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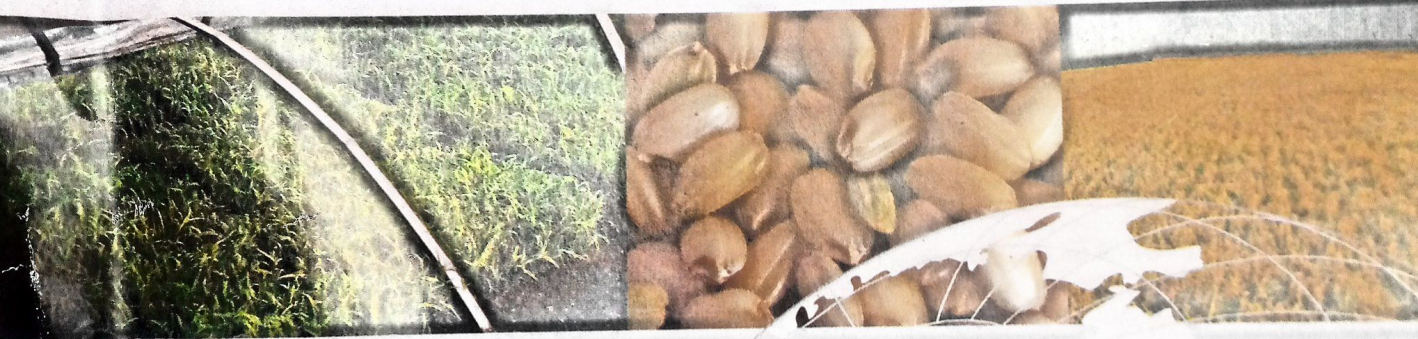
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AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has enormous potential for agricultural activities because of its vast available cultivable land and water resources. It has a total land area of 98.3million hectares out of which, about 71.2 million hectares are cultivable. 34.2 million hectares representing 48 percent of the cultivable land is being cultivated. This huge potential in form of land has made it possible for the country's economy to depend on agriculture in the 1960s as agricultural produce were the major export commodities. The major export crops were groundnut, cocoa, cotton, rubber and palm products. However, the oil boom in the 70s diverted governments attention away from agriculture and agricultural activities and productivity started dwindling. This situation led to the importation of many agricultural products into the country. In order to reverse the trend, various governments formulated different policies to revitalize the agricultural sector, which are vividly highlighted in this paper. These actions have recorded some achievements and it is hoped that agriculture will soon become one of the principal sector of the economy that will contribute immensely towards the development of the nation, as the present government is putting necessary structures in place to revive it.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a total land area of 98.3 million hectares of which 71.2 million hectares are cultivable. About 34.2 million hectares (48 percent) out of the total cultivable land area are actually being cultivated, and less than 1 percent of the arable land is irrigated. This made it possible for the country to rely on agriculture before and shortly after independence in 1960. Within this period, agriculture accounted for well over half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and was the main source of export earning and public revenue as shown table 1 and figs 1-2.

Nigeria's has a wide range of climate that permits the cultivation of a variety of crops. The northern part of Nigeria experiences a dry season of five to seven months, during which less rainfall is experienced. The staple food-crops produced are millet, rice, sugarcane, sorghum, guinea corn, maize, soybean, cowpea, yam, cassava etc while the principal cash and export crops are cotton and groundnut (table3).

Rainfall is heaviest in the south, thus has abundant precipitation and relatively short dry seasons. Hence, major food-crops like cassava, cocoyam, yam, sugarcane, rice, plantain, banana and cash and export crops such as cocoa, rubber and oil-palm are grown.

This climatic blessing made it possible for the economy of the country to depend on agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s when agriculture accounted for 60-70 percent of total exports. Nigeria was then a major exporter of Cocoa, Cotton, Palm oil, Palm kernel, Groundnut and rubber. Between 1970 and 1974, agricultural exports declined as percentage of total exports fell from about 43 percent to slightly over 7 percent. By 1996, agriculture accounted for only 2 percent of exports. As agriculture exports shrank later, Nigeria became a net importer of some commodities that it formerly exported (Adubi, 1999).

Services had the highest percentage GDP of 45% followed by agriculture with 41%, while the oil sector had 6% only in 1970 as shown in fig 1 and 2. In 2004 the oil sector had a percentage GDP of 48.2% while agriculture had 16.6%.

Currently, Oil and Gas now contributes about 99% of the total export earning and nearly 88.5% of government revenues. Agriculture, the second largest sector, fell from 48% in 1970 to 20.6% in 1980 and was 23.3% of GDP in 2005 (Daramora, *at el.*, 2005). However, this trend is gradually being reversed as the present and immediate past governments have put several encouraging agricultural programmes and projects in place. Most farmers are now having access to these programmes and improving their productivities.

PREVIOUS GORVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIES

The following schemes and programmes were established by previous governments in order to boost agricultural productivity in Nigeria:

- i) **Farm Settlement Scheme:** This was used in Nigeria in the 1960's to improve the quality of life of the people. Its objective was to improve food production by introducing modern agricultural methods through farm settlement scheme, formation of farmers cooperatives and supply of improved farm inputs and implements.
- ii) **National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP):** The NAFPP was launched in 1972 with the objective of improving and accelerating food production in Nigeria.
- iii) **Operation Feed the Nation (OFN):** This programme was launched in the 1976, with the aim of increasing local food production and reduce the importation of agricultural and food products.
- iv) **River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs):** This was created in 1976, to harness the country's water resources and optimize Nigeria's agricultural resources for food self sufficiency by promoting all year round agricultural activities. A total of eleven (11) river basin development authorities were established.

- v) **The Green Revolution Programme:** This programme was introduced in 1980 and was intended to ensure self sufficiency in food production and to introduce modern technologies into the Nigeria agricultural sector largely through the provision of modern inputs such as high yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers and tractors. The programme introduced a wide range of project support to the nations agricultural development, this include the establishment of the 11 river basin development authorities, the ministry of water resources, national food production programmes and the agro service centres.
- vi) **The Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRI):** DFRI was launched in 1992. It was intended to open up rural areas through construction of feeder roads and provision of basic amenities that would turn them into production centres for the national economy. The programme was aimed at promoting rural employment based on the assumption that if rural infrastructures such as electricity and road was available in the villages, many technicians and craftsmen would remain gainfully employed in those areas rather than migrate to cities in search of jobs that were hard to come by.
- vii) **National Agriculture Land Development Authority (NALDA):** NALDA was launched in 1992 with the aim of transforming rural peasantry by mobilizing human resources and other support services to open up new lands for increased food production.

ON GOING GOVERNMENT STRATAGIES

- i) **National Directorate of Employment (NDE):** This programme was established to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at improving the livelihood of the people.
- ii) **The World Bank-Funded Agricultural Development Project:** This was in existence since 1974 to date. The ADP's were designed in response to a fall in

agricultural productivity and hence a concern to sustain domestic food supplies, as labour had moved out of agriculture into more remunerative activities that were more benefiting from the oil boom. The project provided agricultural services such as extension and training of farmers, rural roads, village's water supplies, etc.

iii) **Establishment of Agricultural research Centres/Institutes:** Various agricultural research institutes have been established in Nigeria to improve productivity through the introduction of high yielding varieties, improved farm inputs, farm techniques and machines.

The first research centre in Nigeria started formally with the establishment of a botanical garden in Lagos during the late 19th century which focused on the introduction of new crops. This centre has metamorphosed into the National Cereals Research Institute (NCRI).

Some of the other agricultural research institutes that have been established include Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR), Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR), Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI), Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN), National Root Crop Research Institute, National Veterinary Research Institute, National Institute for horticulture (NIHOT), National Agricultural Extension Research and Liaison Service (NAERLS), National Animal Production Research Institute (NARPRI), Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR), Institute for Agricultural Research and Training (IAR & T), National Fresh Water Fisheries Research Institute (NFFRI).

iv) **National Seed Service (NSS):** This centre was set up to produce, certify and sell high quality seeds/seedlings to farmers.

v) **Agricultural Finance Programme:** The objective of this programme is to provide loans and credit to small scale farmers. This is done through some agricultural orientated financial institution such as the Nigerian agricultural co-

which prevented the maximization of the benefits. This programme made Nigeria the largest cassava producer in the world (Kinye, 2008).

- x) **The Agricultural Credit Support Scheme (ACSS):** This is an initiative of the Federal Government and the Central Bank of Nigeria with the active support and participation of the Bankers Committee. The scheme has a prescribed fund of ₦50.0billion. ACSS was introduced to enable farmers exploit the untapped potentials of Nigeria's Agricultural sector, reduce inflation, lower the cost of agricultural production,(i.e. food items), generate surplus for export, increase Nigeria's foreign earning as well as diversify its revenue base.

- xi) **The Rural Access and Mobility Project for Nigeria:** This programme aims at improving rural access and mobility by providing improved all- weather access road networks in selected rural areas, and by supporting the institutional reforms in the transport sector to improve management of the state wide road network. (NAPEP, 2010).

- xii) **The MDG goal:** This programme, among other things aims at reducing the number of hungry people by half by 2015. Globally, food crisis has been increasing as the number of hungry people in the world increased by 75 million in 2007 and by 100 million between 2008 and 2009 hitting the one billion mark in 2009. This means that one in every six (6) persons in the world is hungry. It is important to note that most of the 1billion hungry people in the world live in rural areas and their main source of income and lively-hood is agriculture. Therefore Agriculture has been assessed as a vital tool for achieving the MDG goals by 2015 (Olive 2009).

- xiii) **National Fadama Project:** The development objective of the Fadama project is to increase the incomes of users of rural land and water resources on a sustainable basis. It relies on the facilitation for demand-driven investment and empowerment of local community groups and to

improve productivity and land quality. The project is assisted by the World Bank and covers the thirty-six states and the federal capital territory (FCT).

CHALLENGES

- Discontinuity in many of the programmes by past governments.
- Political interference
- Undefined policy frame work for the programmes.
- Inappropriate monetary policies that would insure stability in foreign exchange
- Inappropriate agricultural practices.
- Inappropriate marketing policies and strategies for the produce
- Inefficient and insufficient mechanisms to add value to the agric products
- Lack of institutional support to farmers to cushion glut of agric products.
- Past military interventions in government

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There was minimal direct federal government involvement in agriculture during the 1960-69 as the federal government played a supportive role, while regional and state governments were left to take major initiatives and specialized in producing various agricultural exports crops. Nigeria was then having robust agricultural sector and the country was self-sufficient in food production with minimal imports of processed food.

The revenue generated from exporting agricultural produce was used to develop the other sectors of the economy such as education, health, construction e.t.c while the agricultural sector was neglected. As a result, the contribution of agriculture to the economic growth of the country became very minimal between 1980 and 2004.

The introduction of various schemes and programmes by the immediate past and present governments in order to revive agriculture is yielding positive

impact as evidenced by the stability of food prices in the country and gradual comparative increase in the contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation in recent years. In order to sustain and also improve on the present status on agricultural productivity in the country, the following recommendations are made:

- Governments should screen the existing schemes and programmes and strengthen the activities of the viable ones.
- Government should evolve a proactive mechanism of monitoring the activities and structures of the viable schemes and programmes
- Government should put up political structures that would stimulate youths into engaging in agriculture
- Mechanization of agricultural activities should be encouraged as the older generation is phasing out from agriculture
- Value addition to primary agricultural products should be given active attention
- Government should engage in capacity building of people in agriculture
- Government should sustain inter-country collaborative activities such as this to share experience and gain knowledge from one another.

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