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Faisal C Emetumah

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Quality of Life in Rural Nigeria: Three and Half Decades Following Igbozurike and Raza

Faisal C. Emetumah

Department of Geography & Environmental Management,
Imo state University, Owerri
fc.emetumah@imsu.edu.ng

Introduction

Successive post-colonial Nigerian governments made several efforts to uplift the quality of life for Nigerians living in rural communities. These efforts which seem not to have provided the right panacea were mostly centered on increasing agricultural participation and productivity. Still, issues like poverty, unemployment, lack of basic shelter and electric power, dilapidated infrastructure and rural-urban migration still plague rural Nigeria and agriculture has remained one of the largest employers of labour in Nigeria (Auta & Dafwang, 2010). With that backdrop, the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) and the Federal Department for Rural Development (FDRD) in collaboration with the academia, organized a seminar on Quality of Life in Rural Nigeria which held July 6-7, 1983, at ARMTI, Ilorin. The seminar covered relevant issues in rural management and development at that time. The seminar proceedings were themed on four key areas: physiological, physical, psychological and socio-economic dimensions of the quality of life in rural Nigeria (Igbozurike & Raza, 1983). Over 25 academic papers from several authors in various Nigerian universities were discussed and important positions taken. At the end of the seminar, participants agreed that there was still a lot of poverty in rural Nigeria, fueled by inconsistent agricultural policies and few government services together with poor physical and socio-economic infrastructural facilities. Moreover, lack of reliable data was a significant setback to monitoring and evaluation of the quality of life in rural Nigeria at that time. Recommendations made for ameliorating the key problems raised included the setting up of a Rural Technology Unit in FDRD to bridge the gap in information and communication.

It has been 35 years since Igbozurike and Raza (1983), and rural communities in Nigeria continue to face many of the challenges identified in the ARMTI seminar. Poverty and rural-urban migration remain widespread in Nigeria. Further issues of security and terrorism have also

made their way into the array of problems facing rural communities in Nigeria. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to review the issues affecting the quality of life in 21st century rural Nigeria, in order to ascertain what has changed or remained the same since 1983. In achieving the study aim, the parameters used by Igbozurike and Raza (1983) will be linked with current literature on the quality of life in rural Nigeria. The paper will look at the following parameters: socioeconomic indicators, social services and infrastructure, nutritional status, population structure and mobility, institutional frameworks and the role of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs).

Socioeconomic indicators

In the early 1980s, global perception on socioeconomic development was centered on quantitative indicators like gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP). Before that period according to Oyebanji (1983), Nigeria's GNP grew from N220 per person in 1975 to about N298 by 1979 which was a significant growth pace. However, the question was whether the ordinary man on the street felt that growth. In all probability, he did not; and that was mostly due to high unemployment, corruption, inflation and derelict infrastructure, among other matters, which were troubling the Nigerian state then (Okafor, 1983).

It is quite disheartening that three and half decades after Igbozurike and Raza (1983), the overall situation appears not to have improved. One burning issue, for instance, is the rapid rate at which young men and women continue to leave rural communities in search of a better life in urban centers. According to Paul, Agba and Chukwurah (2014) most development initiatives designed to foster development in rural areas are mostly inadequate, despite the fact that more than 60% of Nigerians live in rural areas. See also Shehu, Onasanya, Ursula, and Kinta (2010). The development initiatives have been designed mainly without the contribution of all relevant stakeholders thereby making them only good in theory and unimplementable in reality. The main programs which have been put in place over the past three decades by government to check rural underdevelopment are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Some Government Development Programs that Affected Rural Development Instituted Since Igbozurike and Raza (1983)

	Name of Program	Year initiated
1	Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)	1986
2	Better Life Program for Rural Women (BLP)	1987
3	Family Support Program (FSP)	1993
4	Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP)	1997
5	Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)	2000
6	New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)	2001
7	National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP)	2001
8	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	2004
9	National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (NPIRD)	2004
10	Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS)	2013
11	You-win Entrepreneurship Program	2014
12	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	2015
13	N-Power Graduate Employment Program	2016
14	Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)	2016
15	School Feeding Program	2017

The Table shows that the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) and Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs have been the most specific government efforts towards improving life in rural Nigeria since Igbozurike and Raza (1983). Other programs like National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), School Feeding Program and N-Power Graduate Employment Program are not particularly for rural dwellers even though they are also beneficiaries. Many of these government programs are not yielding the desired results as shown by socioeconomic indicators in which it is clear that the status of many rural dwellers in Nigeria is still pathetically low. This can be attributed to lack of continuity in government policy as some of the programs are scrapped as soon as a new government takes over. Aworemi, Abdul-Azeez, and Opoola (2011) undertook an appraisal of indicators in rural-urban migration in Lagos which provided vital findings since Lagos is the

most populous migrant hub in West Africa. The study used a logistic regression model to analyze rural-urban migration using variables like education, unemployment, health and inadequate amenities. Analyses identified that most people migrate from rural to urban areas because they are ‘pushed’ by low quality of life in rural areas and the same time they are ‘pulled’ by the perception that urban areas have a higher quality of life.

Similarly, social and capital indicators can be used to analyze rural development. These indicators are ‘casual customs’ (membership of sociocultural organizations, networks, ethno-religious identity, culture among others) which enhance familiarity among individuals through regular interactions at social events (Fukuyama, 1999). Olajide (2016) examined the effects of social capital indicators on the development of rural communities in Nigeria. The study avers that individually, these indicators are necessary in fostering development in rural areas but they play better roles when their application is combined. The pace of development in rural areas is significantly affected by the social capital (especially network potential, status, ethnicity and culture) of the individuals within each community.

Social services and infrastructure

The level of development in any community is largely determined by the availability of social services like hospitals, water supply, communication technology and schools. In addition and on a broader scale, access to infrastructural facilities like good road and railway systems, bridges and internet connectivity can serve as indicators of rural development in a developing country like Nigeria. As at the time Igbozurike and Raza (1983) was published, there was a clear distinction and disalignment between rural and urban centers in Nigeria. Even though urban areas were cumulatively less populated than rural areas, most social services and infrastructure were concentrated in urban areas at that time . According to Lawal (2014), people living in rural areas across Nigeria still have insufficient basic infrastructural amenities like good roads, qualitative healthcare delivery and standard as well as affordable education. These deficiencies still linger despite several efforts by government in terms of policy and development plan formulation. In their study on rural infrastructural development in Nigeria between 1960 and 1990, Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005) affirmed that the Nigerian government had designed five national development plans over the years in order to bolster the rate of development in rural areas. However, the study posits that these development plans have not been effective in

ameliorating the poor quality of life in rural Nigeria. Similarly, Ikeji (2013) examined rural infrastructural development in Nigeria and identified three main government efforts in improving the quality of life in rural communities: The Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) developed in 1974, The River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBDAs) established in 1975 and the DFRRRI which began operations in 1986. Many decades after making these efforts, government is still grappling with the immense of problem of rural underdevelopment in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, the last 30 years has shown a reasonable level of enhancement in the quality of life in many Nigerian rural communities. The advent of mobile phones, increased road networks, primary healthcare centers and schools have improved social services and infrastructure in rural Nigeria. Social services and infrastructure in many rural communities in Nigeria have been remarkably improved since 1983. Oguzor (2011) carried out a spatial analysis of infrastructure and social services in Imo State and identified that social and infrastructural development (especially electricity, education and health facilities) in most rural communities is increasing although they are not evenly spread. Access to social and infrastructural amenities in rural communities can be affected by the level of income within the individual communities. This assertion is elucidated by Osumgborogwu (2016) who analyzed the relationship between access to social infrastructure and income in rural communities in Imo State, Nigeria. Regression analyses of data collected for the study show that access to healthcare services, better schools and recreation centers is strongly related to the level of income within Imo state. Therefore, income in rural communities needs to increase and compete with those in urban areas in order to have a commensurate improvement in social infrastructure.

Nutritional status

The nutritional status (accessibility and affordability of a regular balanced diet) of any community goes a long way in determining the quality of life within that community. The nutritional status of Nigerian rural dwellers is usually a product of the extent of agricultural activities (especially cropping) within a given area. According to Omololu (1983), most Nigerian farming communities depend on precipitation during the rainy season and where this season is short the hunger season is correspondingly long. This means that some communities have an extended period to endure without adequate food supply, since they depend mostly on their farmlands for food supply. Food scarcity during the long months after harvest is mainly due to

lack of dry season farming because farmers do not have access to regular water supply or irrigation systems to water their farms.

In the 21st century, nutritional levels and knowledge continue to play a major role in determining the quality of life in rural Nigeria. This is because having information on what a balanced diet means as well as the nutritional values of some food staples enhances the health and wellbeing of individuals. According Shehu, Onasanya, Ursula, and Kinta (2010), even though there is a significant difference in the packaging, calorific and nutritional content of food consumed in rural and urban areas, variations in nutritional lifestyles in rural and urban areas may be insignificant. Educational programs and capacity building on nutrition and dietetics are important for both rural and urban communities.

Issues bordering on nutritional status and its attendant effect on quality of life are better understood when there is an objective comparison between urban and rural areas. Ezeama, Adogu, Ibeh, and Adinma (2015) undertook a comparative analysis of the nutritional status of nursing mothers in rural and urban areas in Anambra State of Nigeria. The study results show that stunting, wasting and underweight are more prevalent in rural areas while there are more overweight mothers in urban areas than rural areas. This result could also be attributed to the higher income of urban dwellers as opposed to rural areas usually characterized by low income farming families. In the same vein, Ene-Obong, Enugu, and Uwaegbute (2001) assessed the determinants of health and nutritional status (socio-cultural issues, economic standing, and nutritional intake) of rural Nigerian women (teachers, farmers and traders). The study ascertained that rural teachers had a better health and nutritional status mainly due to their higher level of education than rural farmers and traders. The study also identified that the level of education is significant in terms of attitude towards abhorrent cultural practices that affect nutrition. Likewise, Awoyemi, Odozi, and Ogunniyi (2012) studied environmental and socioeconomic factors that affect malnutrition in Oyo State, showing that age of child, sanitary conditions and disease infection prevalence were the most significant factors in the malnutrition of children in that part of Nigeria.

The structural formation of any rural family unit is important in understanding their nutritional status. According to Henry-Unaeze and Ibe (2013), the nutritional status of rural pre-school children (2 – 5 years of age) in Abia State of Nigeria was significantly affected by the family

structure. The study posits that nutritional intake of the rural children were mostly determined by the availability of food and there was a lot of meal-skipping by these children as well as significant daily consumption of snacks and fizzy drinks.

Population structure and mobility

The question of how many people are bonafide citizens living within the geographical entity known as Nigeria has always been a contentious issue in the country. Controversy over population figures in Nigeria is premised on the notion that having a higher population with more urban centers results in having more political and socioeconomic power as well as more states and regions for the group in question. However, increased rural-urban migration impoverishes many young people who are forced by poverty and unemployment to relocate to urban centers with the persistent belief that they provide more opportunities and quality of life than rural areas. According to Igbozurike and Raza (1983), the ability of people living in Nigeria's rural communities to move about had been considerably hindered by poor dilapidated road network and this had immensely contributed to rural-urban migration in many part of Nigeria, as it continues to contribute today. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the present structure and mobility of Nigeria's rural population.

Sumaila (2014) examined rural mobility in the Jos Plateau with the view of explicating the state of transportation infrastructure there. The study shows government efforts in recent years have not yielded much result and have even made the situation worse. It affirms the role Global System for Mobile (GSM) communications has made in improving the quality of life in the study area, but argues that because of poor roads, many rural dwellers are unable to move about effectively with their goods. This position is similar to the conclusions of Aderamo and Magaji (2010) on their study on rural transportation and public infrastructure in Kwara State, Nigeria, which established that poor road connectivity between communities was a significant factor in the mobility capacity of rural dwellers.

According to Ikwuyatum (2016), access to standard education and healthcare facilities and availability of good transportation are among the many factors that encourage people living in rural areas to migrate to urban centers despite poor housing and environmental sanitation in the latter. Therefore, the willingness of government to institute policy guidelines that will foster

equitable distribution of socio-economic infrastructure in both rural areas and urban centers becomes imperative.

Institutional framework

It is usually the responsibility of government to design, engender and institutionalize policy guidelines that serve as oversight for everyday living in any sovereign state. As at 1983, the institutional framework for improving the quality of life in rural Nigeria was based on the Fourth National Development Plan (1980-1985). According to Raza (1983), rural development initiatives based on the Fourth plan were implemented mainly through ADPs and RBDAs with little attention to issues like healthcare, housing, and welfare services. Most healthcare facilities and housing programs are concentrated in urban areas thereby resulting in poor health and sanitary conditions for rural communities which in turn reduces their capacity to engage more in productive agricultural activities. In addition, Local Government Councils as the last tier of government is not effective in terms of policy implementation even though they are closer to the people than State and Federal governments (Nwosu, 1983). Given that many of Nigeria's over 190 million population live in rural areas, it is important that adequate institutional frameworks are implemented towards improving the livelihood of rural dwellers.

Even in recent times, the policy framework has not significantly improved the lot of Nigerian rural communities. According to Nyagba (2009), National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (NPIRD) was designed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to raise sustainably, the quality of life in Nigeria's rural areas using a holistic, unified approach. The aims of NPIRD were to increase rural infrastructure, improve human capital development and also reorganize and mobilize the rural populace. However, poor policy implementation has marred the ability of NPIRD to make a meaningful impact in rural communities across Nigeria. The implementation of NPIRD should incorporate the contributions of all relevant stakeholders in both public and private sectors, while focusing on agriculture, agro-processing, mining, manufacturing, marketing and financial systems for rural dwellers.

Egbe (2014) studied rural development in Nigeria in order to ascertain the policies and methodologies used by relevant stakeholders in improving the quality of life in rural Nigeria. The study asserts that most government approaches towards rural development have not

provided the required panacea due to the 'elitist' attitude of some of the policy frameworks that did not favour poor rural dwellers. Moreover, the transient and unsustainable nature of some of these frameworks makes them unimplementable over an extended period of time.

Nigeria can learn a lot from India and China which have successfully designed policy frameworks that improve the quality of life within their rural communities. According to Nwagboso and Duke (2012), rural development in China and India focuses not only on improving agricultural productivity, but also expanding human capital development, technological integration, access to credit facilities, land reforms, and social security programs, among others. Hence, they recommend that Nigeria with her large, should seriously combat corruption and engender rural development frameworks that can significantly improve the quality of life.

Due to the relevance of transportation and mobility in improving the quality of life in rural areas, it is necessary that transportation policy should be well articulated so as to make it effective. According to Oledinma (2015), the main issue with transportation policy in Nigeria is that it is not cohesive with other government policies. Therefore, policies in agriculture, health, education and other sectors should be designed in consonance with transportation policy, particularly for rural areas.

Role of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs)

First operationalized in northern Nigeria (Funtua, Gusau and Gombe) in 1974, ADPs are the oldest rural development effort that has survived while efforts like Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Green Revolution program did not last. The activities of ADPs in 1983 were quite noticeable in many rural farming communities across Nigeria. According to Adejo (1983), ADPs in many parts of Nigeria provide extension services to local farmers, give access to farm credit facilities, construct roads for easy access to farm produce, provide potable water supply and hire out tractors and other equipment to farmers. They were able to do this due to the availability of funding from international development partners, Federal government and State governments. In the same vein, Ukoje and Baba (1983) studied the impact of ADP on the quality of rural life in Ayangba (within present-day Kogi state) and came up with vital findings: ADPs provided rural farmers with access to their Rural Development Centers (RDCs) located in various communities

within the study area, where they could get agro inputs, marketing opportunities, and extension services.

Faced with many challenges, the role of ADPs in 21st century rural Nigeria has diminished significantly as many of them are now a shadow of what they were in the 1980s. According to Auta and Dafwang (2010), over 60% of ADPs across the federation are very feeble due to poor funding, significant reduction in the magnitude of extension services offered, and many valuable employees redeploying to other departments due to persistent inactivity and redundancy. The study asserts that even though funding is very poor, many rural farmers still benefit from the services of ADPs, hence the need for relevant stakeholders to fund the activities of ADPs across Nigeria's rural farming communities.

The area of food security in Nigeria is the bedrock of the existence of ADPs since they are supposed to significantly drive up overall agricultural output. Ibeogu and Abah (2016) investigated the role of the Ebonyi State Government authorities in fostering food surplus through the State ADP activities. The study is premised on the fact that Ebonyi, being a predominately agrarian State should have a robust and efficient ADP. The study posits that the Ebonyi ADP has not lived up to the expectations of rural farmers mainly due to lack of credit financing which implies that farmers are not able to cultivate as much as they would have done if adequate resources were made available.

Generally, ADPs have had reasonable impact on the quality of life among rural farmers across Nigeria having been in existence for over four decades. However, there are still many lingering issues affecting increased agro-processing and production output in many rural farming communities in Nigeria. Omonijo, Toluwase, Oludayo, and Uche (2014) assessed the impact of ADPs on rural dwellers in Isan-Ekiti, Ekiti State, and revealed that ADPs have improved agricultural production through provision of extension services, pesticides, fertilizers and improved seedlings. However, the study indicates that lack of credit facilities and loans for rural farmers as well as modern farming equipment has seriously diminished the potential of these farmers. Similarly, Izuogu and Atesie (2015) in their study on revitalizing agricultural production through agricultural extension services, stated that paucity of funds, poor farmer involvement, unavailability of a holistic extension policy, and weak leadership are some of the issues that militate against agriculture in rural Nigeria.

Because of the invaluable role women and mothers play in societal development, it is necessary to understand the impact of ADPs on the quality of life among rural women. Ezeh, Anyiro, Ogbonnaya and Obioma (2013) examined the impact of ADP in Aguata area of Anambra State on the extent of poverty among rural women farmers and identified that the income and farming capacity of rural women farmers are significantly affected by the activities of ADPs within the communities. Therefore, it is important that the rural farming women should be provided with more credit facilities as well as access to fertile farmlands.

Conclusion

A lot has been achieved since 1983 as more Nigerians in rural communities get access to better markets and prices for their goods and services. The emergence of technological innovations like the internet and GSM phones have facilitated communications in many Nigerian rural communities. However, social infrastructure in many rural communities is still rudimentary and far below international standards. Many people living in rural areas still have less nourishment than their urban counterparts mostly due to poverty and lack of understanding about nutrition and dietetics. The population structure is still significantly affected by rural-urban migration while mobility has increased due to better road network. While institutional frameworks of the past heralded improvement in quality of life in rural Nigeria, governments in recent years have not made much effort in instituting a holistic framework. Specifically, ADPs have remained in existence and continue to do valuable work but they are no longer providing as much service as they did in the 1980s, as a result of poor funding.

In conclusion, improving the quality of life in rural Nigeria should be the immediate mandate of government especially when it is realized that these rural communities harbour most of the populace. Unfortunately, development in the preceding decades have concentrated on urban areas with little of such activity taking place in rural communities across Nigeria. Therefore, it is necessary for all stakeholders in both public and private sectors to team up and significantly bolster the quality of life in rural areas so as to mitigate the continuous exodus of Nigerians from rural communities.

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