

## **Rural Neglect: A Setback to National Development and its Implications**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores the sordid plight of the Nigeria rural communities as a result of elite neglect for not providing them with the catalyst to accelerate development like their urban counterparts. The paper briefly explained development within the framework of individual and societal perspectives, the intricacies in rural neglect and its nexus as a setback in national development and the implications thereto. It also chronologically traced the origin of rural-urban dichotomy in Nigeria communities and suggested panaceas to curb or eradicate the persistent ugly trend which has constituted a gross setback to national development, thereby stagnating and suffocating Nigeria into underdevelopment. Integrated Rural Development (IRD) approach is identified as a gateway to connect and harness the diverse and scattered elements and strategies of rural development into multi-purpose (an all inclusive and all-round) development to reflect true national development to ensure national prosperity and welfare of the citizens. This paper marshaled out way forward to rural emancipation, and advocated result oriented empowerment of rural human capital and infrastructural development. It also exposed that national development is a fallacy without rural development, thus whatever happens in the urban centres in terms of development should be adequately replicated in the rural areas in greater or at least equal proportion before it becomes national and balanced development.*

**Keywords:** Rural neglect, national development, setback, integrated rural development.

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### **AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL NEGLECT**

A critical observation of Nigeria enclaves lives no doubt that Nigeria is bipolarized into urban and rural communities, created conscientiously by the urban elite. However, a little further observation lives one with glaring characteristics and differences between the two communities; one urban (developed), and the other rural (not developed), thereby being ghettoed, improvised, ravaged with poverty, diseases, squalor, uninhabitable thatched and mud huts, hunger, illiteracy, impassable roads, lack of access to basic modern facilities etc as a result of 'rural neglect' occasioned by government and other agencies statutorily involved in rural development mandate.

It is an acclaimed fact that government is catalyst for development. But shockingly, this paternalistic role of government in developmental process of Nigeria has not been fairly carried out in the rural sector which is the pillar of our foreign exchange and major source of revenue generation. Obodoechi (2009)[1] attests to the fact that oil which constitutes a large proportion of Nigeria foreign exchange is exploited principally in the rural areas, but, by and large the rural people are on-lookers in the exploitation process. They suffer from the effects of physical degradation of the oil, pollution of the fishing waters, and lacks access to employment. Worse still they are neglected in the distribution of infrastructural facilities like, all season roads, electricity, potable water, telephone, health facilities, schools etc.

This neglected Nigeria rural sector is arguably the back bone in which the urban sector and the national economy are predicated on. It is the rural sector that produces food for the nation, raw materials for the urban industries, has 70-80 % of national population for electoral conquest in determining who coasts to victory in democratic dispensation. Yet, they are pathetically dejected, deprived and subjected to deplorable inhuman conditions that are conscientiously created by the urban elite (ruling class).

Johnny Obiukwu (1992)[2] affirms that rural people occupy a very significant position in the advancement of government and the larger society. They support government through various patriotic measures. They pay taxes, education levies and contribute to self-help efforts in their belief that every government must have too much in its hands to give equal attention to all areas of the society. Yet, they are the most marginalized lot in our society. According to Ezeani (1995)[3] the rural economy is only considered important in the development scheme of things so long as it continues to service the urban economy without which the metropolitan centres can neither operate in the country nor exploit its resources.

Sunday Statesman (Feb; 2, 1987) in Michael Olisa and Johnny Obiukwu (1992)[2] records that even no less personality than a state governor had this to say:

*“The wealth which built modern Nigeria whether in the era of the dominance of agricultural commodities, or of petroleum, was derived from the rural areas. Notwithstanding this, we have witnessed even in the not-too-distant past, the virtual neglect of these areas and their population. The recent phenomenon of massive importation of food and growth of slums in our major cities along with its attendant social, political and economic consequences have been the result of the collapse of the rural economy and infrastructure”.*

The persistent occurrence of rural neglect and government acceptance of the hard truth on its unfairness to rural communities paved way for an attempt for the very first time for inclusion and integration of rural communities in its National Development Plans. Ezeani (1995)[3] posits that, it was not until the Third National Development Plan (1975-80), that specific attention was paid to rural development. I was only in the Fourth National Development Plan (1980-84), that rural development was recognized as a plan category, and even then the programmes had to do mainly with agriculture which is only an aspect of

rural development. The Third national Development Plan emphasized on balanced development, thus:

*In the past the rural areas have lagged behind the urban areas in development resulting in increasing disparity between standard of living in the rural and urban areas and in mass migration of population from the former to the latter. The present plan aims at checking this movement by especially promoting the development of the rural areas. (Third National Development Plan, 1975).* While the Fourth National Development Plan captures its rural development agenda as:

*Government is committed to social transformation in the rural sector in order to give farmers a sense of belonging and pride in their occupation... During the plan period, the Federal Government, through the Federal Department of Cooperatives will give boost to the formation of agricultural cooperatives throughout the country... In addition to promoting agricultural production, efforts will be made to improve social amenities in the rural areas through the provision of feeder roads, water supply, storage facilities, et cetera (Fourth National Development Plan, 1981). (Ibid).*

However, the government efforts in the implementations of the National Development Plans were done in a shoddy and shallow manner thereby subjecting rural communities through provisions of matching grants in aid for financial and technical assistance by state governments to communities, who initiated projects via self help strategy, raised fund called development levy taxed on members of communities under the guidance of Town Unions. The communities also contributed labour; choose their leaders who managed the various projects from initiation to completion, and from commissioning to usage and maintenance, unlike their urban counterparts.

The gloomy excerpt from (Igboeli, 1992)[4] paints an obvious picture of rural neglect when he posits that quite a number of self help projects were embarked upon by various communities when to their utter dismay, they realized soon after independence that contrary to their expectations, government was not in a position to provide all their needs. The feeling that “successive governments have neglected us” became transformed into an attitude of “what can we do for ourselves”. Because of their concern mostly for education and health, most of these communities built primary and secondary schools and negotiated with either the government or voluntary agencies for teaching staff. They built clinics and made similar arrangements for staff. Attention was also directed toward the building of feeder roads, bridges and boreholes.

The adoption of rural neglect or ‘do nothing approach’ by the authorities concerned in the delivery of human and infrastructural developments to the ruralites constitutes a land slide setback on national development purported to be in pursuit by the same authorities which turned deaf ear and blind to the glaring plights of the rural dwellers. This has earned the rural people various degrading names which Obodoechie (2009)[5] asserts that Olatubosun called them “Nigeria’s neglected rural majority”. Anthonio referred to them as the “Stagnant sector” in the economy. To Ijere, Nigeria’s rural people constitute “the other Nigeria” with poverty linked characteristics... They are victims of “collective poverty” in contrast to the

American Style where there “Island” of underdevelopment surrounded by a region of abundance.

In the same vein, Frantz Fanon called them “Wretched of the Earth”. All these mockery on the rural people is a clear demonstration of the reality of the mess they are in. The worst of it all is that the mess is occasioned by the urban ruling elite who were mostly born and raised in villages amidst the rural plights, thus experience would have taught them not to commit rural neglect, but woefully the reverse is the case. The most painful aspect of the sorrowful situations of rural areas is that up to 92 % of the national population has their roots in rural communities either by birth, origin, parental residents, family consanguinity, affinity, marriage, cultural and traditional linings, religion etc. which should form basis for radical development in the rural spatial, but to no avail.

The neglect of the rural areas discussed above persists to date. Therefore, in contrast to the situation in the urban places, where there are surpluses of the facilities that make life worth living, the rural areas remain disadvantaged, while their inhabitants maintain a marginalized existence. Life in the rural sector is characterized by abject poverty, debilitating diseases and unpardonable ignorance[3].

#### A TRUE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For a true national development to be achieved, it must affect a critical mass of the national population and the critical mass of the geographical dispositions irrespective of the locations, whether in the rural or urban settlements. It must adopt an all inclusive pattern and maintain a balanced perspective to ensure that the critical mass of the population contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which will lead to an increase in per capital income of the people and the nation at large, thereby improving the standard of living, purchasing power and welfare of the majority of the national population. This is the economic blueprint for an all inclusive and integrated national development which brings national prosperity and national welfare. Development has a broad prospective and multi dimensional nature at individual and societal levels thereby cutting across all facets of human life. Rodney (1972:1) says that “development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. He further posits that development at the level of social groups implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships”.

Development according to Abah (2007:4)[6] means to improve, to make progress, change for better, higher income or better living standard. Increase in the quantity of goods and services available to people and thereby the quality of their lives. Social and material advancement which enables people to gain greater control of their environment. Akpan and Onyinlola(1995)[7], in Olowe (1995)[8] defines development as a widely participatory process of directed social change and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment. There are myriads of literature on the definition of development but we will leverage on the above definitions from the perspectives of the

authors which gives us a wider view of development at individual and societal levels. Therefore, for a nation to develop, the citizens must be first developed (human capital/resource development) which will lead to overall national development at macro level via deployment of material and infrastructural development induced by self-reliant achievements from the developed citizens. It is the people that develop the nation, thus the people must be first developed and empowered before they can utilize the skills they acquired to transform the nation in whatever capacity they want. Eze (2005:8)[9] asserts that the greatness of nations is not measured on their land mass, vegetation, mineral resources, climate or geographical location but the quality of their citizens. It is in the light of the above that this paper posits that Nigeria underdevelopment or backwardness in development is a direct product of its rural neglect in pursuit of development strides, thus lacks the credentials and credibility of a true national development.

Ezeani (1995)[3] opined that over 75% of Nigeria's inhabitants living in the rural areas and depending for their livelihoods on agriculture, the true success of a comprehensive economic and social development programme in Nigeria is primarily dependent upon the extent to which it contributes to the well-being of those living in the rural areas.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Integrated Rural Development (IRD) - this advocates for the adoption of holistic and systemic perspectives in pursuit of national development by linking up or integrating urban and rural areas (national/balanced development) as a given entity in the scheme of things, plans, programs, projects and implementations of human and material developments, aimed at given the citizenry equal opportunity in all things, irrespective of wherever one resides in the country. It (IRD) canvasses for uniformity in recognition of rural development as a multi-sectoral, interrelated, jointed, interdependent, and multi-purpose application of all factors, strategies and philosophy of rural development concurrently as a single plan of action, not treating rural development as a disjointed and uncoordinated subject with irreconcilable diverse approaches for diverse results.

IRD is anchored on the 'whole' aspect of rural development, not on the 'part'. It is the ecology and anatomy of rural development that captures and factors in all variables in the rural environment. Michael O. Olisa (1992)[10] defined IRD as a programme of rural development which recognizes the essences of all human and material factors relevant to rural development, their positive and negative potentials in rural development goals and implementation. He further posits that factors involved in rural development are interrelated and mutually enhance one another in their effectiveness. According to Eze (2005)[9] IRD is a development strategy that aims at not just increasing the contribution of the rural sector to the Gross National Product (GNP) but also one that attempts to enthrone equity in the distribution of gains of increased productivity between the urban and the rural dwellers. In other words, it seeks to integrate the ruralites into the economic and political mainstream of the nation. The strategy also entails government and community cooperative participation in the provisioning of better health, education, rural infrastructure, in such a coordinated and simultaneous manner to enhance the overall welfare of the rural dwellers.

To Obodoechie (2009)[5] IRD is a comprehensive and coordinated efforts of all relevant persons and agencies concerned with participatory determination of policies, planning, and implementation of program designed to improve the economic, social, political and cultural conditions of the people to engender their positive contribution towards national development. Integrated approach arises from the understanding that the complicated nature and high interrelatedness of community and rural development deserves more than a single expert.

### FORMS OF INTEGRATION

The following are forms of integration according to Michael O. Olisa, in Rural Development in Nigeria: Dynamics and Strategies PP. 42 - 50

1. Integration of objective policies and programmes
2. Integration of sectors
3. Organizational integration:
  - I. Governmental units: national, state, (in federations) and local governments.
  - II. Non-governmental associations: community improvement unions, and rural cooperative associations.
  - III. Quasi-government bodies: DFRRI, National Directorates of Employment, the special banks (cooperative, development, commerce, industrial and agricultural banks).
  - IV. Natural rural communities.
  - V. The sexes: special provisions and programmes for women's involvement in rural community.

Frantz, Fanon (1968)[11] in Ayichi (1995)[12] succinctly asserts that integrated rural development is the believe that the problem of rural development is how to eradicate the "integrated rural poverty" which can only be achieved by pursuing integrated strategy. This approach seeks to develop all sectors of the rural economy and effectively link them to the urban economy. Thus it encourages mutually supportive urban and rural linkages. In other words, it seeks to promote linkages between formal and informal sectors, farm and non-farm activities.

### ORIGIN OF RURAL-URBAN DICHOTOMY IN NIGERIA

For better insight and appreciation of how Nigeria as an enclave or entity fall prey to rural-urban dichotomy, it is necessary that we classify it into phases according to evolutionary trends that created the disparity, its adoption, and sustenance.

#### 1. Phase one (Pre-colonial era)

To know where we are and how we got to the place, it is essential that we trace back to where we were and the things that brought us to where we are. Prior to the advent of the White on African soil, and Nigeria shores in particular, every community was a hinterland with rural settings marked with high degree of uniqueness as a result of differences in cultural linings, geographical dispositions, and pattern of social structure, relations, progress and variables. Yet there existed uniformity (rurality) in diversity (communities). At this phase, every community in Nigeria was rightfully presumed to be a rural community

with no special central government, thus there was no special concentration of attention (development) in one place against the other. But note that at this stage, every community in Nigeria and African made one level of social progress or the other in advancement of the collective course or welfare of the people. This general course was pursued for the general good of the communities with no disparity in the application of gains thereto.

## **2. Phase two (Arrival of the White in Nigeria and Colonialism)**

Shortly, the 'game changer', which is the invasion of the White in Nigeria, process of their arrival, objectives and activities evolutionarily altered the natural rural communities' landscape, thereby resulting in the emergent of cities (urban areas) which marked the birth of rural-urban dichotomy in Nigeria society. The cities are the hub or epicenters of where the White lived known as Government Reserved Areas (GRA), where they worked (Governance activities), where they bought and exported slaves and raw materials for European and American capitalists industries in exchange for goods & services (trade & commerce) etc.

In the light of the above, the areas known as White Settlements began to wear a different look through gradual deployment of infrastructure for the use of the White colonialists, not for social services and progress, thereby leading to those hitherto hinterlands to become urban centres (communities) which divided the uniformed Nigeria hinterlands of communities into urban and rural centres. Ayichi (1995)[12] rightfully posits that in Nigeria, the administrative and commercial interests of colonial masters influenced the development of urban centres. Hence, industrial and commercial nerve-centres were delineately situated in the urban areas. However, experience across the country, has shown that the trickle-down hypothesis implicit in this model is not always true. In Nigeria, the emerging result of the model has been economic dualism characterized by rural-urban migration, rural neglect, and consequently urban decay caused by over population.

Obodoechie (2009:23)[5] captures it clearly when he posits that in Nigeria, urban areas began to develop because of the advent of the White Man. As early as fifteenth century, centres began to emerge where slaves were packed for onward movement to America and Europe. This was supported by trade in tobacco, ho drinks, salt, metals like matchet, gun etc. This was before colonialism was forcefully introduced in Nigeria (i.e. 1900-backwards), while the era of colonialism was (1900-1960).

Creation of money economy by the colonialists to enhance deeper penetration of capitalist exploitation dislocated our locally emerging economy and created a vacuum in the hinterlands now known as rural communities. This is because the able bodied youths migrated en masse out of the rural settings to the colonial urban settings in search of menial jobs to earn money, pay taxes to the colonialists, and to have a glance or taste of facilities deployed in the cities by the colonialists. This no doubt disorganized collective social progress in various communities. See "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa", by Walter Rodney, 1972.

According to Ezeani (1995)[3], the rural areas were particularly denied social services that are essential for rural development, while the bulk of the social services went to the cities where British administrators and 'experts' lived. This fact was succinctly put by [13].

*The Southern part of Nigeria was one of the colonial areas that was supposed to have received the most from a benevolent 'mother country'. Ibadan, one of the most heavily populated cities in Africa had only about 50 Europeans before the last war, for those chosen few, the British colonial government maintained a segregated hospital service of 11 beds in well furnished surroundings. There were 34 beds for the half-a million blacks. The situation was repeated in other areas, so that altogether the 4,000 Europeans in the country in the 1930's had 12 modern hospitals, while the Africa population of at least 40 million had 52 hospitals. This was the situation in Nigeria prior to her independence.*

### **3. Phase three (Independence era, 1960 - date)**

During and after independence, little or no effort was made by the self government of the people of Nigeria to discontinue or abate the rural neglect occasioned by rural-urban dichotomy inherited from the ex-colonial masters. Rather, rural communities witnessed the worst neglect until the Third National Development Plan (1975 - 1980) when the indigenous government accepted being negligent to rural welfare and perpetration of rural-urban dichotomy; thus, agree to arrest the ugly trend. Moreover, the extent to which our various national development plans have failed woefully to arrest the situation is a clear indication of the glaring evident of inhuman status prevalent in Nigeria rural/village communities.

Obiukwu Jonny (1992)[2] states that ruralism as we know it today in Nigeria underlines the dichotomous thinking which existed in relation to patterns of development and which ascribed certain degrees of importance to specific areas and left other areas in total neglect. According to Igboeli (1992)[4] one of the major common characteristics of the developing countries is the increasing disparity between the urban and the rural sectors. This is an outstanding feature of Nigeria politics in which preference in location or completion of projects is often accorded some areas to the total neglect of others.

However, Ezeani (1995)[3] clearly asserts that in spite of political independence, the pattern of production and economic activities instituted by colonialism survived unscathed. The economic motivation of the petty bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie which assumed the leadership of the country after independence did not seek to make a break with the colonial production process. Thus the colonial development strategies were perpetrated after independence. Olantunbosun (1975)[14] commenting on the nature of Nigeria development plan after independence posits that the character of the plan made it essentially a continuation of the colonial development policy in Nigeria, for the substance of the economic policy implicit in the plan did not differ significantly from the previous policy of the colonial masters.

The deliberate and continuous nonchalant of various self or indigenous governments in failure of provisions of infrastructure and human developments in the rural spatial account for the widening gap between rural and urban communities. This has led to centre



periphery politics of the Nigerian ruling elite which holds the nation backward in development via their denial of the peripheries (rural areas) equal development opportunities with their (centres) urban counterparts.

#### **PANACEAS TO RURAL-URBAN DICHOTOMY IN NIGERIA**

1. Governments at all levels and development agencies will have to accept the hard truth that there will never be national development they purports to be pursuing until the rural spatial wear looks close to or equal to their urban counterparts. A genuine implementation of all round integration approach will enhance the achievement of a true national/balanced development.
2. Bottom-up policy approach should be adopted in our national development, not the top-bottom policy approach that is directive in nature, autocratic, lacks consultation and participation of the people, and in most cases do not touch or address the real needs of the ruralites.
3. Governments should declare state of emergency in rural areas and embark on aggressive pursuit of human capital and infrastructural developments in the rural communities. This in other words will create room for balanced development; a development that cuts across all categories of persons, the length and breath, the width and height of the entire nation in equal proportion that recognizes diversity in geographical or environmental needs of each area based on its peculiarities.
4. Restructuring of our shoddy federalism to guarantee urgent restoration of local governments' autonomy in order to be fully empowered to operate as an independent tier of government. This will enable local governments to live up to its developmental roles to the grassroots (rural communities), being the government closest to the people. The federal and state governments claim to have been saddled with national development for so many years now, but all we could see indeed is federal capital (Abuja) and various state capitals being developed at the exclusion of local governments. Therefore, the statutory responsibility via full financial autonomy and independence should be granted to LGs to man its constituencies (rural communities), and to enable them develop their own people and places, having federal and state governments failed to integrate them in the scheme of national development.
5. Optimization and utilization of rural population. It is widely agreed fact that 70-80% of Nigeria population lives in the rural communities. Therefore, the workforce of the nation lies dormant and trapped in rural unemployment. If government and its agencies can develop the rural population, the macro manpower need of the nation will be a productive sector that will leverage on the advantages of optimum population to enhance nation building and development. But right now in Nigeria what we have seems to be over population due to lack of efficient utilization of the available manpower in the countryside.

#### **THE FALLACY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPEMNT**

Anchoring on Chapter 2 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitutional provisions captioned 'Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy', the provisions thereto,

provide a mirror for assessment and reflection on how genuine the law has been obeyed and complied to in pursuit of national development, or how it has been flouted with lopsidedness in favour of urban areas at the expense of rural areas. The Political Objectives in Sections 15 (3a) says that, it shall be the duty of the State to: (a) provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the federation; While Section 16(1) under Economic Objectives says that, the State shall ...

- (a) harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy;
- (b) control the national economy in such manner as to secure maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity;

Section 16 (2) says that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring:

- (a) the promotion of planned and balanced economic development;
- (b) that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good;
- (c) that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or a group etc.

A sincere study with understanding of the above spotted relevant sections and the entire Chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria will guide and open one's eyes to see the pitfalls and fallacies in our purported national development, for failing to be in tandem with the provisions of the Chapter 2 which advocates all-round and balanced development (elimination of rural-urban dichotomy in persons and infrastructural advancement), equitable distribution of national resources (equal opportunity in development and empowerment of citizens despite areas of abode) etc. have not been evenly applied thereby leading to glaring neglect of rural areas to the concentration of development in the urban areas that account for only 20-30% of the national population. This is a clear injustice to the rural people and their environs based on the noncompliance of the state and its actors in deployment of developmental oriented projects.

In the light of the above, the sordid status of Nigeria rural communities is a clear cut indication and evidence of the failure of national development acclaimed to be in pursuit by government and development agencies. The concept of national development as it affects rural communities is based on cognitive dissonance fashioned by the elite deceit/lie to massage the feelings of deprivation of the ruralities into false sense of belonging on the assumption that central and state governments care for and provide their needs collectively with their urban counterparts within the framework of national development. Sincerely, any development that is not based on inclusiveness of all and sundry, every nook and cranny of the human society irrespective of locations and the dwellers is not national/balanced development; rather, it is sectional, selective, and sectoral development, which is not sustainable.

Therefore, what has been going on in Nigeria despite the various acclaimed national development plans and efforts have been sectoral (urban) development, not national development, because the development only takes place in the urban areas thereby being evident in the unimaginable wide disparity between rural and urban spatial. This ugly gap must be closed before we can agree that we are pursuing national development agenda. However, for the gap to be bridged, government which created it must also close it through massive, aggressive, and consistent human capital and material developments of the rural settings. This is because the gap is too wide to be left for self-help efforts of the people, and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Awa (1992)[15], in Ayichi (1995)[12] views area development of one place against the other that it promotes emergence of “economic islands” surrounded by “sea of rural poverty” and thus incapable of enhancing overall national development.

In the same vein, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999)[16] states inter alia that all these positive efforts on the part of government derive from the realization that unless the rural sector is developed, whatever development as may be achieved in the urban sector may come to naught because of the gross economic interdependence between the urban and rural; the centre periphery. He further posits that the hope is that if every community is developed, the whole nation can be said to be developed and opportunities for discord and wrangling within the national system will be averted. Ohagwu (2010:66)[17] asserts that the purported national development is fallacious; not national, but lopsided by affirming that 80% of Nigeria population thus live in rural areas and whatever affect this majority, especially as the wealth of the nation is sourced from their area, must be important. Yet over the years, they have been neglected and have no access to the basic infrastructure required to meet the needs of the modern man.

The self-help efforts of the members of various communities where they initiate projects, contribute money and labour to sponsor projects to logical conclusion, from implementation to commission and usage which has resulted in several successful projects execution in various communities nationwide is as indictment that national development is not truly national in principle and application. This is because if it were, communities won't have to tax themselves for the execution of projects supposedly to have been provided by the government. The question that agitates the mind is: why is it that self-help projects are only seeing in rural communities without its kind in urban communities? I guess you already know the answer. But if not, you only see self-help projects where there is no government presence as the case of rural areas where government is doing nothing significant, thereby living the people with no choice than to mobilise themselves and take up the responsibilities of providing certain “real/felt needs” for themselves with the bid to ensure survival and development in the long run. While in the urban areas, government is seeing living up to its biddings, thus there is no need for self-help projects otherwise it will lead to wastage by unnecessary duplications of projects.

Similar indictment as in the above is also the government provisions of matching grants in aid to encourage communities to support and partner with them in provisions of development via financial and technical assistance. In conformity with government strategy

for rural development embodied in the plan, various state governments provided matching grants to aid their communities to embark on self-help projects. Aided self-help has since then become popularized as a strategy for rural development in the country (Igboeli, 1992)[4]. The same question goes here again. Why is it that government does not provide matching grants to aid urban communities to embark on development of their cities via self-help efforts as they do to their rural counterparts? The two questions above show that there is a wrong perception, unwillingness, strategy and approach by the government in tackling rural development and concerns.

For a deeper perspective on the elitist fallacy of Nigeria national development, it is necessary to quote Akpan H. Ekpo and Onyinlola Olaniyi (1995)[7] at a length:

*... the phenomenon of underdevelopment in the rural sector could be more appreciated if it is possible to understand the nature and character of an economy in general. If an economy pursues a balanced development strategy, then the rural sector becomes part and parcel of that economy and invariably becomes developed. However, if any economy views the rural sector as 'special' that is an area that provides cheap sources of raw materials and labour then the approach to develop the rural sector proceed from that of a centre-periphery hypothesis. In this case, the rural sector becomes the periphery which is exploited by the centre. Thus, the role of the centre is to milk the rural area. Consequently, the rural sector is devoid of any significant improvement for years. The belief is that the overall development efforts will trickle down to the rural population. It is this kind of situation which characterized most African countries[17].*

### CONCLUSION

The acclaimed efforts and incessant quest for national development in Nigeria has been a mirage and will always be until the conscientiously orchestrated rural communities are properly 'integrated' into development with sustainable and tangible results seeing reflecting on the human capital, material and social progress of the rural areas. The prevalent and ever widening disparity between rural and urban communities is an indictment on national development, and lives a big question mark on 'Nigeria National Development Plans and the various developmental blueprint agenda of different regimes'. The ever increasing high rate of poverty, stagnation, squalor, hunger, disease, joblessness, illiteracy, lack of access to basic modern facilities of life to mention but a few prevalent in Nigeria rural settings, while the reverse is the case with their urban counterparts who enjoy the ever increasing advancement in every facet of human endeavour is a demonstration of neglect to the most important sector (rural) of the nation. Nigeria rural communities are deliberately ignored and neglected by the ruling elite thereby being battered by the same elite who came from the same rural communities that should have been reverend for playing key roles in making and sustaining the elite and the entire nation. It is the rural communities that has the 70-80 % of the national population, they have mineral resources like crude oil that the national economy is dependent on, they feed the nation via their agricultural occupation, they provide raw materials for the urban industries without which they will die, and they constitute the electoral power house during elections based on the strength in their population etc. Yet they are neglected and abandoned in the scheme of

things thereby keeping Nigeria underdeveloped since the majority of the population and landmass are found in rural communities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discoveries made so far in this paper, it is clear that backwardness in development in Nigeria is largely perceived to be due to neglect of rural development to the pursuit of urban development, which has not yielded significant change oriented results. Therefore, this paper recommends that:

1. Government should pursue balanced development (true national development) which knows no boundaries thereby penetrating into the hinterlands and its inhabitants in equal proportion with their urban counterparts.
2. Policies that encourage self-reliance should be pursued for the development of the nation by developing people who then develop capacities needed to develop the environment according to their taste and aspiration, thereby guaranteeing sustainable development.
3. Bottom-top policy approach should be inculcated in the national stream of project initiation and implementation which enhances mass mobilization and participation of the ruralites in the government's bid to develop the rural communities. This will give room for emergence of people oriented projects (real needs), create sense of belonging, and importance that will earn the support and protection of the people.
4. Nigeria government should learn to do things thoroughly, not halfway. Government imported shoddy federalism in Nigeria instead of the practice of true federalism as seen in the USA and other civilized countries, and in the same manner, instead of adopting true/balanced national development, the same government adopted lopsided development that favours the urban centres and neglects the rural areas.
5. Integrated rural development should be aggressively, massively and consistently adhere to in all forms to ensure faster rural development.
6. State of emergency should be declared in Nigeria rural areas for urgent rescue of the areas from further neglect and havoc.
7. Local governments being the grassroots governments closest to the rural populace should be granted full autonomy and independence to enable them meet the developmental quest of the people since the federal and state governments which are far from the rural populace have failed woefully to provide development in the rural communities.

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