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AN OVERVIEW OF DEFICIENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS AND REMEDIES.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the disparity between rural and urban areas in terms of basic infrastructural facilities in Benue State, most of which are concentrated in urban centres only. Rural infrastructure are physical, social and institutional forms of capital, which enable rural dwellers to perform their production, processing, marketing or distribution activities much better. The paper is an overview of deficient rural infrastructural development in Benue State, effects on post-harvest losses, types of rural infrastructure, the present status of rural infrastructure, problem affecting provision of rural infrastructure and implications such as lack of transportation network that lead to breakdown of vehicles, poor storage and packaging facilities, deficiency of adequate agro-based industries, reduced income of rural farmers and poor marketing facilities. It was recommended that the government, non- governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as private individuals should as a matter of urgency provide rural infrastructure for rural people. There is need to mobilize rural people to form cooperative societies in their rural areas so as to pool their resources together with which they can embark on self-help rural development projects in Benue State.

Keywords: Deficient, rural infrastructure, facilities, implications, remedies.

1.0 Introduction

Rural under-development in Nigeria can be traceable in part to continued disparity between rural and urban areas in terms of provision of basic infrastructural facilities, most of which are concentrated in urban centres only.

According to Sule (2006), this sordid state of affairs of disparity between rural and urban started during colonial era, when early European Colonial masters purposely selected and favoured the urban centres as their dwelling places to the detriment of remote rural

areas. The colonial masters used urban centres mainly as commercial points for which agricultural raw materials were evacuated from rural areas and gathered for use in their home countries. As a result, it became increasingly imperative for them to develop and provide the necessary conducive environment for themselves and their cronies in business.

Now that Nigeria is under political dispensation, the colonial mentality of favouring urban development and deliberate neglect of the rural community to the background is still with us. For national development of any country to take place, there must first of all be a substantial development of the rural areas, and for any meaningful development of rural area to take place, there must be availability of rural infrastructure. Rural infrastructure can be defined as physical, social and institutional structures that are required to facilitate the development of rural areas.

According to Idachaba and Ekong (2000), rural infrastructure can be defined as the physical, social, human, and institutional forms of capital which enable rural dwellers to perform their production, processing, marketing or distribution activities better, while at sometime improving their living standard. Infrastructural development raises agricultural productivity, which in turn induces growth in the rural area, bringing about higher agricultural wages and improved opportunities for non-farm labour. Increased agricultural productivity reduces food prices, benefits both urban and rural inhabitants who are net food buyers. Thus, apart from numerous benefits, agricultural productivity has significant effects on poverty reduction. Rural infrastructure contributes to economic development both by increasing productivity and by providing social amenities, which enhance the quality of life and also reduce post-harvest losses of crop produce in Nigeria (Lianto, 2012).

Rural infrastructure fosters physical connectivity and promotes better integration of rural and agricultural areas with growing urban markets, which in turn are linked to the global trading markets, thereby stimulating economic growth and creating poverty reduction opportunities in those areas, such as deplorable state of most rural infrastructural facilities and the state of disrepair, lack of maintenance, especially electricity, roads, and railways experienced in Benue State that seems to neglect these important infrastructure due to the drastic reduction in government focus on the facilities, vandalization of the existing facilities, corruption, bureaucratic delay in the construction, maintenance and repairs of damaged facilities (Agenor and **Moreno-**Dodson, 2006).

The services generated by rural infrastructure investment can lead to growth in the production firms, the flow of infrastructure services is the main measure of economic benefits from these sectors, and that an efficient allocation of resources in these areas should be in response to effective demand for services (Edame and Fonta, 2014).

Development economists had long acknowledged the centrality of public expenditure, particularly on rural infrastructure as an important instrument in development process. Public expenditure has remained a central issue in economic development, especially developing countries in sub-saharan Africa, whose economies are characterized by structural rigidities, weak support services and institutional framework, declining productivity, high corruption cum policy instability.

Rural infrastructural development is paramount for sustainable economic growth, research and development (R&D) is also necessary to stimulate economic development as well as agricultural productivity, they contribute to government revenue, poverty alleviation and food security. Therefore, this paper intends to examine lack of rural infrastructural development and its effects on post-harvest losses of crop produce

types of rural infrastructure, an overview of the present status of rural infrastructure Benue State, Nigeria, and problems affecting provision of rural infrastructure, implications and remedies.

Research has shown that investment in rural infrastructure has tremendous positive impact on a country's economic growth and development (Adenikinju, 2005). Improved rural infrastructure will enhance productivity, income growth, economic growth and sustainable development at all level of the country (Dibie and Okonkwo, 2000).

The current level of rural infrastructural deficit in Nigeria has been identified by Samusi (2012) as the major constraint towards achieving the nation's vision of becoming one of the 20 largest economies in 2020.

Edame and Fonto (2014) identified that deficiency in rural infrastructure could be a critical development constraint (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2007).

2.0 Types of rural Infrastructure: Basically, there are three categories of rural infrastructure viz; physical, social and institutional.

Physical Infrastructure: Include transportation facilities such as roads, waterways canals, bridges, culverts, agricultural facilities such as dams, farm machinery, agro-service centres, farm buildings and processing facilities. These structures facilitate evacuation of agricultural produce from rural areas to urban centres on time, thus reducing post-harvest losses of crop produce that are perishable in nature. Where processing, preservation, good storage facilities, good transportation network are lacking, post-harvest losses can surely occur.

Social Infrastructure: Social amenities that can improve the well- being of the ruralities, include provision of pipe borne water, boreholes, rural electrification,

provision of health care facilities (hospitals, clinics, maternity), telecommunication facilities, rural housing, and information centres. If the facilities that support the processing, preservation and storage are not available, post- harvest losses of crop produce tend to increase in Nigeria.

Institutional Infrastructure: Are structures that provide social order or security to the people, provide financial or economic support to the people, facilitate socialization of the people and provision of agricultural infrastructure and rural financial institutions, (cooperatives, commercial banks), farmers' organizations, community development associations, rural markets, traditional institutions, religious institutions as well as family and political institutions. Institutional infrastructure also play a vital role in the prevention of post-harvest losses, for example, provision of agricultural marketing services to care for farmers who produce such perishable agricultural crop produce.

3.0 Present status of rural infrastructure in Benue State, Nigeria

To appreciate the present status of rural infrastructure in Benue State, there is need to critically assess some of the following: physical, social and institutional infrastructural facilities.

i. Rural Roads: Rural roads are constructed to link rural areas with urban centres with a view to enhancing accessibility and evacuation of agricultural produce from rural areas to urban centres. Every nook and cranny of rural Nigeria these days has rural roads, but the condition of such road is deplorable and in most cases inaccessible, especially during rainy season.

The fact that majority of these rural roads were constructed locally through self-help by the ruralities themselves, these rural roads have no drainage systems and as such are characterized by gully erosion and run offs. These gully erosion and run offs cause

potholes and gullies on majority of the rural roads, thereby affecting vehicular movement to evacuate agricultural produce, thereby abeting post-harvest losses.

Some of the bridges that are locally made by the ruralities are washed away by floods, thus compounding problems of rural accessibility, especially during rainy season. The few rural roads that were constructed by the government are nothing one can write home about, since they were contracted to emergency contractors, who only succeeded in grading and covering them with gravels or laterites. None of Nigerian rural roads is solidly constructed; the worst part of the story is that, there is lack of post-construction maintenance. According to Sule (2006), lack of maintenance is responsible for neglect of rural roads, hence their early state of dilapidation and subsequent abandonment. Even when maintenance is done, it is badly done, in such a way that the potholes are merely patched unprofessionally and as such the patched roads become death traps and eye-sores to passers-by, such is the sorry state of Nigerian rural roads.

i. **Rural Electrification**: Rural electrification is sine-qua non for industrialization of rural areas, electricity power supply apart from illuminating our rural communities is a source of energy for small and medium scale industries. According to Sule (2006), rural communities are poor partly due to the absence of basic source of energy, which is a pre-cursor for industrialization. Nigeria has 774 local government areas, and of these, only the local government headquarters are electrified. What one finds in remote rural areas is private generators. In those few rural areas there seem to be electricity power supply, the quality and sustainability of it is worrisome and questionable. There is always low voltage, which cannot be compared with candle light, and frequent outage in electricity power supply yet at the end of the month, heavy electricity bills are charged to consumers.

ii. Poor Market Facilities: In most of our rural markets in rural Nigeria, there are no good marketing structures and facilities that can provide protection for crop produce against thieves, pest and weather vagaries or climate change. Lack of post-harvest facilities especially for perishable farm produce can lead to rapid deterioration of fruits and vegetable. The worst thing is that trying to sort out produce by separating the saleable from unsaleable produce at retail marketing stage can lead to more losses.

iii. Lack of financial institution: Majority (95%) of our rural communities do not have commercial banks for saving their money. The rural people often save their money in local banks which are not secured.

iv. Bridges: Majority (80 percent) of the rural roads lack good bridges and this affects mobility of the ruralities. Even where bridges are found, they are locally constructed with wooden materials that can easily be blown away by running water or burnt by fire. This development is worrisome. Farmers find it difficult to evacuate their farm produce from the rural areas to urban centres for sale which lead to post-harvest losses.

4.0 Problems Affecting Provision of Rural Infrastructure in Rural Nigeria

Provision of rural infrastructural facilities in the rural area is affected by the following problems:

(a) High Capital Outlay: Provision of rural infrastructural facilities requires high capital outlay, which our peasent rural communities can hardly afford, due to their high level of poverty. According to Sule (2006), infrastructural facilities are generally capital intensive and therefore require huge financial investment. It is government that is looked upon always as the main provider of rural infrastructure because it is capital intensive.

(b) Commitment of our political leaders: The non challent attitude of our political

leaders towards provision of rural infrastructure is the major causes of infrastructural under-development in Nigeria. This colonial inheritance by our native leaders made them to forget so soon that they all came from rural areas. It is surprising to note that many years after independence, our native leaders are still exhibiting colonial tendencies, which favour development of urban infrastructure to the detriment or rural communities.

(c) Lack of maintenance culture: It is one thing to provide rural infrastructural facilities to rural communities and another thing to maintain them to ensure sustainability. If government provides rural infrastructure in rural communities, but there is nobody to maintain them, such facilities cannot last long.

(d) Rural Poverty: This is another constraint to provision of rural infrastructure. Majority (98%) of our rural populace are wallowing in abject penury and can hardly contribute to provision of infrastructure in their localities.

(e) The Scattered nature of settlement pattern: The dispersed settlement pattern in most of our rural communities makes it very costly to site rural infrastructured facilities in settlements that are scattered and far apart. In Benue State, especially Tiv land, due to the struggle for the right of land ownership, people tend to spread outward so as to cover their inherited lands, particularly those at the boundaries with other rural communities.

4.0 Implications

(I) Lack of good roads leads to frequent break down of vehicles. In fact, breakdown of vehicles during transportation of fruits and vegetables is a significant factor to post-harvest losses. Farm produce that are perishable in nature when exposed to the sun for a day or more while repairs are carried out by motor mechanics easily get spoiled.

(II) **Poor marketing facilities:** Most of our rural markets in Nigeria, lack good marketing structures and facilities that can provide protection for farm produce against thieves, pests and negative effects of climate change. And poor quality markets lead to rapid deterioration of fruits and vegetables.

(III) **Lack of proper storage and packaging facilities** can also cause losses of horticultural and root crop produce thereby reducing their shelf life.

(IV) **Lack of Agro-based industries:** without these industries over cannot process raw horticultural, root crop and other farm produce into finished products.

(V) The income of farmers and revenue for the government is reduced greatly due to losses of farm produce as a result of deterioration.

4.2 Remedies

I. Government, non-governmental organizations (NGO) as well as private individuals as a matter of urgency should provide infrastructure for the rural people.

II. There is need to put in place a legislated policy that will make it compulsory for all political leaders to concentrate more on provision of rural infrastructure.

III. Our rural communities should learn to provide security to rural infrastructural facilities sited in their communities.

IV. There is need to mobilized rural people to form cooperative societies in their local areas so as to poo their resources together so that which they can embark on self-help rural development projects themselves.

V. Rural people should be encouraged to come together in nucleated settlements so as to make it easier for the government to site infrastructural facilities in such settlements.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Deficient rural infrastructural facilities poses significant challenges with far-reaching implications for the well-being and development of rural communities. Insufficient access to basic amenities such as roads, electricity, water supply, healthcare, and education hinders economic growth, limits opportunities, and exacerbates inequalities. Moreover, deficient infrastructure can impede the delivery of essential services, compromise public health, and increase vulnerability to environmental hazards. In conclusion, addressing the deficiencies in rural infrastructural facilities requires a holistic and integrated approach that encompasses planning, investment, innovation, and policy reform. By prioritizing rural infrastructural development, we can unlock the full potential of rural communities, promote inclusive growth, and achieve sustainable development goals.

5.2 Recommendations

To address these challenges, it is essential to implement comprehensive remedies that prioritize rural infrastructural development. This includes strategic planning, resource mobilization, and multi-stakeholders collaboration to ensure equitable provision of infrastructural services. Investment in infrastructure projects must be targeted towards addressing the specific needs of rural areas, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing resilience to climate change and natural disasters.

Moreover, leveraging technology and innovation can play a pivotal role in overcoming infrastructural deficits by improving connectivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of service delivery. Empowering local communities through capacity building, participatory approaches, and inclusive decision-making processes is also crucial for fostering ownership, sustainability, and resilience.

Furthermore, advocating for supportive policies, regulatory frameworks, and institutional mechanisms at all levels of governance is essential for creating an enabling environment for rural infrastructural development. This includes promoting private sector participation, decentralization, and resource allocation mechanisms that prioritize rural development.

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