Abstract

This paper examines the relationships between inadequacy of food and poverty levels in Nigeria. It also provided a proof that there is direct relationship between lack of food and poverty level and also offered solution to some of the agricultural problems in Nigeria. Agricultural producing nations are gradually becoming importers of all categories of foods. Continuous seizing and burning of these banned imported foods have shown that we are not ready to learn. The state of poverty could be linked to inconsistency in government policies, soil and environmental degradation, few infrastructural facilities to rural dwellers, no accountable facilities for farmers, overstressing of petroleum sector development over others and so on. In order to reduce poverty level in Nigeria through agriculture, the paper suggests the way out; such as provision of infrastructural facilities to all citizens no matter the location, involvement of Agricultural Engineers on the Government policies that relate to agricultural production and easy access to credit facilities for practicing farmers.

Introduction

The Nigerian population below the national poverty line increased from 42.8% in 1992 to 65.6% in 1996 (World Bank, 2001). The figure should have gone up than 70% as a result of high rate of devaluation of Naira compare with other currencies and inflated prices of commodities in the market. The other reasons for this increase can be linked to a number of factors such as low per capital income, low calorie intake, low savings, small capital investment, illiteracy and food insecurity.

Careful consideration of the above reasons has shown that lack of food supply is a major cause of poverty in Nigeria. In order to increase food supply, farmers ought to improve their modern inputs such as capital through credit facility, hybrid seeds, increase in land areas for farming, provision for storage structure etc.

The paper therefore, examines the impact of food insecurity on poverty level in Nigeria and suggests that an increase in the supply of food will go a long way to reduce the level of poverty in Nigeria.

Definition and Measurements

Hunger is known as chronic under nourishment or starvation from food. Hunger affects hundred or million of people. The world produces enough food to feed all its people, but that food is not distributed equally among the rich and poor or across national boundaries. While malnutrition is a deficiency or excess of one or more essential nutrients in the diet, children suffer from the effect of starvation more quickly than adults. There is an adage which says that if the food is no longer part of the poverty, situation of things is better. So, to solve poverty problem means providing adequate food to all citizens.

In economic terms, poverty may be defined as the number of people living below a specified minimum level of income. Individual measurement of poverty as stated by Odusola (1977), as lack of resources to obtain and consume a certain bundle of goods and services such as ability to eat 3 times daily, clothe oneself adequately, avoid decent shelter and other basic necessity like gainful employment, and to meet social obligations.

According to the World Bank (1993), the criteria for measuring community level of poverty include:
(i) Inadequate social economic infrastructures and basic amenities such as lack of security, roads, sanitation facilities, health centers, education, water supply, electricity, markets etc.
(ii) Inadequate employment, low income, absence of commercial and industrial facilities, lack of resources (mineral and agricultural inputs).
(iii) Environmental pollution (natural degradation) and over population.

War Against Poverty

United National millennium declaration is to render assistance to African in order to bring her into the mainstream of the World Economy. Special measures need to be taken to address the challenges of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development in Africa. They may include Debt Cancellation, Improved
Market Access, Enhanced Official Development Assistance (ODA), increased flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Transfer of Technology, support for Democracy in Africa, promote Gender Equality and Empowerment to develop a Global Partnership for Development and Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty.

Organization and programme have been put in place in Nigeria to eradicate poverty. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NURFUND), Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB), Nigeria Bank for Commerce and Industry (NBCI), People Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), Family Support Programme and Family Economic Advance Programme. Despite all these measures toward Nigerians, more than 69% of Nigerians are still living on less than $1 per day (UNDP, 2001) as shown in Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>% of Population Living on Less Than $1/day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The recent programmes on poverty reduction and the National Poverty Eradication' Programme and Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) which gave out micro-credits and KEKE NAPEP to the poor have not succeeded in reducing poverty level in Nigeria. The following problems have to be tackled if poverty is to be reduced in Nigeria.

(a) Inconsistency in Government Policies

Nigerians are poor because the past governments had been selfish in their dealings with the governed. Most of the programmes originated by the government have not been on the target. For instance, NAPEP started with the sum of =N=10 billion poverty alleviation funds, but did not yield desired result because the people who are in need e.g. poor widows, orphans, the disabled, the rural and urban poor, the aged people and retrenched civil servants are left out. The agricultural nation has turned to become importer of foods. Despite government ban on these products, continuous burning and seizing of the items by Nigerian Custom and Duty men proved that some of them get into our country through illegal routes.

(b) Insecurity

Nigeria, not rely on vigilante groups, the Bakassi Boys are for the Eastern part, the Oduduwa People Congress (OPC) for the West and Arewa Boys for the Northern counterpart and Sundiy Association to protect their lives and property. Even the government’s police Affairs Minister, David Jemibewon, and some state government once supported this concept of allowing vigilante alternative to the proper rule of law. Their support for illegal methods of combating crimes in Nigeria shows that they have no confidence in the ability of the government security agents. In situation like this, foreign- investors would find it difficult to invest where there is no peace. Lack of proper rule of law do not only drives away foreign business, but also hinders domestic business. Since the advent of political independence, Nigerians have been passing from one religious/political riot to another. The shops and homes are looted burnt ones are mainly from the poor who try to make ends meet.

(c) Lack of Infrastructure

It is the poor that suffers and fights for few amenities provided by the government. In fact, the poor are regularly forced to pay a premium for public goods and basic services, such as access to education, Electricity supply, water supply, health care, public transport and market.
(d) **No Accountable Credit Facilities**

The Head of State and Government of the African Union have repeatedly given priority attention to Agriculture at the recent A. U. summit at both Lusaka and Maputo in 2001 and 2003 respectively. There was consensus at the peak of their discussion to raise their budget allocation to agriculture to a minimum of 10% of total public spending within five years. This is a task to break the barrier of food shortage in the Africa continent. In the past, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) launched Rural Banking Scheme (RBS) as far back as 1977. Through this scheme, Commercial Banks and Development Banks opened a number of branches in the rural areas and even some Merchant Banks were not left behind. Bringing banking nearer to rural people is a welcome idea, but how many of our rural farmers will benefit from it? Unlike huge capital project allocated to quick profitable business. Token amount was given to real farmers. One of the major reasons for not having enough investors in the agricultural sectors was high risk of failure in the agriculture business. Other demerits are lack of continuity if a farmer dies and no heir of the farmer to continue the farming activities, no collateral or tangible assets from the farmers to stand for the loan issued to them, diversification of loan to non-agricultural project etc. Many big farms have failed, especially agro allied companies and many ex-government farms despite huge amount invested due to the high risk involved in farming. The problems of agriculture in Africa and Nigeria in particular demands for global solution. As recently recognized by African Union’s summit, the agricultural sectors should be taken as number one in any African Nation’s economy setting.

**The Way-Out of Poverty from Agricultural Aspect**

The five specific opportunities and priorities for improving Nigeria’s agriculture are as follows:

**Increase Food Supply and Reducing Hunger**

The importance of improving food security is based on the recognition that African’s population (about 70%) suffers from chronic hunger and malnutrition. The small scale subsistence farmers live in social conditions associated with poverty for example, poor health, water and electricity supplies.

**Improve Rural Infrastructure and Market Facilities**

Improvements in roads, storage, market, packaging and handling systems are vital to raise the competitiveness of local production. Nigeria urgently, needs infrastructural improvement development. For example, facilities that will provide easy transportation of agricultural product from farm settlement to market, Exporting countries of agricultural products, like petroleum product, need to meet and have trade negotiation with the World Trade so as to produce their capacity and quality requirement.

**Agricultural Research and Technology**

The aims/impact of this to agricultural productions are to accelerate gains in agricultural productivity. The followings are required among other things: there should be efficient link between researchers and producers. The use of new communication and information technologies to bring quickly the innovation to farmers should be put in place. Supporting agricultural research system and also to effectively generate and adopt new technologies that are needed to increase the output such as high yield seeds, adequate storage etc should be provided. Adoption to mechanisms that reduces the drudgery, performance risk and cost unit of production is necessary.

**Extension of the Area under Sustainable Land Management and Reliable Water Control Systems**

Our reliance on irregular and unreliable rainfall for agricultural production is a major constraint on crop productivity. Therefore, rain-fed agricultural crops can not achieve their full production potential. The improvement of the soil through the use of fertilizer is recorded very low. The low fertilizer productivity level compared with Asia and developed countries are 36% and 92% respectively. Land and water management will not only provide farmers with opportunities to raise output on a sustainable basis, but will also contribute to the reliability of food supplies at all times.

**Conclusion**

With the commitment of international development community in support of African agriculture and determination of African leaders, there is a wind of change in Africa, especially, in Nigeria, toward restoration of food security.

Finally, Agricultural Engineers should be encourage and supported to develop appropriate
technologies that will enhance food production and processing, thereby enhancing food security and reducing hunger in Nigeria. Many of the government imported agricultural machines from Republic of China and Taiwan can be developed in Nigeria by Agricultural Engineers, if they can have their ways in government.

References


