

The Political Economy of River Basin and Rural Development Authority in Nigeria: A Retrospective Case Study of Owena-River Basin and Rural Development Authority (ORBRDA)

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ABSTRACT We, in this paper, attempted to put into a clearer perspective the relational reciprocity between the centers of public policy making and its ecology. We specifically assessed the relevance of River Basin Authority to Nigerian Economic development and sustenance of increased food production. Using a retrospective analytical method, we zeroed in, on the Owena River Basin and Rural Development Authority and, its operational management at that point in time. In the process, we brought into focus (even though at a later date) the catastrophes of undue politicization of important policies or programmes like the River Basin Authority in a given polity like Nigeria. Consequent on this, we concluded that for this programme and those of its calibre to succeed in a country like Nigeria they should be eclipsed from undue political interference.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major crises facing under-developed countries is that of food production. Throughout the underdeveloped countries the major concern has been how to produce enough food to support the teeming population. This concern has been expressed in various national governments, and international organizations pronouncements, policies and programmes. In Nigeria the concern has been expressed in various government policies and programmes such as farm settlements, the Green Revolution (GR) Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NADPP), and the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAS).

The creation of the RBRDAS was motivated by the desire on the part of the Nigerian Federal Government to facilitate and accelerate the production of food crops and mobilize the rural agricultural population throughout the country toward increased food production.

Thus, the RBRDAS were specifically designed and saddled with the responsibility of solving the problems of declining agricultural productivity and; for encouraging the diffusion of agricultural innovation to the rural areas in ways conducive to increased agricultural productivity and improved living standard of the rural dwellers.

Though, the creation of the RBRDAS and

other programmes like operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Revolution (GR) derived from genuine beliefs by governments that political independence can hardly exist if the country has to depend on external sources for the supply of a significant proportion of basic food (FDI). It is our contention that all such efforts or programmes, most especially the RBRDAS have failed to actually attain the desired objectives in Nigeria. The failure of the RBRDAS is due to unnecessary political interference and managerial problems resulting from socio-economic cleavages which have permeated the nations socio-political, economic and cultural institutions.

In other words, the failure of the RBRDAS to achieve its aims and objectives can be mainly attributed to the factors of political environment and actions of political actors which have been incompatible with the managerial and organization goals of the authority since its establishment.

This being the case, the purpose of our paper is to examine the political factors and how they have contributed to the failure of RBRDAS. Specifically we shall focus on the Owena-River Basin as a component of the Benin-Owena River Basin and Rural Development Authority as it existed between 1984 and 1986 with a due cognizance where necessary of few preceding years. We believe that Owena component of the BORBRDA provides a useful ground for

examining the role of political environment in the management of the RBRDAS as an economic organization in Nigeria.

THE RBRDAS

As we noted earlier the creation of RBRDAS was seen by government as one of the techniques of boosting agricultural food production and attaining Nigerian self-sufficiency in domestic food production. Prior to independence, her self-sufficiency gradually disappeared due mostly to sectoral imbalance in the economy created by the oil boom.

The "oil boom" with its sudden and unexpected wealth seriously undermined the status of agricultural production and. Regrettably, succeeded in creating utter neglect for and relegation of agriculture to the background (MANR, 1966). The pre-occupation with the accumulation of petrol Naira created a "false wealth situations (Ibid) to the detriment of agriculture and policies dealing with it: Unfortunately, the false wealth situation created serious structural imbalance in subsectoral growth, (and) unfortunately agriculture was left relatively underdeveloped, (and) could not make its full traditional contribution to Nigerian economic development process (Ibid).

Thus, by 1976 the declining rate of agriculture which was about 7.8% between 1970 and 1974 had reached an intolerable level of 1% (Bamisyaye, 1985). This embarrassing decline and its concomitant food crisis led to the Nigerian federal governments decision prior to the introduction of OFN in 1976 that:

The only way out of this situation (starvation and erosion of political independence) is for Nigerians to feed themselves rather than depend on the importation of food (FMI, 1982).

The desire to avert national starvation and erosion of political independence formed part of the antecedent rationale for the creation of RBRDAS. For example, the decree that established the Basins charged them to enhance:

- i. increase in production of food and other raw materials to meet the country's growing population and expanding industries and to attain self-sufficiency in food production.
- ii. the expansion of employment opportunities at the rural levels and the need to develop underground water domestic use (FRN, Gazette, 1976).

In 1976 the Obasanjo regime promulgated the River Basin and Development authorities Decree, creating eleven Basin Authorities distributed all over the country.

According to the Decree

There shall be continued in being in accordance with provisions of this decree, the eleven bodies corporations known by the following names, that is to say:

- (a) The Sokoto –Rima River Basin Development Authority;
- (b) The Hadejia Jama're River Basin Development Authority;
- (c) The Chad Basin Development Authority;
- (d) The Upper Benue River Basin Development Authority;
- (e) The Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority;
- (f) The Cross River Basin Development Authority;
- (g) The Anambra River Basin Development Authority;
- (h) The River Niger Basin Development Authority;
- (i) The Ogun-Osun River Basin Development Authority;
- (j) Benin-Owena River Basin Development Authority;
- (k) The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority; (RBDA Decree 87, 1979).

The River Basin Authorities were charged with the following functions:

- (a) to undertake comprehensive development of both surface and under ground water resources for multi-purpose use;
- (b) to provide water from reservoirs and lakes under the control of the Authority for irrigation purposes to farmers and recognized association as well as for urban water supply Authority concerned;
- (c) the control of pollution in rivers, lakes, lagoons, and creeks in Authority's area in accordance with nationally laid standards;
- (d) to resettle persons affected by the works and schemes specified under special resettlement schemes;
- (e) to develop fishes and improve navigation on the rivers, lakes, reservoirs, lagoons and creeks in the authority's area;

- (h) to undertake the mechanical clearing and cultivation of land for the production of crops and livestock etc.
- (i) to undertake large-scale multiplication of improved seeds, live stock and tree seedlings for distribution to farmers and for afforestation schemes;
- (j) to process crops, livestock products and fish produced by farmers in the authority's area in partnership with state agencies and any other person;
- (k) to assist the state and local governments in the implementation of rural development works (construction of small dams, provision of power for rural electrification schemes, establishment of grazing reserves, training of staff) in the Authority's areas (Ibid).

In 1984 under the Buhari regime the eleven River Basin Authorities metamorphosed into eighteen Authorities and were redesignated as "River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (ORBDAS) (FFSDSRP) with one serving the purpose of each state and one for Ogun and Lagos State combined.

It was as a result of this metamorphosis that ORBRDA gained autonomy for independent existence in 1984 when it was excised from the old Benin-Owena River Basin and Development Authority (BORBDA) to cater exclusively for Ondo State (ORBRDA, 1987). The ORBRDA came into force as an autonomous body in July 1984 (Ibid).

THE POLITICS AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ORBRDA

In order to understand the impact of political environment on the management of the ORBRDA it is necessary to provide a conceptual elucidation of politics and management.

Politics can be defined in several ways depending on the author's political persuasion and orientation. The orthodox conceptions of politics range from David Easton's authoritative allocations of scarce societal values" (Easton, 1965), Lasswell's "who gets what, when, where and how" (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950) Khan's "activities which revolve around the decision making organs of the state involving the concept of power, authority, command and control" (Khan et al., 1972) to its conception by Merkl as the "process at work everywhere (Merkl,

1976). and Dahl's process that" requires the shaping and sharing of power (Dahl, 1976), as well as Apter's "learning of power" (Apter, 1977).

In Nigeria, practical politics, that is, the struggle for the control of the institutions of the state tends to assume a new dimension different from what obtains in developed economy. The developed economies that we have in mind are those of the United States of America, Canada, West Germany, Britain etc. where economic power usually determine individual's political influence. The reason for this is that access to and control of the institution(s) of the state is a prerequisite for personal accumulation of wealth. This is why establishments like the ORBRDA, are over politicized and rendered ineffective in dealing with societal problems for which they have been established.

The concept of management refer to the process of achieving predetermined objectives through others. It is the "cement that binds together all parts of an organization, moving it towards a goal (Silver, 1981). In whatever ramification, the purpose of management is to coordinate many divergent resources human and materials alike. Hence the need for effective management is of paramount importance in any organization.

It is our view that the ORBRDA as an organization, inspite of the laudable and optimistic aims preceding its establishment has not been truly allowed to function within the parameters of the principles of effective management due to interference culminating from the lack of understanding of the nature of bureaucracy by self-seeking political actors. This can be ascertained by examining the quality of leadership of the ORBRDA, its organizational structure, activities and governments policy towards the organization.

In order to effect the authorities performance of its functions, section 5 and subsection 1 of the ORBRDAS Decree, gave the needed and unquestionable authority to the ORBRDAS:

Each authority shall have power to do anything which in its opinion is calculated to facilitate the carrying out of its functions. (ORBRDA Decree, 1981)

To make sure that the authorities have effective leadership and organizational structure, section 2 subsection 1 (i – iv) of the enabling Decree specified leadership for the

Table 1: Owena-river basin rural development authority staff list summary as at 31st december 1986

Department	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
General Manager's Office and Adm.	5	11	6	7	3	3	5	1	2	1	-	2	-	1	1	1	49
Finance	-	-	3	5	-	3	-	5	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	19
Audit	19	20	3	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Security	-	2	1	3	-	3	5	12	5	2	-	2	1	-	-	-	42
Agriculture	-	-	-	3	-	3	-	3	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	36
Planning	8	4	30	36	10	4	2	3	7	2	-	-1	-	1	2	-	11
Engineering	-	5	2	-	-	2	2	2	3	2	-	1	-	-	1	-	20
Live Stock/Fisheries	6	3	8	1	2	-	-	3	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	24
Fishery Terminal																	
Total	38	45	53	55	15	20	14	28	19	09	-	8	1	3	5	1	314

Sources: ORBRDA 1986 Annual Report (June 1987) p. 26

administrative set up of the Authority as well as independent membership of the management Board (Ibid). This Board which is to be usually headed by a General Manager is expected to formulate broad policies, guidelines and programmes which are in consonance with the governments objectives vis-à-vis the ORBRDA.

Organizationally, the ORBRDA was divided into five main division: Administration and Finance, Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries, Engineering and Planning. Each division was headed by an Assistant General Manager (ORBDA Report, 1981). This was aimed at creating effective functioning of the five divisions and for "ease of administration (ORBRDA, 1981op cit). The staff strength of ORBRDA was also made to reflect the departmentalization as indicated in table 1

The perennial problem of the ORBDA is that majority of the top management are professionally incompetent to provide effective

Table 2: Orbrda plan expenditure for 1985

S.No		'000(N)	
1.	Salaries and wages	1,000	20.4
2.	Overhead Charges	720	14.7
3.	Project design for 5 th plan	250	5.1
4.	Rescheduling payment of Debts	240	4.5
5.	Farmer based projects (crops)	400	8.5
6.	Scientific laboratory (including soil and H2O) analysis	20	0.4
7.	Forestry development	20	0.4
8.	Igbokoda Coastal fishery Terminal	50	1.0
9.	Usi-Ekiti Fish Farm	110	0.2
10.	Igede Fish Farm	50	1.0
11.	Ugbonla Sees Fish Farm	70	1.4
12.	Ikere Poultry	250	5.1
13.	Igbokoda Zon Broiler Production	90	1.8
14.	Co-operative poultry Projects	10	0.2
15.	Ikun Dairy Project	100	2.0
16.	Rural Agro-Industrial Projects	30	0.6
17.	Community Development Projects	10	0.2
18.	Rural H2O Scheme (Brochole Projects)	170	3.5
19.	Owena Dam Project	50	1.0
20.	Equipment and Machinery (including workshop equipment)	150	3.1
21.	Vehicles	120	2.4
22.	Buildings (Workshop, office & Staff houses)	500	10.2
23.	Roads (to Ikun Dairy farm)	100	2.0
24.	Canalization / Dredging	400	8.2
25.	Contingencies	100	2.0
Total 4,910		100.0	

Source: ORBRDA Half Yearly Report (January – June 1985) p.2.

leadership envisaged by the enabling Decree. The end result is that problems are improperly implemented for the sake of political expediency and not on the basis of economic rationalizations. This is particularly evident in the creation of more than 20 grandiose projects scattered all over the state. Our examination of the projects, majority of which have been abandoned shows that they were white elephant projects.

As regards the organizational structure, the creation of the five departments – administration and finance agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, engineering and planning and the existence for five assistant General Managers led to unnecessary duplication of functions, waste of funds and overstaffing. The problem of duplication of functions which led to overstaffing was such that in 1985. Salaries and wages (excluding staff housing) gulped 20.4 percent of the total expenditure of the ORBRDA while important projects like research, forestry development, cooperative poultry projects rural agro-industrial project, community development projects and the Owena Dam Project were allocated 0.4 percent, 0.4 per cent, 0.6 per cent, 0.2 per cent and 1.0 per cent respectively (see table II).

Similarly, a review of the financial allocation to the five departments in 1985 shows that two departments: Administration and planning took almost N2 million (about 40 per cent) of the total N4 million allocation to the five departments. Agriculture, the purpose for which the Authorities were created received about No. 4 million (about 10 percent) see table III.

In addition to the above, the management of ORBRDA has been subjected to unnecessary political interference which has made it quite impossible for the Authority to achieve some of

its goals as attested it by the abandonment of its projects (ORBRDA, 1986). For example, constructions have stopped on Ayede-Ekiti Cooperative Poultry Projects; Aramoko Senatorial Poultry projects; Otun-Ekiti Senatorial project; Usi-Ekiti and Igede – Ekiti fish farms; Owo senatorial poultry; Ijare senatorial poultry. Some of these projects have been sold while the others have been put up for sale (Ibid).

Another political factor that affected the performance of the ORBRDA has been inconsistent government policy towards the authorities. A good example of this was the decision of the Buhari administration to increase the Authorities into eighteen in 1984. Although the increase was aimed at decentralizing the authorities and bringing her functions and activities closer to the rural populace, it further politicized the Authorities as their sitting were synonymized with the sharing of political spoils through the over politicized national patronage system and principal of federal character. This in our view disregards the need for effective, rationale management and improve organizational techniques which could have made the authorities live up to the rationale for creating them.

Moreover, the increase of the authorities into eighteen which led to the severance of the ORBRDA was not effected in law. There was no Decree by the Buhari government to give legal backing to the split. This almost paralysed the activities of the newly created authorities like ORBRDA, as directors and managers had to rely on conflicting directives from the supervisory ministry.

While the ORBRDA was still going through organizational structuring to adjust to its autonomous status the Babangida administration that succeeded Buhari invalidated the split and merged the eighteen authorities into the original eleven. The government also stripped the authorities into the original eleven. The government also stripped the authorities of their all embracing functions except the provision of water resources. This led to another stalemate in the activities of the ORBRDA and ushered in another process of reorganization.

Added to these problems is the fact that the ORBRDA is one of the most financially mis-managed authorities in the country, especially between 1979 and 1984 and this had a management effect on its ORBRDA Component. The extent of the financial mismanagement of the

Table 3: A summary of financial allocation on Departmental basis In 1985

S.No.	Department	Allocation in	Percentage
1.	Finance and Administration	1,960,000	39.92
2.	Planning	250,000	5.1
3.	Livestock, fisheries and forestry	650,000	13.24
4.	Engineering & Rural Develop	1,530,000	31.16
5.	Agriculture	420,000	9.55

Source: Half Year Report of Activities of ORBRDA (January–June 1985) p. 2

ORBRDA component cannot be easily determined. The public perception of corruption in the organization was such that government was forced to set up a visitation panel to look into the activities of the authority. What is saddening is that government has failed to make its findings public. Efforts made by the researchers to obtain the report were rebuffed by both present and past managers of the authority. However, reliable sources in government and in the authority informed the researchers that the level of corrupt practices in the authority was such that the revelation of the visitation panel report will cause political damage to highly placed individuals within and outside Ondo State.

Another important factor that inhibited the performance of the ORBRDA was the hostile attitudes of the defunct UPN controlled government toward the Authority. This is implicitly discernible from refusal of the UPN controlled state government to give land to ORBRDA. This was done by the UPN government through the negative interpretation of section (5) subsection (2) of the RBRDAs decree (1979) which specified that any acquisition of land by the RBRDAs (ORBRDA inclusive) must be approved by the hosting state government (RBDA Decree op cit). The then state government used this clause to deny approval of lands to the BORBRDA and consequently stifled the independent existence of ORBRDA. This addition to non-availability of conducive political environment led to the situation whereby there is nothing significant to show for the existence

of the ORBRDA in Ondo State since its creation. In the parts of the State where the Authority established projects they were improperly conceived, politically motivated and badly executed. As a result many of the projects were abandoned. This is shown in table IV and V.

In some other places like Eporo, Ekiti, Ita-Ogbolu, and Ayede-Ogbose where structures for projects were established they were not utilized. But the structures were used by government to score political advantage by deceiving the citizens in the area that government establishment are cited in their areas.

It is (very) unfortunate that the authority (ORBRDA). Operating in a very rich agricultural region such as Ondo State could not make its impact felt by the people of the state. What the authority had succeeded in doing was to erect big and conspicuous signboards and maintain monumental farmlands having no crops on them (Esho, 1987).

The 1984 excision of the ORBRDA as a full fledged authority from ORBRDA has not been able to change the fortune of the ORBRDA when compared with other ORBRDAs in other parts of the country. This is in spite of the fact that the ORBRDA is located in an agricultural and naturally endowed state with:

relative physical and technical advantage for growing certain crops and raising specific live stock. Right from the coastal riverine areas of the South through the Mangrove Swamp to the evergreen rain forest and the derived Savannah in the North, there is hardly a part that cannot be suitably used for one form of agricultural

Table 4: Orbrda livestock projects abandoned/offered for sale

S.No.	Location	Type F Project	Size	Remarks
1.	Ayede-Ekiti	Coop. Poultry Project	4,000 layers	Production stopped infrastructure offered for sale
2.	Aremoko-Ekiti	Senatorial Poultry project	5,000 layers 10,000 broilers	Construction, abandoned to be sold
3.	Otun-Ekiti	-do-	-do-	-do-
4.	Eporo-Ekiti	Coop. Poultry	5,000 layers	Not functional
5.	Ita-Ogbolu	Coop. Poultry	1,500 layers	Not functional
6.	Ayede-Ogbose	-do-	1,000 layers	-do-
7.	Owo	Senatorial Poultry	10,000 layers	Construction stopped
8.	Asewele	Coop. Poultry	4,000 layers	No more production
9.	Ijare	Senatorial Poultry	5,000L 10,000B	Construction abandoned to be sold
10.	Igbokoda	Broiler Farm	10,000	Production stopped
11.	Usi-Ekiti	Fish Farm	-	Construction stopped
12.	Igbede-Ekiti	-do-	-	-do-

Source: ORBRDA: Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry Projects on sub-basin by sub-basin April, 1986, p. 2, p. 3

enterprises or another (MANR, op cit).

As a result of the extraneous political factors, the ORBRDA as a component of BORBRDA failed to take advantage of the resourcefulness of the State. These extraneous political factors were particularly more pronounced between 1979 and 1983. This period could be regarded as the darkest period of existence for the ORBRDA in Ondo State because it was a period marked by poor governmental relations between the federal and Ondo State government due to political cleavage between the defunct NPN Federal Government and the defunct UPN controlled Government of Ondo State

The proscribed Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), which controlled the government of Ondo State abhorred all federal government policies (ORBRDA inclusive) (Esho, op cit)

This undue politicking has prevented the ORBRDA from being successfully used for the promotion of agricultural developments as well as other aspects of socio-economic developments. Such lack of good intergovernmental relations cannot but negatively affect an establishment like ORBRDA because of the politics of confrontation and rivalry between the defunct UPN and defunct NPN, the citizens of Ondo State were denied the benefits of the RBRDAS (Ibid). Instead of attracting federal resources to Ondo State for the benefits of the citizens, the political orientation of the then UPN controlled government in Ondo State between 1979 and 1983 stifled the activities of the Authority in the State.

This is one of the major factor responsible for the failure of the RBRDA in Ondo State Although it has been argued in some quarters that the failure of RBRDA in the State was due to lack of lack of propaganda machinery by the RBRDA to sell its programme to the people of Ondo State (Ibid). It is our contention that no matter the sophistication of the propaganda machinery during the 1979-83 period, the Authority. The ORBRDA was not seen by UPN as a federal agency but as an NPN agency set up to destabilize Ondo State. This is quite unfortunate for the development of the State because rather than seeing the authority as an economic agency specifically created for agricultural production, it was perceived otherwise. Thus, its impact on the people of Ondo State has been very negligible despite the enormous facilities at its disposal.

The detrimental effects of the politicization

of ORBRDA created conditions that made it possible for financial misappropriation and embezzlement by (party) supporters of NPN – controlled federal government to take place. In other to make an in – road in an opposing State like Ondo State NPN party resulted to giving out money to river basin authorities. Such money was infact misappropriated by party supporters who were appointed to serve on the boards of these authorities (Ibid).

As a result of this political incursion the RBRDAS particularly ORBRDA became “money making avenues for unscrupulous Nigerians” (Ibid).

The (RBRDAS) became conduit pipes for siphoning the Nations wealth to countries across the sea. Millions of Naira made available for projects to be handled by the authorities were diverted to party and individual coffers (Ibid).

Due to these problems “no projects or programmes meant to be carried out in Ondo State by the authority saw the light of the day”(Ibid). Those that saw the light of day were not effectively prosecuted leading to their eventual abandonment because the (defunct) NPN in reacting to the overt political hostility of the defunct UPN chose to see the politicization of the activities of the authority as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. In other words, the defunct NPN saw the existence of the RBRDA in Ondo State as a means of getting money for party faithful rather than seeing it as a mechanism for effecting increased food production.

In 1986 the Babangida administration reverted the RBRDAS to the original eleven. As a result of this the ORBRDA lost its autonomy and became a component of the BORBDA. In addition to this, the activities of RBRDAS was limited to the provision of water resources only. This set in another round of reorganization which has somewhat paralysed the activities of the ORBRDA. The above problems combined, are responsible for the management problems which continue to plague the organization since its inception.

CONCLUSION

Our basic argument in this paper is that the factors of political environment are responsible for the failure of ORBRDA both as a component of as incompetent management staff, inconsistent

government policies, the organisational structure of the ORBRDA, and most importantly the rivalry and hostility between the defunct UPN and defunct NPN in Ondo State between 1979-1983.

In order to ensure the success of RBRDA in Ondo State political interference of any kind vis-à-vis its management must be discouraged and stopped forth with. Anything other than this would be very detrimental to the aims and objectives of the organization.

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