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**GOVERNMENT AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
IN NIGERIA**

**Mbadinuju's Joint Action on
Development Programme in
Anambra State**

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10

The Role of Councillors in the Actualization of the Joint Action on Development Programme in Anambra State

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Introduction

The nexus between democracy and development especially rural development is becoming apparent in Nigeria as we inch towards desirable democratic culture, which, among other things, encourages mass participation. Indeed, the transformation of the rural areas through various strategies is a manifestation of the democratic dividend. One of the strategies of rural transformation is the highly potent Joint Action on Development (JAD) programme, put in place by the Anambra State Government out of some rare ingenuity.

Clear as the design may be, JAD requires support for actualization and sustainability. The local government system, through its machinery, is a veritable outfit for the actualization of the JAD concept.

The Guidelines for the Local Government Reforms (1976) prescribed four principal aims of local governments. According to the Guidelines, local governments are to:

- make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving and delegating them to local representative bodies
- facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potentials
- mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development
- provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government.

From the above functions, it is clear that councillors, who are the accredited representatives of the people and lawmakers at the grassroots level, have a vital role to play in rural development, and by extension, the JAD policy of rapid development of the communities in Anambra State. Before addressing their role, let us take a quick look at the concept of rural development.

Concept of rural development

The meaning of rural development has evolved over time in line with the continually unfolding meaning of *development*. The meaning of development has evolved from its earlier narrow conceptualization with economic growth expressed in an aggregate economic indicator of GNP to a more broad-based conceptualization as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty (Todaro, 1979). In this sense, development has an economic growth component, a modernization or human development component, an equity or social justice

component and a socio-economic transformational component (Mabogunje, 1980).

As in the development process, the creation of "... false surfaces of rural development stems primarily from the varied definitions given to the concept" (Okafor, 1981). To many people, rural development means agricultural development; to some, it is primarily concerned with welfare. These people are myopic, because RD has more to do with the development of rural people than with any isolated sectoral consideration within society. It is true that the economic base of the rural area is agriculture, but it is wrong to put it at the centre of rural planning. Rural people need food, employment, decent housing, education, healthcare, electricity, means of communication, entertainment, facilities for social interactions, etc.

RD has often been confused with rural 'transformation.' The two are not the same because while *transformation* implies "a change in form, appearance, nature, condition or character," *development* implies "a gradual growth or advancement through progressive changes." While both concepts connote change of some sort, development connotes change with rate and direction. Because of the entropo-centric nature of development, a recent UNDP study characterizes rural development as "a process of socio-economic change, involving the transformation of agrarian society in order to reach a common set of development goals based on the capacities and needs of the people."

Lele (1975) regrets that the disparate meanings of rural development have given rise to efforts to articulate ways of establishing "... priorities and time-phasing between and among both productive and social service activities." These are further complicated by problems arising from financial, manpower, and institutional resources in rural development. We can then define *rural development* as. "... a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to

cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with changes consequent upon this." It is concerned with the improvement of the living standards of the low-income population living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis, through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their production activities.

Lele (1975) argues that this definition has three important features:

- 1 Improving the living standards of the subsistence population, involves the mobilization and allocation of resources so as to reach a desirable balance over time between the welfare and production services available to the rural subsistence population.
- 2 Mass participation requires that resources should be allocated to low-income regions and classes and that the productive services actually reach them.
- 3 Making the process self-sustaining requires the development of appropriate skills and implementing capacity and the presence of institutions at the local, regional and national levels to ensure effective mobilization of the subsistence sector. Self-sustenance means involving, not reaching the rural people through development programmes.

For the achievement of these three objectives, Lele calls attention to the following three issues which impact significantly on the design and performance of individual programmes. These are:

- 1 the articulation of national policies on issues such as marketing systems, commodity pricing, land tenure, wages and interest rate structures
- 2 the administrative systems needed in terms of the degree of centralization-decentralization in governmental structure
- 3 the scope of institutional pluralism, ie the distribution of development responsibility among the normal government structure, private, commercial and traditional institutions and elective bodies, such as councillors.

which govern its procedures and processes. They are mass participation, people's initiative, planned programmes, effective leadership, non-coercion, agreement with the people's norms and values, partnership, accountability, and coordination.

Apart from making appropriate by-laws which would facilitate rural development, councillors have strong roles to play in all the processes and procedures since they are the closest link between the people and government. Let us take a brief look at these processes and procedures.

Mass participation The members of the community should be generally mobilized in order to achieve an accelerated pace of rural development. This could be through the instrumentality of town unions, social clubs, age grades, women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc. The people should participate fully in both the planning and execution stages. This calls for periodic meetings with people and key organizations in the wards.

People's initiative It is the responsibility of the people to initiate their own projects. They decide for themselves their needs normally through the town unions, age grades, community leaders, etc. When these needs are determined, they are prioritized and costed. They choose those projects of greatest interest and importance to the community which they will usually be able to fund.

Planned programme Planning is a crucial factor for rapid rural development. Rural development planning is an integrative activity, which seeks to provide a framework of activities through which there is massive commitment of the resources of the community in the most effective manner as to satisfy the needs of the community. A planned programme is a series of interrelated activities, strategies and targets, systematically arranged and designed to effect positive changes. It equally takes into full account the available and potential resources of the people and

should make a proper relation of resources and desired programmes.

Effective leadership This is indispensable in rural development. The planning and execution of projects requires control, coordination, direction and supervision if the desired goals are to be attained. The people can be adequately mobilized for developmental activities if there is a leader capable of inspiring the people to positive transforming action.

Non-coercion Rural development is a non-coercive process. The satisfaction of these needs, however, is determined by the resources available to the community and channelled therein by the governments – state and local government.

Agreement with people's norms and values Rural development is aimed at enhancing the general well-being of a people and their harmonious relationship with their environment. An attempt to introduce a change which is repugnant and antithetical to people's cherished norms and values results in a sharp break with the past and, consequently, does not bring any satisfaction to the people. Thus, it is a desideratum – it becomes imperative that a people determine their own needs by themselves.

The involvement of rural people in their own development is a strategy of a kind. After all, all changes that result from rural development depend, in the final analysis, on the ability and willingness of rural dwellers to adopt and utilize innovations. As a result, the participation of a people in the planning and execution of community projects has gained heightened popularity. Abasiokong explains that participation of people in the planning and execution of community projects has gained heightened popularity. He further explains that participation involves playing an active role in community decisions, some knowledge of local issues, attendance at public meetings and related attempts to influence proposed measures through individual or group action.

Partnership Rural development calls for the joint action of both the community and the government. It is not a means by which the government shifts the burden of development exclusively to the people. Government exists to cater for the welfare of all the inhabitants of its area of jurisdiction. It should, therefore, through the councillors, play leading roles in the partnership.

Accountability Communities respond very promptly and favourably to rural development efforts where community leaders and government officials are popular and accountable to the people on how money and materials are utilized. Therefore, they should give regular and accurate accounts of their activities. In addition, effective communication strategies and machinery should be established between the people and community leaders and state and local government officials to provide the right atmosphere for rural development activities to flourish.

Coordination Change agents and councillors should appreciate that when organizations work alone, they cannot solve some problems especially as resources are scarce. Therefore, it becomes imperative that organizations should be coordinated so that the people benefit. Coordination involves group or joint decision-making and action among community, state and local government officials and agencies, linking their services for the community's benefit or taking each other into account as they work towards their goals. The purpose of coordination is to achieve a greater impact from participating organizations by planning and working together. It involves joint planning, joint action or the joint evaluation of outcomes.

Councillors should also serve as government's public relations officers in their wards. At every point in time, people should not be left in doubt about government activities. The good intentions of government and JAD's philosophies, goals and procedures should be general knowledge. This can be made possible through the relay-like activities of councillors.

Conclusion

Local government councillors have special roles to play in the process of development. Development is a multidimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves, in addition to the improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs (Todaro, 1982). The ultimate object of development is to ensure material and non-material abundance in order to improve the socio-economic well-being of the people. This coincides with one of the functions of the local governments and also the mandate of JAD. This, therefore, informs the need for elected councillors to vigorously work towards the actualization of the JAD programme by mobilizing the people, ensuring their participation and that of the people: providing good leadership and building up the people's confidence in government. If JAD succeeds in making the desired impact, the councillors will not be left out in sharing the credit.

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