

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper attempts to outline and describe the major problems and prospects of agriculture to induce growth of output and accelerate development. On the basis of the forgoing, the paper suggests further directions of policy. Among suggested strategies for agricultural development are granting of more credit facilities to farmers so that peer pressure would help minimize loan default, greater adoption of technological breakthrough to increase crop yields, training sub-sector specialists for research and extension work, development of infrastructure, development of land tenure system and mechanization policy, introduction of better species of plants and animals, adoption of affordable hand pump- based irrigation technique instead of costly huge dams and broadening environmental protection programmes to cover erosion and flood control.

The paper concludes that if most of these measures are adopted and effectively implemented, the targeted real annual growth for the agricultural sector could be achieved.

Introduction

'The importance of the agricultural sector in the Nigerian economy cannot be overemphasized. Most public policy makers have expected the sector to satisfy the bulk, if not all, of the food requirements of the country, supply, most of the agricultural raw materials needed by the manufacturing sector, provide adequate employment to farmers as well as earn substantial foreign exchange. Beattie, (1966) a Colonial Officer, realized as much, when he asserted, in defending the proposals, made for the agricultural sector in the first ever development plan for Nigeria, that "the social and political advancement of the people is necessarily bound up with the dependent of the people and dependent upon improvements in agricultural practices" (Federation of Nigeria, 1946).

In line with the anticipated contributions agriculture is to make to the overall development of the Nigerian economy, several measures were designed in the years preceding such as encouragement of agricultural research, provision of agricultural inputs, provision of production policies, provision of agricultural infrastructure, marketing and pricing policies, provision of agricultural mechanization as well as the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 to stimulate the growth and development of the agricultural sector.

In spite of these measures, the fortune of agriculture have so diversely changed within the past three decades, that today, Nigeria has not only lost its leadership position as an exporter within the past three decades, but instead she is now a net importer of these items or exports very little if any, at all, in addition has become dangerously dependent on foreign food import since the end of the civil war.

Perhaps, the performance of the sector have generally been considered unsatisfactory and the expected significant contribution was to make towards the attainment of several national economic and social goals remains largely an expectation. The question is, why have the measures adopted over the years not achieved sustainable growth of the sector and in which direction should policy be focused to hasten the realization of the objectives for Nigerian agriculture?

Thus, the objectives of this paper are to:

- (1) Outline and describe the various problems of agricultural development in Nigeria.
- (2) Propose the prospects for enhancing growth of agricultural output.

Constraints to Increased Agricultural Output in Nigeria

The low degree to which the sector has responded to policy measures may be partially understood in the context of the country's agricultural system, The Nigerian system of agriculture is based on numerous small farms. A 1990/91 rural survey indicated that about 55 percent of all producing farms were smaller than 2-5 acres and that 82 percent of all farms had less than 5 acres. In

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advanced countries, farmers also may not own large farms, but they are able to produce efficiently to feed the growing population of their countries and still have surplus for export. In Nigeria, as in the other West African Countries, about 85 to 90 percent of the working population are employed in agriculture and yet the nation is unable to raise enough food for home consumption, (Hyde 1981:1; and Millor, 1961: 569). However, the following problems constrained the growth of the agricultural output in Nigeria.

The first perspective is what may be referred to as the colonial heritage of inappropriate policies. This involves the continuation of colonial agricultural policies which were formulated to serve largely the interests of the metropolitan countries, by the pre independence governments of Nigeria. The colonial agricultural policy was anchored on ensuring the production of industrial cash crops by the Nigerian peasant farmers so as to keep the industrial wheels in their home countries running. This was achieved through the use of both carrot and stick approaches on the peasant. (Igbogurike, 1982: 1-4).

Similarly, after independence the official perception of Nigeria's agricultural problem was that of how best to ensure that the country's agricultural exports generated enough foreign earnings to finance the much desired development as quickly as possible. In practical terms, the policy involved the encouragement of cash crop agriculture through the establishment of research institutions, provision of fertilizers, agro chemicals for the various cash crops, institutional structures for the marketing of the products, suitable infrastructural facilities; and various forms of incentives given to cash crop farmers in the form of grants, credit facilities, supply of inputs to encourage them either to expand their farms, replant old crops or to adopt improved farm management practices. Naturally, our farmers, being rational, would be concentrated on cash crop farming and became contented merely in growing food crops just to satisfy the needs of their families, (Heleiner, 1976).

Moreover, another factor which constrained output increase in agriculture is that of the changing economic structure. Towards the end of 1960, petroleum emerged as a new sector in the Nigerian economy, by the end of the Civil War, it had grown to become the pillar on which the national economy was built, thereby displacing agriculture which hitherto had played that role. The petroleum sector generated unprecedented revenue to the government thereby creating what some refer to as "money illusion" which led our leaders to have reportedly boasted that money was not the problem but how to spend it Lipsy, (1962).

In addition, the windfall of oil revenue brought in its tail many ramifications which together worsened the already precarious position of agriculture in general and that of food production in particular. The increased revenue from the oil sector spurred the government to embark on ambitious construction efforts and other development projects - most of these were concentrated in urban areas. These construction efforts and projects translated into more jobs, better salaries, mere attractive and good things of life in urban centres and increased opportunities to make fast money for doing anything including business investment. The immediate effect of these, according to Udo (1982, pp.2 & 3) was a massive out-migration of both young and old, men and women from the rural area to the urban centres in search of better paid jobs. This led to withdrawal of the much needed labour from the agricultural sector.

Finally, cultural values and belief, system, land tenure system, inadequate manpower, biological and climatic problems, poor agricultural financing, poor banking etiquette, low interest rate prevailing in the agricultural sector and inadequate supplies of rural banking hamper the production and growth of agricultural output in Nigeria.

Prospects of the Agricultural Sector In Nigeria

The prospects of agricultural sector in Nigeria was aimed at the development of the nation generally through the provision of adequate food and techniques of production. In this regard, Nigerian governments have taken various measures since independence to upgrade agricultural production. As a

result, they have devoted several chapters in their national development plans, explaining the different policies to achieve higher production in agriculture.

In view of this, by the middle of 1970 various programmes as well as institutional and administrative reform both at the federal and state levels came to be put in place aimed at improving the productive capacity of the national agricultural sector. These include the National Accelerated Food Production programme (NAFFP), Operation Feed The Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, the Land Use Decree, Commodity Boards, Food production companies, Agricultural Credit Bank, Agro Service Centres to facilitate access to farm inputs by farmers, River Basin Authorities, agricultural infrastructure, marketing and pricing policies, agricultural mechanization and massive irrigation works. These can be explained as follows:

Firstly, encouragement of agricultural research; the various governments in Nigeria have accorded high priority to agricultural research in a bid to boost the productivity of the farmer through introduction of improved and high yielding crop varieties and the replacement of the hoes and cutlass culture with modern technique. (CBN Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 1990 / 95 edition). Government activities in this research are concentrated in the establishment of research institutions across the country as well as the encouragement of agricultural research in Nigerian Universities. Some of the prominent research centres include the Umudike Research Station which specializes in root crops such as yam, cassava and cocoyam, The Jos Research Station which deals on Potato, the Moor Plantain Research Station in Ibadan which deals on maize, rice and pulses, and the Samara centre which concentrates on wheat, millet and sorghum. Others include the Cocoa, Research Institute in Ibadan, the Nigerian Institute For Oil Palm Research (NIFOR) in Benin and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture Ibadan which is a joint venture between Nigeria and some foreign interests. In the Second National Development plan, agricultural research accounted for *H9.7* million or 15.7 percent of the total federal capital expenditure of N61.7 million (Udoka, 1992).

2. Agricultural input:- The procurement of inputs for distribution to farmers has been a major pre-occupation of the Government both at the national and state levels. Uptill 1985, the procurement and distribution of inputs to farmers have been the sole responsibilities of the government. These inputs include farm machinery for land preparation, seeds and seedlings, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, sprayers, veterinary drugs and vaccines, feed concentrates etc. These inputs were distributed to farmers at subsidized rate. (Aleguuno and Ukpong, 1992).

3. Direct Government Production Policies: Various Governments in Nigeria in response to the increasing

demand for food, established food production companies during the third plan period. These included the National Grain Production Company, the National Root Crop Production Company, The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFFP) and the integrated Agricultural Rural Development Pilot Programme (ADP). While the first two were concerned with the production of grain and root crops respectively across the country, the last two were more or less concerned with the supply of necessary inputs to meet the growing needs of farmers for seeds, fertilizers, agricultural implements, storage and credit facilities. In addition, the ADP was to be involved in socio-economic activities such as rural road construction, dam construction, water supply, live stock production etc. The aim of the scheme was to provide improved services in the form of an integrated package to existing small holds, farming communities with the objective of increasing their productivity, raising their incomes and bringing overall socio-economic development to the rural areas. By 1990, the ADP had operated seven projects located in Funtua (Kaduna State), Gusau (Sokoto), Anyangba (Benue State), Lafia (Plateau State), Bida (Niger State) and Ilorin (Kwara State) which catered for about 632 thousand farming families (Ojo, 1991).

Another major effort at direct agricultural production by the government comes with establishment of River Basin Development Authorities across the country. The concept of river basin development as a tool for agricultural transformation was introduced in 1970. In 1973, the Sokoto - Rima and the Chad Basin Development Authorities were established bringing the total to eleven. In 1984, the number of river basin development authorities in the country was increased from 11 to 18, following the decentralization of their operations on a state basis. The authorities were established with the specific objectives of assisting the State Government in the implementation of rural development programmes in the following ways:

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- (1) Large scale mechanized clearing and cultivation of land for farmers,
- (2) Construction of small dams and bore holes for rural water supplies and clearing of federal roads for the evacuation of produce etc.
- (3) Agricultural Infrastructure: Agricultural infrastructure consists of activities such as irrigation, soil conservation, land use survey, agricultural research, manpower training and storage and marketing. Doubtless agricultural development in Nigeria is hampered by lack of adequate infrastructural facilities such as water, good roads electricity, storage and marketing facilities. The high priority given to infrastructural development in the agricultural sector is evidenced in the huge budgetary allocation to the sub-sector under the 3rd and 4th National Development Plans. In the third plan period, a total of 428.8 million was allocated for agriculture infrastructure while in the 4th plan the sub sector gulped a total of N455.1 million thus represented of this' soil conservation consumed a total capital rate of £4290.3 and 14212.0 million in the third and forth plans respectively.

Efforts have been stepped up to arrest the menace of soil erosion and desert encroachment through intensive tree planting campaigns.

The construction of rural roads for easy evacuation of agricultural products to the marketing centres has also occupied the attention of both the Federal and State governments in Nigeria. In 1986, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was established to serve as a catalyst in providing rural infrastructure as a step toward agricultural expansion and development in Nigeria (Helleiner, 1976).

4. Public Campaign Agricultural Programmes:-These include the Operation Feed the Nation of the Obasanjo era, the Green Revolution launched by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the School to land programme introduced by the Rivers State government and the Graduate Farming Scheme of the Lagos State Government and the Operation Food First of the Babangida administration. The Operation Feed the Nation was established in 1975 with the objectives of mobilizing the nation towards sufficiency in food production, encouraging the section of the population which relied on buying food to grow its own food and encouraging balanced nutrition and thereby producing a healthy nation. Apart from exhortation and publicity designed to get the people to produce more food, government's contribution to the programme included the provision of essential input to farmers at subsidized rates including fertilizers, fishing inputs and live stock feeds. In 1978, a total of over 703,000 tonnes of fertilizers were distributed to farmers at 50 percent subsidy which over 350,000 broilers, 82,500 Layers, 1.5million eggs and 21,500 tones of grain were sold in various parts of the country; (Lugard, 1991).
5. Agricultural Mechanization:- Agricultural mechanization is an important component of agricultural policy in Nigeria. Mixed feelings have however been expressed on the efficiency of agricultural mechanization in bringing about the desired transformation to the agricultural sector and greater output. Advocates for mechanization as a strategy for agricultural expansion point to the saving in time and labour gained and the increased productivity of the farmer as a result of the application of modern mechanized technique of production.
Temporary and Grist (1958) has warned that "it is of the utmost importance that efforts to introduce mechanization of peasant farming to the tropics should not be attempted until its implications on the social habits of the people have been completely appraised, and not before practical trials of machines and organisation have been made on sufficiently large scale to provide the necessary technical, economic and social experience.

Summary And Recommendations

The paper has attempted to review and identify constraints to increase of agricultural production to include small proportion of actual credit disbursed to the various sub-sectors relative to serious bottleneck in input supply, colonial heritage of inappropriate policies, poor infrastructure, changing economic structure, the wind-fall of oil revenues, inadequate manpower, cultural values and

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belief and inadequate supplies of rural banking scheme. The paper also recommended that in the years ahead,

- (a) More agricultural credit should be provided to formal and informal groups of committed farmers, so that peer pressure would help minimize incident of loan defaults.
- (b) In addition, various government policies should be established; such as Agricultural research institute, agricultural input, public campaign, agricultural programme, agricultural mechanization, agricultural infrastructure and agricultural financing etc to achieve higher production in agriculture output.
- (c) The paper also recognised the need for the development of human resources involved in the sector.

It is believed that if these recommendations are adopted and the contents addressed in the next few years, the targeted real annual growth of 5.0 per cent for the sector could be achieved.

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