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THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF SMALL SCALE FAMERS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the challenges and prospects of small scale famers in Enugu state, Nigeria. The effects of these observed hindrances that limit the prospects of the farmers in the study area were thoroughly elucidated and options for improvements discussed. Some of the observed challenges include, poverty, unfavourable legislation, inadequate capital and limited access credit facilities, land ownership system, poor yield and markets, the use of unmechanized farming, lack of basic social and infrastructural facilities and negligent of rural areas where majority of the small scale farmers lives amongst others. From the foregoing, the researchers conclude that government of every tier should as a matter of necessity embarks on policies which are conducive to sustain positive effects in small scale farmers. A continued process of infrastructural development and maintenance in the rural areas as well as positive specific reforms in agricultural system is thus necessary to realize the full potential of the rural sector to function as the engine of growth and the key ingredient for promoting rapid political, social and economic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Challenges, Prospects, Small Scale, Farmers.

Introduction

Farmers play a strategic role in the process of economic development of any country. This is because farmers are the major players in the agricultural sector which is an important segment of any economy. Agriculture has already made a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of advanced countries and its role in the economic development of less developed countries is of vital importance. In the United States of America and Japan, agricultural development has helped to a greater extent in the process of their industrialization. Similarly various under-developed countries of the world presently engaged in the process of economic development and have by now learnt the limitations of putting over emphasis on industrialization as a means to attain higher per capital real income. In early stage of the economic development of any country, it will

be rational and appropriate to place greater emphasis on further development of the agricultural sectors (Desai, 2008).

There has been heated debate over what should be the appropriate size of the farm because the size of the operating unit, as in the case of manufacturing industries, decisively affects the income from agriculture. In the case of manufacturing industry, we have optimum size of the unit, a size which in existing conditions of technique and organizing ability has the lowest average cost of production per unit. Similarly, in agriculture, too, we have a size, which under given conditions, would yield the best results to the farmers. The advantages of large and small farms have been debated for at least a century. There are economists and farmers who advocate large-scale farming for efficient operations, a satisfactory income to the farm family and food to the consumer at reasonable rates. But, on the other hand, some persons strongly advocate small scale farming on the ground of social justice.

Poverty in agriculture in most of the third world countries is as much a problem of farm size as of any other single factor. The great majority of farm families in these developing countries with low incomes live on under-sized and inadequate units. Since the amount of income is dependent on the size of the farm, preponderance of small and tiny holdings is mainly responsible for poor peasantry in these countries. Even where there are no cost advantages or disadvantages for farms of various sizes, small farms will have, under usual price relationships, low incomes and hence savings, than large farms. Thus, the size of farm is a vital element in determining the earning capacity of the farmer of a farm unit.

Nigeria is endowed with large fertile agricultural land, rivers, streams, lakes, forest and grass lands, as well as large active population that can sustain a productive and profitable agricultural sector. This enormous resource base can support a vibrant agricultural sector capable of ensuring self-sufficiency in food and providing raw materials for the industrial sector, as well as providing gainful employment for the teeming population and generating foreign exchange through exports. According to Mordi *et al* (2010) the major characteristics of Nigerian agriculture is that majority (about 80 percent) of the population engaged in agriculture are small scale farmers. According to him, this is mainly in response to the resource endowment of the country, government policies and programmes, the state of technological advancement, the land tenure system and the cultural practices prevalent in the various communities.

Small scale farmers play different and often multi-functional roles in different parts of the World and in Nigeria. They are among the key drivers of the economy as well as providing sources of employment, food security, poverty reduction and ecosystem services. However, in Nigeria, despite the doggedness of these small scale farmers, they had continuously produced below their potentials as they are hindered by many problems and challenges. This research project therefore attempt to study the problems and prospects of small scale farmers in Enugu State with a view of offering solution to the myriads of problems facing small scale farmers in the country.

Conceptual Framework

Defining a small scale farmer is always a challenging task as there has been heated debate among agricultural economists on what farm size constitutes small scale farming. For instance, Nagayets (2005), maintains that small scale farming include family farms as

operated units in which most labor and enterprise come from the farm family, which puts much of its working time into the farm. But World Bank (2011) opines that small scale farmers are those with low asset base, operating less than two hectares of crop land and a small holder farmer (Crop or Livestock) practicing a more of commercial and subsistence production or either where the family provides the majority of labor and the farm provides the principal source of income. Thus, there has not been agreement among authors on what constitutes small scale farming. However, the size of land holding (or number of livestock) owned or managed by a house hold or enterprise, the amount of capital used in the farm business and the numbers of people in employment are the key creteria in determining what constitute small scale farming. For instance, a farmer cultivating less than two hectares annually, employ less than ten people in his farm and is doing the farming business with less than N200, 000 may be considered a small scale farmer (Onwudinjo, 2012).

Africa has abundant arable land and labor which with sound polices, could be translated into increased production, incomes and food security. This has not materialized because of lack of consistent policies and/or effective strategies. Thus, despite agriculture accounting for 70 percent of the labor force, over 25 percent of GDP and 29 percent of agribusiness in most countries, it continues to be given low priority. Agriculture also has a high multiplier effect, which means that agricultural investment can generate high economic and social returns and enhance economic diversification as well as social development.

The bedrock of agricultural development in developing countries of Sub-Sahara Africa is rural development, without which all efforts at agricultural development will be futile. A large majority of the famers operates at the subsistence, smallholder level, with intensive agriculture being uncommon. According to Eastwood *et al* (2010), "a characteristics feature of the agricultural production system in such countries, Nigeria inclusive, is that a disproportionately large function of the agricultural output is in the hands of these smallholder farmers whose average holding is about 1-3 hectares. Also, there is very limited access to modern improved technologies and their general circumstance does not always merit tangible investment in capital, security is strongly dependent on the performance of the small- scale agriculture sector. The mean farm size varies by country , and show , for example a mean range size range varying from 0.8 ha in Egypt , 1 ha in Ethiopia, and 1.3 ha in India , to 2.5 ha in Colombia and 7.3 ha in Brazil . In general, farms are smaller in countries with high population densities in South and Eastern Asia and in some countries in Africa. This means that farm size is a reflection of a number of factors, not least historical legacy and the institutional and legal arrangements relating to land access and reforms. In Africa and Asia, mean farm sizes seem to have shown an overall decline over the 20th century, whereas in South American there appears to be no clear overall long-term trend. In terms of the ratio of agricultural area to agricultural population, trends vary considerably, for Kenya, Senegal and Bolivia for example, there has been a decline over the period 1980 to 2008, possibly suggesting a lack of alternative income earning opportunity set in the context of an increasing population and stagnating growth in agricultural area, while the converse applies in the case of Brazil. In some regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, in the period 1980 to 2010, the agricultural population almost doubled yet there has been very little expansion of total agricultural area.

Small-scale farmers play different and often multifunctional roles in different parts of the world. They may be key drivers of economy-wide growth in the early stages of development of a given country, as well as providing sources of employment, food security, poverty reduction and ecosystem services. Multiple factors influence the extent to which they play such roles, not least land distribution and land inequality (Deiningger and Squire, 1998). The ability of the small-scale farm to provide a decent livelihood varies depending on land quality, water access, availability of public goods closeness to market and infrastructure (such as roods). The type and value of crop (or livestock) is also a factor since a farmer producing high value horticulture cannot realistically be compared with a farmer with the same farm size producing a staple crop largely or exclusively for home consumption.

The Study Area: Enugu State is located in the South-eastern part of Nigeria. It shares borders with Benue State to the North-east, Kogi State to the North-west, Abia and Imo States to the South, Ebonyi State to the East and Anambra State to the West. The people of Enugu State have cultural affinities with the ethnic groups of their six neigbouring states. Enugu State is situated on the highlands of Awgu, Udi and Nsukka. This is a chain of low hills which run through Abakaliki (Ebonyi State) in the East to Nsukka in the North-west, then South wards through Enugu and Awgu. The rest of Enugu State sits on the rolling lowlands of the Idodo River Basin to the East, and Oji River Basin to the West. The State has numerous streams, rivulets and lakes. The major rivers are the Adada River, the Ekulu, the Ajalli and the Oji Rivers. The lakes are to be found in three main areas: the Opi Lake Complex in Nsukka Local Government (made up of seven lakes all of which are fairly large in size); the Ezeagu Lake in Ezeagu Local Government, three kilometers long and a couple of hundred meters wide), which in the same locality has a cave (comprising several channels, branching out in different direction) and the Amagunze Lake Complex in Nkanu East Local Government (altogether nine principal lakes of considerable length, breadth and depth, and containing a range of aquatic animals such as hippopotamus, crocodiles, seabirds. These resources are potential for the establishment of tourist industries and growth of agriculture in Enugu State. Enugu State lies largest within the semi-tropical rain forest of the south of Nigeria. But it also stretches toward the north with its features changing gradually from rain forest to open woodland and savannah. It has a land area of approximately 8727.1 square kilometers. It has a good well-rained soil and a fairly equable climate. The main temperature in the hottest month (February) is 36.2ºC and the minimum temperature (usually recorded in November) is about 20.3ºC. Its lowest rainfall is about 0.16cm and occurs in February, and its highest is about 35.7cm in July. Basically, the people of Enugu State are agrarian. The soil and climate of the state is good for production of variety of agricultural goods, the key cash crops are cashew, rice, oil palm and castor oil. The food crops produced in Enugu are yam, cassava, peas, maize, cowpea, melon, kola, plantains, bananas, mangoes and citrus. Virtually all the local governments in Enugu state have majority of their populace as farmers, but about 90% of them are small scale farmers (SEEDS, 2004).

Challenges of small scale farmers in Enugu State

Generally, agriculture and rural development in Africa has been neglected for many reasons and Enugu state Nigeria is not an exception. A critical assessment of agriculture in Nigeria

today indicates that one of the major factors militating against agricultural output growth in Nigeria is the neglect of small scale farmers in the country. Poverty in agriculture in Nigeria as in most of the third world countries is a much a problem of small scale farmers as the majority of farm families in their countries with low incomes live in under- sized and inadequate units. Since the amount of income is dependent on the size of the farm, preponderance of small and tiny holdings is mainly responsible for poor peasant in the country (Desai, 2008).

Other challenges facing small scale farmers in Enugu state Nigeria are firstly, most small scale farmers are faced with inadequate finance to procure the necessary materials needed to enable them embark on agricultural production. Secondly, lack of government support in terms of favorable legislation that will support and encourage them. Thirdly, lack of social and basic infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity, markets. Fourthly, lack of basic farm inputs like improved seedlings, fertilizers, storage facilities etc. Fifthly, the land tenure system make the small scale farmers mostly women to always find it difficult to obtain land for farming, and finally, lack of technology like, mechanized farming, irrigation facilities poverty, poor yield etc.

Also, there the gender dimension of farm works as most farm lands are owned by men, while women headed household maintained subsistence farming often associated with drudgery, poverty, and suffering. Again majority of the farmers are aged with little strength and capacity for expansion, as energetic young men are shying away from farming. Other challenges faced by small scale farmers in the study area include amongst others dearth of mechanized farming as many Enugu farmers still make use of crude farm tools in their farming enterprises; inadequate capital and lack of credit facilities; poor yield and markets; and the use of local farm inputs. From the foregoing, the researcher concludes that government of every tier should as a matter of necessity embarks on policies which are conducive to sustain positive effects in small scale farmers.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings of the study, the researchers were induced to make the following recommendations:

1) The Federal, State and Local Governments should step up activities towards improving the lives and productivities of the small scale farmers. A special commission should be set up by the government, which will be entirely responsible for monitoring the activities of the small scale farmers.
2) Federal and state ministries of rural development should be created to oversee the affairs of the rural sectors where most of these small scale farmers reside.
3) Rural-oriented programmes like DERRI (Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure), Better Life for Rural Women should be reactivated to help in the development of rural areas.
4) Infrastructural facilities such as roads, portable water, electricity, adequate and qualitative education, health care facilities and security should be as a matter of priority provided in the rural communities.
5) Governments of different tiers should set up a special intervention agro-services agency with the sole task of addressing the peculiar

agricultural needs of the small scale farmers through the creation of agro-clusters areas. This should be created along the lines of the cash and food crops that each zone has absolute and comparative advantages.

6) Farm input such as improved seedlings, fertilizers, agro-chemicals, credit facilities and trainings could be made available to the small scale farmers through this agency as against, the present system of consigning them to the politicized local government and ministry of Agriculture officials.

7) Land tenure issues should be revisited by all relevant authorities and relevant laws made to allow women farmers' access to land for agricultural production.

8) Government and microfinance institutions should endeavour to provide small scale farmers with a non-collateralized credit with lower interest rate to boost rural productivities.

9) All government development policies should be geared towards bottom-top approach.

10) Activities of Community based organisations like the rural NGOs, and agro-based co-operative societies should be strengthen and organized to have the capacities of provisions of self help projects.

11) Financial empowerment by banks and governments, infrastructural development, provision and subsidizing of modern farm input etc are prerequisite for enhancing the plight of small scale farmers in Nigeria.

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