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## **Rural Development Practice in Nigeria: How Participatory and What Challenges?**

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## **Rural Development Practice in Nigeria: How Participatory and What Challenges?**

### **Abstract**

Participatory rural development has evolved in the past 60 years as a development process and discourse that should encapsulate a wide range of views, voices and stakeholder contributions. How has this approach been followed in Nigeria's rural development practice? This paper reviews the practices and challenges of participatory rural development in Nigeria from a historical perspective emphasizing on the colonial system and post-colonial military and civilian governance. The paper observes that participatory development has not been practiced in the real sense of the concept in rural development in Nigeria. While highly centralized and top-down exploitative rural development practice dominated the colonial system up to the period of post-independence military dictatorship, not much significant difference have been observed within the current civilian democratic experiment. The paper argues that while long years of military rule in Nigeria have made it impossible for the development of effective institutional arrangements that could sustain true participatory democratic culture, a lack of citizens' capacity to participate in development intended for their benefit has posed the greatest challenge in achieving sustainable participatory rural development.

**Keywords:** participatory rural development, Pre-and post-independence practice, Challenges, Nigeria, review

### **Introduction**

Participatory rural development has evolved in the past 60 years as a development process and discourse that should encapsulate a wide range of views, voices and stakeholder contributions. This can be seen in the various definitions from scholars and international organizations (see ESCAP, 2009: 5-6). Cohen and Uphof (1977) see participation within the framework of rural development as entailing people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes. This definition, more or less, places the people at the core of rural development practice. Pearse and Stiefel (1979) framed their definition of participation as the

organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control. Pearse and Stiefel's definition attempt to make a case for scaling-up of people's involvement in development projects affecting them. The import of this definition seems to be advocating partial empowerment of the people in development process that affect them. Ghai's (1988) definition of participation as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded seems quite in agreement with Pearse and Stiefel's position. Ghai's view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. In this sense, participation necessitates the creation of organizations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant.

Much more liberal and broad-based definition of participatory rural development is associated with some international organizations namely, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. The OECD (1994) sees participatory development as partnership which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This entails negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda, and ultimately places the people as actors instead of being beneficiaries. In the same vein, the World Bank (1994) sees participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. A more fundamental theoretical explanation of participation was provided by Arnstein (1969: 216) who defined participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.

Participatory development has evolved as a norm of development practice in the early 1950s mostly embedded within the context of community development in most developing countries. However, its relevance as a people-centered development approach was rediscovered in the 1970s in response to the rising awareness that previous approaches and practices of rural development did less to incorporate and empower local voices as well as placing them at the centre of local development initiatives. The world conference on agrarian reform and rural development (WCARRD-Rome, 1979) fundamentally contributed in pushing participatory rural development to the frontline of development practice in the 1980s and 1990s when it declared participation by rural people in the institutions that govern their lives as a basic human right: 'if rural development was to realize its potential, disadvantaged rural people had to be organized and actively involved in designing policies and programmes and in

controlling social and economic institutions. WCARRD saw a close link between participation and voluntary, autonomous and democratic organizations representing the poor. It called on development agencies to work in close cooperation with organizations of intended beneficiaries, and proposed that assistance be channeled through small farmer and peasant groups' (IWG, no date: cited in ESCAP, 2009: 5). Participatory rural development has become deeply entrenched as rural development norm among governments, donors and international organizations, but how does this approach work in Nigeria's rural development practice? What are the challenges of fostering participatory rural development practice in Nigeria?

This paper addresses this important question by reviewing the practice, challenges and opportunities of participatory rural development in Nigeria from a historical perspective which will attempt to compare successive regime rural development plans. Following this introductory section, the second section discusses Nigeria's rural areas as a way of capturing the various development challenges that provide the basis for development practices. The third section reviews the trend of rural development practice in Nigeria from a historical perspective. This is to capture the various policies and programmes of successive regimes from colonial and post-colonial periods. The fourth section takes analytical insights into the contents of the various development plans to understand the extent of participatory practices of associated regimes. The fifth section discusses the general challenges of evolving and sustaining a participatory approach in rural development in Nigeria, with concluding remarks.

### **Nigeria's Rural Areas and Development Challenges**

A great majority of Nigeria's population resides in the rural areas. For instance, the 1963 Census recorded 80.7% of the national population as rural residents. By 1985, the proportion had slightly gone down to 70.13% and was estimated that a further drop to 69% in the proportion was expected in the 1990s (Muoghalu, 1992). In 2005, it was estimated that 53% of the Nigerian populace resides in the

rural areas (World Development Reports, 2005) and in 2011, the world Bank reports recorded 51.6% of Nigeria's rural population. The general consensus seems to be that the rural areas in Nigeria are very heavily populated. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, contributing about 45 per cent of GDP. The agriculture sector employs about two-thirds of the country's total labour force and provides a livelihood for about 90 per cent of the rural population. Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava, yam and cowpea – all staple foods in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also a major producer of fish. Yet it is a food-deficit nation and imports large amounts of grain, livestock products and fish. Apart from serving as the agricultural base for the country, the rural areas constitute the major sources of capital formation as well as huge market areas for domestic manufactures (Olatunbosun, 1975; Abdu and Marshall, 1990; Olayiwola and Adeleye, 2005). Indeed, the rural areas are involved in a whole lot of primary economic activities that are important in sustaining the entire Nigerian economic system.

Despite Nigeria's plentiful agricultural resources and oil wealth, poverty is widespread in the country and has increased since the late 1990s. Over 70 per cent of Nigerians are now classified as poor, and 35 per cent of them live in absolute poverty (IFAD, 2011). Poverty is especially severe in rural areas, where up to 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and social services and infrastructure are limited. The country's poor rural women and men depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 per cent of Nigeria's food is produced by small-scale farmers who cultivate small plots of land and depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems. Surveys show that 44 per cent of male farmers and 72 per cent of female farmers across the country cultivate less than 1 hectare of land per household (IFAD, 2011). This implies that Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops.

Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has long been neglected. Investments in health, education and water supply have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has

extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water. The productivity of the rural population is also hindered by ill health, particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Neglect of rural infrastructure affects the profitability of agricultural production.

Despite the fundamental contributions to the national economy, the rural areas are not attractive to live in given the general absence of basic infrastructure (potable water, roads, electricity, healthcare systems, and financial institutions, among several others) and poor quality of life occasioned by persistent poverty. Attempts at solving the rural problems had been the concern of the governments over the years. Several programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), among others, have been witnessed most especially at post-independence era. What were the contents of such programmes and how did they respond to the diverse needs and development challenges in the rural areas? The next section takes a historical look at the various public commitments to rural development in Nigeria from colonial period to the present period.

### **Rural Development practice in Nigeria: a historical perspective**

Nigeria as a geo-political entity has existed for close to ten decades beginning from 1914 when the northern and southern Nigeria was formally amalgamated by the British colonial masters. 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. 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 centres 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).

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. 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.

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, and water, among several others.

The second national development plan (1970-1974) came as 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 its 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 centres 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 programmes and policies such the structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the vision 2010 were prominent. The structural adjustment programme, 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 programme 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 programme 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 programmes, intra and inter community cohesion activities.

The plan for the implementation of DFRRRI programme 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 programme in the second phase starting in June 1987. In pursuit of its objectives, DFRRRI also planned to co-operate with organizations like Nigerian Building and Road Research Institute (NBRRI) as well as rural water supply and sanitation programme (RUWATSAN). The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) was not to be involved in direct implementation of the programmes. Rather, for the purpose of the programme implementation, the directorate used as its main agents, the states and the local governments, to execute its programmes. The funds for the programme 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 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 programme 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.

If the goal of rural development practice is premised on improving the quality of life of the rural populace, it means relevant policies and development plans should clearly have the benefit of involving the intended beneficiaries by giving them the chance to articulate their problems and interest at every level of activity. According to Javan (1998), involving people in decisions that affect their lives has the empowering effect of self-confidence, self-esteem and knowledge as well as helping in developing new skills among the participants. Such active involvement opportunities entail not only a process, it is also the end of development (see Chambers, 1997; Moser, 1989; Asnarulkhadi, 1996). To what extent was the rural populace involved in the various rural development plans? The next section addresses this issue by discussing some depth and insights into the various regime practices and the associated development plans in Nigeria.

### **Participatory rural development in Nigeria: insights into development plans and regime practices**

Rural development practice in Nigeria often aims to, first, improve the quality of life of all members of the local community, and second, to involve all members of the community in the development process. To what extent has the second aim of participatory development been practiced in Nigeria? Based on Conyers' (1986) 'top-down', 'bottom-up' and 'partnership'

approaches<sup>1</sup>, rural development practice in Nigeria beginning from the colonial to post-independence has evolved at various levels as measured in the various rural development plans. The colonial rural development approach exhibited very high degree of centralized and top-down practice characterized by excessive economic exploitation than the aim of improving the standard of living of the rural populace. Rural development in Nigeria under the British colonial system (1914-1960) did not carry clear specific plans. However, their interest in the rural areas was furthered by the need for material and human exploitation in the form of primary agricultural products and cheap labour to sustain their commercial interest and advance the economic and livelihood wellbeing of the colonial masters. Consequently, rural development was synonymous with highly centralized and well-organized system of disempowering and exploiting the rural populace and its resources. 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). The nature of social relations was unambiguously hierarchical with the colonial masters in London, their representatives in urban Nigeria, as well as the commoners settling in the rural areas. While the colonial masters and their representatives were interested in excessive dispossession and accumulation through directives, the commoners in the rural areas were responsible for local labour with low wages and without knowledge about how decisions affecting them were taken.

The 'parasitic' character of social relations in rural development practice did not end with the British rule, post-independence Nigeria inherited such mode of rural development practice but to a certain extent. Frequent military intervention in Nigeria's post-independence governance, meant longer years of military rule (1966 to 1999 with a brief democratic interlude between 1979 and 1982) than civilian democracy (1999 to date). Under the military rule, various rural development plans came up as: a) the First National Development plan (1962-1968); b) the Second National Development plan (1970-1974); c) the Third National Development plan (1975-1980); d) the Fourth National Development plan (1980-1985); e.) the post- Fourth National Development plan (1986-1998). Quite like the colonial arrangement, rural development practice under the post-independence military system was equally highly centralized and 'top-down' often conceived, legitimized and implemented by few individuals or groups who had access to public offices. Although the military used the State and local government systems to hand down development packages, the rural populace hardly got involved in the processes of development given that the local administrative leaders were military appointees who only acted for and on behalf of their masters. Consequently, every rural development programmes for Nigeria during this period carried uniform mandates and mostly were agriculturally-based programmes. The river basin development authority initiated and consolidated by the military and inherited by the civilian governments, still retain its uniform

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<sup>1</sup> In a top-down approach to rural development, main activity of development is centrally initiated and managed by the government or authority while the community assumes a passive position. The bottom-up approach to rural development is actively initiated and managed by the intended beneficiary community while government and service providers merely play supportive role as facilitators and consultants. When the development attempt is combined or initiated by both the government and the community, it implies partnership between the people and government (see Finger, 1994; Nikkah and Redzuan, 2009).

mandate and objectives of rural development in total disregard of the huge environmental, socio-economic and physical diversities of the various regions of Nigeria. Akpabio (2010), in this particular case of the river basin development authorities, had argued that most public policies and programmes in Nigeria hardly succeed because of utter disregard for local socio-ecological circumstances of operation. This argument applies to all other agricultural and rural development policies and programmes under the military regime except the second development plan (1970-1974). The uniqueness and participatory character of the second development plan could be appreciated against the backdrop of the circumstances of the post-civil war where the need for rehabilitation, and building a united and egalitarian society necessitated interest and subsequent engagement of relevant stakeholders. Such context of participatory governance and development soon could not be sustained given subsequent military intervention. In this case, all other subsequent development plans claimed participation, though falsely, at inter-governmental levels, which in reality amounted to mere directives and communication of what to implement at the state and local government levels.

The emergence of democratic governance beginning from 1999 was to offer the best opportunity for participatory rural development at every level. For one, the constitution of Nigeria guarantees, in principle, some levels of autonomy to state and local authorities. Second, the power of democratic election and political informational debates offer remarkable political incentives of participatory development at every levels of governance. However, these standards have not yet been internalized in the Nigerian political space. Every known rural development programme beginning from 1999 hardly reflect the true perspectives of the diverse stakeholders and voices. Nigeria's democratic governance still remains relatively young. Most rural development efforts revolve around the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) which are all duplicated at State levels as State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The

NEEDS was formally launched in May 2004, and was designed to serve as a home-grown economic empowerment and development programme. Although the NEEDS and its local wings preach stakeholder participation, the entire planning process is in total negation of the principle of participatory development. The formulation of terms of reference, appointment and composition of facilitators as well as problem identification are often pre-determined at the top. Local stakeholders are only co-opted as members of project implementation committee whose role nominally revolves around site identification for project implementation. The entire process that even result in the composition of the 'so-called' stakeholder implementation committee members is often fraught with excessive politicization as opportunity to reward and patronize the local members of the ruling political party. Participation in this context is selective, sectional and elitist, with the implication that real development benefits do not really get to the intended beneficiaries. If participation is to give voice to local populace to define their problem and proffer solutions in a way that will improve their wellbeing, it is argued here that Nigeria's democratic governance has not fared well in participatory rural development.

At the institutional level, rural development programmes and policies are still driven by individuals and select few in public offices as was common practice during the military dictatorship. Just as in the military era, the survival of every rural development programme is often closely tied to regime longevity and individual influence in a given regime and department of government, rather than the relevant institutional structures. Taking example of the Vision 2010 of the Sani Abacha regime, Aluko (2006) observed that inspite of the best ideas and intentions encapsulated in the reform agenda, the subsequent regime led by Olusegun Obasanjo terminated the plan because of sheer hatred for Abacha. He went on to observe that Obasanjo's tenure elongation programme was explicitly premised on guaranteeing the survival of his Vision 2020 plan. In the case of NEEDS, Osagie (2007: 29) particularly observed a lack of institutional coordination and absence of effective

leadership as most important problems that limit efforts at guaranteeing sustainable and long-term rural development programme. The participatory contents of every rural development programme under the current democratic arrangements often assumes rhetorical public statements while actual practice, at best, is narrowed to administrative decentralization. This is when States and local government areas duplicate such federal initiatives at their respective domain. While Nigeria assumes a constitutional federal structure, real autonomy is still lacking in practice as the States and local authorities still depend on the federal government for funding. States and local level authorities hardly take independent rural developmental initiatives as they practically depend on the federal authorities.

### **Challenges and Concluding Remarks**

Participatory rural development in Nigeria has not recorded any remarkable impact in practice. The greater part of efforts to develop the rural areas was packaged around agricultural development. This dominated the colonial and post-colonial periods up to the late 1980s when some elements of broad conceptualization of rural development were witnessed through investment in physical and social infrastructures. Emphasis on agriculture alone reflects the single handedness or unilateral approach to rural development where government alone conceptualizes the problem of the rural areas and consequently decides on what it perceives as best for every rural areas and its people. This equally gives some insights into the exploitative nature of most public rural development programmes as agricultural development is often targeted, not in the true sense of developing the rural areas and its people but as a means of guaranteeing stable food supply for the leaders and urban elites. Given that Nigeria's economy is agrarian-based, the rural areas were perceived to be important productive centers to service the foreign exchange earnings of the country. As rural people's livelihoods do not entirely depend on agriculture, its overemphasis functions much to the detriment and neglect of many other productive sectors of the rural economy which could place some areas at a

relative comparative advantage. Thus, other key sectors of rural development including rural small scale craft industries and human capital development through investments in wide range of social opportunities including education, healthcare etc. were ignored. This is an indication that the people's voices were hardly engaged in discussing the best developmental options for them.

Long years of military rule have been seen to be one factor contributing to the absence of institutionalized participatory rural development. The military were not able to create enabling institutional environment for participatory governance given that power revolved around individuals and groups within the military hierarchy. Every rural development package including DFFRI, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Green Revolution, etc. had no record of evidence to the fact that the people were consulted. The development plans were framed at the seat of power by one or few individuals and handed down for implementation without recognition of the variation in local environmental and socio-economic circumstances of the people. When Nigeria started experiencing democratic governance, the needed institutional foundation for democratic and participatory governance was already not nurtured. This has affected the functioning of Nigeria's current democratic experiment as 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 not only to corrupt public development processes, but also serve to inhibit the proper functioning of public policies and plans that are meant for rural development.

Citizenship participation and input in any policy formulation and programme implementation processes is very crucial since the outcome of such arrangements is bound up with popular views and inputs and is useful in empowering local level development actors and intended beneficiaries as well as strengthening the sustainability of development project. Current challenge in Nigeria's participatory governance space border on: a) citizens capacity to participate in development intended for their benefit and; b) transparency guarantees in the

intended processes of participation. Given that over 70% of Nigerians are classified as poor (IFAD, 2011), it means the basic human and socio-economic capabilities that would guarantee substantive participation in development practice is absent (see Sen, 1999). While some public rural development programmes boast of participatory contents, actual practices are often narrowed to unilateral top-down package as those in the policy and administrative leadership still dominate every rural development spaces. Communities are often handed water facility where either there are many natural sources of supplies or the cost of access marginalizes the greatest number of the people. Given a lack of basic citizen capabilities and capacity to participate in public rural development programmes, the transparency in the processes of delivering such public development benefits becomes increasingly diminished. Policy officials and implementers often manipulate development programmes to the dictates of ethnicity, clan affiliation, financial gratification and undue favoritism, among several other corrupt practices.

In conclusion, it is argued that rural development practice in Nigeria over the years has been a one-way practice still centrally packaged by public officials and development agents, and handed down to the people who become passive recipients of such public development benefits. Such top-down rural development perspectives are still very much common even in the current democratic experiment. This is explained with reference to a lack of basic capability on the part of the citizens to participate and negotiate in the processes that are intended for their own development benefits. To make rural development practice participatory, the paper recommends that massive public investments and spending should be directed at improving social opportunities such as education, healthcare and economic empowerment. Such investments in social and economic opportunities will contribute in improving the basic capabilities of the rural populace and will contribute in guaranteeing effective participation in any development process.

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