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The Journal from the onset strived to constitute and enrich members of the Editorial Board with a view to ensure critical assessment and quality-oriented production of knowledge through rigorous review of submissions of papers to ensure they meet the requisite standard. The journal also is very mindful of some of the challenges authors face especially the lengthy review process; this is avoided and equally very mindful of not compromising standard and quality.

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The Editor-in-Chief is very grateful for the laudable support and commitment from the members of the Editorial Board towards the growth and development of this journal for the benefit of humanity.

Assoc. Prof. Bashir Malam
The Editor-in-Chief,
August, 2025

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Nigeria's Rural Development Policy: Fostering Sustainable Cities and Communities

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Abstract
Sustainable Development Goal 11 emphasizes the need to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, and serves as the framework for this study. The idea of sustainable cities and communities has become a central focus of contemporary urban planning and governance. However, rapid urbanization and the persistence of unsustainable development policies have intensified the challenges of rural underdevelopment, particularly in Nigeria. Despite the crucial role of rural development in driving sustainable economic growth, successive administrations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have largely neglected policies aimed at strengthening rural communities. This neglect has produced multifaceted socio-economic and environmental challenges. This study examines the relationship between rural development policy and the concept of sustainable cities and communities as articulated by the United Nations. It further interrogates the interconnected challenges facing both rural and urban areas in their pursuit of development. Employing a qualitative research design, the study relies on thematic analysis of data and insights from purposively selected respondents. Findings reveal that rural development and sustainable cities are mutually reinforcing, underscoring the importance of integrated policy frameworks. The study recommends prioritizing strategies that strengthen rural–urban linkages, such as efficient transportation systems, sustainable agricultural and land use practices, investment in renewable energy, expanded access to education and healthcare, and the preservation of biodiversity and ecological balance.

Keywords: Rural, Policy, development, Sustainability, cities, communities

Introduction
Traditionally, rural development policies have primarily focused on rural areas, often neglecting the interdependence between rural and urban spaces. However, sustainable cities and communities require a holistic perspective that recognizes the vital role rural areas play in supporting urban centers. The United Nations (UN) projected that about 500 million people, comprising roughly 66% of the world population, will dwell in urban areas by 2030. Rural areas provide essential resources such as food, water, energy, and natural ecosystems, which are crucial for urban sustainability. Additionally, rural regions can serve as sources of innovation, employment opportunities, and cultural heritage, contributing to the overall well-

being of urban populations. The need to improve the standard of living for rural populations has become increasingly significant. Rural areas consist of small villages, communities, and settlements characterized by primary occupations, poor infrastructure, and low life expectancy.

Empirically, rural development policies, such as sustainable cities and communities, are designed plans aimed at promoting economic growth and social development in both rural and urban settlements, as outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG-11, focusing on sustainable urbanization, is crucial for many countries due to the high rates of urbanization and the anticipated future urban population (Koch & Krellenberg, 2020). Sustainable cities and communities strive to balance economic development, social well-being, and environmental protection by adopting holistic and integrated approaches in both rural and urban settlements. The goal is to create a high quality of life for residents while minimizing negative environmental impacts and promoting social equity. Ideally, rural development policies address the challenges of urbanization by ensuring that the facilities and opportunities available in urban centers are also accessible in rural areas. Therefore, developing rural areas is a step toward achieving sustainable cities and communities.

Problem Statement

Despite Nigeria's considerable economic growth, a significant disparity exists between urban and rural development, leading to challenges in achieving sustainable cities and communities. Rural areas in Nigeria are often characterized by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to essential services, low economic opportunities, and poor living standards. This gap hampers the overall national development and exacerbates urban-rural migration, putting additional strain on urban centers.

Nigeria's rural areas are crucial for the country's sustainability, providing essential resources such as food, water, and energy. However, the lack of a comprehensive and integrated rural development policy has resulted in the neglect of these regions, undermining their potential to contribute to the nation's economic growth and social development. This situation calls for a rural development policy that not only addresses the immediate needs of rural populations but also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG-11, which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Nigeria faces challenges in achieving SDG11, particularly urbanization, socioeconomic, and security challenges, but has made progress in achieving MDG7 (Abubakar & Aina, 2019).

The current rural development efforts are fragmented and often fail to consider the interdependence between rural and urban areas. A holistic approach is needed to create synergies between rural and urban development, ensuring that rural regions can support and enhance the sustainability of urban centers. This policy must promote infrastructure development, improve access to education and healthcare, create economic opportunities, and preserve cultural heritage, thereby fostering a higher quality of life in rural areas and contributing to the overall well-being of the nation. Without addressing these critical issues, Nigeria will continue to face challenges in achieving balanced and sustainable development. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop and implement a robust rural development policy that fosters sustainable cities and communities, ensuring equitable growth and development across the country.

Literature Review

Rural development is a multifaceted concept with varying definitions and approaches. Scholars and institutions have long debated its scope, often linking it to agricultural development. Abubakar (2022) posits that the philosophical underpinning of rural development is the belief that increasing agricultural production can alleviate poverty among rural populations. Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (2019) highlights that rural development has become a central goal of numerous assistance programs from both developing countries and multilateral institutions, aiming to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being in rural areas.

Moseley (2018) defines rural development as a process aimed at improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. This perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to services, and low economic opportunities. Hinzen (2019) expands this view by stressing the need for creating and expanding opportunities for rural individuals to realize their full potential through education and active participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

The concept of sustainable development, as defined by Hornby (2021), involves gradual growth and advancement through progressive changes. Umebali (2018) asserts that development is multi-dimensional, encompassing structural, attitudinal, and institutional changes, along with economic growth, social justice, and socio-economic transformation. These components are essential for creating a self-sustaining basis for development in rural areas.

Different scholars and institutions provide various definitions and conceptualizations of rural areas. Adisa (2019) notes that the term 'rural' lacks a conventional definition, with significant variations even within individual countries. For example, in Japan, rural areas are classified based on population size and density, while in Nigeria, the 2006 Census defines rural areas as those with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants (Adisa, 2018). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines a "predominantly rural region" as one where more than 50% of the population lives in rural communities with a population density of fewer than 150 people per square kilometer (Wikipedia). The World Bank (2017) historically viewed rural development as an economic issue, focusing on raising rural incomes through agricultural modernization. This perspective, prevalent in the 1970s, underscores the economic dimension of rural development. However, contemporary approaches recognize the need for a holistic view that integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects to achieve sustainable development.

In the context of Nigeria, rural development policies must address the significant disparities between urban and rural areas. These policies should aim to enhance infrastructure, improve access to education and healthcare, create economic opportunities, and preserve cultural heritage. By fostering synergies between rural and urban development, Nigeria can work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG-11), which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Nigeria's rural development policy should adopt a holistic approach that considers the interdependence between rural and urban areas. Such a policy would not only address the immediate needs of rural populations but also contribute to the overall sustainability and well-being of urban centers. This integrated approach is essential for fostering sustainable cities and communities, ensuring equitable growth and development across the country.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data sources that were critically analyzed and reviewed to establish performance indicators.

Rural Development Policy and the Concept of Sustainable Cities and Communities: A United Nations Perspective

The United Nations has long advocated for the development of sustainable cities and communities, recognizing their crucial role in achieving global sustainability. The concept of sustainable development, particularly in the context of rural areas, is integral to this vision. Rural development policy, which aims to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, intersects significantly with the United Nations' goals for sustainable cities and communities.

Rural Development Policy

Various authors, depending on their discipline, have defined rural development differently, but no universally accepted definition exists. According to Diejemaoh (1972), as cited in Nwachukwu (2009), rural development involves not only increasing the per capita income in rural areas but also improving the standard of living for the rural population. This standard of living is influenced by factors such as food and nutrition, health, education, housing, recreation, and security. The World Bank (1975), as cited in Eme (2009), defines rural development as a strategy aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of the rural poor. This strategy focuses on extending the benefits of development to those who seek a livelihood in rural areas, including small-scale farmers, tenants, and landlords.

Rural development policy encompasses a range of strategies and initiatives designed to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural communities. This policy aims to address issues such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, and economic underdevelopment. By focusing on these areas, rural development policies strive to create opportunities for economic growth and improve living standards in non-urban settings.

The components of rural development policy include the enhancement of agricultural productivity, the provision of basic infrastructure (such as roads, electricity, and water supply), and the promotion of local industries and entrepreneurship. These elements are essential for stimulating economic activity and reducing rural poverty. Furthermore, effective rural development policies emphasize participatory approaches, ensuring that local communities are involved in decision-making processes and benefit from development initiatives.

Sustainable Cities and Communities

Ballara (1991) suggested that sustainable development involves humanity's capacity to thrive by using renewable resources wisely, avoiding disruptions to ecosystems or overexploitation of natural resources, and refraining from actions that harm cultures or societies. Instead, it aims to allow these cultures and societies to reach their full potential. Sustainable development provides a framework for communities to adopt economic development strategies that benefit both the local environment and quality of life. It promotes the efficient use of resources, the creation of effective infrastructure, the enhancement of life quality, and the establishment of new businesses to support current and future generations. Thus, sustainable development must fulfil the needs of the present without compromising the ability

of future generations to meet their own needs (Uluocha, 2003; Nyagb, 2009, cited in Okazie & Baharuddin, 2013).

The United Nations has framed sustainable cities and communities within the broader context of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable." This goal emphasizes the importance of creating urban and rural environments that support the well-being of all residents while minimizing environmental impacts. Sustainable cities and communities are characterized by their ability to integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability. This involves:

i. **Environmental Sustainability**: Ensuring that development does not compromise the health of ecosystems or deplete natural resources. This includes promoting green infrastructure, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and enhancing biodiversity.
ii. **Social Inclusion**: Fostering inclusive communities where all individuals have access to essential services and opportunities for participation. This involves addressing inequalities and ensuring that vulnerable populations are supported.
iii. **Economic Resilience**: Building economies that can withstand shocks and adapt to changing conditions. This includes supporting local economies, diversifying economic activities, and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

The Convergence of Rural Development Policy and the concept of Sustainable Cities and Communities:

i. **Infrastructure Development**: Investments in rural infrastructure, such as roads and utilities, are crucial for connecting rural areas with urban centers. This connectivity facilitates access to markets, services, and opportunities, contributing to the overall sustainability of both rural and urban areas.
ii. **Sustainable Agriculture**: Rural development policies often focus on improving agricultural practices to enhance productivity while minimizing environmental impacts. Sustainable agriculture practices, such as organic farming and agroforestry, align with the UN's sustainability goals by promoting environmental stewardship and food security.
iii. **Local Economic Development**: Empowering rural communities through economic development initiatives is essential for reducing poverty and promoting resilience. This includes supporting small businesses, fostering entrepreneurship, and creating job opportunities that contribute to the economic vitality of rural areas.
iv. **Education and Healthcare**: Access to quality education and healthcare is fundamental to improving rural livelihoods and achieving sustainable development. Policies that enhance educational opportunities and healthcare services in rural areas support the broader goals of inclusivity and resilience.
v. **Community Participation**: Engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of development initiatives ensures that policies are tailored to their needs and priorities. This participatory approach aligns with the UN's emphasis on inclusivity and community empowerment.

Overview of Rural Agricultural Sustainable Development Policies in Nigeria

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, public policies on rural economic development have been structured under various programs, such as:

- The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) of 1972, which focused on producing high-yield seedlings, stems, and vegetables.

- The River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) of 1970, which aimed to support year-round farming through rural farm irrigation.
- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976.
- The Green Revolution (GR) of 1980, which sought to encourage self-reliance in food production and promote small-scale farming among rural households.

Other significant projects include:
- The Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) of 1975.
-The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) of 1986, which focused on generating employment for grassroots and graduates to reduce rural-urban migration and enhance the rural market economy.
- The Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW) of 1987, designed to empower women at the local level by mobilizing income-generating equipment and establishing cooperatives to enhance access to credit facilities.
- The National Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRI) of 1987, an initiative to improve rural areas through constructing feeder roads, silos, and providing rural and farming infrastructure.
- The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) of 1997.
- The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of 2000.
- The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001, which aimed to economically emancipate rural household farmers through the provision of subsidized farm inputs, among other initiatives (Sule, Alinno & Ikwegbe, 2013). These programs and their structures constituted parts of the policy instruments on sustainable rural economic development. Additionally, Nigeria implemented several national development plans, including:
- The 1st National Development Plan (1962-68).
- The 2nd National Development Plan (1970-74).
- The 3rd National Development Plan (1975-80).
- The 4th National Development Plan (1981-85).

These were apart from other national rolling plans of the Babangida military regime and the unimplemented late General Sani Abacha's Vision 2020, within which sustainable rural economic development programs were encapsulated and structured as specific projects (Oyebamiji & Adekola, 2008). Unfortunately, since 1999, when Nigeria reverted to civilian governance, there seems to be no direct and sustained public policy instruments focusing on rural economic development. Instead of domesticating its own rural development policy, Nigeria has relied on the now-defunct 8-point Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where rural economic development was inherently subsumed without a clear-cut direction. Consequently, Nigeria failed to achieve any of the 8-point MDGs by the end of 2015, leading to the United Nations' declaration of the 17-point Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on September 25, 2015, expected to be attained by all signatory countries by 2030 (The New York Times, 2015). Given these premises, it is evident that there were, and still are, perceived and existing public policy instruments on rural economic development in Nigeria. However, the dynamics of sustainability and performance indicators in rural Nigeria remain a development issue that needs to be addressed.

Blueprint for Rural Economic Sustainable Development

The rural economy in Nigeria is a sector that has been grossly neglected and under-invested in, despite the well-known fact that it holds the key to the nation’s sustainable rural economic development. Analyzing 55 years of sectoral performance appraisal of the Nigerian rural economy in relation to sustainability is neither informative nor educational if it lacks

development and performance indicators specific to the rural economy. Akintayo and Oghenekohwo (2004) argued that rural economic development encompasses actions, policies, programs, and projects that are economically driven, aiming to improve the standard of living in non-urban settings, neighborhoods, the countryside, and remote villages. Essentially, rural economic development activities are primarily related to agrarian activities, including food production, raw materials, rural marketing, and enterprise. Paudel (2007) noted that rural development actions aim at the social and economic transformation of these areas.

It is unlikely that there are no measures to assess the performance indicators of sustainable rural economic development in rural Nigeria; however, the sustainability of these policies remains questionable. Olayide, Ogunfowura, Essang and Idachaba (1981) stated that rural development policies aim to provide basic amenities, infrastructure, improved agricultural production, and extension services that generate employment for rural dwellers. Rural settings are often characterized by rural-urban migration, low social interaction, high illiteracy rates, high population density, poor infrastructure, and a vicious cycle of poverty (Umebali & Akubiulo, 2006). Public policy instruments are expected to address and reverse these negative conditions. Unfortunately, rural economic underdevelopment, exemplified by rural poverty, means that inhabitants, groups, communities, and rural societies frequently experience income levels below what is needed for a desirable minimum living standard and sustainable quality of life.

The United Nations has articulated 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), with the first being to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” (including rural settings), and the second to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030 (The New York Times, 2015). The attainment of the other goals is contingent upon achieving the first two. Since 1999, there appear to be no specific sustainable rural economic development policies in Nigeria to counteract poverty, hunger, low health status, unemployment, poor sanitation, inadequate water supply, and squalid housing, among other socio-economic challenges prevalent in rural areas. This situation is exacerbated by the 1999 constitution, which made local government areas appendages of state governments. Addressing these complex challenges is crucial for promoting rural economic growth. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate the evidence of rural economic development and performance indicators in Nigeria's rural settings.

Impact of Rural Underdevelopment

The non-implementation of rural development programs over the years in Nigeria has led to various severe issues, as noted by Adefolalu (2020) in Okhankhuele and Opafunso (2013, p.87). These issues include inaccessibility, isolation, underdevelopment, poverty, drabness, boredom, ignorance, depopulation, hunger, and numerous illnesses. Writers such as Udo (2020), Makinwa (2019), Adepoju (2020), Essang and Mabawonku (1974), cited in Okhankhuele and Opafunso (2013, p, 188), agree that migration from rural to urban areas reduces the rural population, negatively affecting agricultural output and hindering rural development. The migration of youths drains rural areas of their vibrant social life and energy, leaving behind the elderly, women, and children to labor on farms, which is the primary occupation. This has resulted in decreased agricultural production, adversely impacting the gross domestic product, development funds, income, and living standards of rural inhabitants, leading to underdevelopment and desertion of rural areas.

Rural areas in Nigeria lack socio-economic facilities such as piped water, electricity, motorable roads, industries, and high-paying jobs, subjecting them to significant deprivation

and a vicious cycle of poverty. Lykke (2019) highlighted that rural-urban migration often involves the highly educated and agile individuals, leaving behind the frail and mainly uneducated, who struggle to combat poverty. This migration exacerbates disparities in living standards between rural and urban residents. Ocheni, Atakpa, and Nwankwo (2021, p.132) observed that this trend has resulted in the underdevelopment of rural communities, prompting more qualified individuals to migrate to cities. Consequently, highly qualified professionals leave rural areas, compounding the challenge of development at the local level. Roberts (2019) noted that urban migration has also led to a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labor in rural communities. Rural workers often view themselves as temporary residents, awaiting better opportunities to migrate to cities for improved survival prospects.

Conclusion

Nigeria's rural development policy is at a crucial juncture, presenting both challenges and opportunities for fostering sustainable cities and communities. Recognizing the interdependence between rural and urban areas is essential for creating a cohesive and integrated development strategy. By adoptin a holistic approach that addresses economic, social, and environmental dimensions, Nigeria can ensure balanced and inclusive growth by improving infrastructure and connectivity, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, investing in education and healthcare, empowering local communities, and enhancing environmental sustainability, provide a comprehensive framework for action. These measures, supported by effective policy coordination and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, can significantly contribute to the overall well-being of the population.

The successful implementation of these recommendations will not only bridge the development gap between rural and urban areas but also enhance the quality of life for all Nigerians. By fostering sustainable cities and communities, Nigeria can achieve long-term development goals, ensuring that the benefits of progress are shared equitably across the nation. In conclusion, a well-crafted and effectively implemented rural development policy is critical for Nigeria's future. It will help transform rural areas into vibrant, sustainable communities that support the broader national agenda of growth and development. This integrated approach will pave the way for a prosperous and resilient Nigeria, where both rural and urban areas thrive together.

Recommendations

To effectively foster sustainable cities and communities through Nigeria's rural development policy, a multi-faceted approach is recommended, integrating economic, social, and environmental strategies. The following recommendations provide a comprehensive framework for achieving this goal:

1. The policy makers should not view rural and urban development in isolation. Instead, they should recognize the interdependencies between these areas. By integrating rural development into the broader urban sustainability agenda, the policy can ensure balanced growth and resource distribution.
2. The government needs to develop reliable and efficient transportation networks to connect rural areas with urban centers. This will facilitate the movement of goods and people, thereby boosting economic activities and access to services. More so, invest in digital infrastructure to provide rural areas with internet access. This will enhance education, healthcare, and business opportunities, bridging the digital divide between rural and urban areas.
3. The citizen should be encouraged to support Modern Farming Techniques. Through encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and modern farming

techniques. Provide training and resources to farmers to increase productivity and ensure environmental sustainability. In addition, the development of agricultural value chains to enhance the processing and marketing of agricultural products. This will increase income for rural farmers and contribute to food security.

4. The government should invest in building and upgrading schools in rural areas. Provide training for teachers and ensure that educational curricula are relevant to rural development needs and inclusive by strengthen healthcare infrastructure and services in rural areas. Implement mobile health clinics and telemedicine solutions to improve access to healthcare.
5. The stakeholders and government agencies should involve local communities in the planning and implementation of development projects. Ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed. This participatory approach will lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

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