Rejuvenating the Economies of Ogbese Rural Region, Nigeria

J. O. Daramola[1] and J. O. Basorun[2*]

[1]*Department of Urban and Regional Planning, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.*
[2]*Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author JOD supervised data collection and wrote the first draft of the manuscript, while author JOB designed the study, wrote the protocol, managed the literature search and performed the statistical analysis. Both authors managed the analyses of the study, read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Aims: To examine the level of socio-economic and physical development of Ogbese town vis-à-vis the regional development potentials.
Study Design: Reconnaissance survey and administration of questionnaires were carried out in the study.
Place and Duration of Study: Ogbese region in Akure Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, between July and August, 2013.
Methodology: We sampled 96 respondents in the study region (Ogbese 60, Elemo 8, Benin 7, Owode 9, Araromi 7 and Lisa 5). Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages.
Results: Research findings show that agriculture as the spine of the rural regional economy is declining due to the financial constraints and failure of the farmers and traders to harness labor and facilities for effective operations.
Conclusion: Policy measures were recommended based on research findings to improve the economies of the rural environment.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: orimo60@yahoo.com, nbason2003@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

In developing countries, rural farmers contribute greatly to the socio economic development of nations. Today, more than two third of the Nigerian population whose primary occupation is subsistence agriculture reside in the rural areas. These rural areas serve as a source of the nation's staple food like maize, cassava, yam, wheat, guinea corn and plantain for urban dwellers and provide raw materials for industries. With all these efforts, the rural farmers earn meager income and are always neglected. It is easy to observe that the rural sector constitutes the economically backward areas of Nigeria and has been so since the colonial days. The effect of this in recent years is that the gap between it and the urban sector continues to widen drastically.

The past governments in Nigeria have made several efforts since independence to remove this problem of neglect by establishing various bodies and agencies such as River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Farm Settlement Schemes (FSSs), Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) which was evident in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) [1] and so on. Regardless of these entire programs, over 75 million Nigerians are still living below "the poverty line of $1.25 per day (equivalent to $1.00 a day in 1996 US prices)" [2]. Apparently, most of these programs failed due to instability in government and corrupt practices. The laudable government initiatives notwithstanding, such efforts hardly continue beyond the government that initiated the schemes. Most of these efforts failed to yield desired results due to lack of information dissemination and inadequate data in respect of the needs of the rural dwellers.

Our rural areas today are characterized with high level of emigration. The rural-urban migration by young school leavers seeking green pastures in towns and cities where their dreams of jobs and better lives are not often realized brings about crimes of different magnitudes such as drug addiction, smuggling and prostitution. The dynamic growth in the urban areas in terms of socio-economic opportunities, and existence of political and physical factors on the other hand, continually pull people from the rural areas to urban centers, thus, leading to imbalanced growth in the nation's economy. The origin of this problem is the failure of the country's planning machinery (which has been dominated by economists), to recognize the spatial diversities and complexes in culture, people and material resources which justifies the need for regional planning and a sound regional development policy and frame work for the country [3].

Ogbese region comprises Ogbese community and some neighboring agrarian settlements that sustain it with agricultural produce. The location of Ogbese in the rain forest zone in South Western Nigeria gives it a natural tendency of wood, timber and food production in the region. The community serves as an economic life wire of Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State that produces food crops in large quantities. With these economic potentials, the town still remains a remote rural settlement in the State. This position, coupled with the neglect and lack of attention by past government in many developmental projects, call for assessment of (i) the wavering socio-economic development in infrastructure, facilities and other basic amenities, (ii) the natural endowment of the region and (iii) the cause of poverty among the regional population.

The concern for economic growth and equitable distribution of the fruits of such growth has led to the formulation and articulation, by regional planners, of such concepts as growth poles, growth centers and core periphery- all in an attempt to formulate the spatial theory of development [4]. At the centre of the theories were certain propositions about the role of a

centre, which in other words implies a major town, city or regional centre, with some indices of growth and centrality [5]. The practical demonstration of these theories has led to environmental improvement and balanced growth as experienced in some developing countries.

As observed by [6] and [7], the widespread use of the growth pole concept is reflected in a number of conferences and publications on the subject, as well as the apparent positive outcome of its application in developed countries of Western Europe, particularly in Great Britain, France and Italy. Regional development based on growth pole strategy still remains popular and fully embraced in developing countries, mostly in Latin American countries, with national governments filled with optimism about its benefits for economic growth and social progress [8]. Growth pole approach to economic development in developing countries is formulated on the presumption that by deliberately focusing investment at a limited number of centers, a necessary condition for development would be satisfied [7].

In some developed countries like Canada, UK, France and USA, where there are regional gaps in economies, strong measures are adopted to address the situation. The United Kingdom, for instance, enacted laws towards reducing regional disparities between the North and South [9]. In Canada, some complex regional planning activities have been undertaken in provinces by the Ministry of Regional Economic Expansion to reduce regional disparities. In the USA, the concern for depressed areas led to the emergence of a Department of Commerce and Economic Development Administration to initiate growth centers to generate income and employment to marginal agricultural districts [10].

In most countries in Latin America and South East Asia, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a conception of strategic points and regions of cities as growth poles in the urbanization process and this served as momentum to jumpstart economic growth in development and industrialization by pursuing a growth pole strategy [11]. Planners and development economists, therefore, attempt to identify locations, which they believe, could act as growth poles or growth centers in the national urban system. This is because the geographical aspect of growth poles has been considered to be the most important facet of the growth pole theory [12].

The African Millennium Cities Initiative (MCI) involving seven cities namely: Kisumu (Kenya), Blantyre (Malawi), Kumasi (Ghana), Akure (Nigeria), Bamako-Sogou (Mali) and Langa (Senegal), was also another movement that ventured in growth pole project. The Millennium Cities Initiative (MCI) which is a United Nations' African development initiative is the most recent African experience with the growth pole strategy [13]. The main aims of Millennium Cities Initiative (MCI) are:

(i) To assist through research and policy analysis, selecting seven mid-sized cities across sub-Saharan Africa, located near Millennium villages, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, by transforming the communities from sub-subsistence lifestyles.
(ii) To assist them to enhance their absorption capacities through a balanced industrialization process which is expected to prevent them from growing into mega cities with the attendant infrastructure problems and mega-slums.
(iii) To improve capacities of the selected cities to attract investors and durable investments to spearhead the development of a sound industrial base that can sustain the burgeoning inner and peri-urban populations through domestic

enterprise development and employment generation; and to serve as "regional urban centers in Africa, with the resulting employment and economic growth effects".

In order to attract private sector initiative to accelerate employment-generating activities in the rural areas, the Indian government adopted a rural development strategy titled: Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) with the sole objective of stimulating high growth in rural economies. PURA envisages a combination of physical, electronic and knowledge resources at the local level in rural settlements, thus, selected a ring of 10 to 15 villages which are connected with high quality transportation as well as telecom system to attract industry and commerce to the ring, set up key education and health facilities around the ring and enabling interest connectivity for linking up with "far-flung areas" [14].

In 1995, after gaining political independence, Estonia, a country in the Northern Europe, adopted a National Agricultural Strategy for the development of its rural economy, with an important objective which is to promote the development of competitive enterprises, efficient structures and international trade relations. The strategy viewed the development of competitive enterprises, efficient market structures and international trade relations as necessary prerequisites to achieving the broader goal of improving the rural standards of living [15]. Estonian government had a vision of rural developing regional growth centers to empower local governments' financial and administrative capacities and improve channels for citizen to participate effectively in solving problems that are universal to them. What Estonian government is aiming at is the creation and promotion of growth poles by investing more on infrastructure and providing incentives for industries and services to locate in these poles.

In Nigeria, there is increasing interest in regional development in recent years. To mention but few of the studies that have been carried out in this area are: [16] in a study on the impact of spatial growth of Ibadan on its surrounding hinterland with a focus on resource processes and the environmental impact of the growth; [17] studied people-environment relationships at the rural-urban interface of Kano, Northern Nigeria and identified socio-economic and cultural factors as major forces shaping the process of peri-urban change in the city. The 2006 Federal Government of Nigeria's survey of re-development of the Lagos Megacity region [18] also made reference to the phenomenon of peri-urban settlements as main contributors to the growth and development of Lagos metropolis. In another study, [19] suggested sustainable strategies for strengthening Igbemo-Ekiti as a regional agro-pole with emphasis on its rice production while [20] explored the productivity and marketing of cassava for the regional development of Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria. Obviously, most of these studies have not sufficiently addressed the improvement of rural economies generally through a growth center with a view to promoting regional growth and development.

Ogbese is the research locale. It is a prominent rural growth center in food production and commercial activities in Akure North Local Government Area (ANLGA) of Ondo State, Nigeria. Ogbese is about 12km away from Akure (Ondo State Capital) which lies within latitude and longitude $7^o 30^1$ and $7^o 45^1$ North of the Equator and longitude $5^o 45^1$ and $6^o 00^1$ East of the Greenwich Meridian. Politically the ANLGA shares boundaries in the North with Ekiti State, in the South with Oke-Agunla, East with Uso and West with Bolorunduro. It covers a total land area of about 5 square kilometers. Ogbese ranks first (as the only major community in the area) with a population of 5396 out of the estimated 8635 for the entire Ogbese region which comprises Ogbese town and settlements such as the Elemo Camp, Benin Camp, Owode Camp, Araromi Camp and Lisa camp [21]. Ogbese, the growth pole

requires regional development policies that will diffuse growth into all other settlements in the study region.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was designed to combine primary survey of residents in the region with secondary information extracted from records of the state Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The research instrument used was a well-structured questionnaire which was designed to investigate 35 variables covering the physical, social and economic components of the study area. The variables were structured in question form and responses were sought in pre-coded alternatives given. The stability and consistency of the instrument used were tested using the 'split-half' method by dividing the questionnaire into parts based on odd-numbered and even-numbered questions. These were administered separately to a sample of respondents at the same time and scored accordingly. The two sets of scores gave a high correlation coefficient, thus, indicating high reliability of instrument. Five (5) fifth-year Urban and Regional Planning students of the Federal University of Technology, Akure who acted as research assistance and had earlier been tutored by the authors, administered the questionnaire through face-to-face contact with the respondents in the evening for four weeks between July and August, 2013. They were instructed to read and interpret the questions in Yoruba (the local language in Ondo State) in case the respondent could not speak English.

Ogbese region represents ward II of the twelve (12) political wards in Akure North Local Government Area. The ward which constitutes a well-defined Data Delineation Area (DDA) from which empirical data were collected, is a political ward demarcated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the State. The six (6) settlements in the ward constitute the sampling frame. The reconnaissance survey carried out in the study area showed that Ogbese has 120 dwelling units, while dwelling units in other villages/settlements which range from 10 to 20, sum up to seventy two (72). Questionnaires were administered to half of the entire dwellings (96) in the region by picking samples randomly in every two houses. The respondent picked in a dwelling unit is preferably a head of household who is of age 18 and above. The variables that were employed in analysis are respondent's sex, occupation, level of education, annual income, household size and goods produce as well as market types and industrial development. These variables have been selected because they form the structure of the economy of the rural region.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings on the socio-economic characteristics of people in the study area revealed that 65.4% were males while females constitute 34.6% of the regional population. About 23.6% were farmers, 24.2% traders, while artisans (who were self employed) rendering services like plumbing, auto mechanic, vulcanizing, carpentry etc made up 16.0%. Nearly 5.8% were civil servants working in government establishments and 12.4% engaged in lumbering activities while the remaining 18.0% were unemployed. Majority of those who were married fell within the age bracket 25-36 (48.5%), followed by 37-48 (21.2%) most of them engaging their families in farming activities (16.4%) while 12.4% made use of hired labor. As observed "labor cost component seems to account for the highest share of most production cost" [19].

Only 12.0% of the respondents had tertiary education ranging from National Certificate of Education (NCE) to Degree level; 53.3% stopped at secondary school level, 15.0% had

primary education while the remaining 19.7% were illiterate. Many of them were poor as 38.4% of the respondents earned below ₦10,000 per annum ($62.5), 22.7% between ₦10,001 – ₦30,000 ($62,5 – 187.5), 21.3% between ₦30,001 – ₦60,000 ($187.5 – 375.0) and 17.6% between ₦60,001 – ₦90,000 ($437.5 -562.5). As expected, most Nigerians are poor, hence characterized by low income, low status of job, absence of savings and constant struggle for survival [22,23].

The only major market in the region is located at Ogbese which is the growth centre. Ogbese contributes greatly to agricultural, commercial as well as industrial growth of Ondo State. This is due to the fertile soil for agricultural productivity which aids influx of people from neighboring towns to transact business in the area. Buyers and sellers within and outside the region come to the market to transact business. Even though a traditional market, it lacks some important market facilities like good road network, parking spaces, lock up and open stalls, warehouse, security office, toilet facilities etc. The major hindrance encountered by farmers in bringing their farm products to the market is poor transportation as 40.0% patronized the market by foot, 15.0% by motor cycles, and 10.0% by bicycles while the remaining 35.0% used commercial buses.

Only 12.0% of the respondents practiced mechanized farming on 20-22 hectares of land, 8.0% between 11-20 hectares, 15.0% between 5-10 hectares while 65.0% used below 5hectares of land. The farming practice by majority can still be regarded as peasant as it falls below 5 hectares [24]. In the opinion of [25], farmers particularly in sub-Saharan Africa are handicapped by lack of timely and sufficient access to inputs, credit and appropriate technology. Other challenges faced by these farmers included poor road condition, most especially during the raining season; lack of labor and government policies which do not have the interest of rural communities in their agenda, while the assistance received from government is meager to have major impact on their lives and businesses.

Analysis of data on the industrial activities in the region revealed an effective utilization of the forest resources in medium sized privately owned sawmill industries where primary wood processing were carried out. No industries that produce edible food substances, beverages and building materials. About 75.0% of the existing industries were privately owned and financed through owners' personal savings and cooperative societies with little grant from government. The industrial challenges include unfavorable government policies, inadequate infrastructural facilities like good roads, electricity and problem of accessing raw materials for their operations.

The locational advantage of Ogbese community, with abundance natural resources and growth potentials, present it as a regional pole endowed with natural resources such as fertile agricultural lands and water resources. The community is also endowed with infrastructural facilities than other agrarian communities with same fertile lands for agricultural practices. The regional communities produce agricultural products for the town's market and for consumption. Planning for a balanced regional growth and development, therefore, calls for concentration of more investment in the community with growth potentials, so that the pole will spread development outwardly to the less favored areas. This will create large scale benefits of economic agglomeration and diffuse development into areas at the periphery of the region. According to [26], the act of providing some basic necessities at the appropriate time and places is a stepping stone towards fostering development.

4. CONCLUSION

Rejuvenating the economies of Ogbese region Nigeria is likened to introduction of development input that form life support for the regional population. These include infrastructural facilities and utilities such as water supply, energy (electricity), sanitation and waste disposal facilities, irrigation systems and most especially good roads which are basic components and institutional arrangements that facilitate the flow of goods and services among individual households, firms and governmental entities. They are highly essential in any economy for steady growth and development to set in. Eventually industrial firms, commerce, banking, government administration, efficient marketing media for agricultural produce will be attracted to sustain existing development.

A farm settlement policy with well conceptualized and articulated program must be set up by government in this area to exploit the agricultural potentials. This will constitute a service or system which assists farmers through educational procedure for improving farming method and technique and increasing production effort and income to enhance standard of living. Such policy promises to diffuse information among people about new cultural practices, improved varieties, problem solving techniques and current research findings that will ensure the stability of food throughout the year. Majority of people with at least elementary school education will be drawn from within the region and trained in an agricultural institute, for better performance. Incentives for individual development must be provided by the Local Government. Agricultural bank should be established to give loans to farmers at a low interest rate. Establishment of Agro-allied industries should be encouraged to create job opportunities and sustainable use of natural resources in the region.

Since the region produces various kinds of wood, food and cash crops, there is need to support growth of Ogbese market (currently of regional status) with necessary facilities for the finished products and farm produce to enhance buying and selling. To achieve success of the above recommendations, implementation and monitoring is highly essential. The Community Development Unit of Akure North Local Government should implement and monitor the performance of the plans to ensure that the pole is positively influencing the socio-economic situations of the community and its catchment areas. This unit should regularly collect information and disseminate to the region and advise on efficient governance and management of the pole and sub-urbs to alleviate the poor conditions of the rural dwellers in the region.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors declare that there are no competing interests.

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