AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

VOL. 4, NO. 3, - JULY, 2006

THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

Vol. 4, No. 3, July 2006

ISSN 1596-3489

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES AS A STRATEGY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL IN KADUNA STATE

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ABSTRACT

We cannot talk of development in a country like Nigeria with over seventy per cent (70%) of the population living in rural areas in abject poverty without basic social amenities and infrastructure. Experience has shown that the much talk about rural development is more often than not a political gimmick ***or propaganda. The*** *third tier of government is expected to design strategies* ***for*** *effective utilization of human resources for rural development at its level, being the closes to the rural areas. Such strategies are critically examined as one of the major objectives in this article. The approach is mainly a critical analysis of available data. The article is concluded with some major recommendations in respect of power to utilize its revenue without interference by State governments. It is also recommended that United Nations Specialized Agencies like UNDP, Food and Agricultural Organization and World Health Organizations should not only assist but also deal with local governments directly in the process of rural development.*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of rural development in Nigeria like any other agrarian society cannot be over-emphasized, considering the fact that over seventy per cent (70%) of our population development and utilization. It has been a deliberate attempt not to limit our study to a particular local government area so that we can be able to have some ideas on what happens in other parts of the country, of course, appreciating the fact that it is not possible to cover the whole country.

2) The Functions of Local Government in Nigeria

A discussion of the local government functions tantamounts to a reminder of what any local government council including that of B/Gwari is doing, or is supposed to be doing. What a local government is supposed to be doing in Nigeria is in conformity with the objectives of the local government reforms of 1976 which include:

a) to make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representative bodies;

b) to facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potential;

c) to mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development;

d) to provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government (both State and federal).

In a nutshell, the objectives of the local government reform of 1976 is to bring government closer to the people.

It is important to make a specific reference to objective (c) above which has the closest bearing on this paper, especially when it refers to mobilization of "human and live in rural areas, quite a lot has often been said about rural development by successive governments at all levels without commensurate commitments of the zeal and resources for the attainment of the ultimate goals. Since local governments are saddled with a big chunk of the responsibility for rural development, effective utilization of human resources as a strategy for rural development at this level has become necessary if not imperative.

This paper is set to examine how local governments can effectively manage their human resources as a strategy for rural development in Kaduna State. It must be admitted that the topic is broad and is likely to constitute obstacles to a more cohesive analysis. It is broad in the sense that it contains about four key concepts or sub-themes that can be further developed into different areas of study. In the first place, it has some bearings on the functions of local government in Nigeria. Secondly, it delves into the broad area of human resource management which embraces human resources development and utilization. Lastly, but not exhaustively, it stretches to rural development which is yet another broad area of popular research interests. These key areas are so crucial that we cannot omit any of them and still expect to be exonerated from academic injustice or even defect. In the same vein, we cannot claim to cover all of them without being unfair to depth. Thus, one of the most difficult tasks in a paper of this nature is how to render justice to both scope and depth.

The paper inevitably commences with a brief overview of the local government functions in Nigeria. This is followed very closely with another brief consideration of the issues of rural development before delving into the areas of human resources development and utilization. It has been a deliberate attempt not to limit our study to a material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development". In fact, it is needless to re-emphasize the importance of human and material resources, because without them, no any other objective can be achieved. This paper is actually set to examine how the human resources can be effectively mobilized or managed by local governments for rural development in Nigeria.

Although the task of manpower planning, development and utilization is essentially a central government responsibility, the involvement of local governments in the processes is a matter of necessity. This is particularly true of less developed countries including Nigeria with over 70% of the population living in rural areas. If it is accepted that a very high percentage of the population of our country live in the rural areas, it follows that the government is almost beyond the reach of a vast majority of the populace, because, the higher the level of urbanization, the closer the government to the people. This is particularly true of the central government which is usually found to be concentrating its activities on one or two cities at the expense of a vast area under its jurisdiction. The trend of concentration of government activities on one or two cities tend to hasten the pace of urbanization of capital cities and

consolidate the position of rural poverty and rural underdevelopment in the other parts of the State or the federation. The rural majority who are not only poor and underdeveloped but also exposed to all the mankind enemies which include dreadful diseases, epidemics, starvation and under-nourishment, are then left at the mercy of local governments, majority of which are rural based in this country. And, of course, while the municipal local governments like those of Bauchi, Maiduguri, Kano, Kaduna, Ilorin and Yola, to mention just these, team up with the State governments to invest huge sums of money for rapid urbanization of these cities, the rural based local governments like those of Birnin Gwari, Ikara, Jema'a, Kachia, Saminaka, KefFi and Toro, to mention just a few, are saddled with heavy responsibility for the management of the country's human resources with little or no funds for the task. We are all living witness of huge sums of money being expensed for decorating the capital cities by constructing beautiful "Round-abouts" in this country, at a period when most of the rural based local governments are unable to meet their recurrent expenditures let alone the capital expenditure. We can see that the management of the human resources is more difficult and cumbersome to the rural based local governments than the municipal administration. This requires rural based local governments to set up, tighten their belts in order to face the challenges put up in the present set up for effective human resources development and utilization, with special focus on education, health, food and agriculture, all of which are in the concurrent legislative list.

3) The Role of Local Governments in Educational Development

Education is one of the items in the concurrent legislative list involving all the levels of government in the country. Of course, it has to be so due to some inherent structural and fundamental problems. We cannot expect a high level of performance by making it an exclusive list item, for example, without encountering administrative or management deficiencies, particularly at the grassroots level where the federal government officials will have to face so many limitations in terms of skills, data, time and even the necessary funds, for effective penetration and management in the vast majority of rural areas. What this means in essence is that»it is cheaper and more effective and convenient to handle certain educational matters particularly at the lower levels like the primary education, at the grassroots level by the local communities themselves or their local governments as their representatives.

> The federal government, no doubt is aware of this economic advantage by placing the burden of management of primary education on the shoulders of the local governments. Unfortunately, however, research experiences (A. Aliyu: 1985) have shown that funds allocated to the local governments are usually grossly inadequate. Looking at the Kaduna Municipal Administration, for example, the sum of N7,005,037.00 was allocated for primary education in 1980.

This amount was decreased by 5.8% in 1981. There was a further and more drastic decrease by 32% in 1982, thereby leaving local education authority with only N4,482,719.00 and, by 1983 the local allocation dropped sharply from N7,005,037.00 in 1980 to N3,371,150.00; a trend that merely created a mockery of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme. During the same period the annual percentage increase on enrolment was between 18 and 35% with little or nothing on the increase on the number of classrooms. In Tudun Wada and Makera zones, for example only 46 new classrooms were constructed during the period. The

situation was even worse in the outskirt of the town and other rural areas in the State. In Doka and Kawo zones, for example, only 6 new classrooms were completed during the same period. The whole situation tends to make a mockery of the universal primary education programme which started in 1976. Despite this however, primary education has continued to gulp about 60% of the total statutory allocation of Kaduna Local Government.

The local government inability to met the aspirations of the yearning population usually creates a bad public image for itself and subjects it to public criticism, outcry, and in some cases resorting to threats, intimidation, strikes and condemnation, by pupils and their parents, especially at a time when the local government is unable to pay teachers' salaries let alone embark on capital projects like classrooms constructions and provisions of library services. With these experiences, the local government is left with little or no opportunity to expand its literacy programmes to include intensive adult education and other informal learning programmes. And if these problems can persist in the municipal local government of the Kaduna State capital city, we cannot expect anything different from other capital cities in the federation. Similarly, if the situation deteriorates to this magnitude, in the capital cities or the municipal administration, whose efforts are normally seen as merely insignificant contributions to the activities of the central government and international organizations such as the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), we must expect the worst with the rural based local governments among which B/Gwari is one. This in essence means that the UNESCO's major objectives are hardly attained in the less developed countries.

4) **Food and Agriculture**

There is hardly any nation or community in this world that needs to be reminded of the importance of food and agriculture as a necessity for livelihood. And any nation or community which does not embark on massive production of food and agriculture is billed for doom, poverty, starvation and high death rate.

The necessity of food and agriculture for the sustenance of human resources has been given much publicity and recognition at all levels of the society from international organization, national and local governments. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) which has become a specialized agency within the meaning of Article 57 of the UN charter, for example, expects all nations accepting its (FAO's) constitution "to promote the common welfare by furthering separate and collective action on their part for the purposes of

raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the peoples under their respective jurisdictions;

Securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products;

Bettering the condition of rural populations; and thus contribution towards an expanding world economy. (Article 2(1).

"and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger" (J.G. Kapteyn, etal, 1982:1)

The above quotation stresses the importance of food and agriculture as a necessary means of sustaining and utilizing the human resources in all societies. It also stresses the important roles expected at all levels of government in order to achieve these objectives. But the question is: to what extent or how effective are these roles performed at all governmental levels?

To answer this question in respect of FAO, one will not hesitate to submit that a majority of us, particularly in the rural areas do not even know of its existence, let alone its objectives and achievements, since its activities are still scanty if any and are yet to penetrate the rural based local governments and the peasants in this country.

At national level, Nigeria has been coming out with beautiful policies on food and agriculture right from independence to date. Yet, the concept of self-reliance on food and agriculture is far from reality. The country still spends huge sums of money on importation of food and agricultural items.

The country's fertilizer plants, for example, are yet to meet the needs of our farmers and save part of our foreign exchange in the world market. The country spends huge sums of money annually on importation of fertilizers. But we are all aware of the difficulty in seeing and purchasing these fertilizers by our farmers. And this is where the local governments are expected to play the most crucial roles. Being the closest to the people, the local governments must ensure that fertilizers come to them as a matter of constitutional right and the distribution a constitutional obligation.

We are also aware that so many villages and farmlands are inaccessible. This is one of the factors responsible for so many hardships and obstacles to massive production of good and other agricultural items. The ultimate effect is under utilization of the human resources in the rural areas, rural-urban migration and eminent national starvation.

To alleviate these hardships and curb the trend of the sad effects, government have continued to come out with some measures one of which is the commissioning of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986. The Directorate is expected, inter alia;

> to identify, involve and support viable local community organizations in the effective mobilization of the rural population for sustained rural developmental activities, bearing in mind the need for promoting greater community participation and economic self- reliance of the rural community (Decree No. 4 of 6th February, 1986).

This makes the functions of the Directorate overlaps with those of the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Social Development, This is why some critics usually opin that the functions of the former are nothing more than mere duplications of those of the latter. But the DIFRRI should not be seen as a replacement rather than a supplement of the Community Development Division and other Rural Development Agencies. And that is why the Directorate itself is expected

To liaise with Federal Goyernment Ministries and Agencies in the design and implementation of programmes and projects in the field of food production and processing, rural water supply, road construction and maintenance and the provision of rural infrastructures, and any other rural development activities (ibid).

The Directorate is also expected to utilize the local initiatives, available local resources and local government personnel for effective implementation of programmes. Our discussion so far in this part of the paper points towards a **submission that we are duty-bound to feed our population or, at least encourage the various communities to feed themselves, for, a hungry man cannot perform.**

5) **Health**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health "as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity: (Premable of Constitution of WHO). Health is fundamental - one of the most important basic necessities of mankind. Emphasizing on this basic necessity, the World Health Organization submits that

The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition... Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures (Arts. 1 & 2 of WHO Constitution).

The above quotation implies that every individual in the society is entitled to health services. It also emphasizes the indispensable or rather obligatory roles of governments at all levels in the provision of health services which is a prerequisite for effective development and utilization of human resources at all levels down to the rural set ups.

If a hungry man cannot perform, an unhealthy man cannot perform either. And that is why the question of health is usually an item in the agenda of planners from international to national down to local levels. Health matters have been more often than none in the concurrent legislative list involving governments at all levels. Yet health services are far beyond the reach of millions of people in this country. The problem is more severe in the rural areas with over 80% of the country's population.

Health services have not been given the desired attention in the successive National Development Plans in this country. In the first National Development Plan, for example, only about £17 million was allocated to the health sector by all the governments in the country with a population of well over 50 million. Despite this meager amount, only £7.46 million; i.e. about 45% of it was actually spent (A. Adedeji in Akinnangba et al, 1981,p.100),

The Second National Development Plan seemed to have echoed the importance of health by the statement that "a healthy population is an economic asset since the assured supply of a strong and healthy labour force is an essential factor in development. Despite this however, only about £54 million out of £800 million was allocated for the health sector for a population of more than 60 million people." The inadequacy of the fund in the plan made it almost impossible for provision of preventive services and manpower development and utilization in the health sector during the Plan period (S. I. Akenzua, in Akinangbe et al, p. 91).

Experiences have shown that the health sector has always been deteriorating rather than improving. The country has been witnessing acute shortage of medical Doctors, Nurses and other paramedical personnel. By 1981, for example, the Doctors/population ration was estimated at 1:30,000 with some parts of the country recording as low as 1:100,000 (T.O. Agunlesi, in ibid, p. 100). The validity of the federal government's claim that the ratio is almost meeting the WHO's minimum standard of 1:10,000 as at 1988 is therefore questionable.

This claim was made at a time Kaduna State could boast of only 12 qualified medical doctors for a population of about 7 million people. During the same period, the State could boast of only 29 qualified pharmacists, 1,034 Nurses/Midwives and Laboratory Technicians and 4 Radiographers. All these were spread to cover the various local governments. In Jema'a Local Government, for example, there is only one standard government Hospital with 301 beds, 7 medical doctors, 3 Dentists , 2

pharmacists, 111 Nurses/Midwives, without even a single laboratory Technologist or/and Radiographer - all to cater for a population of about 221,300 people in an area of 4,000 square kilometers. The situation is even worse in other local government areas like those of Birnin Gwari, Ikara and Saminaka. This is coupled with lack of medical equipments and drugs. Of course, we are all living witnesses to the usual "OS" (Out-of-Stock) inscription by our pharmacists on our Doctors prescription cards. Unless this situation is controlled, we cannot claim of having a healthy population not to talk of effective development and utilization of human resources particularly in a rural setting like those of Birnin Gwari, Ikara and Saminaka Local Governments all in Kaduna State.

6) Strategies for Human Resources Development and Utilization

Our discussion so far has centred on the inhibitive factors for effective human resources development and utilization. At this juncture, the paper is set to design models or strategies meant to overcome these obstacles in order to enhance the chances of effective development and utilization of human resources by local governments.

We cannot talk of effective human resource utilization without first and foremost considering human resource development. In other words, effective human resource development is a prerequisite for effective human resource utilization in any given society. The local government is the closest tier of government to the people at grassroots level. Inf fact, to the common man in the rural area, the local government is his own World of Polity or the entire political system in the country, because, what happens at both State and federal levels are far beyond his reach, beyond his comprehension and imagination. The local government must therefore device various strategies for effective development of the potential of the individuals in its area of jurisdiction.

We have already highlighted the teething problems of primary schools administration which is a heavy responsibility for the local government. Some of these problems can be resolved by resorting to utilization of local resources - both human and material resources. The problems of inadequate or shortage of classrooms, for example, can be curbed by embarking on a number of community development projects.

Instead of waiting for Statutory Allocation or Central Government Grants which sometimes never materialize, the local government should always encourage the various communities in its area of jurisdiction to embark on classrooms construction through community initiatives and participation. By so doing, the local government involves the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Social Development, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Development, and other Central Government development agencies. This is a very good strategy to commit the Central Government to execute for the communities what they might otherwise not do without the initiative of the community.

The adult education programmes are not given adequate attention by the various governments in this country. This is rather unfortunate and the trend must be curbed if we are to reduce the high illiteracy rate in the country. If we agree that the illiteracy rate is higher in the rural areas than the urban areas, we cannot run away from the fact that the local government has a very serious responsibility and a crucial

role to play in our efforts to reduce the illiteracy rate in this country. Again, both local human and material resources should be exploited for this purpose.

Although the various government agencies responsible for adult education such as the Adult Education Departments of the Ministry of Education and Local Governments respectively, have a vital role to play in this respect, we don't have to relax our efforts for complete dependencies. There is no doubt that villages or communities could embark and execute adult education programmes without necessarily receiving assistance from any government. Local volunteers can constitute a corps of instructors. All the local government needs to do is to enlighten the various communities in its jurisdiction along this line of thoughts and action. Similar efforts should be extended to the health sector.

As regards the issue of food and agriculture, it must be appreciated that nearly everybody in the rural areas is involved in production of food and other agricultural items. Unfortunately however, experiences have shown that many farmers encounter hardships in their efforts for food production. The banking facilities are far beyond their reach, just like the fertilizers bonanza is becoming a thing of the past. These, in addition to inadequate complete absence of storage facilities, tend to place the farmers particularly the rural based ones in miserable conditions.

If we are to curb these problems, banking facilities should be made very liberal and easily accessible by our farmers including the rural based ones. The local governments should take the lead in a nationwide campaign for a high level decentralization of the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) - a sort of taking the farmers bank from the towns to the farms; i.e. by encouraging rural banking facilities. A similar zeal should be pursued in respect of fertilizers and storage facilities. One will not hesitate therefore to support the idea that the federal government should leave the procurement and distribution of fertilizers to the State and local governments. This is particularly so when we consider the fact that the federal government is too far beyond the reach of our farmers who are mostly rural dwellers. Secondly there is a tendency for laxity on the part of federal government officials in the processes of procurement and distribution of fertilizers, especially when one considers the fact that the need for fertilizer differs from one State to another. There are some areas in the country which need little or no fertilizers while others, particularly, Bauchi, Kaduna, Niger and Plateau states etc. can hardly produce food crops without the use of fertilizers. It is strongly recommended that measures should be taken as a matter of urgency to control the situation, because, lack of accessibility of fertilizers to farmers renders a high percentage of our human resources redundant or under-utilized and the ultimate result is poverty, malnutrition and starvation. A final suggestion on the issue of food and agriculture is in respect of FAO which should make concerted efforts to be seen and felt by the rural communities throughout the federation of Nigeria and other less developed countries with similar problems. In this respect, exchange visits between FAO officials and local government chairmen should be encouraged and be seen as a matter of routine for better understanding of our problems as guiding principle for policy formulation and implementation.

Conclusion

Right from the onset, the inherent problems of the paper have been highlighted. It has not been an easy task, for example, to cater adequately for both scope and depth due to the inherent characteristics of the nature of the paper itself

which commences with an overview of the functions of local governments before moving on to examine some aspects of subsystems of rural development with particular references to education, health, food and agriculture.

Our discussion on these subsystems has thrown more light on the various problems confronting local governments in this country. In fact, the discussion has unveiled some of the major inhibiting factors for rural development in Nigeria in particular and other less developed countries in general.

The discussion has enabled us to make a good number of suggestion which, if heeded to will go a long way to solve some of the major problems confronting rural based local governments or rural communities in Nigeria and other less developed countries. Some of the major recommendations include the urgent need for rural banking for the benefits of our rural farmers or communities. They also include a strong call for extension and intensification of activities of the United Nations Specialized Agencies. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization, for example, should extend its activities to cover the various rural areas so as to boost the efforts because, hunger is a major inhibitive factor for development. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) should penetrate the rural areas through their representative local governments and provide health sendees including technical advice to the rural communities, because, only a healthy population can contribute effectively toward development processes. One other major recommendation made in this paper is the need for local governments themselves to encourage the people they represent to embark on community development projects as a strategy to committing the central government for assistance or grants. Finally, in view of the poor financial positions of the local governments, or the State governments contributions should be increased to 50%, leaving the remaining 50% to be shared between the local government and communities in the ratio of 3:2. It is only when these strategies are designed and followed that we can talk of effective local government development and utilization of human resources for rural development in Nigeria.

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