

Lower Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authority and Poverty Alleviation

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Abstract

The study is set out to assess how the lower Benue River Basin and Rural Development Authority (LBRBRDA) has achieved in alleviating poverty in its host communities. The objectives of the paper are to assess the impact of LBRBRDA on poverty alleviation, to identify the constraints of the agency on poverty alleviation and to make suggestions for improvement. It was hypothesized that LBRBRDA has not succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities. Primary data obtained through questionnaire and interview, and secondary information gathered from text books, government documents and journals were used for the study. The primary data were presented in tables, frequencies and percentages using chi-square distribution to test the hypotheses. It was revealed that corruption, political interferences, inadequate funding and inadequate consultation with the rural poor in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the agency's programmes have marred its success in alleviating poverty. It was therefore, recommended that the agency should be adequately funded, corruption should be properly checked through anti-corruption agencies; and that the rural people should be adequately involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of poverty alleviation programmes.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since independence in 1960, governments' development programmes have favoured urban areas to the neglect of rural areas. This is exemplified by the concentration of development projects/programmes in the urban areas. The reason behind this deliberate action of government was based on the fact that the development of the urban areas would trickle down to the rural areas and would enhance overall development of the country including the rural areas. However, this intention of government became a mirage as it encouraged rural-urban drift and failed to achieve the intended purpose (Aliyu, 2002). Poverty among the rural people have therefore being on the increase. Successive governments have therefore, continued to search for other strategies which might alleviate rural poverty and at the same time, reverse the trend of rural-urban migration.

One of the attempts at checking the menace of rural poverty and its attendant consequences was the establishment of the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs). These were created by Decree No. 25 and 31 of the 1976 and 1977 respectively, and amended by decree No. 87 of 1979.

As an agency, LBRBRDA has a cardinal aim of raising the income of the rural people through optimisation of land and water resources potentials within the country for multi-purpose use ranging from irrigation to household use. Specifically, the Agency (LBRBRDA), just like the other RBRDAs have the following as their functions:

- a. the development of both surface and underground water resources for multi-purpose use;
- b. control of floods and erosion, and for water-shed management;
- c. construct and maintain dams, dykes, polders, wells, boreholes, irrigation and drainage system;
- d. develop irrigation schemes for the production of crops and livestock and to lease the irrigated land to farmers or recognized associations in the locality of the area concerned;
- e. to resettle persons affected by the works in paragraphs 'C' and 'D' above; and
- f. to control pollution in rivers and lakes etc (FGN, 1976).

The execution of the above functions by the agency however, indicates that considerable gap exists between the target objective-alleviating rural poverty and achievement. For example, infant mortality rate, poor drinking water and accessibility to health facilities, among others are still lacking in the rural areas. What is responsible for this gap? Has the LBRBRDA alleviated poverty in its host communities? What are the factors responsible for the failure of LBRBRDA on poverty alleviation in its host communities?

The objective of the paper is to assess how LBRBRDA has alleviated poverty in its host communities. Other objectives are, to identify the reasons for the failure of LBRBRDA on poverty alleviation in its host communities, and to proffer solutions to the constraints of the agency on poverty alleviation in its host communities. It was hypothesised that LBRBRDA has not succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities.

The study covers the execution of the functions of LBRBRDA in its catchments areas – Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa and Kogi states between 1989 – 1999. A project with irrigation infrastructure and other provisions has been selected from each state and used for the study, and they include:

- a. Naka project (Benue state)
- b. Doma project (Nassarawa state)
- c. Ejule – Ogebe project (Kogi state)
- d. Dep project (Plateau state).

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The paper used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were generated from questionnaire and interviews administered to staff of LBRBRDA the rural people around the LBRBRDA project sites in the four catchments areas of the agency earlier mentioned. Out of 376 questionnaires administered, 214 were returned. Out of the 214 questionnaires returned, 61 were from staff of LBRBRDA, and 105 from the rural people and 48 from local NGOs. The primary data were analysed through simple statistical tools such as tables, frequencies and simple percentages using chi-square distribution to test the hypothesis.

Stratified random sampling was used in administering the questionnaire on the staff sample size, while accidental sampling was used on the customer (rural people) sample.

Secondary data for the work were gathered from textbooks, journals and government documents.

2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Poverty is currently one of the most serious problems in the world. Recent estimates indicate that about 1.5 billion people live below poverty line of less than one dollar per day in the whole world. Out of the 1.5 billion people, Africa contributes about 250 million, which is about 17% of the world's total poor population.

Statistical data from the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) (*see appendix "A"*) in Nigeria, indicate that by 1960, poverty covered about 15% of the Nation's population and by 1980 it grew to 28%. By 1995 the extent of poverty was about 46% and then dropped to 43% by 1992. By 1996, poverty incidence in Nigeria was estimated to be about 66% in a total population of about 110 million.

Several strategies, policies and plans; programmes and projects have been formulated and executed over the years to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. Few of these strategies in place during the period of assessment are hereunder reviewed.

Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) was Established by Decree No. 22 of 1990. It was charged with the responsibility of extending credit to underprivileged Nigerians who could not ordinarily access such loans from the orthodox banking system. Before it was merged with the Nigerian Agriculture and Cooperative Bank (NACB) to form the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), the PBN was engaged in group lending to cottage industry promoters, agricultural producers etc.

The bank (PBN) had a high degree of problem loan. Its external audit report showed a huge loss provision of over 80% on its loan portfolio at its close. Some of its funds were also trapped in distressed and liquidated banks due to unwise investment decisions.

The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established to provide credit for agricultural production and processing, cottage and small-scale industries through cooperative societies; and to establish enterprises and pilot projects at village level as a means of providing employment. Before it was wound up in 2000, FEAP financed 20,382 projects with a total credit of N3.33 billion; trained about 2000 loan beneficiaries in cooperative laws, principles and practice and basic marketing skills.

The organisation (FEAP) had problems of non-supervision and monitoring of the loans and projects by the participating banks, provision of sub-standard equipment and delays in the fabrication, and poor loan recovery. Its assets and liability were handed over to the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) when it wound up.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme is an off-shoot of the defunct poverty alleviation programme which was phased out in 2001 as a result of structural inefficiency. It (NAPEP) consists of four schemes namely: Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) and National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS).

A critical assessment of the performances of NAPEP also leaves much to be desired. Available evidence shows that the rural people still remain poor. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation World News Programme on ten years of democracy in Nigeria, (01 May 2009), observed that the level of poverty which stood at 34 million population in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule had risen to 74 million population within ten years of democratic rule (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010).

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on its multi-dimensional nature, poverty is usually perceived using different criteria. This accounts for the numerous attempts in defining the concept; each definition tries to capture the perception of the author or the poor as to what the term is.

Narayan et al (2000:30) captured the definition from the point of view of the poor in different countries in the following perspectives; "poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help."

Another of such views of the poor is that expressed by a poor man in Kenya in 1997 as reported by Narayan et al (2000:30) thus:

Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house. Look at the house and count the number of holes. Look at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty.

The above reflect just descriptions of a few of the various perceptions of poverty, at least from the poor.

Lending credence to the divergent views on defining poverty, the World Bank (1999:10) states that "participatory studies have cumulatively shown that the poor also experience and understand their poverty in terms of a range of non-material and intangible qualities such as insecurity, lack of dignity and status or a lack of power or opportunity." These qualities and characteristics of poverty differ markedly by social group and by geographical, political and economic contexts.

Furthermore, examining the definition of poverty from the dimension of material wellbeing reveals yet other varying opinions. The case of a 10 – year old child in Gabon in 1997 as stated in Narayan et al (2000:39) succinctly captures it thus:

When I leave for school in the morning I don't have any breakfast. At noon, there is no lunch, in the evening I get a little supper, and that is enough. So when I see another child eating, I watch him, and if he doesn't give me something I think I am going to die of hunger.

The perception of this Gabonese child is akin to the song one old woman claimed her siblings used to sing as a result of lack of food to eat. It is translated thus: "give me the one I will eat in the afternoon, in the night I am ready to forgo food, food, food."

Material well being is always relative. While some perceive it in terms of ability to meet basic needs such as the provision of three square meals daily, as in the cases above, few perceive it from ability to educate ones children, provide clothing for the family and relatively comfortable shelter. Yet, some perceive it from ability to respond to emergencies by falling back on one's savings. The lack of these things is ordinarily perceived as ill-being and by extension, poverty.

There is also the non-material dimension of poverty, which is manifested in incapacities to participate fully in the political and socio-cultural activities of one's community. Simply put, poverty is powerlessness.

Poverty has been broadly classified into two: relative and absolute poverty. Relative poverty exists if an individual's income allows him consume less (quantity and quality) relative to another individual. Similarly, one community (national or international) can be said to be poor relative to another if the per capita income/consumption of the former is less than that of the latter. Relative poverty is only problematic if the level of resources available to individual (or communities) fails to provide goods and services necessary to lead to a life worthy of human dignity.

On the other hand, absolute poverty refers to lack of a minimum requirement in terms of the consumption of both private and public goods. People in absolute poverty do not have the resources to meet their basic needs, including access to clean water, food, shelter, medicine and schooling. Because they are not getting sufficient calories, there are high infant mortality rates, and the life expectancies of these people are low. The literacy rate is also low, making it hard to find work. People in absolute poverty also suffer from diseases and parasites that could easily be cured, but no one can afford the medicine.

3.1 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES OF DATA

Data collected during the course of the study is hereunder presented in tables and analysed in percentages and are subjected to statistical tool of analysis, especially the one relating to hypotheses to enable it (hypotheses) to be tested. The distribution and return of questionnaires are analysed in the table below:

Table 2: Questionnaires distributed and returned

The distribution and return of questionnaires to respondents to elicit information for the paper is stated below:

Table 1: Distribution and Return of Questionnaire

Institutions/ Agencies	Number Distributed	Number returned	Number not returned	% of total returned	% of total not returned
Rural people	202	105	97	28	26
LBRBRDA	91	61	30	16	8
Local NGOs	83	48	35	13	9.3
Total	376	214	162	57	43

Source: Field survey, 2012

The table 2 shows that out of 376 questionnaires distributed, 214 were returned representing 57% of the entire distribution, while 162 or about 43% were not returned.

3.2 ANALYSES OF SOME RESPONSES

The response to some of the questions in the questionnaire have been analysed hereunder.

3.2.1 THE RURAL POOR AS TARGET FOR IMPLEMENTING LBRBRDA PROGRAMES

Respondent were asked to state if the programmes of LBRBRDA targeted the rural poor and their responses are analysed in table 3 below

Table 2: The Rural Poor as the Target for Implementing LBRBRDA Programmes

Responses	Beneficiaries	LBRBRDA	Local NGOs	Total	% of Respondents
Strongly agreed	20	17	10	57	27
Agreed	43	25	18	86	40
Strongly Disagreed	20	16	10	36	17
Disagreed	14	13	08	35	16
Total	97	71	46	214	100 apr

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 3 indicates that 57 respondents represented by 27% strongly agreed that the rural poor are the target for implementing LBRBRDA programmes for poverty alleviation. While 86 or 40% agreed that the poor are the target for implementing LBRBRDA as a poverty reduction programme. Of the 36 respondents (17%) strongly opposed to this assertion, 35 respondents represented by 16% disagreed.

Given the total number of 143 respondents that strongly agreed and agreed, the drift was more towards the assertion that the poor were well targeted by the programme implementation.

3.2.2 SUCCESS of LBRBRDA in Poverty Alleviation

Respondents were asked to indicate if the agency has succeeded in the alleviation of poverty and their responses are stated in table 4 below.

Table 3: Success of LBRBRDA in Poverty Alleviation

Responses	Rural people	LBRBRDA	Local NGOs	Total	% of respondents
Strongly agreed	26	20	14	60	28
Agreed	40	26	20	86	40
Strongly Disagreed	18	08	12	38	18
Disagreed	15	06	09	30	14
Total	99	60	55	214	100 apr

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 4 reveals that 60 respondents or about 28% of the respondents and 86 respondents or about 40% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that LBRBRDA has alleviated rural poverty. While 38 respondents or about 17% and 30 or about 14% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that LBRBRDA has alleviated poverty.

3.2.3 Provision of irrigation infrastructure

The respondents were further required to indicate whether the LBRBRDA provided irrigation infrastructure for all the year round farming. Their responses are shown in table 5 below:

Table 4: Provision of irrigation infrastructure

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	23
No	140	65
Undecided	24	11
Total	214	100 apr

Source: Field Survey, 2012

The table 4 shows that 50 or 23% of the respondents affirmed that the LBRBRDA provided irrigation infrastructures for all the year round farming. While 140 or 65% of the respondents said that the agency did not provide irrigation infrastructure. The remaining 24 respondents (or 11%) were however undecided. Thus, by looking at the percentages of the respondents, one can infer that the agency did not provide irrigation infrastructure in its four catchment areas earlier mentioned. Thus, the rural people are not gainfully employed in the all the year round farming. However, some respondents remarked that irrigation infrastructures were provided only at the inception of the agency sometimes in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

3.2.4: Land Clearing and Preparation

Again, respondents were asked to indicate if the agency cleared and prepared land for local farmers, and their responses are stated in table 6 below

Table 5: Land clearing and preparation

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	47	22
No	135	63
Undecided	32	15
Total	214	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

From table 5, 47 respondents represented by 22% stated that LBRBRDA cleared, prepared and allocated land to farmers. While 135 respondents or 63% objected that the agency did not clear and allocated land to farmers. However, 32 respondents (or 15%) were undecided. It can therefore, be adduced here that the agency has also failed in the clearing and preparation of land for farmers. Hence, the rural farmers have to resort to their traditional methods of land clearing and preparation. This explains the low productivity among the rural people and consequently aggravating their poverty situation.

3.3 TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses being tested, as earlier mentioned in the paper area:

The LBRBRDA has not succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities.

The LBRBRDA has succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities.

The above hypotheses are tested using the chi-square (χ^2) as a statistical tool. A table of expected frequencies is computed from table 4 to enable calculation of the chi-square.

$$\text{Formula for expected frequency} = \frac{RT \times CT}{G}$$

Where RT = Row total

CT = Column total

G = Grand total

Table 6: Computed expected frequencies

Responses	Rural people	LBRBRDA	Local NGOs	Total
Strongly agreed	27.76	16.82	15.42	60
Agreed	39.79	24.11	22.10	86
Strongly Disagreed	17.58	10.65	9.77	38
Disagreed	13.88	8.41	7.71	30
Total	99.01	59.99	55	214

Source: Compiled from table 3

Table 7: Computation of χ^2

Institutions/Agencies	Responses	O	E	(O - E)	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
Rural people	Strongly Agreed	26	27.76	-1.76	3.10	0.11
	Agreed	40	39.79	0.21	0.04	0.10
	Strongly Disagreed	18	17.58	0.42	0.18	0.01
	Disagreed	15	13.88	1.12	1.25	0.09
LBRBRDA	Strongly Agreed	20	16.82	3.18	10.11	0.60
	Agreed	26	24.11	1.89	3.57	0.15
	Strongly Disagreed	8	10.65	-2.65	7.02	0.66
	Disagreed	6	8.49	-2.49	6.20	0.73
Local NGOs	Strongly Agreed	14	15.42	-1.42	2.02	0.13
	Agreed	20	22.10	-2.1	4.41	0.20
	Strongly Disagreed	14	9.77	2.23	4.97	0.51
	Disagreed	9	7.71	1.29	1.66	0.22
Total		214				3.51

Source: Computed from table 3 and 6

Formula for Degree of Freedom = (R - 1) (C - 1)

Where R = Row

C = Column

$$\text{Thus} = (4 - 1) (3 - 1)$$

$$= 3 \times 2$$

$$= 6$$

Level of Significance is at 5%

Thus, the table value of χ^2 at degree of freedom 6 on a 5% level of significance is 12.59.

Decision Rule

If the calculated χ^2 is less than χ^2 critical, accept the null and reject the alternative hypothesis, and vice versa.

Decision

Since from our computation, χ^2 is 3.51, which is less than the χ^2 critical (12.59), we therefore accept the null hypothesis, which states that LBRBRDA has not succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities. The data from the FOS on table 1 of the paper also collaborates this position.

3.4.1 Causes of Poverty in the host communities of LBRBRDA

In a bid to develop effective policy devices to overcome poverty, it is indispensable to have an understanding of the causal factors of the phenomenon.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (1999:12) grouped the causes of poverty in two categories namely, “low economic growth and market imperfections.” The World Bank (2002:34) however, reasoned that one route to investigating the causes of poverty is to examine the dimensions highlighted by the poor people:

- Inadequate access to market the goods and services that the poor can sell. This is caused by their remote geographical location; or
- Inadequate access to education, health sanitation and water services. These emanates from inadequate social service delivery which consequently results in the inability of the rural poor to live in a healthy and active life and take full advantage of employment opportunities;
- The destruction of the natural resources endowments, which has led to reduced productivity of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This often resulted from the desperate survival strategies of the poor as well as inadequate and ineffective public policy on natural resources management.
- The inadequate access to assistance by those who are victims of transitory poverty such as drought, floods, pests and wars. This is brought about by lack of well conceived strategies and resources; and
- Inadequate involvement of the poor in the design of development programmes. This is often exacerbated by the non-involvement of the representatives of the poor communities or beneficiaries in the discussion, preparation, design and implementation of programmes that will affect them.

The responses by the respondents through interviews and questionnaire collaborates the above to be responsible for poverty in Nigeria. Other factors, as gathered from the respondents include: distaste for farming, bad government, corruption, and non-payment of compensation for land acquired by government.

4.1 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The LBRBRDA, as was gathered, is an appropriate agency for the provision of infrastructural facilities to ameliorate the high incidence of poverty in its host communities. However, its effectiveness in this regard is constrained by corruption, inadequate funding, bad governance and inadequate consultation with stakeholders, and a host of others. Consequently, LBRBRDA, just like other poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria has not succeeded in alleviating poverty in its host communities.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Over the years, efforts have been made by different governments to alleviate poverty. But it has instead become more intractable. Therefore, emphasis should be shifted from strategies or researches to actions. Both the government and the governed should be committed in this task.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the reviews, surveys conducted and suggestions made by respondents in poverty alleviation efforts, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The government should fund LBRBRDA adequately so that it can discharge its functions of rural infrastructures to alleviate poverty.
2. The LBRBRDA should be strengthened for its coordination and monitoring mandate as well as consultation with the stakeholders on a bottom-up approach basis.
3. Probity and accountability must be ensured in the management of LBRBRDA to alleviate poverty.
4. The government should compensate the affected persons whenever their land is taken over for a public project/programme.

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APPENDIX “A”

Table 1: Poverty Incidences by States Including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (1980 – 1996)

States	1980	1985	1992	1996
Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2
Adamawa	33.4	47.2	44.1	65.5
Akwa Ibom	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9
Anambra	12.8	37.7	32.3	51.0
Bauchi	46.0	68.9	68.8	83.5
Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3
Benue	23.6	42.9	40.8	64.3
Borno	26.4	50.1	49.7	66.9
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9
Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	66.1
Ebonyi	12.8	37.7	32.2	61.0
Edo	19.8	52.4	33.9	66.1
Ekiti	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6
Enugu	12.8	37.7	32.3	51.0
Gombe	46.0	68.9	68.8	83.5
Imo	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2
Jigawa	37.5	54.0	38.7	71.0
Kaduna	44.7	58.5	32.0	67.7
Kano	37.5	55.0	38.7	71.0
Katsina	44.7	58.7	32.0	67.7
Kebbi	25.4	45.8	37.9	83.6
Kogi	33.3	39.3	60.8	75.5
Kwara	33.3	39.3	60.8	75.5
Lagos	26.4	43.6	48.1	83.0
Nassarawa	49.5	49.5	50.2	62.7
Niger	34.0	61.4	29.9	52.9
Ogun	20.0	56.0	36.3	69.9
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6
Osun	7.8	28.3	40.5	58.7
Oyo	7.8	28.3	40.5	58.7
Plateau	49.5	64.2	50.2	62.7
Rivers	7.2	44.4	43.4	77.3
Sokoto	25.4	45.8	37.9	83.6
Taraba	33.4	47.8	44.1	65.5
Yobe	26.4	50.1	49.7	66.9
Zamfara	33.4	45.8	37.9	83.6
F.C.T			27.6	53.0
All Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (FOS)

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