Pro-poor Rural Growth of Agricultural Food through Rural Public Library Services for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

The economic challenges in Nigeria make it to suffer from food insecurity which is due to low agricultural production and productivity. Specific initiatives by the Federal Government on pro-poor rural agricultural food growth to achieve SDGs to end hunger have been established. Similar structures have also been established in all the 36 States of the Federation and, in some cases, at Local Government Area level. The government is also with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and a wide array of stakeholders. Use of pro-poor rural agricultural food growth through rural public library services to achieve the goal 1 and goal 2 targets of SDGs (end poverty and hunger) is particularly the focus of this study. This paper submits that public libraries have a great role to play in the implementation of SDGs by using emerging technology, collaborating on capacity building and going into partnership with critical stakeholders to make information available to poor rural farmers. Hence, materials from the key partners of the government on information about production forecasts, increased agricultural productivity, soil composition, markets for different crops, dairy and poultry farming, farm mechanics, land use, preservation of soil, rainfall and cultivation of different types of crops, effective extension service delivery and feedback on situation for improved research and policy implementation on agriculture should be acquired by public libraries, organized, preserved and made available to rural poor to facilitate pro-poor rural agricultural food growth for the attainment of SDGs in Nigeria.

Keywords: Pro-poor rural growth of agricultural food, Rural public library services, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria
Introduction

According to the National Voluntary Review on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (2017) poverty eradication remains one of the major focus areas for the government of Nigeria. Orelope-Adefulire (2017) notes that almost two-thirds (62.6%) of population in Nigeria is classified as poor and 27.9% of the population classified as multi-dimensionally poor.

This disturbing poverty profile according to the author is occasioned by the various economic crisis bedeviling the country. For instance, GDP growth has slowed from a high of 6.2% in 2014 to -1.5% in 2016, there has been general decline in gross foreign currency reserves since 2013, inflation has been on the rise, peaking at 18.7% during Q1 of 2017, there has been prevalence of wide divergence between the inter-bank and parallel market exchange rates, and 5.2 million people are currently in need of food assistance among others. Given this poverty profile trend, the Federal Government as well as the other two tiers of government namely the 36 states and the 774 local governments are aggressively pursuing strategies that will eliminate poverty in Nigeria.

To this ends, agriculture which is being regarded as the mainstay of many rural economies is being used to remedy some of these situations by ensuring food security, creating employment and supporting livelihoods, contributing significantly in export earnings and economic development of the nation. Similarly, integrated strategies that address the multiple factors that hamper its development, including insufficient infrastructure, skills, innovation, food processing and marketing, access to land, good working conditions, and that strengthen the voice of agricultural workers and employers, can help lift the majority of the Nigeria’s poor out of poverty (Paratian, 2011).
To begin with, the government is implementing Conditional Grants Scheme (CGS) and other pro-poor initiatives including the Cash Transfer Programme to support agricultural productivity. In addition, the School Feeding Initiative, the Women’s’ Entrepreneurship Development Scheme, as well as the various Small Business Growth Programmes among many others are being implemented, in order to bring a multi-sectoral approach to addressing poverty, hunger, unemployment and inequality while also ensuring that tens of millions of citizens are given the dignity promised in the pursuit of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (National Voluntary Review on Implementation of the SDGs, 2017).

It is noteworthy that the Federal Government uses the CGS in particular, to incentivise State and Local Governments to set aside and utilize 50% and 20% of the cost of selected SDGs-related projects in their annual budgets in order to accelerate progress in SDGs core areas. It is instructive to note that public libraries are both state and local government affairs. According to Fayose (2000), each state is responsible for establishing and maintaining public libraries by law.

The UNESCO public library manifesto cited by the author states that for public library to fulfil its purposes, it must be readily accessible and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment. It should be noted that the SDGs implementation framework as being adopted in Nigeria places emphasis on the principle of “leaving no one behind.” This aligns to the essence of mobile library services by public library to ensure that no one is left behind. Hence, the public library which has the mandate to reach out to rural people could enhance their access to information, which is an essential feature of food production, consumption and exchange for national development. It is against this backdrop that this paper
argues that pro-poor rural growth of agricultural food can be facilitated through rural public library services for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to Adejumo and Adejumo (2014), the economic challenge inherent in the Nigeria economy include issues such as poverty, low per capital income, inequitable distribution of home, low capital formation, inefficiency in the mobilization of resource, over- dependence on a singular commodity oil-as a major source of income, unemployment, inflation to mention a few. Other challenges faced by Nigeria in her efforts to meet the SDGs include, insecurity, social inequality, the absence of inclusive growth, gender inequality, limited funding as well as prevalent weak institutional capacities. Additionally, the country suffers from a huge infrastructural deficit in power, roads and rail networks and most importantly food insecurity which is due to low agricultural production and productivity.

Meanwhile, increasing food demand and population growth coupled with decreasing farm labour and dependence on limited environmental resources, make agriculture and food production issues a priority for the country. However, necessary support for intellectual efforts by public library in all the activities directed towards SDGs especially as they relate to the major investments into agriculture and rural development to facilitate pro-poor rural food production to combat hunger and poverty seem to be inadequate. It is for this reason that this paper seeks to set agenda for discussion on pro-poor rural growth of agricultural food through rural public library services for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria.

**Sustainable development goals through pro-poor rural agricultural food growth in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a Federal Republic with thirty-six (36) States, a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 9, 572 Political wards. The States and FCT
constitute the second tier of government while the LGAs constitute the third tier of government. Nigeria is located in the Western region of Africa with a total land area of 923,768 square kilometres sharing boundaries with the Republic of Niger to the north; Chad to the northeast; Cameroon in the east and southeast; Benin in the west and the Gulf of Guinea in the south. The country’s population was projected to be 190 million by end 2016 on the basis of an approved annual population growth rate of 3.2% from the 2006 national population census figure of 140 million. It is thus referred in the country’s MDGs Acceleration Framework of 2013 and the MDGs Report of the same year as the most populous country in Africa, including in the entire black race (National Voluntary Review on Implementation of the SDGs, 2017).

However, it has been observed that changes in the integrated approach to social, economic and environmental issues have not really facilitated the developmental goals in Nigeria (Adejumo and Adejumo, 2014). For instance, problems such as poverty, flooding, ethnicity, environmental pollution, corruption, attitudes and lopsided income distribution have been on the increase. A cursory look at the poverty profile in Nigeria showed that in 2004, Nigeria’s relative poverty measurement stood at 54.4%, but increased to 69% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

In view of these challenges, in the year 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by 189 member countries of the United Nations including Nigeria. This was with a view to fast track key developmental issues in Nigeria which include increasing the availability of basic life sustaining goods, raising the standard of people’s living as well as expanding the range of economic and social choices. A set of eight goals to be achieved by 2015 was adopted by the United Nations which were to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child
mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development (Amusan, Oyetola and Ogunmodede, 2012).

The MDGs which ended in 2015 were replaced by the SDGs. Unlike the MDGs, the SDG framework does not distinguish between "developed" and "developing" nations. Instead, the goals apply to all countries. According to (Adejumo and Adejumo, 2014) sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It emphasizes the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations. The broad goals are interrelated though each has its own targets to achieve. The total number of targets is 169. The SDGs cover a broad range of social and economic development issues. These include poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice. The SDGs are also known as "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" or 2030 Agenda in short (United Nations Official Document, 2014).

This agenda has 92 paragraphs. Paragraph 51 outlines the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the associated 169 targets. Each target in the SDGs has between 1 and 3 indicators used to measure progress toward reaching the targets. In total, there are 304 indicators that will measure compliance. Use of pro-poor rural agricultural food growth through rural public library services to achieve the goal 1 and goal 2 is particularly the focus of this study.

Goal 1: “No Poverty” is identified with word phrases “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.” Poverty is more than the lack of income or resources. People live in poverty if they
lack basic services such as healthcare and education. They also experience hunger, social discrimination and exclusion from decision making processes. Goal 2: “Zero hunger” is identified with word phrases "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".

Globally, 1 in 9 people are undernourished. To this ends, Agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40% of the global population. It is the largest source of income for poor rural households. Goal 2 targets state that by 2030 all countries should end hunger and end all forms of malnutrition (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). This would be accomplished by doubling agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition as well as ensuring sustainable food production systems and progressively improve land and soil quality. Other targets deal with maintaining genetic diversity of seeds, preventing trade restriction and distortions in world agricultural markets to limit extreme food price volatility and eliminating waste with help from the International Food Waste Coalition (Shenggen and Paul, 2014).

**Strategies for pro-rural poor growth of agricultural food production for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria**

As the threat of hunger and food insecurity looms in most part of Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has already embarked on a review as far back as 2006, the aim of which was to achieve a ‘zero hunger’ target and provide nutritious food to its teeming population. The prevalence of undernourishment reflected the fact that some 25.5% of the population was lacking adequate and improved nutrition. At the same time, severe food insecurity within the population based on the
Food Insecurity Experience Scale stood at 26.4% based on data from the National Bureau of Statistics. In addition, there was a stunting or delayed growth prevalence of 37.45% among children of kindergarten; 37.4% for school age and 15% severe cases of malnutrition for under 5 children. The Government's response was to embark on an aggressive growth enhancement scheme to improve the yield of agricultural commodities. Huge investments were made on the setting up of irrigation sites for farmers in order to provide the platform for cultivation of agricultural products all year round.

Overall, the trajectory to end hunger is on course, particularly given the strong collaboration among different stakeholders with the aim of improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agricultural development programmes. The review summarises the Goal 2 indicators against the 2015 baseline, a 2020 projected target and finally the 2030 SDG (Agenda 2030) target (Implementation of the SDGs: A National Voluntary Review 2017).

There are at least seven specific federal policy and programme drivers to promote pro-poor rural agricultural food growth as summarized below aimed at the realisation of the Goal two (2) targets:

i. The Green Alternative Agriculture Promotion Policy: To consolidate on the gains of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) that was launched by the previous administration and which recognizes agriculture as a business, the Green Alternative Agriculture Promotion Policy (2016-2020) was introduced to boost food production in the country. The objective is to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, reduce import, stimulate exports and create jobs. As incentives, the government will provide access to land, inputs, storage, processing, marketing and trade; including access to finance. Other areas covered by the Green Alternative are the promotion of agribusiness, investment
development, institutional setting and roles, youth and women, infrastructure, research and innovation as well as nutrition security.

ii. Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ): The government similarly channelled energy on attracting private sector agribusinesses under the Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ) platform. The concept is to set up processing plants in zones of high food production and to process commodities into food products. The SCPZ will link farmers in clusters to food manufacturing plants.

iii. Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk-Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL): The NIRSAL is an innovative mechanism targeted at de-risking lending to the agricultural sector. It is structured to provide the singular transformational and one bullet solution to breaking the seeming jinx in Nigeria’s agricultural lending and development addressing both the agricultural value chains and financing. Ultimately, NIRSAL will promote agricultural industrialization process through increased food production and processing.

iv. Rural Finance Institution Building Programme (RUFIN): The RUFIN is a loan agreement of US$27.2 million between the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The central objective of the programme is to develop and strengthen Micro Finance Banks (MFBs), other member-based Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), by enhancing the access of the rural populace to basic banking services. This is to expand and improve agricultural productivity and Micro-Small Rural Enterprises.

v. Anchor Borrowers’ Programme (ABP): The ABP is a Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) initiative designed to lift thousands of small farmers out of poverty and generate millions of jobs for unemployed Nigerians. It is to complement the Growth Enhancement Support
vi. Commercial Agricultural Credit Scheme (CACS): The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria, represented by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) established the Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme for promoting commercial agricultural enterprises in Nigeria. This is a sub-component of the Federal Government of Nigeria’s Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (CADP) and the fund is to complement other special initiatives of the Central Bank of Nigeria in providing concessionary funding for agriculture such as the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) which is mostly for small scale farmers, Interest Drawback scheme and Agricultural Credit Support scheme- among other.

vii. Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN): This is an innovative business plan competition aimed at job creation by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurial youths in the country to develop and execute business ideas. The YouWiN Programme is a collaborative effort of the Ministries of Finance, Communication Technology and Youth Development that launches an annual Business Plan Competition (BPC) for aspiring young entrepreneurs in Nigeria in line with the Federal Government’s drive to create more jobs for Nigerians.

There are also Sub-National Government Level Policies and Programmes for Goal 2 in which case most States in Nigeria set up skills acquisition centres to train the youth, women and those living with disability. The trainees are trained and provided with agricultural inputs like fertilizer, to boost their yield. Agricultural extension services and programmes such as intervention in agricultural processing for crops like rice, yam and cassava are also provided and
achieved through land development scheme and provision of farming equipment. Similarly, the Conditional Cash Transfer is extended to extremely poor families in order to address the hunger menace. In addition, extensive support is also given to agricultural based cooperative societies (Orelope-Adefulire, 2017).

Although, by this Nigeria has clearly defined her path to the SDGs, but a lot of support will be needed in her pursuit of the SDGs, especially in the areas of resource mobilisation, technology transfer and continuous capacity development for reliable data collection, processing as well as putting in place institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs indicators on a timely basis (Orelope-Adefulire, 2017). In addition, to achieve the SDGs, creating and maintaining smart and effective partnerships founded on the undoubted patriotism and goodwill of the entire Nigerian citizenry, alongside the moral and in kind support from the global fraternity of nations will be critical.

According to Adejumo and Adejuma (2014), The ‘plan of implementation of the world summit on Sustainable Development’ listed about 170 issues as they affect sustainable development, with one of the major issues listed as follows: Access to quality health care services by rural and urban for all person; good education for all children especially primary schooling and all levels of schooling; combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, floods; land and natural resource management; increase access to clean driving water and adequate sanitation to improve and protect human health and environment; transfer basic sustainable agricultural techniques and knowledge including natural resource management to small and medium scale for mores, fishes and the rural poor in developing countries.
In the light of this, economic development should involve achieving a balance in all sectors of the economy in the process of production of goods and services be it finance, manufacturing, health, education and more importantly agriculture to facilitate achievement of SDGs in Nigeria.

**Role of rural public library services in pro-poor rural growth of agricultural food production for the attainment of sustainable development goals in Nigeria**

Libraries can take the pioneer role as an efficient vehicle for acquiring, organizing and making information available. Public libraries especially, are an integral part of any community, regardless of size. The development of any rural community is a positive indicator for the development of a nation. Information dissemination via rural public library therefore, is an essential ingredient for the development of the rural community (Sultana, 2014).

Dent, Goodman and Kevane (2014) state that one of the objectives of rural public library is to help the poor rural farmer increase productivity by providing information about such topics as soil composition, markets for different crops, dairy and poultry farming, farm mechanics, land use, preservation of soil, rainfall and cultivation of different types of crops such as coffee and tea. Rural public library and information centres could play a significant role in this direction by providing information and communication services to the rural people (Hoq, 2015). However, the federal, state and local governments have responsibility to better the lives of rural people by reaching the rural communities through effective rural public services (Ebiwololate, 2010).

Specific initiatives by the Federal Government on pro-poor rural agricultural food growth to achieve SDGs to end hunger and poverty include: The Green Alternative Agriculture Promotion Policy Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ); Rural Finance Institution Building Programme (RUFIN); Anchor Borrowers’ Programme (ABP); Commercial Agricultural Credit
To successfully implement these initiatives, an Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs has been established and operational guidelines for the same developed in order to guide the coordinated engagement with Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Similar structures have been established in all the 36 States of the Federation and, in some cases, at Local Government Area level.

The government is also with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and a wide array of stakeholders that included line Ministries, Civil Society Organizations; organized Private Sector, the Academia; Development Partners; youth groups; women’s organizations; persons with disabilities as well as Media Organizations (Implementation of the SDGs: A National Voluntary Review 2017).

According to Jaiyesimi (2016) the UN’s categorisation of means of implementation of the SDGs includes finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy coherence, partnerships, and, finally, data monitoring and accountability. Rural public library have great role to play in the implementation of SDGs by using some of these aspects such as emerging technology, collaborating on capacity building and going into partnership with the critical stakeholders. Nwalo (2000) opines that libraries are information agencies. They draw their strength from publications emanating from individuals, organizations, local and international bodies. Certain agencies like the ministry of information, the mass media (the press) and special units of the ministries of agriculture and health, including others strive, like the library, to provide information for the people to enrich their personal lives and enlighten them on good citizenship.
The library by its roles in the society, is therefore, strongly related to other agencies in the society. In essence, their roles are complementary.

For example, library and the mass media share the same tasks and lines of activity and in some countries come under the same programme and plans for the development of the national economy. Similarly, to inform the public especially the rural poor on government activities and initiatives on agricultural productivity, the ministries of information and other stakeholders print or publish materials like books, posters, almanacs, calendars, pamphlets, monographs and so on. They also take up space in the newspapers and magazines and air time on radio and television. Information disseminated by the media is soft and could lapse within a very short time. Other times, people who are interested in specific items of information provided by the media are unable to get their information because radio and television broadcasts are made when one is not close to a radio or television receiver. The same applies to newspapers and magazines. Any edition missed for whatever reason is information missed. Such opportunities for information lost may never be made up for many people (Nwalo, 2000).

However, media information is either, acquired or recorded by libraries, organized and made available for use by libraries. Likewise, materials from the key partners of the government on information about production forecasts, increased agricultural productivity, effective extension service delivery and feedback on situation for improved research and policy implementation, could be acquired by public libraries, organized, preserved and made available to rural poor. They are also important reference materials used by library staff to answer user queries on diverse issues on agricultural productivity. Libraries are therefore to work hand in hand with the, ministries, departments, agencies and other partners in informing the public on
government programmes and other important initiatives that can facilitate pro-poor rural agricultural food growth for the achievement of SDGs.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Public libraries in Nigeria can take the pioneer role as an efficient vehicle for acquiring, organizing and making information available to help the poor rural farmers increase productivity. More importantly, public libraries have a great role to play in the implementation of SDGs by using emerging technology, collaborating on capacity building and going into partnership with the critical stakeholders to make needed information available to poor rural farmers. Hence, materials from the key partners of the government on information about production forecasts, increased agricultural productivity, soil composition, markets for different crops, dairy and poultry farming, farm mechanics, land use, preservation of soil, rainfall and cultivation of different types of crops, effective extension service delivery and feedback on situation for improved research and policy implementation on agriculture should be acquired by public libraries, organized, preserved and made available to rural poor to facilitate pro-poor rural agricultural food growth for the attainment of SDGs in Nigeria.

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