

Government's Agricultural Policy and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Case of Bendel State 1964 – 1988

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Introduction

In 1960, it was estimated that 86.2 percent of the population of Nigeria lived in the rural areas. By 1970 the estimate was 80.7 percent while by 1981 it was 70 percent. This fact notwithstanding successive administrations in the country did not take meaningful steps to improve the conditions of the rural majority. Olatunbosun has therefore adequately described them as the "neglected rural majority".¹ It is true that respective Development Plans outlined ways of developing the rural areas, but in concrete terms, they hardly went beyond the realm of rhetorics.

In any case, the rural development policies were largely centred around agricultural development. This is not to lose sight of other measures like rural industrialization, construction of rural roads, the provision of electricity, pipe borne water, health and educational facilities in the rural areas. The fact however remains that the crucial role was given to agriculture. The important place accorded agriculture can be understood if one takes into account the main economic activities of the rural populace. This centres around the direct or indirect exploitation of land in the form of farming, animal husbandry, poultry, fishing, forestry, food processing and cottage industries.

This paper uses Bendel State as a case study of the impact of the agricultural policy on rural development in Nigeria. The 1963 census showed that 88.8 percent of the population of the state lived in the rural areas. By 1981, the estimate was 70 percent. Furthermore, it was estimated that about 70 percent of the population in the rural areas solely depended on agriculture for their means of livelihood. For instance, by the end of July, 1976, it was estimated that there were 242,260 rural households in Bendel State. Of these, 175,730 or 72.5 percent were agricultural households.² Thus agriculture is the lifewire of the rural population. Yet these people went about their agricultural activity with cumbersome and rudimentary implements which require a lot of energy input without a corresponding yield in production. It therefore follows that any attempt to improve their standard of living must start with agricultural development.

It is perhaps necessary for one to add that part of the reasons for the attempt to develop agriculture was the increasing food scarcity and therefore high food prices in the urban areas. This trend became particularly serious from the 1970s. Thus in a sense, agricultural development in the rural areas was to some extent aimed at solving the food needs of the urban minority and not necessarily improving the material conditions of the rural majority *per se*. In theory, there is nothing wrong with this strategy. But if viewed within the context of the role rural areas played in the colonial times, the policy can be seen as a continuation of the exploitation of the rural sector for the benefit of the non rural sectors. In colonial times, it was mainly for the benefit of the metropolitan economy, while in the period under study it was for the benefit of the urban areas. The point being made is that to some extent, the agricultural pol-

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icy at best regarded the rural areas as mere appendages to the urban centres. This perhaps account for the fact that the agricultural policy that was pursued by the State government particularly in the 1970s had little or no relationship with the upliftment of the material conditions of the rural farmers.

It is pertinent to state right away that in our discussion, when we talk of rural development we mean the overall improvement in the standard of living of the rural populace. It is from this perspective that his paper examines the contribution of government's agricultural policy to rural development in Bendel State. It states that the policy was based on two approaches – the transformation approach and the improvement approach. The transformation approach was designed to by pass the lengthy process of improving small farms within the existing village structure. Its main features were the infusion of capital intensive technologies, such as tractor mechanisation, central management, and mobilisation and training of an unskilled labour force, by removing people from their villages.³ The improvement approach on the other hand, comprised a series of efforts coming under the broad heading of extension services which were largely directed at peasant farmers. It aimed at the progressive development of peasant farming by improving the existing services in the form of spreading new techniques to peasant farmers through demonstration, incentive schemes, credit facilities etc. No attempt was made to radically alter the traditional institutional environment of the farmer.⁴

The Transformation Approach

This approach can be subdivided into two categories. The first involved the establishment of large scale co-operative schemes such as Farm Settlements and School Leavers' Farms where the farmers were landowners rather than wage labourers. Nevertheless, they were required to substantially reorganise their way of life by submitting to a degree of discipline regarding the crops they grew and the husbandry standards they should achieve, in order to maximise the possibilities for the use of modern technology.⁵ The main reason for the adoption of this strategy was the problems created by school leavers. It was believed that the attendant benefits from such large scale economies would encourage young school leavers to take to farming thereby reducing rural-urban drift. The second category involved the establishment of large scale relatively capital intensive farms, plantations and ranches using modern cultivation and ranching practices. An important requirement was the employment of wage labour to operate them under the supervision of a managerial elite.

Large Scale Co-operative Schemes

The farm settlements in Bendel State were established between 1960 and 1963. Five of them (located at Ekpoma, Iguoriakhi, Mbiri, Utagba-uno and Okpe) were established by the then Western region's government when the state was still part of that region. Due to a reorganisation measure in the mid 1960s, the Okpe settlement was closed down. The main objective of the scheme was to bring about rural progress through the modernization of agriculture which would lead to increase productivity and income among the rural popular. The settlements were to demonstrate to young school leavers that by careful planning and the modernization of agriculture, farmers could achieve a standard of living comparable if not higher than what was obtained in the urban centres. This would in turn help to curb rural – urban drift. Towards this

end, the settlers were to be provided with social and recreational facilities, in addition to their farms being fully mechanised. Thus the settlements were capital intensive. It has estimated that about N 8,000 (8,000 nairas) were spent on each settler. This is in spite of the fact that the government did not meet its promise in terms of mechanisation and the provision of social and recreational facilities. The belief was that the success of these model communities of youngmen or "islands of agricultural productivity"⁶ would have a trickle down effect on the surrounding peasant communities. Hence the settlers were to be a small group of capitalist farmers surrounded by a deprived peasant majority.

In any case, the scheme failed. This is because government did not provide all the amenities that were promised to the settlers. The farming operations in the four settlements were not mechanised, while none of them had storage facilities, electricity, pipe borne water, health centres and recreational facilities. Only two of them (Ekpoma and Iguoriakhi settlements) had accessible roads. This situation resulted in disenchantment among the settlers, many of whom abandoned the settlements. Given this fact, it is apparent that the scheme did not affect the standard of living of the surrounding peasant population.

The failure of the scheme is not surprising. It would have been too much of a wishful thinking to expect such a capital intensive programme to succeed in a society with excess labour. Moreover the surrounding small holder farmers lacked the capital necessary for the establishment of such expensive projects. There is also the fact that the neighbouring peasant communities were not involved in both the conception and execution of the programme. The pattern of organisation and administration of the settlements, gave the settlers the impression that they were a group of pampered farmers who depended on the government for what to plant and for farm inputs. They therefore did not sufficiently identify themselves with the success of the scheme.

The pattern of land allocation for the production of crops was in line with the colonial agricultural policy of giving prominence to the so called cash crops vis-a-vis the production of food. For instance, of the ten acres that were allocated to each settler, seven were for cash crops while only three were allocated to food crops. It is therefore clear that the settlements did not contribute to rural development in the State. Thus, Wells adequately observed that:

The settlements have provided very little information about the efficiency of new forms of agricultural organisation. As programmes to provide high levels of farmer income, they appear to have rested since their inception on implicit government subsidization and involve levels of capital outlay per person that would preclude any significant effect on agricultural employment. Very few of the settlements' innovations could be implemented by private small holders with limited access to capital, and the demonstration effects of the settlement programme have been correspondingly low.⁷

As early as 1964, the high cost of the farm settlement scheme had come under severe criticism. This led to the introduction of various cost saving measures. One of such devices was the establishment of School Leavers' Farms in 1964 by the Community Development Division of the State's Ministry of Economic Planning. This type of farm organisation was a peripheral type of settlement which took place in and around an existing village. The scheme was designed to train young school leavers to

develop interest in farming, thereby solving the unemployment problems among them. It was equally aimed at motivating the rural communities to participate more in agricultural activities as a way of improving their standard of living.

The pattern of operation of the farms were tailored to suit the existing conditions in the communities in which they operated. Unlike the Farm Settlement Scheme, houses were not built for the farmers. On the contrary, they lived in their communities. They were responsible for establishing and maintaining their farms, while the Community Development Division provided them with small loan on short term basis for the purchase of seeds, fertilizer and tools at subsidised rates.

The farms were established in small compact rural communities consisting of few participating villages which gave pieces of land, free of all charges as their own contribution to the project. Thus, unlike the Farm Settlement Scheme, huge amount of money was not spent to pay compensation for the land acquired. Each farm had 40 participants who were jointly selected by Community Development officials and the representatives of the villages concerned. Each farmer was allocated 15 acres out of which 10 were devoted to cash crop production and 2 to food crop production.⁸ This again was a continuation of the colonial agricultural policy. However, in contrast to the farm settlement scheme the school leavers' farms were less capital intensive and the surrounding communities were involved in the execution of the projects. In addition, the farmers were given the opportunity to make most of their decisions with minimum interference from government officials. The Community Development officials were there merely to advise them rather than issue instructions. It has been argued that the feeling of ego-involvement, sense of commitment and the spirit of ownership which the management practices encouraged among the farmers in School Leavers' Farms made them to regard themselves as owner - operators rather than as government employees. On this basis, it was concluded that the school leavers' farms represented profitable investments which were more likely to encourage young school leavers' to remain in rural areas and take to farming, with its attendant positive effect on rural development.⁹

This optimism notwithstanding, the farms were abandoned by 1972. Infact many of the participants left during the civil war. The failure of the programme had much to do with the inability of the government to improve the poor condition of living in the rural areas. The scheme was conceived as part of an integrated rural development programme, yet social and infrastructural amenities were not provided for rural areas. In addition, the farmers continued to work with the same tedious and rudimentary implements, while no storage facilities were provided. Income therefore continued to be low and rural life unattractive. An important lesson from the failure of the School Leavers' Farms in spite of their initial potentials for success, is that any attempt to develop agriculture in the rural areas must be part of an integrated rural development scheme.

Large Scale Capital Intensive State - Owned Farms

In the 1970s, the strategy of the State government shifted to the establishment of large scale, fully mechanised and capital intensive State-owned farms and ranches. It was claimed that the soaring prices of foodstuffs necessitated a radical transformation of the agricultural production system as a way of stemming the situation. It was equally argued that the demonstration effect of the projects would result in rural

development. The projects that were established included the mechanised farms at Agbede and Warrake, the cattle and goat ranches at Igarra and Ubiaja.

The Agbede farm was established in 1972 at an estimated cost of N 1,500,000, while the one at Warrake was established in 1974 at an estimated cost of N 2,546,000. According to the then Commissioner for Agriculture, the farms were "established out of a realization that peasant farming alone could no longer solve the problem of food production in the face of increasing population growth and rising food costs".¹⁰ Furthermore, they were expected to provide the needed demonstration effects which would result in the adoption of modern technologies by peasant farmers. An expected indirect result of this was the improvement of the standard of living of the farmers, while at the same time increasing food production.

Agbonifo's comprehensive study of the two farms have shown that none of the above objectives were achieved. Apart from the fact that the philosophy behind the establishment of the farms was faulty and downright dishonest, the projects merely served as an avenue for primitive accumulation by members of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in the state.¹¹ The sophisticated machineries that were introduced into the farms are not suitable for the Nigerian conditions, hence the frequent breakdown. Yet no efforts were made by the State government to test their suitability before importing them. Of course this was to the advantage of the initial management of the farms which was equally the manufacturer and marketer of the mechaneries. It ensured a ready outlet for the marketing of the goods.

Worsestill, the machineries resulted in environmental disorders thus adversely affecting the means of livelihood and therefore the standard of living of the neighbouring peasant farmers. For instance in the process of opening up large expanse of land, trees which functioned as wind breaks, and thus controlling the amount of evaporation were destroyed. In addition, erosion became a serious problem in the project sites. The new seed varieties that were introduced were not as resistant to local weed *striga* and diseases as the local varieties. Hence they required large amount of herbicides and insecticides. For optimal yields, they equally required an enormous quantity of fertilizers which resulted in increased acidification of the soil.

Is it therefore surprising that the projects performed poorly? According to Agbonifo, the two farms produced very much below capacity and therefore made negative profits. In the 1976/77 and 1977/78 seasons for example, Agbede farm made negative profits of about N 422,266.17 and N 179,464 respectively.¹² In terms of demonstration effect they did not make any impact. This is hardly surprising for as has been observed earlier such capital intensive projects, apart from being out of tune with the requirements of a labour surplus economy, were beyond the financial capacities of small scale farmers. It is therefore pertinent to pose the question whether the government of the state was actually sincere in partly justifying the establishment of the projects in terms of demonstration effect. Available evidence suggest that they were not. Afterall, they had the experience of the farm settlements to benefit from.

On the contrary, such projects were seen as avenues for the accumulation of wealth by the ruling elite in the State. The 1970s witnessed a great increase in the revenue that the country derived from oil so much so that a Federal permanent Secretary had to boast that the country's problem was not money, but how to spend the petro-dollars.¹³ Thus to accumulate surplus the ruling class had to emphasise pro-

jects that involved the award of contracts, importation of spare parts, and other goods and services. The amount of corruption associated with the execution of such farm projects clearly substantiates this fact. In May, 1974, the State government entered into an agreement with an American firm, Tiffany Industries Inc. for the purpose of establishing in the State three other mechanised farms covering 42,000 hectares at a contract sum of N 10 million. The company was to supply the necessary equipment and machinery and apart from the initial payment of 15 percent of the amount, the State government was to pay another 15 percent on the delivery of equipment. The balance of 70 percent was to be spread over a period of six years and paid from the profits accruing from the farms to be established. This arrangement was to ensure the commitment of the American company to the success of the scheme.

Surprisingly, within a year of the negotiation of the contract, the State Governor Brigadier S.O. Ogbemudia approved an unrealistic 4 percent increase in cost of the farm equipment to a new cost of N 12,500,000 arguing that prices had increased considerably since the contracts were negotiated. In addition, and contrary to the terms of the contract he ordered that the unpaid balance of 85 percent be paid at once on delivery of the goods. Since payment was no longer tied to the profits to be realised from the farms, the major incentive for the company to be fully committed to the execution of the contract was removed. Yet the company being a new comer in the country, had not been tested.¹⁴ If one realises the amount of abuse that is associated with the contract system in Nigeria, it would be easy to appreciate why the Governor acted the way he did.¹⁵

Perhaps more important for use is the fact that such an agricultural policy merely helped to make the State's agricultural development dependent of foreign inputs. It is difficult to imagine how this would have improved the standard of living of the peasant farmers, and promote rural development. On the contrary, they enhanced rural under-development. Indeed in preparing the ground for the marginalisation of the peasant farmers, the 1970s witnessed a sustained attack on them. Thus the Third National Development plan identified certain "well known" characteristics of peasant agriculture as responsible for the poor agricultural performance. They included the land tenure system, scattered land holdings, primitive agricultural technology, poor storage facilities and shortage of capital. Of course, the solution to the problem was the establishment of large-scale fully mechanised farms. Thus the stage was set for the progressive elimination of peasant farmers in favour of large scale farms.¹⁶

Similarly, the livestock development programme did not contribute meaningfully to rural development in the State. One of the objectives of the programme was to increase the level of protein consumption in the State by making sure that meat was available at cheaper rates. For in the 1981 budget, it was stated that the State suffered from a protein deficiency of about 22,000 tonnes per annum. Moreover, over 90 percent of the protein consumed in the State was said to be of plant origin.¹⁷ The programme was also to encourage peasant farmers to take to mixed farming by adding livestock production to their food and cash crops production. The belief was that this would lead to an increase in the standard of living of the farmers. Apart from the supply of inputs like livestock feeds, government was to establish large scale livestock farms which would also serve as model centres for the surrounding farmers. Towards

this end, some poultries, piggeries, cattle and goat ranches were established in the 1970s. However, in the Bendel State 1981 – 85 Development Plan, the State government admitted that these projects failed.¹⁸

Apart from mismanagement by government officials, the projects failed due to the high level of imported inputs. Infact almost all the items in the livestock farms were imported – ranging from the animals to the technologies and their feeds. This is inspite of the fact that local breeds had adapted themselves to their environment overtime and had relatively high yields. Thus with increase in the price of poultry feeds in the late 1970s and 1980s, most of the poultries folded up. The danger in relying on imported inputs for livestock development was also demonstrated by the cattle ranch at Igarra started off with imported N'dama cattle, because unlike the Zebu cattle from the Northern States they were resistant to trypanosomiasis. However, in most part of Northern Bendel State there were the local breeds – the Muturu which were equally resistant to the disease and had been in the area for ages. It certainly would have been more economical and more in line with the realities of the environment to stock the ranch with the local breed. It is therefore hardly surprising that as at 1986, the ranch which at peak should have at least 2,500 animals had only 45.

The same thing applied to the dairy project at Ubiaja. At peak it was stocked with about 400 dairy cattle imported from Australia and Holland. They found it difficult to adapt to the tropical conditions and a lot of money was spent to provide conditions similar to what was obtained in the temperate region. By 1983 no single animal was in the farm. The case of the goat ranch at Ubiaja was even worse. Worse in the sense that goat is the main livestock that is kept by the people in and around Ubiaja. Yet the ranch started off with 1,000 goats that were imported from Israel. Because they could not adapt to the environment many of them died. In the second half of the 1970s, cross breeding between the varieties found in Northern Nigeria and the West African dwarf found in Sourthen Nigeria were tried. This again did not succeed. It was only in 1984 that the government decided to concentrate on the West African dwarf and even then by 1986, the ranch had only 500 goats instead of the estimated 4,000 at optimal produciton.

It is thus apparent that the livestock programme of the State government did not in anyway result in rural development. In any case the capital intensive nature of the programme, coupled with the high level of imported inputs, precluded any demonstration effects on the surrounding peasant farmers.

By and large, it can be argued that the large scale, capital intensive agricultural projects were never really meant to increase the standard of living of the peasant farmers nor were they meant to bring about rural development. These considerations were at best peripheral to the thinking of State government officials. While food scarcity in the urban areas provided the excuse for their establishment, the main considerations of the government officials were the amount of wealth they and their allies in the business – commercial sectors would gain. This explain their penchant for contract awards and the massive importation of agricultural inputs of the projects. They never really bordered themselves with the succes or otherwise of the programmes. The selfish interest of the set of people ended up making agricultural development in the State development on imported alien inputs, thereby enhancing neo-colonial dependence.

Perhaps the greatest indictment of this approach was the neglet of the rural mas-

ses both in the conception and implementation of these projects. Yet an important aim of the projects was the improvement of their standard of living. It is probable that if the rural masses had been involved in the exercise, they would have continued against the projects in view of their obvious inadequacies and irrelevance. Moreover, since they were those directly affected, they were in a better position to recommend measures that would improve their material condition.

The Improvement Approach

The staff of the Extension division of the State's Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) were incharge of the implementation of this strategy. The approach involved the provision of various extension services to peasant farmers operating within their traditional milieu. It included the provision of credit facilities and the sale of subsidised improved seedlings, cassava cutting and fertilizers to peasant farmers. The aim was to increase the yield per hectare.

In the period between 1966 and 1974, a total of 650 metric tons of maize seed, 522 metric tons of rice and 72,000 bundles of cassava cuttings were said to have been distributed to farmers. They were used to establish about 26,000 hectares of maize, 14,800 hectares of rice and 1,200 hectares of cassava.¹⁹ Also in the 1975 – 80 plan period, an estimated total of 180,000 citrus seedlings, 630,000 assorted vegetable sedlings, 425,800 bundles of improved cassava cuttings and 505 tonnes to rice were allegedly distributed to farmers.²⁰ However, most of these inputs did not get to the small scale peasant farmers for whom they were supposedly meant. This much was admitted in the State's 1975 – 80 plan document. The solution that was proposed as the distribution of seeds to selected large scale farmers, who inturn would multiply and sell them to peasant farmers.²¹ Thus the peasant farmers were placed at the mercy of large – scale farmers who used their middlemen position to exploit them. In the circumstance, very few of them could afford these items and so the intended benefits did not get to them.

Even then the point has to be made that the distribution of these so-called varieties of improved seedlings was not in the interest of the development of agriculture in the State. This was particularly the case with the introduction of the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) which was launched in the country in 1975 and started in the State in 1976. Abba *et al*, have successfully demonstrated that the programme which emphasised the use of high yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides all of which were imported from American, European and Japanese Transnational Corporations (TNC), turned Nigerian agriculture into a permanent market for imported agricultural inputs.²² A comparison of the amount of fertilizers that were sold in the state in the period between 1965 and 1971, and that between 1976 and 1985 will help to substantiate this claim. In the first period 867 tons of fertilizers were sold while the figure for the second period is 39,059.65 tons. Thus, while the State's agricultural development was forced to depend on foreign seed banks, the local seeds which survived diseases and other climatic adversities and were ecologically adapted to Nigerian conditions, faced the risk of extermination.

In any case the point has to be made that majority of the peasant farmers in the State did not benefit from services of extension against. This is due to a number of factors. They include lack of enthusiasm on the part of extension workers, inability to

get to many peasant farmers due to lack of motorable roads, general absence of infrastructures in the rural areas and perhaps more importantly the very poor ratio of extension workers to farmers. Okuneye in 1984 put the ratio of extension agents to family farmers in Nigeria at 1:2,500. He concluded that with this poor ratio, it was not possible for the extension agents to keep in touch with all the farmers so as to initiate the required modification in their farming practices.²³

Although as early as 1964, the State government realised that to be able to implement the technologies that were being introduced by the new capital intensive farms, farmers needed credit facilities, no meaningful step was taken in that regard. Until 1978, what existed was a number of credit schemes for cash crop farmers. This was in line with the colonial agricultural policy of emphasising cash crop production to the detriment of food crops. Apart from this, the fact that the schemes were mostly handled by commercial banks meant that majority of the cash crop farmers could not benefit from the programmes since they lacked the needed collaterals. Thus in 1978, a special agreement was signed between the State government and the Nigerian Agricultural Bank for the provision of loan to small scale farmers. Only farmers who were involved in food crops, fisheries and oil palm projects were qualified to benefit from the loans. The conditions for giving out the loan were an existing farm, evidence of a previous farm, physical fitness and the presentation of two guarantors. Even though this was an improvement on previous schemes, the amount involved and the number of people who benefited from the scheme were so small, that the programme could not make any meaningful impact on rural development in the State. For instance in the period between 1978 and 1985, the amount of N 5,931,174 was disbursed to 5,747 farmers. It is even doubtful whether many of the beneficiaries were actually peasant farmers.

It is thus apparent that the agricultural policy, merely made the State's agriculture to be dependent on foreign agricultural technology and inputs. Although, in theory the policy was supposed to improve the material conditions of the peasant farmers, thereby contributing significantly to rural development, the antithesis turned out to be the case. In fact as we have seen earlier the peasant farmers became objects of uncharitable attack. Yet this attack merely blamed the victim of neglect. In addition, it represented a faulty reading of the economic history of Nigeria as a whole. Far from failing the nation, the peasant farmers have in fact greatly helped to save it from unmitigated disaster in the agricultural front.

In any case, given the inadequacies of the policy, this paper attempts to recommend alternative agricultural strategies that can more meaningfully contribute to rural development through the involvement of the masses. Since the agricultural policies of the respective state governments in Nigeria were more or less similar, the proposed alternative strategies are applicable to the whole country.

Alternative Strategies for Developing the Rural Areas Through Agriculture

One of the greatest shortcomings of the agricultural policy, is its paternalistic approach. Government officials assumed that they knew what was good for the peasant farmers and so did not involve them in decision making processes. Yet it is our belief that any policy that aim at improving the material conditions of the peasant farmers must emanate from them. Furthermore, they have to be fully involved in the execution of such policies.

Basic to the alternative strategies, is the democratisation of the decision making processes right from the village level to the State and National levels, with the villages playing a crucial role. All feudal structures in the villages should be abolished. In their place, there should be democratically elected village councils that should be in charge of the day to day running of the village affairs. Urban areas should also have similar councils. These councils would elect representatives to the local government level, while representatives would be elected from there to the State level and from the State level, representatives would be elected to the national level. Under this situation, decisions arrived at would emanate from the true representatives of the people. It is nevertheless recognised that this can only take place within the context of a radical transformation of the political, social and economic systems of the country and therefore a long term solution. In the interim, however, the following measures are proposed.

Since land is the lifewire of peasant economy, the peasant farmers should be in control of this crucial factor of production. No one should be allowed to have permanent ownership over any piece of land except those used for residential purposes. For the effective administration of the land, each village should have an agricultural committee comprising representatives of peasant household, primary and secondary school teachers, and youth associations. Also, the committees should be involved in the initiation and implementation of any agricultural policy affecting the peasant farmers.

In addition, each village should form marketing co-operatives, which would be directly incharge of the purchase of agricultural inputs for its members. They are also to co-operatively market the products of their members. Through this process, the middlemen who have been feeding fat on the peasant farmers would be eliminated.

An important section of the rural economy that has suffered from serious neglect is the women who are involved in food processing. Prior to the advent of colonialism, these people played a crucial role in the economy of the rural areas. Though to some extent their role is still important, the increasing importation of processed food and drink items from western countries, coupled with the neglect of the rural areas have progressively marginalised them. Yet, these people have been producing nutritious drinks and snacks from different kinds of grains, root crops and fruits. With adequate credit facilities, and the provision of other necessary inputs like hygienic and durable packaging items coupled with adequate transportation system, these food items would be able to compete favourably with imported urban based food items. For the competition to be fair, they should be displayed in urban supermarkets, and served in hotels and institutions of higher learnings.

Another important sector that should be mobilised is the rural industrial groups. Before the advent of colonialism, these people produced the implements that were used in the farms. There was an effective integration between this sector and the agricultural sector so that the implements produced at any given time were in line with the agricultural requirements of the period. However, colonialism which not only introduced capitalist relations but also integrated the country's economy into the world capitalist system at a subordinate level, resulted in the dislocation of the rural economy. Since there was no longer any integration between these sectors of the rural economy, that complimentary role which would have made the industrial classes to respond to new challenges in the agricultural system, by developing

improved technology, was absent. In the circumstance, their technology were either static or in some case even stagnated.

None the less for technology to be effective, it has to be relevant to the requirements of a given people and such technology must emanate from the people. What is being proposed here is the mobilisation of the rural industrial classes who would be given the necessary encouragement to produce implements that are relevant to the requirements of the agricultural process. Thus this would once again result in the integration of the different sectors of the rural economy – a condition which is basic for rural development.

With regards to livestock, there should be a complete ban on the importation of animals and their feeds. The local animals that have ecologically adapted themselves to their environment over time should be kept in conducive environments which would make reproduction easy. In addition, Oculi has rightly observed that an important section of the rural livestock that has been completely neglected is the rural bushmeat. This is because it is generally assumed that they fall under the non-nutritious domain of tourist items. Yet, from the prices roadside food sellers charge, it is obvious that this is a food area of high consumer appreciation. Moreover, certain species of bushmeat are disappearing. To stem the situation, centres for domesticated bushmeat production should be established in the villages. This will greatly help to boost protein resources in the rural areas.²⁴

The feeds for the animals should be prepared from local weeds, grains and other items. Apart from creating ecological harmony, these measures would help to stimulate the production of these items. In other words, what is being said, is that crucial to the successful implementation of our proposed strategies, is the incorporation of ecological or environmental elements.²⁵

Finally, it is important that government should provide rural dwellers with facilities that should make life in those places conducive. Towards this end, health, educational, electricity, water, storage, entertainment, road and transportation facilities should be provided. The point being made is that for rural development to take place, agricultural development should be carried out along side social and infrastructural development in the rural areas.

On the surface, it would appear as if the activities of the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of the Babangida administration is geared towards this purpose. However, one basic flaw of the programme is the none involvement of the rural masses in its policy formulation and implementation processes. On the contrary, it is fully under the control of urban based government officials. Yet it is supposed to serve the interest of the rural masses. Apart from the paternalistic nature of this policy, the important role given to government officials is bound to introduce bureaucratic redapism into the whole system. Furthermore, it is even doubtful whether the programme as was the case with similar ones in the past, is not merely serving as an avenue for primitive accumulation of wealth by government officials and their allies in the business – commercial sector. Recent indications are that this is to some extent the case.²⁶

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis demonstrate that the agricultural policy of the State government did not result in rural development. Infact, the emphasis on the transformation

approach which consumed about 70 percent of the amount allocated to agriculture in the respective development plans, only resulted in colossal waste of money. Indeed, as was observed by Ajaegbu,

The spread effects of many of the government's major (agricultural) programmes ... have been non – existent or very minimal, in spite of the high financial costs involved in setting them up. Their only success has been in their beneficial effect on the few people directly involved and nearby. Thus these programmes are in the main, single point locations or enclaves of 'development islands', with little or no real spread effects. They have not therefore proved very helpful to rural development, nor as they stand can they be improved to benefit a substantial proportion of the population.

Thus in view of the inadequacies of the government's policy we have sought in this paper to recommend alternative strategies for developing the rural areas through agriculture. The gist of the recommendation is that the rural masses themselves should play crucial roles in both the initiation and implementation of policies that are aimed at improving the rural areas. Put differently, what is being recommended, can be described as a Mass-line policy, which involves the mobilisation of the rural masses as the central motive force in rural development.²⁷ This means that the rural masses would be in control of their own destiny. It is hoped that on the one hand, the integration of the different sectors of the rural economy which the alternative strategies involve, and on the other hand the integration of the rural economy with that of the urban centres at an equal level, would result in multiplier effects, thereby stimulating rural development.

NOTES

1. D. Olatunbosun, *Nigeria's Neglected Rural Majority*. (Ibadan, Oxford University Press, 1975).
2. *Report of Rural Economic Survey: Bendel State 1976/77* (Benin City, Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1979), p. 5.
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