Needs and Sustainable Community Development in Abia State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Given the urge to grow all sectors of the Nigerian economy to achieve the laudable objectives of Vision:20:20:20, this paper explores both the desirability and feasibility of extending the dictates of NEEDS to the Community level in Abia State through the instrumentality of ACEEDS as a development plan of action that is community-based, collaboratively-participatory and rural-focused. The paper posits that ACEEDS is not only feasible but imperative if development is to be taken all the way to the grassroots in Abia State and Nigeria in general.

1.0 INTRODUCTION.
One of the challenges of development in developing societies is the absence of grassroots-conceived development approach. The United Nations agenda 21 calls for sustainable development that is locally planned and participatory in design and implementation. There is no gainsaying the fact that there has been uneven and lop-sided development between urban and rural areas in many countries of the world today. This is essentially because most development plans in these countries are geared towards addressing the urban settings. Nigeria is no exception to this socio-economic malaise as most development plans are regrettably approached from top to down and urban to rural.

There is therefore the need to design a development plan that is grassroots and rural-based. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is a flexible and adaptable economic plan capable of fitting into both local and national situations. This paper intends to explore the capacity and in fact the feasibility of NEEDS fitting into community development planning in Abia State.

NEEDS as a development plan or strategy was borne out of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declarations wholly adopted by 189 Sovereign States in September, 2000. The Millennium goals include, the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, reduction of child mortality, improvement in maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing partnership for development.

NEEDS is focused on empowering people, promoting private enterprise and changing the way government operates. It is concerned about good healthcare delivery, quality education, integrated rural development, adequate housing, youth employment and development, providing safety nets, ensuring gender and geographic balance, introducing painful but progressive reforms, promoting investment through the provision of adequate security and rule of law, engaging in massive infrastructural development, encouraging savings and development of strong financial institutions, encouraging sectoral strategies, insisting on privatization and liberalization of trade, promoting integration and globalization, and encouraging public sector reforms to ensure transparency, accountability, zero tolerance to corruption, good governance, service delivery, and budgeting and expenditure reforms predicated on due process.

As a development plan of action, NEEDS is conceived with the private sector as the ultimate engine of economic growth. It is therefore envisaged that the private sector will be the executor, investor and
manager of businesses in Nigeria while government provides the enabling environment for business to thrive. It stipulates that government should play the role of a facilitator and regulator of the private sector for it to grow, create jobs and generate wealth. NEEDS encourages a trimmed public service that is stronger, better skilled and more efficient in delivering essential services that is devoid of corruption as well as serving as a catalyst to development.

To ensure the MDGs were not mere wishful thinking, the MDGs contain 18 policy targets designed to drive and guide policy actions and programmes towards a step by step achievement of the MDGs by the year 2015. These targets include:

* Reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar (N155) per day.
* Ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.
* Eliminating gender inequality in primary and secondary education preferably by the year 2005 and at all levels by 2015.
* Reducing by two thirds, the mortality rate among children under five years.
* Reducing by three quarters, the maternal mortality ratio.
* Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
* Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
* Integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes.
* Reversing loss of environmental resources.
* Achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.
* Developing further, an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discretionary trading and financial system which includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, both nationally and internationally.
* Addressing the special needs of LDCs (Least Developing Countries) which include tariff and quota-free access for LDC’s exports, enhanced programme of debt relief for HIPCs (Highly indebted Poor Countries) and cancellation of official bilateral debts and a more generous ODA (Official Development Assistance) for countries committed to poverty reduction.
* Addressing the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states.
* Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debts sustainable and long-term.
* In co-operation with developing countries, developing implementing strategies for decent and productive work for youths.
* In co-operation with the private sector, making available the benefits of new technologies, information, communication and education.

Although the MDGs were agreed upon in September 2000, it was not until 2004 that the final draft of Nigeria’s version (The NEEDS) was prepared and adopted. The delay was attributed, in part, to the need to involve all stakeholders in the formulation, design and preparation of the final document. Be that at it may, it is obvious that NEEDS is our national plan for prosperity, poverty reduction, sustainable growth and promoting equality and empowerment of the vulnerable groups in the society.

2.0 ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF NIGERIA PRIOR TO THE YEAR 2000

It is apt at this juncture for us to take a cursory look at the state of affairs in Nigeria prior to the Millennium declaration in the year 2000. The Nigerian economy before the year 2000 could at best be described as an economy that was almost comatose.
A cursory look at Table 1 above on key macro economic indices for Nigeria between 1995 and 2000 eloquently buttresses the point that the Nigerian economy prior to the Millennium declaration of 2000 was in fact in a pitiable state. For example, the average growth rate of our GDP at 1990 constant basic prices was only the 3.02 % in a country in which inflation averaged 22.4% per annum for the period under review. Electricity generation averaged only 1804.5 Megawatts per hour. In fact, between 1999 and 2000, electricity generation decreased from 1985.8 megawatts per hour to 1738.3 megawatts, whereas average demand for electricity was estimated at over 20,000 megawatts per hour.

Capacity utilization in the manufacturing sector was even more pitiable. It averaged only 32.6% of the manufacturing sector’s installed capacity. What this means is that a whopping 67.4% on the average of the manufacturing sector’s installed capacity has been lying idle between the year 1998 and 2000. Can we pause for a moment to imagine what this 67.4% translates to in terms of huge expenditure on plant and machinery and other fixed assets begging to be worked upon to churn our goods and services for the benefit of all of us? Is it any wonder then that Nigeria has been beset with mounting unemployment?

With an economy that is largely idle and unproductive, the recourse to debt both external and domestic became imperative. In fact, Nigeria’s external debt position grew astronomically within the period from N716.9 billion in 1995 to N3.13 trillion in the year 2000 while domestic debt component grew from N248.8 billion in 1995 to N898.3 billion in 2000. External debt service obligations continued to exert pressure on the lean national resources so much so that foreign direct investment into Nigeria almost dried up completely. With massive unemployment, persistent inflation and scarcity of goods and services, crime rate in the country surged upwards coupled with general insecurity of lives and property.

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### Table 1: Nigeria’s Key Macroeconomic Indicators (1995-2000)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product GDP growth rate % at 1990 Constant Basic Prices</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity generation (Mw/Hr)</td>
<td>1810.1</td>
<td>1854.2</td>
<td>1839.8</td>
<td>1724.9</td>
<td>1859.8</td>
<td>1738.3</td>
<td>1804.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of manufacturing production (1985=100)</td>
<td>136.2</td>
<td>138.7</td>
<td>138.5</td>
<td>133.1</td>
<td>137.7</td>
<td>138.2</td>
<td>137.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity utilization</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI:all items (1985 = 100)</td>
<td>2040.4</td>
<td>2638.1</td>
<td>2863.3</td>
<td>3149.2</td>
<td>3357.6</td>
<td>3590.6</td>
<td>2933.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation rate (%)</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ext.Debt Outs.(Nb)</td>
<td>716.9</td>
<td>617.3</td>
<td>595.9</td>
<td>633.12</td>
<td>2577.4</td>
<td>3130.3</td>
<td>1378.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Debt. (Nb)</td>
<td>248.8</td>
<td>343.7</td>
<td>359.03</td>
<td>537.5</td>
<td>794.8</td>
<td>898.3</td>
<td>530.4</td>
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At the international level and within the comity of nations, Nigeria became almost a pariah state. In point of fact, it is estimated that 7 out of every 10 Nigerians as at 2000 live on less than one US dollar per day which means that over 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line. This was the state of affairs of the Nigerian state at the turn of the 21st century when the Millennium Development Goals were marshaled out in 2000. NEEDS as a development framework was therefore, set against the backdrop of the dwindling economic fortunes of Nigeria and a fervent desire to halt the drift towards economic self-strangulation and move Nigeria forward towards the path of national growth and economic prosperity.

3.0 STATE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (SEEDS)

The dismal performance of the Nigeria economy prior to the year 2000, as depicted above, applies to all states of the federation more or less, thus justifying the need for the adoption of NEEDS at the state level if all parts of the country are to be developed. As stated earlier, NEEDS is conceived in such a way that it fits into every tier of government. At the state level, it is called SEEDS (State Economic Empowerment And Development Strategy) while at the Local Government level, it is called LEEDS (Local Economic Empowerment And Development Strategy). Hence, the extension of NEEDS to the grassroots or Community level is the basis of this paper. However, before this is done, let us examine briefly SEEDS in Abia State.

SEEDS is intended to apply to all the 36 States of Nigeria including Abuja. Here in Abia State, our version is called ABSEEDS (Abia State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy). As an economic blueprint that is directly derived from NEEDS both in philosophy and vision, the policy thrust of ABSEEDS takes into consideration the peculiar strengths, weaknesses, opportunities as well as the value system of the people.

Abia State SEEDS (ABSEEDS) is the result of the collaborative efforts and inputs of all Stake-holders in the quest for rapid development of Abia State. Such Stake-holders whose inputs shaped the formulation of the final draft of ABSEEDS include Professional bodies and organizations, Civil societies and NGO’s, the private sector, academic institutions like universities, colleges and primary schools, religious organizations and other faith-based organizations, local government personnel, politicians, the mass media and the general public including children, youths, students and parents and even foreign donors and development partner agencies. Thus, for the very first time in the history of National Planning in Nigeria whether at the federal, state or local government level, we are witnessing a development plan that is broad-based in conception, collaboratively participatory in formulation and in which all stake-holders are collectively responsible for its success.

ABSEEDS broad policy goals, as with NEEDS at the federal level include:

- Eradicating Poverty
- Attaining Universal Primary Education
- Efficient healthcare delivery and combating HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases
- Ensuring gender balance and women empowerment as well as pursuing pro-poor programmes.
- Ensuring good governance value re-orientation and crisis reduction
- Expanding Investment Opportunities and
- Promoting Public-Private Partnership
- Ensuring Sustainable Environment
- Wealth creation through small-scale industries and quality local production.

From the foregoing, it is clear that ABSEEDS is structured in such a way that the MDG policy targets are used as catalysts for attaining its objectives and goals including that of LEEDS. It is important to state that SEEDS in terms of objectives and goals varies from one state to another, depending on their peculiarities while the similarity is on the common philosophy and vision of NEEDS.
4.0 ABIA STATE LEEDS

The third leg of the tripod on which the MDGs lie is the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) which for now is the most important and most strategic. This is because over 80% of the entire population of Nigeria live in the rural areas and as such LEEDS, as a collaborative programme of action at the grass roots level, if and when effectively implemented, possesses the potential of turning around the economic well-being of the greatest number of Nigerians spread across 774 LGAS of this country.

As with ABSEEDS, the 17 LGAS in Abia State working in tandem with all stakeholders in the local government areas and the State Planning Commission have each prepared their own version of LEEDs taking into consideration the special peculiarities, the strengths and weakness as well as the differing opportunities and threats that characterize each LGA across the three senatorial zones of Abia South, Abia Central and Abia North, within the ambit of the state-wide SEEDS blueprint.

For example, the Ukwa East LEEDS abbreviated (UELEEDS) mission statement is “a commitment to enthroned good governance for the reduction of poverty, job creation and economic growth” anchored on the core values of equity, enthronement of justice, ethical re-orientation, transparency and corporate governance. Thus, the specific principles that will underlie the operations of UELEEDS are to:

* Promote poverty reduction through enhanced collective productivity.
* Promote employment opportunities for all and aim for full employment.
* Investments and promotion of agriculture as the building block for economic development.
* Utilizing traditional craft, culture and tradition as mobilizing forces for development.
* Investments and promotion of tourism as a veritable source of revenue.
* Infrastructure development of roads, electricity, water, etc as a basis for speeding up development and reducing the cost of doing business.
* Upgrading human development especially in education and health.
* Public sector and financial reforms that enhance service delivery, efficiency in the use of resources and accountability.
* Create the enabling environment for private sector intervention to create jobs, grow productivity and enhance economic growth.(Oti & Onyeike, 2006)

For Ukwa West LEEDS abbreviated (UWLEEDS), one can see the vision statement of (UWLEEDS) which “envisions a prosperous, growth-oriented and peaceful locality, multi-sectoral grass roots approach and economic of the people significantly and to become economically transformed as one of the most prosperous LGAs in Abia State” which is intended to be accomplished through:

- Eradicating abject poverty from all homes.
- Improving welfare services and social amenities in every community.
- Channeling of resources for the provision of basic infrastructure and amenities at the grassroots across the LGA.
- Evolving new cultural values that are based on transparency and accountability and
- Promoting, encouraging and motivating staff and reinforcing excellence and strengthen the rule of law (Chigbundu, Jones and Enwere, 2006).

In sum, the vision, goals and objectives of Ukwa East LEEDS as well as the implementation strategies mapped out in the said document may not be the same with other Local Government Areas but they have similarities because of their connections to the basic philosophy that underlie NEEDS. Thus, the LEEDS documents for the various seventeen Local Government Areas in Abia State have explicit statements concerning the Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives and targets set out for attainment in the areas of Education, Health, HIV/AIDS, Environment, Housing, Gender Balance, Safety Nets for the Vulnerable Groups, Value Re-orientation Strategy; Private Sector Development, Infrastructure Development, Growth Drivers Enterprises and Services, Agriculture and Transport. They also include Public Sector Reforms.
Public Finance and Budgetary Reforms as well as the Financing and Implementation Strategies earmarked for the attainment of these laudable targets.

5.0 AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (ACEEDS)

Having explained NEEDS as a development strategy and its adaptability to different levels of government, there is the need to examine how NEEDS can be employed in the development of Autonomous Communities in Abia State. To do this, certain questions must be posed and answered. What would be the goals of NEEDS at the Community level? How can NEEDS be replicated at the Community level? What are the benefits of NEEDS at the Community level? Do Autonomous Communities in Abia State have institutional structures to which NEEDS can be ultimately adapted?

5.1 Structure of Autonomous Communities in Abia State.

In Abia State, there are about 800 Autonomous Communities spread across the three Senatorial zones of the State. Each Autonomous Community has a Traditional Ruler as its Head. There are other institutions in the Autonomous Communities which may vary from one Autonomous Community to another that assist the Traditional Ruler in the day to day administration of his Autonomous Community.

In Isi-Mkporobe Autonomous Community, for instance, there is the Eze’s Cabinet comprising all Paramount Chiefs each from every village and the Titled Chiefs. The Eze’s Cabinet is the highest law-making body in the Autonomous Community.

Secondly, there is the Community Development Council comprising all adults in the Community. Meetings of the Community Development Council are held once a month and is statutorily fixed for the 28th day of every month. Chiefs, Elders (Ofo-na-Ogu) as well as representatives of the Youths and other interest groups are eligible to attend the Council meetings. The Executive members of the Community Development Council comprising the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, General Secretary, Asst. General Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer and Provost are elected every three years. The Autonomous Community Development Council is responsible for the day to day administration of the Autonomous Community and reports to the Traditional Ruler and his Cabinet.

At the Village level, there is the Village Council comprising all registered adults in the village. The Executive members of the Village Council are also elected in accordance with the Constitution of each village. The day to day administration of the village is the responsibility of the Village Council. The Paramount Chief of each village is the Village Head.

There is also the Council of Elders (the Ofo-na-Ogu’s) comprising the eldest Ofo-na-Ogu from each village. They are the custodian of the hallowed tradition and cultural ethos of the Autonomous Community.

Apart from this, the Women’s group also have their meetings. There is the general meeting of all registered women at the Community level known as the Echefula Nwanne Women’s meeting whose Executive members are elected every three years. This arrangement is also replicated at the village level where we have the village women’s meetings comprising all registered women in the village.

The foregoing institutional arrangement extends to the Youths. At the Community level, there is the Community Youth Council with its elected Executive members to look after the peculiar interests of youths in the Community. The Youth Council is replicated also at the village level.

Beyond these bodies, there are other organizations like the Age Grades, Clubs, Co-operative Societies and other sundry voluntary organizations that function collaboratively and mutually supportive to enhance the peace and well-being of the Community.

In addition, Isi-Mkporobe Autonomous Community has its local economy which is largely dependent on economic trees, particularly oil palm tree, farm produce, livestock, trading in the Community market places, grocery stores located at homes and artisanship such as bicycle and motorcycle repairers, barbing...
salons, drinking joints and bars etc. It is from these economic activities that civic levies are obtained for the administration of the Community and the financing of its self-help development programmes. It is pertinent to mention that the palm tree plays a significant role in such financing as its harvesting and processing are collectively coordinated to raise funds for development purposes. Therefore, granted that there is an Autonomous Community economy and traditional political administration, then there can be Autonomous Community Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (ACEEDS). The people’s economic sources of income can be improved upon by empowerment and the traditional political administration can provide the enabling environment for it as well as facilitate its realization.

6.0 THE GOALS OF ACEEDS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL
Though the goals of NEEDS and their extensions - SEEDS and LEEDS - are clear. It varies from one level of government to another and even within a level, it varies from one component to another. The goals of NEEDS at the Autonomous Community level must suit the Community situations, while at the same time be in agreement with its basic philosophy. Poverty is very rife at the community level. The economy of the community is not buoyant and that accounts for why many in the community are poor and unable to realize their God-given potentialities. Furthermore, there are no strong financial and credit institutions and facilities for members to enjoy and utilize in their economic activities. Some communities do not enjoy facilities such as electricity and where it exists, it is epileptic and this affects the setting up of small scale businesses. Agriculture is usually at the subsistence level and there is a very high rate of rural-urban migration especially among the youths.

In view of the above situation, the broad goals and objectives of ACEEDS should be as follows:
(i) Eradicating abject poverty from all homes in the community.
(ii) Encouraging children to take advantage of the universal primary education.
(iii) Promoting adult literacy in the community.
(iv) Providing regular power supply and other basic facilities like water, roads etc.
(v) Promoting agriculture as the mainstay of the community economy.
(vi) Promoting employment opportunities in the community through the establishment of small scale enterprises.
(vii) Promote the establishment of strong micro financial and credit institutions as a way of boosting the community economy.
(viii) Encouraging human capacity development and knowledge especially in health, agriculture, education and entrepreneurial development.
(ix) Promoting value re-orientation by helping to restore traditional value system that stresses hard work, discipline, trustworthiness and respect for elders.

7.0 STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING ACEEDS.
Having explored the structure of a typical Autonomous Community in Abia State and the broad goals of ACEEDS at the community level, it is important for us to discuss the strategies and techniques of
implementing ACEEDS. No matter how comprehensive and thorough a development plan is, the factor of implementation is very important in the attainment of the policy goals and targets contained in the plan. ACEEDS is not a development strategy to be foisted on people in the community. It should be conceived, discussed and debated among the people. The traditional political administration should have the responsibility of convoking meetings of all stake-holders (Chiefs, Amala, Youths, Women etc) in the community in such a way as to embrace all the villages that make up the Autonomous Community to brainstorm on ACEEDS in line with the philosophy of NEEDS.

At the end of the discussions, a working document or plan of action on ACEEDS should be produced to guide the implementation. An implementation committee should be set up which should serve as an institutional framework to assign responsibilities to different groups (Women, Community Development Council, Village Council, Youths, Age-Grades, etc ) in the execution of the strategy.

The goals and objectives of ACEEDS should be broken into targets set to be attained within an implementation time frame of short-term, medium-term and long-term. This will ensure proper benchmarking and objective monitoring of the performance of the strategy.(Loomba,1978).

In addition, there should be established an independent monitoring structure to oversee the implementation of the ACEEDS documents as well as using both the traditional communication and multi-media approach to disseminate the provisions of ACEEDS in the communities.

Last but not the least, Autonomous Communities in the State should be encouraged and assisted to prepare and lunch their own development plan of action (ACEEDS) in line with the dictates of LEEDS, SEE and NEEDS. Such a venture will have the salutary effect of directing and galvanizing the creative energies at the level of the Autonomous Communities rather than such Communities dissipating their energies on irrelevant squabbles and disputes. To ensure compliance and stimulate competition, a matching grant or aid could be given to each Autonomous Community that successfully prepares and launches its own ACEEDS.

8.0 ENVISAGED BENEFITS OF ACEEDS

At this juncture, we can pinpoint some of the benefits of ACEEDS which include:

A. Galvanizing All Stakeholders To Focus Resources On Achievement Of Goals.

Given that ACEEDS is prepared with the active participation of all stakeholders in the Autonomous Community with each Autonomous Community identifying its needs, goals, targets and priority projects, it is apparent that ACEEDS will help focus and galvanize our resources, energies, time and attention on the attainment of the goals and objectives of ACEEDS in the communities. ACEEDS will help release the potential energies of Abians right from the grassroots level, thereby boosting aggregate wealth, welfare and happiness.

B. Ensures That Development Is Kept Under Control

Another benefit of ACEEDS, as a blueprint for development at the community level, is that the document would adequately incorporate institutional mechanisms and structures for measuring performance and identifying derivations from policy targets when they occur. Such periodic measurement of performance against set targets would help us to promptly take corrective actions and programmes that will lead to the attainment of set goals.

C. Engenders Effective Communication And Feedback

ACEEDS stresses symbiotic and effective communication between leaders and the led, between government and the people. This is reflected from the all-inclusive and participatory approach to be adopted in producing the ACEEDS documents. Government cannot succeed unless it communicates effectively with people. Effective communication clarifies issues, defines goals and objectives and clearly establishes clear-cut targets for everyone, as well as explicitly stating standards against which performance of all can be gauged for corrective action.
D. Generation Of Reliable Data Base For The Autonomous Communities.
Another benefit of ACEEDS document is that it emphasizes the importance of accurate data. Without adequate, accurate and timely data, planning becomes vague and meaningless. The ACEEDS documents when prepared and implemented in the communities will help boost our database which is a sine qua non for proper planning.

E. Performance Measurement
Properly prepared, the ACEEDS documents would clearly spell out templates that explain how performance should be measured at different points in time without any ambiguities. This would enable comparison of performance with set standards and targets to ensure that communities are on the right track. This is a very critical benefit of the ACEEDS document.

F. Stimulation Of Performance
Another salutary aspect of the proposed ACEEDS is that the document would incorporate the aspect of human factor in development, of motivating, stimulating and sensitizing community members to excel, to perform and to seek the intrinsic qualities of self-esteem, achievement, discipline, integrity, respect for one another, wealth creation and advancement.

G. Assignment Of Tasks And Responsibilities
As earlier stated, the ACEEDS document would make ample provision for the assignment of tasks and responsibilities to all stakeholders, including the leaders whose responsibility it is to motivate the led.

H. Anticipating Change And Uncertainty
As pointed out by (Kontz, H. et. al, 1980) “planning helps in offsetting future uncertainties and changes both anticipated and unanticipated.” One of the benefits of ACEEDS is that it will force community members to anticipate changes and uncertainties in future and hence marshal out contingent plans to offset the effects of such uncertainties when they do occur rather than being caught napping and helpless.

I. Minimizes Cost Of Development
The proposed ACEEDS document emphasizes efficiency, effectiveness and minimization of waste in terms of time and material resources. Thus, if properly implemented, ACEEDS has the potential of minimizing greatly the cost of our march towards the attainment of a strong and booming economy in Abia State come 2020 in line with the goals of Vision:20:20:20.

J. Flexibility
As a development plan of action, the ACEEDS document would be prepared in such a way as to ensure flexibility in development action and programmes across the Autonomous Communities. Furthermore, by avoiding rigidities in its formulation, the ACEEDS document is, ab initio, made adaptable to both the Vision:20:20:20 and the Transformation Agenda of the present Administration.

9.0 APPRAISAL OF NEEDS (2005-2009)
As earlier pointed out, it was only in the year 2004 that the final NEEDS document was deployed in Nigeria and at this juncture, it will be necessary for us to examine whether NEEDS has actually made any impact in the performance of the Nigerian economy.

A brief look at some macro-economic indicators for the Nigerian economy between 2005 and 2009 will suffice. For example, the average GDP growth rate for the period between 2005 and 2009 was 6.13% compared to an average GDP growth rate of 3.02% achieved between 1995 and 2000 as shown in Table 1. In addition, capacity utilization in the manufacturing industry averaged 53.82% for the period 2005 to 2009 as against 32.6% recorded for 1995-2000. Inflation made significant gain dropping from an average of 22.4% for the period 1995-2000 to 10.8% for the period 2005 -2009. External debt, which seemed intractable prior to the year 2000, steadily declined from a high N3130.3 billion in 2000 to a low N584.6 billion in 2009.

Given the above impressive performance of the economy following the adoption and implementation of NEEDS at the national level, we can confidently expect a replication of this level of performance at the
other tiers of government if SEEDS and LEEDS (as well as our proposed ACEEDS) are properly and vigorously implemented.

10.0 CONCLUSION
There is a popular adage in management, which says, show me a man who fails to plan and will show you the man who has planned to fail; for to fail to plan, is to plan to fail.
For the very first time in the history of our dear country, we are being offered a proposal that represents a paradigm shift in development planning that is comprehensive, participatory, collaborative, collective, grassroots- based and stresses a radical value re-orientation. A plan that is not foisted on us from top-down but is prepared from bottom-up. ACEEDS is our development plan of action right from the community level and therefore should be supported and embraced by all. Thank you.

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