

Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) Sustainable Development for Nigerian Rural Communities of Abia State: A Media Evaluation

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Abstract

One of the aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to end poverty in all forms everywhere. This challenging goal may seem realistic but for the fact that poverty is becoming more and more concentrated in certain parts of the World. With extreme poverty taking firm roots in some countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, the region demands a stronger focus. Despite all the remarkable gains from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty still persists at an alarming rate in some specific communities. For instance, out of the 100 million people estimated to be under threat of extreme poverty in 2030, 43 million people are estimated to be in Nigeria and four other African countries. Despite favourable reports, poverty has continued to profoundly affect rural dwellers lives in Abia state. The situation is aggravated by poor infrastructure. Majority of the people continue to experience not only low road infrastructure but poor condition of roads and transport services. Using the survey Methodology and Field Survey of the rural road projects undertaken by the World Bank assisted project (RAAMP) in select communities in Abia State. The study engaged by the media engagement assessed the impact of this intervention in alleviating poverty within the agrarian communities. Finding revealed need for rural education and more funding from the donor agencies. It recommends stakeholders meeting and disclosure of updated policy framework on environmental and social management to tackle poverty.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Agricultural Marketing, Poverty, RAAMP, Rural Communities, Abia State, Mass media

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government of Nigeria initiated the preparation of the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) to succeed the Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP – 2). The project which is financed by the World Bank and French Development Agency and guided by the Government Rural Travel and Transport Policy (RTTP). The main agency of the Nigerian government driving this project is the Federal Department of Rural Development (FDRD) of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD).

The Federal Project Management Unit (FPMU) is saddled with overseeing the project on behalf of the Federal Department of Rural Development (FDRD) and the States who have paid their counterpart will be responsible for the implementation of the project. They in turn set up their respective State project implementation units (SPIU).

The participating States are thirteen (13) namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Plateau and Sokoto. The project is distinct from the earlier ones with its inclusion of agricultural marketing package which entails unlocking agro value chain potentials of rural and household farmers through agro-logistics hub development. Agro-food value chains are designed to increase competitive advantage through collaboration in a venture that links producers, processors, marketers, food service components, retailers and supporting groups.

This is the rural engagement of the government of Abia State in tackling rural underdevelopment as fulfilling one of the aims of the sustainable development goals to end poverty in all forms everywhere.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With extreme poverty taking firm roots in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region demands a stronger focus. Despite all the remarkable gains from the millennium development goals (MDGs) poverty still persists at an alarming rate in some specific rural communities. For instance, out of the 180 million people estimated to be under thrust of extreme poverty in 2030, 43 million people are estimated to be in Nigeria. The evidence is clear and mounting in rural Nigeria. Despite favourable media reports poverty and poor infrastructure has continued to profoundly affect rural dwellers in Abia State. Majority of the people live in a situation aggravated by poor infrastructure, low road infrastructure, broad road network and transport facilities.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. To ascertain the level of implementation of rural road and agricultural marketing project in the rural Abia communities.
2. To determine the degree of community involvement and engagement in realizing the rural development for the rural people.
3. Assess the level of funding and sustainability of the rural development project by RAAMP through the Mass media investigation.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The study employed the Field Survey approach of research and Content analysis. The field survey involved on the spot investigation of the project sites by the Mass media relating with key community stakeholders and the project implementation unit in the state who were interviewed.

It also relied on literatures and written material as secondary sources gathered from the compendium of library sources on issues relating to the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project with Rural Development.

1.5 RAAMP RURAL ACCESS AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETING PROJECT)

According to Chima Chukwu, Chairman Sub Committee International Donor Agency (IDA) buttresses that RAAMP engages in opening several roads in rural communities of Abia State. Farmers are assisted to build small cottage industries, process and market foods thereby making sure foods are not wasted in the country.

The project which is expounding government's policy thrust of uplifting the economic life of rural Abians through the provision of suitable road network and mainstreaming of Agricultural Marketing and Agro hubs in rural areas.

RAAMP has fostered value chain addition to the agricultural produce, from the production, processing of Agricultural Marketing and Agro hubs in rural areas. The value chain starts from production, processing and storage which is in line with the "zero reject" of Agricultural policy of the Federal Government thus reducing wastages arising from transport of farm produce and mitigate the effect of lack of storage facilities in the state.

In 2019, through the Federal Ministry of Finance and financing from the International Development Association (IDA). The World Bank and French Development Agency (AFD) went into rehabilitation of prioritized rural roads and river crossings, construction and rehabilitation support for the establishment of agro logistics hubs and institutional development.

1.6 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated area. The indices of rural development thus include improvement and raising the living standard of the less privileged, who are distanced from government engagement and development.

Rural development tends to focus on improving the utilization of the abundant natural resources that abounds in these neglected and isolated population. The deprivations suffered in the rural areas include exploitation of natural resources, oil, gas, agriculture and tourism sites.

For rural development to be effective, it must be wholistic and approached with a wider perspective and broad range of development touching agriculture, education, emphasis on local content production.

According to Mbaya (2019) rural development is the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the rural people by providing social amenities like quality education, water, good roads, and access to health facilities among others which accounts for the development of a country.

These development indices are quite critical and serve as a template to distinguish and classify a people as developed or underdeveloped. This supports delivery of needed social services regardless of their geographical location, socio-economic situation or political persuasion.

It is on this note that Santas (2013) noted that rural development in realities to Africa will be inadequate if it does not accommodate the rural development orientation. The rural development change should affect the life of the rural peasants, peasants farmers, petty traders, fishermen and the laborers. It should be beneficial to the rural people and involve intensive projects that must

provide a capacity for the neglected majority with sustainable projects for the betterment of lives of the rural people.

Rural Development is multi-dimensional and includes all efforts made by the rural societies in a bid to move from lack to plenty. This agrees to Echenim (2004) wholistic approach which laid emphasis on community based development anchored on fundamental moral principles. This was propelled by the need for a total integration of individual needs and aspirations within the overall pre-occupations.

Rural development ensures the modernization of the rural society and the transition from its transitional isolation to integration with the National Economy. Bessong and Ojong (2019) agree that the approach to accomplish a good rural development plan should be comprehensive and suitable for the rural areas concerned in order to avoid priority planned programmes which end in failure.

The lack of infrastructure development is hindrance to rural development. Most communities in the rural areas of Nigeria and other African countries have virtually no infrastructure. According to (IFAD, 2010) in Abah 2010. Rural development is multi-sectional and should include agriculture and other critical sects of sustainable development and economic growth.

1.7 DEVELOPMENT MEDIA AND PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

The theoretical foundations for this discourse are the Development Media and Participatory Development Theory. The Development Media as propounded by McQuail is primarily rooted in the functionalist paradigm of mass media's role in development. It presupposes the use of the mass media in achieving development in developing countries.

Development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its effort to bring about national development. By supporting government development efforts, media aid society at large. This theory seeks collaboration with the mass media to promote development in the country than being cantankerous and critical of the government.

Participatory Development Theory which is a new alternative approach to development in the rural communities is a response to calls for a more active engagement of the rural communities in their development to tackle poverty, bad road network, inadequate health facilities and other infrastructures. Its focus is the rural and grass root level which permits a plurality of development goals to be realized as well as give the rural people say in their own issues for their development. The two theories are relevant to the study as the media plays a critical role as societal conscience to inform and educate the people on developmental projects initiated by government and agencies. Community dialogue being a bottom up approach offers the rural communities the platform of engagement and participation in their development process to meet their needs and wants with external interference.

1.8 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

According to Nwabueze (2011), Sustainable development is a widely participatory process which creates opportunities for people to increase their skills, better their standard of living, moral and technological advancement of a people, among other features of this process.

Uduak (2015) describes sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need.

It involves institution of projects that are viable enough to stand the test of time. It is not white elephant projects that is on paper but not on location. As has been the case in previous projects that have marred by poor execution and corruption.

There is increased reduction of absolute poverty where sustainable development is involved and also reduction in economic inequalities. Other indices of sustainable development include the improvement in the quality of life of the people as measured through provision of infrastructure such as clean and affordable water, good road networks, provision of constant power supply, adequate health care and decent accommodation among others.

1.9 RAAMP ABIA INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

I) RURAL ROAD PROJECT

The rural road intervention covers a span of 500km rural roads cutting across twelve rural government areas of Abia State which are Arochukwu, Bende, Isuikwuato, Ohafia, Umunneochi, Ikwuano, Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Osisioma, Obingwa, Ugunagbo and Ukwia East. These local governments are agricultural hubs and trading centres with local markets. In pursuit of the instruction of the World Bank through the Federal Project Monitoring Unit to determine the efficacy of Otta seal as a road surface method in Abia State. The selection of 1km rural road project started with Obikabia Umuchima road in Isiala Ngwa North Local Government Area. The next road being the 21.50km spanning through Ubi-Nkwo Elechi in Obingwa and Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Areas.

These roads passed through phase's preliminary design and Environmental and Social Impact Assessment on the selected areas for pilot road projects using very competent civil engineering and environmental consulting conglomerates.

II) AGRO LOGISTIC PRIORITIZATION STUDY

The RAAMP has conducted an agro logistic prioritization study which identified six (6) major agro logistics intervention areas and five (5) major value chain crops with comparative advantage to rural people. The prominent value chain crops with comparative advantage are oil palm, cassava, rice, cocoa and cashew. All these are rural crops produced by the rural people.

The Agro logistic hubs have the following as their host communities and intervention areas which are the rural local government areas.

Table 1.

1.	Orie Ukwu Amorji	Amorji Rural Community	Isiala Ngwa North and Isiala Ngwa South
2.	Nkwo Elechi	Ahiaba Mbuu Rural Community	Obingwa/Osisioma
3.	Orie Ohanku	Ohanku	Ukwia East and Ugunagbo
4.	Orie Obinto	Umuzomgbo Rural Community	Arochukwu and Ohafia
5.	Eke - Uzuakoli	Uzuakoli Rural Community	Bende and Ikwuano
6.	Orie Ngodo	Ihube Ngodo Rural Community	Umunneochi and Isuikwuato

Source. Field findings

III) STAKE HOLDERS ENGAGEMENT

The project engages on Stakeholders engagement Strategy (SES) as a means of dialogue and with the objective to ascertain their acceptance of the proposed project and inculcate a sense of ownership on project participation for sustainability. It involved grievance redress mechanism in

this engagement, consultation is made with traditional rulers, men, women and youth groups across the selected rural communities to identify their

iv) ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK (ESMF)

The RAAMP has developed this framework to handle policy, principles, institutional arrangements and procedures that the project management will follow in addressing environmental and social issues. These involved the sensitization of relevant ministries, department and agencies on the RAAMP components. The Ministries and Agencies are the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Women Affairs and Social Development as well as the Head Project Financial Management Unit. (PFMU)

v) GENDER BASED VIOLENCE MAPPING

The gender based violence (GBV) is to address sexual exploitation and abuse of the rural people. The rural communities have been mapped out with about thirty four (34) research assistants already trained to engage in the exercise. This is in compliance with Human right issues and gender sensibility. In most rural places where such projects are organized, the people had been sexual exploited or abused by those who came to execute such projects. This is the effort of the RAAMP to contain and check such excesses. It also engages the vulnerable to educate them on their gender rights and address sexual exploitation.

1.10 FINDINGS

The following findings were made from the research work

1. Through the RAAMP intervention, access road has opened up the rural community to the cities
2. It has brought about increased trading activity of their agricultural and economic products.
3. Improved the per capita income and increased the earning power of the rural population.
4. Enhanced rural development of these rural communities and attracting social amenities such as health centres, schools, electricity among others.
5. Empowerment for the rural population who were through compensation assisted financially to set up their business, build better houses and feed better.
6. Ensured better education for the rural people as the donor agency and government awarded scholarships to indigent children in the rural community to go to school.
7. There is the boosting of the morale of the rural people and giving them the confidence in the capacity of government to give them the desired dividends of democracy.
8. Assuaged the psyche of neglect, abandonment and rejection which was prevalent before the project execution.
9. It has cleared primitive beliefs that the gods has rejected them in the rural area, which has led to their age long neglect as some of the road constructed were the first ever in history.
10. It has reduced waste of economic and agriculture resources which were either destroyed or got spoilt before sales due to inaccessible road network. Traditional ways of settling disputes and handling land settlement.

1.11 CONCLUSION

The RAAMP Project no doubt has a sustainable impact positively in the life of the rural dwellers in the communities of Abia State. Despite certain teething challenges and some administrative and financial constraints, it is sure to indeed become a success venture. It is more sustaining as it is a counterpart project that involves the World Bank and other agencies fully monitored to execute the project.

1.12 RECOMMENDATION

1. The need for funding the project and enable it become loan effective
2. More engagement of the rural people in the project execution by engaging dialogue
3. The award of the projects should be without political coloration or clannish consideration but for the desired area of maximal interest need.
4. Hold capacity building programmes to educate the rural people on this laudable government project.
5. The need for more media. engagement in human interest and donor agencies projects for quality assurance and social responsibility

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