

Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria within the Context of the Millennium Development Goals

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Abstract

The rural areas are generally recognized as important in the areas of agricultural production and employment in Africa. Despite these, the rural communities have faced with enormous challenges in the areas of increasing poverty, infrastructure deficiencies and a high level of an illiteracy rate. The Nigerian government is aware of the challenges befalling the rural areas which prompted past and present governments to initiate rural development policies to work along the Millennium Development Goals to combat the problems the rural areas are encountering. This study was embarked on to evaluate Nigerian government National Policy on Integrated Rural Development which is also known as Nigeria's Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth. The policy is working along the MDGs and from the findings of the study. The government has progressed in the area of rural poverty reduction, rural infrastructure development and rural education. However, meeting the target of 2015 for the MDGs is an optical illusion this is because much effort is needed from the government, stakeholders and development partners in addressing the challenges befalling rural communities. Finally, the paper calls for special interventions for sustainable rural development towards MDGs and beyond 2015.

Keywords: MDGs, Rural development, Rural areas, Sustainable development, Sustainable rural development

1. Introduction

The majority of Nigerians live in the rural areas as compared to the urban centers. However, the rural-urban migration drift continues unabated because the rural areas lack the basic infrastructure for social and economic development, and poverty is prevalent in the rural areas. The rural-urban drift has constituted problems to the urban areas because of the increase in population. For instance, most of the cities are overcrowded. As a result of this, health problem is associated with overcrowded population. A case in point is the recent Ebola outbreak that has affected people in Lagos and Port Harcourt which has led to fatalities. According to Laah et al. (2013) “rural development demands attention if the living condition of people is to improve particularly those in the rural areas. The understanding of the rural development as a concept and its principles will afford the extension agent the opportunity to collaborate with other stakeholders in order to come up with all-encompassing development agenda for the rural people.” The enormous challenges befalling the rural areas prompted the Nigerian government to inculcate a sustainable development approach in the Vision 2010 Committee in 1996. “The committee set out long-term policies to develop socio-economic need of the country to meet global development” (Amiolemen and Adegbite, 2012). However, the committee did not implement its policy initiatives because of the change of government in 1998. The importance of rural communities in respect to agricultural production made the government initiated the National Policy on Integrated Rural Development. The policy thrust of the policy is to develop the rural areas through sustainable development. The National Policy on Integrated Rural Development lays special emphasis on five core areas:

- (i) Promotion of rural productive activities
- (ii) Support human resources development;
- (iii) Enhancement of enabling rural infrastructure;

- (iv) Special programs for target groups;
- (v) Rural community organization and mobilization.

The Nigeria Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth, which is the National Policy on Integrated Rural Development, other development policies in the new democratic dispensation are formulated to work along the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

1.2 Concept of sustainable rural development

An understanding of the concept of development and sustainable development will give us a vivid picture of sustainable rural development. According to Mirikhor and Askari (2010) development means “quantitative growth, qualitative improvement, and expansion in the capabilities, capacities, and choice of individual groups or state” In the same vein, Tisdell (1988) conceptualized development as “ the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of life”. The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 defined sustainable development as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). In a similar vein, Laah et al. (2013) define rural development as the product of various quantitative and qualitative changes in the midst of a rural population and whose converging impacts indicate, in time, an increase in the standard of living and favourable changes in the way of life of the people concerned. So with these various definitions of development and sustainable development, how can we define sustainable rural development? The Center of Sustainable development defined sustainable rural development as the “improving the quality of life for the rural people by developing capacities that promote community participation, health and education, food security, environmental protection and sustainable growth, thereby enabling community members to

leave the cycle of poverty and achieve their full potential.” Sustainable rural development is by and large known as a product of the activities of human beings that use resources of rural communities to increase their standard of living.

2. Literature Review

Nigeria is conceptualized as a rural society because a large section of the Nigerian population lives in the rural areas (Osuntogun and Oludimu, 1986; Olowu, 1986). The neglect of the rural communities by successive governments has made the rural-urban drift intensified. Abah (2000) postulates that the rural development in Nigeria was launched in the 1940s, when such projects as Bamende Cross River and Niger Agriculture Scheme, Mokwa were inaugurated since then no meaningful projects have been felt in the rural areas. In a similar manner, Olayiwola and Adeleye (2005) posit that the lack of basic amenities in rural communities has made life difficult for graduates of rural post-primary schools. Most of the rural areas in Nigeria are predominantly agricultural communities. Ayagba (2012) claims that “the rural population represents an average of over 60 percent of the total population on the continent; about 90 percent of the rural labour engages directly or indirectly in agricultural activities. For the continent’s rural people, accelerated agricultural and rural development would contribute to greater efficiency, increased household income, improved standards of living, and poverty reduction.” In support of this notion and in the words of Ndangara (2005) rural development and agriculture development are interrelated. However, agriculture cannot develop if the rural areas lack basic amenities. Different academic scholars have x-ray rural development from different angles. (Rostow, 1969; Oluyide and Essang, 1975) examine rural development from the perspective of increase in per capita income. Whereas, Mabogunje (1980) observes it from the point of qualitative improvement of the living standard of rural dwellers. As for the views of (Dudley, 1977; UNDP, 1997) rural

development consists of the “availability of job opportunities, reduction of poverty to an acceptable minimum, and the provision of policy that will emphasize constant equality for all.

3. Rural Development: From Practices and Policies towards Theory

The embracing of rural development as a new paradigm in terms of policy and practice is still raising dust among academic experts. It is believed that the new rural development paradigm is replacing the modernization paradigm that has for sometimes ruled policy, practice and theory (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000). However, Mueller (2006) asserts that previous paradigms of development were basically Keynesian and state-centric, with a solid emphasis on growth. The need for a comprehensive definition of rural development has put scientists on a collision course. Why Clark et al. (1997); Nooy, (2000) stress there is no all-inclusive definition of rural development. However, study by some experts in rural development encapsulate that it is a process that will put to a stop the expropriate of farmers, for others is a strategy that will invigorate agriculture (Van Broekhuizen et al. 1997 cited in Van der Ploeg. 2000). To some keen researchers, rural development is an add on to the current model of agriculture and rural life (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000). In a similar fashion, others predict both agriculture and rural life will experience key re-formation (ibid.). The debate surrounding the rural development prompted this study to contribute to the expansion a new approach that holistically replicates a new practice and policy incorporated in rural development practice in African rural communities. Sustainable rural development is construed in this study with reference to sustainable development as conceptualized by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1978, i.e, the Brundtland Report. Development here is encapsulates “in such a way that productivity may be maintained over the longer term for future generations, whilst preserving essential natural systems and protecting human heritage biodiversity” (Cawley and

Gillmor, 2008). The Nigerian government has now integrated these principles of sustainability into a policy known as the Nigeria Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth.

“The policy objectives of the National Policy of Integrated Rural Development draws from the national objectives of developing the rural areas, raising the quality of life of the rural people, alleviating rural poverty and using rural development to contribute to laying a solid foundation for national development. While the strategies of the policy are to achieve integrated and even development on a sustainable basis, the strategies to be adopted will empower rural dwellers through the development of productive employment, enhancing their income, ensuring protection of the environment, promoting gender responsiveness and ensuring adequate care for vulnerable groups” (Nyagba, 2009).

This policy is to work along the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MGDs are eight international goals that were agreed upon by world leaders to help achieve the following MDGs:

- eradication of poverty and hunger;
- achieving of universal primary education;
- promoting gender equality and women empowerment;
- reducing child mortality
- improving maternal health;
- combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- ensuring environmental sustainability and
- developing a global partnership for development.

Aside, the Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth, all other development policies in the Nigerian democratic era since 2004 such as the National Economic Development and Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS), the Seven Point Agenda and the Transformation Agenda are geared to achieving the target date of 2015 of the MGDs. Rural development is synonymous with agriculture development, it is on this ground the Nigerian government is keen on developing the rural areas through sustainable rural development initiatives. In a

nutshell, official rural development documents embrace a comprehensive approach to the conceptualization of sustainability that involves environmental, economic and social dimensions (Jenkins, 2000 cited in Cawley and Gillmo, 2008). These three dimensions of sustainable development are the core principles of sustainability. In addition to this, an institutional dimension is supplemented into these dimensions in order to address vital institutional policy and capacity issues.

4. Nigerian Government's Efforts Towards Achieving Rural Sustainable Development Through Poverty Reduction Strategies

Poverty is predominant in the rural areas of Nigeria as compared to the urban centers. This was attested to by the poverty profile of Nigeria as released by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2012. The prevalence of increasing poverty in Nigeria, especially in the countryside has made previous governments initiated anti-poverty programmes to cushion the effect of poverty on rural dwellers. Some of the past poverty strategy programmes are: Peoples' bank; Community bank; Agriculture Development Programs (ADPs); National Directorate of Employment (NDE); Poverty Alleviation Programs (PAP); Better Life for Rural Women; Family Economic Advancement Programs (FEAP) and Nigeria Agriculture and Cooperatives Bank (NACB). The national strike by organized Labour in 2012 over fuel subsidy removal prompted the government of President Goodluck Jonathan to come up with another poverty reduction strategy called Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P). According to the federal government the Community Services Women and Youth Employment (CSWYE) an organ of SURE-P has generated 16.000 jobs nationwide since its inception (Udo, 2013). The benefits of most of these programmes for the poor have been minimal (Anyanwu, 2004).

4.1 Appraisal of Government Poverty Eradication Strategies Towards Sustainable Rural Development

Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) are meant to reduce poverty but in the case of Nigeria most of the PRS initiated by successful governments in Nigeria have failed to achieve their set objectives. According to Acha (2012) most of the PRS did not meet their set goals and government decided to disband them and replace them with the microfinance scheme. For Anyanwu (2004) the PRS did not work to full capacity because people refuse to use them owing to the lack of enlightenment from the government on the benefits of such programs. Some of the PRS has been politicized in their operations. Peoples bank branches were located in some regions for political reasons and not because they are important in their localization Abraham and Balogun (2012). Most credit facilities of National Poverty Eradication Programs (NAPEP) were beneficial to members of the party in government while opposition party members did not benefit from the program (Abdu, 2005). Despite the shortcoming of the PRS, Akindiya observes that the anti-poverty programmes of the government have recorded some successes in providing credit facilities, health facility and education and agricultures services to the poor, although, most of the programmes are not targeted at the poorest in the society (Akindiya, 2013). Mustpha (2011) reviews past poverty reduction policies in Nigeria and concluded that many PRS were able to make an impact on the poor by creating employment, increase income and the empowerment of women, however, the programmes were short-lived because whenever there is new government existing policies are changed to accommodate new policies of the new regime. Lack of consistency in policy implementation has been a major problem in Africa. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in its 38th session gave an award to Nigeria for reducing poverty by half while the African Development Bank (ADB) in a month later criticized the Nigerian

government's anti-poverty policies by saying that the policies are too weak and Nigeria cannot meet the 2015 target of the MDGs. According to ADB, the poverty situation has worsened from 65.5 percent to 69.0 percent in 2010. In order for the government to meet the MGDs target on poverty reduction, all efforts should be concentrated to see how the government can meet the MGDs target.

5. Evaluations and Discussions

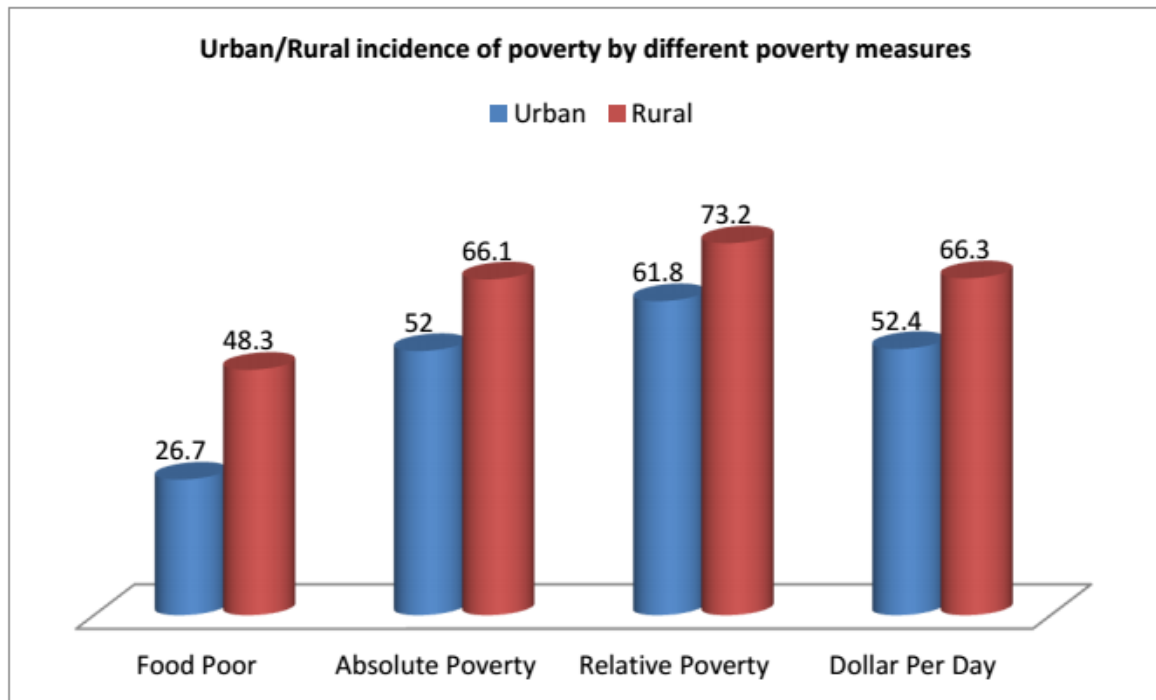
This section of the paper is to evaluate Nigeria progress towards meeting the target date of 2015 of the MDGs vis a vis the approach to sustainable rural development.

5.1 Poverty Reduction

Poverty continues to increase in Nigeria despite the government effort in reducing it. The democratic governance that was installed in Nigeria in 1999 opened a new chapter in the government drive in curtailing the increase in poverty. For instance, the Olusegun Obasanjo civilian administration in 2004 initiated the National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS). The main aim of the policy is to reduce poverty and empower the women, especially those in the rural areas. The Musa Yar'adua regime that succeeded the Obasanjo government came out with the Seven Point Agenda. This was a development policy that intended to reduce poverty in the rural and urban areas and it was formulated to work along the MDGs. The present administration that is headed by Jonathan Goodluck introduced the Transformation Agenda. The policy thrust of this development policy is to empower Nigerians economically and make the rural areas economically viable through sustainable rural development. However, despite all these impressive programmes, poverty continues to increase significantly in Nigeria. For instance, the official release of Nigerian poverty profile in 2010 illustrated that 112 million Nigerians live in poverty. Poverty is prevalent in the rural areas when compared to the urban centers, the poverty profile indicates that 48.3% rural

dwellers live in food poor, 66.1% in absolute poverty, 73.2% in relative poverty and 66.3% in one dollar per day. This is illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Urban and Rural Poverty in Nigeria



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010

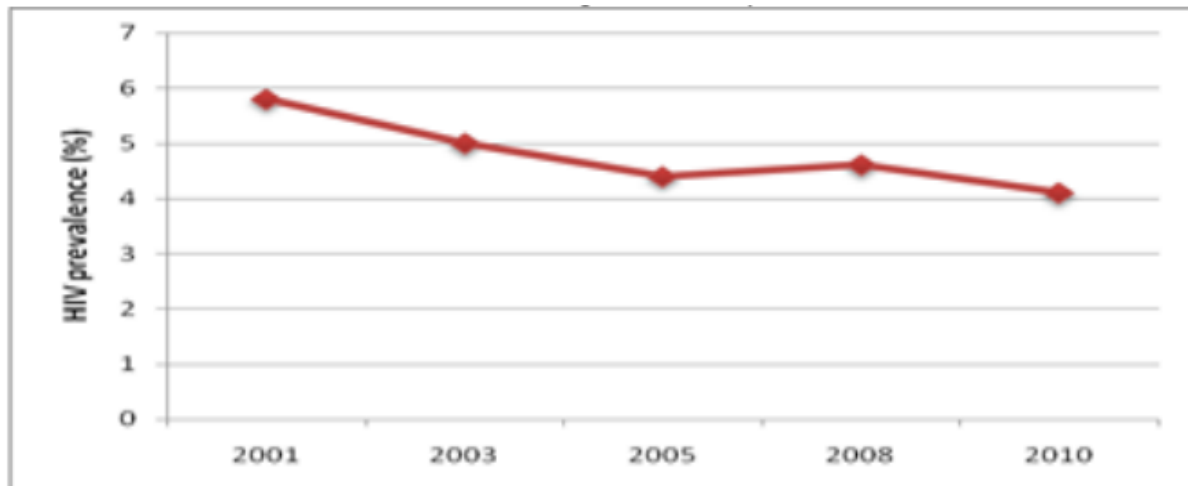
The rate at which poverty is increasing in Nigeria has made the African development Bank to admit that Nigeria cannot meet the target of the MGDs because of the increasing level of poverty in the rural and urban areas.

5.2 Health

Health is wealth and that is the reason all United Nations member states are committed to seeing an end to child mortality, improving maternal health and combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. All these health issues have been of concern to the Nigerian government. Most rural communities lack the effective health facilities and the required manpower to tackle the health challenges confronting rural areas. The local

government councils in Nigeria are responsible for primary health care for rural communities in order to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers. Child mortality, maternal health and malaria epidemic are concentrated in the rural areas and that is the reason the government has initiated the Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth in order to address these health issues befalling the rural communities. However, “the health system remains overstretched by a burgeoning population with lot of challenges in infrastructural and skill development. Though the health indices have shown mixed performance over the last two decades, they are yet to meet international standards. Inequalities in health outcomes also exist between rural and urban areas, between northern and southern regions, and cross income group” (Nigeria’s Country Report to Rio+20 Summit, 2012). Despite the high level of infant and child mortality rate, the figure is depreciating (ibid.). For instance, infant and under five mortality rates have got better from 91 and 191 in 1990 to 75 and 157 in 2008 (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2008 cited in Nigeria’s Country Report to Rio+20 Summit, 2012). With a further improvement in 2011 to 141. With regard to the issue of maternal health, the government claimed that even if it is difficult in meeting the MGDs target, the ratio of maternal mortality has enhanced from 704 in 1990 545 in 2008 (NDHS, 2008). As a result of this, the rural women are having more children than the urban women (Country Report to Rio+20 Summit, 2012). There have been decreases in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. This is from 5.8% in 2001 to 4.1% in 2010 (FMOH, 2010 HIV/AIDS Sero prevalence survey). Figure 2 demonstrates the trend of HIV/AIDS prevalence in Nigeria.

Figure 2: Trend of HIV/AIDS prevalence in Nigeria



Sources: Nigeria's Country Report to Rio+20 Summit, 2012

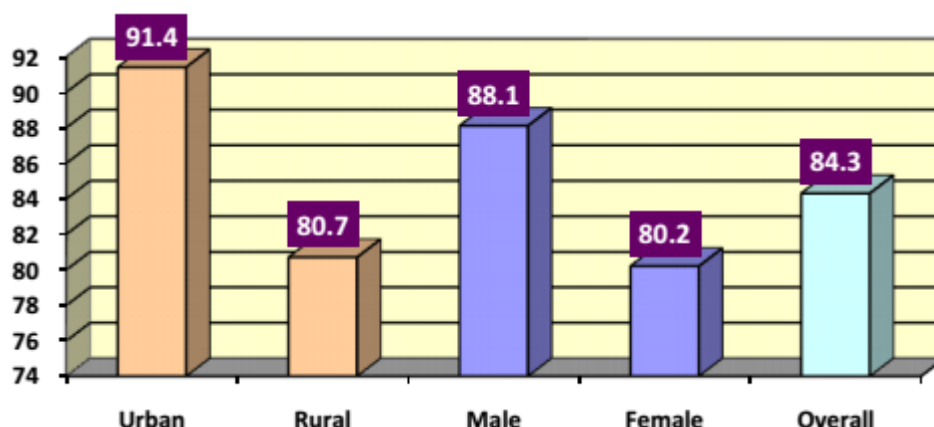
Malaria remains the major cause of children deaths below the age of five in Nigeria. In order to combat the malaria surge, the government has taken step by providing mosquitoes net to major households in the urban and rural areas and the introduction of integrated vector management and treatment using artemesin in combination therapy. To sum up, the Nigerian government has shown remarkable progress in the challenges of health related issues as it is related to the MDGs and sustainable rural development. However, the target of meeting the MDGs is not feasible because with less than one and half years to the target date, Nigeria is still lacking behind in providing essential health services to Nigerian especially the rural dwellers.

5.3 Rural Education and Literacy

Education is a key to national development and government of advanced nations lay emphasis on this hypothesis. Rural dwellers in Nigeria lack basic education and the Nigerian federal government has pursued the policy of universal education to encourage rural children to have the basic requirement of education. For instance, the present government has initiated special intervention programmes most especially in the rural areas to reduce the number of

out of school children. Such programmes include the Girl-Child Education, Back-to-School and the Almajari Education. As a result of this, the primary school attendance ratio has increased to 52.2%, though, it is less than that of the urban centers with 74.4% (Nigeria Education Data Survey). According to the Nigerian Education Data Survey in 2010, 60% of urban children attended school and surpassed that of the rural areas with 36%. Furthermore, the National Literacy Survey in 2010 illustrated that an estimate of 84% Nigerians have either attended a formal or non-formal school with the urban Nigerians having 91.4% as contrary to the rural population of 80.7%. In terms of sex variation, the survey indicated that the male attendance (88.1%) outshines that of female attendance (80.2%) (NBS, 2010). Figure 3 revealed more light on this.

Figure 3: Percentage of Persons ever attended school



Source: Nigeria's Country Report to Rio+20 Summit, 2012

Despite the tremendous progress of the Nigerian democratic governments since 2000 in providing universal basic education to Nigerians especially the rural populace, the journey in meeting the target date for the MGDs is still very far. In a nutshell, meeting the target date of the MDGs for basic universal education for out of school children in the rural area is a mirage. This is because there are not many teachers to teach in the rural areas. And

infrastructure deficiency in the slum communities prevents qualified teachers for going to the rural areas to teach. Aside this, most of the teachers teaching in the rural communities are unqualified.

6. Shaping Intervention for Sustainable Rural Development towards MDGs and Beyond 2015

The conditions in the rural areas in Nigeria are pathetic, for instance, the roads are bad, erratic power supply, dearth of qualified manpower in the health and education sectors. The development problems confronting the rural communities have been responsible for the unprecedented rural-urban drift. This situation calls for special intervention to reverse the rural-urban trend and to give a meaningful life to the rural dwellers. This study canvass the following interventions for comprehensive sustainable rural development approach towards the MGDs and beyond 2015.

- (i) *Drastic measure in poverty eradication:* The poverty rate in the rural communities is higher than the urban areas. Although, previous and present government have initiated poverty reduction programmes in the rural areas, but these programmes have failed woefully in checkmating poverty in the rural communities. The is the need of the political will of the government, stakeholders and development agencies to initiate a holistic poverty reduction strategy to fight poverty in the rural areas. Most of the microfinance institutions that were introduced to empower most of the rural women were established in the urban cities instead of the rural areas, this trend is uncalled for, a regulatory agency should be put in place to monitor all poverty alleviation programmes in the rural areas.
- (ii) *Provision of infrastructure facilities:* The rural-urban drift will continue if the government fails to commit itself in providing basic amenities in rural communities.

If the government can create a ministry for the Niger Delta development, it can also create a ministry for rural infrastructural development that will finance, execute, monitor and evaluate infrastructural development projects in the rural areas.

- (iii) *Agricultural development:* Agricultural development is synonymous with rural development. If the government enhances the development of agriculture in the rural areas, it will also in a way be developing the rural areas. For instance, the construction of feeder roads from the rural to urban cities will facilitate the conveying of agricultural products from the rural communities to the urban centers. Furthermore, using mechanized agriculture equipment will increase the yield of farmers in the rural areas. A case in point is that an increase in agriculture products is synonymous with an increase in income to the farmers and this is an avenue to reduce poverty. In addition, the re-introduction of agriculture schemes such as the farm settlements and extension service will go a long way in boosting agriculture development in the rural areas in relation to the sustainable development of the rural areas.

7. Conclusion

The study evaluates Nigerian approach towards sustainable rural development in relation to the Millennium Development Goals with the formulation of a Rural Development Policy for Sustainable Growth. Although, the study found the government has made giant strides in the development of the rural areas in the areas of poverty reduction, education and health. However, meeting the target date for the MGDs is a mirage and the study pinpoints intervention policies for the government in order to consolidate its efforts in developing the rural communities through the sustainable rural development approach.

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