



Public Enterprises and Rural Development in Nigeria: A Study of Anambra State Community and Social Development Agency, 2013- 2023.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated public enterprises and rural development in Nigeria: with focus on Anambra State Community and Social Development Agency, 2013-2023. The functionalist theory were adopted as theoretical frameworks. The paper adopted secondary data as sources of data and content analysis for data analysis. Findings revealed, amongst others, that the connection between public enterprises and rural development is grossly significant but the approaches adopted by the state agency has been faulty due to political interference, discrimination, lack of clear-cut objectives, inefficiency, mismanagement, poor returns, low morale and excessive bureaucracy leading to unsatisfactory services. In line with the findings, the paper among others recommended that the state government must make policy to encourage public private partnership that is value-loaded with result-driven approaches whose processes and procedures must be transparent, organized and committed to the nucleus of the programme objectives.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Public enterprises or state corporations as they are sometimes called have their origin in the colonial era (Mukandala 2020). They are actually economic and commercial organizations established and managed by the government on behalf and, like private sector establishments, involved in the production and distribution of goods and services to the public (Epelle, 2020).

Epelle stressed that since the main reason for the setting up of a public corporation as we have noted is for the provision of economic and social services to the people, government always see it as its unquestionable responsibility to ensure that the citizens for whom it exists have these goods and services produced for them promptly, adequately and at the most affordable price. He argued that private investors are never known to go into any business that does not yield profits; hence whenever government feels that a particular product or service if provided by the private sector will be priced beyond the reach of the common man it can intervene by setting up a public enterprise to produce such commodity or service cheaply (that is at a subsidized rate). Allied to this issue of private investors and their encumbrances is the problem of huge capital outlay which some investments require for take-off. It is a well-known fact that some investments are very capital intensive and hence usually scary for the private investors to undertake. In fact, a related dimension to the issue is that a project requiring huge investments also takes a long gestation period before it can begin to yield dividends. No private investor will be prepared for this, the only alternative is for government to come in and fill the gap through the establishment of public enterprises.

According to him, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Section 1-6, Sub-Section 1 & 4) empowers the government whether federal, state or local to participate in such economic activities as “the production, distribution and exchange of wealth or goods and services”. The only way through which the government can pursue and realize this objective is through the establishment of state-owned enterprises,

alternatively called public corporation. Expectedly, state enterprises established to pursue essentially economic objectives are normally profit driven. In other words, state enterprises established to operate in a commercial manner can only remain afloat if its product prices are determined by the forces of demand and supply and not by government policy pronouncements.

On the ideological side, the scholar reiterated that it will be recalled that soon after political independence, most African leaders claimed a new found romance with socialism. This is because these post-colonial leaders as nationalists during the colonial era had relied on socialist rhetoric to rally support for their struggle against foreign rule. Thus, it is not surprising that on attainment of political independence, so many of these leaders fearing western domination and control of their economy resorted to nationalizing key industries and putting them under government control. Their belief is that for independence so hardly fought and won, conceding the economy of the nascent postcolonial state to the bourgeois free market jingo will make their new situation more constricting than formal colonial rule – a situation late Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana aptly termed “neo-colonialism”. Consequently, it is on record that the phenomenon of public enterprise was more prevalent in avowed socialist countries like Tanzania (under Julius Nyerere); Ghana (under Kwama (Nkrumah), Guinea (under Sekou Toure), Ethiopia (under Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam); and Zambia (under Kenneth Kaunda). Even Nigeria that on political independence claimed, under Sir Abubakar Tafawa Bewlewa, to be non-aligned in its foreign policy also pursued this line of reasoning with some relative success. Allied to this reason is that following from their ideological conviction of the evils of free enterprise which provides protective cover for the capitalists against his propertyless workers, some of our postcolonial leaders also ensured that not only is foreign domination of the economy reduced to the barest minimum but that the local private sector is not given free reins to exploit and immoderate the hapless citizens. The result is the establishment of public enterprises so as to check-mate the atavistic motives of the private investors (Mukandala 2000). Some of the public enterprises established in Nigeria were set up basically for this reason indeed.

One of the political reasons according to Epelle (2020) for the establishment of public enterprises is to bring to fulfillment promises made to the electorates during electioneering campaign periods. While preparing to contest for public offices, politicians are known to try to sway voters to their side by claiming they will create more jobs if elected thereby providing enhanced opportunities for employment for the citizens. To achieve this objective, these politicians on assumption of office create public enterprises or mandate existing ones to employ as many persons as possible. This explains why many public enterprises in Nigeria before the introduction of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1986 were flooded with persons most of whom had no takes to occupy them on a daily basis. Little wonder many of these public enterprises were made to drop these surplus staff at the period of economic down turn that was witnessed in the country beginning from the early 1980s. Another political dimension to the establishment of public enterprises is, in order to achieve the philosophy of self-reliance which many African leaders advocated in the early period of political independence, it was felt then that if our independence both locally and internationally was to be safeguarded then we must have state owned enterprises charged with the sole responsibility of producing goods and services which if left for the local private sector may be surreptitiously hijacked by the foreign multinational enterprises. It must be recalled that at political independence in 1960, most of our local bourgeoisie has a tenuous economic base and so were disadvantageously placed in the event of any competition with the ubiquitous multinationals, it was now left for the government to fill in the gap by establishing public enterprises to help pursue this nationalist goal of self-reliance.

The major subject of discussion in this work is the Anambra State Community and Social Development Agency (ANCSDA). The agency came into existence over a decade ago through an enactment by the Anambra State House of Assembly, but the project did not take off immediately until August 1, 2018, and commenced community and rural development programmes implementation by March 2019. The implementation came due because of the special interest shown by the then Governor Willie Obiano in rural development which his government had earlier demonstrated in the Community-Choose-Your-Project initiative. The agency is responsible for capacity building of youths, skill acquisition, women empowerment, agricultural support, infrastructural development, rural development policies and other support services to enhance rural development. Globally, public enterprises’ influence and contribution in the developmental process has become very significant to the extent of drawing the attention of most authorities to a point of consideration and need to create equal opportunities for all. Some schools of thought believe that public enterprises all over the world have contributed immensely to the development of nations while other school of thought believe that public enterprises have contributed nothing rather than maximizing internal gains. Be that as it may, this goes to show that the role of public enterprises in society cannot be over emphasized in the functions they perform both at the federal, state and local levels. Rural development on the other hand is a process of not only increasing the level of per capita income in the rural areas but also of the standard of living of the rural population, where the standard of living depends on such factors as food, nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and

security. It is seen in terms of the condition and percentage of the labour force in the agricultural sector, although it is argued that a program of rural development should go beyond agriculture to include the country's total economic development in rural areas because about 70 percent of Nigeria's labour force is employed in the agricultural sector, which is characterized by a predominance of small-scale production using mostly local inputs. It is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor (Umembali&Akubuilu 2006). Deji (2005) sees rural development as a way of restructuring the national economy to bring about improvement in the standard of living of people in rural areas. But rural development cannot be achieved unless certain strategies are used. Ebiriwa (2005) outlines some approaches to rural development as modernisation approach, transformation approach and demonstration approach, while Nwobi (2007) adds agricultural approach, internal combustion approach, basic resource approach, etc. to the list. Each of the listed strategies has contributed in one way or another to the development of rural areas. However, the inclusion of rural entrepreneurship as a strategy appears to be capable of contributing much more. It is germane to state that rural development is an integral part of the entire development process which requires a consciously combine efforts of all sectors to ensure a well balance and generally accepted approach to mitigate effect of rural poverty.

The aim of the study is to investigate public enterprise and rural development in Nigeria with a focus on Anambra State Community and Social Development Agency, 2013 – 2023. Flowing directly from the aim, the objectives are to;

1. investigate the connection between public enterprises and rural development
2. assess the effect of public enterprises on rural development

In line with these objectives, the paper posed the following questions, thus:

1. What is the connection between public enterprises and rural development in Nigeria?
2. What are the effect of public enterprises on rural development?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The functionalist theory is was adopted as our theoretical construct. The theory is based largely on the work of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parson, and Robert Merton. According to functionalist, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influence by other parts. Functionalist use the term functional and dysfunctional to described the effects of social elements on society. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if the disrupt social stability. Merton (1968) identified two functions perform by every society: manifest and latent function. Manifest functions are consequences that are intended and commonly recognized. Latent functions are functions are consequences that are unintended and often hidden. The functionalist school of thought has from its inception been concerned with how society adapts and changes. The classic evolutionary view sees changes occurring slowly, allowing for adaptation and realignment of the various interrelated social institutions. The classic evolutionary adaptation of social systems has never posed a problem for functionalists, since such change tend to occur without disrupting the existing social system. More conflictive forms of change; however, has challenge functionalist explanations because they tend to lead to social disharmony.

Relating the functionalist theory in understanding public enterprises and rural development, it becomes imperative to state that society will be more stable and harmonious when all segments of the society are involved in the decision-making process. The public enterprises have been an indispensable segment of the society must be encouraged and given the opportunity to contribute their inputs into the decision-making process by way of effectively participating in the process of development. Thus, socio-economic, political stability and development will be more enhance when the atmosphere feel the roles of public enterprises inthe formulations and implementation of rural development policies. The functionalist theory is more appropriate as one of the theoretical frameworks as its emphasis on the various functions performed by the various segments of society including the public service so as to ensure stability and enhance rural development.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept of rural development covers a wide area and as such, it's a multidimensional process which covers areas like agriculture, health, education, and general infrastructures, economic and political issues and their integration within a sound national economy. Hence the concept of rural development has a very wide scope; it is therefore better to follow an integrated approach to its definition. The United Nations sees integrated rural development to be a comprehensive programme for developing rural areas where all relevant segments such as education, health, housing, employment are perceived as interwoven elements in a system having horizontal and vertical linkages in spatial and operational terms. According to Hinzen (2000); Ogidefa (2010) the authors perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for individuals to realize their full capabilities through education and participate in decision and action which affect them in this world.

Ogunfowora (1981) sees rural development as a means or an avenue for the delivery of basic amenities, infrastructures, improvement in agriculture production and extension service and as well generating employment for rural inhabitants. Olatunbosun (1976) holds that rural development is based upon the necessity to balance the form and direction of governance for the advantage of both the urban & rural sectors and also to provide technical requirements for speedy economic growth and development. In the same vein, Nchuchuwa and Adejuwon (2012) opines that developing the rural sector is very crucial and important not because of its impact on the rural people but also because of its input to the overall development of a nation. The Nigerian situation where majority the citizens live in rural areas where the output level is low, mobilizing the rural inhabitants provides the speediest and quickest path to a harmonious and steady economic growth and development. Mabogunje (1980) is of the view that rural development has to do with improvement in the living standards of low-income individuals living within the rural area on a self-sustaining basis through transformation of the socio-spatial arrangements of their productive undertakings. It implies a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the rural residents and resources for capacity enhancement of the rural populace to cope well with the daily responsibilities of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this. This definition has three central features which are as follows:

1. Improving the quality of living of the subsistence population through organization and allocation of resources to attain desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive services available to the rural populace.
2. Mass involvement targeted at achieving both the allocative rationality and equity with distributive efficiency.
3. Making the process capable of self-sustenance requires appropriate expertise acquisition and development, capacity building and existence of functional institutions at the federal, state & local levels to enable optimal use of available resources for the development of the rural areas. self-sustenance implies grassroots participation in development programs tailored at transforming their lives.

Lele (1975) posits that the realization of above objectives hinges on the interaction of the under listed crucial variables:

1. National policies: which include land tenure systems; commodity pricing and marketing systems; wages & interest rate structures.
2. The scope for institutional heterogeneity: which imply delegation with the distribution of developmental responsibility among the normal government structures; semi-autonomous government structures and institutions, traditional, private and commercial institutions; and elective bodies.

Rural development according to Khosla (2000) is a process which aims at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through collective process. According to Agarwal (2013), it is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of rural poor. In the context of rural background, it means developing better physical, social and economic conditions of a specific group of people, the rural poor living in the rural areas. This group includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless. Improving the living standard or well-being of the people providing them security and basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and employment; making the rural areas more productive and less vulnerable to natural hazards like poverty and exploitation; giving them mutually beneficial relation and ensuring them, that development is self-sustaining, involving the mass of people with little disruption of traditional customs and administrative decentralization.

The word 'rural' means an area which is marked by non-urban style of life, occupational structure, social organization and settlement pattern. Rural is noticeably agricultural, its settlement system consists of villages or homesteads; Socially it signifies greater inter dependence among people, more deeply rooted community life and a slow-moving rhythm of life built around nature and natural phenomenon; and occupationally it is highly dependent on crop farming, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities (FAO, 2015). In the same sequence of thinking, rural development would essentially mean desired positive change in the rural areas-both in a quantitative as well as qualitative sense. Thus, rural development is a real-concept, it is a complete term which means a variety of elements (Social, Economic, Technological and Natural) of human life and activities (UNICEF, 2009). Rural development means noticeable changes in all these components. But such changes should take place in a mutually supporting relationship so as to generate organic and optimum development Organic development is one which maintains a healthy relationship among the various elements or components of a system.

The concept was born in the context of agriculture and for a long time it encompassed agricultural development Since 1970s, the concept has become more definite in its interpretation and it is being regarded as

a design to improve the economic and social life especially, by extending benefits of development to the poorest, small farmers, tenants and landless. Now, rural development is not exclusively restricted to any single activity or area, it travels many or all areas which anyway affect upgrading, enlisting and petrifying improvement of transformation in socio-economic lives of rural people. Rural development means overall improvement of die quality of life for rural people. It is about reduction of poverty, increasing productivity, providing basic services like health, education, drinking water, sanitation, extending infrastructure, attempt to reverse distorted land distribution and ownership and host of other aspects redressing inequality, exploitation and deprivation in any conceivable sense. The general credence is that for breaking the 'interlocking log-jam' and disadvantages, it will surely require attacking several barriers through concerted action and multi-pronged strategy.

Rural development as a concept for planning and executing changes in rural areas is based on the assumption that production increases and social improvements are not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary, are mutually strengthening. The relation between the two is complemented so heavily that development on one front cannot proceed beyond a point, without a simultaneous or prior change in the other. Another trend in rural development is the special emphasis on the weaker sections of the society, i.e. the rural poor, not merely for improving their level of living, but also to bring about a greater degree of their involvement in the development process. The concept has emerged as a distinctive field of policy and practice and of research in the last decade, and particularly over the eight or nine years since the inception of the "new strategy" for development planning by the World Bank and UN agencies. This strategy came to be formulated as a result of the general disenchantment with previous approaches to development planning at national and sectoral levels, and it is defined by its concern with equity objectives of various kinds. It can also be seen as "an integrated development of the area and the people through optimum development and utilisation of local resources-physical, biological and human and by bringing about necessary institutional, structural, and attitudinal changes of rural public". The ultimate objective is of improving quality of life of 'rural poor' and the 'rural weak' of our country. Thus, rural development is die means to the "process of improving basic needs, increasing productivity and employment facilities and developing potentials of rural resources through integration of spatial, functional and temporal aspects".Development of rural area means, development of the people living in rural areas through implementation of various rural developmental schemes. The objectives of development include sustained increase in per capita output and incomes, expansion of productive employment and greater equity in the distribution of the benefits of growth.

Rural development over the years has emerged as "a strategy designed to improve the economic, social and cultural life of specific group of people as well as living in rural areas". Increased employment, higher productivity, and higher income as well as ensuring minimum acceptable levels of food, clothing, shelter, education and health in the main objectives of rural development. Thus, rural development means, development of infrastructure. "Rural development must constitute a major part of development strategy if a larger segment of those in greatest need are to benefit". The term refers to a distinct approach to interventions by the state in the economies of underdeveloped countries, and one which is at once broader and more specific than 'agricultural development'. It is broader because it entails much more than the development of agricultural production - for it is in fact a distinct approach to the development of the economy as a whole. It is more specific in the sense that it focuses (in its rhetoric, and in principle) particularly on poverty and inequality. Although there is a substantial overlap between the field of conventional agricultural economics and the concerns of "Rural Development", the kinds of study required to understand the factors affecting "Rural Development" are not contained within the discipline of agricultural economics. Not only does "Rural Development" include attention to other aspects of rural economies as well as agriculture, but the analysis of distributional issues demands an inter-disciplinary approach in which the broader social and political factors interacting with economic processes are subjected to examination. The expression rural development may also be used, however, to refer to processes of change in rural societies, not all of which involve action by governments. In this case, the activity of "Rural Development" a form of state intervention must be considered simply as one of the forces concerned - although it is one which has become of increasing importance.'

The term generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. It has traditionally centred on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanization have changed the character of rural areas. Increasingly tourism, niche manufacturers, and recreation have replaced resource extraction and agriculture as dominant economic drivers. The need for rural communities to approach development from a wider perspective has created more focus on a broad range of development goals rather than merely creating incentive for agricultural or resource-based businesses. Education, entrepreneurship, physical infrastructure, and social infrastructure all play an important

role in developing rural regions. Rural development is also characterized by its emphasis on locally produced economic development strategies. In contrast to urban regions, which have many similarities, rural areas are highly distinctive from one another. It is therefore an area, where the people are engaged in primary industry in the sense that they produce things directly for the first time in cooperation with nature as stated by Srivastava (1961). A society or community can be classified as rural based on the criteria of lower population density, less social differentiation, less social and spatial mobility, slow rate of social change, etc. Agriculture would be the major occupation of rural area. Jain and Gopal(2002) listed the scope and importance of rural development. According to them, rural development is a dynamic process which is mainly concerned with the rural areas. These include agricultural growth, putting up of economic and social infrastructure, fair wages as also housing and house sites for the landless, village planning, public health, education and functional literacy, communication etc.

CONNECTION BETWEEN PUBLIC ENTERPRISES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Majority of the respondents were in the age range of 36 – 55 (50%). Gender-wise, 56% of the respondents were male while 44% were female. More than 70% of the respondents are graduates. Also, most of the respondents are agency staff, youth and women beneficiaries and community leaders. The study has shown that the state enterprise is fairly informed on the dimension of rural development. Particularly interesting is the strong agreement by most of the respondents that the state agency creates an entirely new venture by utilising local resources for the purpose of rural development. The place and the role of public enterprises in rural development are well appreciated by rural entrepreneurs in Anambra State. They agreed with the fact that entrepreneurship can help reduce wastage of local resources, reduce rural urban drift, create employment, improve the standard of living and help in rural wealth creation. These findings are important because they represent processes that bring about rural development. Obviously, they appear to endorse the contention of Petrin (1994) when he wrote that stakeholders in rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development.

The development of a country is a choice made by government, non-governmental agencies and its people, who situate and live in either urban or rural areas. The earliest definition of public enterprises sees it as an economic term which describes the process of providing essential services at certain subsidized prices (Di-Masi 2000). Later commentators, however, broadened this definition to include the concept of bringing together the factors of production. But this definition according to Di-Masi (2000) led others to question whether there was any unique entrepreneurial function or whether it was simply a form of management. The concept of innovation was added to the definition of entrepreneurship by theorists in the early part of this century. This innovation could be to process innovation, market innovation, product innovation, factor innovation, and even organisational innovation. Later definitions described entrepreneurship as involving the creation of new enterprises and that the entrepreneur is the founder. On the role of public enterprises in the development process, Naudes (2008) states that an effective entrepreneurship venture fosters the production of wealth for a nation, creates jobs that utilise human resources and also reduces economic waste in rural development. He maintained that the income level of the average person and the standard of living of a society increase with every successful entrepreneurship project. Ejiofor (1989) points out that rural entrepreneurship is the first step towards a self-reliant economy that can generate internal self-sustaining economic growth and development in rural development. In the same vein, Brain (2005) states that entrepreneurs occupy a central position in a market economy, and there are never enough of them. A society is adjudged prosperous only to the degree to which state or government agencies reward and encourage entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial activities are the critical determinants of the level of success, prosperity, growth and opportunity in any rural development objective.

Rural entrepreneurship in grassroots development though desirable is usually fraught with difficulties and risks. A respondent revealed that:

It was initially difficult to understand the concept of rural development and the role played by rural entrepreneurship until the state agency came up with the idea of creating values by devoting necessary time and effort, with the necessary financial and psychological supports to combat social risks and maximising monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (S. Ugwuoke, personal communication, January 11, 2023)

Responding to the above, Gana (2001) reveals that rural entrepreneur possesses both positive and negative qualities. He therefore advises that rural entrepreneur must effectively use his positive qualities like risk taking, decision making, planning, self-confidence, creativity, uniqueness, futuristic, drive and energy to overcome the negative qualities such as arrogance for business success in rural development. When entrepreneurs effectively

combine these qualities, they are able to perform useful functions. Public enterprises, conceptually speaking, is not much different from entrepreneurship. Indeed, public enterprises could be seen as using the process and methods of entrepreneurship to exploit untapped potential of rural areas, to bring about growth and development. Petrin (1994) describes public enterprises as:

a force that mobilises other resources to meet unmet market demand, the ability to create and build something from practically nothing, the process of creating value by pulling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity. This process is usually enhanced by the government through its agencies practically the public enterprises (p.65).

Onyekwelu et al. (2008) highlight some pro-development entrepreneurial functions of public enterprises such as identification of investment opportunities, formation and nurturing of enterprises, assembling and coordinating of resources (human and material), invention, innovation, risk bearing, decisionmaking, etc. These functions according to them are not left only for entrepreneurs in the urban areas but also for the rural entrepreneurs. Rural entrepreneurs are individuals who find investment opportunities in the rural areas. The strategic role public enterprises could play in rural development appears to have caught the attention of policymakers and development experts. Petrin (1994) notes that institutions and individuals promoting rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process. In his words development agencies see public enterprises as an enormous employment potential, politicians see it as the key strategy to prevent rural unrest, and farmers see it as an instrument for improving farm earnings while women see it as an employment possibility near their homes which provide autonomy, independence and a reduced need for social support. Clearly, rural entrepreneurship is seen as a vehicle for improving the quality of life for individuals, families and communities as well as to sustain a healthy economy and environment. He stresses that to accelerate economic development in rural areas, it is necessary to increase the supply of entrepreneurs who will take risks and engage in the uncertainties of new venture creation. Sherief (2008) is equally emphatic about a possible role public enterprise could play in rural development. He notes in particular that entrepreneurial orientation in rural areas is based on stimulating local entrepreneurial talent and subsequent growth of indigenous companies, which in turn would create jobs and add economic value to a region, and at the same time keep scarce resources within the community. Rural entrepreneurs are people who are prepared to stay in the rural areas and contribute to the creation of local wealth (Petrin 1994). According to an interviewee who responded to the connection between public enterprises and rural development. He revealed that:

Rural areas are isolated, economically poor, depopulated and un-mechanised. Based on this, local entrepreneurial talents have to be harnessed, and consequently, the growth of indigenous companies should be encouraged and promoted. This will create jobs, add economic value to rural development and, at the same time, retain the scarce resources within the local area. Of all available theories that could be used to unravel our subject matter under investigation, the integrated rural development theory is perhaps the most potent. Integrated rural development theory is a multidimensional strategy for improving the quality of life of the rural people. It is based on the premise that the socioeconomic framework of the traditional rural system is obsolete; therefore, integrated rural development strategies are designed to change this framework and promote structural changes in society (J. Chijioke, personal communication, January 12, 2023).

Another respondent who corroborated the position of the above interviewee on the relationship between public corporations and rural development revealed that the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of Babangida's administration is a typical example of the integrated approach to rural development in Nigeria. But however, revealed that the connections between the two variables were not always positive. He responded that:

In spite of the clamour for the promotion of public enterprises as an effective rural development channel, there is evidence that certain socioeconomic challenges could beset it, thereby truncating the desired benefits that would be realised. A major challenge here could be linked to the remoteness of the rural business environment which is symptomized by a lack of local industrial and service milieu, meaning that there are fewer opportunities for firms to subcontract out locally than in an urban centre. Again, and from the point of view of innovation specifically, the low density of the business population results in a small number of potential collaborating firms locally, as well as more sparsely distributed research and development, educational institutions and business support providers compared with some other types of

location (M. Onwubuiko, personal communication, January 13, 2023).

Corroborating the above claim, Okeke and Eme (2014) opined that inadequate or dearth of infrastructural facilities have impacted negatively on the business environment, including public enterprises. They noted that poor access to infrastructure affects a large percentage of the rural population. Only about one in every three households in rural areas has electricity and even when it is available, the supply of electricity is often erratic. Agbola and Ukaegbu (2006) point to the devastating effect of poor infrastructural facilities – erratic power supply, poor condition of road network and inadequate water supply – on emerging businesses. Perhaps, one singular constraint that discourages entrepreneurship and business growth in the rural sector is the security challenges posed by the activities of Unknown Gunmen (UGM) and IPOB restriction order on rural traders bid to hold every Monday.

The respondents summarised the problems or challenges faced by the state agency in rural development as political interference, mediocrity, discrimination, lack of clear-cut objectives, inefficiency, mismanagement, unsatisfactory services, poor returns on investment, low morale with over 70% of them suggesting a clear-cut reform for result-driven performance.

THE EFFECT OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The paper revealed that the state agency has been assigned the important role of achieving one state objective of economic growth with social justice, generating larger social gains and strengthening state's economy by removing disparities and promoting balanced development in different parts of the state. Anyaduba revealed that with what it achieved through the Community and Social Development Project, the Anambra State Community and Social Development Agency could easily claim to be the consolidation and institutionalization agency for the government's community and social development interventions. He opined that the agency has brought immeasurable joy to the communities and it is expected that any other project that may come in its stead, should strive to consolidate on the gains already made. Without doubt, the Community and Social Development Programme accentuated all the efforts made by the Anambra State government in driving a comprehensive and equitable development of the state. Already the beneficiary communities are expressing the hope that the project should continue or worst-case scenario metamorphose into a new one in order to continue with the good works.

Some officials of the state agency, beneficiaries and community managers noted upon interview that every project has a life-span, and so does the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP). Upon interview, one of them revealed thus;

The Project (an Anambra State Government Planned Undertaking in partnership with the World Bank) has made its mark after nearly two years of operation. Arriving at the needy communities in the 12 Local Government Areas of Awka North, Anambra East, Anambra West, Ayamelum, Orumba North, Dunukofia, Orumba South, Anaocha, Oyi, Ogbaru, Idemili North and Ihialawas achieved, using the State Poverty Mapping. While the areas of intervention – about seven sectors in all were determined by the communities through expression of interest. The communities also planned, part financed, implemented, monitored and maintained any of the projects they host (E. Anyaduba, personal communication, March 20, 2023).

The information produced by an official of the state agency is a testimony of the fact that public enterprises are established to provide essential services to the people and communities. The study further revealed that the communities that benefited from the scheme wouldn't have been able to provide for these services without the state government assistance through the state's agency.

Similarly, another respondent revealed that:

To the agency's credit, a total of 62 communities, 17 vulnerable groups and well over two million beneficiaries have been empowered with access to improved social and natural resource infrastructure. About 249 micro projects were supported with over a thousand temporal jobs, direct and indirect, created. Trainings were offered the youths in various skills acquisition like carpentry, tailoring, phone repairs, bead making, hair dressing, etc., with a proviso to step it down on return to their different communities (C. Mojekwu, personal communication, March 25, 2023).

The state's enterprise has rendered useful help and service in the development of human resource in backward areas for changing the traditional character of village life. Investment in human capital is considered an essential

ingredient of development planning. Such development is only possible if rural talents are identified properly fed with modern knowledge of relevant science and technology. A large number of public sector undertakings have been set up in the backward areas/regions/districts in order to capitalise the rural labour by equipping them with vocational education, technical training and managerial skills. The strategy behind this is to transform the unemployed rural people to get self-motivated and self-inspired employment avenues in local economic activities. The state agency working as a vehicle of communication has taken the new knowledge to villages and acted as “change agents” for introducing changes in existing practices, initiating commercial use of appropriate rural technologies in agriculture and allied activities, village artisan and handicrafts and rural industry by inducing use of productivity enhancing equipment and light machinery. In related response, another respondent revealed that:

Apart from project implementation and other forms of pro-poor interventions, the agency was able to approve 58 Community Development Plans and 17 Group Development Plans for possible use by the state in her quest for integrated development. It also made some critical interventions in area of social responsibility in giving psycho-social support to care-seekers and victims of various kinds of trauma, including gender-based violence, domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, herdsmen attack among others by the agency staff trained on such matters (C. Chimezie, personal communication, April 28, 2023).

Continuing, the respondent opined that the agency equally played pivotal role in sensitization of many communities on protocol observation at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. True to that commitment, the sensitization was taken to the far reaches of the communities by the agency’s field workers who had earlier been trained on the pandemic protocols.

However, not all its efforts to provide access to improved economic and social infrastructure to the communities, hitherto without them, came through. Working with the resources available to it, the agency was able to attend to appreciable number of expressions of interest communicated to it by the communities. Note, however that not all of them could be managed as the agency’s guns were without sufficient power, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, to bring about total reduction in the request made. Its funding was affected because of budgetary and time constraints in much the same way rains and flooding threatened some of the project’s implementation.

Recounting the effect of public enterprises on rural development, a community manager revealed that the then governor of the Mr. Willie Obiano gave a mandate to the community to choose the project of their choice tagged Community-Choose-Your-Project model that covers all the 180 communities in the state for effective implementation. Although, not all the projects identified by the communities were implemented but a substantial number. He further revealed as follows:

The agency achieved within its short period of existence remarkable improvement in infrastructural development in the focal communities where its efforts were directed. The Amanuke Feeder Road and Culvert, the Ndiukwuenu Science Lab, Okpeze Rural Electrification, EziAnam VIP Toilet, EnugwuAguleri Civic Centre, Nkpunando Health Centre, Umuzu Community Secondary School, Igbakwu Community Secondary School, Onneh Water Borehole, etc., were some of the projects implemented by the agency which will continue to speak to the hearts of the beneficiary communities (E. Asiegbu, personal communication, April 28, 2023).

Improvement in economic infrastructure in the rural areas can be provided through the help and active participation of the state agency. This should broadly cover constructing or improving existing link roads in rural environments to make these accessible by modern means of transport; ensuring that each village is equipped with electricity and power for domestic as well as commercial and industrial use. The state agency constitutes the core of the rural social and economic development history. Rightly, this agency is described as an engine of rural development and social and community development. The enterprises of public agency are unique, when compared to their counterpart in private sector in the sense that the former have to bear greater social obligation apart from displaying good performance to secure reasonable profits, which being the all-important concern of the private enterprises. The public sector agency emerges very significant in the state context by fulfilling various social obligations such as generation of employment, human capital development, provision of basic infrastructure and public utilities, promoting rural development initiative and achieving balanced development.

In the agency, according to Anyaduba, the state has a chance to drastically reduce poverty of infrastructural development in most of her rural communities, especially those considered to be particularly in need. Perhaps it

is only in continuity that this expectation is better served and the whole idea of comprehensive development as envisaged by the agency can be achieved.

II. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study revealed that public enterprises are key agents for rural development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of economic, socio-cultural, political and religious required for rural development. Based on this, the study revealed that skill acquisition has a strong and positive relationship with rural development, and that women employment has a positive impact on rural development in Anambra State. The positive relationships are demonstrated in the discussion of findings where beneficiaries revealed that the agency has provided infrastructural facilities, education, healthcare facilities, skill acquisition programmes, and reduces poverty. However, the study also revealed that public enterprises have failed in many areas due to poor funding, mismanagement, political interference, unwanted attitude towards work, faulty bureaucratic measures, and recklessness of the system. The skill acquisition and women employment programmes were highly selective, while names were most time shortlisted on gratification. Only those with political affiliation were informed and selected. The programmes do not reflect the wishes of the beneficiaries as they were not given the opportunity to make their choices. These factors undermine the impact of public enterprises in rural development. In a nutshell, the study concludes that there exists positive relationship between the agency's programmes and rural development but the connections are negatively demonstrated.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the followings:

1. The state government must make policy to encourage public private partnership that is value-loaded with result-oriented approaches whose processes and procedures must be transparent, organized and committed to the nucleus of its programmes. The overhauling of the state's enterprise in this direction would breach excessive political interference, mediocrity, discrimination in appointment, promotion and discipline, unsatisfactory services, mismanagement, lack of clear-cut objectives, inefficiency, low morale and guarantee virile rural development initiative.
2. The agency must ensure that the materials required for public enterprise's projects comply with specification. The materials should be attested to and approved by experienced contractors of the agency with price verification before procurement. Sub-standard materials and equipment should not be entertained under the guise of government work. There must be continuity of state projects while also discouraging the award of contracts to politicians and family allies as the state would be unwilling to question the standard of projects awarded them.

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