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Transformation in South Western Nigeria

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# Techniques in Harnessing the Potentials of Rural Communities for Positive Agricultural Transformation in South Western Nigeria

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*Abstract: Rural Communities in South Western Nigeria remains the hub of agricultural activities in terms of crop and livestock production for the populace. Numerous potentials abound in the rural areas but surprisingly, they have been grossly underutilized and these have deleterious effects on the rapid agricultural transformation of the rural areas. Prior to the Nation's independence, agriculture was the main source of foreign exchange earner. The onset of the Civil wars of late 60's prompted the government to look for alternative sources to prosecute the huge cost of the war. The advent of the oil boom in Nigeria in early 70's marked the downward trend in agricultural production and rural transformation in Nigeria. Regular drifts of able bodied men and women from rural areas of the country in search of non-existent white collar-jobs further weakened and depleted the rural labour workforce. Attention of individuals and those of the government now shifted to the Urban areas particularly in areas of banking, finance, science and technology, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) etc to the detriment and development of rural areas for agricultural purposes. Various government initiatives all aimed at food production and self sufficiency have not yielded positive results either and contrary to the giant strides in agricultural revolution recorded in Asian and some Latin American Countries as a result of Green revolution concept of 1970s. This paper takes a cursory look at the potentials of rural communities for positive development, the concept of agricultural transformation in South Western Nigeria and the inherent benefits; and the techniques in harnessing and enhancing potentials of the rural communities. Recommendations and suggestions in the quest for the rural and agricultural transformation are suggested.*

Keywords: Techniques, Transformation, Oil Boom, Poverty, Green Revolution

## Introduction

**T**HE RURAL COMMUNITIES no doubt remain the hub of most agricultural activities in Nigeria - crops production in areas of arable crops, vegetables, fruits, cash crops etc, livestock production, animals and crops products processing, marketing, preservation, re-processing etc. The inherent potentials of these rural communities have remained largely untapped basically because of the low level of education of the practicing farmers, government insensitivity in the provision of basic amenities of potable water, good health care delivery system, good roads, and most importantly, electricity to power most of the cottage industrial set-ups. On the part of the farmers, marketers and the food processors, the level of prevailing poverty becomes a much dominant and prevailing factor.

Agriculture is central to the livelihoods of the poor (who are mainly farmers, processors and marketers) and so should be a major concern in area of positive transformation in the rural areas.

The recurring concept which is central to the overall welfare of the people is the issue of poverty. As a catalyst, the level of poverty determines the rate of development and transformation of the rural areas by the "work-force".

According to Chambers, (1980), rural poverty or deprivation can be viewed from five interlocking dimensions;

- Poverty proper (lack of assets and lack of flows of food and cash).
- Physical weakness (reflected in lower body weights and greater seasonal variations in those weights).
- Vulnerability to contingencies (to irreversible ratchets of impoverishment – the mortgage of sale of assets or the incurring of debts because of sickness, famine, disaster, dowry, bride-wealth or other assets).
- Powerlessness (both political and in terms of control of events and relationships) and
- Isolation (the dimension which impedes the understanding of outsiders, and which by the very nature often very difficult to recognize.)

The interlocking dimensions indicated above are variables capable of dampening or possibly obliterating any form of meaningful developmental initiative no matter how laudable it may be in extricating people from poverty.

The inherent attributes and potential of the communities must be developed through outside interventions, government efforts, NGOs' etc. The production



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and market related risks must be attended to first and foremost and reduced to barest minimum. In summary, the variables so indicated above are common features of our rural communities.

Ludi (2008) indicated that reforms for pro-poor growth require the existence of a developmental state and an elite that supports poverty reduction. However, if the functioning of the state and the actions of the elite are to support pro-poor growth, institutions (e.g. norms and practices) need to be supportive. Donor interventions should seek to strengthen institutions that will enable pro-poor growth.

### **Agricultural Transformation Initiatives in Rural Communities**

The bulk of the activity in agriculture takes place within the private sector among the small holder farmers. The production and marketing activities are in the hands of a diversity of operators, from semi-subsistence small holders to large commercial farmers producing high value crops for local consumption and international markets. There are also wage-labourer, agribusinesses, farmer associations, large co-operative and many other actors populating the rural landscape.

Agriculture is likely to remain a holding operation for the majority of the rural poor. For three-quarters of small holders, agriculture is likely to remain a semi-subsistence activity – a kind of “hanging in” livelihood strategy until they are ready for “stepping up” into more profitable agriculture production or “stepping out” of agriculture into other activities that generate better returns (Dorward, 2006).

Over 80% of the working population depended solely on agriculture immediately after independence. With oil prospecting and exploration, there was massive drift of youngsters from villages to cities in search of white collar jobs and this created a labour shortage on the farmlands. This resulted into a decline in agricultural production which is still a permanent feature in our rural areas today.

The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria fully abreast of this subsistence nature of the agricultural system in the country have since independence initiated a lot of projects aimed at extricating the resource poor farmers who are predominantly in these rural areas from perpetual poverty. Some of the initiatives which were meant to improve the lots of these farmers were deliberately not well directed ostensibly for selfish motives of the government officials. It is noteworthy to indicate that millions of hard earned currencies have been pumped into so many of these programmes without corresponding improvements to justify such expenditures.

They include those which values still remain till today and those which values change with successive governments:

1. **Rural farm settlement schemes** – initiated during the government of Action Group in South – Western Nigeria which was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in mid 1950s. Farmers were given adequate land, necessary farm inputs and a little capital to enable them to permanently settle in specially selected rural areas of the Region. It led to the establishment of rubber plantations, oil palm plantation, timber reserve areas, cocoa plantations etc. proceeds from some of these farm settlements enable the government then to earn foreign currencies which they in turn invested in industries and real estates. The financial position is what has really made all the states in the former Western region of Nigeria to be in the forefront in all areas of development in the country till today.
2. The military incursion into governance in the 70s, 80s and 90s brought with it so many initiatives that changed the status quo in name and operations. Notable ones among the agricultural initiatives include; Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Directorate of Foods Roads and Rural Infrastructures, River Basis Development Authority, Agricultural Development Project, Better Life Programme, Family Support Programme and many more. They have all gone into oblivion. Some of these initiatives were meant to improve food production and security, reduce hunger, reduce unemployment and increase income generation activities among the various farming households. As time went on, the slide begun.
3. Those that have survived present governments and are still performing the roles for which they were initiated by the past governments include; the Roots and Tuber Expansion programme which replaced the Cassava Multiplication Programme which was sponsored by IFAD in 1985, Agricultural Development Project which is supported by the World bank and most recently the National Poverty Eradication Programme which specifically targets the poorest of the poor in these communities. As with other programmes, they were to increase farm outputs, income and production, and also reduce hunger among the people.
4. Some other initiatives were heavily politicized and these include – Better Life Programme for rural women, Family Support Programme, Community banks, People's bank, Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Self reliance.

All the programmes enunciated above were laudable on paper but the implementation were not executed with the best of intentions as millions of Naira ended up in pockets of private individuals.



### Inherent Potential of Rural Communities

Agriculture in many poor rural areas, particularly in Africa, has been on a serious decline in the last few decades. This has also been affected by two major policy changes over the last thirty years – a large reduction in emphasis on liberalization. Reduced investments are attributable partly to perceived failure of earlier investments and to the growing importance of non-farm activities in rural livelihoods (Dorward, et al, 2004).

Over the years, some of the various plantation projects established in the 50s have recorded dwindling fortunes – Ilusin rubber estates, Lomiro oil palm estate, J4 teak and Gmelina plantation, Ondo/Akure cocoa plantations, Apoje oil palm plantation, Odeda farm settlement etc all located in Ogun State South-Western Nigeria have all become shadows of their old self. Government funding into these sectors have been drastically reduced and this has further strengthened the nefarious activities of the pilferers and fraudsters that operate within such enclaves.

Some private commercial companies' leasehold agreements to turn around some of these agro allied ventures have not done the magic and as such were short-lived as a result of some inconsistent government policies on the deregulation exercise of such establishments in the 80s and 90s.

Agricultural liberalization emerged as a reaction to fiscally unsustainable state intervention in agriculture, with high costs for low quality services. New policies therefore called upon the discipline, incentives and resources of the private sector to perform these functions more responsively and efficiently. This led to removal of regulatory controls in agricultural markets, elimination or reduction of subsidies and tariffs, and reform or privatisation of parastatals. These changes have delivered some positive impacts, in the supply chain systems for some crops in Africa, and in reduced food prices to many poor rural and urban consumers (Jayne and Jones, 1977). This clearly negates the situation in Nigeria.

### Measures in Enhancing Rural and Agricultural Transformation

There is no gainsaying that substantial evidence abound that agricultural growth has played a critical role in poverty reduction in most sub-Saharan coun-

tries and most especially in Asia. Rapid agricultural transformation has allowed for emergence of some of the "Asian Tigers" on the world economy. This international recognition stems from the ability of some of these countries to feed their teeming millions coupled with their leaps in technological and allied fields.

The government agencies and parastatals no doubt have not performed substantially in their service delivery to the farmers, food processors and marketers in the last few decades. There are widespread reports of role conflicts – MANR, DFRRI, NALDA etc in Nigeria in the execution of some agricultural project.

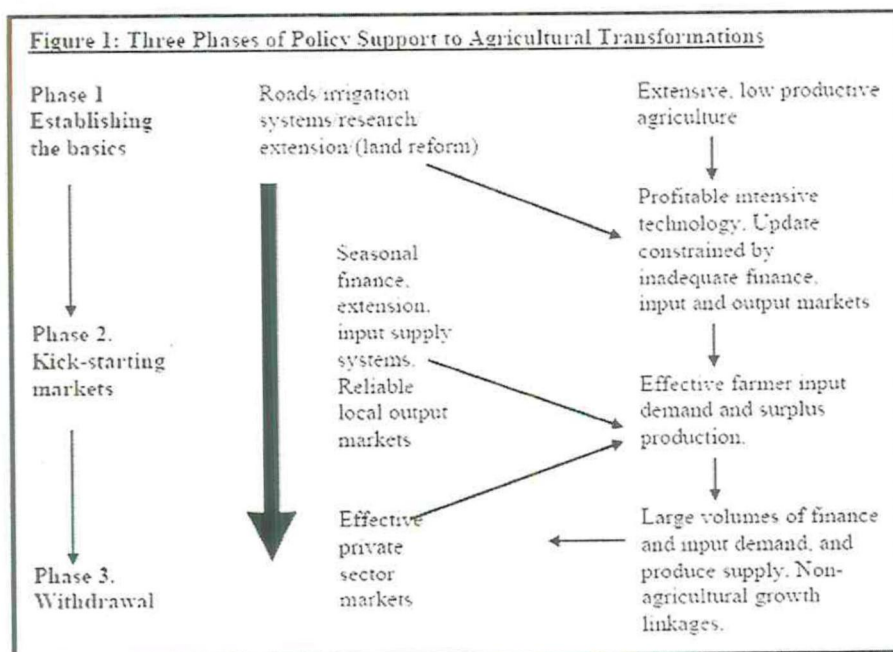
Government agencies and parastatals are gradually losing focus on their primary roles on the farmers regarding their productivity and incomes. It is conventional and there is a conceptual agreement that state intervention should provide public goods (such as research and regulation) and address pervasive market failures. The reverse is the case regarding stakeholders' perceptions about the core functions of the ministries (Chisinga, 2008). Similar expression in Ogun State in South Western part of Nigeria specifically, points to the same direction (Alademerin et al, in progress).

Policies in agriculture will therefore need to go hand-in-hand with social protection policies to enhance the resilience of poor households in the face of shocks and stresses, reduce disinvestment by the poor and promote investment, and strengthen demand for local produce (Farrington et al, 2007).

Over the years, the potentials of the rural communities have not been fully tapped as a result of the unprecedented migration of able-bodied men from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of white-collar jobs. Basic social amenities and infrastructure are generally lacking in the rural areas which is the hub of agricultural activities.

The current downward trends being recorded in agricultural development in the tropical Africa States are basically due to the utter neglect of the primary public infrastructures – good roads, electricity, potable water and essential services agricultural extension, health care delivery, financial loans, markets, agricultural education, capacity building etc. (Chisinga, 2008)

The combination of these can adequately guarantee a rapid agricultural transformation and tackle the problem of unemployment and poverty. (Dorward et al, 2004)



Source: Dorward et al (2004)

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

In the face of apparent failure of government agencies in performing their roles, the private sector initiatives now become the best option to ensure the rapid agricultural transformation in the rural areas.

Modern sustainable livelihoods approaches are now in support of private sector participation in agriculture through community capacity building. According to White (1998), well organized communities can support sustainable agriculture by;

- Undertaking group activities such as water development, feeder road maintenance and market development.
- Lowering transaction costs for services
- Managing common property resource
- Lobbying for policies and services appropriate to their needs.

Typically, people promote participatory and community based planning for the following reasons;

- To make plans more relevant to local conditions
- To increase community involvement in service provision
- To increase people's control over their livelihoods
- To help promote community-based action. (CBP Partners, 2003).

The erratic conditionality given by some of the foreign donors and aid providers coupled with the

problems of political, economic, social and population growth in Nigeria pose serious impediment to agricultural transformation. Time for loan repayment for governments and individuals are very short and policies are constantly being shifted. These do not allow farmers to invest in long term sustainability.

The followings are hereby recommended:

1. Adoption of Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) initiative and model regarding the four dimensions of development co-operation for sustainable poverty reduction – learning, capacity building, integration and sustainability in all the nooks and crannies of the rural areas in the country. An enduring partnership of government and the NGOs or government and the private sectors may do the magic.
2. Future projects that are targeted at the rural poor must be strengthened and decentralized administratively for the real beneficiaries to have a say in the ways which the projects will be impactful on them. Such projects can be in the hands of Co-operative farmers societies..
3. The seeming failure of the bureaucratic approach of government in the service delivery to rural farmers, processors and marketers is a pointer that private participation in agricultural and rural development should be fully encouraged.
4. Local governments should concentrate more in rural transformation through provision of infrastructural facilities and enhanced service delivery to the people at the grassroots. In this case,



- people needs may be prioritised and executed in the line with this.
5. The gradual resuscitation of the Tractor hiring units in all local government areas to make agricultural mechanization interesting to the farmers for their overall efficiency.
  6. Encouragement of farmer groups and co-operatives as group dynamics to exert pressure on governments in respect of infrastructural needs in the rural areas.

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## About the Author

*Dr. Edwards A. Alademerin*

Almost 12 years out of 25 years of teaching and lecturing, I have been involved in skills training programme for students in tertiary institution. Apart from my normal primary assignments of lecturing Agricultural Education courses, I also coordinated the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and Centre for Research and Development in Primary Education (CERDEP). SIWES is a skill training programme designed to expose and prepare the students for the industrial working situation they are likely to meet after graduation. It is a compulsory part of the programme towards acquisition of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). I have been involved in the retraining exercises and workshops for Senior Extension Officers and Community Development Officers at the Lagos State Local Government Service Commission, Ikeja-Lagos for over six years. My Doctoral research work between 1998 – 2001 was in the area of Programme Impacts Evaluation on Cassava research and development in Southern Nigeria. The research exposed me to the inherent attributes of Cassava as a Poverty Alleviation crop in the tropical world. The study also equipped us with all the necessary skills and rudiments required in the successful planning in the areas of poverty alleviation programme and initiatives on the poor and the marginalized. I have no doubt that the experiences I have gained during the doctoral field work have prepared me for better challenges ahead in adequate service delivery to mankind. Presently I lecture agriculture courses in my University. My previous and present positions have sharpened my horizons as they prepare me for greater tasks and challenges ahead in life.