

## REVITALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE AS A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING POVERTY IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The time for agriculture to shift from “farm” to “firm” in Nigeria has come. This can serve as a giant stride for industrializing the sector as well as for achieving food security thereby reducing poverty rate to a bearable minimum. Using modern technology and methods in agricultural production should be supplemented by modern marketing in agro-business, adequate information and agricultural sustainability for the safety of our environment. The study found that agriculture played a significant role in the Nigeria’s economic growth and its downturn is one of the contributory factors of high rate of poverty in the country, hence its revitalization will make a great difference. It also found out that majority of Nigerians(rural dwellers in particular) are engaging in agriculture as a source of livelihood or income, but very negligible few are aware of modern agriculture. Similarly, very few are benefiting from assistance made by government and NGOs. Therefore, there is the dire need for government and NGOs to commit themselves to helping farmers with enough information, good road networks to link rural farmers with other areas of market prospects, mechanize, or at best, industrialize the agricultural processes. The rural farmers should also be made to know about competitive advantage skills, local content initiative, value chain management; production, processing, packaging, storage, distribution and marketing of agricultural goods at profitable rate.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria was a self-sufficient agrarian economy. It derived its export earnings from cocoa, groundnut, rubber, palm produce, cotton, millet, etc. Crude oil then contributed a negligible percentage of export earnings. In the 1964-1965 fiscal years, agriculture contributed 59.2% of Nigeria's GDP. In 1964, agricultural sector also contributed over 80% of export earnings. In contrast, the proportion of crude oil in total export was about 15.2% in the 1964 and its share of GDP was about 36. In 1983 crude oil contributed 17.5% of the nation's GDP and accounted for over 80% of the country's foreign exchange. The sudden wealth brought by oil led to many social dislocations in the economy (Ijeoma, 2002).

While speaking on the Millennium Development Goals, the then UN Secretary General Kofi Anan said, "It is the absence of broad-based business activity, not its presence, that condemns much of humanity to suffering" (Quoted in Ekeh, 2009). This implies that, lack of industries and entrepreneurs perpetuates poverty and the assertion is applicable to the dramatic downturn of agriculture and the corresponding economic crises in Nigeria.

Learning a lesson from our previous mistakes may bring a better solution to the current prevailing socio-economic problems. One of the mistakes Nigeria ever made was the negligence of agricultural sector. With this grave mistake, selfish leadership and poor economic policies, majority of the Nigerian citizens are subjected to abject poverty, joblessness and hunger (or better yet, "poor amidst affluence"). An observation made by Ijioma (2002): Nigeria has become a cruel paradox. It is a land of great resources- arable land, velvety forests, abundant sunshine, abundant rainfall, enormous mineral resources- but these resources have been put to dubious use and the benefits there from to the generality of the people remain elusive.

In World Bank's(2003) comparative study on the performance of agriculture sector to economic growth between fast growing resource-rich African countries (Nigeria inclusive)and fast growing resource-poor African countries (Ethiopia is one of them),it was found that the first group had only 1%, whereas the second strikingly had 2.5%. It is as a result of this difference in the composition of growth that other differences exist in performance between the two groups in poverty reduction (World Bank, 2003).

Acknowledging the fact that Nigeria's population size is rapidly increasing, ensuring food security, job creation through agro-business, sustainable agriculture to avoid environmental degradation as well as mechanization of production and marketing strategy skills among unenlightened rural farmers can make a big difference. Presently, Nigeria's food imports are growing at an unsustainable rate of 11% per annum. This is unfavorable to the economy as a whole, especially in the quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on eradication of hunger and poverty by 2015 (Falola and Adewumi 2012).

To get rid of hunger and poverty in Nigeria, agriculture has to be revitalized. This is largely because poverty is situated in rural areas, and villages are engaged primarily in agriculture.

Whenever questions on rapid population growth, poverty, hunger and unemployment are raised, the answer remains "agriculture". By 2025 the world's population will be around 8.5 billion, with nearly 75% living in developing countries. The challenge of producing enough food for everyone is immense the rural people of developing countries desperately need new ways out of poverty (Kroll, 1997).

Nigeria is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country of the world by comparison, in 2012 the country's population reached 168.8 million (World Bank, 2014). In the northern part of the country, the pressures of increasing population are understood to cause increasing food demands by urban consumers and rural farmers. The expansion of areas of cultivation reduced fallow intervals with lack of inputs necessary to compensate and as a result reduce soil fertility. This means that per capita and per hectare yields will decline and food will become scarce especially for those in the rural areas. To attack this, many development plans were made, one of which was the Third Development Plan (1975-1980) with some degree of successes and failures. For instance, the focus of the plan was on management on agricultural companies and wealthier farmers, while the poorest farmers, and in fact, the bulk of farmers were not aided with strategies, such as improved roads, labor, land, cooperatives, high-technology and information adequately.

Against this background, study is forwarded to find answers to the following questions:-

- 1) Is agricultural sector relevant to Nigeria's economic growth?
- 2) What are the challenges of agricultural sector in Nigeria?

- 3) Will poverty be reduced through revitalization of agriculture in Nigeria?

### Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to evaluate the revitalization of agriculture as a strategy for reducing poverty in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:-

- i. examine the role of agricultural sector in Nigeria's economic growth
- ii. identify the challenges agriculture faces in Nigeria
- iii. determine the possibility of reducing poverty through revitalization of agriculture in Nigeria

### Conceptual Framework

#### Revitalization

The word revitalization is a noun and an offshoot of the verb "revitalize", which Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005) defined as "to give new life, energy, activity or success to something". From the above definition we can observe that revitalization is a decisive effort to reinvigorate a decaying pattern of activity like agriculture in Nigeria for there is no gainsaying that, not only the Nigeria's agriculture sector, many of our institutions are collapsing and are therefore in serious need of revitalization to overhaul the system.

#### The Concept of Agriculture

Agriculture is the cultivation and/or of animals, plants, fungi and other life form of food, fibre and other products used to sustain life. Agriculture was the key implement in the rise of sedentary human civilization whereby farming of domesticated species created food surpluses that nurtured development of civilization. The study of agriculture known as "agricultural

science” is also observed in certain species of ant and termite, but generally speaking refers to human activities (Sharma, 2013).

Sharma (2013) also observed that, historically, agriculture dates back thousands of years and its development has been driven and defined by greatly different climates, cultures and technologies. However, all farming generally relies on techniques to expand and maintain the lands suitable for raising domesticated species. For plants, these usually requires some form of irrigation, although there are methods of dry land farming, pastoral herding on range land is still the most common mean of raising livestock. In the developed world, industrial agriculture based on large scale monoculture has become the dominant system of modern farm, although there is growing support for sustainable agriculture (e.g permaculture or organic agriculture). The modern agronomy, plant breeding, pesticide, fertilizers and technological improvements have sharply increased yields from cultivation, but at the same time have caused widespread ecological damage and negative human health effect.

The major agricultural products can be broadly grouped into foods, fibres, fuels and raw materials. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, plants have been used to grow biofuels, biopharmaceuticals, bioplastics and pharmaceuticals. Specifics foods include cereals, vegetables, fruits, and meat. Fibres include cotton, wool, hmp, silk and flux. Raw materials include lumber and bamboo. Biofuels include, methane from biomass, ethanol, and biodiesel. Cut flowers, nursery plants, tropical fish and birds for the pet trade and some of the ornamental products (Sharma, 2013).

### **The Concept of Poverty**

Many attempts have been made to arrive at a single universally accepted meaning of poverty with varying degree of successes. Soundara-Pandia(2005) sees poverty as broadly referring to: Lack of means to satisfy a person’s basic and other essentials of life. Such needs may be defined narrowly as those necessary for survival or more broadly as determined by the prevailing standard of living in the community. Poverty is caused by lack of assets combined with low and uncertain returns in the limited stock of assets owned by the farmers. Poverty includes lack of access to services, wages and prices, unemployment and education e.t.c.

Sankaraiah (2011) views Poverty is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, poverty viewed in terms of capability deprivation encompasses not only material deprivation (measured by income or consumption) but also other forms of deprivation, such as unemployment ill health and lack of education, vulnerability, powerlessness and social exclusion.

It has been discovered that there is geography of poverty, with poverty concentrated in the rural areas of certain states. It also found that there is sociology of poverty with certain social groups identified as poor. It also noted that there are identifiable occupational features of poverty. They are concentrated in agricultural labor and artisan households in rural area (Sankaraiah, 2011).

### **The Challenges of Agricultural Sector in Nigeria**

Until the Industrial Revolution, the vast majority of the human population labored in agriculture. The type of agriculture they developed was typically subsistence agriculture in which farmers raised most of their crops for consumption on farm and there was only a small portion leftover for the payment of taxes, dues or trade. In subsistence agriculture cropping decision are made with an eye to what family need for food, and to make clothing and not for the world market place. But the above is a traditional form of agricultural practice which is virtually non-evident in developed countries, but still lingers in the developing nations including Nigeria.

Accepting the fact that, the dominant economic activity in the rural settings is agriculture, production and distribution of goods and services is in agrarian sense of the word. It is in line with this that Otite (1994) analyzed the rural economy with emphasis on agriculture and with regard to the difficulties rural farmers are facing. According him, Production is the process of changing raw materials into consumable goods. To do this, four factors of production are necessary: land, capital, labor and organization. For agricultural production in developing countries, several constraints create a great bottleneck to the farmers in relation to these factors. Land refers not only to the soil itself, but also to other natural resources required to obtain agricultural products such as the fertility of the soil, water (both supply and quality), forests, wild life e.t.c. Problem have surfaced over land tenure system, the unpredictability of water supply, exhausted soil and over-exploited forests, wild life e.t.c. These problems have hampered farmers, especially the subsistence oriented farmers in an attempt to increase productivity.

Capital is a necessary component in trying to increase one's output. For the farmers, the need to use improved inputs, such as fertilizer, hybrids seeds, herbicides and mechanical implements to increase hectare and yield. These inputs, however, cost a lot of money which is hard to secure. Small farmers typically are unable to save much from their meager incomes and obligations to the extended family are likely to exhaust even such savings. Commercial banks are unwilling to give loans to such small farmers who lack collateral. Credit corporations which have been set up to aid the farmer have typically been poorly managed and farmers' supervision has been inadequate so that organizations largely failed to meet their goals.

Farming demands heavy labor commitments at the time of land preparation, planting, watering and harvesting, but other times may result in under-employment. Because of the seasonal nature of the farming, many farmers have a secondary employment like blacksmithing, fishing, crafts, e.t.c. to these times when there is no work on the farm.

Organization means the combination of these three factors of production by an individual or group to obtain the final product. For the small farmer, this involves decisions concerning which crops to plant and how much, how to use available capital, when and who will do the work e.t.c. Such decisions involve some risk and the small farmer will usually try to minimize this risk by taking "safe" decisions even if an innovation might yield a higher return.

Distributing the produced goods and services is a problem in rural areas where communication and transportation systems are more vital as farmers are more dependent upon the transport system for moving their own crops to market and receiving crops grown in other areas for their own use. As farmers become less self-sufficient and more specialized, the need for effective distribution becomes greater. The markets are the means for distributing and exchanging goods and services, whether the market is small and local or complex and impersonal, its function is the same. For markets to grow and become more modern, it is again imperative that the transportation and communication systems improve. Most developing countries, such as Nigeria, are characterized by poor production and poor distribution (Otite, 1994). The inability of the farmers in such places to produce at a rate that can meet the need of the populace has been linked to lack of timely access to crucial information on improved agricultural practice (Falola and

Adewumi, 2012). In his view, Etuk (2012) admits that, the fall in agricultural production could be attributed to inadequate infrastructure, under-mechanization and inadequate finance.

Experiences from around the world have shown that for farming to be efficient and profitable, it has to actually be mechanized. However, it is found that respond to this reality in Nigeria has been slow. Probably because of the poverty prevalence in the rank of those engaged in farming. Our farmers still use very rudimentary farming implements which are not only energy sapping and time consuming, but also inefficient.

According to the World Bank (2014), agriculture had contributed more to the economic development in resource-poor nations than in resource rich nations, such as Nigeria. The World Bank further suggests that, African countries will need to bring more electricity, nutritious food, jobs and opportunities to families and communities across the continent in order to better their lives, reduce extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity.

### **Poverty Reduction through Revitalization of Agriculture In Nigeria**

Observations and comments about the viability of agricultural sector as a tool for economic growth have been made by many scholars, among who are Desai and Pujari (2007) and argued that Agriculture has been and will always remain the most important sector of a natural and global economy which provides the ultimate in essential food and fibre for the world's population. No industrial substitutes have yet been found to replace food requirement. Thus the long term survival of mankind will depend on the sustainability of the global agricultural economy.

Nnodim (2013) observed that the country's agricultural sector is currently experiencing a downturn while it constituted the major source of the country's income years back and it played a crucial role in terms of job creation offering employment to about 70% percent of the population. Shehu (2013) added that Agriculture used to provide sufficient raw materials for manufacturing outfits, food consumption and for international market. The sector need a fresh impetus to enable us achieve food security for our citizens as a responsible nation .... It is against this backdrop that we have decided on strategies for transforming the agriculture and water resources sectors of the Nigerian economy (through) basic agricultural hydrology: water



management, conservation and use, water and wind erosion control: livestock production... farm crop production, storage and preservation of agricultural products; and tractor manufacture, procurement and maintenance.

To fight poverty, revitalization of agriculture is the best strategy because food security is the number one poverty reduction tactic. However, the sector is suffering negligence over the years. For example, only 1.7% was allocated to the sector in 2013 national budgetary allocation, and in the following year, 2014, it came down from about 8 billion naira to about 6 billion naira. This does not reflect the Maputo Declaration made by Heads of State Governments of the African Union (AU) on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2013. The assembly was meant to revitalize agricultural sector by addressing the root causes of agricultural crises in Africa.

In 2001, one third of the world's population workers were employed in agriculture. The services sector has overtaken agriculture as the economic sector employing most people worldwide. Despite the size of its workforce, agricultural production accounts for less than five percent of the gross world product (an aggregate of all gross domestic product) (Sharma, 2013). In Nigeria, agriculture remains the non-oil sector of the economy supporting about 80% of the non petroleum export (Etuk, 2012).

Hunger and malnutrition are twin manifestation of poverty, and Mukhtar (2012) observed that they remain among the most devastating problems facing the world poor. The Food Insecurity Report by FAO (2012) estimated that 799 million people in 98 developing nations are not getting enough food to live a normal healthy and active life. Poverty, inefficiency and unemployment have been suggested by many empirical evidences as the areas of great concerns to policy planners as well as policy makers in the developing countries. Nigeria has great potential for better economic growth both in short and long run than current experiences (Mukhtar, 2012).

However, achieving this remarkable success can only be realized when the government carefully looks at the bottom line of the current economic problems. To be precise, agriculture is found to be one of the major reliable facets of the economy that, if taken seriously, Nigeria will not regret in the poverty reduction efforts. It is a source of employment, food, fibre, and raw materials for the manufacturing industries to mention but a few.

## Conclusion

It has been widely agreed that agriculture is a sector that cannot be done without everywhere in the globe. However, the sector is in a constant state of transformations to meet the need of the worlds' growing population, dietary test for agricultural foods (on either plants and animals as well as manufacturing industries. Many countries are responding to these trends, but revitalization or transformation of agriculture seems to be very slow in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons why the country failed to tackle such problems as poverty, unemployment and food insecurity in various states of the federation, while there is no gainsaying that agriculture alone, if it is fully revitalized, can provide a panacea for most Nigeria's economic issues. To do this, old practice of subsistence agriculture, in which producer holds a minor ambition of getting rid of immediate extended family's hunger by producing only cereals like maize, millet, yam, cowpea, etc. with the use of rudimentary farm implements, must give way to the new and modern one whereby single farmer can singlehandedly produce food enough to feed the population of one state in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

For the agricultural sector to be revitalized in Nigeria, the following recommendations were offered:-

- 1) Intensify agriculture through utilization of a method that is environmentally sustainable and economically viable.
- 2) Provide extension services to the farmers on how to grow good crops and make profit from it. The role of extension workers is especially crucial in this regard
- 3) Make knowledge available among rural farmers on modern marketing of agricultural produce, competitive advantage and good record keeping for maximum profitability and reduction of cost in agro-business.
- 4) Widen the scope of agricultural producers. Agriculture is for all sexes, marital statuses, old and youth. Women can engage in fishery, poultry, or honey bee farming as they demand less mobility, rigor and expenditure of energy.

- 5) Villages to be reachable by construction of feeder roads linking them with other parts of the country.
- 6) Support the rural and poor farmers with fertilizers soft financial loan, pesticides, hybrid seeds and modern agricultural implements at subsidized rates and in good time.
- 7) Make computer literacy easier and encourage the rural farmers to learn so that they can supplement marketing process through the aid of modern ICT to advertise and learn new development pertaining their businesses.
- 8) Transform the power sector which is the backbone of all industrial development.
- 9) To review the national budgetary allocation especially the one usually allocated to agricultural sector.
- 10) Support more agricultural researches by funding individual researchers and agencies such as Raw Material Research and Development Council (RMRDC), through Agriculture Transformation Agenda (ATA) and Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAAP), as well as special package for extension workers, e.t.c.

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