

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), Rural Development and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper has examined the nexus between Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), rural development and democratic sustainability in Nigeria. The paper establishes that democracy has come to be the best form of government in the world. To this end, it is considered to be a representative system of government that requires empowerment of the rural dwellers who constitute a large percentage of the poor in Nigeria. Thus, sustainability of democracy is only dependent to the extent that it empowers the poor to participate in politics and other civil activities. The rural sector of the Nigerian societies is an object of neglect by different administrations in the country, and it is the manifestation and embodiment of Nigerian underdevelopment condition. The overall analysis of the study revealed that NGOs are very prominent in effective advocacy and implementation of development programs towards sustainable rural development and that these NGOs achieve this through gender awareness and participation, community mobility empowerment, health care programs, micro credit schemes and poverty alleviation, human right advocacy, conflict resolution and peace building. The findings also entail that these activities have impacted positively on democratic sustainability. The work therefore recommends that government and NGOs should synergize to provide good governance, basic infrastructural facilities, employment opportunities and general development of the rural areas as these would facilitate the reduction of poverty and its attendant effects, which are impediments to sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organizations, Rural Development, Democratic Sustainability.

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Introduction

Nigeria is predominantly a rural economy. Nigeria's population is estimated at 206 million in 2020(www.statista.com), and out of this total population, 49.66% is believed to constitute the rural population (indexmundi.com). these rural areas are also agrarian in nature. "The core problems of widespread poverty, growing inequality, rapid population growth and rising unemployment all find their origins in the stagnation and too often retrogression of economic life in rural areas. Furthermore, most of the rural people are poor and disadvantaged. Their sufferings stem not only from low income but also from illiteracy, ill-health, ignorance and various kinds of deprivations" (Utuk, 2014, p.24).

It is universally acknowledged that rural areas are very important to a nation, they serve as the base for the production of food and fiber. They are also the major sources of capital formation for a country and a principal market for domestic manufactures. (Ayo,2012). In general terms, the rural areas are seen as the fulcrum in the generation of the primary activities that form the foundation of any economic development, especially as it relates to the third world countries. In the rural sector of the economy, rural development is the vehicle or conduit through which government accomplishes rural transformation. However, the story of the rural areas, has been of elongated neglect, which has

manifested in absence of infrastructures such as water, electricity supply and motorable roads, which are considered to be harbinger for improved quality of life. Indeed, the constant and obvious dereliction of the rural sector has contributed to the wide gap and its attendant consequences between the urban and rural centers in Nigeria.

Needless to emphasize that the phenomenon of poverty and backwardness of the rural areas weaken the political system and renders the basic principles of democracy (such as free and fair elections, tolerance, popular sovereignty, rule of law, accountability and separation of powers) impotent (Edoh,2003). As enunciated by the political economy approach, in an environment of excruciating poverty and backwardness, voters have been too willing to sell their registration cards to political vendors, electoral officials have been glad to alter and falsify total number of votes cast to the advantage of a higher paying politician while security agents have turned the other way as the under-aged cast ballot repeatedly in multiple voting. The bulk of political and civil injustices is hinged on poverty. Resultantly, government formed on the basis of the outcome of such elections is not likely to survive.

In Nigeria over the years, the legitimacy of governments, which are direct outcome of electoral violations and manipulations have proved difficult to govern well, enjoy the support of the people and develop the nation as a whole. Consequently, it has become a reoccurring decimal that after every election, the nation is shed to a political *cul de sac* as the losers, crying foul, take legal and extra-legal steps to redress or reverse perceived injustice.

In order to bridge this gap, the Non-Governmental Organizations are considered by many public commentators and analysts to be the last hope for the common rural dwellers in the areas of provisions of the non-existent or inadequate services to the rural areas. The objective of this paper therefore, is to examine the activities of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) as a catalyst of development in the rural areas of Nigeria, thereby engendering rural democratic sustainability. Fundamental and foundational in this study, is the conceptualization of key concepts. This will aid in the facilitation of the idea presented in the discourse.

Conceptual Issues

The universality and general scholarly consensus of the concepts of NGO, rural development and democracy is difficult to come by. This difficulty is largely hinged on the different faculties of knowledge and the socio-milieu of scholars in this area of study. However, a range of meanings has been associated with it rather than narrowing it down to a unique definition. Hence, a precise and widely agreed definition is elusive.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) are considered to be civil organizations that are largely or totally independent of government in their areas of function. They are perceived to be as charitable or religious associations which mobilize private funds for development initiatives and programs , raise awareness and influence policies in pursuance of the ideals of democracy and good governance as well as undertake diverse humanitarian projects that could better the lots of the grass-roots (Sandberg, 1994; Chalmer, 2002).

Iriye (2004) defines Non-Governmental Organizations as a voluntary, non-state, non-profit, nonreligious, and non-military association. It is an independent voluntary association of people acting together on a continuous basis for some common purpose other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities. In his view, two main types of Non-Governmental Organizations are recognized according to the activities they pursue: (i) operational NGOs that deliver services; and (ii) Campaigning NGOs, that involve in advocacies.

The United Nations (UN) through its department of Public Information (DPI) on the other hand, sees a non-governmental organization as a not-for profit, voluntary citizen's group that is organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good (www.outreach.un.org/ngorelations). In corroboration of this perspective, the World Bank (1990), describes non-governmental organizations as private agencies; indigenous groups organized regionally or nationally and member groups in villages that support international and national development and partnering with governments in global development initiatives. Central to this understanding, is the fact that the term 'Non-Governmental Organization' was necessitated and birthed as a result of the activities of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, and is seen as organizations that are not a part of a government and are not profit-oriented in their activities. Should there be funding by governments or government agencies, NGOs largely, are considered to be independent of the government.

In terms of structure, NGOs remain the same irrespective of the varieties in their operations. The structures of NGOs are capsulated in the following; their methods of operation, staffing, funding, project management, public relations and consultations.

The importance and roles of NGOs can be underscored by the provisions of the United Nation Convention, as it is seen in chapter 27 of Agenda 21 of the United Nations (UN) Convention, thus paving way for an all-inclusive protocols and recognition of the NGOs in consultative relationship with United Nation.

What is Rural Development?

An understanding of the concept of rural development should be heralded by the full picture of the meaning of development. Accordingly, Iji (2018) concludes on development when he asserted that it means a state of wellbeing of both a country and individuals. It is an explicably term which at various times has the underpinning of economic growth, individual and national wellbeing. This definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes. Furthermore, Umehali (2006) sees these changes to be multi-dimensional, involving changes in structures, attitude and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth; the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. He asserts that development involves economic growth component, equality or social justice component, and socio-economic transformational component which are all on a self-sustaining basis. In corroboration, Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) in both quantitative terms. He opines that development must be seen as actually and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society, and culture.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that rural development is not a one-off thing or an immediate and snap phenomenon. Rather, it is a gradual and progressive towards perfection having a set standard in mind. Rural development has variously been defined. Abdu (1992) asserted that rural development is majorly concerned with improving the living conditions of the low-income population residing and seeking their livelihood in the rural areas and making progress of their development self-sustaining. As a strategy, rural development is to be a process designated to transform the nation's rural life and landscape by ensuring progressive social, economic, cultural and political improvements (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The world bank sees it as an economic venture, thus by stating that it is raising the low levels of rural income through agricultural modernization (World Bank,1975). The present situation in Nigeria necessitates for rural development. The poverty, rural-urban migration with its attendant consequences and the long negligence attest to the fact that rural development is an idea whose time has come. Therefore, rural development is a strategy for bringing about desirable socio-economic, cultural, institutional and technological changes for developing the rural traditional societies.

Different strategies and approaches have been outlined by various scholars as means in which the rural areas can be developed. These include:

1. **The Basic resource Approach:** this strategy, according to Abah (2000) assumes that development depends on the existence, the magnitude and quality of basic natural resources. So, the exploration and development of natural resources will naturally attract large volumes of investment capital and economic activities to the areas where they exist, and thereby increase income and employment.
2. **The basic Needs Approach:** this approach is anchored on the satisfaction of the individuals' needs. It is believed that the development of human capital involves the provision of health services, education, housing, sanitation, water supply and adequate nutrition. The rationale of the approach is that the direct provision of such goods and services is likely to relieve absolute poverty more immediately than alternative strategies which simply attempt to accelerate growth or which rely on raising incomes and productivity.
3. **The System Approach:** this approach strives to provide answer to problem of rural development. It is anchored on focusing and linking systemic nature of rural areas and the complexity of their components in their relationships and attributes. The principal components of the rural system are social, water, farmers and their families, products tools, traders, animals, natural vegetation, pathways, storage facilities, transport facilities, money, cooperatives (Obi&Chukwumeka, 2006).

Attempts at Rural Development in Nigeria

Since after the colonial era, the rural sector in Nigeria has remained backward. The dispositions of the political leaders of the country towards this sector have largely been that of neglect. In spite of the stability in the national economy in the 1960's and the Oil boom of the early 1970's, the living conditions of the people in the rural sector of Nigeria have remained basically unaffected by development efforts. This situation has left Nigerian rural dwellers with diverse problems. Some of these problems as highlighted by the Better Life Programme for Rural Women in 1988 quoted in Girigiri (2000:124) include lack of portable water; Health Care problem; transport problems; lack of storage and preservation facilities; Educational problem; inaccessibility to loan and credit facilities; poor return on subsistence farming; the problem of unemployment; environmental degradation; vagaries in weather condition; communal conflict; and general poverty.

According to Olatunbosun (1995), successive governments have created rural development programmes and some of the rural development programmes include:

- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme of May, 1976.
- The River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDA) of 1973;
- Directorate of food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of 1986;
- Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW);
- The family Support Programme (FSP);
- Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); and
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE).

It is worthy of note that Nigeria through her administrations, has never had a coordinated programme for rural development. As a solution to the gap in coordination when it comes to formulation and implementation of rural development programs, Olatunbosun (1995) suggests that in order to improve the quality of life of the neglected rural majority in Nigeria, Programmes of agricultural production; health care delivery; investment in rural non-farm activities; nutrition; education training-both formal and non-formal; rural electrification; co-operatives; water supply;

rural credit; entertainment; and road construction should be planned and implemented in an integrated manner, with consideration for projects that mutually support and inter-lock with one another in an overall rural development plan.

The Concept of Democracy

Just like other concepts that defile universality and consensus, democracy enjoys different meanings from different perspectives. This is basically because of the different perceptions by different scholars and the context in which they are applied. However, the word, “democracy” derives from two Greek words, ‘*demos*’ which means ‘*the people*’ and ‘*krasten*’ meaning ‘*rule by the people*’. In addition to its Greek antecedents, modern democracy is also taken to have evolved from such medieval institutions as the British parliament and the jury and from the political theories of the seventeenth century such as equality of men, natural rights and sovereignty (Heater 2001). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that democracy is not an exclusively Greek or Western value. Recent historical and archaeological research by African archeologists has shown that some of the basic principles of democracy existed in other civilizations. For instance, the popular participation was a major and relevant feature of many pre-colonial systems of government in Africa (Tsuwa 2006).

Schumpeter (1964) defines it as: a political method that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions, a method by which the individual acquire the power to participate in decision by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote. In the same vein, Sagay (1996) sees democracy as a system of governance that allows the people to freely elect their leaders and hold them accountable and which provides opportunity for the greater number of people to use their human potentials to survive in dignity.

From the above, it can be safely concluded that democracy refers to an institutionalized arrangement for arriving at political decisions as well as competitive political platform in which competing leaders offer public policy alternatives to maximize rational and mass participation in the decision-making process.

As a way of classification through the historical perspectives on democracy, it is found out that there are two kinds of democracy; pure, direct or participatory democracy, and indirect electoral or representative democracy. The distinction here is how sovereign power of the state is exercised. According to Garner in Johari (1989), a pure democracy so called, is one in which the will of the state is formulated or expressed directly and immediately through the people in mass meeting or primary assembly rather than through a medium of delegates or representatives chosen to act for them.

The other is the indirect or representative democracy, which is seen by Schumpeter (1964) as an institutional arrangement in which individuals acquire power by means of competitive struggles for people’s votes. An elaboration of Schumpeter’s notion is reflected as Bello (2003) observes that a cardinal ingredient of democracy is the process through which the citizens confer political mandate on their representatives to form the government. In the contemporary world, representative democracy means that state power is vested in the people, and exercise of such power is given to representatives chosen by and answerable to the people.

Aside from the foregoing, we have other variant of democracy such as Liberal, and socialist democracy. Liberal democracy is a product of industrial capitalism and is championed by countries such as the United States of America, France, Britain etc. It emphasizes the principles of good governance, trade liberalization, internationalization of human rights, rule of law and other principles while socialist democracy is known as the people’s democracy which seeks to extend equality of all citizens from the political, social and economic spheres of life. Thus, it is achieved by bridging the

gap between the rich and the poor through the socialist mode of production. In line with this, Anifowose (1999) argues, closing the inequality gap takes the form of nationalization of major enterprises, institutionalization of rights to education, pension, medical services, insurance, employment and general welfare provisioning.

Theoretical Framework.

The research work adopts the Marxist-political economy approach to explain how the incidence of poverty has determined the nature and practice of democracy in Nigeria. This approach was popularized by a German philosopher, Karl Marx. Political economy has been described as the science of laws, governing production and exchange of material means of production. The centrality of this school of thought, is that the economy determines to a large extent, other aspects of the society, such as politics, religion, culture etc. The primacy given to the economy underscores the fact that the economic needs are man's fundamental needs and until they are satisfied or met, man cannot survive in the first place (Ake, 1981).

Indeed, man must eat before he does anything else such as worshipping and politicking and this is achieved by labour, which supports us. Little wonder, Ake, (1981) asserts that man is as he works. Thus, the economic base determines to a large extent the nature of any society. Applying it to the fundamentals of this work, it is safe to argue that poverty and backwardness which are index of the disarticulated Nigeria economy and democracy are strange bedfellows and by inference, democracy cannot survive well in an environment where poverty is prevalent. Ake, (1996:6) avers thus:

In the context of democracy, the sick cannot participate, the poor are slaves they struggle for survival, and the ignorant cannot choose, we are obliged to choose between democracy and development. Perhaps it is more sensible to eat than to vote with an empty stomach.

The point being made here is that democracy, as the foregoing has shown, is a mitigated failure in Nigeria due to the weak and feeble nature of the rural economy that lacks the productive forces to produce the material needs of the people. Since man must eat before he can do anything else, it become pretty difficult, if not impossible, to talk of effective political participation at the grassroots level which enthrones democracy in the first place. The NGOs therefore seeks through their development programs to empower the rural people and revitalize the rural economy thereby enhancing the ability of the rural people to sustain democracy. The question is; how have the NGOs fared and achieved this goal?

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Rural Development in Nigeria

The emergence of the concept of rural development has also led to the redefinition of the role of the State and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in addressing development priorities. The unprecedented upsurge of NGOs and their role in facilitating participatory development has been on the increase since the last three decades. NGOs, according to Tvedt (1998), has been very effective in mobilizing their beneficiaries in the process of decision-making, identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects that affect the beneficiary's lives. Moreover, NGOs are flexible and effective at obtaining true meaningful participation of the intended beneficiaries, as well as achieving the correct relationship between the development process and outcomes. Over the years, NGOs have played various roles in the development processes which in turn increased the people's ability to participate in politics. These roles are highlighted below:

Gender Awareness and Participation: Although the right to be treated as equals is entrenched in the constitution of most states, there are however several loopholes which have made certain

discriminating policies against women. For example, relocating women at the place of their husbands' employment regardless of the constitutional right for equality, the state still perpetuates traditional sex role stereotypes through its policies and development programmes. The role of women in the society and the images people mostly are deeply rooted in religion and culture. But the activities of NGOs like the Human Liberty Development Centre and Centre for Community Health and Human Services have gradually changed the situation for the better in the rural areas as they have paved the way for women to exercise their political rights in local governance. Again, they ensure women participation to certain extent; challenges social stigmas relating to their ability to exercise power and alter the texture of daily politics by injecting different values and perspective. Women through participation display more integrity, improved political administration because women are more accessible to the community than the men. They are more transparent and more effective in fighting grassroots corruption and problems. Women have become more enlightened to draw attention to education, water, sanitation, drug and alcohol abuse issues, which are generally not focused by men. The above have in no small measure galvanized increased participation of women which in turn has enhanced democratic sustainability.

Community Mobilization/Empowerment: The NGOs through their effective community mobilization and empowerment, the communities are being made to take their own destiny in their own hands by making them to know that they have the capacity to organize or manipulate their environment for their own end. Through the process of mobilization and empowerment, communities have been able to take control of their political and economic circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Utuk 2014). They embark on the training of people in the area of skills acquisition. They also award scholarship to deserving students to study both at home and abroad. They render technical assistance to both Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and governments. This assistance helps in no small measure in building capacity among the people hence an empowered man is better positioned to participate in democracy.

Health Care Programmes: Access to qualitative health care has gone beyond the reach of most Nigerians particularly those in the rural areas. But thank God for the activities of NGOs like the Community Partner for Development and Hope Foundation etc who have come in as the saving grace with efforts aimed at encouraging community mobilization for health development activities. They have developed so many communities' health care programmes and trained volunteers on various community problems to undertake baseline information and follow up on those who need medical care and attention. Since the dogma of democracy is popular participation it becomes difficult if not impossible for the people with health issue to effectively participate in politics. The activities of NGOs in bursting the health of the people therefore serve as a catalyst for democratic sustainability. In the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, NGOs were at the fore front making advocacy and educating people on how to live in the realities of the pandemic. Some went ahead to distribute hand sanitizers, facemasks and other protective materials to rural areas in Benue State. Organizations such as Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, Kaarvan Crafts Foundation and Amref Health Africa created awareness on how to prevent outbreaks, and provided food materials to the vulnerable (Shaw, 2020).

Micro-Credit Scheme and Poverty Alleviation: The last three decades have been extremely turbulent, poverty becoming endemic as millions of Nigerians without work deteriorate fastly below absolute poverty line. More and more the future seems gloomy as the link between democracy and the poor is increasing with a new stratum, of society ("New Poor") gets impoverished. This new poor includes the well-educated, without or with jobs earning salaries that cannot finance even minimum

living condition for themselves and families. Transforming the Nigerian society then becomes a major challenge to sustainable development in our new democracy, and more and more policy makers are concurring with the inevitable conclusion that poverty alleviation schemes must be adjusted to reduce or eradicate poverty. The government has confronted poverty through different approaches which have failed or not yielded the desired result either due to politicization of poverty alleviation programmes, lack of continuity and inconsistency in policy implementation, which inhibit progress and create climate uncertainties and lack of the political will of the leadership to ensure that resources for social development programmes, get to the targeted beneficiaries.

HIV/AIDS and other Topical Issues: There is no doubt that NGOs have been at the fore-front (although in collaboration with government) in fighting the endemic problem of HIV/AIDS. Through various work-shops, seminars, symposiums, media campaign etc, NGOs like Community Partners for Development and Action in Development Centre etc have been able to create awareness of HIV/AIDS and its implications on poverty and development. They have also been involved in other topical issues such as child abuse, early marriage, human trafficking and prostitution, child labor etc. with a view to creating awareness of policy makers to the plight and consequences of these social maladies.

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: Non-governmental organizations have emerged as an indispensable partner in conflict resolution and peace building. They have complemented the efforts of governments and other stakeholders in reconciliation and peace building (Baride 2013). The potential strength of non-governmental organizations as an effective check to state power and dynamic agents of grassroots empowerment and development has been recognized by successive governments since independence. NGOs will continue to play a leading role in the promotion of good government, poverty alleviation, education, health, infrastructural development, promotion and defense of human rights, peace building and conflict prevention.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

NGOs have played a role akin to that of an eye specialist in human right issues. It takes some one (NGO) from the outside to tell the government (democratic or dictatorial) that you are not representing the interest of the citizenry but a few elites. When the vision of government and politicians are blurred as regards respect for human rights, the NGOs who are acting as eye specialist can fit them a pair of appropriate glasses to see properly. The issues of development and democracy is being linked to human right issues because there can be no true economic and political advancement without respect for human beings. The abrupt truncation of the ill-motive Third Term Agenda was stopped by the coalition and activities of NGOs. The recent protest by youths against the wanton hardships experienced in the Nigeria was facilitated by the activities of NGOs.

A legal environment must be created in the form of law whereby each individual can flourish and his freedom thrives in a concept of responsibility with rights and duties. There has been pressure exerted on government to ensure respect for those fundamental rules and human rights. NGOs cannot wait for the situation to get out of hand and talk about intervention, which causes a lot of dislocation and human suffering. NGOs move in quickly whenever a problem crops up and take up such issues through dialogue for the interest of all stakeholders. As the world philosophy is shaping, towards democratization, the world is no longer one of confrontation but the rights of human beings to live in peace and to express themselves fully within the society. NGOs have played a major role in the democratic process through dialogue, lobbying and advocacy. The Social Media Regulation Bill by the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria faced aggressive rejection by Nigerians. The NGOs

led the fight against the obnoxious bill. The ‘Not Too Young to Run Bill’ was signed to law as a result of the activities of NGOs championed by young Nigerians.

Indeed, the interface between poverty and democracy is intertwined and interwoven. Democracy as a system of government is anchored on the rule of law, separation of powers, free and fair elections and the tolerance of opposition. But the situation of poverty as we have it in Nigeria today makes it difficult for the people to challenge democratic institutions because, they simply lack the wherewithal or capacity to sponsor litigation or prosecute erring authorities. For instance, there is a low level of opposition in the country due to poverty. People are easily bought over to the ruling party. Again, people with fundamental grievances such as issues of electoral malpractice, human right violation etc has been unable to challenge such issues in court or with the appropriate authorities due to poverty. Relatedly, the growing scale of poverty in the country has created an ever-widening pool of “available non-elites” who for a pittance are hireable to commit arson, carry out assassinations, cause general mayhem or destroy other innocent citizen’s property. Meanwhile ethnic militias with membership recruited mainly for jobless youths and other individuals with different axes to grind against the society are today available in virtually all part of the country (Akuul 2005). Therefore, the reduction of poverty by the NGOs will greatly improve democracy.

Challenges of Non-Governmental Organizations in Nigeria

Some of the challenges of non-governmental organizations in Nigeria include the following:

- Financial constraint. Their financial resources are made up almost exclusively of dues/contributions paid by members. Most at times, these dues and contributions are not paid regularly by members which in turn affects their growth and also prevents them from performing their legitimate roles effectively.
- Leadership. Non-Governmental Organizations in Nigeria lack efficient leadership. Some are characterized by illiterate and inexperienced leaders who lack requisite knowledge and managerial ability to pilot their affairs.
- Corruption. There is large-scale misappropriation, embezzlement of funds (gifts and dues) and other unprogressive activities. The prevalence of widespread corruption limits their scope of activities and impede their growth.
- Tribalism, ethnicity and nepotism. Nigeria is a heterogeneous society and as a matter of fact, tribalism, ethnicity and nepotism are canker-worms that have eaten deep into the social fabric of the society. This problem has adversely affected the performance of non-governmental organizations in Nigeria.
- Insecurity. There is high-level and widespread insecurity in the country that has led to the wanton destruction of lives and property is also a major factor that has hampered the progress of nongovernmental organizations as some of their members are kidnapped and even some killed for example in Borno State, North East of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The role played by government at various levels national, state and local has in some or many ways at addressing the key issues in rural economic development cannot be overemphasized. NGOs now play a pivotal role in the mobilization of rural communities for rural and democratic development. The rural development programs embarked upon by government to transform the rural economy have minimal impact on the rural economy of the nation. NGOs are now seen as the bridge in the gaps of development. It is therefore, the responsibility of the NGOs to penetrate the rural communities and engage the citizens on the need and benefits of participating in development process for the rapid development of the rural areas. In addition, NGOs are flexible and effective at obtaining true meaningful participation of the intended beneficiaries, as well as achieving the correct

relationship between the development process and outcomes. Rural development has the rural dwellers as the focus of attention. It is the rural dwellers alone who can effectively identify their own problems and adequately identify their perceived needs. It therefore, becomes imperative that they be involved in the design and implementation of development programs meant to improve their welfare. Therefore, rural development planning should start from the people themselves in a bottom-up strategy.

It has also been pointed out that the prolong backwardness of the rural areas has for so long had negative effects on democratic contours, abject poverty and economic stagnation which is pervasive in rural areas in Nigeria are strange bad fellow with democracy. The new democratic experiment upon which the nation has embarked upon since 1999 must embrace the activities of NGOs in order for the government or administration to succeed.

Recommendations

In order to ensure improved and sustainable rural development and democratic consolidation the following suggestions suffice:

- Effective human capital development in the form of skills development, provision of healthcare delivery and other social and educational services.
- Establishment of a policy framework that maximizes the incomes of the working rural dwellers through policies to promote rural self-employment and reliability.
- Encouraging and strengthening cooperative and community based initiatives in the formulation and management of rural development programs, in liaison with available NGOs and the three tiers of government to avoid duplication of efforts, while fostering effective coordination; this includes increased access to micro-credit facilities through the establishment of more cooperative, community and micro-finance banks in the rural areas.
- Providing additional and maintenance of existing infrastructural facilities.
- Encouraging the principle of continuity whereby successive governments adopt the viable rural development programs initiated by their predecessors.
- Carrying out periodic surveys, the rural dwellers' development priority in order to ensure that they are carried along in efforts to better their lives.
- Tackling and curbing crime, violence and youth restiveness which could be through better policing and creation of recreational facilities in the rural areas.

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