

Challenges of Agriculture in Nigeria Economy: A Bane to Food Security

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Abstract: *The Nigeria National Flag have two combined colour of Green and White (Green-White-Green). The Green colour symbolizes that Nigeria is a potential agricultural economy. Not only that, the Nigeria Coat of Arm have a symbol –The Black Shield. This symbol equally represents rich agricultural soil. With The combination of these two symbols , one may quickly concluded if he is not a Nigeria and probabaly not living in Nigeria that agriculture is the main stream of the Nigeria economy. However, this assumption is fallacy because Nigeria after over fifty three years (1960-2014) of attaining Political independence is not among the list of the agriculturally recognized countries of the world. Against this backdrop, this paper through secondary source of information enumerated the various challenges faced by agriculture in achieving food security and a source of foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria. The paper chiefly recommends amongst that government should encourage boosting of agriculture through subsidizing of organic fertilizers and at the same time embark on granting agricultural crdit facilities to farmers, link rural areas with good road network and fix agricultural marking institutions and encouraging agricultural investment framework.*

Keywords: *Challenges, Agriculture, Economy, Food & Security*

I. Introduction

Agriculture apart from the contribution to employment creation, poverty and hunger reduction as well as reduction in rural-urban drift was also a source of major foreign exchange earnings of Nigeria and a major contributor to economic development in the early colonial days up to the time of attainment of political independence through to 1970. It was as a result of enormous contribution of agriculture to the economy according to Olufolabi (2009: 1) that:

Agricultural research in Nigeria started more than 100 years ago with the establishment of a botanical garden in Lagos during the late 19th Century. By 1903, the forestry and botanical Department (renamed Agricultural Department) for Southern Nigeria was created . By 1912, the latter was divided into Northern and Southern regions. By 1914, the Forestry and Veterinary Departments were created. The Fishery Department evolved in 1951. In a nutshell, by the 70s and 80s, different research institutes and departments of agriculture had emerged. Presently Nigeria has the largest and most elaborate National Agricultural research systems in sub-saharan Africa. By 2006, the Government set up an umbrella body known as Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) which was established to address the challenges faced by agriculture.

The major functions of agricultural research is to provide necessary information for policy makers and also to funding agencies. It is also to as well provide transfer of research-induced technology to farmers which essentially measure research benefits to society. Lastly, agricultural research impact study also provides feedback to scientists on which technologies or technology components are successful at farm levels.

Find below lists of the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) under the aegis of Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN)

1.	National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI)	Umudike
2	National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT)	Ibadan
3	Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN)	Ibadan
4	Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR)	Benin-City
5	Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria (RRIN)	Benini-City
6	Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research (NIOMR)	Lagos
7	Lake Chad Research Institute (LCRI)	Maiduguri
8	National Veterinary Research Institute (NVRI)	Vom
9	National Institute for Fresh-Water Fisheries Research (NIFFER)	New Bussa
10	Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI)	Ilorin
11	National Cereal Research Institute (NCRI)	Badgi
12	Institute for Agricultural Research & training (IAR&T)	Ibadan
13	National Animal Production Research Institute (NAPRI)	Shika Zaria
14	National Agricultural Extension & Research Liason Services (NAERLS)	Zaria
15	Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR)	Samaru Zaria

Source: "The Role of Research In Agricultural Development" by Dr (Mrs) Adenike Olufolabi, Executive Director, National Horticultural Research Institute, Ibadan Nigeria

From the above, it presupposes that with the so many number of research institutes, agriculture would be able to assist the Nigerian economy greatly and its contribution compete favourably with the oil sub-sector of the economy. However, the story is a sharp opposition of our presupposition. In the light of the above, let's examine some of the challenges of agriculture in Nigeria and why Nigeria with her vast and rich agricultural soil and many number of research institutes is not among the list of agriculturally developed countries of the world.

There is low public spending on "agricultural research as a proportion of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Africa declined over the years (ECA-OECD Review 2005). Take for instance, "Nigeria invest 2% of her national budget into agriculture annually..." this is comparable to small country like Burkina Faso which invest 10 % and most Asian nations invest 16% of their national budget into agricultural sector, we shall discover that Nigeria Government is doing little or nothing to make Nigeria a potential agricultural nation.

Mismanagement is also a major challenge of agriculture in Nigeria. All facet of Nigeria of Nigeria economy is faced with mismanagement of resources by those who allocate resources. This challenge extends to the agricultural sub-sector of the economy. It is as a result that all the numerous research institutes across the country are yet come out with a viable formula for agricultural improvement as expected.

Another close link factor to that of mismanagement is corruption. Corruption is "the infringement of normal or societal norm or practices..." World Bank define it "as the abuse of public power for private benefit". Transparency International define it "as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" while the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Acts 2000 provides corrupt acts to include bribery, fraud and other related offences. To Vision 2010 Committee, corruption "implies those improper actions or transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgements and positions of trust" (Shanum 2013), the above wide range felonies and others such as embezzlement, nepotism, favouritism, money laundering and advanced fee fraud which manifest in forms such as inflation of government contracts in return for inducement et-ceteral are the order of the day in the agricultural sector like any other government business in Nigeria. This singular factor is gulping almost all money allocated to the agricultural sector and that is why our agriculture is suffering the set back we are currently facing.

According to Olufolaji (2009) Biotechnology has provided unparallel prospects for improving the quality and productivity of crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry. Genetic Modification (GM) technologies have emerged more recently" the challenge that African countries including Nigeria is facing with using the biotechnology to improve agriculture through this method is that bio-safety is a highly technical field requiring high initial investment for building the necessary human resource capacity and institutional infrastructure such as laboratories and green houses for risk assessment or testing and identification of genetically modified organism" bio-safety issues according to PAPA(2008) transcend national boundaries thereby cripples transboundary movement of Genetic Modification Organism (GMOs) across borders is "going to be formidable challenge which may require policy interventions and coordination". Getting this GMOs if I shall deduce from PAPA(2008) position is that it is not easy for cross borders transportation since it has to get legislative and other legal processes.

In a related development, it has been argued that "there is a general consensus that both transgenic and conventional breeding will be needed to boost crop and livestock productivity during the next 50 years (Science, March 2008). The problem with this is that there is low public investment in biotechnology and slow progress in regulating possible environment and food safety risks in restraining the development of GNO that could help the poor.

Based on United Nations Millenium Development Goals, target are set to reduce by 2015 hunger and poverty as well as enhancing basic life support systems including land, water, forest, biodiversity and the atmosphere. This to a large extent shall not be attained by 2015 in Nigeria.

The new Partnership for Africa is Development (NEPAD) 2001 in its agenda is "driven by the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) which expected annual grow trade is target at 6.5% . Also, at least 10% of the national budget of countries based on the Maputo Declaration of February 2003 should be allocated to agriculture. Nigeria is yet to attain this cvriteria in this agricultural target.

There is also low agricultural mechanization in Nigeria. Agriculture in Nigeria is still left in the hands of farmers who employ crude method of farm impliments such as the use of hoes, cutlasses etc for cultivation, tilling and general farming. This development to some extent assist to encourage food insecurity in Nigeria.

In a related development, there is no improved seeds and seedlings available to farmer. Even when the improved seedlings are made available to farmers, majority of the farmers because of ignorance reject the use of such imprved seedling sometimes on flimpsy excuse that their soil may not adapt to it or that the taste of the crop after harvesting is not always as good as the ones that they has been planting hitherto.

High level of illitracy of Nigerian farmers is also causing food insecurity in Nigeria. Majority of Nigeria farmers are illiterate or barely literate because the literate and highly literate elites consider being a farmer as

a dirty job. Therefore, it is the illiterate farmers that is responsible for accepting most of the new techniques and improved new seedlings etc.

The discovery of crude oil across states of the Niger Delta Region in the late 1950s made the government at all levels to abandoned the agricultural sub-sector of the economy. This neglect as the result of the oil discovery is contributing immensely to the low attitude towards agriculture thereby pointing to the impending food insecurity in Nigeria.

Initially, the government was subsidizing organic Fertilizer to help boost agriculture in Nigeria. During this period, most farmers get access to fertilizers at affordable prices. Today, most government at various levels placed low premium to subsidizing of organic fertilizer thereby making the commodity to be too expensive for the poor farmers to afford. Also, government had divorced herself from distributing fertilizers to farmers as it used to be in the past instead the procurement is left in the hands of fake or relatives of those in power who are tagged as contractors of the government. These people diverts the products to unknown destinations while the chief executives will be in the government house organizing press conference to tell the world the number of millions of metric tonnes of fertilizer distributed to farmer for that farming season.

Though, in 1978, the then Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo promulgated the Land Use Decree which transferred all Nigeria land to the Government, Land tenure system is still the major challenge of agricultural revolution in Nigeria. In case of large scale agriculture, people vehemently oppose releasing their inheritance (land) for such purposes.

Lack of credit facilities from either the government or financial institutions. The agriculturalists are faced with severe challenges in securing better loan for their agricultural production. Most of the credit facilities available are mostly from the Federal Government through the agricultural banks which subject farmers to rigorous conditionalities and the farmers who are majorly illiterate could not afford to under go the rigour in the name of collecting loans. Also, the agricultural banks are not helping matter as they give agricultural loans to civil and public servants who are not farmers thereby making the essence of granting the loan useless.

The use of obsolete and archaic harvesting instruments is a also a source of set-back to farmers in Nigeria. Because of the neglect of agriculture by the government coupled with poor credit facilities available to the farmers in Nigeria farmers still depends on the old and crude method of using manual harvesting implements through the employment of manpower. These crude implements not only frustrate farmers but create unnecessary expenses and slow down the harvesting processes due to manual application.

Pest and rodents activities against crop production constitute another challenge to viability of the agriculture in Nigeria. Nigeria farmers are undertaking agricultural profession under the mercy of the pests and rodents that eats up and consume as much crops as they desire. This situation though is an act of God have been successfully controlled in most developed countries of the world that they are no longer constituting challenge to agriculture in those countries.

Vagaries of weather condition determine to a large extent the yielding of agricultural crops in Nigeria. Farmers in Nigeria depends majorly on the natural God-given weather conditions. The consequent of this is that farmers not only wait until rainy season before planting crops but also completely depends on the sufficiency of the rain to take the crops to yielding stage. Sometimes the farmers may experience low yields possibly because the rain is too much or because it is too small depending on the type of crop that a particular farmer may plant.

Closely linked to the above factor with respect to challenges of agriculture in Nigeria is the inability of the government to build facilities for irrigation farming across the country for both dry season farming particularly. The end product of this neglect is that in Nigeria immediately dry season sets in, new crops siezed in the market and or become so scarce and costly. This situation is indeed a great and challenge to food sufficiency in Nigeria.

Private partnership in agriculture is not a common practice in Nigeria because private capitalists and bourgeoisie class have not make agriculture as a priority area yet coupled with the fact that agriculture don't bring quick return on investment and more also that when you invest on agriculture the pay back period is highly unpredictable due to many of the factors enumerated above.

Weeds and weeds control is one of the threats to farmers in Nigeria. The farmers spend substantial part of their meagre income on controlling of weeds in their farm through the hiring of manual labourers. The farmers do not have access to chemicals like herbicides which would have been less expensive in controlling weeds. Even when the chemicals are introduced for them they reject it on the ground that it could as well kill their crops along side with the weeds. The resistance attitude towards the use of chemical may not be unconnected to illitracy and lack of proper education on the usage of the chemical accordingly.

II. Conclusion

Agriculture in Nigeria suffers set back as a result of certain impediments which is hinged mainly on government neglect following the discovery of oil and its subsequent boom. The neglect became so detrimental

in such a manner that farming is left in the hands of local farmers with their crude use of farm equipment which depends mostly on manual application as well resistance to using of improved seedlings that would have earned them abundant harvest.

The government also politically established various agricultural research institutes across the country even in some cases two in a single place as the case with Zaria as seen in serial number 13-15 on page 4 of this paper. For the fact that the citing of these research institutes were mostly on political consideration outrightly made the agricultural research institutes a shadow of its intended glory. The repercussion of these negative developments in the agricultural sector in Nigeria rebranded Nigeria as 'a low agricultural' nation from its former name of a nation that is well known for earning its foreign exchange earnings particularly from cocoa, rubber et-ceteral.

III. Recommendations

The Federal Government should as a matter of urgency allocate higher percentage of her annual budget to agriculture in order to boost agricultural production;

Second, the Federal government should also revamp these agricultural institutes by privatizing them since it has been proved in business that privatization of companies is the best way to efficiency and effectiveness in management;

The local farmers that presently constitutes the largest chunk of agricultural production in the country should be encouraged through direct supply of fertilizers, improved seedlings et-ceteral. The farmers should equally be educated on the advantages of improved seedlings and how to use them by the agricultural extension workers;

Government should equally grant the local farmers agricultural credit facilities through the agricultural banks located across the country by making the various traditional leaders to surety the loans to make the recovery easy.

Agricultural marketing board be resuscitated to set and determine price of agricultural products in order to boost agriculture and encourage more people particularly the capitalists to go into large scale and mechanize agriculture

The above recommendations if implemented will not only go along way to making Nigeria an agricultural nation but it will make our nation to be food sufficiency, discourage over reliance on oil, and Nigeria will also become an exporter of agricultural products as Nigeria used to be in the past

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