

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

M. C. Udeolisa

Abstract

Food has ever remained the primary need of man. Millions of the world population have died of hunger due to inadequate availability of food, both quantity and quality. This seems obvious why the writer looks at the issue of food security as being very pertinent in an age where millions of Nigerians can no longer feed themselves. The writer in the present discourse focuses on various strategies to step up food security in the entire nation.

Introduction

Agriculture is universally looked at or simply defined as farming. It is the science and art, involving control production of both crops and animals for the ultimate benefit of man. It has remained the backbone of the economy of most advanced countries of the world, and the primary source of food supply to millions of the world population.

In Nigeria, before the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, agriculture was the life wire of the economy, supplying the people with enough food and excess for export. A huge sum of foreign exchange is realized from the sale of cocoa, cotton, palm and even groundnut.

But after the end of the civil war, this great industry began to show signs of stress and strain. Agriculture was eventually de-emphasized and the oil took its place. It was no more the main stay of the national economy and its foreign exchange earning relative to other sectors of the economy took a nose-dive. The consequences were food importation, which give rise to the great 'rice Armada'.

It was on account of this deplorable situation of the agricultural sector of the economy, that both the Federal and various State Governments timely intervened by instituting various agricultural policies, programmes and projects. Prominent among these was the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). It was quickly recognized in the mid seventies that most of the fundamental economic problems of Nigeria such as youth employment, inflation and rural-urban migration stemmed mainly from the neglect of the agricultural sector. Hence, the government considered it necessary to mount a nationwide campaign and appeal with emotional flavour addressed to all Nigerians to take to farming order to feed themselves and the nation:-The emphasis of the crusade is to bring to all Nigerians the dignity of labour through mass participation. Consequently the Operation Feed the Nation programme was launched on 20th May, 1976. Also, sequel to the report of the Operation Feed the Nation Scheme, the Green Revolution Programme was launched by the Shagari administration in April 1980. Others worthy of mentioning are: the River Basin Development Authorities established under decrees 25 and 27 of 1976, primarily designed to harness water resources for various use for crop production, livestock and fisheries, etc.; National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP); Agricultural Development Project (ADP); National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), established in May, 1991, to execute a National land development programme that would address the chronic problems of low levels utilization of abundant farm land and rural labour resources and the high cost of land development (Lombin, 1995).

Food Security and National Development

After life itself, the most basic need of man is food to sustain life. As at now, the single threat to man on this earth is hunger as nearly 800 million people round the world are chronically under nourished, lacking insufficient food to aid healthy active lives. The number of people, who die annually of starvation and malnutrition related diseases, especially at present, is by far greater than the cumulative deaths rising from past world and localized wars since 1940. It is out of this concern that the recent global concept of food security was introduced to symbolize the crucial importance of the need to nations, individually and collectively, to tackle the menace of hunger which is taking a heavy toll around world.

Food Security, therefore, can be defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life (World Bank, 1988). In a broader sense, it is the availability of food,

The Nigerian Academic Forum, Volume 10 No. 1, May, 2006

through production, storage or imports and also access of people to food, by having the income to buy it or the financial and other resources to grow it. There are broadly two aspects of food security- intra generational food security, which is simply the ability of future generation and household, most especially

Udeolisa, M. C.

the rural dwellers and urban people to meet their staple food needs all year round. The other aspects is inter-generational food security which is the ability of future generation to meet their food needs on-season and off-season.

It should be noted that the seriousness of food security was reaffirmed in 1996 at the world Food Summit in Rome, where the summit recognized the right of all people to be free from hunger emphasizing their basic human welfare including nutritional well-being must be at the center of social and economical efforts, particularly of those nations, whose people are the most afflicted by hunger.

Despite our bountiful material resources and endowment, Nigerians are today generally acknowledged to be poverty and hunger stricken. The need for Nigerians to ensure and assure food supplies and adequate food consumption on a sustainable basis is therefore, both critical and imperative for national self-esteem, security, development and socio-political stability.

Measures to Boost Food Security

1. Greater Priority to Agricultural Practices

Past experience has taught us that the past neglect of Agriculture in our national development strategy was responsible for our present economic crisis generally and the non-performance of agriculture as a major production sector of the economy. The present government has indicated a political commitment to the development of agriculture. I wish to advocate that this political commitment will be complimented by concrete policy measures and interventions in budgetary allocation and micro and macro economic measure, which are friendly to sustainable agricultural growth.

2. Increase in Agricultural Output

With good policies, which make Nigerian farmers technologically competent and enterprenually motivated, Nigerians can expect rapid increase in agricultural output at rates which would guarantee not only the peoples need for food but also the required industrial raw materials and surpluses for export and foreign exchange. The desired agricultural growth rates which should guarantee the country's food security can only be achieved and sustained if producers are motivate by availability of markets and arrangement which also guarantee remunerative prices.

3. Accessibility to Food by all Nigerians

With growing urbanization and stratification of the population into various economic endeavours, the country is experiencing a rise in non-rural and non-farming population concentrated in our rapidly growing urban center. Access to food for this class of people is critical. This can be achieved through effective network of food marketing and distribution systems, which include post harvest processing, and storage. Also critical to food access is the ability of all Nigerians to earn enough wages to be able to buy the required quantity of quality and safe food. This implies of course an economy with ample opportunities for remunerative employment.

4. Capacity to Deal with Emergency

The most desirable food security situation for any country is to have a sustained capacity and capability to produce its needs at any given situation or at a point in time. Nevertheless the country should, in addition, be able also to provide emergency arising from both natural and unnatural cause where stop-gap measures are needed by the people until they can regain their more normal routine lives. This emergency capacity takes the form of strategic food reserves at national level and buffer stocks at the state and local government levels. For example, construction of steel silos each with a capacity of 125,000 tones of dry grains, has been completed in five locations in the country and another to store 250,000 tones was completed in 1998.

5. Food safety and Regulatory Issues

No meaning enduring sustainable food security programme for Nigeria can afford to ignore the vital issues of food safety especially for consumers who are far away either from the point of raw material production or point of processing into semi and finished consumer products. In our country today, the role of NAFDAC towards food safety needs commendation. The organ has greatly helped to put some checks on manufacturing and distributive industries around the nation. This has helped to reduce mortality rate from food poisoning.

6. Institution and Legal Support for Food Security

The success of implementing policies and strategies for agriculture generally and food

Agriculture and Food Security for National Development

security particularly will depend on an efficient institutional agreement to carry them out. This will reduce or eliminate disruption and discontinuity of policies either arising from changes in government or personalities within the government.

The Eco System and Food Security

Making agricultural system sustainable in Nigeria demands among other things an accelerated re-capitalization of soils to reverse the downward spiral of degradation. This goal will require policies to improve individual or group tenure security as well as encourage private entrepreneurs to function more efficiently in both input and output markets. These policies should be associated with continued development and promotion of environmental sound and economically viable technologies that enable small holders to meet increasing demands for food and other agricultural commodities.

The following strategies will help for an enhanced food security:

1. Enhancing sustainable soil fertility by improving organic matter management through mixed farming, composing recycling and increased fertilizer use.
2. Re-establishing the stock of phosphorous, the lack of which is a key limiting factor in agricultural productivity.
3. Promoting erosion control techniques, such as contour farming, minimum tillage, mulching, crop rotation and intercropping system.
4. Improving farm water management through water harvesting and complementary small scale irrigation.

Conclusion

Nigerian population is growing geometrically. The citizens can no longer be allowed to wallow in abject poverty and hunger. There is therefore, every need to step up workable food security measures to ensure all around production and availability of food all year round.

References

Ekemode (2000). Introduction to Agriculture for Sustainable Development.

Jackson, Gaius (2000). Conservation and Management of Natural Resources for Sustainable Food Security. A Paper Presented at the National Security, Abuja.

Egbule, P. E. (2000). Fundamental and Practice of Agricultural Education. Owerri: Totan Publishers Limited.

Ango Abdulahi (2000). Seminar on Sustainable Food Security for Nigeria.

Oluwu, T. A. (2000). Stakeholders Participation for Strengthening Agricultural Extension Practice and Security in Nigeria. Proceedings of Eight Annual National Conference of the Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria 16th - 19th September.