**RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

**The Meaning of Rural Development**

Rural Development is the transformation of the rural community into socially, economically, politically, educationally, orderly and materially desirable conditions, with the aim of improving the quality of life of the rural population. The workshop on Rural Development in Africa and the workshop group on integrated approach to Rural Development (1996) defined Rural Development in terms of uniform distribution of national resources. It conceived of Rural Development as a comprehensive way of social transformation which recognises that national development must involve all parts of the population. Furthermore, it was defined as a socio-economic process which seeks to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources and incomes within a society. It involves the integration of the rural poor, which constitutes the large majority of the population of most developing countries, into the national economy. In many developing countries, agriculture constitutes the occupation of a large majority of rural people. Therefore, agricultural development is an important aspect of Rural Development. Many industries also use agricultural raw materials. For example, the textile industries use cotton; canning industries use fruits and vegetables; beverage industries use cocoa, coffee and tea; vegetable oil industries use vegetables; animal products industries use diary, cheese, butter, broiler, sugar industries utilise sugarcane. Rural industrialisation is thus a significant aspect of rural development.

**Goals of Rural Development**

Rural Development aims at attaining some goals or objectives in the rural community. Some of these are:

1. Improved distribution between the rural and urban areas to bridge or narrow the differences between the two parts of the society.

2. Provision of welfare needs in forms of housing, health and infrastructural facilities such as clean and regular water, motorable roads and supply of electricity.

3. Full and productive employment in rural area/community. This is to change the situation in which many rural people are under-employed and operate only at the subsistence level, so that they can apply their full productive capacities and generate commensurate benefit from their efforts.

4. Increased productivity via sensitisation of the rural people to their potentials for development, and acquiring education and training needed to translate the potentials into productive efforts.

5. Increased food production. This is the primary agricultural development dimension of rural development. It is expected to lead to a state of improved quality and quantity of food available to the citizens.

6. Wide diffusion of literacy so as to allow rural people participate intelligently in the political, economic and social activities of their society. The foregoing goals can be achieved through coordinated planning and implementation of rural development programmes at the local, state and national levels. National integrated philosophies, policies and procedures for rural development will help facilitate the efforts.

**Strategies for Rural Development**

A rural development strategy is a systematic, comprehensive and reliable tool aimed at bringing about desirable rural transformation. A strategy for rural development is expected to produce results; therefore it is tested and found effective under certain circumstances before being introduced under similar circumstances in another setting. Its expected effectiveness could be due to the fact that it is developed from tested variables. It could also be because it is developed on the basis of experience which had worked. The strategies which have been adopted for rural development by many developing countries, according to Williams (1998) include:

1. Community development

2. Agricultural extension, and

3. Integrated rural development.

**Community Development** Community development aims at using the rural people to develop themselves through self-initiative and motivation, with minimum assistance from government. It aims at social development such as prevention and control of juvenile delinquency, and community development through self-help projects, health and nutritional improvement projects and similar projects. It involves community members in planning and implementing programmes for their own development. It stimulates or encourages government and other development agencies to provide technical advice and materials in planning and implementing the projects. The multi-purpose community development agent who is trained in many aspects of community life such as health, agriculture, education, cooperatives, is stationed at the local level where he works with local people. To achieve this, the community development worker needs to make use of the services of specialised agencies of government in the rural areas. This is because it is not easy for an agent to be skilled in different areas calling for development attention in the rural sector. The problems in utilising this approach include these:

a) There is often no formal coordination between the agencies working at the local level, thus the community development agent has no power to enforce cooperation by other development agencies;

b) It is not very easy for one person to be effectively trained in all sectors of rural development; hence the community development agent may become ineffective. Education which is the cornerstone of all forms of development should be provided. Therefore, it is advisable that rural people are educated on how to develop themselves. Even when infrastructural facilities are provided, the rural people should still be educated on how to maintain them and even introduce others to them.

**Agricultural Extension** Agricultural extention aims at helping rural farmers to bring about agricultural development. It achieves this by facilitating education of farmers to improve their skills, knowledge and attitude as related to agricultural development. It passes the results of research on how to solve the problems of agriculture to farmers and encourages the application of these as well as other improved technical knowledge in agriculture by farmers. It takes the problems of farmers to the research institutions for solutions. It uses demonstration farms, farm visit, audiovisual aids and methods in teaching farmers. Agricultural extension concentrates on agricultural development and encourages related development agencies to extend their services to the rural areas; community development tries to provide some of the services. The trainings received by the village level agricultural extension worker and community development agents are thus aimed at equipping them to perform their various roles. Ineffectiveness in promoting agricultural development is a glaring deficiency of the agricultural extension strategy. The main reasons for this include.

a) Inadequate number of extension agents who are to teach farmers improved farm practices;

b) Inadequate credit facilities to buy farm inputs;

c) Lack of proper use of local leaders to assist extension agents in teaching farmers;

d) Lack of adequate planning of extension programmes;

e) Inadequate motivation of extension agents. If these and similar problems are vastly solved, extension should become an effective instrument for agricultural development.

**Integrated Rural Development** Integrated rural development strategy combines the development of the various areas of the rural society including educational, agricultural, health nutrition, rural electrification, rural water supply and cooperative simultaneously. The strategy also aims at improved employment, access to production resources, access to social services, and management of development resources. The distinguishing feature of this strategy, is that the various development sectors are considered jointly together rather than in isolation in order to see their relationship clearly. The utilisation of this strategy involves increased mobilisation and motivation of rural people to participate actively in decision-making process concerning their progress and in the development activities. There should also be established institutional relationships which will facilitate the development of the sectors. Rural development councils should be set up at the national, state and local government levels to educate people, clarify difficulties and mobilise moral and financial support for rural development. Government has set up a directorate of foods, roads and infrastructure which is charged with the responsibilities for specially facilitating food production, road construction and provision of other rural infrastructural facilities such as electricity and pipe-borne water supply to the rural area. Many agencies and institutions employ the integrated-strategy for rural development. Some church denominations have agricultural and related rural development projects in Nigeria. Universities have also embarked on integrated rural development on experimental basis. The Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, embarked on integrated rural development project since 1972 in the forest zone of Nigeria. This is the Isoya Rural Development Project (Williams 1998).

**Approaches to Rural Development** Approaches to rural development are the geographical and the subjectmatter of rural development. Three approaches could be identified namely:

1. The sectorial approach

2. The holistic approach and

3. The regional approach

**The Sectoral Approach** In the sectorial approach, rural development efforts are geared towards developing the different sectors of the rural society. Efforts are made to identify the significant sectors such as the agricultural, health, education and infrastructural sectors of the rural society. Development efforts are then focused on one sector. This tradition had tended to favour the development of agricultural sector, which had been regarded as the most important sector of the rural society in developing countries, because majority of the rural population of these countries are engaged in it. Experience with this approach had led to some problems such as:

a) There had been strong criticism of this approach by the professionals from the other non-agricultural sectors.

b) The agricultural sector has not been substantially developed partly because of its relationship with other sectors which have not been assisted or supportive.

**The Holistic Approach** This approach attempts to develop all the sectors in a given area simultaneously. The agricultural, health, education, and infrastructural sectors are developed at the same time. The problems with this approach are:

(a) Inadequate coordination of the development activities in the various sectors;

(b) Inadequate number of specialised and technical manpower to implement the prgrammes, and (c) Inadequate financial resources to implement development programmes Regional Approach In the regional approach to rural development, a society is soned into development regions which are most suited for establishing certain development projects. In Nigeria, for example, while production of potato might be developed in the dried savanna parts of the country, cocoa, kola nut and oil palm production are naturally encouraged in the rain forest areas of the country. Infrastructural facilities are developed all over the country. The major demerits of this approach is that it ignores the fact that scientific rural development aims at bringing development facilities to rural areas where they do not exist originally, apart from developing the potentials where they naturally existed. Example of this is that water could be channeled into the desert for crop, livestock and human consumption. Also, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, improved seeds and other scientific inputs are similarly introduced to boost production. This results in establishment of human settlement, institutions, organisation and industrial establishments. Another constraint is that some regions might be ignored while others are developed or favoured on the ground of political advantage (Jibowo 1992).

**Stages of Rural Development** The change agent should first of all clarify the concept of rural development to be embarked upon. This must be compatible with the needs and aspirations of the community to be helped. An adequate concept of rural development in a democratic and developing society like Nigeria should aim at permanent development of the skill, knowledge, attitude, sensitivity, consciousness required to improve the target system educationally, socially, economically and psychologically along with the physical and biological features of their environment. According to (Jibowo 1992), when this concept is clarified the worker can then embark on five stages of rural development namely:

1. Enquiry

2. Planning

3. Implementation

4. Adjustment, and

5. Evaluation.

**Enquiry** At the stage of enquiry, emphasis should be on how to obtain reliable and valid information about the community where the programme is to be implemented and the neighbouring communities. The resources available within and outside the community in terms of number and quality of personnel, local and external financial aid available have to be determined. The characteristics of the community and its surroundings, their needs and aspirations among other information should be determined. The information can be collected through personal observation, survey, history and records of local events.

**Planning** The planning stage should depend widely on the information collected at the enquiry stage in formulating rural development objectives and methods of implementing them. You should evaluate the results which the programme might generate. The planning stage should involve the administrators of the programme, the change agents, farmers representatives and related officials of the agency. The planned project is kept as a flexible and modifiable document to allow changes for improvement. Too much emphasis on agricultural development is avoided unless the programme is conceived mainly as agricultural development project. Industrial development and non-agricultural vocations, saving and investments, cleanliness, environmental sanitation and beautification might be added. Adjustment programme should be included in the plan.

**Implementation** At this stage the plan is followed with concrete action. Infrastructural development should be given priority at this stage. Where a substantial amount of infrastructural facilities and natural resources existed before the statement of the programme, success would be better assumed. Rural development is a complex assignment which requires full-time staff. The role of any part-time staff should be supplementary to the major role needed to realise the objectives of the programme.

**Adjustment** For effectiveness, the change agent has to understand the community and its resources and start within the framework of the existing social structure. Even when the programme implementation is in progress, collection of information on the progress of the programme continues. The timing of the project along with other areas of the plan and calendar of work have to be followed. When modifications or adjustments are made, they have to be communicated to all people concerned with the project. Change could be traumatic. It is thus necessary to implement the programme designed to assist the target population adjust to the development exercise.

**Evaluation** This should in fact be a continuous exercise. The programme should be at least evaluated about half way in its implementation to make necessary in-process modification and at the end to determine accomplishments and provide information from which the programme could benefit in future.

**Predicaments of Rural Development** In spite of the efforts which various institutions have made in trying to develop the rural area, there is the general dissatisfaction that the rural area is still generally backward in many societies, especially the less developed countries. This state of limited development could be associated to many constraints which have confronted rural development planning and implementation. The following problems in the rural development planning by African governments were stated in the report of an international workshop on designing rural development strategies (1995).   
1. Poor statistical base for effective planning

2. Wrong view of small farmers who are considered as irrational and incapable of making progress on their own initiatives, although small farmers produce most of the food consumed in Africa.

3. Lack of commitment to rural development as indicated by expertoriented planning at the expense of local food production for local consumption.

4. Top-down planning in which few top administrators make decision on rural development programme planning and disseminate this down for implementation.

5. Planning without implementation and implementation without planning of programmes.

6. Lack of plan monitoring and evaluation, thus there is no systematic way of determining programme accomplishments, facilitating effectiveness and efficiency. In addition to the foregoing design problems, other rural development problems are stated below:

7. Rural development programmes on one hand traditionally concentrated on agricultural development to the neglect of the other sectors and projects, a situation which has resulted in the problem of over-loading and consequent ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

8. Rural development projects being carried out by educational and research institutions suffer from lack of full attention of the researchers and educators to rural development. This is because their primary concern in the community is much.

9. Many rural development projects also suffer from shortage of resources and infrastructure. When plans are made for delivery of these, hardly are the plans adhered to. Resources such as land, labour, personnel, buildings, equipment and financial capital are scarcely obtained as anticipated.

10. Inadequate understanding of the rural community such as its structure of influence, communication and decision-making, patterns, existence of functions, norms and values by the change agent. This is because they rarely live with the rural people. However, adequate understanding is an important foundation for collective work in rural communities.

11. Lack of follow-up. Many rural development programmes have collapsed shortly after the withdrawal of the change agent system. This is due to lack of systematically implemented follow up after the expiration of the initial period planned for the programme. The main aim of rural development workers is to provide and implement solutions to the above related problems. It is then that the state of dissatisfaction can change to relative satisfaction with advances in rural development.   
**CONCLUSION** This topic is the most essential part of the course that has to be taken seriously. It has revealed to us the various issues of rural development in the country.   
**SUMMARY** You should have learnt from this topic, the meaning, objectives, strategies and approaches to rural development. Stages of rural development as well as its problems were also highlighted. It is hoped that by now, you would be able to understand the general concept and issues in rural development.

**STAY SAFE AND BE GOOD**