

Self-Reliance: Key to Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the principles of self-reliance as critical elements to the overall sustainable development of the rural economy drawing examples from Nigeria. It argues that there is a need for an alternative model for development in traditional, predominantly rural communities which avoids creating overdependence on foreign aid and allows for the empowering of local people to trust in their own capabilities and spirit. Self-reliance as an alternative to the western model if properly understood and applied can bring hope for a brighter and more sustainable future.

Keywords: *Self-reliance, Rural, Development, Sustainable, Nigeria.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Development is defined as sustainable according to the World Commission on Environment and Development^[1] when it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The preceding definition expresses the intervening priority of the needs of the world's poor as well as certain restrictions (e.g. state of technology and social organization) on the environment to meet present and future needs. Though, development as a concept is elusive, the major objective should be to satisfy human needs and aspirations. Therefore, all countries - developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned, must share certain common characteristics and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad planned structure for achieving it.

It is to be noted with dismay that the basic needs of vast numbers of people in developing countries for food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met, and beyond their basic needs, these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.

However, the upsurge of economic downturn racing through sub-Saharan African countries generally and Nigeria in particular has overwhelming impact on the vast rural population, subjecting it to unprecedented economic and social dislocation. Many rural areas are finding it difficult to cope with the decline. The situation has been worsened by the increasing inability of the state to respond effectively and adequately to the rural crisis. The worsening problem of resource scarcity in sub-Saharan Africa dictates that governments can no longer rely on conventional means to successfully address the basic needs of their populations.

In the light of the preceding, Njoh, A. Opined that Community participation can be a potentially viable strategy in complementing efforts to meet the needs of the rural populace^[2]. Correspondingly, Gooneratne and Mbilinyi^[3] avowed that self-reliance is a viable alternative strategy to "dependent development" and

donor-led "structural adjustment" in developing countries. Hence, Self-reliance in this case is considered not "merely a necessity but a matter of survival" as Galtung, O'Brien & Preiswerk^[4] aptly noted that indigenous development initiatives have experienced upsurge in the Grasslands. In fact, the population of the Grass fields possesses the creativity to adapt new techniques and knowledge to their local realities^[5]

The size, scope and function of these inward-looking strategies of development will be detailed, indicating the essential features for their proper functioning. Besides, Hyden^[6] noted that development literature is replete with cases of communal efforts wherein the economy of affection in which both town dwellers and villagers are held together in webs of kinship and tribal obligation contributes inordinately to basic survival, social maintenance and development. The recent reliance on indigenous technology and local human resources has led to overwhelming popular participation in community-driven development.

The rest of the paper is considered in four parts. Part two consists of the theoretical framework, part three illustrates the concept of self-reliant development; part four reviews policies, program and efforts of government to achieve economic self-reliance for and in Nigeria, part five discusses challenges or factors militating against economic self-reliance in Nigeria and the final part presents some valuable suggestions and recommendations on revitalizing self-reliant economic development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper will proceed by adopting the development theory as its theoretical frame of reference. This theory is deemed necessary because the paper is primarily focusing on how Self-Reliance could aid Sustainable development. It should be made clear from this point that the development theory showcases two major schools of thought, which are referred to as the Liberal and Marxists perspectives. The earlier analyze development from the point of view of economic indicators. Development to these scholars is measured from the perspective of percentage growth in Gross National Product (GNP) recorded by a country over a period of time. In this vein, Meier^[7] describes

development as “the maximization of the growth of the GDP through capital accumulation and industrialization”. While, Todaro^[8] conceptualizes development as the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic condition has been more or less static to generate and sustain an annual increase in its GNP at rates of perhaps 5 to 7 percent or more.

The Marxist school of thought however, largely disagrees with the explanations of the Liberal scholars who only attempt to equate development with the recorded level of GDP attained by a country. This has been attacked as not only faulty but misleading. Scholars with this Marxist worldview have argued that the entire talk about development should revolve around the welfare of the citizens. They observe further that rather than view development as an abstract economic category, it should be looked at from a multi-dimensional perspective. They argue that any discussion on development should focus squarely on man and his well-being.

Supporting this view Rodney^[9] recognized development at different levels of individuals and social groups in the society. At the individual level, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being while at the level of social groups, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations. Moreover, Robert^[10] asserted that in the past development has always meant the increase in the ability to guard the independence of the social group. It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to assess the prospects of a sustained development through self-reliance.

2.1 The Concept of Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is defined by independence. It is the ability to think and act without the help or influence of others, the ability to decide what you should be or do. It is one of the bases of effective community development in Nigeria as it is in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. There is no gainsaying that the concept of self-reliance is positioned centrally within the discourse of community development and is linked to similar terminologies like self-help, mutual-help, indigenous participation and rural development. Self-reliance encourages the need for people to improve their living conditions using home initiatives and resources at their disposal. This concept is being given great attention and considered as a new blueprint for community development. Anyanwu^[11] posits that the widespread acceptance of this concept in the development planning of most African countries has the tendency to give greater stimulus and cohesiveness to community development in these countries.

Thus, Ojameruaye^[12] defines self-reliant economic development as that type of development that relies on the human and material resources of the economic unit whose development is the subject of discussion. In other words, it is development that relies on “internal” resources as opposed to development that relies heavily on “external” resources. It is pertinent to note that

Self-reliant development is not autarky; it should allow for “external” support, however, it is propelled and sustained by “internal” resources. Consequently, one general objective discovered in economic plans or blueprints of continental, regional, national and state organizations or governments is “to promote self-reliant development”^[13]. This means that in as much as rural economies are encouraged to pursue policies of self-reliance and strive to ensure “autonomy”, they should allow for substantial external support. Ojameruaye^[12] contends that in many cases external resources do make a difference and can challenge the independence of the economic unit. Hence, self-reliance ought to be viewed as a continuum that is bounded on the left-hand side by parasitism and on the right-hand side by autarky but which does not include both boundaries. Thus we can talk of different degrees or levels of self-reliance; the farther an economic unit is to the right-hand side of the continuum, the more self-reliant it is. In the vein, Mansour^[14], Ikoku^[15] & Bloom^[16] submit that self-reliance should be seen as a development strategy based on indigenous socioeconomic engineering. Its philosophy is improvement from within. This does not imply a return to the past, nor does self-reliance equate to autarky or dismiss some advantages of international relations. It means, rather, the search for and the application of scientific and rational knowledge to the resolution of local problems, within the context of maximum autonomy in decision-making.

However, Anyanwu^[12] argues that in most African countries community development has depended significantly on voluntary cooperative efforts. This follows a traditional trait that clearly underscores the virtue of self-reliance. This explains the emerging trend in community development, which sees it as an important point of take-off for better living. The emphasis is to involve groups of people in planned programs from which they may gain skills that will enable them to cope more successfully with the problems of their everyday life (Charles & Lotsmart^[17]). It is against this framework that Galtung et al.^[4] advanced that self-reliance is development derived from a country’s own resources, involving its populations based on the potentials of its cultural values and traditions (traditional technology). Communities and individual people define their own development according to their own needs, values and aspirations (Preiswerk^[18]).

Hence, Local-level development, no doubt provides a major force in activating the utilization of local resources (land, water, labor) and therefore constitutes one of the most effective methods of promoting people’s participation in determining their own development. This accounts for the wide acceptance by many scholars of the needs for local alternatives and self-reliance in repositioning the rural system. For instance, Brett^[19] has called for cooperative and voluntary alternatives, while Sandbrook^[20] has emphasized the need for “small-scale community solutions”. Several literatures on community participation and development have unanimously agreed that in most sub-Saharan African villages including

Nigeria, communities have contributed to developing their infrastructure and social services. Self-reliance is a key factor in community development which demands that community members apply their knowledge and skills to the resources at their disposal. This is in perfect accord with Anyanwu's observations that the development of related skills and attitudes of a people can enable them to satisfy their basic needs, to grow self-reliant, and to minimize precarious dependence on agencies external to their communities.

Ghari^[21] aptly noted that the concept of self-reliance is closely allied to the principles of self-help and mutual help. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines self-help as "the use of one's own efforts, resources, etc. to achieve things, without depending on others". In other words, it is "do-it-yourself" (DIY). Today, there are very many self-help or DIY books, tools and other resources to assist individuals in doing a wide variety of things. In practice, however, there is hardly anything like DIY because some form of "external" assistance is usually required for an individual to improve himself. For instance, you may need to read a DIY book (written by somebody else) to be able to fix a problem (e.g. electrical or plumbing) by yourself. This is why economists take a more robust view of self-help as "helping poor and disadvantaged people to help themselves". In other words, it is "assisted self-help" or "autonomy-respecting help" (Eade^[22]). It is recognized that poor and disadvantaged people find it extremely difficult to improve their condition of living without outside help. Sometimes they even become "complacent with poverty". In such a situation, external help or support can serve as a catalyst or provide the push for action against poverty or to improve condition of living, and even to sustain improvement actions. In fact, self-reliance can be regarded as a "helper-doer" relationship or game where the "principles of self-help" are adhered to. As stated by Ojameruaye, these principles involve the following actions:

- The outsider must make a positive difference in the living conditions of the doer (the helped), i.e. the impact of the helper must be seen as felt.
- The doer (the helped) must own and implement the program or plan of assistance.
- The outsider must see the world through the eyes of the doer and respect the autonomy of the doer.
- The help or support must not undercut the autonomy of the doer – too much help can make the helped lazy.
- The help must be for a limited period of time – long-term charity corrupts self-help and undercuts the capacity for development.
- The doer should be able to sustain or continue with the development process if and when the help stops or even terminated abruptly.

These principles of self-reliance have been adopted by many countries and groups in promoting rapid development. A classic example is the Harambee Secondary School Movement in Kenya from the mid-

1960s to the late 1980s. It was a spontaneous grassroots initiative to develop greater access to secondary school education than what the government could provide after the country's independence from Britain in 1963.

There is no doubt that the current situation in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries calls for the read option of a self-reliant approach to development if we are to overcome some of the current maladies in the rural settings.

2.2 Government's Efforts to Achieve Economic Self-Reliance for Sustainable Development in and for Nigeria

The concept of economic self-reliance as a development strategy has never escaped mention in budgets speeches since independence. Our leaders have always appreciated the need for Nigeria to be economically self-reliant (Osazua^[23]). Consequently, over the years, they evolved well-articulated policies and programmes aimed at achieving economic self-reliance in Nigeria. We shall examine them serially.

First, the Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution programs of President Olusegun Obasanjo in the late seventies and President Shugu Shagari in the early eighties, respectively. Prior to the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in the mid-fifties, agriculture was the basis of the national economy. Thus, the programs were intended specifically to revitalize agriculture in the country so that the country could have stability and self-sufficiency in food production (Imhonopi and Urin^[24]).

Second, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the Babangida administration in 1986. This was in reaction to the paradigm shift from a public-sector dependent economy to a private sector-led enterprise and to a certain extent forced on the country by the steady drop in its revenue profile (Adamu, ^[25]). The objective of the program was to:

- reform and diversify the productive base of the economy, with the aim of lessening dependence on the oil sector and imports;
- achieve a fiscal and balance of payment feasibility over the medium term
- and lay the basis for a sustainable non-inflationary growth over the medium and the long-term.

To actualize the aforementioned, government had to embark on partial or full privatization of its companies and parastatals. Therefore, seventy-three of the 95 government enterprises put on the block were privatized (Imhonopi).

Third, the Obasanjo civilian administration on May 29, 2004, launched the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, NEEDS. According to Chief Obasanjo, the NEEDS was to address the development challenges of Nigeria. He said that the

program would lay a solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and value reorientation. The same program at the state and local government levels were known as State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local-Government Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) respectively. NEEDS rested on the following pillars, which were, reforming the way government and its institutions worked, boosting the private sector, implementing a social charter for the people and reorienting people's values. NEEDS was strongly supported by the federal government with comprehensive reforms in the public sector. Most especially, the banking consolidation, where twenty-five mega banks emerged each with a minimum capital base of 25 billion naira. The banks were burly enough to support private initiatives and entrepreneurship. Subsequent to the NEEDS were also Millennium Development Goals to be actualized by the year 2015. These goals in a nutshell were to see to poverty reduction and environmental sustainability among others (Adamu^[25])

Fourth, others were the 7-Point Agenda, the Eight-Point United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the American AGOA, the African New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the sudden Food Crisis policies of the late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua (Imhonopi^[26]).

2.3 The 7-Point Agenda

What then constitutes Yar'Adua's seven-point agenda? The major policy thrust of this administration, otherwise referred to as the 7-point agenda are:

1. Critical Infrastructure: This would involve paying attention to adequate power supply to facilitate industrialization. Development of rail, road, air and water transportation to facilitate movement of persons, goods and services.
2. Niger Delta: This would involve complete overhaul of the region to ensure provision of physical infrastructure and empowerment of the people.
3. Food Security: Through this vision, the administration has declared interest in enhancing agricultural and water resources to ensure adequate food supply for local consumption and export.
4. Human Capital Development: This would involve reform of education sector to improve skills and enhance standards.
5. Land Tenure and Home Ownership: Review of the Land use laws to facilitate proper use of the Nation's land assets for socio-economic development; and citizens' access to mortgage facilities.
6. National Security and Intelligence: Through this strategy, the administration intends to give adequate attention to the provision of security to lives and property.
7. Wealth Creation: This aspect would be used to initiate the process of diversification of the

nation's revenue base and increased production to provide jobs (FMIC^[27]).

2.4 The Eight-Point United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs thus refer to the eight major goals identified by international leaders, which if pursued with vigor, is likely to lead to better lives for the people of the world. These eight goals have been identified as:

- reducing extreme poverty and hunger,
- achieving universal primary education,
- promoting gender equality and women empowerment,
- reducing child mortality rates,
- improving maternal health,
- fighting disease epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and others,
- ensuring environmental sustainability and
- developing a global partnership for development.

As at the year 2000, these international goals had received the consent of 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations. The leaders set 2015 as the target year for the maximum realization of these goals (Robert^[28])

2.5 The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)

AGOA was signed into law by President Clinton in May 2000 with the objective of expanding U.S. trade and investment with sub-Saharan Africa, to stimulate economic growth, to encourage economic integration, and to facilitate sub-Saharan Africa's integration into the global economy. The Act establishes the annual U.S.-sub-Saharan Africa Economic Cooperation Forum (known as the AGOA Forum) to promote a high-level dialogue on trade and investment-related issues. At the center of AGOA are substantial trade preferences that, along with those under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), allow virtually all marketable goods produced in AGOA-eligible countries to enter the U.S. market duty-free.

The U.S. Government provides assistance most notably through four regional trade hubs to African governments and businesses that are seeking to make the most of AGOA and to diversify their exports to the United States (AGOA Fact sheet^[28]).

2.6 The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)

NEPAD which is a program of the African Union (AU) was adopted in Lusaka, Zambia in 2001. It is fundamentally new intervention, organized by African leaders with the intent to track new priorities and methods to achieve the political and socio-economic transformation agenda of Africa. NEPAD specifically is aimed at enhancing Africa's growth, development and participation in the global economy (Rawia^[29])

Lastly, we have the Transformation Agenda of President Good Luck Jonathan. The Transformation

Agenda is based and draws its inspiration from Vision 20:2020 and the 1st National Implementation Plan (NIP). The objective is to deepen the effects and provide a sense of direction for the current Administration's all-inclusive development of Nigeria during its term. The agenda is based on a set of priority policies and programmes which will transform the Nigerian economy to meet the future needs of our people. The cardinal elements of the Transformation Agenda of the current Administration include constitutional and electoral reforms and transformation of the budgeting process. Others will include overcoming the current security challenges through ensuring peaceful co-existence, tolerance, employment generation, poverty alleviation and job creation for our youths aside from determined focus on developing critical infrastructure and human capital development. There is an overriding push for effective planning, coordination and continuity of policies and programmes with creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation through Public Private Partnership (PPP). The Administration is also poised to deliver good governance through tackling corruption, value re-orientation, accountability and transparency as well as Monitoring and Evaluation for all priority policies, programmes and projects

2.7 Challenges/Factors Militating against Economic Self-Reliance in Nigeria

There are factors working against the genuine efforts of government to achieve economic self-reliance in and for the country. These factors are as follows:

1. Corruption: The genuine efforts of government over the years have suffered incessant drawbacks as a result of the entrenched corruptive tendencies and sharp practices engaged in by public officials and political office holders. This frustrates the efforts of government to achieve economic self-reliance either through the deployment of state-owned enterprises or through the creation of social and economic programs in the country. Although, government has put in place the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to checkmate the incidence of corruption among political office holders and public officials, Nigerians are yet to see the tangible benefits of the anti-corruption war engaged in by the agency.
2. The Nigerian factor: The efforts of government to pursue economic independence for Nigeria has resulted in failed policies and programs because of factors like nepotism, tribalism, lack of meritocracy, federal character, bribery, politicization of benefits and privileges and other corruptive tendencies that have continued to weaken our resolve as a nation to lead the rest of the continent and even the world.
3. Frequent change of policies: Each new government comes into power with its own virgin economic blueprint which it promotes in the place of existing policies. This frequent change in policies does not help to stabilize existing programs, so they can deliver their dividends to Nigerians. Therefore, before a policy implementation process matures, a new policy is introduced, terminating the existing process and denying Nigerians the benefits that could have accrued from such programs. Many healthy and pragmatic programs initiated in the time past by successive administrations in the country have suffered this fate.
4. Multiplicity of economic advisers: One of the strong drawbacks to achieving our economic self-reliance is the engagement of many economic advisers in the life of one single administration. These advisers come on board with different ideologies, programs and initiatives which collapse on one another and entrench the culture of frequent policy somersault and back-flips (Imhonopi.). For instance, during the eight years' rule as the President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had six different Economic Advisers/Ministers of National Planning who were supposed to have been responsible for the midwife of the NEEDS. This situation creates setbacks to the policy formulation and implementation process towards economic self-reliance.
5. Lack of continuity of policies: As a corollary to the above points, genuine efforts of government at achieving economic self-reliance for the nation cannot be realized within a climate of inconsistent policy formulation and implementation. This is one area that the country has almost become acculturated to as a nation. Lack of continuity has led to the existence of many policies but fewer results in practical terms for Nigerians.
6. Low-level of technology: No nation develops its economic constituents without having an enabling technology backbone. The absence of a home-grown or customizable technology platform has denied the country of access to an industrialized and vibrant economic system. The history of the Asian Tigers is an instructive lesson on the need for developing nations like Nigeria to invest in technology tools and the manpower to run these technologies in order for the country to achieve the much anticipated economic self-reliance.
7. Lack of infrastructure: This is another deep-seated crisis facing the nation. The absence of an effective road network, power supply and other social amenities further limits government's efforts to achieve self-reliance. In fact, today, many multinational companies like Dunlop Nigeria and a few others are leaving Nigeria for countries like Ghana where the infrastructural facilities are in place and where the economic climate is supportive of and mild to their business operations.
8. Political instability: Before now, the frequent change of government in Nigeria, which created

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political instability, resulted in the frequent change in policies. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced repeated change of governments and political leadership. This situation engendered the abandonment of existing policies and the repeated introduction of new policies, creating waste of resources, waste of government's time and denying Nigerians from being positively impacted by these policies.

3. CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, Self-reliance is defined by independence. The whole idea is the ability to think and act without the support or influence of others, the ability to take decisions as to what should be done. Whereas dependency is a reference to the act of relying on others to make decisions for you. Hence, people with power and privilege often take responsibility for the lives of those that are less fortunate. Dependent people often fail to find the motivation to solve problems on their own. Hence, self-reliance is vital for residents in developing countries to successfully govern their own lives and economies. When residents rely too heavily on outside influences, even supposedly benevolent players, such as government agencies and non-governmental organizations, they relinquish control of their resources and more importantly, their future. They allow others to make decisions not always in the best interest of these communities. The people of these developing regions often have a vast amount of resources available to them, but they do not have the skills, knowledge or experience to use these resources to benefit their economy. Instead, groups and individuals who know how to produce and sell these commodities in many cases take the natural resources, leaving the local people with minimal profits. Those that benefit from these resources often exclude the people that need help the most: the third-world residents living in poverty.

Having looked at the challenges militating against government's genuine efforts to achieve economic self-reliance for Nigeria, the following are suggested ways by which the present challenges can be addressed.

First, accountability: one of government's greatest challenges is lack of accountability of its resources. The political leadership and public office holders have taken advantage of the loopholes in government accounting system, poor financial monitoring and the absence of the digitalization of government financial records to steal from government coffers. However, the present massive digitalization and computerization of government business, that is e-government, will help to reduce government's exposure to the activities of political fraudsters and thieves.

Second, the empowerment and independence of anticorruption agencies: The Economic and Financial

Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), are two agencies of government created to stem the growing tide of political and other forms of corruption in the country. For these agencies to effectively discharge their functions, the government needs to empower them and let them have total independence from government interference and encroachment so as to dispense justice as they carry out their duties.

Third, renewal of ethical standards: The government of the day must evolve program aimed at reviving the fallen ethical standards and morals such as sincerity, credibility, transparency, truth and honesty. It should have a zero tolerance for those who engage in sharp and questionable practices whether in and outside government, while, individuals who are found to support this paradigm shift are to be encouraged through a reward system to be put in place. Also, along this line, government business needs to integrate global best practices like professionalism, creativity, innovation, meritocracy, performance-based reward systems and planning.

Fourth, consistency in policy formulation and implementation: To achieve economic self-reliance, government needs to be consistent in its policy formulation and implementation.

Fifth, development of home-grown technology: Today's global economy is governed and controlled by those who own the technologies in place. Nigeria, for many years, has remained a consumer nation and this will continue to frustrate the genuine efforts to transform our economy. As long as Nigeria remains at the receiving end of the technology trade continuum, the desire to achieve economic self-reliance will be farfetched.

Sixth, the need for entrepreneurship development: Globally, countries are beginning to look inwards towards developing and empowering their small businesses, creating a climate that supports small business growth and encouraging citizens and young graduates to create businesses rather than seek employment. By investing in the growth and development of small businesses in the country, the massive result to be realized from this effort can facilitate economic self-reliance for Nigeria.

Seventh, the political will and commitment of government to economic self-reliance is key to achieving economic development. Government, at whatever level, must refuse to pay lip service to the question of economic growth, development and independence for the country. Government needs to put its money where its mouth is by making a genuine commitment to efforts aimed at achieving economic self-reliance in Nigeria and for Nigerians.

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