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## ONE-VILLAGE ONE-PRODUCT (OVOP): A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*One Village One Product (OVOP) is a participatory rural development approach focusing on local specialties. It is a strategy to develop value based on local available resources by the local people. The principal actors are the inhabitants of a community, and it is neither a project nor an undertaking of top-down nature, imposed by and implemented under the auspices of external entities like the central government or donor agencies. This paper demonstrates how the concept of OVOP can be used to effectively mobilize the rural populace in Nigeria for enhanced productivity through effective participation. First, the paper x-rays the fundamental principles of OVOP. It further dwells on the practices, drawing examples from nations where the concept has been used successfully to aid rural transformation. The key successes of OVOP were also discussed, while the challenges and issues relating to the propagation of the concept were highlighted drawing implications for Nigeria. The paper recommends that the concept of OVOP be adopted and factored into the current Agricultural Extension Transformation Agenda (AETA) in order to enhance sustainable rural transformation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** One village-one product, rural development, rural transformation, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

One Village One Product (OVOP) Programme is a community centered and demand driven regional economic development approach which originated in Japan in Oita in the 1970's. It is a unique approach to local development by which villages and regions are transformed into economically vibrant entities through utilization of local potential (i.e. resources) and creation of unique and appealing local products and environments. A particular Village (or region) chooses a product for which it has comparative advantage and specializes in its production through adding value (processing), quality control and marketing. The OVOP philosophy is about helping enterprises in a local area or region to focus on a product or industry which is distinctive to that area. The OVOP institution helps the business owners to make their products competitive in local and international markets by contributing skills, money,

technology and networks while drawing on numerous service providers to accomplish this. The OVOP movement encourages the mobilization of local human, material, and cultural resources to create value-added products/services for domestic and external markets.

OVOP was proposed to prevent de-population and loss of energy in Oita; find and nurture products/industries that could best reflect and benefit each region; and eradicate heavy dependency upon government, and to promote autonomy and willingness amongst regional people (Yamagami, 2006). The concept was initiated by the Japanese former Governor of Oita State, Dr. Hiramatsu, who used his previous experience and exposure in the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) to try to find a solution to Oita's serious rural economic decline. At the time, other regions in Japan relied on external resources i.e. budgetary support from the central

government and huge investment by private companies for their economic growth. Based on the concept of OVOP, Oita State has now shown successful stable development and economic growth for the last few decades.

This approach has attracted, and continues to attract wide international appeal, particularly in developing countries, Nigeria in particular, because of its potential to reduce poverty. Other countries that have embraced OVOP include Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, China, Cambodia, Philippines, & Indonesia in South East Asia, and Malawi, Ghana, Tunisia and Uganda in Africa.

The One Village One Product (OVOP) movement is one example of a successful regional development policy (JICA, 2008). In 2006, the Japanese government launched the OVOP Campaign as part of the Aid for Trade initiative at the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Conference. In 2008, at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and G8 meetings, the Japanese government reconfirmed its commitment to African development including its support to OVOP programmes. So far, twelve African countries – Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Zambia, Madagascar, South Africa, Senegal, Ghana, and Malawi – have adopted the OVOP approach. In these programmes, people are encouraged to identify local material, natural, or cultural resources and to devise methods to add value to them.

The objectives of this paper is first to clarify the uniqueness of the OVOP approach as initially elaborated in Japan, to examine how it has been applied in other countries, and understand critical issues about OVOP. This paper also compares the One Village One product (OVOP) movements of Japan, Thailand, and Malawi to examine their similarities and differences and to provide Nigeria which is adopting the OVOP approach with

measures necessary to overcome existing constraints.

## **OVOP: THE CONCEPT AND THE PRACTICE**

OVOP is a distinctive approach to rural community development in which latent local community creativity and potential is triggered, through effective local leadership and human resources development, and directed at community revitalisation through development of unique products that have strong market appeal. Its overall aim is to develop and consolidate local self-organising capability for sustainable local development and poverty reduction. The classic OVOP concept was built on three principles, namely (i) thinking locally but acting globally (ii) self-reliance and creativity, and (iii) human resources development. The first principle encourages local entrepreneur to produce at least one product of commercial value per village using available natural resources, local craftsmanship and creativity. To promote self-reliance, government subsidies were not provided for OVOP groups. Instead, government aids come in form of technical assistance and infrastructural support for product development, assistance for marketing and distribution to reduce the transaction cost that local entrepreneurs have to bear if they were to execute product development and penetrate markets themselves. Under the third principle, human resources are developed through training and capacity building in terms of leadership (dynamic and visionary), management and community buildings as communities become engaged in the OVOP processes (AbdulKader, 2009). In all, local people take the lead, independent of external prompting and largely on their own creativity and self-reliance, to make unique products from local resources for their own good and to capture markets external to their locality. In the process,

they develop their expertise through production of competitive products, their livelihoods improve due to enhanced incomes, and their communities develop closer bonds at the same time.

The OVOP rural community development concept has been implemented in different ways where it has been introduced, depending on the overall objective and the unique circumstances of each country.

OVOP was not intended to be the main or only socio-economic development strategy for the Oita prefecture, nor was it considered a substitute to attracting industries to Oita. Rather, it was meant to be a complementary strategy to other interventions, but with special focus on promoting economic and social wellbeing of rural communities through leadership action (JICAF, 2008). Emphasis was placed on economical use of resources and environmental conservation, owing to scarcity of natural resources in Japan generally. To deal with the problem of market circulation and sharpening competition, value addition focused on promoting product originality, uniqueness and diversity. Human resource development targeted leaders or those with potential to become leaders, taking the priorities of OVOP into account.

In terms of administrative structure, OVOP in Oita is not overseen by any national body. Initially it was coordinated by a section in the Oita prefectural government called the OVOP Promotion Council but this responsibility was transferred to the Oita International Exchange Promotion Committee. OVOP activities are financed by donations from the private sector (e.g. Tokiwa Department Store) rather than from the prefecture government.

OVOP in Oita depends a great deal on partnership between government, the community and the private sector. Individuals and groups within the community undertake entrepreneurial

activities on their own initiative; government provides technical support, infrastructure and marketing information; and the private sector, with government's assistance, contributes to community development (and also benefits in the process).

### **Propagation of OVOP**

Mr. Hiramatsu proposed the movement to regional leaders and delivered lectures on the movement to people of all sectors in all the regions of Oita. The movement was further publicized through mass media, while Prefectural research and guidance facilities were established for technical support in various industries (Hayashi, 2007). Also, training and education were offered to regional and industrial leaders. A special system for the distribution and sales of OVOP products was set up to aid product marketing. Achievers of OVOP were also rewarded to serve as motivation for participants.

### **Outcome from OVOP in Japan**

OVOP has revitalized the rural economies by leveraging local specialties and local cultures in Japan. It has symbolized the uniqueness of each community; hence raised the pride of Local people and their own identity even in rural small communities. OVOP has spread all over Japan

### **Keys for the Success of OVOP**

Since its inception, OVOP has achieved key successes. OVOP has created lots of awareness among people and has explored the unrealized potential of each village through continuous trials and enduring efforts while seeking higher added-value in products. OVOP has developed markets and distribution channels for various products (Adachi, 2005). People's talents have been well nurtured and developed. Importantly, OVOP created and sustained effective institutional collaboration.

OVOP aimed to increase the incomes of rural community peoples regarding aspects of human

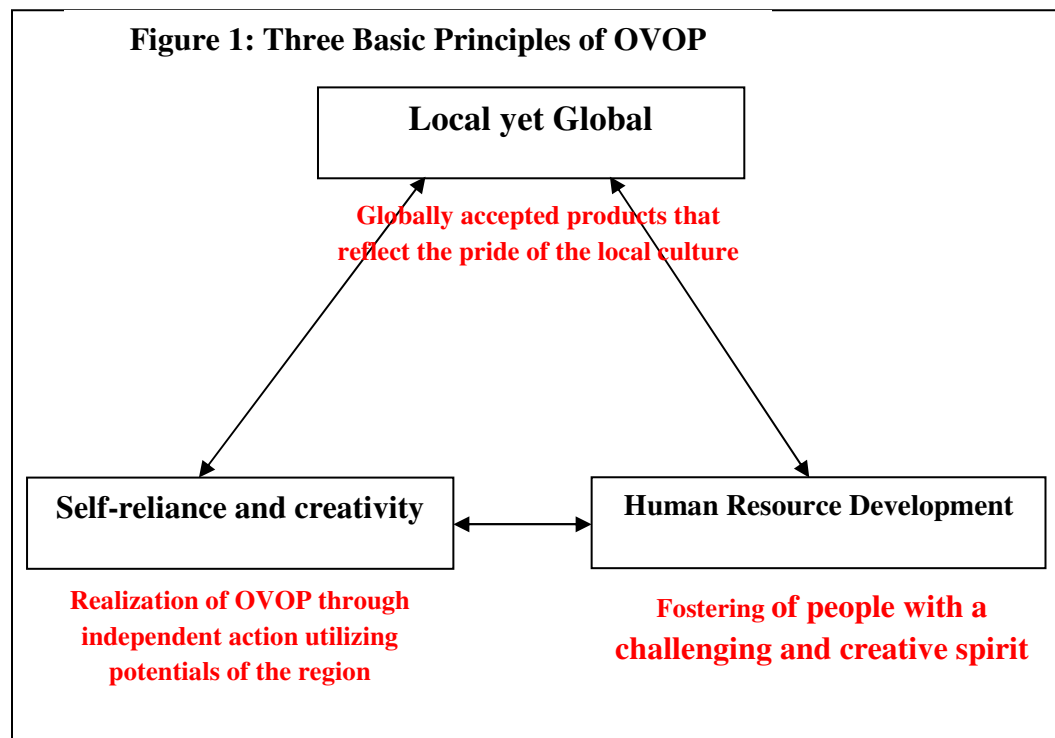
resource development. According to Adachi (2008), the 9 main factors of success in the OVOP project in Oita Prefecture were: land, labor, capital, technology, marketing, networking, local government, mass media, natural environment, international exchange and local diplomacy.

### Fundamental principles of OVOP

- (1) The movement of OVOP is a sort of communal endeavour expressed in various terms such as regional promotion or development, village development and municipality development. It differs from a simple economic development project targeting a particular sector, like the development of medium and small enterprises, that of a rural manufacturing industry or that of an exporting industry.
- (2) OVOP is a “movement”, the principal actors of which are the inhabitants of a community, and is neither a project nor an undertaking of top-down nature, imposed by and implemented

under the auspices of external entities like the central government or donor agencies

- (3) Three fundamental principles of OVOP depicts originality and ingenuity on the part of a local community which are its essential attributes and what counts most is the creation of a commodity that is unique to a particular locality by mobilizing such originality and ingenuity and by exploiting locally available but undeveloped resources (local resources). To speak of self-reliance and self-help by relying on originality and ingenuity, for the international cooperation in the context of OVOP movement, it is essential to share the spirit of OVOP movement, which should not be the imposition of a particular formula or a particular mode of approach to the problem.
- (4) OVOP movement is not a simple process of fabrication of things but an objective-oriented endeavour for the development of human resources through fabrication of things (Hiramatsu, 2008).



### Challenges

1. Marketing of OVOP product and services:  
Constraints of marketing include poor access to market, credit, training, value addition technology, machineries, storage facilities, extension service, processing facilities, and quality control.
2. International cooperation for financing and management
3. National cooperation for OVOP assistance
4. Social aspects of OVOP (Kuroka *et al.*, 2010).

Other challenges could be politicisation, shortage of capable leaders, institutional capacities, and coordination. According to Gondwe (2007), submission of proposals seeking huge investments without a track record of business experience and lack of understanding of OVOP concept were the major challenges.

#### **Practices:**

- allowing the committees at the local level to make their decisions while working hand in hand with the implementing secretariat
- strengthening accountability among the people through involving them in programme planning, designing and monitoring
- converting local endowments (particularly local plants and minerals) into potential products (or production resources)
- job creation through the building of the necessary infrastructure in rural areas for instance roads, water, processing facilities etc
- monitoring and evaluation of the programme activities to ensure attainment of the desired outputs and impacts for that matter.

#### **Examples of OVOP experience and successes around the World**

OVOP, an endogenous development model, is a strategic movement for local people to identify local products of which they are proud and develop them into competitive products which will be accepted in the domestic market as well as the

global market, which will also greatly contribute to reinvigorate the local economy.

The model has shown the economic success not only in Japan but also aforesaid developing countries like Thailand, China, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia. The model has focused on only one product from one village which is not suitable from biodiversity view point but in fact, the village which adopted this model made more products and gained more profit from it than previous time.

#### **OVOP in Malaysia**

After 16 years, the implementation of OVOP in Malaysia has been strengthened. The project has also been monitored by a central agency and Implementation Coordination Unit under the Prime Minister's Department. Additionally, several ministries have collaborated with OVOP implementation. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro based Industry was responsible for food production and the Ministry of Tourism was responsible for homestays. Fascinatingly, homestay was one of the most successful OVOP activities in Malaysia Igusa, (2011).

#### **The Thai 'One Tambon One Product' Model**

The Tambon is an administrative unit in Thailand roughly equivalent to a Ward in Nigeria. 'One Tambon One Product' (OTOP) is Thailand's version of OVOP. The legacy of centralised administration in Thailand arising out of centuries of absolute monarchism made a centralized approach to OVOP the natural choice. Although OTOP (like OVOP) has adopted a bottom-up implementation modality that hinges on government-community-private sector partnership, and is based on the same three principles, it is formulated and implemented by the Thai central government, with strict guidelines for product development and marketing. OTOP (like OVOP) is

not promoted as the only or even main development strategy for Thailand; rather it is part of the Thailand's dual track development policy of fostering the nation's competitiveness, while stimulating domestic consumption and empowerment of grassroots communities.

The administrative structure for OTOP is much more defined than that of OVOP. OTOP is directed and coordinated from the top by the National OTOP Administrative Committee (NOAC), with sub-committees comprising officials from line ministries at national, provincial and district levels.

OTOP activities are based on an annual project master plan, which is funded directly from the national budget. The budget for OTOP is managed by NOAC and is used to fund activities in the OTOP annual project master plan, but not to provide financial support to producer groups. These groups are encouraged to seek funding from the regular budgets of government ministries and agencies, banks and the private sector.

Unlike OVOP which is based on a gradual, long-term development strategy, OTOP aims at rapid development of community entrepreneurship. Among the measures promoted to achieve this is periodic designation of certain individuals or groups as 'OTOP Village Champion' and assigning 'number one' or five star status to certain products based on government-set selection criteria for value addition. OTOP focuses primarily on producing outstanding products that can compete successfully in urban and external markets.

OTOP does not only create jobs and income in communities, the Thai government also aimed to promote Thai wisdom in its OTOP project. Surprisingly, 76,876 products have been registered as OTOP products, including foods and beverages, clothes, decorative items, and spa-related items (Khon Kaen Province. 2008). To control the quality of products, the Thai government has applied a 5-

star grading system to the assessment of local specialties. Only 5-star products can be exported to other countries. Currently, OTOP products are among Thailand's major exports. Japan has supported Thailand's development of OTOP and promoted OTOP products in the Japanese market since the beginning. Currently, the biggest demand has come from Japan, followed by the United Kingdom, France and Germany (Adachi, 2007).

### **The Malawi OVOP Model**

The origin of the Malawi OVOP programme can be traced to earlier visits to the Oita prefecture in Japan by high ranking Malawi government officials to see how the OVOP approach to local development had transformed local communities there. The minister of agriculture visited first in December 1997, followed by the former President of Malawi, Dr Bakili Muluzi, in October 2003. Both visits made such an impression on the Malawi government that a strategic decision was made to adopt OVOP as a full-fledged national development programme. The overall goal of the programme was to empower community to generate equitable incomes and wealth, while its mission was to generate incomes and wealth for the Malawian society by community mobilisation to produce value added goods and services that are marketable in order to reduce wealth disparities. Underlying the programme is zoning of production, processing and marketing of goods and services, the idea being that communities should direct their efforts towards the production of goods and services in which they have a comparative advantage over other communities.

The Malawi OVOP programme is managed through an elaborate institutional arrangement that starts from the central government and cascades down to the district and community levels.

The responsibility for coordinating OVOP activities at district level is assigned to a District

Commissioner in each of Malawi's 28 districts. Each District has an OVOP Committee which reports to the District Assembly. The District OVOP committee has multiple roles which include (i) promoting the OVOP concept at village level (ii) facilitating formulation of OVOP projects (iii) supporting preparations of OVOP proposals (v) submitting viable proposals to the OVOP Secretariat (vi) supporting implementation of approved OVOP projects, and (vii) liaising with the Secretariat on any OVOP related issue. Lower down are Area and Village OVOP Development Committees which promote OVOP activities in their respective areas.

While the OVOP administrative structure is top-down, project conception, development and approval takes a bottom-up approach. At the community level, any group that is engaged in a local productive activity can apply to the OVOP district office for certification as an OVOP entity. It submits a proposal containing an annual business plan and the required technical, financial and marketing support. At district level, the OVOP office or committee analyses the plan and provides guidance to the relevant community group on how its plan can be improved, and how the group should manage itself and its business with the help of extension workers to be certified as an OVOP entity. At the central government level, the National OVOP secretariat examines the proposals forwarded to it by the District OVOP office and awards certification to those with merit. The OVOP Secretariat arranges for the necessary financing, in addition to providing technical support in various areas including packaging, food processing, quality control and business management. This is done with the help of the OVOP Technical Support Centre which coordinates various government institutions and universities. Government has been providing financing to OVOP projects and

activities but plans are under way to hand over this function to micro-finance institutions.

### **Nigerian experience**

In line with its mandate of poverty alleviation, employment generation, wealth creation and value reorientation, Abuja Enterprise Agency embarked on the OVOP initiative, a strategy being adopted to bring about economic empowerment on a massive scale whereby communities identify local products of which they are proud and develop them into competitive products which will be accepted in the domestic markets as well as the global market (Abuja Enterprise Agency, 2012). Maduekwe (former Nigeria Minister for Foreign Affairs) in a visit to an OVOP exhibition in Japan asserted that the OVOP initiative is a celebration of creativity, imagination and the passion for a more inclusive global economy (The Punch, 2008).

In FCT, the OVOP strategy was planned to be implemented in the 6 Area Councils namely AMAC, Abaji, Kuje, Kwali, Bwari, and Gwagwalada. Shea Butter was selected for the OVOP pilot project among the other products in the FCT food map. This was to span over a period of 3 years in 3 communities namely Nuku and Rimba in Abaji Area Council and Rubochi in Kuje Area Council.

Shea butter was selected based on the following reasons:

1. There is global focus on Shea butter at this time
2. Shea trees are found in abundance in the FCT, naturally growing in the wild and are therefore an abundant resource whose potentials can be maximized.
3. Shea butter is an age old product that has been used locally for food, skin care and general medication. It is therefore a readily available product especially in the rural communities.

5. It has value in both local and international markets based on its uses and appeal. It is a leading export commodity in Africa.
6. Shea butter has high value in the international market especially in the cosmetics and body products industry. It is currently used in the chocolate industry especially as a substitute for cocoa.
7. Women are active participants in the business of Shea, hence the project was seen as very strategic in empowering rural women in the FCT thereby delivering Abuja Enterprise Agency's (AEA's) mandate of economic empowerment and poverty reduction.

As at March 2012, 165 women have undergone the Quality Improvement Trainings, and four cooperatives have been formed following the Group Formation and Organizational Development Trainings.

#### **Implications of the experience of other countries for Nigeria**

The transferability of development experience from one country to another can be a challenge due to differences in history, culture and socio-economic endowments. However, the experience from other countries, such as Malawi and Thailand, suggests that the OVOP concept can be successfully assimilated and integrated with other development interventions if it has strong political support at the top, if it has a strong income generation motive and is focussed on value-addition, if it is well understood and supported by local communities (who essentially are its main implementers), if it has sound institutional and coordination arrangements, and if the role of government (central and local) is limited to providing technical support, infrastructure and market information, while local communities are left to make product choice in response to market forces. The interplay between these elements needs

clear thinking, planning, and execution. The starting point is to consider the conditions favouring the introduction of OVOP in Nigeria, as well as the policy Institutional factors that must be taken into account to ensure that the concept is properly implanted into the country's development framework.

#### **Conditions favouring the introduction of OVOP in Nigeria**

Nigeria has ideal conditions for the introduction of OVOP to transform the livelihoods of people in rural areas. These include a well defined poverty reduction policy framework, an extensive and well tested local government administrative system and a rich experience with implementing poverty reduction strategies from which to draw.

#### **Poverty Reduction Policy and Implementation Framework**

The Nigerian Government has long identified widespread poverty as the single most important hurdle in the country's development, and has been pursuing a relentless and sustained campaign to reduce it or, if possible, eradicate it outrightly. Several programmes have been implemented by successive governments to address poverty problem. This includes Better Life Programme, ADPs, NARIs, NFDP, etc

#### **The Nigeria Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA)**

Nigeria investment in agriculture is exceptionally low averaging approximately 2% of government expenditure. This is exemplified by poor ranking in agricultural indices e.g. mechanization intensity of 10 tractors per 100 ha of land (Indonesia is 241 tractors per 100ha); irrigation of 0.8% of arable land (Thailand has irrigated 28% of arable land). Nigeria is the World largest importer of US wheat to the tune of ₦635b per annum; the second largest importer of rice

₦356 billion per annum. Sugar and fish importation remains ₦217 and ₦97 billion per annum, respectively. Food importation grows at 11% per annum (FMARD, 2011). Unfortunately, the imported items are those that can be produced in abundance in the country. This ugly situation prompted the formulation of ATA to revitalize the agricultural sector. The ultimate goal was to create an industrialized, high growth, diversified economy, creating jobs and wealth as well as providing security for the people. This is intended to be achieved through i) import substitution agricultural development; ii) export-oriented agricultural sector; iii) growing value-added agro-processing sector; and iv) backward integration into higher value added manufacturing. Provision of correct policy, regulations and efficient administrative framework also remained a major objective. Under the arrangement, Government intends to i) focus on agriculture as a business and not as development project; ii) focus on value chain for commodities where Nigeria has comparative advantage; iii) develop strategic partnership (with State Governments, local Governments, related ministries, private sector, farmers groups and civil society) to stimulate investment to drive the market-led agricultural transformation; and iv) focus sharply on youth and women (FMARD, 2011). The commodities being promoted under the value chain approach include cassava, rice, cocoa, soybean, sorghum, maize, oil-palm, cotton, livestock, fisheries and horticulture.

#### **Critical Success Factors for OVOP in Nigeria**

Successful introduction and implementation of OVOP in Nigeria is contingent on a number of factors that must be given careful thought. Even in Oita, OVOP faced several challenges, notwithstanding Japan's advanced economy and technology, which included local and external resistance, mobilising communities effectively and

developing competitive products. The challenges that must be overcome in Nigeria include the following.

#### ***Commitment by the Top National Leadership***

Experience has shown where OVOP has been successfully implemented as a national programme (e.g. Thailand, Malawi, etc.) that 'buy in' by the top national leadership is extremely important to give it a high profile among contending development programmes. This is very important for Nigeria where a large number of poverty reduction programmes are being implemented by different sectors. It is crucial for those officials to understand that while OVOP is primarily a local economic development approach, it also has important community and human resource development dimensions as well. Otherwise its total value might be lost if it is looked at from its poverty reduction benefit alone.

#### ***Appropriate Model to Adopt***

While OVOP is primarily a local economic development model, there are important variations in its concept and implementation. As indicated earlier, the Japanese (Oita) 'model' emphasises community self-reliance and benefit, as well as gradual build-up to generate gross national satisfaction (GNS). Developing and marketing products that are competitive nationally and internationally is, of course, of primary importance, but developing human resource and enhancing community cohesion and pride are also crucial considerations for the success of the programme. On the other hand, the Thai model places emphasis on rapid, government aided externally market-oriented product development and upgrade with very limited focus on overall community development. Which OVOP model to adopt, and how to customise it to Nigerian circumstances, should be clearly thought through in advance.

Secondly, it is important to consider the appropriate institutional framework for the programme. For example, there should be a dedicated coordination unit under the new Federal Department of Extension in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD). What should be the composition of the steering committee? What structures should set up all the way from the federal government level down to community level to implement the programme, including promotion of public-private-NGO-Community partnerships? How would the activities of the different stakeholders be monitored and coordinated with other ongoing poverty reduction strategies? Most importantly, how will the programme be evaluated and its impact assessed to ensure that it realises its goals and objectives? This last point is extremely important because impact assessment is often not built into many government programmes.

Whatever the model selected, it might not be a good idea to try to implement the OVOP programme country-wide without first establishing on the ground the conditions that might favour or hinder its successful implementation. OVOP should be piloted in carefully selected districts to establish its most ideal implementation modalities, particularly with respect to local leadership development, institutional support (for business, financial and technical services), and coordination of government (federal, State and local), private sector, NGO and community efforts. The successful development of the State Development Programme (SDP) pilot would serve as a good example for the establishment of the Local Government Development Programme (LGDP) as a scaling up.

#### ***Development of Local Leaders***

The success of OVOP is highly contingent on dynamic and entrepreneurially minded local leadership. Means must be found by which an entrepreneurially minded leadership can be developed to give direction to local economic transformation through OVOP. Local leadership that emerges spontaneously from communities would be far more effective than that which is engineered from the above.

#### ***Countering the Entrenched Dependency Syndrome***

While the rural, local and community development efforts that have been implemented in Nigeria in the past have meant well, they have also inadvertently led to the entrenchment of a highly developed dependency syndrome among local level operatives. Virtually all local leaders and their subjects are accustomed to looking up to the central government for development solutions and all local government systems are configured to act as mere conduits for transfer of resources from the centre to the local level. This mental frame runs counter to the OVOP concept which emphasizes self-reliance and creativity. Measures must be taken to develop and nurture an entrepreneurial and self reliant spirit and culture among local communities so that they can see themselves as holding the key to their economic well being and success. Government should be seen as only providing support towards product development research, market information, transport and communication infrastructure, and export promotion.

#### ***Provision of Adequate Finance***

Access to finance and credit is critical to economic enterprise. However, it is risky for government to finance the economic activities undertaken by communities under the OVOP programme, because the whole idea of self-reliance community entrepreneurial action will be lost. Government credit and finance schemes failed

because many of the recipients mistook the money to be “national cakes”. A culture of borrowing and paying back must be carefully nurtured for that purpose. Government should leave financing of OVOP activities to microfinance institutions so that communities develop a culture of working with credit institutions.

### ***Community Participation***

Community participation in local development in Nigeria is quite low. The reasons for this include low awareness arising from inadequate sensitisation, participation fatigue, pre-occupation with the daily struggle for survival, and repeated disappointment from unfulfilled expectations arising from bottom-up participatory planning processes. Because citizens are not provided with adequate space for involvement in decision making, they are often not aware of opportunities decentralization offers. Thus, generating and sustaining community interest in the OVOP concept activities must be of paramount importance. This is achievable if the economic benefit can be clearly demonstrated.

Getting communities at the grassroots level to participate effectively in local development projects is not a simple task, even if they are expected to be the primary beneficiaries. In addition to the impediments mentioned above, communities also take account of the opportunity cost of participation and whether the projects in question are ‘sensible’ from their point of view, (i.e. whether they can lead to tangible solutions to their problems). In this respect, an approach that has sustainable and long-term beneficial outcomes is likely to generate higher levels of participation than others.

A related issue that must be addressed is the potential tension between community (group) and individual interest in money generating enterprises. Community cooperation in Nigeria is more

common with respect to social activities (weddings, funerals, etc) than with economic enterprises where individualism as well as family and kinship ties are more pronounced. Ways must be found to ensure that the individuals’ spirit, a key driver of economic enterprise, does not prevent development of community cohesion and pride, which is one of the most important objectives of OVOP.

### **Implementation Strategy**

Pilot scheme in selected local governments in at least one State in each agroecological Zone of the country is recommended. The concept can then be scaled up after its successful implementation at the pilot level.

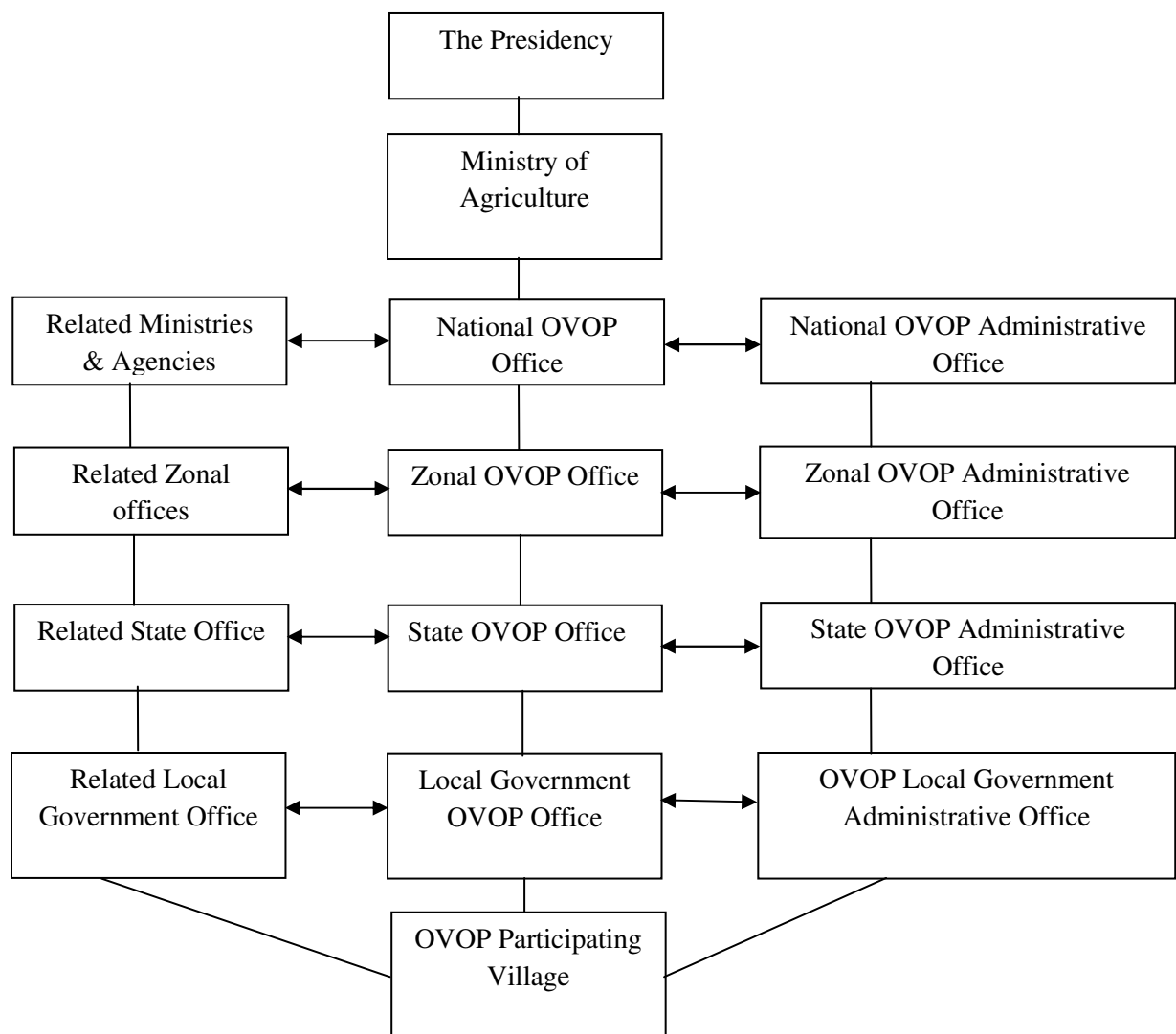
At the apex will be the National Steering Committee comprising of the relevant Government Ministries and affiliated institutions representatives, as well as other key private sector stakeholders; who will be responsible for providing overall strategic direction to the program and guiding resource allocation. Below the Steering Committee will be the OVOP Secretariat at the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), which should coordinate the Programme activities with the Zonal OVOP committees, in addition to providing the strategic policy direction. Below the Zonal OVOP committees are the State committees which will be in direct contact with the OVOP Beneficiary Committees to oversee all their activities.

The OVOP programme can initially be piloted in 3 Wards per local government. These pilot Wards should be technically assisted to enhance value addition, human capital development as well as marketing of their products; because it is expected that the beneficiary communities will specialize in the production, processing and marketing of the identified products which have comparative advantages in addition to potential markets, both local, regional and international. Thereafter, the programme can be rolled out across

the country following expected recorded successes. The strategy will be co-funded by Government, private participating stakeholders and Development partners.

The strategy will be to facilitate the OVOP secretariat for the effective and coordinated delivery of services and support within the context of the OVOP strategic plan. The following strategic action will be critical:

1. Appropriate OVOP structure that supports better delivery of the OVOP strategic plan
2. Focus and align OVOP activities within the National budget
3. Establish a strategic presence in the OVOP States through State OVOP facilitation teams/committees
4. Engage with all stakeholders, private, public institutions and NGOs
5. Streamline and strengthen these partnerships.



**Figure 2: Proposed Administrative Structure for OVOP in Nigeria**

### **The role of the governments**

Notwithstanding the importance of local people's initiatives, the government needs to play an important facilitating role, especially in technical development, producer promotion, and product marketing. The success of OVOP was due to the continuous support given by the local governments (Okura, 2007).

In the field of technical support, national research institutes (NARIs) should help improve the quality of local products and offer local producers training programmes.

The granting of awards or prizes by governments is necessary to contribute to heightening the motivation of local residents. This will contribute to enhancing participation and commitment by local people to the OVOP movement.

The government should help market OVOP products by periodically holding Fair/Product Exhibition and to further promote Local Produce/Consumption Promotion Campaign.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is increasing understanding and appreciation globally, especially in developing countries, of the OVOP concept and its potential for transforming the socio-economic fortunes of communities in rural areas. The current poverty eradication policy framework and implementation modalities, as well as the recent emphasis on exported growth, as contained in the ATA plan, greatly favour an approach of this kind.

A great deal of thought, however, should be given to crafting Nigeria's own unique variant out of the OVOP experiments that have been tried elsewhere. It is important that the OVOP 'model' Nigeria eventually adopts empowers local people to develop entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, to engage in self-sustaining economic activities, to take pride in transforming their communities and

environment, to develop their latent creativity to full potential and to stop looking at government as the provider of solutions to all their livelihood challenges.

This study suggests that, in order to make OVOP take off and work properly in Nigeria with a view to transforming the rural areas, prompt actions are necessary in several fronts. It must be realized that the key success of community-driven regional development was "local people." To make products valuable and sustainable, the government should let the local people choose their specialty to revitalize their area, which is the "Self-reliance and Creativity" idea. What the government could properly help with is provide the local people with technical guidance and support in terms of sales promotion; however, how to utilize people is also a key point. Consequently, "Human Resources Development" is the most important issue for OVOP success. The government would encourage successful villagers who succeeded in the OVOP movement to share their successes and failures with others, called a self-help group. Before creating new OVOP products, the project also needed to be concerned with the "Local yet Global" idea.

Successful implementation of the strategy is expected to significantly contribute to Nigeria's plan of reducing poverty among rural population and will lead to a stable progressive economic and social development for Nigeria. Target communities will have improved productivity and competitiveness including gainful employment for members.

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