

CREATING JOBS AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA THROUGH AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

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Abstract

The paper examined the imperative of creating jobs and engendering food security through agrarian revolution in Nigeria. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Nigeria did not have any problem feeding herself and exporting the surplus food items she produced. This transcended through 1960s to early 1970s, then agriculture was the mainstay of the nation's economy providing a means of livelihood for over 70% of the populace and also contributing significantly to the nation's Gross domestic product GDP. However, today, larger part of Nigerian agriculture remains rudimentary and backward. Negligence of the sector, lower productivity, government lukewarm attitude towards the sector, lack of technology, system of land ownership were identified as the major factors hindering the sector's growth. Based on these, suggestions were made, which include the need to radically transform Nigeria's agricultural sector thereby creating jobs to the majority of the populace and make the nation self-sufficient in food production; and put an end to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Key words: Job Creation, Food Security, Agricultural Revolution.

Introduction:

Agriculture is an integral part of the African economy and, arguably, the daily lives of the majority of Africans. It accounts for over 51 percent of jobs across the continents. Despite its central role, the agricultural sector represents only a quarter of Africa Gross domestic product (GDP) due to low production of the sector. Each year, Africa spends far too much on food imports, approximately 35 billion US dollars in 2016. Left unchecked, the figure is expected to surge to US110 billion dollars by 2025. This is a real paradox, given that more than 60 percent of Africa most active population is

engaged in agriculture. Africa contains 65% of the most arable uncultivated land, and it has an abundance of fresh water supply (ADB, 2017).

In Nigeria, like other developing countries, the agricultural sector's role transcends the classical functions of providing food, raw materials, employment and incomes to much more transformative and phenomenal role in a modernizing economy (Eboh, 2011). This is because agricultural growth increased farm incomes which are prerequisites for structural transformation.

In the face of a large land mass, favourable climatic conditions, as well as abundant labour, the agricultural sector offers a very good opportunity for promoting economic growth, generating employment and guaranteeing food security in the country. During her first republic, Nigeria did not have problem feeding herself and exporting its' surplus food items that she produced, then agriculture was the main stay of the Nigerian economy providing a means of livelihood for over 70% of the populace and also contributing significantly to the growth of the GDP (Attah, 2008). As of then, agriculture was in residual legislative list in our constitution and every region specialized in the production of one major crop; East (palm oil), West (cocoa), North (groundnut). That time, oil boom has not come, Nigerians were not distracted, even the colonialists in the 1940s and 1950s were focused and greed was not a virtue in the country. However, the emergence of oil and the consequent oil boom in the mid-1970s depressed growth in the sector (Onwudinjo, 2012).

Today, the larger part of the Nigerian agriculture remains rudimentary and backward. Obsolete equipment is used and currently, only about 53% of the 72 million hectares of arable land is under cultivation (Attah, 2008). As a result, the sector is unable to meet domestic food demands and hence, billions of naira is spent annually on food importation. For instance, Mobolaji (2016) noted that agriculture employs about 60% of Nigerians including many rural women, and contribute up to 35% of the nation's GDP, but the nation faces huge security challenges.

Specifically, this paper examines the role of agriculture in engendering job creation and food security in Nigeria.

Overview of Agricultural Development in Nigeria:

Nigeria is supposed to have one of the most modern and developed agricultural systems in Africa but this is not so because the sector

is fraught with a lot of set-backs. Nigeria's agricultural sector has suffered untold set back due to neglect, greed, corruption and policy summersaults. Crops, livestock, as well as forestry and wildlife make up the structure of the agricultural sector in Nigeria economy.

In Nigeria, the sector's growth performance could be attributed to the performance of the four agricultural sub-sectors; crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry. As of 2008, crops contributed about 85 percent to the agriculture GDP, while livestock contributed about 10 percent to the agriculture GDP, fishery 4 percent and forestry about 1 percent to the agriculture GDP (Sackey, 2011:28).

In Nigeria, the crop sub-sector serves as a source of beverages, sugar, vegetable oil, vegetable and fruits, roots and tuber crops, oil seeds and nuts, grain legumes and cereals; while the livestock sub-sector provides meat, fish, animal oil and fat, butter, cheese, milk, eggs, hides and skin; and the forestry and wildlife sub-sector provide timber and several wildlife species. Some popular crops grown in Nigeria include Cassava, Yam, Maize, beans, Beniseeds, Cocoa, Palm tree, Cowpea, Forage crops, vegetables amongst others. Likewise, in the livestock subsector, Chicken, Guinea fowl, Duck/Geese, Turkeys, Cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, donkeys, etc. are raised. Also fish farming is practised to complement the efforts of artisanal fishermen. While the most important forest trees in Nigeria are: Obeche, Sapele, Iroko, Mahogany, etc.

However, very few large farms and numerous small ones characterized agriculture in Nigeria. The Majority of the operators of the sector use small capital input relative to labour and in most cases low managerial inputs. Each farm household has at least two holdings on the average. The average size of holding varies from 1.5 hectares in the north to 0.23 hectares in the

south (Igbene and Eyo; 2002). The sector has been hampered by the lack of investment in improved farming technology while over farming of fragile soil has worsened the problem of soil degradation (UN, 1999). The country is yet to make significant use of its irrigation potential estimated at about 3.14 million ha. The area actually under irrigation is officially estimated at about 40,000 ha, which is less than 1 percent of irrigable land actually in use (Takeshima, 2010). Most of the large – scale public sector irrigation schemes established in 1980s have become non-operational due to high operating costs, poor maintenance and lack of ownership by intended beneficiaries (World Bank, 2003). This notwithstanding, the growth performance of agricultural sector in Nigeria had been largely driven by the performance of the crop sub-sector, despite its low yield. The low yield could be attributed to growth of output derived mainly from acreage expansion and favourable weather.

The cropping system mostly practised in the country is mixed cropping/inter cropping. This is in addition to sole cropping and mixed farming sparingly practised. Livestock farming has been part of Fulani cattle rearers in Nigeria while sole animal husbandry is gradually taking ground in South.

Agricultural imports far exceed agricultural exports in Nigeria. While agricultural imports amounted to about \$3 billion per annum, agricultural exports are less than N100 billion. Fish importation necessitated by domestic production deficits abound. While the national demand for fish is estimated at about 2.6 million metric tons (MT). In 2008, local supply was only about 600,000MT, resulting to the estimated high annual import of about 700,000 MT of fish at US\$500. Also, domestic production of livestock products is inadequate. It is estimated that about 30% of livestock slaughters are imported from neighbouring

countries. Domestic production of beef production is estimated at about 672,000 MT, far below the estimated annual demand of 1,008,000MT and this implies an annual deficit of 336,000MT. The fact that the country spends about \$3 billion annually on food imports (particularly wheat, rice, sugar, vegetable oil, fish etc) is a serious thing not to ignore. According to a study, the annual cost of yield declines of roots, tubers, cereals and pulses is estimated at N210 billion, or nearly 3 percent of GDP in 2003 (Eboh, 2011). Thus, since domestic agricultural production has failed to meet up with the increasing demand for food, the government had to spend on importation to feed her teeming population. For instance, food imports increased from 19.9% in 2000 to 30.6% and 22.7% in 2011 and 2012 respectively while food export is barely 5.3% of the merchandise (Mobolaji, 2016).

Income level of farmers is generally low. For most of the farmers producing food for their family survival is their goal, not profit maximization. Where family survival is the most important goal, the farmer sells at any price to obtain money for use in buying other goods. A consequent of this is low returns. This explains why income levels of the farmers are generally low. The sector has the highest incidence of poverty. 7 out of every 10 farming households are living below the national poverty line and 6 out of every 10 poor households are in agriculture. The FAO (2009) reported that during 2004-2006, Nigeria had about 11.3 million people or 8 percent of her population reported as undernourished. The poverty and employment character of agricultural sector commends it as the economic sector with the largest scope of fostering equitable prosperity and achieving economic emancipation in the country.

The percentage contribution of agriculture to the GDP of Nigeria has been fluctuating overtime. The contribution of agriculture to the GDP declined steadily since 1964. It

dropped from 60.96% in 1964 to 34.70% in 1981 and gyrated thereafter to 42.71% in 1986. It then declined steadily to 37.91% in 1993, stabilized at 38 percent between 1994 and 1996 and increased slightly to 39.17% by 1997. However, an average growth rate of 0.79% was recorded annually between 1981 and 1997. The performance of agricultural sector to the GDP improved since the sector amidst low and stagnating productivity, accounts for about 40% of GDP and about 60% of total employment. Several factors are known to positively or negatively influence the performance of the sector. Pre-eminent among them is government policies.

Since the colonial period, various governments in Nigeria have launched one catch agricultural intervention programme or another to address food insecurity. Between 1976-1986, three such programmes were launched. They were Operation Feed the Nation OFN, initiated by General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976-1979; Green Revolution and National Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme of Shehu Shagari 1979-1983 and the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure, DFRRI, by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, 1986-1993. The major idea behind these programmes had been to encourage Nigerians, the youths, men and women, to take agriculture while peasant farmers were enjoined to adopt improved technologies. However, these policies performed below expectation. Evidence shows that land expansion accounts for about 60% of agricultural growth; only 40% of growth is attributed to productivity increase.

This structural transformation is envisaged to crystallize through 300% increase in agricultural productivity enabled by investments to strengthen agricultural research and extension, develop critical infrastructure and market-based agricultural value chains and also efforts towards

‘resource decoupling’ that is delinking output growth from land expansion.

Problems of Agricultural Sector in Nigeria

1. Negligence of the Sector: Even before the advent of the oil boom, there was a general de-emphasis of agriculture in favour of Industrialisation by economic development theories. Structural change theories like W.W Rowstow’s-five state theory and A. Lewis’s famous two-sector model are examples of development theories that placed heavy emphasis on rapid industrial growth. These theories triggered rural-urban migration and the consequent of rural/agricultural neglect.

2. Low yield: In sub-Saharan African, yield increased by only about one third. Despite, the far smaller number of farm workers per hectare in the United Kingdom, its grain yield per hectare (measured as kilograms of grains harvested per hectare of agricultural land) was 3 times that of India, 6 times that of Nigeria, and almost 12 times that of Sudan (Todaro; 2009 438).

3. Government Negligence of Agriculture: In Nigeria for instance, this manifests in poor budgetary allocation to the sector, policy summersault and poor implementation. One of the most important challenges agriculture faces in creating jobs and engendering food security in Nigeria is to get the government to provide enabling environment for the sector to thrive.

4. Lack of Innovation and improved technology in the sector: producers of most agricultural commodities in Nigeria still maintained low yield varieties together with rudimentary tools.

5. Land Tenure System: In Nigeria the system of land ownership is still not in favour of massive agricultural production. There is need to repeal and amend the Land

Use Act 1978 in other to make land available and accessible to genuine farmers.

Recommendations

1. **Rural development:** According to Todaro & Smith (2009), if development is to take place and become self-sustaining, it will have to include rural areas in general and the agricultural sector in particular. Since some three quarters of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas, and a majority of them are involved in agricultural activities. Massive infrastructural development in the rural areas in Nigeria is very important.

2. **Implement NEPAD Initiative:** The African unions NEPAD initiative targets the allocation of 10% of national budgets to agriculture and a 6% rate of growth in the agriculture sector at the national level. It is imperative for Nigeria to implement this.

3. **New Green Revolution:** This entails everybody getting involved in agriculture. The public sector, the private and non-profit sectors getting involved playing joint role in agricultural development.

4. **Buffer stock.** Mechanisms to ensure market price stability especially during the harvest seasons should be evolved through government intervention of buying up excess supply to the market to encourage farmers.

5. **Land tenure system.** Land tenure issues should be revisited by all relevant authorities and relevant laws made to allow genuine farmers and women farmers access to land for agricultural production and also to remove all impediments to acquisition of land for communal large scale farming projects.

6. **Encourage farmers' cooperatives.** Rural farmers should be encouraged on agro-based co-operatives for them to qualify them to access and benefit from credit schemes by

the government and international development agencies.

7. **Enabling environment.** The federal and state governments should create enabling environment that will attract young people to take agriculture as a profession, particularly young school leavers and graduates.

8. **Value chain:** Most successful big time farm businesses are integrated projects with backward and forward linkages. Agro-entrepreneur should pursue the twin objective of primary production and processing either in one unit farm or linked with a firm that processes the primary farm products.

9. **Financing/Extension services.** Financial institutions and development partners such as World Bank, ADB, FAO, IFAD, UNDP should provide financial support for farmers. Extension services workers should be deployed to rural areas to ensure that information and other packages that will help the rural farmers adjust to new inventions and innovative changes in agriculture.

Conclusion:

In the words of the Nobel Laureate in Economics, Sumner Myrdal, it is in the agricultural sector that the battle for long term economic development will be won or lost. Today, development economists and agricultural economists alike have come to realize that far from playing a passive, supporting role in the process of economic development, the agricultural sector in particular and the rural economy in general must play an indispensable part in the strategy of economic progress especially for the low income developing countries. Sound agricultural policies and programmes must be put in place by various governments in Nigeria and followed up to implementation level, this will go a long way to create more jobs and ensure food security for Nigerians.

A new agrarian revolution which will influence the emergence of agricultural clusters and genuine value chains for the dissemination of technologies, better access to water and irrigation, and financial resources. Revolutionizing Nigeria's agriculture value chains require a paradigm shift in perceptions. For too long, subsistence agriculture has been associated with drudgery, poverty, and suffering (ADB, 2017). This too must change, as there is need to champion and support new generation of young Nigerians with the right resources, thereby creating jobs and engendering food security in Nigeria.

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