

Rural Development in Nigeria: the Way Forward

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief presents strategic recommendations for enhancing rural development efforts in Nigeria through improved coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders. Despite various initiatives by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), many rural communities remain unreached, with basic necessities still considered luxuries (Olajubutu, 2020). The proposed approach advocates for a paradigm shift from isolated interventions to a collaborative framework that harmonizes development efforts across sectors.

BACKGROUND

Rural communities in Nigeria are characterized by:

- Pockets of poverty
- Lack of or inadequate social infrastructure (education, healthcare)
- Limited access to basic services and amenities.

Research has confirmed that rural Nigerian communities face persistent development challenges despite decades of intervention programs (Adeyemo, 2020; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). While various MDAs have implemented projects to address these challenges, a significant gap remains in reaching remote rural communities (Olajubutu, 2020). Every Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MA&RD) in Nigeria maintains a Department of Rural Development (DRD) responsible for rural community development. Additionally, specialized agencies focus on specific aspects such as:

- Rural Water Supply and Sanitation
- Rural Electrification
- Community and Social Development
- Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP), etc.

POLICY CHALLENGES

The current approach to rural development is characterized by:

1. Isolated interventions by different MDAs
2. Lopsided focus on agriculture within DRDs
3. Ineffective coordination mechanisms
4. Limited reach to remote rural settlements
5. Insufficient documentation of rural infrastructure needs

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Restructuring the Role of Departments of Rural Development

DRDs should transition from their current limited scope to become central coordination hubs for all rural development efforts. This requires:

- Broadening their mandate beyond agricultural focus
- Developing comprehensive coordination frameworks
- Establishing formal liaison mechanisms with other MDAs
- Building capacity for multi-sectoral planning and implementation

2. Enhanced Information Management Systems

- Develop comprehensive mapping of rural settlements
- Create profiles and documentation of infrastructural deficiencies
- Establish an online Geo-database allowing public uploading of rural settlement coordinates
- Implement real-time monitoring systems for rural development projects

3. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Framework

DRDs should establish formal collaboration mechanisms with:

- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Education
- Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency
- Rural Electrification Agency
- Community and Social Development Agency
- Local Government Councils
- Non-Governmental Organizations

4. Rural Inclusion Policy

Develop and implement a national rural inclusion policy that:

- Mandates a minimum 25% rural implementation quota for all MDA projects
- Establishes clear guidelines for identifying eligible rural communities
- Creates accountability mechanisms for monitoring compliance
- Provides incentives for exceeding rural inclusion targets

5. Strengthened Local Government Engagement

- Provide technical support to Local Government Councils
- Facilitate capacity building for rural development planning
- Establish joint coordination committees at

local levels

- Develop toolkits for identifying and addressing rural needs

6. NGO Partnership Framework

- Create a structured engagement process for NGOs in rural development
- Establish information sharing platforms on rural needs and interventions
- Develop complementary implementation models to avoid duplication
- Provide regulatory support for rural-focused NGO activities

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

1. Phase 1: Policy Framework Development (6 months)

- Develop the rural inclusion policy
- Design coordination mechanisms
- Establish monitoring frameworks

2. Phase 2: Institutional Realignment (12 months)

- Restructure DRDs with expanded mandates
- Establish formal inter-agency coordination mechanisms
- Develop capacity building programs

3. Phase 3: Systems Development (18 months)

- Implement the Geo-database system
- Develop comprehensive rural settlement mapping
- Create monitoring and evaluation frameworks

4. Phase 4: Full Implementation (Ongoing)

- Roll out the rural inclusion policy
- Activate all coordination mechanisms
- Implement monitoring and enforcement

This phased implementation approach draws on best practices from successful rural development programs in developing countries (Chambers, 2014; Adesina, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The challenges facing Nigeria's rural communities require a paradigm shift from isolated interventions to a coordinated, collaborative approach. By repositioning Departments of Rural Development as coordination hubs and implementing a rural inclusion policy, Nigeria can achieve more significant progress in rural development. This approach, likened to a computer system where components work collaboratively and interdependently, promises more efficient resource utilization and sustainable development outcomes for rural Nigeria.

This policy brief is based on recommendations presented by Damilola Olajubutu (Nee Iyiola), Convener of the Young Rural Developers Summit (YORDS), as part of a keynote address on "Rural Development in Nigeria; the way forward?" The YORDS 2020 summit was designed to explore innovative and sustainable solutions to rural development in the post-COVID-19 era.

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