

Contributions of Non-Governmental Organizations to Rural Development in Nigeria

Egbichi Blessing Anyikwa
Department of Adult Education
University of Lagos
Akoka, Lagos State

Victor Akinsanya Idowu
Department of Adult and Non – Formal Education
Federal College of Education
Abeokuta, Ogun State
idowuvictor1234@gmail.com

Hamed Adesile Soyele
Morgan State University
1700 E Cold Spring Ln
Baltimore, MD 21251

Abstract

The existence of Non-governmental organizations in Nigeria is not in doubt to a good number of the nation's citizenry. Their existence is further confirmed by the identification signposts erected in their premises and the names inscribed on their buildings and vehicles. Despite all these, their contributions to the development of the rural communities in Nigeria appear unclear to many among the rural populace and the entire nation. To this end, the paper examines the contributions of NGOs to the development of rural communities in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the discourse places premium on conceptualizing NGOs and rural development while problems militating against the involvement of NGOs in rural development were also highlighted and discussed. Finally, the paper discusses the involvement of NGOs in the development of the rural communities in Nigeria. Based on the conclusion of the paper, it was recommended among others that adequate and functional monitoring mechanism should be put in place by the governments to check the excesses of NGOs, especially those that benefit from financial support from the government. This will help to minimize the rate of corrupt practices among the leaders of NGOs.

Keywords: contributions, non-governmental, organizations, rural, development

Introduction

Rural communities in Nigeria have distinct features which differentiate them from communities in urban setting. Sometimes, the rural communities are characterized by subsistence farming and production of locally made items. Besides, many rural communities may also lack infrastructure like good roads, electricity supply, water

supply, schools and a host of other amenities that are meant to complement standard of living. Olisa and Obiukwu (2002) argued that most rural areas in Nigeria lack basic infrastructure; and where they exist at all, they are far inadequate for meaningful development.

Apart from infrastructure, rural communities are usually sparsely populated. In order to corroborate this assertion, Olisa and Obiukwu (2002) further reported that population is the main characteristic that differentiate rural areas from urban areas. The low population density recorded in rural areas is partly attributed to the rate at which rural community members migrate to urban areas for greener pasture.

In order to tackle the aforementioned problems and to promote the development of these rural communities, many stakeholders like the governments, especially at Federal and State levels, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Faith Based Organizations and other organizations that have the interest of the nation at heart had contributed their quota towards developing the rural communities across the nation. Specifically, the involvement of NGOs in the development of the rural areas is an area of interest to the researchers.

NGOs in this regard are non-profit oriented outfits that engage in projects meant to develop the rural communities and the country at large. These NGOs have different areas of specialization, ranging from education, health, natural resources conservation, environmental issues, to campaign against child abuse, child trafficking, child labour and many other inhumane practices that pose serious threat to the existence of human race. According to Uzuegbunam (2013), NGOs are classified into two major groups. These groups are operational NGOs and advocacy NGOs.

Conceptual clarifications

Non – governmental organizations

Non- governmental organizations (NGOs) came into existence as a result of some individuals or group's perception of needs that will promote standard of living. These individuals and groups further initiated appropriate strategies to meet these needs. NGOs are selfless and non-profit inclined organizations working towards helping people to achieve their goals in life. These organizations are entirely independent of the governments; and their activities are premised on humanitarian grounds.

World Bank (2000) in its effort to define NGOs stated that:

(a) NGOs are flexible and democratic organizations primarily established to serve people without making any profit for themselves.

(b) They are organizations established to cater for the needs of the community members without or with little intervention from the governments.

(c) They are organizations of private individuals who believe in certain basic principles that can promote social, economic, political and cultural activities of the entire citizens of a nation.

(d) They are not affiliated to any political party; but basically, engage in working for aid, development and welfare of the community members.

(e) They are primarily committed to defining root causes of problems, put mechanism in place to solve these problems to better the quality of life of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized in rural and urban communities.

A close look at these characteristics clearly shows that NGOs are majorly established for all kinds of developments, advocacy and empowerment geared toward living a comfortable life. The growth and contributions of these NGOs are informed by series of factors ranging from societal tension which arises due to insecurity of varying types; conflicts, occasioned by religion, ethnic and political struggles; the dire need to respond to crisis situations like human rights violation, child labour, child abuse, human trafficking, injustice among others; the realization that governments alone cannot solve a nation's problems due to differences in ideologies, values and orientations among the powers- that- be in executing developmental work.

Classification of NGOs based on operations and advocacy

Operational NGOs are primarily established to handle development inclined programmes and projects. NGOs can achieve this by mobilizing resources through financial and material donations and voluntary labour (Adeyeye et al., 2017). On the other hand, advocacy NGOs are primarily concerned with issues having to do with rights. According to Adeyeye et al. (2017), such NGOs perform this function by advocating, defending and promoting policies and changes relating to a particular course, especially the ones that are rights inclined.

These two types of NGOs may have distinctive characteristics in the delivery of their service; yet they still perform similar functions before arriving at their final output. According to Mostashiri (2005), despite the differences, operational and advocacy NGOs still engage in fund raising, work mobilization, organizing special events, engaging the media, among other activities.

Rural development

Rural development focuses on all efforts meant for the development of rural communities. These efforts are intensified to transform these rural communities to communities where industrialization and infrastructural developments will replace the traditional farming and production of items like locally made soap on a small-scale basis. Ward and Brown (2009) reported that rural development is traditionally centred on the exploitation of land's intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry.

Rural development basically depends on the implementation of the policies made by the governments towards achieving its goals. From the year of independence in Nigeria (1960), many rural development policies have been formulated. Such policies include establishment of Directorate of Food, Roads and Infrastructure, establishment of Green Revolution (G.R), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Better Life Programme (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP), National Fadama Development Programme (NFDP), Special Programme on Food Security (SPFS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS).

Others are State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) and other more recent ones like Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP), Seven Points Agenda (SPA), Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP), among others. These policies were primarily put in place to eradicate rural poverty in order to promote healthy living among the rural populace. Chukwuemeka and Ikechukwu (2013) submitted that rural development is that aspect of development that seeks to enhance the quality of life in the rural areas by providing basic infrastructural facilities. Likewise, Mabogunje (2001) noted that rural development is concerned with the self-sustaining improvement of the rural areas through re-organization and mobilization of rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with their daily tasks.

More importantly, the objectives of rural development clearly corroborate the submission of the scholars above. These objectives, as cited in Ijere (1990) by Mohammed-Hasim (2008), are as follows:

- (i) To have greater commitment of the resources to the rural areas in terms of budgetary allocations and actual expenditure.
- (ii) To ensure popular participation of the rural people in the identification of priorities, planning of programmes as well as their implementation.
- (iii) To lay greater emphasis on the use of local resources and promotion of local skills.
- (iv) To maintain social and political stability.
- (v) To create rural employment opportunities.
- (vi) To increase output and production and subsequently increase food and food supply as well as rural farming income.

Problems militating against the involvement of NGOs in rural development

In spite of the efforts exerted by NGOs on rural development, it appears as if nothing has been done to make rural communities more habitable for the rural community dwellers. Thus, the major factors militating against the involvement of NGOs in rural development are highlighted and discussed as follows:

- i. Corruption on the part of NGOs' management: The inability of the people at the helms of affairs of NGOs to judiciously use the capital resources meant for executing

programmes and projects is a serious problem working against the efficiency of many NGOs in Nigeria. Many NGOs are not using the sourced funds for the exact project it was meant for. This is a big challenge because, at the end, the rural community dwellers are still underdeveloped. For instance, the palliative meant to be shared during the COVID-19 pandemic era was bedeviled with lots of corrupt tendencies. According to Sahara Reporters (2020), NGOs deployed one thousand volunteers to monitor the sharing of the palliative among the beneficiaries in order to avoid the diversion of the items.

ii. Financial constraint: Financial resources are limited in supply; hence, many activities which would have been put in place to actualize rural development are left undone. The implication of this is that many NGOs engaging in rural development will have to ration their resources since the resources at their disposal are not adequate for executing rural community projects at hand. Shimawua (2020) argued that many NGOs operating in Nigeria are hampered by lack of finances which compels them to streamline their operations to accommodate few people and communities.

iii. Lack of fairness and objectivity in the choice of development area: Many NGOs are not always sincere when selecting communities that are truly in need of assistance. Rather, they prefer to employ “man know man” or “godfather’s” factor to select the benefiting communities. This factor has denied many communities that are in dire need of assistance the opportunity to benefit from many programmes or projects implemented by the NGOs.

iv. Cultural and religious beliefs: The culture and religions practiced by some rural community dwellers are strong factors that influence the way and manner they will react or accept the operations of the NGOs. For instance, the purdah system practiced by some people in the Northern part of Nigeria forbids married women from moving out of their homes without the consent of their husbands. It is worthy of note that the practice of purdah system will undoubtedly limit the opportunity of these women to actively participate in many rural development activities organized by the NGOs. More so, many Faith Based Organizations located in the territory of another religious groups may experience rejection especially when they try to establish learning institutions like Faith Based Schools of both formal and non-formal types due to differences in their cultural and religious beliefs.

v. Insecurity: The activities of many of the dreadful sects have greatly influenced the functionality of many NGOs especially those that are located in some parts of the Northern region and the middle belt of Nigeria. The frequent killings and destruction of properties perpetrated by dreadful sect like the Boko Haram sect have created unimaginable fear in the minds of the managers and coordinators of many of the NGOs; and this basically explains why some NGOs are inactive while some have relocated from the threatened zones to other places that are perceived to be more peaceful.

Collaboration of NGOs with governments in improving rural development

In spite of the efforts exerted by many NGOs in their different areas of interest, there is still a clear evidence that they (NGOs) cannot do it alone except they collaborate with

the relevant government agencies to support them for better delivery of services. For instance, the issue of rural poverty in many rural areas in Nigeria has gone beyond imagination; hence, something must be done to arrest this situation.

NGOs in the area of poverty alleviation in rural areas need a lot of support from the government in order to succeed in their campaign. The United Nations (UN) (2016) confirmed this by reporting that in rural communities in Bida Local Government Area, 37% of children under five (5) years are stunted in growth, 18% had died due to malnutrition, 29% are underweight and only 10% of the children aged 6 – 23 months are well fed. A situation like this requires the collaboration of the state government and the NGOs engaging in poverty alleviation in that region.

In the past, government have made concerted move to complement the efforts of NGOs in actualizing rural development in rural communities in Nigeria. Governments in their magnanimity on many occasions had donated large sum of capital resources to NGOs to ensure successful execution of their projects. To corroborate this, Murtala (2015) asserted that Local Council Authorities often render monetary assistance to NGOs to implement their projects or programmes.

Although, the efforts of the government have not translated into meaningful developments as many NGOs are alleged to have diverted the large sum of capital meant to support them in the delivery of their services to their personal accounts. Caleb (1985) cited in Ichima and Ibrahim (2020) reported that funds donated by the governments to support the NGOs in their service delivery were not used for the purpose; rather, the funds were politically manipulated to benefit those close to the corridors of power and their families.

Despite this shortcoming, governments have not relented in their efforts to support the NGOs. In order to further complement various development programmes, the federal government in the past had created additional Local Government Councils. According to Ichima and Ibrahim (2020), this development was to pave way for massive infrastructural improvement like electrification, construction of roads, establishment of schools, among others. Besides, this infrastructural improvement will go a long way to complement and ease the execution of projects penciled down for rural development in rural communities by the NGOs. For instance, construction of roads in rural communities will aid mobility of NGOs; especially in accessing many rural communities that were not previously accessible. Murtala (2015) listed construction and maintenance of road among other public facilities as one of the major functions performed by the Local Government Councils.

Non-governmental organizations and rural development

According to Ngeh (2013), NGOs have played tremendous roles in rural development in Nigeria. Notable among these roles are:

a) Provision of literacy education: A good number of NGOs provide literacy education for the rural populace since many of them are non-literates. Provision of literacy education for this category of people aims at developing their knowledge, attitude, understanding and values required in all walks of life. Itari (2005) submitted that education opens one's eye and mind to the knowledge of good and beauty which releases one from a chain of ignorance often responsible for conservative life.

Non-governmental organizations like Education for All Initiative in Lagos State, Agape Foundation for Literacy and Rural Development in Ebonyi State, Centre for Sustainable Education and Youth Empowerment in Nasarawa State, Faith Based Organizations like Baptist Convention among others have their interest in educating the non-literates among the rural populace. These NGOs also create awareness to acquaint the non-literates in rural communities with the benefits of education and encourage them to register in adult literacy classes so as to help them embrace new vision necessary for living a standard life (Idowu, 2009).

b) Reduction in rural poverty: Poverty connotes a situation of lack of access to resources and materials required for living a standard life. Rural poverty is linked to land degradation of different forms, lack of access to safe water, lack of good road, non-availability of electricity supply and many more. In order to minimize the magnitude of these problems, many NGOs have taken it upon themselves to offer help to the rural populace.

Such help could be in form of grants, loans, provision of improved seedlings and allied chemicals and other fringe benefits that will increase the yield of farm produce. Ngeh (2013) posited that NGOs help in the development of small-scale farmers by giving supports and assistance in form of loans, grants; and by providing farmers with improved seedlings and technical advice that will facilitate their growth and development. According to Idowu (2009), other notable duties performed by these NGOs in rural areas include supporting livelihood projects like sustainable crop farming, livestock rearing and fattening, bee keeping and honey production, skill training and micro-business development.

The aforementioned services are meant to address problems of poverty by promoting sustainable livelihood practices which will help in elevating the living standard of the rural community dwellers. Muiguriji (1990) cited in Anure (2013) argued that NGOs have significantly increased their commitment, both human and financial, to the cause of development, seeking actively to reach a greater number of people and to improve their quality of life.

The employment of the rural community dwellers as members of staff of NGOs is a right step toward reduction of rural poverty. In addition, these NGOs sometimes collaborate with the government to provide portable water for the rural populace, organize seminars and workshops on agricultural production, land degradation and

agricultural related practices, sales and marketing, storage and preservation among others.

Good examples of NGOs that render these services include Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative in Kaduna State, Kano Development Project in Kano State, Home and Street Kids Welfare Initiatives in Kwara State, Change Maker African Youth Empowerment Initiative in Lagos State among others. Ruth (2019) affirmed that these NGOs have become agencies of poverty reduction and capacity building for the rural populace as they impart skills and knowledge, and dish out information to improve the quality of life of the rural populace.

c) Forest conservation: The laws on preservation, protection and conservation of wildlife are enshrined in two sets of Acts, namely: The Nigerian Endangered Species Act (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act, Decree 11 of 1985 and Section 20 of the National Parks Service Act. These laws frown at unlawful trade on wildlife, hunting and possession of wildlife parts, to promote sustenance of ecological balance and prevention of extinction of endangered plants and animals (Adewunmi et al. (2018). However, Ndukwe (2000) reported that despite the law put in place by the state and federal governments against unauthorized activities in Nigerian forest, bush burning, game poaching, illegal grazing and logging remain the order of the day.

NGOs like Centre for Research in Environmental Resource Management in Delta State, Centre for Population and Environmental Development in Edo State, Centre for Environmental Impact and Ethics in Gombe State, Environment and Tourism Support Initiative in Imo State and many others take it upon themselves to see that considerable degree of sanity reigns among the creatures co-habiting in the forest. As cited by Ayeni (1985) in Idowu (2009), establishment of these NGOs ensures conservation, utilization and development of wild flora and fauna resources. They are able to perform this function effectively by educating the rural populace on the prospects of forest conservation and the impending danger in obstructing the free flow of the forest ecological system.

d) Provision of health services: The issue of health among the rural populace is another significant factor to be reckoned with. Health related issues like family planning, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, hygiene practices, campaign against drinking of contaminated water and general health issues are considered as priorities by many NGOs. Sometimes they offer free health services and provide free drugs to rural community dwellers while campaigning against diseases like COVID-19 especially during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, malaria, prevention of maternal death and that of new born babies, child health care are also part of their obligations.

These NGOs also provide free drugs and hospital equipment to Primary Health Care Centres and offer laboratory services to facilitate delivery of their medical services. Richard (2018) argued that NGOs erect infrastructure in form of health clinics,

construct drainage channels, offer free eye medical tests and treatments, provide mosquito nets, organize health education programmes and disseminate health related information to the rural populace in a bid to improve rural community health.

Some NGOs that engage in the provision of health services include Health Initiative for Safety and Stability in Africa in Abuja, Anglican Diocese of Nnewi Health and Community Development Centre in Anambra, Community Initiative for Promotion of Health Education and People with Disability in Bauchi, Heal the Land Initiative in Nigeria operating in Benue State, Centre for Health Promotion in Cross River State, Biire Child and Maternal Health Care in Lagos State, Safe Food and Feed Foundation in Ogun State among others.

e) Human rights protection/peace keeping: Many NGOs engage in the protection of human rights in the rural communities. These NGOs often ensure that rural community members are not unjustly punished or cheated. Such NGOs take up cases of rape, negative cultural practices like sleeping with the dead, wife inheritance, drinking of water used for bathing the dead, among others, unlawful detention of people and many others. NGOs that engage in these services include Atan Justice, Development and Peace Centre in Abuja, Child Right and Rehabilitation Network in Akwa Ibom State, Children and Gender Support Initiative in Bauchi State, International Peace and Civic Responsibility Club in Anambra State and many others.

Conclusion

The functions performed by the NGOs are premised on their different areas of interest. These NGOs engage in different areas of life to add value to human existence. Despite the fact that many of these NGOs have recorded considerable success in the development of rural areas, going by the projects and programmes implemented so far, there are still many rural communities in Nigeria that are yet to experience any iota of development. This deficiency is attributed to factors like financial constraint, corruption on the part of NGOs' management, lack of fairness and objectivity in the choice of development areas, among others.

Recommendations

Based on the articulation on this paper, it was recommended that:

(i) Adequate and functional monitoring mechanism should be put in place by the governments to check the excesses of NGOs, especially those that benefit from financial support from the government. This will help to minimize the rate of occurrence of corrupt practices among the leaders of NGOs.

(ii) Massive campaigns against cultural beliefs and practices that seem to retard the pace of development in the rural areas should be done by the government to acquaint the rural community members with the specific roles played by the NGOs and the inherent benefits in the services they offer.

(iii) NGOs that render same or similar services to the rural communities should merge to form stronger alliance for better service delivery. This merger will go a long

way to strengthen them particularly in the area of finances, broaden their philosophical and administrative knowledge and equip them with greater skills necessary for improved service delivery.

(iv) Regardless of their area of interest, NGOs should collaborate with the relevant government agencies in the development of the rural areas in Nigeria, especially where there is no such collaboration. But where collaboration between the NGOs and government exists, there must be proper and adequate monitoring of funds to bring about transparency and accountability in the delivery of their various services.

(v) In collaboration with the traditional rulers, NGOs in forest conservation should endeavour to establish conservation clubs especially in primary and secondary schools in rural communities to serve as channels through which environmental friendliness is propagated.

References

- Adewunmi, A. A., Edward, J. B., Agunbiade, R. O. & Oyeniran, B. H. (2018). The Nigeria wildlife management policy, institutional and legal framework. *Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research*, 5(8), 6-13.
- Adeyeye, M. M., Obiegbo, I. K. & Ogu, D. A. (2017). Non-Governmental Organizations activities and poverty alleviation among rural dwellers of Bosso. *Nigerian Journal of Management Technology and Development*, 8(2), 449 – 461.
- Anure, J. K. (2013). Non-Governmental Organizations and national development. *Journal of Social Science and Public Policy*, 5(2), 143 – 151.
- Chukwuemeka, O. E. & Ikechukwu, U. B. (2013). Enhancing rural development in Nigeria: Periscoping the impediments and exploring imperative measures. *Kuwait chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management*, 10(4), 56 – 66.
- Ichima, S. & Ibrahim, Y. (2020). Local government and rural development: An evaluation of the contribution of Bida Local Government of Niger State to rural development, 2015 – date. *Journal of Politics*, 2(1), 233 – 244.
- Idowu, V. A. (2009). Non-governmental organizations activities in the implementation of community development projects in Calabar, Cross River State [Unpublished Master Thesis]. University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.
- Itari, P. E. (2005). Adult education as an instrument of community and national development in Nigeria. In I. Asuquo and B. Joshua (Eds.), *Education and Environmental Change* (pp 34 – 52). Calabar: NIV in conjunction with IBEPS.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (2001). *The Development Process: A Spiritual Perspective*. London: Hutchinson Publishers.
- Mohammed-Hasim, Y. (2008). Implementation of rural development policies in Nigeria: Agenda for the future. *Journal of Research in National Development*, 6(1), 142 – 160.
- Mostashiri, A. (2005). An introduction to Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Management, Iranian Studies Group. MIT.

- Murtala, A. (2015). The role of local government in rural development in Nigeria: A case of Sokoto South Local Government Area [An unpublished project]. Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.
- Ndukwe, O. U. (2000). *Element of Nigerian Environmental Laws*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Ngeh, D. B. (2013). Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and rural development in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 107 – 112.
- Olisa, M. S. O. & Obiukwu, J. I. (2002). *Rural Development in Nigeria: Dynamics and Strategies*. Awka: Mekshink Publishers.
- Richard, M. (2018). *The Evaluation of Cultural Actions*. Macmillan: London.
- Ruth, N. (2019). *Sociology of Development*. VaniVihar: Utkal University press.
- Sahara, Reporters (2020). NGOs deploy 1000 volunteers to monitor COVID-19 palliatives in Nigeria. Sahara Reporters, New York. April 19, 2020.
- Shimawua, D. (2020). The role of Non-Governmental Organizations: A case of Aisha Buhari Foundation. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Global politics, Governance and Management*, 2(1), 74 – 97.
- United Nations (2016). Consultative meeting on the formulation of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
- Uzuegbunam, A. (2013). Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Conflict and peace building in Nigeria. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1), 207 – 212.
- Ward, N. B. & Brown, D. (2009). Placing the rural in regional development. *Regional Studies*, 42(10), 1237 – 1244.
- World Bank (2000). *Rural Poverty under previewed Problems and Remedies*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.