
Food Security and National Development: A Historical Perspective

By

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in the world. God in his infinite generosity has endowed her with human and material resources natural resources that could have made her one of the richest nations in the world. Nature endowed her with mineral resources such as fossil fuels, gold, coal, uranium, bauxite, bitumen, etc while her rich agricultural endowments sustain subsistence farming and cash crops. But Nigeria has not been able to secure and sustain her food supply as the basis for securing her sovereign status as a nation. This paper examined the essence of food security and the need to sustain Nigeria's food supply. It is the contention of this papers that the revitalization of the agricultural sector is of strategic importance.

Introduction

Before the discovery of crude oil, Nigeria's major exports were primary goods in the form of agricultural products and solid minerals. Nigeria earned 90% of her foreign exchange through agricultural products such as cotton, cocoa, rubber, groundnut, etc. post-independence Nigeria derived its revenue from agriculture. The Eastern, Western and Northern regions based most of their budget estimates, development plans, income and expenditure on these natural resources. Before oil was struck at Oloibiri in 1958, Nigeria's regional governments depended to a large extent on agriculture and solid minerals. The development challenges which faced the post-independence regime in this traditional agriculture-dominated economy were enormous. In deed,

Agriculture provided over 80% of the export earnings and employment and about 65% of total output or gross domestic and about 60% of government revenue in 1960 (Eloho:2001,2).

Over the years, agriculture, solid minerals and other important non-oil sectors of the economy suffered unquantifiable neglect due to serious disparity between government's devotion to the petroleum industry and other important sectors of the economy. The revenue derivable from the exportation of oil increased significantly

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through the years. In deed, between 1966-1977 total oil revenue receipts was N160 million. By 1977, it jumped to N6.650 million (Gahia: 1993, 48). The poor state of agriculture in Nigeria and the non-challant attitude of government towards evolving a concise food security policy for the nation attracted the attention of the researcher and to a large extent the global community. Numerous strategies applied by previous regimes in the past (both military and civilian) had failed woefully to revive the dwindling fortunes of agriculture and implications for Nigeria's food security. Agriculture which a very important sector of the economy that could have helped in the overall transformation of Nigeria into a major world power was not regarded as a critical sector of the economy. Therefore, it is the intention of the author to assess the attitude of colonial and post-colonial government and its policies towards the development of agriculture and the concept of food security in a changing world.

Before the advent of colonial rule, most communities in Nigeria practice agriculture. The basis of all human existence revolved around most germane sector of the economy, agriculture. Many ethnic groups in Nigeria practiced agriculture before the advent of colonial rule. The most important element in the production of food in pre-colonial Nigeria is the climate. The farming activities in different parts of the country were influenced to a large extent by the proportionate distribution of rainfall. Here, rainfall is a major factor in the production process and a very important component in agriculture. The different crops produced and cultivated in various parts is a reflection of the different environment and cultural affiliations of various ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the northern part of Nigeria, crops such as millet, guinea corn, cotton and groundnut predominates. In the mainly tropical South crops such as maize, cocoa, palm oil, yam, cassava, cocoyam, etc are widely cultivated. The North witness lesser incidence of rainfall while in the South, the months of June, July and September witness very heavy rainfall. Apart from crop production, livestock farming remained an important aspect of agriculture. The Niger Delta provides ready sources of fish, salt and other products from the swampy area as the environment is not conducive for cultivation. It is needless to remind us that the most important step taken by man to tame and control his environment was sedentary life. During the Neolithic period (some ten thousand years ago) man made a very unique transition from a hunter-gatherer to sedentary life. He tamed his environment and domesticated over a period of time, species of wild plants and animals. The exact date for this transition has regional variations. Thus, transition from hunting and food gathering to cultivation of plants and domestication of animals was a gradual process even though agricultural tools were still very rudimentary. Agriculture became the basis for the accumulation of wealth, class stratification (or social stratification) development of new methods of storing farm products, the emergence of major empires such as Oyo, Benin, Kanem-Bornu, Kano, etc. and the sustenance and increase in population.

The emergence of agriculture took several centuries of experimentation with craft and animals for man to domesticate his immediate environment. It formed the spring board for the rise of the birane (or cities) in Hausa land. The people of Oyo

Food Security and National Development: A Historical Perspective. **John C.N Ukwumah** were engaged in agriculture and cultivated a variety of crops. Agriculture became the major sources of income and employment for the Igbo. Both men and women were gainfully engaged in agriculture at this period. The great quantity of yam and other crops were raised and labour was richly rewarded. From Olaudah Equiano, we learnt that Indian corn, cotton, tobacco, pineapples, manufacturing of tools, took place in pre-colonial Igbo land. Fishing along the River Niger and its tributaries became an important occupation, among the Igbo living along the Niger Delta. For the Igbo interior, they depended by and large on the Igbo, Efik and Ibibio for their fish supply. In Hausa land, for instance, there were probably small agricultural communities known as kuayuka or unguwoji. Thus, birni Kano owe its rise to the fact that it is situated on a fertile area and produced food which sustained the growing population and crops such as cotton for industrial purposes. The introduction of iron technology revolutionized the agricultural sector. Thus, Rodney asserted that the:

Single most important technological change was the introduction of iron tools notably the axe and hoe, replacing wooden and stone tools. (1977,48)

A European explorer and an eighteenth century slave merchant while visiting the Bight of Benin and Biafra attested to the excellent quantity of Oyo blacksmithing (Adams:1822). In birni Kano, too, the presence of iron ore in Dutsen Dala made Kano a reputable industrial complex. Thus, despite the relentless onslaught by the agents of colonial rule, the local economy dominated by the agricultural sector survived with remarkable virility. This paper highlights the remarkable survival of ideas and practice of agriculture despite the changes or challenges occasioned by colonial rule was the introduction of the local economy into the global economy. The agricultural policy the British colonial administration was tailored towards the satisfaction of her imperial designs and its exploitative tendencies. The colonial administration did not enunciate any well-defined programme(s) for the improvement of the quality and production process of agriculture. Colonial agricultural policy never envisaged a long-term development plan for this important sector of the economy that could be sustained over the years. The main aim of colonial agricultural policy was the indefinite exploitation of peasant farmers by fixing ridiculous prices to farm products without taking due cognizance of cost of production. The colonial attitude towards its colonial outposts was little more than serving as cheap sources of labour and raw materials. The colonial policy favoured the development and cultivation of cash crops such as cotton, palm produce, rubber and cocoa. The food production sector was neglected in favour of cash crops. Subsequently, the peasant farmer was neglected while colonial officers created a new set of individuals (or farmers) to run plantations set up by the colonial administration, farm settlements (especially in the Southern part of Nigeria) marketing boards, co-operative societies, new farming inputs, extension services, etc. were provided for this experiment. The introduction of Nigeria's economy into the capitalist economic structure created the opportunity for emphasis on the cultivation of cash crops such as rubber, cocoa, palm produce, groundnut,

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cotton, etc. for the purposes of feeding the inexhaustible demand for these crops by industries in Europe.

The gradual movement towards the cultivation of cash crops became manifest from the tail end of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. The gradual transition from food crop production to cash crop dominated production was initiated and perfected by the peasant farmers using local tools or implements (basically the hoe and machet). The colonial administration stirred itself from slumber by the end of the Second World War (1939-1945) when it took another look at the agricultural sector of the economy. The colonial administration took several decisions in this regard namely the creation of a Department of Agriculture in Southern (1902) and Northern (1912) parts of Nigeria. The administration also encouraged the adoption of novel farming methods, establishment of pilot plantation system, cultivating of cash crops for external consumption. But various attempts aimed at the establishment of individual plantation systems were discouraged as a matter of colonial policy. The unco-operative attitude of the colonial administration, failure of the plantation experiment, resistance by land owning families to attempts to alienate their lands made this private plantation system unworkable. Various development plans initiated by the colonial administration made sectoral allocation to the development of agriculture especially the production of cash crops to the detriment of food crops. This sectoral allocation was for the purposes of furthering the colonial and imperial designs of the British government. Thus, Nigeria became the supplier of raw materials and Britain serving as her greatest source of manufactured goods. The colonial development plans from 1946-1955 and 1955-1960, financial allocations were made for the development of agriculture with this sector getting as high as 11% of budgetary allocations. The utilization of agricultural machines such as tractors, harvesters, etc. and the use of experimental stations failed because it did not take into account the local environment. I totally agree with Esedebe when he said that:

To see advancement solely in terms of mega projects: gadgets...is to miss the point in that material values are neither the only values nor the most important..These yearnings have no absolute connection with sophisticated technology (2003,15-16)

Most of the success recorded by the agricultural sector at the period was essentially a function of the industrious nature of the peasant farmers and the utilization of their simple farming methods and tools. With the establishment of marketing boards between 1947 and 1949, it was specifically meant for the major cash crops such as cocoa, groundnut, cotton, palm produce, etc. These marketing boards were meant to moderate current producer prices and provide needed funds for the purposes of sponsoring agricultural research. Approval was given for the establishment of not only marketing boards for each region (East, West and North) but also supported the existence of a central marketing board for purposes of superintending over the export of cash crops. Further changes were effected in 1958

Food Security and National Development: A Historical Perspective. **John C.N Ukwumah** resulting from constitutional changes at the period as its functions were appropriated by the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industries, regional commodity boards and Nigerian Produce Marketing Limited (Ofoeze:2000,111). Colonial rule precipitated changes in the social, political, economic and cultural lives of the people. Despite innovations in the agricultural sector occasioned by colonial rule, such as farm settlements, tractors and other mechanical contraptions, a large percentage of crops produced for consumption and export were largely attributed to the use of indigenous production techniques and processes reflecting the inherent cultural environment of the people.

The inheritance of colonial agricultural policies and programmes was manifesting in the First National Development Plan (1962-1968) as sectoral allocation to agricultural within this period was between 9% and 13% of the budget. There was no obvious change in policy direction on the part of government. It still retained most aspects of colonial legacy such as the plantation system, farm settlement, cash crop production, use of imported agricultural machines, etc. colonial policies and post-colonial strategies by government's preferences for wholesale importation of tractors, fertilizers and other farming inputs. Indigenous capacity, response and participation in the production process were ignored. Previous attempts at raising the level of food production through farm settlements, etc. failed largely because it ignored the role of the indigenous. In his study of Upper Mustang, Purna B. Chletri opined that:

Lack of strong community representation at the higher level...and participation of local communities should just be targeted implementation of development initiatives. There should be opportunities for local communities in decision making (2005:122)

The regional governments (Eastern, Western) gave undiluted attention to agriculture as the platform for economic and rural transformation. From 1900-1918, half-hearted attention was paid to agriculture even though this vital sector was regarded as the vehicle for the industrialization of the Nigerian economy. Emphasis was not only on food production but also cash crops for exports that are suitable to their environment. This explains why the West specialized on cocoa production, the East on palm produce and the North on groundnut and cotton production. In order to give vent to government's plans for agriculture, the regional governments of Eastern and Western Nigeria experimented with the idea of farm settlements. For instance, the Six Year Development Plan of the Eastern Nigeria regional government (1962-1968) was an attempt (on the part of government) at infusing modern agricultural techniques into the farming system of the indigenous people. The dizzying revenue from oil sounded knell of agriculture as government through utter neglect and poor policy implementation neglect the very important but strategic and key sector of the economy. The real thing is for government to re-align its policies taking into consideration the cultural milieu been a very important segment. Meanwhile, the cultural environment provides the right setting for agriculture to serve as the nursery bed of Nigeria's scientific, technological and industrial transformation from a mono-

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economy to a diversified one. Therefore, while we advocate industrialization of agriculture, the process could be quite different from the industrialized agriculture of the developed world. Nevertheless, the stupendous performance in the 1960s in the agricultural sector especially palm produce derived mainly from aligning government policies with the cultural milieu of the people. This attracted the attention of Malaysia. She wanted to understudy Nigeria's palm production process that made her the highest palm producer in the world. Earnings from cocoa, cotton and groundnut were very impressive too. Malaysia adopted Nigeria's palm seedlings to her environment and now she is a leading exporter of palm oil to other parts of the world. What an irony!

Retired General Yakubu Gowon administration established in 1975, the National Food Production Programme (NAFPP) as a policy thrust meant to address the issue of agricultural development. This was against the backdrop of food scarcity, increase in prices and population explosion. As noted by Douthwaita...

Agriculture in developing countries faces huge challenges. In the next fifty years the number of people living in the world's poor country will increase from five billion to eight billion (2005:271)

It is a frightening prospect in deed. Sectoral allocation continued to dwindle from 13% to 9%. It declined from N256,334 million to N29433 million (Tamuno:2000,147). Revenue from oil accounted for 85% of our foreign exchange thus making our policy makers to blissfully forget the importance of this sector in our overall national development. Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Shehu Shagari's Green Revolution failed woefully largely because the peasant farmers were not incorporated into the scheme of things. The billions of naira generated through the exportation of oil was misused by those in authority. The money could have been used to diversify the economy, develop agriculture and encourage indigenous contributions and response to the development and utilization of technological and industrial sectors of the economy. Nigeria has made several attempts through various programme towards food production and food security is mentioned above. The non-challant attitude of government towards ensuring food security is, indeed, very sad. Previous regimes have neglected this aspect of our status as a sovereign nation. Developing agriculture and ensuring food security becomes the best form of defense for any nation desirous of safeguarding her national security within a competitive global community. The idea of national security is no longer equated with the latest improvement in military technology as a platform to protect, strengthen and entrench the sovereign interests of members of the global community. The present but pervasive attitude of applying food security, security, domestic stability, dynamic economy, advancement in the field of technology became vital components of national security. This is important because agriculture, the basis of food security employs over 65% of the active labour force and accounts for over 90% of income from non-oil sector of the economy. This is because there is a Siamese

Food Security and National Development: A Historical Perspective. **John C.N Ukwumah** linkage between food security, development of the rural areas and poverty alleviation (Chimaroke: 2007, 34). Indeed, forty seven years ago, Nigeria was ranked as the fortieth richest country in the world even though she placed total reliance on agriculture and solid minerals as sources of revenue. At independence, we were performing better than countries such as Malaysia, India, South Korea, etc.

Between 1970 and 1989, five development plans were launched but with little impact on the society. This is evident in the mass poverty, large scale unemployment, malnutrition, increased destitution, etc. The emerging global consensus and concerns for food security informed President Yar'Adua's Seven Point Agenda namely education for security, wealth creation, transport, land reforms, general security and power. Meanwhile, in the year 2000, the United Nations Conference came up with a set of Millennium Development Goals. These goals are global co-operation for development sustaining the environment, improved maternal health and reduction of infant mortality. Other goals are women empowerment and gender balance, education at the primary level and the elimination of poverty and extreme hunger. Poverty and extreme hunger thrives in the absence of well-articulated national food security programme for the nation. The food security conference held in Maputo, Mozambique recommended a yearly budgetary allocation of 10% to the agricultural sector. Many African countries including Nigeria ignored this vital recommendation. The essence of food security as an important component of the Millennium Development Goal is the elimination of extreme hunger, pervasive poverty and regeneration of the economy. The availability, accessibility and affordability of food at a reasonable price by people is the primal focus of food security. Within the global community, food security has become an important segment of national security. It exerts a great influence over the political, social and economic sectors of the economy. Attainment of food security is directly linked to the strategic realization of national food security because a nation that cannot feed itself is prone to manipulation by countries that have achieved this goal. Nations that have attained high levels of food security and donor agencies have realized that food can be used as a political and economic weapon. The predominance of poverty within the Nigerian environment is the inevitable result of the general fault lines of the Nigerian economy. She has depended heavily on importation of food as a result of the neglect of the agricultural sector over the years.

The crux of the matter is that though Nigeria is well-endowed by nature both human and natural resources. She has large agricultural lands, impressive population figures and clement weather. But the sorry state she finds herself in as a result of unimpressive policies and lack-lustre implementation. Over a period of twenty years, the level of food supply is not in tandem with the sharp increase in population and improved earning capacity. Availability of food has become a global concern against the widespread hunger and poverty. Concerted efforts must be made to ensure increasing levels of food supply by encouraging affected countries to take affirmative action towards the realization of this goals while developed nations that have attained

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some level of food security may suffer various forms of financial and technical handouts to needy nations. Relying on external aid may be suicidal because attainment of food security requires internal efforts by the government and people of affected countries. Many industrialized nations are unwilling to help the less fortunate countries. Various policies towards developing the agricultural sector have been enunciated by the government over the years. Some of these policies are attainment of self-sufficiency in food production, adequate use of resources and preserving the environment as a means of encouraging food production. The policy also aims at providing jobs, the deployment of the product of science and technology in the production process. While providing raw materials for the agro-based industry and the production, processing and packaging for export received favourable mention. It has become a Herculean task to attain development goals.

It is quite obvious that the challenges posed by global developments and the local milieu are inherent in challenges in agriculture in Nigeria. The greatest challenge facing agriculture is government misconception of what agriculture means;

- (a) Government ignored the role played by the people's cultural background.
- (b) Since development means the capacity of a people to maintain self-sustaining growth the erroneous belief and equation of agricultural development with the importation of agricultural inputs such as tractors, huge silos, gigantic buildings for River Basin authorities, large bureaucratic outlay, etc.
- (c) Policy enactments and poor implementation had greatly distorted agricultural development in Nigeria as reflected in the abandonment of agricultural programmes of a predecessor such as the NAFPP, OFN, RBA, ADP, etc.
- (d) The determination of the political outcome of agricultural programmes. The politicization of agricultural programmes have not augured well for our overall national development, financial allocation to agricultural programmes, choice and location of projects and even funding were done on the basis of ethnic, geographical and political considerations.
- (e) There is no synergy and synchronization of efforts by agencies in various sectors of the economy. This absence of organic relationship between key sectors of the economy has impacted negatively on the overall development of the country.

Conclusion

Our discussion so far has shown quite clearly that food security is very important to the realization of the overall objective of national security. The reason(s) for the collapse of policies enunciated by the government was as a result of the levity with which government had created the agricultural sector in the past. As important component of the Millennium Development Goal, food security for the nation and its people can no longer be ignored. We do so at our own peril. Government must take urgent steps to boost agricultural production through the provision of higher budgetary allocations, subsidies, agricultural inputs and creating an enabling environment for agriculture to thrive. Government must re-focus its attention on the

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local environment and adopt positive strategies in realizing the overall objectives of food security.

Recommendations

Therefore, the author makes the following recommendations: (a) Attempts at development within the agricultural sector without putting into consideration the local environment and input are bound to fail. It is quite obvious to all and sundry that transplantation of foreign production process, ideas and policies has not changed dramatically the average farmer's output. Previous government's efforts aimed at improving the level of food supply through various farming inputs, failed largely because it ignored the indigenous. (b) Improvement in science and technology and outcomes of research must be domesticated for it to succeed. The political, economic, social, cultural and technological transformation of countries such as Japan, China, former USSR, Cuba, etc. was as a result of the adoption of scientific breakthroughs to their needs. (c) There is an apparent disconnect between the farmers and relevant research institutes on the spread and adaptation of research findings. The institutes on their part suffered the misfortune of battling with the problem of old and outdated research facilities thus impairing its ability to intimate the ultimate beneficiaries on the latest research findings. According to Ijioma: The problem is made worse by the low level of technology involved in agricultural production (2000, 176)

Thus, Nigerian scientists, researchers, etc. continued to be challenged by the need to adopt improvements in technology to suit the local environment. (d) Research is the bedrock of all improvement in various fields of endeavour especially agriculture. Improvements in technology through breakthrough in research had made it possible for increase in production output and overall national income. Presently, subsistence farming is responsible for more than 70% of agricultural output in Nigeria. The level of application of mechanization processes, improved means of agricultural production is very minimal indeed. (e) For any meaningful impact of changes in agricultural production processes, there should be overall structural transformation of this vital sector of the national economy. These structural transformations should be in the realm of improved power supply, capacity utilization, good roads, supply of petroleum products, lessening of the level of poverty and massive unemployment, etc. our primary products should be of high value and highly competitive so as to attract patronage from external markets in Asia, Europe and America. The main challenge facing agriculture is not necessarily production output but the preservation of farm products, processing and access to European markets despite daunting obstacles posed by the erection of tariff walls against products from Africa. However, Adedeji recommended that: The barriers to free flow of food and fiber across state boundaries...should be removed (2006:A6) (f) Government agricultural policies are not encouraging. Successive government policies have continually favoured large-scale farmers and multi-national corporations to the detriment of indigenous producers. It is simply because government had failed to learn from the avoidable blunders of the past. Unfortunately, previous

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government's agricultural policies have not been farmer-friendly. Government and Ministry officials have continued to churn out voodoo agricultural policies that had little or no consideration for the local economy (or farmers) and failed to assign roles to the farmers too. Government has always maintained an unfriendly attitude towards local farmers. Policies so designed have always been anti-small scale farmers. Sound policies enunciated by government were not situated within the context of the overall plan(s) towards national development by linking it to resolution of failed policies and problem of development. (g) Increased government participation, funding and sectoral allocation to agriculture must be considered without any further delay. A more positive response to the diversification of the country's economy is very important.

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