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Review of Agricultural Development and Employment Generation in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the way Forward

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Abstract

This study is a theoretical paper aimed at looking at issues, challenges and the way forward concerning agricultural development and employment generation in Nigeria. Nigeria as an economy is endowed with too many resources both human and natural. Yet there is still threat of poverty, starvation, insecurity and unemployment. The unemployment rate is so alarming that between the periods of 2010 and 2019 the rate stood at 5% and 23.1% and a projected 33.5 in 2020. This is a worrisome status as Nigeria serves as the global poverty capital with the incidences of high prevalence of crime rate, murders, kidnappings, militancy, armed robbery, drug abuse and many other vices. To combat this menace calls for urgent attention. It is in the light of the above this study is carried out to access the level of development in the agricultural sector and unraveling the potentials and capacity of the Nigeria agricultural sector if properly developed in generating jobs for the millions of people (Nigerians) without jobs. However, in the course of this study, poor agricultural funding, poor and lack of farm inputs, inconsistent and no sustained policy and programmes for the sector, lukewarm and lackadaisical attitude of political leaders and neglect of agricultural research institutes are seen as some major issues hampering the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study revealed that the agricultural sector is the most critical sector that has the potential to industrialize Nigeria, reduce poverty, increase food security and create jobs for the massive unemployed population. The study concludes that the development of agricultural sector is still at its infant age despite the numerous policy efforts of successive government to develop the sector. Therefore, it is suggest that the only way forward for Nigeria agricultural sector to drive industrialization, guarantee food security and employment generation is by total and massive investment in the sector, budgetary allocation to the sector should be increased by 10% to meet 2003 African Union Summit in Maputo and the right policy and programmes put in place, sustained and managed by patriotic states men and women for the benefit of all.

Keyword: Agricultural Development, Budget Allocation, Employment Generation, Nigeria

1. Introduction

All over the world, agriculture happens to be the mainstay of many economies. It is the most important sector of the Nigeria economy in terms of employment generation especially in the rural area. As a critical sector that drives industrialization and economic development of a country with the ace for reducing unemployment and boosting food production (Ita, Ukpong and Ekpebu, 2013), the development of the sector is pertinent and critical if the major objectives of agricultural development which the World Bank (2017) identified to include increase food production, income and employment generation must be achieved. Binswanger-Mkhize, McCalla and Patel (2009) quoted in the work's of Iwedi, Igbaniho, & Onuegbu (2015). documented that the Nigerian Agricultural sector has not been able to achieve the major objectives of agricultural development as stated by the World Bank. They asserted further that the failure of agriculture to meet these objectives is due to the systematic neglect of the agricultural sector by all levels of government. This neglect is traceable to low capitalization and inadequate funding of the sector occasioned by the dwindling nature of the budgetary allocation to the sector by all level of government, limited use of purchase input and mechanization. As a major source that provides raw materials for the country industrial sector, foreign agro allied industry and a potent source of the much needed foreign exchange, there is need to fund the sector adequately if the objectives of agricultural development will be attained. (World Bank 2018 and Okwumadewa, 1997) .

After, independence in 1960, the agricultural sector dominated the Nigeria economy, such that the development of the country was hinged on the sector alone (Ogbalubi and Wokocha, 2013). It accounted for two-third of the Gross Domestic Product and served as a key driver of growth, wealth creation, employment as well as a tool for poverty reduction. Despite the greener pasture this sector promises, it has repeatedly received a lackadaisical attitude from the government. The steady decline in the budgetary allocation to agricultural sector is a testament to this fact which has highly impeded its development from inception. Megbowon, Ojo and Olasehinde (2017) postulate that the potentials of the agricultural sector for employment generation and as a driver of growth has become doubtful as economies move in the process of development and much more in the era of availability of efficient less labour-demanding production technologies, and climate change that has affected agricultural size negatively. Never the less, despite these facts about the agricultural sector, many governments of developing countries believe that the sector remain a viable target sector in tackling the growing youth unemployment. In Nigeria, unemployment rate has been consistently high for more than 8 years now. In 2010 and 2011, national unemployment rate were 5.1 percent and 6.0 percent respectively. It increased to 10.6 percent and 10.4 percent in 2012 and 2015. It later increased marginally to 13.9% in 2016, 18.8 % in 2017, 22.6% in 2018 and 23.1% in 2019 with a projection of 33.5% in 2020 by the Federal Government respectively (NBS, 2019). This is a worrisome status as Nigeria serves as the global poverty capital with the incidences of high prevalence of crime rate, murders, kidnappings, militancy, armed robbery, drug abuse and many other vices. (World Bank, 2018). This high rate of unemployment in Nigeria is unacceptable if her economy must be sustainable. It is on this pedestal that the Nigeria agricultural sector needs to be developed through the aid of micro-credits since it has the capacity of providing employment opportunity and human development in the economy. Tunji and Oluwaseun, (2015). The agricultural sector can galvanise agricultural production through employment generation and human development in Nigeria, this is based on the logic that increase in agricultural output requires an increase in micro credits to the agricultural sector, which will lead to an increase in output, employment generation and human development. Evbuomwan (1999).

This high rate of unemployment in Nigeria is unacceptable if her economy must be sustainable. It is on this pedestal the Nigeria agricultural sector needs to be developed since it has the capacity of providing employment opportunity and to curb the problems that might want to spring forth from unemployment vogue in the economy. The unemployment problem has increased poverty rate, prostitution, ethnic conflicts, dejection, increase in crime as well as family disputes and broken marriages (Tunji and Oluwaseun, 2015). Unemployed individuals become more and more dissatisfied and resort to riots and demonstrations. Due to unemployment, the economy's GNP will be less than the potential GNP. In view of the aforementioned i.e. high unemployment rate in Nigeria, the potential of agricultural sector in employment generation is guaranteed if the government must invest in the sector together with other agro allied industries. This study aim to answer the question thus; can agricultural sector promote employment generation in Nigeria?. This is based on the logic that increase in agricultural output requires an increase in inputs from the agricultural sector, which indicates an increase in output and employment generation in the agricultural sector.

2. Challenges of Agricultural Development visa vice Employment Generation

According to Downie (2017), several factors have hindered the development of the Nigeria agricultural sector from becoming an engine for economic transformation, job creation and food security. He identified them to include:

i **Poor Agric Funding**

The development of Nigeria agricultural sector has the capacity to create job and remain the only alternative to combating the menace of high unemployment in Nigeria. Presently, Nigeria agricultural value chain accounts for 38% of Nigeria GDP and could increase to 80% if the sector properly funded. However, in recent times there is this lackadaisical attitude of the government to the sector in term of funding is so worrisome. The steady decline in the budgeting allocation to agricultural sector is testament to this fact which has highly impeded the sector development. The table below presents a percentage allocation of the Nigeria budget to the agricultural sector for two decades now.

Table 2.1 Budgetary Allocation to Agriculture Sector in Nigeria (1999-2020)

Year	National Budget (# Billion)	Allocation to Agric Sector (# Billion)	Percentage
1999	947.69	12.15	1.28
2000	701.05	13.60	1.94
2001	1,018.02	64.94	6.38
2002	1,018.02	44.80	4.40
2003	1,446.05	14.99	1.04
2004	1,356.95	11.26	0.83
2005	1,688.39	16.33	0.97
2006	1,799.46	17.92	0.10
2007	2,088.05	32.48	1.56
2008	2,806.05	65.40	2.33
2009	3,048.81	22.44	0.74
2010	4,079.13	28.22	0.69
2011	4,484.15	81.26	1.81
2012	4,877.25	78.90	1.66
2013	4,697.60	81.40	1.77
2014	4,642.85	66.60	1.47
2015	4,454.45	40.10	0.90
2016	6,060.70	92.05	1.52
2017	7,448.30	103.79	1.42
2018	8,612.05	108.98	1.38
2019	8,920.00	107.00	1.19
2020	10,330.00	79.79	0.77

Source: Nigeria Budget office and CBN statistical Bulletin (2020)

A critical look at the above table shows the dwindling nature of funding of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Logically there is not a problem with allocating more funds to security and education since the citizens needs to fill protected as well as a reduction in illiteracy level, but realistically, how secured will a man be in his house or on the street without available and affordable food to eat? This goes without saying that the phrase a hungry man is an angry man is quite true, which makes him dangerous to the society that the government work so hard to protect. The most secured nations in the world were not built on strong military presence but on adequate provision of basic materials necessary for human existence and survival, this extends to a child in the school who most definitely cannot comfortably learn on an empty stomach. The state of security in Nigeria will continually be threatened as long as people are hungry, unemployed, and continue to live below \$1.43 a day. The quality of education is also tied to agriculture. Federal government definitely needs to get her priorities right if Nigeria is ever going to graduate from the menace bedeviling the nation in one piece.

ii. Lack and Poor Farm Input

This is another major challenge of agricultural development in Nigeria. Nigeria farmers are confronted with constrained access to quality farms inputs such as fertilizer and seeds. Various literatures have documented that lack of fertilizer forms the biggest challenge faced by farmer in their operations. Nigeria as a nation does not produce enough fertilizer to meet its needs and restrictions placed on the transport of urea-based fertilizer due to fear it was being repurposed into explosives by northern militia (Boko Haram) have hampered distribution. Secondly, availability of seeds is another significant problem for Nigeria farmers. The research pipeline for new seed varieties is broken and poor quality or counterfeit seed has flooded the

market in the absence of a functioning regulatory system. Low rates of access to mechanical farm tools such as tractors and crop sprayers prevent farmers from utilizing their labor efficiently.

ii Access to Bank Credit

Nigerian banks are wary of extending loans to farmers. According to Downie (2017) most farmers in Nigeria cited access to bank credit as the main barrier to their operations. In the south-south geopolitical zone, the figure was high. Loans to the agriculture sector account for only 1.4 percent of total bank lending (Kay, 2016). Nigeria has undertaken several initiatives to try to promote more lending to the agriculture sector, notably the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL), launched by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2013, which guarantees loans extended to farmers and offers rebates to recipients who pay back the money on time. However, the economic condition of the country has choked lending as the average interest rate of loans to the agriculture sector had risen to 26 percent (Marcel 2016).

iii Lack of Political Will and Lukewarm Attitude of Leaders

The Nigerian governments have offered rhetorical support for agriculture as a tool of economic diversification but failed to implement policies or provide budgets to match their ambitions (Downie, 2017). Bills aimed at improving the enabling environment for agriculture has sat in the National Assembly, sometimes for years, without finding its way into law. According to one U.S. embassy official who stated that as many as 15 relevant bills were awaiting approval. They include a bill that would allow private-sector development of the railways, thereby removing a serious impediment to the movement of goods; and a bill to introduce a regulatory system for fertilizer.

iv Neglected Agricultural Research Institutes and System

Nigeria's agricultural research system, the largest in sub-Saharan Africa, has stagnated and become disconnected from the priorities of Nigerian farmers. The institutes have been starved of federal funding and become overly reliant on foreign donor funds.

v Poor Market Access

In some parts of Nigeria, farmers simply do not have access to a market for their goods due to underdeveloped value chains. For example, fields lie fallow in Katsina State not because nothing can be grown there but because the dearth of nearby processing facilities means that the market for produce is limited to the immediate surroundings. The absence of adequate storage facilities for their goods means many farmers face the choice of selling immediately after harvest when prices are at their lowest or allowing their produce to rot. The Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) notes that Nigeria's estimated demand for tomatoes is 2.2 million tons per year. While annual production stood at 1.5 million tons, almost half 0.7 million tons is lost postharvest (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2016). According to the head of a U.S. social enterprise working to boost agriculture in Nigeria observed that "when it comes to food, Nigeria doesn't have a production problem, it has a processing problem. Export markets remain underdeveloped, partly because Nigerian agricultural goods are uncompetitive and do not meet international phytosanitary standards (Downie, 2017).

3. Programmes aimed at Developing Nigeria Agricultural Sector and Generating Jobs

Several attempt and efforts have been advance in the past to address the dwindling nature of the country agricultural sector, the government of Nigeria had over the periods developed and launched several agricultural development policy and programmes aimed at increasing food production and reviving Agriculture and promoting self-reliance. Below highlight the progress made:

i National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) was initiated in `1972 during the regime of General Yakubu Gowon by the Federal Department of Agriculture as an agricultural extension programme aimed at bringing about significant increase in the production of maize, cassava, rice and wheat in the Northern states through subsistent production within a short period of time. The pilot states include Anambra, Imo, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Benue, Plateau and Kano states.

ii Agricultural Development Projects (ADP)

The ADP started in 1975 as enclave projects. As an integrated rural development programme involving the provision of feeder roads, potable water small scale irrigation and intensive extension activities for increase production.

iii Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

This programme commenced on 21st May 1976 under the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. The programme was launched in order to bring about increased food production in the entire nation through the active involvement and participation of everybody in every discipline thereby making every person capable of partly or wholly feeding him or herself. Under this programme every available piece of land in urban, sub-urban and rural areas was meant to be planted while government provided inputs and subsidies freely to government establishments. Individuals received these inputs at a subsidized rate.

iv Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF)

The Agricultural Credit Guarantee Fund was established by Decree No 20 of 1977, and started operations in April, 1978. Its original share capital and paid-up capital were N100 million and N85.6million respectively. The Federal Government holds 60 percent and Central Bank of Nigeria, 40 Percent of the shares. The capital base of the scheme was increased to N3 Billion in March, 2001. The Fund guarantees credit facilities extended to farmers by banks up to 75 Percent of the amount in default net any security realized. The Fund is managed by the Central Bank of Nigeria, which handles the day-to day operations of the scheme. The guidelines stipulated the eligible enterprises for which guarantees could be issued under the scheme. However, between 1978 and 1989 when the government stipulated lending quotas for banks under the scheme, there was consistent increase in the lending portfolios of the banks to agriculture, but after the deregulation of the financial system, banks started shying away by reducing their loans to the sector due to the perceived risk. In order to reverse the declining trend several innovations and products were introduced under the scheme such as: the self help group linkage Banking, Trust Fund Model and Interest Draw Bank.

vi The Green Revolution

In April 1980, the administration of Shehu Shagari inaugurated an agricultural programme called the Green Revolution. The programme was aimed at increasing production of food and raw materials in order to ensure food security and self-sufficiency in basic staples. It was also targeted to boost production of livestock and fish in order to meet home and export needs and to expand and diversify the nation's foreign exchange earnings through production and processing of export crops. The federal government provided agrochemicals, improved marketing and favorable pricing policy for the agricultural products.

vii Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)

The DFRRI started in 1984 but has undergone some structural changes. It has the sole responsibility of providing relevant training and self-employment in agriculture, other business and small-scale industries.

viii National Fadama Development Project (NFDP)

NFDP-1 was designed in the early 90s to promote simple low-cost improved irrigation technology under World Bank financing. The reason behind this programme was to sustainably increase the incomes of the Fadama users through expansion of farm and non-farm activities with high value-added output. The programme covered twelve states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Imo, Kaduna, Kebbi, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Oyo, Taraba including the federal capital territory (FCT). Furthermore, the program adopted community driven development approach with extensive participation of the stakeholders at early stage of the project. This approach is in line with the policies and development strategies for Nigeria which emphasize poverty reduction, private sector leadership and beneficiary participation.

ix The Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)

This body was established in 1992. The authority aims at giving strategic public support for land development, assisting and promoting better uses of Nigeria's rural land and their resources, boosting profitable employment opportunities for rural dwellers, raising the level/ standard of living of rural people, targeting and assisting in achieving food security through self-reliance and sufficiency.

x The River Basin Development Authority (RBDA)

According to Ayoola (2001), the River Basin Development Authority was established in 1976 as the authority with sole aim of boosting economic potentials of the existing water bodies particularly irrigation and fishery with hydroelectric power generation and domestic water supply as secondary objectives. The objective of production and rural infrastructural development was later added to this programme.

xi National, Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS)

Launch in January 2002 in the thirty six states of the federation during the Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. The programme has the broad objective of increasing food production and eliminates rural poverty. Other specific objectives of the programme includes: assisting farmers in increasing their output, productivity and income, strengthening the effectiveness of research and extension service training and educating farmers on farm management for effective utilization of resources, supporting governments efforts in the promotion of simple technologies for self-sufficiency, consolidating initial efforts of the programme on pilot areas for maximum output and ease of replication, consolidating gain from on-going for continuity of the programme and consequent termination of external assisted programmes and projects.

xii Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP)

RTEP was launched on 16th April 2003 under Olusegun Obasanjo's administration. It covers 26 states and was designed to address the problem of food production and rural poverty. At the local farmer's level, the programme hopes to achieve economic growth, improve access of the poor to social services and carry out intervention measures to protect poor and vulnerable groups. At the national level the programme is designed to achieve food security and stimulate demand for cheaper staple food such as cassava, garri, yam, potato etc as against more expensive carbohydrate such as rice. Farmers with less than two hectares of land per household were the targets of the programme while special attention is being paid to women who play a significant role in rural food production, processing and marketing.

xiii Agricultural Credit Support Scheme (ACSS)

The Agriculture Credit Support is an initiative of the Federal and Central Bank of Nigeria with the active support and participation of the Bankers' Committee. The Scheme has a prescribed fund of N50.0 billion. The Agriculture Credit Support was introduced to enable farmers exploit the untapped potentials of Nigeria's agriculture sector, reduce inflation, lower the cost of agricultural production (i.e. food items), generate surplus for export, increase Nigeria's foreign earnings as well as diversify its revenue base. At national level, the scheme operates through a Central Implementation Committee (CIC) while at the Federal Capital Territory and States, the scheme operates through State Implementation Committees instituted to ensure that the objective of the scheme is realized without hindrance. To access loans under this scheme, applicants (practicing farmers and agro-allied entrepreneurs with means) were encouraged to approach their banks for loan through their respective state chapters of farmers associations and State Implementation Committee. However, large scale farmers were allowed under the scheme to apply directly to the banks in accordance with the guidelines.

xiv Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme

As part of its developmental role, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources established the Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme in 2009 to provide finance for the country's agricultural value chain (production, processing, storage and marketing) increased production arising from the intervention would moderate inflationary pressures and assist the Bank to achieve its goal of price stability in the country. The primary objectives of the scheme are to:

1. Fast track the development of the agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy by providing credit facilities to large scale commercial farmers at a single digit interest rate.
2. Enhance national food security by food supply and effecting lower agricultural produce and products prices, thereby promoting low food inflation.
3. Reduce the cost of credit in agricultural production to enable farmers exploit the cost the untapped potentials of the sector and increase output, generate employment, diversify Nigeria's revenue base, increase the level of foreign exchange earnings' and provide input for manufacturing and processing on a sustainable basis.

The scheme which is a sub-component of the Federal Government of Nigeria's Commercial Agriculture Programme is financed through a N200 billion Bond issued by the Debt Management office. Loans to the eligible entities under the Scheme were to be disbursed at a maximum interest of 9 percent. Despite these laudable programmes, domestic food production is believed not enough to meet the geometric progression of the Nigeria population and at the same time provide agro-based industries with needed raw materials. Notwithstanding the efforts made so far government have attempted to provide an enabling environment to getting back agricultural production to its rightful place. There is thus a strong need to sustain the current trend in the development of agriculture to a higher level if the challenges confronting the nation as regards food security and unemployment are to be overcome.

xv **Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA)**

The Nigerian government in 2011 launched the Agricultural Transformation Agenda, with the aim of changing the perception about agriculture as a development issue instead of pure business. The vision in the transformation strategy is to achieve a hunger free Nigeria through an agricultural sector that drives income growth, accelerates achievement of food and nutritional security, generates employment and transforms Nigeria into a leading player in global food markets to grow wealth for millions of farmers. In order to achieve this vision, the value chain approach has been in use. Fertilizer procurement and distribution, marketing institutions, financial value chains and agricultural investment framework are poised for a change using this approach.

4. Empirical studies

Olujenyo, (2008) stated in his study, that the production function can be expressed in different functional forms, the linear, quadratic, polynomials, square root, exponential function, cob douglas and according to Olayide and Heady (1982), agricultural productivity is synonymous to resource productivity and therefore can help in agricultural development and employment generation.

Adeyemi 2014 stated in his study that agriculture accounts for about 90 percent of Nigeria's employment and to this end our study is in agreement as we see agricultural development aids the generation of employment.

Ita, Ukpong and Ekpebu, 2013 see agricultural development as a critical sector, equipped with industrialization drive capacity and ace for reducing unemployment and boosting food production which by extension human development. To drive the process of productive engagements and ensure Agriculture plays its role as a critical sector.

5. Conclusion

We conclude by saying that the development of agricultural sector in Nigeria is still at its infant age despite the efforts of successive government but have the potentials and capacity to drive industrialization, guarantee food security and employment generation, if the right policy and programmes are in place, sustained and managed by patriotic state men and women for the benefit of all.

6. The way forward for Nigeria Agricultural Sector

To this end, if the objective of agricultural development must be achievable in Nigeria then the government and other stakeholders must wake up in their responsibility by:

- i Total massive investment in agriculture if millions of Nigeria youth both graduate and non graduate roaming in the street must get jobs.
- ii Increase budgetary allocation to agricultural sector by 10% of budget commitment made at the 2003 African Union summit in Maputo.
- iii Harnessing research capacity of all agricultural research institutes and system by adequately funding them to develop quality inputs such as fertilizers and seeds for farmers
- iv To address post harvest losses Government should strengthen the warehousing system in Nigeria, in part by leasing and rehabilitating government grain storage facilities for farmers to deposit their produce at these facilities for a small fee, confident that it will be safely and securely preserved.
- v Investment in infrastructure: for agricultural sector to be developed and job created there must be paradigm shift from the traditional methods of farming to a more technologically advance and mechanized method of farming.
- vi Expanding the agricultural export market via enacting relevant export expansion strategies that will aggressively stimulate export of agricultural output.

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