factor 1) and administrative cum infrastructural related factors (Factor 2). It was found that there was no single secondary school in the study area (0.00%). However, the following rural and agricultural development projects were found existing in the study area, Churches/mosque (17.16%), Primary Schools (17.00%) thrift societies or local banks (14.30%), ICT facilities (12.01%), pipe borne water (9.73%), health clinic (9.15%), postal agency (8.58%), maize/rice farms (11.05%), oil palm plantation (10.67%), cattle/sheep farms (10.29%), soyabean farm (9.91%), Poultry farm (9.53%) and fish ponds (9.15%). It was also found that there were no markets (0.00%) and commercial banks (0.00%) in the study area. It was recommended that the government and the private sector should endeavour to provide rural and agricultural infrastructural facilities such as marketing facilities, motorable roads/bridges, boreholes, secondary schools as well as commercial banks, feed mill and subsidized farm inputs. Finally, participatory administration and bilateral interpersonal communication should be adopted in conflicts resolution.

Key words: Rural, agricultural, development, projects, host community.

INTRODUCTION

According to Agama (2007), rural development has been one of the major priority areas of the governments since independence in 1960. A lot of attention has been channeled towards rural transformation with a view to empowering the rural people politically, socially and

economically. Several government development programmes and policies had been evolved over the years and were targeted at rural transformation. These include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976, Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in 1978, National Acceleration

ted Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in 1970, Green Revolution Project in 1976, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) in 1986, Better Life for Rural Women in 1987, National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) in 1988, Nigerian Agricultural Cooperatives and Rural Development Banks (NACRDB) in 1977, Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Projects (LEEMP) in 1985, National Policy on Integrated Rural Development in 2001, National Fadama Development Projects (I, II and III), the N200 billion large scale Agricultural credit Scheme in 2009, and the N240 billion commercial Agricultural Project in 2009. All these had been put in place by the past and present governments with a view to promoting agricultural and rural development in Nigeria.

In recent times, it has been found that majority of rural communities have always been marginalized, neglected and related to the background for quite a long time now, in spite of such laudable policies and programmes highlighted earlier. As a result, most of the rural development projects embarked upon by the external experts and donor nations foundered may be due to the fact that the rural people who wear the shoes and know where it pinches were ignored and not recognized. This fact is seemingly attributable to the sectoral approach employed by the past successive governments and other development agencies as reflected in inadequate funding of capital projects, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, and inarticulate rural development policies (Omenka, 1991). The fall out of all these is the continued existence of wide gaps between rural and urban areas in terms of development.

According to Stevens and Jabara (1988), there is probably no greater challenge facing national political leaders worldwide than the problem of agricultural and rural development. According to Sule (2006), most of the developing countries have the problem of maintaining a balance in their development of rural and urban areas. According to Idachaba (1985), in most of the nations, the urban centres are well developed at the expense of the rural areas, and yet, the bulk of the population resides in the rural areas. According to Sule (2006), in spite of their population coupled with the fact that these rural areas produce nearly all the food for feeding the nations population, they have remained relatively backward, pauperized and neglected.

Nigeria has a teeming population of 140 million people and a land mass of 923, 760 km² (NPC, 2006) and majority of these live in rural areas, where they subsist on agriculture. According to Age (2009), in order to bring about a holistic rural development in Nigeria, it is necessary to first develop the agricultural sector. According to this scholar, there can be no meaningful rural transformation without the development of the agricultural sector.

This study is designed to assess the present status of rural and agricultural development projects of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi and its host community.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the present status of rural and agricultural development projects of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi and its host community. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the existing rural and agricultural development projects in the study area,
2. Determine the priority needs of the people in the study area and,
3. Determine factors or problems mitigating against rural and agricultural development in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study area

The study was carried out at the University of Agriculture, Makurdi and its host community. The University of Agriculture, Makurdi was established in 1989. It is located at Nyiev district, North-East of Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. This University lies at latitude 7° 44' North and Longitude 8° 35' East of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and it covers a land mass of 7,978 km². It is bounded on the North East by Guma Local Government Area and by River Benue in the South (Gyang, 1997).

Topographically, it is located in the Middle belt region of Nigeria and is characterized by gentle hills, clay soils, and tropical climate with two main seasons (rainy and dry seasons). The establishment of this University in the middle belt region was supported by the good savannah zone found within the area. The land is generally fertile and supports extensive arable cropping and rearing of animals. The inhabitants of this area are mostly rural farmers who subsist on subsistence farming. They grow crops such as maize, millet, benniseed, rice, cassava and little yam. They also keep animals such as sheep, goats and poultry.

The population of this study consisted of all students, staffs and members of the host community and due to the enormity of this population, a sample size of 150 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were garnered through the use of a well structured questionnaire alongside interview technique. The collected data were analyzed using percentages, frequency distribution (descriptive statistics) and Factor analysis, which is an inferential statistical tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the existing rural and agricultural development projects in the study area. It reveals that the major rural development project existing in the study area were churches/mosque (17.16%), Primary schools (17.0%), thrift societies (14.30%), information and communication technology (ICT) facilities (12.01%), pipe bone water (9.73%), University clinic (9.15%), and postal agency (8.58%). Seemingly, rural projects such as markets (0.0%), secondary schools (0.00%), commercial banks (0.00%), and access roads (2.29%) did not exist in the area.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to the existing rural and agricultural development projects (N = 150).

Variables	*Frequency	Percentage
Rural projects		
Rural roads	20	2.39
Primary schools	149	17.00
Secondary schools	0	0.00*
Pipe borne water	85	9.73
Markets	0	0.00*
University clinic	80	9.15
Post office/postal agency	75	8.58
Bridge/culverts	25	2.86
Commercial banks	0	0.00*
Churches/mosques	150	17.16
Electricity	60	6.84
Thrift societies	125	14.30
ICT facilities	105	12.01
Agricultural projects		
Cattle/sheep farm	135	10.29
Poultry farm	125	9.53
Piggery farm	110	8.38
Veterinary teaching hospital	125	9.53
Maize/rice farm	145	11.05
Citrus farm	100	7.62
Oil palm plantation	140	10.67
Soyabean farm	130	9.91
Research institute/Journals	84	6.4
Agric. extension agency	98	7.47
Fish pond	120	9.15

Field survey (2010), *multiple responses.

For a rural community to be considered as been developed, it must have improved marketing facilities, commercial banks, electricity power supply, primary and secondary schools, hospitals, access roads with strong bridges and culverts. But all these are either sparingly existing or non-existing at all in this study area. Table 1 shows that the following agricultural development projects were existing in the study area namely, Maize/rice farms (11.05%), oil palm plantation (10.67%), cattle/sheep farm (10.29%), poultry farm (9.53%), veterinary teaching hospital (9.53%) soya bean farm (9.91%), piggery farm (8.38%) fish ponds (9.15%), Agricultural Extension agency (7.47%), and Institute of Food Security (6.4%). The success or failure of these projects depends on the extent to which funds are available for implementation, degree of compatibility with the norms or culture and needs of the people and of course, the degree of participation of the end users in project planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation. It also depends on good leadership and co-operation of incessant communal conflicts and civil unrest may not

create conducive environment for any meaningful development. Table 2 shows that the prioritized needs of the people in the study area are; secondary schools (8.19%), subsidized fertilizers (8.19%) drinking water (8.14%), hospitals (8.08%), improved markets (7.37%), rural roads/bridges (7.92%), commercial banks (7.97%), electricity power supply (7.10%) improved varieties of crops (6.83%), feed mills (6.55%) and agrochemicals (6.01%).

For any development to take place in any community, audience analysis or situational analysis must be conducted to determine the prioritized needs of the people. It has been found that most of the development programmes or projects introduced by the external experts or donor nations into this country was founded due to the fact that the rural people who wear the shoes and know where it pinches were ignored, marginalized and relegated to the background and as such, the prioritized needs of the people were unilaterally determined without seeking the consent of the end users. The conduct of audience analysis will help in determining the prioritized needs of the people that are compatible with their societal norms, values or culture or belief, since most of the innovations introduced into any social systems cannot be readily adopted if they are incompatible with the existing practices and culture of the people.

According to Age et al. (2005), most of the technical solutions proposed to address the problems of agriculture in less developed countries in Africa were founded because these solutions had not taken into consideration the culture and the indigenous knowledge system of the local people. It is against this backdrop that Christoffel (1989) reported that "no new approach to rural and agricultural development will succeed unless it clearly manifests a thorough understanding of traditional and human ecosystem which it intends to change and the clients' values, aspirations, mores and the perceptions of the bio-physical environment, particularly, as the latter pertains to renewable natural resources.

Table 3 shows that there are two major categories of problems or factors affecting rural and agricultural development in the study area, namely, the socio-economic cum cultural factors (Factor 1) and administrative cum infrastructural factors (Factor 2). It was found that the socio-economic cum-cultural factors affecting rural and agricultural development in the study area were lack of funds (LOFU=2.870), language barrier (LANB= 3.06), non-co-operative attitudes of members of the host community (NONCO=2.878), incessant communal crisis (ICC=3.487), High cost of farm inputs (HCOFI=2.817), non-payment of salaries of unskilled labour force in the host community (NONPS=3.120), low level of education of members of the host community (LOEB=2.720), who are the target beneficiaries, cultural or traditional barriers (CULB=3.049) and incompatible innovations introduced in the study area (INCOMI=2.757). The administrative cum infrastructural factors on the

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on their prioritized needs (N =150).

Variables	*Frequency	Rank	Percentage
Prioritized needs			
Primary Schools	50	14.0	2.73
Secondary Schools	150	1.5	8.19
Rural roads/bridges	145	6.0	7.92
Hospitals	148	4.0	8.08
Improved markets	135	7.0	7.37
Drinking water	149	3.0	8.14
Electricity	130	8.0	7.10
Commercial banks	146	5.0	7.97
Subsidized fertilizers	150	1.5	8.19
Feed mills	120	10.0	6.55
Improved breeds of animals	85	12.0	4.64
Improved varieties of crops	125	9.0	6.83
Agro chemicals/herbicides)	110	11.0	6.01
Churches/mosques	30	15.0	1.64
Forest reserves/wildlife Park	60	13.5	3.28
Improved extension/Vet. services	98	12.0	5.35

Field survey (2010),* multiple responses.

Table 3. Factor analysis of problems associated with rural and agricultural development.

S/N	Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
1.	LOFU	2.870*	4.1185E -02
2.	LANB	3.061*	2.3424E-02
3.	LOIH	2.903E-02	4.214**
4.	NONCO	2.878*	3.000E-02
5.	PPPE	2.757E-02	3.8005**
6.	ICC	3.487*	0.2338
7.	ADMIN	3.049E-02	4.648**
8.	POE	3.100E-02	4.805**
9.	ENVID	2.975E-02	4.425**
10.	LOAL	3.426E-02	5.869**
11.	LOEPS	0.145*	2.903**
12.	NONPS	3.120*	0.258
13.	HCOFI	2.817*	3.9677E-02
14.	LOEB	2.720*	0.238
15.	CULB	3.049*	4.648200E-02
16.	BADRO	3.110E-02	4.886**
17.	POTS	2.085E-02	4.836**
18.	POOA	3.207E-02	5.142**
19.	NONIP	2.720E-02	3.699**
20.	INCOMI	2.757*	3.9005-25-02

Rotational method (Verimax), * Significant –socio-economic cum cultural factors, ** Significant-administrative cum infrastructural factors, <0.30 not significant due to low loading.

other hand include lack of involvement of members of the host community in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of rural and agricultural development projects (LOHI = 4.214), poor project planning, monitoring

and evaluation (PPPE=3.8005), administrative red-tapism or bottleneck (ADMIN=4.648), political and ethnic conflicts or civil unrest (POE=4.805) environmental degradation (ENVID=4.425), lack of access to land

(LOAL=5.869), poor office accommodation facilities for University staff (POOA=5.142), non-implementation of rural and agricultural development policies, programmes and projects (NONIP=3.699) and bad or deplorable conditions of rural roads (BADRO=4.886), lack of electricity power supply and pipe borne water (LOEPS=2.903), and poor training of staff (POT=4.836).

These findings have several implications. First and foremost, the socio-economic cum cultural factors can either make or mar the success of any rural and agricultural development projects. Take for instance, lack of funds and social amenities in rural areas could lead to high rate of rural-urban migration of youths and financial hiccups. Specifically, lack of economic empowerment of rural farmers could abate self-help project execution. Besides, low level of education of rural people could affect their ability to adopt introduced innovations. Even when they possess the wherewithal, there is bound to be re-invention, which may discourage others from adopting introduced innovations.

Furthermore, administrative cum infrastructural factors such as non-involvement of rural people in project planning, execution and evaluation could lead to rejection of such projects by the rural dwellers, since such projects were not designed to meet their needs and interest. According to UNICEF (1990), Community Participation is "to empower the rural masses with the knowledge and means to decide their own priorities, to improve their skills, to meet their own needs, and to obtain their maximum satisfaction". In endorsing the above view, Paul (1986) conceptualized community participation as "a process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of rural and agricultural development projects rather than merely receiving a share of the project benefits".

According to MAMSER (1989), for proper community participation, the ruralites need a good leadership, who is knowledgeable about the general problems of the community, and who is also acceptable to the generality of the people in that community. Moreso, the community members must show a sense of co-operation with the leaders. Besides, the deplorable conditions of rural roads could encumber vehicular movement or accessibility to rural areas and that could affect evacuation of farm produce from rural areas to urban centers. For rural development to take place in any social systems, there must be a corresponding development of the agricultural sector. There must be a drastic or substantial transformation of agriculture from subsistence base to market or commercial oriented agriculture accompanied by improvement in the standard of living of the rural farmers through provision of rural infrastructural facilities as well as subsidized farm inputs.

Conclusion

The development of any nation starts from the grass

roots through transformation of the rural and agricultural sectors. The findings of this study revealed that there were no markets, no secondary schools and no commercial banks in the study area. Besides, it was found that the socio-economic cum cultural factors as well as administrative cum infrastructural factors were the major classes of problems abating rural and agricultural development in the study area. As long as these problems persist in Benue State, our rural areas and agricultural sector shall continue to lag behind without development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure rapid and accelerated development of our rural and agricultural sectors in Benue State in general and University of Agriculture, Makurdi and its host community in particular, the following recommendations are germane based on the findings of this study:

- i. Rural Infrastructural facilities such as access roads, secondary schools, commercial banks, marketing facilities, pipe borne water, electricity power supply should be provided by well to do individuals, the private sector as well as the Federal, State and Local governments.
- ii. Agricultural facilities such as subsidized farm inputs, improved varieties of crops, feed mills, improved veterinary and extension services should be provided by the government and the private sector.
- iii. Integrated rural and agricultural development approach (IRAD) should be adopted by the government in tackling the problem of rural and agricultural underdevelopment. In other words, multi-sectoral or multi-disciplinary approach where by rural and agricultural development projects are embarked upon at the same time is recommended.
- iv. Contract farming approach, whereby farmers are supplied with farm inputs on contract basis to farm and produce the expected products which are then sold back to the supplying agency should be adopted, considering the fact that majority of rural farmers are wallowing in abject poverty.
- v. Adequate funding of University of Agriculture, Makurdi to facilitate execution of people-oriented projects that have impact on members of the host community, since you cannot run a University with peanuts,
- vi. Participatory administration that is characterized by bilateral and homophilous interpersonal communication should be adopted by the University administration and members of the host community in resolving all communal conflicts, since there can be no meaningful development in a chaotic environment, and
- vii. Mechanization of agriculture through supply of farm machinery and other farm inputs.

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