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RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION-THE UNDP APPROACH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Quite a variety of meanings are attached to the concept of Rural Development. One way is thinking of it in terms of the provision of certain amenities in rural areas. The other way is thinking of rural development basically in terms of the fight of the war against poverty especial among the disadvantaged population of the country who are generally in the majority and are located in the backward non-urban areas of the country. In addition, rural development is a cell for rural participation as well as the promotion of the well being of the rural majority and the production of a surplus of a size and nature that will enable the fulfilment of reasonable part of those national development requirements that are not exclusively rural.

In the light of the conceptual difficulty and its applicability posed by Rural Development in much of the developing countries, the United Nation, touched by the apparently frightening level of poverty, decided to combat poverty and underdevelopment on a global scale through the agency of the United Nations Development programme (UNDP). In discharging its duties, the UNDP sources for funds for development from the developed economies and allied organisations while at the same time, it disburses the funds source for development to needy countries. The main objective of the UNDP is to attack poverty and underdevelopment and to some extent, it is achieving that in Nigeria, through the adoption of various strategies and approaches towards achieving a level of poverty alleviation, employment and capacity building at the local, state and national levels.

INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

In the Social Sciences generally, there is more or less a variety of meanings attached to the concept of Rural Development. There are a number

THE UN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In the light of the conceptual framework provided in the preceding section that the United Nations, touched by the obvious frightening rate/level of poverty, especially in the rural areas of developing countries, decided to combat poverty and underdevelopment on a global scale. To achieve this, the UN set up the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The UNDP is found in all countries of the world. In discharging its duties, the UNDP sources for funds for development from the developed economies and allied organisations while at the same time, it disburses the funds sourced for development to needy countries. The programme aims at attacking poverty and underdevelopment just as conceptualized by Overseas Development Institute and Uma Lele. To achieve this, the UNDP convened a world summit from 11-12 March, 1995 tagged: **WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT** - which fundamentally sought to address issues such as poverty, unemployment and social disintegration.

The summit, which took place in Copenhagen, Denmark, had the UN General Assembly's mandate/objective of recommitting the world to:

- (i) put the needs of people at the centre of development;
- (ii) put the needs of people at the centre of international co-operation;
- (iii) stimulate international co-operation through Governmental, Private and Non-governmental initiatives;
- (iv) assist countries in the implementation of efficient social policies and
- (v) address ways to achieve balance between economic efficiency and social justice in a growth, equitable and sustainable development.

The Summit's objectives as outlined above were based on Article 55 of the United Nations' Charter - which seeks to provide higher standard of living, full employment and development to all nations and their citizens.

THE SUMMIT'S RESOLUTIONS

The World Summit for Social Development holding in Denmark, resolved among others to:

- (a) identify common problems of socially disadvantaged groups, promote their integration into society and ensure a more effective delivery of social services to the disadvantaged;

- (b) mobilize resources for social development at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- (c) make recommendations for more effective action by the United Nations System - an embracing name for all UN Agencies in the sphere of social development.

The UN Resolution No. 47/92 mandated the Summit for the purpose of achieving its objectives resolutions - to address 3 core issues:

- (1) Enhancement of social integration;
- (2) Alleviation of poverty; and
- (3) Expansion of Productivity Employment.

It is note worthy that this mandate is being executed in many developing nations, including Nigeria.

THE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a country with 88.5 million people as at the 1991 population census. This figure no doubt has grown higher probably to between 98 - 104 million at 2.5 - 3% annual growth rate. More than 70% of this figure are not only found in rural areas but are engaged predominantly in agricultural activities. Nigeria, though a country with a vast area of natural and human resources - has all the potentials as a great nation, but she has unfortunately pushed herself into the group of poor nations. At the last count, Nigeria is graded as the 13th poorest nation of the world.

As is evident in studies of development and under development, the cardinal yard stick for measuring the level of development of a nation are:

Education - where the indicators are Literacy Rate, Gross Enrolment in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions;

Health - Access to health Services maternal mortality, Infant mortality, Life Expectancy population Growth Rate, access to health Services. Population per hospital bed, population per doctor, energy and protein consumption level, etc.

Micro and Macro Economic Variables such as Gross Domestic product (GDP); Export/Import Ratio, Growth Rate of the Industrial Sector, Manufacturing Index, Employment Rate, etc.

INDICATORS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Education: - Literacy Rate - 5% (female 41%)
(Male 64%)

Gross enrolment ratio - Primary schools - 72%
- Secondary Schools - 20%
- Tertiary Institution - 35%

Health - Access to health services - 72% 81% Urban
62% Rural

Population per hospital bed - 1,277 people;

Infant mortality Rate 97/1000

Maternal Mortality 750/100,000 live birth;

Life Expectancy - 52 years

Population Growth Rate - 3.3% P.A.

Water/Sanitation Environment; Access to safe water -

average of 50% 81% Urban
30% Rural.

In some areas, the only 15% of the Urban and 5.56% of the rural dwellers have access to bore hole or pipe borne water. Statistics show that 74.08% of Nigerians use pit hole latrines, 3.02% use the pail system, 4.02% use the hillside (e.g. much of Northern Nigeria uses this hillside approach) and only 14.6% the water system. Trends in Macro - economic variables of Export Earnings%

Petroleum - ₦4.9 billion in 1990. This figure declined to ₦13.3 billion in 1993 and provided 25% of GDP, 85%

Government Revenue and 95% of the Export value.

Agriculture: - Growth rate in this sector was 5.3% in 1986/88 and 4.1% in 1982.

The Industrial Sector had a growth rate of 8% in 1989/90 and 2/1% in 1991/92. In terms of the manufacturing Index, an index of 16% in 1987/1993 period was obtained - (Akan, 1996 in Business Trend).

The low manufacturing index led to the laying off of many workers, which led partially to the rise in unemployment. It is to be noted that about 70% of the Nigerian population make up the available work force and those between 15 years to 60 years of age constitute about 40% million (Akan, 1996:14; S. O. Olayide 1972:1975) The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was 5.4% between 1988 - 1993 as against 8 - 12% in newly

industrialised countries. The result of all of these, as any careful and painstaking analyst would see, is increase in poverty level, which Haralambos, (1980:140-144) categorises into three:- absolute, relative and subjective.

A journey into all statistical benchmarks, would cursorily show that Nigeria is a poor country which needs help. In terms of Macro-Economic level of development, which basically is characterised by:

- (i) a growing economy;
- (ii) full employment;
- (iii) price stability;
- (iv) equitable resource allocation;
- (v) foreign trade balance a.k.a. balance of trade and
- (vi) management development - Nigeria can at best still be referred to or described as a poor nation - considering the dismally poor state of application on a national frame/scale of the above six characteristics.

THE FOURTH COUNTRY PROGRAMME

In order to achieve any meaningful socio-economic growth, it was envisioned that there is the need for the development of skills that would lead to the creation of self-employment, self reliance and entrepreneurship. The development of this kind of situation or condition requires unusual creativity and boldness - a condition which the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) fits and attempted to fulfil in Nigeria during the 1980s and early 1990s under General Babaginda's regime. The worldwide economic depression of the 1980s and early 1990s, compared to those of the 1930s, which like the 80s and 90s was global, caused rapid deterioration in Nigeria's economy, leading to shrinkage in industrial output, reduction in commercial activities, loss of or reduction in employment opportunities - has finally created a situation of high unemployment rate, especially among young school leavers including even university graduates.

As a consequence of this, the government in a bid to create enabling environment for the development of skill, has had to put in place different strategies geared at reducing her numation amongst the comity of poor nations of the world. It is in this light that one can appreciate the role and contribution of the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) towards poverty alleviation, sustainable human and infrastructural

development in Nigeria. Against this background, the UNDP approved some 73.6 million U.S. dollars (about ₦6,035.2 million) for nine different programmes aimed at poverty alleviation, sustainable household food security, provision of income generating activities and employment opportunities in what is referred to as The UNDP Fourth Country Programme in Nigeria from 1992.

These programmes are:

- (1) **Agriculture and Rural Development:** In this, 15.7 million U.S. dollars had been approved which is specifically focused on the most vulnerable groups in the rural communities. Five states, selected on the basis of their poverty profile, are slated to benefit from the agricultural activities component of the programme, while six other states were slated for support in artisanal fisheries development activities.
- (2) **Assistance to the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Sector:** Under this, the sum of 13.7 million U.S. dollars was earmarked which was essentially designed to facilitate the development of Industrial Development Centres (IDCs), industrial estates and industrial incubators on a sustainable basis as well as facilitate entrepreneurial development for the small - scale and medium industrialists sprawled all over population~~s~~ regarded as urban in Nigeria.
- (3) **Management Development:** This sub-sector under the UNDP which attempts to alleviate poverty in Nigeria, had 9.5 million U.S. dollars allocated to it. This was aimed at assisting government to improve the co-ordination of external aid resources in the country. The emphasis in this sub-sector is on what is termed capacity building through expensive management training programme as well as other assistance to various institutions at the Federal, State and Local Government levels.
- (4) **Women In Development Programme:** The UNDP voted the sum of 10.5 million U.S. dollars in this sector which was designed specifically to benefit rural and urban poor among Nigerian women. The support at this level is geared towards arousing consciousness of being in women and was intended to be given at the community level to help women unite into purposeful interest groups, develop and secure their economic means through the generation of income and improved access to credit facilities

- (5) **Mass Literacy:** The sum of 8 million U.S. dollars was given for this programme, which is expected to be used as seed money to mobilize an additional ₦20 million (Twenty million Naira) from the Federal Government and ₦20 million (Twenty million Naira) from each state government to significantly reduce illiteracy in Nigeria.
- (6) **The Health Sector:** Here, some \$6.1 million was approved for use particularly to benefit Kano and Katsina States where the following have been identified as target areas;
 - (i) Primary health care,
 - (ii) Control, prevention and treatment of Vesico Vagina Fistula (VVF)
 - (iii) Recto Vaginal Fistula (incontinence of Urine and faeces in women) and
 - (iv) Community based vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons.
- (7) **Nigeria National Statistical and Information System:** This unit received additional strength with the sum of \$5.1 million. The assistance which the UNDP extended to this area was considered very important because Nigeria, like many developing countries, faces problems in the production, co-ordination and use of timely, reliable and comprehensive statistical data required for decision making - for national development formulation and sound economic management.
- (8) **Environment and Natural Resources Management:** This sub-sector received \$2.6 million to ginger the efforts of government in environment and natural resource management. The assistance granted by the UNDP in this direction is expected to act as seed money for an Environment and Natural Resources Management Programme in which the UNDP itself assisted government in designing initially.
- (9) **The Urban Informal Sector:** This sector received \$2.4 million in support of government effort to build national capacities to provide urban informal sector workers with better and more opportunities for training, access to market and credit as well as to sustain and expand their businesses. The goal of the UNDP in this sub-sector is focused on informal sector workers in the areas of automechanics, metal work and wood work in the Lagos, Aba and Kano metropolis.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

In a bid to bring to fruition the lofty ideals aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria, the UNDP chose to use what it calls The Programme Approach. To the designers of the programmes, this approach is geared at allowing nationals of each of the countries where it is found, to be fully involved in the programme, right from the conception through to the planning and to final implementation. Both The Programme Approach and what it calls National Execution (NEX) are new concepts introduced into the UN Technical Aid framework. This, UN agency believes that "there is no country or people that is totally without capacity. Each person, each country has - a certain capacity that is the ability to perform any given function. The capacity may be adequate or inadequate" (Akan, 1996:16).

From the above, we can deduce that the UNDP, had decided to help in building up capacity where such a capacity was inadequate or virtually non-existent. To address the aspect of implementing what it believes in various countries, the UNDP approaches this, beside the two approaches above, with "The Bottom Up - Approach which contrasts with "Top to Bottom or Bottom Down" Approach. All the "Bottom" up or down" approaches imply is that the UNDP aid scheme involves or are directed primarily to the rural poor, who should be party to the initiation, planning and implementation aspects in all the stages of developmental efforts.

The Bottom Approach, it is reasoned, provides the rural poor the opportunity to have a say in activities that concern them. It also provides the privilege for them to be involved in the conceptualisation, the planning and implementation or execution of the programmes. By this action, this thus helps them (the rural poor) to build up their capacity in the area of programme conceptualisation, programme planning and programme implementation. This stage by stage involvement of the rural poor consequently provides further opportunities for National Execution (NEX). This vision agrees with the prescriptions provided by Abasiokong (1982:48-76; 106-127) and to Ekong's Rural Development and the persistence of Rural poverty (1991:9-27).

CONCLUSION

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) serves an all embracing function in contemporary developing societies of the world. It has

virtually taken over a number of functions hitherto performed by specialised agencies of the United Nations.

Gripped by the alarming level of underdevelopment and rural poverty, the UN resolved in Resolution 47/92 to mandate the UNDP through a summit on Social Development to address 3 issues. In doing so, it is the belief of this author that Nigeria could move away substantially from the characterization of rural societies, population and economics as identified by Chitamber (1973:129-135), and Ekong (1983:45 ff) into a force that could be looked upon by still less privileged nations.

The acts of the UNDP in collaboration with state and national committees in tackling the problems associated with rural development and poverty alleviation, it is hoped, will free it from the somnolence and frustration of the rural masses which the pen of an anonymous writer levels thus:

I was hungry, and you formed a committee to investigate my hunger;
I was homeless, and you filed a report on my plight;
I was sick, and you held a seminar on the situation of the under-privileged;
You investigated all aspects of my plight and yet
I am still hungry, homeless and sick (Excerpted from Journal of Food Policy in Abasiokong 1982:ix).

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