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## **IMPERATIVES OF DEVELOPMENT CENTRES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EBONYI STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper captured the imperatives of the creation of Development Centres for the development of rural communities in Ebonyi State. The major objective of this study is to examine how Development Centre creation relates to rural development in Ebonyi State. The paper therefore is anchored on the Modernization Theory of development as explained by Adam Smith, David Richardo, Joseph Schumpeters and associates. The theory explains development as a process that goes in stages cutting across the traditional stage, the pre- take off stage, the take off stage, the stage of maturing and that of mass consumption. The major findings of this study is that despite the pragmatic ideas underlying Development Centre creation for accelerating development in Ebonyi State, the idea has been fraught with political influence as the regime in power use Development Centres as patronage to loyalists who could not make it to executive council. It is on this premise that the study recommends that: Development Centre coordinators should be given a target to achieve in respect to development of their areas of jurisdiction and the need for constant and retraining of management committees and staff of the Development Centres for effective operation.*

**Keywords:** Development, Centre, Ebonyi State, Rural Areas

## **Introduction**

Since the colonial times, most development efforts of most developing countries of the world are directed towards the urban centres at the expense of the rural areas, even though most of the raw materials for the development and sustenance of the urban centres come from the rural areas.

It was not until the 1970s according to Onah (2010) that governments of developing countries began to think of definite policy programmes for the development of the rural areas. They became aware that no meaningful development of any nation can take place when the bulk of its populations are still poor and neglected. This is why considerable attention is now being placed on the issue of rural development by not only making special budgetary provisions, but also inviting international assistance from development partners.

The idea of creating development centres by some states in Nigeria is perhaps one of the institutional approaches to effective rural development in Nigeria (Onah 2010). Development centres are administrative centres created from existing local governments in the states backed by edicts of the state assemblies. Development centres are prototypes of local government councils in a state, with officials appointed by the state governors. For example, in Ebonyi State law No.7 of 2001 local government creation and transition provision, as amended on August, 2006, there exists 67 development centers. The development centres are headed by a coordinator and 5-member management committees.

Agreeably, most local government areas are pretty large and differently characterized. This partly gives reason for the Development Centres which assumes to be indeed closer to the people. Development Centres are therefore, growth poles, or growth centers which cater and care for the peculiar needs of the rural areas (Nwali 2013).

Another reason for the creation of Development Centres according to Onah (2010), Okpata (2003) and Nwali (2013) is decentralizing in infrastructures which hitherto, were concentrated at the Local Government Headquarters. Closely related to this are supervision and monitoring of projects. Because of the proximity advantage, Development Centre management members are strongly positioned to monitor projects and infrastructure in their areas of domain.

However, irrespective of these elegant ideas, Development Centres face challenges ranging from political problems, through social problems, to financial challenges. More so, it is observable that many state Governors use the opportunity of the phenomenon of Development Centres as political patronage for loyalists who could not make it to the Executive Council. Sometimes, the Centres are used to build up political structures. There are also situations where the power struggles between the Coordinators and the Executive Chairmen of the mother local government is vicariously ferocious. It is also known that Development Centres are not adequately funded, irrespective of existing formula for sharing revenue. In those situations, the main objectives of Development Centres are truncated and obviated (Nwali 2013).

But be that as it may, Development Centres have, as their primary functions, the responsibility for rural development. We shall therefore make some further conceptualization of development, rural development, nature of rural environment and the implications of these for development centres.

## **History and Philosophy of Development Centres Creation**

The philosophy and rationale behind the creation of Development Centres in Nigeria generally and Ebonyi State in particular is hinged on the core task that determines the structures

and functions of the local government system. The core tasks derives from the ideological tenet of the regime and to a large extent, determines the structural configuration of the local government administration. Therefore, within the local government, the expectation is that there should be congruence between the structure and the core task and between the core task and the ideological tenets of the government (regime) in power. This rationale pervades the evolution of local government creation in Nigeria and that of Development Centres in Ebonyi State (Okpata, 2003).

Consequent upon this, Ebonyi State government in 2001 and 2006 respectively, enacted a law by the State House of Assembly, creating sixty seven Development Centres. The law enabling this creation has defined objectives which include:

- a. To ensure stable and balanced state;
- b. To decentralize power to the rural populace and
- c. To enhance the structure of political and social mobilization in the state (Ebonyi State Local Government law, 2001:10 cited in Okpata, 2003).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the analysis of Modernization Theory of Development. Proponents of this view include Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Joseph Schumpeters, W. W. Restow, Barbara Ward, etc. It represents the relationship among nations in the form of an international division of labour, whereby some societies contribute to the world market only on commodities in the category of “primary” while others have the advantage of some unequalled proficiency in the production of capital goods and industrial manufactures. These theories explain the disparity in the wealth of nations with reference to unequal experiences of nations with the major revolutions that condition industrial advancement. These revolutions, according to Barbara Ward are those of ideals (equality and progress), biological revolution that related to the application of science and saving (or capital) to the economic processes of our lives.

In the classic view, these four revolutions – “of equality, of this worldliness, of rising birth rates and of driving scientific change” all started in the North Atlantic arena, in those nations which lie around the North Atlantic Ocean, Britain, Western Europe and North America have, by working and expanding together created a new kind of human society, the wealthy and affluent society. According to them, a sort of mutation has occurred and the people in the North Atlantic area no longer share the same way of life with the underdeveloped and emerging people because in the later, none of the revolutions has been fully at work. They have had little idea about equality. There was in the past no great urge for general material progress. The pressure of population followed a strict rotation of famine and feast and had little of the explosive burst that the North Atlantic nations have witnessed. Above all, traditional societies did very little saving and had virtually no science. What has happened is that around the North Atlantic, a ring of societies came into being with more wealth, more economic resources at its disposal than the underdeveloped societies will ever know (at least in this century). This is the profoundly revolutionary change to which all the subsidiary revolutions have contributed. Accordingly, there is an international division of labour, whereby the underdeveloped society offer only primary (raw material) products in the world market, whereas the developed societies have the comparative advantage of offering industrial manufactures and capital goods. Perhaps, by far, the most ambitious categorization of the international division of labour is that which was given by

W.W. Reston as the five epochs in the development of human societies. The five stages which correspond with the levels of industrialization of societies are:

(a) **Traditional Society:** In a traditional society, production functions are limited. This is a society that has Pre-Newtonian Science as well as Pre-Newtonian Attitude to the physical world. The traditional society is not based on modern technology. A ceiling, therefore, existed on the level of attained output per head. The level is limited by the inaccessibility of modern science. Its application and its frame of mind is no science. In terms of behaviour, the traditional society believes that the next generation cannot be better than the present one. There is, therefore, an unfortunate prevalence of long range fatalism.

(b) **Pre-take-off:** This is the stage where society is getting ready to take off. It is a society in transition. So many changes are taking place both materially and immaterially. Banking, transportation, communication, import and export, etc., are on the increase. Also, the people are beginning to adopt a positive attitude to private property. They begin to cherish modernity and everything that nourishes human existence. However, the stimuli for these changes are exogenous. The pre-take-off society has no technology and therefore cannot develop of its own accord. This implies that colonialism is a pre-condition for the development of the emergent nations. Any society at this stage is a dual society having attitudes of tradition that exist side by side with modernity. Society also cannot be industrially independent until the foreign element of development has been internalized to the extent of enabling independent and self sustained growth.

(c) **Take-off:** This is a state at which society is becoming economically independent. Independent industries begin to emerge. Society at this stage is prepared to overcome those traditional barriers to development. There is social overhead capital and also a surge in technological development in industry and agriculture. There also emerges a political leadership that has the economic growth of the nations as its priority. Much of the capital is still imported, so foreign investment is welcome. However, such society is able to invest 5 percent to 10 percent of its National Income in productive capital. There is therefore an accelerator and multiplier effect in the economy where the growths of various sectors of the economy are complementary and mutually supportive. Society at this stage is developing its capital production possibilities to enhance a self-sustained economic development.

(d) **Maturity:** Society at this stage has taken off and is driving to maturity. Economic growth now supersedes population growth and society could invest between 10 percent of its National Income. The economy begins to diversify, structures change; both importation and exportation are irreversibly on the increase. Society now begins to assert itself in the international context and attempts to dominate others if possible. There is a change of emphasis in industrialization beyond needs and towards capital and luxury goods.

The third world countries like Nigeria have not developed to this stage. A mature society is that which has demonstrated the capacity to transcend those original impetuses that powered it into “*take-off*” and also the capacity to apply the fruits of modern science within its boundaries. The mature society can by no means boast of a capability to produce everything, but now, it can

specialize in certain product lines that will enhance its bargaining position in the international system.

**(e) High Mass Consumption:** At this stage, society has achieved maturity and is going beyond it to emphasize the production of consumables. It begins to produce for the better life of its citizens. The personal income of the citizens increase substantially and their consumption patterns change and the proportion of the urban population to the general working population increases. A society in the age of high mass consumption is a welfare society.

*The efficacy of the modernization theory which makes it relevant to this study is premised on the grounds that development in all societies is not the same. The theory identifies that some societies have developed; others are developing while there are those that are yet to witness development like most rural areas in Nigeria. It is on the premise of the need to develop rural areas in Nigeria that occasioned the philosophy of local government and development centre creation in order to achieve a balanced and equitable state. For the fact that most rural areas in Nigeria are in their primitive or traditional nature; no good road network, no portable drinking water, no health or education facilities and presence of endemic diseases etc, therefore the need to champion state development strategies towards the rural areas can be better achieved through development centres.*

### **Development and Rural Development: A Conceptual Discourse**

Development involves progression, movement, and advance towards something better, (Okoli and Onah, 2002). It is improvement on the material and non-material aspects of life. It involves action, reaction and motion. A developing community is thus a community in motion, a people in search of self improvement; and a group concerned with, and committed to, its advancement through its own efforts (Onah 2010).

Development goes beyond economic and social indicators to include the improvement of human resources and positive change in their behaviour. For us in this study, development includes increase in the citizens' access to:

- ❖ Food, water and shelter.
- ❖ Information and means of communication
- ❖ Healthcare delivery, and
- ❖ Justice, etc.

When these are obtainable, there will be increase in the individual's dignity, happiness and patriotic values and quality of life. This is probably why Todaro (1982) defined development as "a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves, in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs". The main contention according to Ujo (1979) is that development is both a physical process and a state of the mind. The transformation of institution is one aspect which is capable of making the thinking of the people to change in the right direction.

As Emezi (1979) wrote, the actions, reactions and interactions which qualify for inclusion as elements of development are products of rational thinking, conscious planning and genuine citizens' involvement. They are not chance events or chance phenomena. They relate first to economic system because they seek to raise living standard, widen extensively the scope of

productive work at the community level and create or strengthen the necessary foundations or infrastructure for higher, larger and more beneficial changes in the economy.

Secondly, they relate to the social because they affect the education, health, housing, games and sports, culture, care of fellow human beings, social ethics and social justice, and these are matters of both the body and the mind which jointly facilitate healthy growth and more meaningful advancement of the individual in society.

Thirdly, they relate to the political system because they seek to create better patterns of legitimacy; patterns which are good and valid because they create condition which enable all or the most significant groups in the population to anticipate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the process of making decision and of allocating scarce resources and values of their communities.

Any attempt at conceptualizing “rural development” should start with defining “development”. There are controversies as to what development is and the path to it. This can be attributed to the scholars’ often unstated assumption, ideological persuasion and socio-economic and political background (Nnadozie, 1986). However, two alternative paths to development are discernable; Western Liberal and Marxist or Socialist.

The western liberal scholars see development as total transformation of traditional or pre-modern societies into the type of technologies and politically stable nations of the western world. Implicit in the above definition is that there is one average or normal path to development which countries have followed in the past and which they are obliged to in future.

They break development into economic, social and political aspects. According to them, economic development is a process of transforming from a primitive, traditional, agricultural and low-productivity economy, to a modern, industrial and efficient capitalist economy. They also see social development as the institutionalization of western behavior, patterns and norms, while political development focuses on the continuous differentiation of political ‘roles’ and structure, increased sub-system autonomy and a diffusion of secular rational norms in the political culture (Ofuebe, 1991).

The scholars of Marxist philosophical persuasion, found the above conception of development grossly deficient, because, it has not led to real development, instead, it enhanced the progressive underdevelopment of most third world states. Thus, they see development as socio-economic transformation which man engenders as he jointly with his fellows, interacts with the natural environment through labour power. In other words, development is a human issue, which should involve the total and full mobilization of a society. Development therefore is a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process (Nnoli, 1981).

Rural Development on the other hand concerns with the improvement of the living standard of the low-income people living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources, so as to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the change consequent upon this (Mabogunje, 1980).

*This definition has three important features:*

- **Improving the living standards of the subsistence population:** This involves the mobilization and allocation of resources so as to reach a desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive service available to the rural subsistence populations.
- **Mass participation:** This requires that resources be allocated to low income regions and classes and that the productive service actually reach them.
- **Making the process self sustaining:** This requires the development of appropriate skills and implementing capacity and the presence of institution at the local, regional national levels to ensure effective use of existing resources and to ensure effective development of the subsistence sector. Self sustenance means involving and reaching the rural people through development programmes. (Uma-lele, 1975).  
According to Uma-Lele (1975), the achievement of the above objectives involves the interaction of the following crucial variables:
  - **National policies:** These include land tenure systems, commodity pricing and marketing systems, wages and interest rate structure, etc.
  - **Administrative system:** These include the degree of centralization or decentralization in governmental structures.

### **Nature of Rural Environment**

Before embarking on any rural development, it is pertinent to understand the nature of our rural environment. The rural environment is characterized by:

- i. **Extreme Poverty:** The rural masses are poor because they have suffered age-long neglect in the provision of infrastructural facilities that are necessary for social and economic development. The people depend mainly on subsistence agriculture, as well as on the middlemen to get their produce sold in distant markets at price which are determined by the buyers and consumer. Hence, they generate low incomes that can hardly cater for their basic needs. This makes them to be below poverty level on yearly basis, (Nwali, 2013)
- ii. **Malnutrition:** The bulk of goods consumed is made of carbohydrates and less of protein and other food types that can help their body fight against diseases. The most vulnerable groups are the children who suffer from kwashiorkor and other childhood diseases. Lack of education and proper medical advices in the rural environment have contributed to poor knowledge of the type of food to be consumed.
- iii. **Prevalence of Diseases:** Poor nutrition, poor environmental sanitation, general state of poverty and lack of personal hygiene are responsible for the high incidence of communicable diseases in the rural environment.
- iv. **Exploitation of Diseases:** The low standard of living and resultant high poverty level have exposed the rural masses to exploitation by the rich and educated urban elites. The labour of the rural masses is hired at low prices. They work for long hours and paid meager wages. Even for those of them who migrate to the centres are subjected to the same treatment as their counterparts in the rural areas.
- v. **Lack of Infrastructural Facilities:** This is the main bane for rural poverty and isolation. The rural areas are not provided with good roads and transportation system, communication, medical facilities (hospitals and clinics), educational institutions (except primary schools under ramshackle accommodations), potable water, electricity etc. The lack of all these is putting the rural areas in a perpetual cycle of poverty.

- vi. **Poor Housing and Sanitation:** Most of the houses are made from simple resources that are less durable and attractive. The building walls are made from mud and clay, while the roofs are made of thatched grasses or bamboo leaves that are woven together in sheets. All these can easily give way under the vagaries of strong weather conditions such as heavy rainstorms or windstorms. Because of lack of pipe borne water, there is no good toilets system. Rather, simple pit latrines and open sewage disposal are common within the rural areas.
- vii. **Subsistence Agriculture:** This is the main sector of livelihood for rural dwellers and involves the use of simple hand tools such as hoes and cutlasses. The cultivable lands are fragmented using “ban and slash” method, lack the use of fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides; highly labour intensive and low yields per hectare of cultivation. The poverty level of the rural farmers makes it difficult for them to introduce mechanized farming and purchase the necessary inputs that can boost production.
- viii. **High Rate of Illiteracy:** Lack of educational institutions in the rural areas is responsible for high level of illiteracy among the rural people. Even where schools are located in the rural areas, there is the dearth of qualified teachers because most teachers do not want to be posted to teach in the rural environments. The reason is simply because of lack of incentives and poor infrastructural facilities.
- ix. **Unemployment:** The large rural populations that are illiterates have contributed to the high incidence of unemployment opportunities. And when young people migrate to the urban centres, they only go there to add to the army of the unemployment people.

### **Implications of Development Centres for Rural Development**

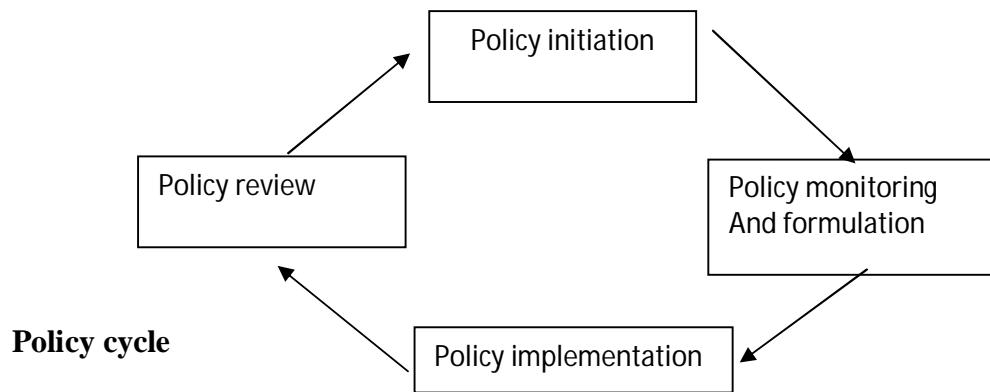
The development centre management and operators have the responsibility of adopting strategies for rural development that are appropriate to the specific environment. Specifically, the objectives of rural development are to:

- a. Reduce rural poverty.
- b. Increase production at rural level.
- c. Increase rural income level.
- d. Increases employment and stem rural urban migration.
- e. Provide basic rural infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, clinics, etc)
- f. Integrate rural areas into the development plans.

### **Rural Development Strategies**

In order to successfully implement the above stated objectives of rural development, certain strategies must be involved. Like any policy issue, there is the need for proper conceptualization of ideas which must be translated into plans and programmes. These plans and programmes are then implemented through a well co-ordinated control, monitoring analysis and evaluation measures (see the diagram below).





In any policy cycle, the most difficult stage is at the implementation. Efficient and effective policy implementation would require inputs of sound managerial and administrative capabilities in terms of proper activity scheduling, resource mobilization and rationalization, network analysis, budgeting, supervision, problem solving, decision making and cost benefit analysis.

Unfortunately for most development countries, the non-attainment of policy objectives could be attributed to many factors, some of which include lack of commitment and discipline, corruption, diversion of resources, overlapping roles of implementation agencies, award of contracts on the basis of political patronage rather than on the ability to perform etc. The effects of all these result in the numerous abandoned projects dotted all over the rural environments in Nigeria.

Rural development strategies which involve the development of some specific programmes, may be sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches. In Nigeria for example, some of the programmes constituting the strategies are:

- i. **Agriculture Development Strategy:** There is need for radical transformation of agricultures system (land reforms, introduction of high yield seeds, fertilizers, credit system, application of simple farm technology, etc). Agriculture activities relevant to the environment should be facilitated by subsidizing the inputs. Youths should be encouraged to go into agriculture by giving them loan and materials.
- ii. Mobilization of rural masses for participatory development.
- iii. **Erosion Control:** To minimize water and wind erosion by construction of drainage channels and planting of tress of service as wind-breakers.
- iv. **Rural Housing Scheme:** Encourage the rural poor masses to use cheap building material as well as introducing simple modern building technology.
- v. **Women Mobilization for Rural Development:** By encouraging the formulation of women groups and teaching them to engage in local production activities so that they can earn better income for self development and sustenance. Examples are better life programme for rural women; family economic advancement programme (FEAP); family support programs (FSP); women cooperative societies etc, through these groups, rural women can attract financial support in form of small scale loans for their businesses.
- vi. **Environmental Protection:** This covers aspects of environmental management such as erosion control, generation and disposal of wastes, environmental pollution control in industrial areas, mineral producing areas, and forest conservation.

- vii. **Poverty Alleviation Programme:** All activities programme put in place that would reduce unemployment and enhance income generating capability of the rural masses. Development centres should be woven into national poverty alleviation programmes.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The idea of the creation of Development centres is pragmatic. Development centres as growth centres have the capability of accelerating rural development in Nigeria. Considering the state of our rural environment characterized by oppression, degradation and deprivation, development centres can address the numerous inadequacies in the rural areas such as poor road network, lack of electricity, pipe-borne water, hospitals, bridges etc.

However, the effectiveness and impact of the development centre vis-à-vis rural development can only be possible if they are adequately funded and empowered. A situation where the centres are turned into pay points for workers is not healthy. The centres should be funded and challenged for higher productivity.

Closely linked to the above is the revenue sharing formula between the centres and the parent local governments via joint state local government account (JAC). The sharing formula should be clear and religiously followed. This will remove and reduce antagonism observable between co-ordinators and executive chairmen.

Development centres should be given targets to be achieved yearly or periodically in respect of the development of their areas of jurisdiction. The target can be executed through budgets. The implication of this is that they should also take active part in annual budgetary exercises.

One of the strong elements for planning and policy making is good data management. The development centres can help in generating, processing, storage and retrieval of data. If the offices are organized well, the centres can effectively manage data obtainable at the grassroots for effective planning and decision making.

Additionally, there is need for constant training and retraining of management and staff of development centres in various aspects of local government administration including development administration. The management and staff should therefore be of high quality so that they can be receptive to training.

Finally, the concept of development centres should be kept alive, improved upon and sustained. This is because the experiment has helped in opening obscure parts of the states and has facilitated even development for some long blighted rural areas. Apart from being easy reach for local administration and development, development centres are politically expedient considering their strength in spreading the dividends of democracy.

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