Social Policies And Implementation Problems In Nigeria: A Case Study Of DFFRI And Policies Before It

OKOM, Emmanuel Njor & ABOH, Fidelis Isomkwo

University of Calabar, Calabar, PMB 1115 Etagbor, Cross River State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

No Nigerian social policy is without criticism, whether it be constructed by a professor of academic wizardry or by the most intelligent group of men in the system. Criticism is not bad in itself. What can be bad about it is the intention of the critic. If a critic sets out to criticise a social policy with a destructive disposition, this then is unprofessional and counterproductive to the very spirit that drives social policy. If, however, a social policy is objectively criticised with a view to seeing that the maker(s) of such policies improve on the quality of subsequent policies and their implementation, this then is commendable. This is an attempt to objectively criticise the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) of the Babangida military regime of 1985, comparing it with policies before it, with a view to highlighting the successes of the policy while exposing its failures.

Keywords: social policies, DFFRI, praxis, CDD approach, Structural Perspective, Sectoral Perspective, Integrated Rural Development Approach

INTRODUCTION

The theory of “praxis” is central to the Marxian analysis. What is practical and helpful to the greater majority is what should be vigorously pursued. Arm-chair theorising is grossly unacceptable by the Marxian theory of “praxis”. A social theory is more or less a social policy. The difference is that while a social theory is a mere proposal, a set of interrelated propositions merely suggesting the way forward, a social policy is more than a social theory in that it is powered with both setting out modalities for the solving of a social problem and providing the means or resources for its practical achievement. The method of implementation of a social policy matters a lot. This can make or mar the policy. A situation where policy makers sit down in the comfort of their air-conditioned rooms and draw up policies for the rural dwellers, without involving them or asking them what their needs are before drawing up the policy, is a method that has failed in most cases. Although successes of such policies are recorded, the failures of such a method far outweigh its successes. In recent times, successes recorded in policy implementation using the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach have been quite encouraging. The CDD approach is in line with the Marxian theory of praxis – that our
wealth of sociological knowledge as social engineers and policy makers should be brought to bear on practical solutions to societal problems. This, for the Marxists, is praxis par excellence.

Government is charged with the responsibility of national development. The government of Nigeria has indeed, both in the past and in the present, risen to the task of national development. It has indeed churned out series of national policies for development, but institutional corruption and mode of implementation have been their arch enemies. The Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) has been one of the many of government national developmental policies, targeted towards the rural dwellers that have collapsed under the yoke of corruption and implementation. The paper shall first of all define social policy, take a critical look at government social policies for rural dwellers before DFFRI, how they fared and see whether DFFRI after them had been any more successful than they were. Then the paper shall also look at DFFRI and its implementation strategy, the theoretical framework for rural development and social engineering, the successes and failures of DFFRI and make some recommendations and conclusion.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL POLICY?

Simply put, social policy is a blueprint for the attainment of societal welfare. It involves setting objectives, proving means for service delivery to subjects by those charged with the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of such subjects. According to Dean (2008),

Social Policy entails the study of the social relations necessary for human wellbeing and the systems by which wellbeing may be promoted. It’s about the many and various things that affect the kinds of life that you and I and everyone can live.

The “social contract” theory propounded by Thomas Hobbes saddles the state with the responsibility of taking care of its subjects, in terms of security, social amenities, and what have you. It is then a statutory duty, an obligation of the state, to provide quality service delivery to its citizenry. This the state does through the formulation of social policies which set out specific objectives for goal attainment, and the means for achieving these goals. The state then, if it must be popular, must prove its mettle by providing quality services to the people through good policy-making and -implementation strategies.

AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES BEFORE DFFRI

The concept of rural development is understood to mean plans and resources earmarked for the development of villages or remote districts that lack basic amenities such as good roads, electricity, health facilities, pipe-borne water and what have you. In the words of Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014), the World Bank (2000) sees rural development “... as strategies and policies designed at improving the economic and social life of a specific group of people – rural poor.”
Wikipedia (2019) states that rural development is “. . . the process of improving the quality of life and economic well being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated area”.

Long before colonial attempts at carrying out developmental projects on Africa’s soil and subsequent indigenous governments at doing same, the natives had engaged in self-help projects at developing their communities. Ebong (1991) noted that rural communities in Nigeria before the colonial era engaged different community self-help projects such village shrines, squares, moats, and a host of other community schemes, targeted at development. According to Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014), when Nigeria gained Independence in 1960 both federal and regional governments were preoccupied with the establishment of farm settlement schemes, which gave rise to several plantations spread across the States of the Federation. This policy, they say, was to stop rural-urban migration of youths. However, according to them, “. . . this policy failed because they were largely incoherent and uncoordinated efforts and programmes within individual settlements”. In 1976, the Murtala/Obasanjo-led military regime rolled out the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). This was designed to bring down skyrocketing prices of commodities at the time, but it ended up enriching a few and impoverishing many farmers. The next was the River Basins and Rural Development Authorities of 1978. It was aimed at transforming the fortunes of rural dwellers. But, sadly, according to Ejue (1998) it tended to make rural dwellers recede deeper into walloping poverty. Although the World Bank in the 1970’s made deliberate efforts at rural development as a means of alleviating the problems of rural dwellers, this ended in a fiasco as it did not yield much dividends to the assaulted peasants. Then came the Green Revolution of 1980 of the Shagari-led civilian regime. Although the policy was aimed and increasing agricultural productivity, it ended up inflating the pockets of a privileged few, as agro-allied resources intended for the policy were sold and the money put in private pockets.

The next was the Babangida-led initiative at improving the rural lot and capacities of the people through the provision of social amenities to the villages. Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014:310) wrote:

> Despite all these efforts made in the past to effect rural development in the country, the conditions of the rural dwellers have not improved, rather they have further deteriorated. In 1985, the Babangida administration introduced the Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).

The first time Nigeria used integrated rural development approach to development, which was comprehensive and coordinated, was with the DFRRI. One would have thought that it would not have record the failures it recorded like its predecessor policy projects, because of its comprehensive and integrated approach, although it recorded quite some successes.

**DFRRI PROGRAMME AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**
Ikeji (2013) captures the DFRRI programme and how the government of the day intended to carry it out. He wrote in a journal:

According to General Babangida, the Directorate was an evidence of his administration’s determination to evolve pragmatic measures to enhance the development of a national network of rural and feeder roads in (order) to strengthen the massive effort for food and agricultural self-sufficiency (in) the shortest possible period (see, The Guardian, January 2, 1986:13). The DFRRI was established in all the states and local government areas of the Federation. The global approach marked a watershed and a significant departure from the strategies hitherto employed in dealing with the problem of rural infra-structural underdevelopment. According to the Chairman of the Directorate then, Air Commodore Larry Koinyan, three criteria were adopted in the operations of the Directorate, namely:
  i. equality of states
  ii. number of local governments; and
  iii. land mass and special ecological problems (See African Guardian, February 19, 1987).

In the Abstract of Decree no. 4 of 1987 establishing DIFFRI, the document spelt out the following objectives of the policy: (a) ascertaining, involving and supporting productive local communities in the adequate mobilisation of the rural populace for consistent developmental activities in rural areas; (b) locating areas of high production propensity for the nation’s food and fibre requirement priority which supports the production of such commodities within agro-ecological zones in a single inter-States market; (c) designing and maintaining a rural feeder-road network programme of national coverage to enhance food self-sufficiency and general rural development, and (d) providing a rural water-supply programme across the country, involving from its inception the of local communities and personnel of the local government in the maintenance of the infrastructures.

The provisions of the Decree establishing the Directorate and its operations and activities were guided and supervised by a Board appointed by the President, consisting of a Chairman and not more than six other members. The equivalence of this Board was also established in the office of the Governor in each of the states to perform similar functions. The Governor was vested with the responsibility of appointing a Director or Coordinator to oversee the day-to-day operations and administration of the programmes of the Directorate. The Governor was the chairman and the effective head of the Board at the state level.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING
According to Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014), looking at the policies of rural development in Nigeria, they suggest that they can largely be grouped into two main theoretical models, namely, the engineering and the clinical models. However, it is possible to identify four main theoretical approaches as discussed below.

The Sectoral Perspective
This is the oldest and most popular approach to development and social engineering used the world over. Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014) say it involves yearly budgets and plans designed on sectoral basis, based on ministerial and departmental reports and projects, which takes into consideration government policies, strategies and programmes. Here, the sectoral policy designers are careful to work within the constitutional provisions of the sectors. It involves a comprehensive approach drawn up and broken down into achievable units of action. Targets are set and resources allocated for its implementation. In Nigeria and many other countries, budgetary provisions are made for all sectors and monies allocated for those charged with implementation to do their jobs.

The Structural Perspective
This perspective to development believes that if certain basic structures and sectors of the polity are developed in line with modern western democratic ideals, it will serve as a catalyst to the development of other areas of the system. The structural approach, according to Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014), carries with it an element of women liberation. The goal of feminism is to free women from the structural and institutional bondages that held down their capacities toward development, thereby dehumanizing them. The structural approach looks at those structures of the society that hamper development and tries to address them. For example, Miriam Abacha’s Better Life for Rural Women was a structural policy programme designed to free rural women from certain cultural encumbrances that bracketed them out of contributing to national development.

The Integrated Rural Development Perspective
This is a more comprehensive and strategic approach to development. It involves capacity building in rural areas as a means of carrying the rural dwellers along in terms of development. Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014) noted that integrated rural development does not hamper the need for economic growth and modern technology building, but, additionally, the strategy stresses that the rural economic base has to be widened through concerted efforts to mobilize and better utilize human and natural resources by providing services; creating motivation and purchasing power through better income distribution and employment opportunities; establishing closer ties between the industrial, agricultural and service sector in the rural areas, and improving the living conditions with respect to roads, water supply, housing, and so on, via self-help actions. The philosophy behind this development approach is that, to achieve an all round development of the system, those amenities found in the towns and cities should be established in the villages and rural settlements. This will prevent rural-urban migration,
thereby decongesting the cities and towns of over population. In addition, enlightenment of the rural people and their involvement in the task of development is a key factor.

The Humanistic Perspective
The philosophy of this approach rests on the fact that education and enlightenment is key to solving societal problem, in that if the people are educated about their social problems, they will make conscious efforts to cooperate with others and contribute to solving them. Ering, Otu and Archibong (2014) noted that it involves the betterment of the capacity of society to comprehend, manage and control its environment to its advantage. It requires the improvement of individual and group awareness towards productive co-operation with other social groups for the wellbeing of all. The logic is to change the perception, attitudes and behaviour of people in order to attain development.

SUCCESES OF DFFRI
The DFFRI programme recorded a number of successes among others, some of which are enumerated below:

(i) Many feeder roads were opened, thus creating access into the hinterlands for better harnessing of the natural endowments of the rural areas.

(ii) Enlightenment programmes for food production were promoted. According to Owuamalam (2014). The programmes exposed rural dwellers to

. . . the mass media, (to) learn to participate in food production, within their environment. It facilitates an insight into how the presented persuasive message attracts the attention of media consumers, enables them to retain obtained knowledge, encourages them to replicate acquired experience and motivates the message content receivers to participate in food production.

(iii) As a result of (ii) above, there was a boost to food production.

(iv) Many boreholes were sunk under this project.

(v) Electrification of many villages was also achieved under this programme.

FAILURES OF DFFRI
Although the DFRRI programme recorded a number of successes, it also recorded a number of failures which seem to outweigh its successes.

(i) Monies meant for the implementation of the programme were diverted into private pockets. The programme thus served as a suction pipe through which a privileged few, who were supposed to execute the programme agenda, drained the nation’s resources.
Most of the feeder roads, if they were constructed at all, were of poor quality while many were merely mud roads opened, which made them difficult for vehicle access.

Agricultural assistance offered in the form of provision of fertilizers and improved seedlings for farmers were diverted and sold by those in charge, and the money put in their private pockets.

Electric poles used for rural electrification during this programme were of poor quality. Both the wooden poles and concrete poles used were substandard and broke down during rain storms.

Most boreholes sunk during this programme were shallow and soon ran dry of water. Their pumps soon became monumental losses, condemned to rust with time and age.

Although there was improved food production at this time, there were no storage facilities to preserve perishables such as tomatoes, pepper, cabbages, and so on, therefore most of them rotted away. In addition, the agro-allied industry at the time was not well developed to put to maximum use the agricultural output.

Subsequent governments that took over from Babangida did not ensure the improvement and continuity of the programme.

Although the DFRRI policy programme was a more comprehensive one than its predecessors, it was not people-oriented, in that it used the engineering approach rather than the clinical approach; it did not ask ahead of time the needs of the people, and did not involve them in its implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) Government policy programmes should take into consideration the needs of the people, and should also involve the people in its implementation. It should employ the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach such as used by the World Bank. This approach which is clinical in its orientation is more cost effective than other approaches which use the engineering approach.

(ii) There should be put in place proper monitoring and evaluation groups to see that monies earmarked for project are used judiciously.

(iii) Government should include in their contract agreements terms of warranty, to ensure that completed projects serve certain number of years before they begin to depreciate. So that should they depreciate earlier than agreed, the contractors will be held responsible.

(iv) Subsequent governments that take over power from their predecessors should ensure continuity of policy programmes of their predecessors. This will avoid duplication of policy programmes which leads resource waste.

CONCLUSION

This paper has so far looked at what social policy is. It took a critical look at government social policies for rural dwellers before DFFRI, how they fared to see whether DFFRI after them had been any more successful than they were. Then the paper looked at DFFRI and its
implementation strategy, the theoretical framework for rural development and social engineering, the successes and failures of DFRRI and made some recommendations.

In all of its policy-making, government must ensure the principle of praxis all the way. Any policy programmes that do not meet adequately the social needs of the people are useless and serve as a suction pipe though which the nation’s resources are drained into private pockets.

References:-

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