Appraisal of Rural Development Programmes in Imo State of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Poverty is universally acknowledged as a societal menace requiring urgent attention. It is largely associated with Africans particularly those in rural areas where a large proportion of the poor are found. This paper sought to determine if government's vision in halving poverty or eradicating extreme poverty in line with the Millennium Development Goals through its numerous newly created agencies and programmes actually matches with efforts and reality on the ground in the rural communities of Imo State. The data were obtained through field observation, oral interviews, and questionnaire administration and a total of 211 households were served. The data received were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that the vision to reduce poverty is indeed there by the presence of multifarious agencies and programmes in the state, but their extent of reach is poor as 82.5% have no schemes in their community which could be said to have imparted to them or their family. Bad governance (43.1%) and corruption (37.0%) were the two greatest factors perceived by respondents as besetting the flow of expected deliverables from poverty reduction schemes. Strategies that would enable the rural poor to start benefiting significantly from those schemes were then suggested, in the light of the fact that intervention programmes are not only insufficient but do not appear to be effective. Strategies such as the empowerment and monitoring of intermediating field workers, the re-kindling of spirit of family and self-help and the employment of tripartite participation in poverty eradication should suffice.

INTRODUCTION

About 70 percent of Africa's poor are rural and Nigeria's population is predominantly rural with rural communities' dwellers making up 70% of the total population. In Nigeria, recent estimate by the World Bank indicates that over 45 percent of the country's population live below the poverty line while about two third of this group are extremely poor (UNDP 1996). Aigbokhan (2000) found out that "an increasing number of Nigerians were living in absolute poverty between 1985 and 1996-38% in 1985, 43% in 1992 and 47% in 1996. Poverty is higher in rural areas than in urban areas". Also it has been shown that there are major gains to be made in reducing poverty by focusing on development programmes.

Many governments of Nigeria in the past have engaged in poverty reduction programmes though many of them were not successful. These programmes had faulty backgrounds, riddled with corruption, no political will to do what is right and follow programmes to a logical conclusion. In some cases the programmes ended up enriching the political and military oligarchy with little or no benefit for the poor (Okeke 2008). According to Iro (2008) some of the rural development focused programmes embarked upon by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the last three decades either lacked ecological and institutional focus and framework or members of the ruling party were favored at the expense of members of other parties.

Presently with Maduagwu's (2007) comment that Nigeria has over the years embarked on many poverty alleviation progammes but majority of these have had appreciable impact, one wonders if true poverty alleviation will not continue to be a mirage. To address the challenges of poverty this day, Nigeria currently has several new poverty reduction programmes in place, with an important objective to help eradicate extreme poverty, in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015. The paper seeks to determine if this vision matches reality in rural parts of Imo State, against the backdrop that even put together all the new measures seem not to be working particularly in rural areas in the opinion of many, who claim their impact is not widely felt and worse still their existence is unknown in the vast proportion of the country side (Ademiluyi 1988; Olayemi 1995; Yusuf 2000 and Iro 2008).

OBJECTIVES

(i)   To ascertain how far reaching the schemes have turned out to be;
(ii) To determine why planned project beneficiaries are not benefiting;
(iii) To identify the leakages (factors) that beset the flow of expected deliverables; and
(iv) To suggest strategies that will enable the rural poor to start benefiting significantly from those schemes.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based largely on primary data. Data were collected through questionnaire administration, personal observations and oral interviews. To capture more questions to add during the survey, the questionnaire design was preceded by personal observations and oral interviews. Personal observation included visits to study communities to see things first hand, and it helped to reveal what perception could not reveal. Two sets of questionnaire were designed and utilized. The first set of questionnaire was designed for heads of households in the residential sector of the study communities. The second set was designed for heads of agencies with the responsibility of poverty reduction through its activities and programmes. The questionnaire contained issues relating to socio-economic characteristics of the people, poverty alleviation agencies which have been imparted to the individual and his family members, specific benefits from agencies/programmes, leakages besetting flow of expected deliverables. The questionnaire administration covered six villages in six local government areas of Imo State. Of the 240 copies of questionnaire administered to various households, 211 questionnaire copies were returned. For the survey, the six study villages were picked through systematic random sampling. The system being first to draw out six local government areas from the twenty-seven LGAs of the state, which served as the sampling frame. And lastly to draw out one autonomous community from each selected local government area. The households were selected randomly from each village. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data analysis is presented. A qualitative assessment of extent of reach of schemes or rather how far reaching these schemes have turned out to be was undertaken for a number of communities. The results are shown in tables 1 and 2. From table 1 it can be seen that 82.5% of the respondents indicated the absence of poverty schemes that have imparted upon them or members of their families. Of the total number of respondents, 98.1% indicated the absence of micro finance bank in their communities, while of the same total of respondents 83.4% have no knowledge of Millennium Development Goals

Table 1: Level of awareness of Millennium Development Goals (mdgs) and extent of reach of schemes/ programmes

Community	Local government area	Schemes Present and has Absent imparted to you and your family	Schemes Absent and has not imparted to you and your family	Presence of micro-finance bank	Absence of micro-finance bank	Aware of MDGs	Not Aware of MDGs
Oboama	Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A	7	28	0	35	0	35
Ihitte aforukwu	Ahiazu Mbaise L.G.A	6	29	2	33	21	14
Dimna nume	Nwangele L.G.A	0	40	0	40	0	40
Umuna	Orlu L.G.A	10	16	0	26	1	25
Odenkwume	Obowo L.G.A	0	40	0	40	0	40
Umuopara	Ehime Mbano L.G.A	14	21	2	33	13	22
Total		37	174	4	207	35	176
Percentage		17.5	82.5	1.9	98.1	16.6	83.4

Source: Fieldwork 2008

(MDGs). Some of these claims are authenticated by the findings of Onyenechere's (2003) and Iro's (2008) study. The situation is similar in all the six communities of the study. The extent of reach is poor since majorities have it that schemes are absent and many are ignorant of the Millennium Development Goals and what it stands for.

However, Government officials in related agencies gave responses that were quite revealing on the extent of reach of their schemes. The respondent from Imo NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) claimed they have toured the 27 LGAs of the state on sensitization workshop and also for planning the implementation of programme. On geographical equality in the spread, they reported having sensitized people in the three geopolitical zones of the state and appointed LGA coordinators for the 27 LGAs. The respondent from Imo LEEMP (Local Economic Empowerment and Environ-mental Management Project) claim they have intervened in 9 LGAs and 150 communities. And for now they are only in the pilot stage, subsequently in the second phase they will scale up to 18 LGAs which is the remaining LGAs in the state. The LGAs they listed as having their presence are; Aboh Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbaise, Ngor Okpala, Obowo, Ihitte Uboma, Onuimo, Orsu, Njaba and Ohaji/Egbema all of which span across the 3 geopolitical zones of Imo State.

The respondent from Fadama II project claimed that they have established their schemes in eleven LGAs of Imo State, namely: Ngor Okpala, Ahiazu Mbaise, Onuimo, Aboh Mbaise, Ohaji/Egbema, Ehime Mbano, Owerri North, Orlu, Nkwere, Oguta and Ihitte Uboma. And these according to them are evenly spread except for Owerri zone with excess of one LGA. According

to the respondent from SDE (State Directorate of Employment), their scheme is in every local government area of the state as the unemployed youths are registered from the Local Government headquarters of the LGAs in the three geopolitical zones. The same applies for SEEDS (State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) which claims to cover 27 LGAs of the state, the ministries, departments and agencies in the state, providing adult education centres and infrastructure. In the words of the respondent from Imo PAP (Poverty Alleviation Programme) their schemes are handy because their selections from the LGAs are always equal and they are easily accessed by Imo people. But results of table 2 show otherwise.

Field observations revealed the absence of projects by many of the poverty reduction agencies of the government in the study communities. From table 2, it can be seen that agencies and programmes such as NEPAD, SDE, NAPEP, SEEDS/NEEDS, SMEDAN, IMO PAP, Microfinance Bank and FADAMA have not offered any benefit nor benefited the people of Oboama, Umuopara, Ihitte Aforukwu, Dim na nume, Odenkwume and Umuna which constitute the study communities. Though there are exceptions in the form of EU MPP6 that provided borehole in Oboama and health centre in Umuopara, LEEMP that provided fish pond in Ihitte aforukwu and borehole in Umuna and lastly Fadama II that provided oil mill in Umuopara and fish pond in Umuna, but generally these efforts are insignificant as a vast majority still have not had their poverty alleviated. Respondents' claims here are authenticated by the results of the works of Njoku (2008) and Okeke (2008).

Obviously the vision does not match the

Table 2: Agencies/Programmes and specific benefits in study communities

Agencies / Programmes	Specific benefits gained by communities					
	Oboma	Umuopara	Ihitte aforukwu	Dimna nume	Odenkwume	Umuma
NEPAD	-	-	-	-	-	-
SDE	-	-	-	-	-	-
NAPEP	-	-	-	-	-	-
EU-MPP6	Borehole	HealthCentre	-	-	-	-
SEEDS/NEEDS	-	-	-	-	-	-
LEEMP	-	-	Fish Pond	-	-	Borehole
SMEDAN	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMO PAP	-	-	-	-	-	-
Microfinance Bank	-	-	-	-	-	-
FADAMA II	Oil Mill	-	-	-	-	Fish Pond
FADAMA III	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Fieldwork 2008

reality on the ground, which is suggestive that certain leakages beset the flow of expected deliverables. In table 3, some reasons were proffered by the respondent from NEPAD such as insincerity on the side of community leaders and the politicization of programmes by politicians. LEEMP is hindered by conflict in some communities, doubt among community members on reality of planned intervention, inadequate operation and maintenance plan and inadequate funding. In the field it was clearly observed that political influence to a large extent affects the flow of expected deliverables e.g. LEEMP alone has forty-five projects in a certain area called Mbaise, while EU- MPP6 commenced its initial activities in this same Mbaise area of Imo State.

Fadama II is constrained by diversion of funds by some beneficiaries, inability of some service providers/contractors to deliver, the capture of projects by elites and politicians and insufficient funds from the funding agencies. SDE is constrained by available resources being too lean to accommodate the number, inadequate statistical data on the unemployed, lack of private sector participation and inadequate funding by the state government. SEEDS/NEEDS is hindered by lack of communication/participation on the part of the people, while reaching the real stakeholders is difficult, interference by politicians and inadequate financing of projects are factors that hinder Imo PAP.

Table 4 shows factors perceived by respondents as besetting the flow of expected deliverables from poverty reduction schemes. From the table it can be seen that 43.1% of the respondents indicated bad governance, while 37.0% indicated corruption. This is because the Nigerian society

is sometimes seen or is referred to as a permissive society, with the implication that something is 'wrong' in some sector of the society. The most single canker worm that has eaten into the fabric of our society today is the problem of corruption. According to Aluko (2000) it has so pervaded the nation that most Nigerians are corrupt in one way or the other.

Other factors perceived as hindrances are bad community leaders (11.4%), poor enlightenment or low level of awareness which leaves them uninformed and ignorant (3.8%), elites interference which they say is manifested in their hijacking of expected deliverables for themselves and members of their extended family (3.3%) and insufficient funds from funding bodies e.g. United Nations Agencies, Federal and State Government etc. (0.9%). The least perceived factor is the exclusion of beneficiaries from the planning stage of a project to its execution (0.5%). However, lack of viable cooperative societies that will facilitate their access to expected deliverables was not identified by any respondent in the six study communities. The reason for this might be because cooperative societies exist in nearly all the six study communities, though their viability varies as observed during the field survey.

In the light of on-going advocacy in the establishment of programmes/projects for the beneficiaries to be carried along from start of a project to its completion as stakeholders, table 5 becomes relevant. This is necessary as the success of community participation requires that the villagers be motivated and involved in the selection and planning of the scheme. According to Bergdall (1993) people's participation in rural development is a popular theme in development.

Table 3: Reasons proferred by government officials of poverty reduction agencies as hindering planned project beneficiaries from benefiting.

Agencies	Reasons proferred
NEPAD	(i) Insincerity of Community leaders. (ii) Politicization of programmes by politicians.
LEEMP	(i) Conflict in some communities. (ii) Doubt among community members on reality of planned intervention.(iii) Inadequate operation and maintenance plan(iv) Inadequate funding.
FADAMA II	(i) Diversion of funds by some beneficiaries.(ii) Inability of some service providers/contractors to deliver.(iii) Capture of projects by elites and politicians. (iv) Insufficient funds from the funding agencies.
SDE	(i) Available resources are too lean to accommodate the number.(ii) Inadequate statistical data on the unemployed (iii) Lack of private sector participation.(iv) Inadequate funding by the state government.
SEEDS	(i) Lack of communication/Participation on the part of the people.
IMO PAP	(i) Reaching the real stake holders is difficult.(ii) Interference by politicians.(iii) Inadequate financing of projects.

Source: Fieldwork 2008

Table 4: Factors perceived by respondents as besetting the flow of expected deliverables from poverty reduction schemes

Community	Local government area	Bad govern-ment	Corrup-tion	Poor Enligh-ten-ment	Lack of viable coope-rative societies	Funds	Exclu-sion of bene-ficiaries from planning to execution	Elites inter-ference	Bad commu-nity leaders	Total
Oboama	Ezeinihitte Mbaise L.G.A	16	9	1	0	1	0	1	7	35
Ihitte aforukwu	Ahiazu Mbaise L.G.A	10	14	3	0	1	1	1	5	35
Dim na nume	Nwangele L.G.A	22	12	0	0	0	0	3	3	40
Umuna	Orlu L.G.A	12	12	0	0	0	0	1	1	26
Odenkwuma	Obowo L.G.A	21	12	0	0	0	0	1	6	40
Umuopara	Ehime Mbano L.G.A	10	19	4	0	0	0	0	2	35
Total		91	78	8	0	2	1	7	24	211
Percentage		43.1	37.0	3.8	0.0	0.9	0.5	3.3	11.4	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2008

This he said was amply demonstrated in Arusha, Tanzania at the "International Conference on Population Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa". They assembled to explore all aspects of participation in African development, yet for all its theoretical popularity, even fervent advocates in reality confess that participation often remains elusive in the realm of practice.

Table 5 reveals specific poverty reduction schemes being desired by the people in the study communities. This is indicative of the need for government intervention, especially for them to liaise with the people to know their priority needs. Not even one of the six study communities has a microfinance bank whilst the greatest need of the people is the provision of micro credit indicated by 30.3% (see Table 5). We acknowledge that the vision for poverty reduction is there, but much effort is still needed to translate it to reality.

CONCLUSION

This paper has appraised rural development programmes in Imo State and contends that intervention programmes to empower the poor do not appear to be sufficient or effective in eradicating poverty. Much of the effort at ameliorating rural poverty is contingent on the provision of an appropriate level infrastructure. Development workers, particularly those in government service, should be keenly aware of this fact if indeed the government is serious about its avowed commitment to rural development. The reduction of poverty is sine qua non to man's desire to live in a peaceful and secure environment devoid of instability,

Table 5: Specific poverty reduction being desired by the people in the study communities

Community	LGA	Desired poverty reduction schemes					Total
		Those Comm. operated	Provision of infrastruc-ture	Provision of micro credit	Enactment of welfare /poor law	Offer of employ-ment	
Oboama	Ezinihitte Mbaise	10	9	5	6	5	35
Ihitte aforukwu	Ahiazu Mbaise	4	15	6	4	6	35
Dim na nume	Nwangele	6	8	19	5	2	40
Umuna	Orlu	5	3	11	3	4	26
Odenkwume	Obowo	4	10	21	5	0	40
Umuopara	Ehime Mbano	2	3	2	18	10	35
Total		31	48	64	41	27	211
Percentage		14.7	22.7	80.3	19.4	12.8	100.0

Source: Field work 2008

criminality and environmental degradation. When the rural poor benefits sufficiently from schemes targeted at them, the issue of poverty will be eradicated from the rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since findings from this research reveal that poverty reduction schemes are not far reaching and bad governance as well as corruption are the greatest factors besetting the flows of expected deliverables, it suggests various strategies which, if adopted would assist significantly in ensuring that planned project beneficiaries actually benefit and the entire rural people in Imo State have their poverty reduced. Government should appreciate the importance of intermediation of fieldworkers who shuttle and liaises between the agencies and the rural population, fully empower them, closely monitor their activities and at random but frequently find out from rural communities how well the fieldworkers are doing their job. The spirit of family and self-help should be rekindled and with government intervention the people be assisted in listing their needs, prioritizing them, planning them, and implementing them starting with short term ones they can easily do with minimal external inputs. Government should revisit and straighten up these poverty reduction agencies employing tripartite participation so that they can get to the grass root and eradicate poverty and they should provide funds adequately too. Civil society organizations should monitor closely activities of agencies to ensure transparency and efficiency in the discharge of duties.

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