

# A REVIEW OF THE EXISTING AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND CHANGES NEEDED TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AGENDA (ATA)

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## ABSTRACT

Although several agricultural policies have been implemented in Nigeria, the agriculture sector is yet to bring about the desired growth and achieve food security for the country's over 140 million population. However, it is expected that the on-going Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of the present administration will break the jinx of ironies and contradictions of the country's agriculture. This paper therefore reviewed the performance of the immediate past (2001) agricultural policy, detailed the bottlenecks in the past policies, key resultant constraints of agriculture and an assessment of the extent to which the ATA policy thrust is in the right direction. The paper depends mainly on content analysis and secondary information. It identified the gaps and weaknesses in the existing policy to include over-centralization of implementation; role conflict; undue emphasis to upstream activities; overcrowding of the private sector; multiplicity of donor supported projects; input dependency, amongst others. Adjustments proposed include: sustained political commitment; effective synergy in the operations of the value chains; provision of optimum resources; institutionalization of viable M&E mechanism; review of targets in the light of available resources, etc.

**KEYWORDS:** Agricultural Policies; Agricultural Transformation Agenda.

## INTRODUCTION

Agricultural policies in Nigeria have been dictated largely by the philosophy of the governments in power and the priority rating attached to various categories of agricultural and rural development problems (Olayemi and Dittoh 1995). Generally, Nigeria's agricultural policies have undergone four distinct chronological phases in line with the developmental stages of agriculture in the country. These are the pre-1970, 1971-1985, 1986-1994 and 1995 to date (FMARD 2010). The first phase spanned the colonial period and the post-independence decade from 1960 to about 1969 (the pre 1970 era); the second covered the period from about 1971 to 1985; the third phase started from 1986 in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period to 1994; the fourth is the post-SAP era to date (spanning 1995-2012). During these development phases, policy statements centered mainly on thematic sub-sectors and regional policies. In 1988 however, a more holistic and articulated agricultural policy document of Nigeria was undertaken with the support of the erstwhile Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) and was revised in 2001 as the New Agricultural Policy Thrust.

With the coming of the Economic Transformation Agenda of Mr. President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development launched an ambitious Agricultural Transformation Agenda in 2011, thus again, refocusing the agricultural policy direction of the country. This study was therefore undertaken within the context of the challenges facing the Nigeria's agriculture sector, with a view to: (i) outlining the gaps and implementation bottlenecks in the immediate past policy, (ii) identify key resultant constraints of agriculture and an assessment of the extent to which the ATA policy thrust is in the right direction. Key adjustments needed to facilitate effective institutionalization and implementation of the ATA policy thrust was also discussed.

To achieve the objectives of the study, secondary data were used, which included information from publications of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), National Bureau of Statistics, Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigeria Agriculture Digest and Draft Report of the FMARD Committee on Implementation Strategy on

the Agricultural Transformation Agenda. The data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive analysis involving frequency distribution, percentages and tabulation of data.

### OVERVIEW OF THE 2001 POLICY FRAMEWORK

The 2001 New Agricultural Policy was conceived to address the numerous constraints hindering the attainment of the policy objectives. These included the; unstable national macro policies which impinge on prices and money flow in the economy, inconsistencies in the implementation strategies of the micro-agricultural policies which have often been inimical to agricultural production, implementation failures, lack of gender consideration, amongst others. According to FMARD (2001), the policy aims at the attainment of self-sustaining growth in all the sub-sectors of agriculture and the structural transformation necessary for the overall socio-economic development of the country, as well as the improvement in the quality of life of Nigerians. The broad policy objectives include:

- i. attainment of self-sufficiency in basic food commodities with focus on crops with comparative advantage and those that account for the bulk of the country's foreign exchange;
- ii. increase in production of agricultural raw materials to meet growth and expanding industrial sector;
- iii. increase in production and processing of exportable commodities, with a view to increasing foreign exchange and diversifying export base.
- iv. modernization of agricultural production, processing, storage and distribution through the infusion of improved technologies and management;
- v. creation of more agricultural and rural employment opportunities to increase the incomes of farmers and rural dwellers and to productively absorb an increasing labour force;
- vi. protection and improvement of agricultural land resources and preservation of the environment for sustainable agricultural production;
- vii. establishment of appropriate institution and creation of administrative organs to facilitate integrated development and realization of the country's agricultural potentials.

The policy defined roles for the three tiers of government and the private sector as follows:

- i. The Federal Government is to provide general policy direction, facilitate resource flow into agriculture sector, undertake research and development, maintain a national food reserve, support input provision, manage impounded water and large dams, amongst others
- ii. The State Governments will be primarily responsible for promotion of primary production of all agricultural produce, ensuring viable extension, maintenance of buffer stock, invest in rural development, coordinate data collection and information management at local government level, amongst others
- iii. The Local Government Councils are expected to gradually take over the activities of the State Governments through provision of agriculture extension service, provision of rural infrastructures, mobilization of farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development, provision of land for new entrants and coordination of data collection amongst others
- iv. The Private Sector is to play leading role with regards to investment in all aspects of agric production, including downstream activities, agricultural input supply, support research and provision of certain types of rural infrastructures.

### ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR PERFORMANCE POST 2001 NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY ERA

Arising from the aforementioned policy overview, it is not in doubt that the agriculture sector was subjected to numerous macro and micro economic policy effects within the implementation period. Thus, the effect of these policies can be deduced from growth trends and structural changes in the sector. The indicators capturing these

effects included changes in gross domestic product, agricultural production and productivity, agricultural investment, agricultural employment, agricultural exports and imports and agricultural prices to mention a few.

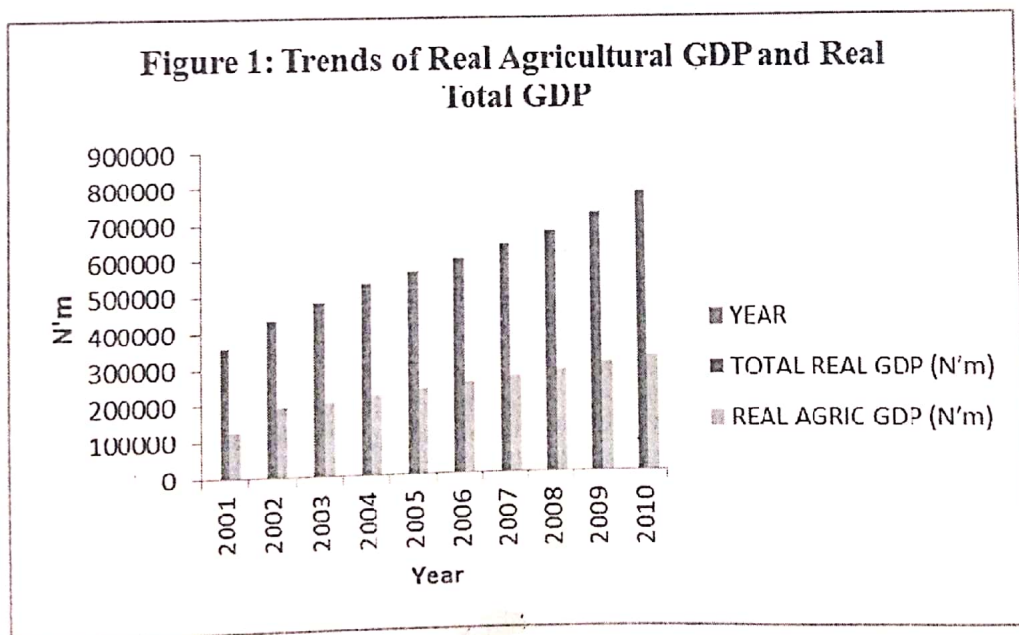
**i. CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)**

Table 1 showed that the agricultural sector witnessed some growth following the implementation of the 2001 agricultural policies. The agricultural GDP for instance, witnessed an upward increase from ₦122.52 billion in 2001 to ₦316.7 billion in 2010, representing about 158.5% growth. The performance of the sector is not unconnected to a number of factors, including favorable weather, acreage expansion and the Presidential Initiatives on seven agricultural products, especially cassava, rice, cocoa, cotton and the promotion of commercial agriculture (Figure 1).

**Table 1: Trends of Agricultural Gross Domestic Products**

YEAR	TOTAL REAL GDP (N'm)	REAL AGRIC GDP (N'm)	AGRIC GDP AS % OF TOTAL GDP
2001	356 994,26	122 522,34	34,32
2002	433 203,51	190 133,40	43,89
2003	477 532,98	203 409,87	42,60
2004	527 576,04	216 208,47	40,98
2005	561 931,39	231 463,61	41,19
2006	595 821,61	248 598,96	41,72
2007	634 251,14	266 477,18	42,01
2008	672 202,55	283 175,43	42,13
2009	718 977,33	299 823,86	41,70
2010	775 525,70	316 728,70	40,84

Source: National Bureau of Statistics



**ii. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY**

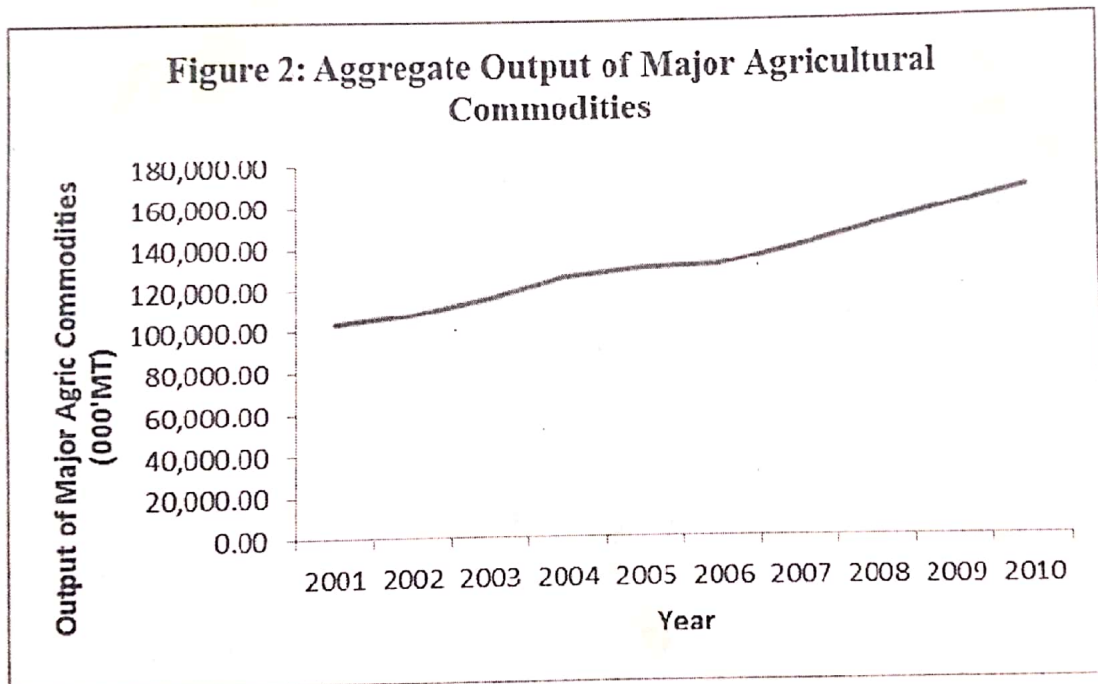
A cursory review of the Figure 2 showed that output of major crops has been on the rise between 2001 and 2011 from 103.6 million M/tons to 167.8 million M/tons in 2011. The mean output growth rate stood at 5.5%, fluctuating from 3.8% in 2002 to a peak of 8.5% in 2004 and then witnessed a decrease to 5.8% in 2010 (Table 2). However, output increases have largely been due to acreage expansion given that

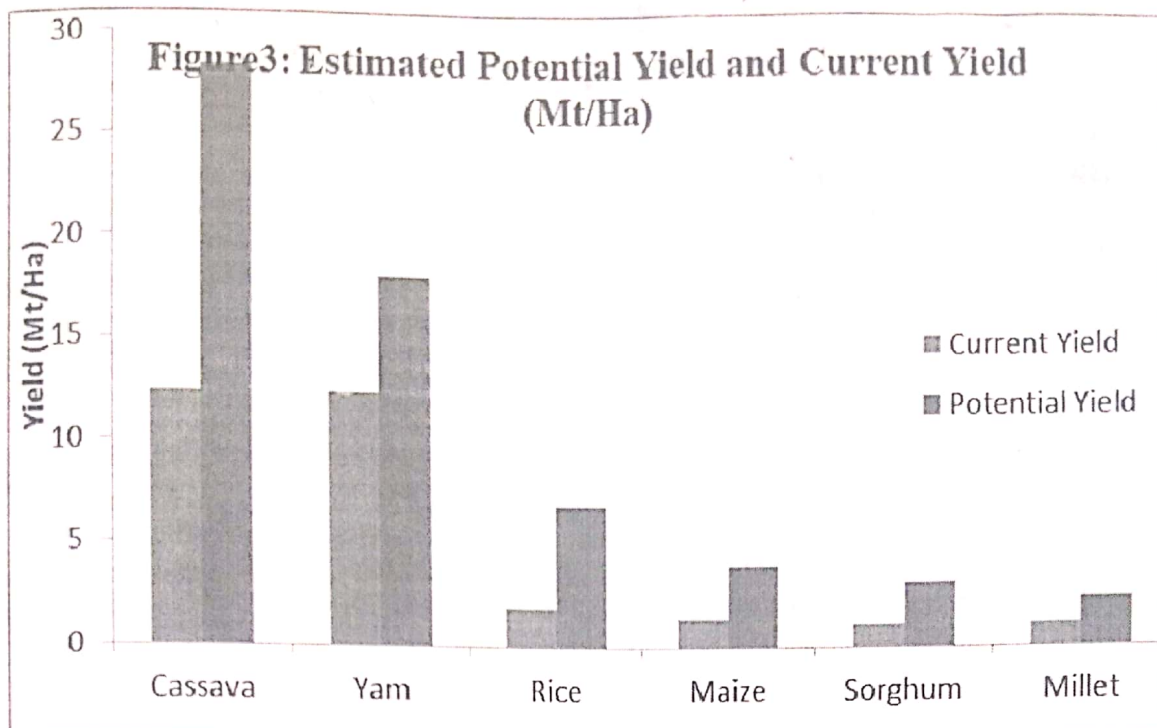
productivity per hectare has been low. Figure 3 showed that Nigeria's yield per hectare has been far below the potential yield.

**Table 2:** Aggregate Agricultural Production and Growth Rates

YEAR	OUTPUT OF MAJOR AGRIC COMMODITIES (000'MT)	GROWTH RATE (%)
2001	103 635,80	NA
2002	107 572,50	3,80
2003	115 304,10	7,19
2004	125 084,90	8,48
2005	129 533,50	3,56
2006	130 574,08	0,80
2007	139 315,13	6,69
2008	149 442,19	7,27
2009	158 679,29	6,18
2010	167 795,55	5,75

Source: National Bureau of Statistics





### iii. AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENT

The role of agricultural investment in enhancing agricultural growth is not in doubt. However, FGN (2009) noted that the share of Agriculture in Federal Government's annual budget ranged between 1.3% and 7.4% from 2000 and 2007 and this has consistently fallen below the Maputo Declaration of 10% share of total country budget for agriculture, an indication of the low priority previous governments had placed on agriculture. It further hinted that state level agricultural expenditure share were observed to be relatively higher compared to that of the Federal Government, while those of the Local Government Councils were highly erratic and concluded that the country's agricultural expenditure was far below international standards. Regrettably too, in spite of the importance of the sector, only 1% of the total lending by commercial banks in Nigeria goes to agriculture, compared to Kenya and Brazil, where 6% and 18% of their total bank financing go to agriculture. The Vision 20:2020 report further noted that inadequate and untimely funding of agriculture by the public sector, coupled with inefficient and/or ineffective application of such funds (budgetary or otherwise) constituted bottlenecks to agricultural project implementation. It observed that the reluctance of commercial banks to finance agricultural enterprises has also been a major hindrance to agricultural growth. NAIP (2010) noted that the resource gap on investment projects/programmes amounts to as high as about 64 percent of resource needed in 2011 and averaged 53 percent for the 2010-12 fiscal years. In this respect, it affirmed that the FGN's capital budget allocation of ₦149.9 billion for agriculture was incapable of substantially reducing the resource gap, while, the capital budget allocation for agriculture failed to meet the FGN commitment to invest 10 percent of its budget on agriculture in line with the Maputo Declaration.

### iv. AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT

According to the NAIP (2010), the agricultural sector currently employs about two-thirds of the country's labour force. However, it affirmed that the sector has significantly underperformed its potential in the past. Akinwunmi (2011) noted that Nigeria's unemployment rate was spiralling, driven by the wave of 4 million young people entering the workforce every year with only a small fraction able to find formal employment.

### v. AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

Available statistics from Table 3, showed that agricultural import was generally on the rise, thus affirming, the colossal leakage from the country's flow of income. Generally, agricultural import rose from 8.82% in 2002 to 61.06% in 2007, dropped by about the same percentage the following year, before reaching a peak of 141.43% in 2011. Contrariwise, the performance of export was mixed, culminating in decrease of 1.54 percent in 2011. Before independence in 1960 and up to 1975, agricultural commodities were the main sources of export earnings. However, following the rise of the oil economy since the 80s, agriculture's share of export earnings has been on decline. Oil now accounts for over 95 percent of export earnings, about 76 percent of government revenues and about 33 percent of GDP (World Bank 2004). The low share of export earnings coming from non-oil exports, including agriculture, reflects the heavy reliance of the Nigerian economy on a single, non-renewable resource (petroleum) and explains the strong emphasis for agricultural development and growth.

**Table 3: Details of Agricultural Imports and Exports (N'000)**

YEAR	AGRIC. EXPORT	GROWTH RATE (%)	AGRIC. IMPORT	GROWTH RATE (%)
2001	392,879	-	195,814,959	-
2002	20,484,725	5116.61	213,081,730	8.82
2003	148,893	-95.37	305,878,523	43.55
2004	1,460,572	53.92	301,383,949	-1.47
2005	4,298,181	194.28	384,310,354	27.52
2006	28,304,823	558.53	537,076,019	39.75
2007	121,311,590	328.59	865,017,844	61.06
2008	132,967,333	9.61	335,813,929	-61.18
2009	372,136,600	179.87	621,787,300	85.16
2010	476,693,600	28.10	703,957,400	13.22
2011	469,369,700	-1.54	1,699,581,340	141.43

*Source:* Trade Summaries (Various Issues)

**i. AGRICULTURAL PRICES**

Food prices have always been volatile, and they may become even more unstable in the future given the linkages between grain prices, population growth, improved standard of living, increased, vagaries of weather, weak down-stream development, etc. Table 4 revealed that the food component of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) have been unstable, ranging from 9.1 in 2002 to peaks of 15.5 in 2005 and 2009 fiscal years, before the decline to 11% in 2011.

**Table 4: Food Component of CPI**

Year	CPI Food	Growth Rate of CPI
2001	28,9	-
2002	9,1	-68,51
2003	11,9	30,77
2004	12,1	1,68
2005	15,5	28,10
2006	3,9	-74,84
2007	8,2	110,26
2008	18	119,51
2009	15,5	-13,89
2010	12,7	-18,06

2011	11.0	-13,39
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Source: National Bureau of Statistics

Arising from the aforementioned discussions, it is obvious that agricultural policies in Nigeria have not only been inconsistent but they have often been poorly coordinated as well. Against a background of short political cycles, agricultural policies tended to change frequently with changes in political leadership, and often the political will to implement the policies had also varied as well. The history of Nigerian agriculture is littered with abandoned policies, programs, and initiatives. The fragmented approach to policy-making has also constrained agricultural growth because it has prevented a sustained commitment to a coherent, integrated strategy for agricultural development. FMARD (2009) affirmed that such a sustained commitment is needed to achieve good results in a sector that not only requires longer time spans to yield desired outcomes, but also relies on other sectors for its development.

#### GAPS AND IMPLEMENTATION BOTTLENECKS IN THE 2001 POLICY

Against the backdrop of the experiences of the past policy implementation, the 2001 Agricultural Policy focused on redirecting the policy environment through demand-driven, needs oriented, forward-looking thrust that will lift Nigeria's agriculture to new heights through: (i) creating a conducive macro-environment to stimulate greater private sector investment in agriculture; (ii) rationalizing the roles of the stakeholders in agriculture and rural development; (iii) reorganizing the institutional framework for government intervention; (iv) implementing integrated rural development; (v) enhancing budget allocation to the sector; (vi) improving incentives and promoting increased application of modern technology to agricultural production, while reinforcing the need to assign clearly defined, but complementary and mutually reinforcing roles to all stakeholders.

In spite of these efforts however, numerous gaps and implementation bottlenecks hindered the effective implementation of these policy objectives. Firstly, there was over centralization of implementation activities at the center at the detriment of the lower tiers of government. Most field offices operated with limited funds, while majority of staff were redundant. This hindered effective policy implementation and monitoring of policy targets at the farmer level. The lack of political will to enhance effective policy coordination to drive the sector further limited achievement. There was also the issue of role conflicts, given that there were no clear role definition and clarification amongst the various tiers of government, even though attempts were made in the policy document at addressing this. This development led to duplication of mandates, wastages and ineffectiveness of implementation, with obvious negative impact on the farmers. A major gap was also that the immediate past policy focused more on the production stage to the detriment of the other stages of the value chain, without deep attention on specific commodities. Though, the Presidential Initiative of President Obasanjo implemented within this policy era focused on specific commodities, it lacked a sharp focus on the value chain, while the National Food Security Programme which featured a value chain operated on a generic basis, with little emphasis on specific commodities, even though, specific commodities were mentioned in the policy document (Nigeria Agriculture Digest, 2012). Though, due cognizance was given to the roles of the private sector with regards to investment, mechanization, input distribution, infrastructure provision, research, storage, processing and marketing, actual implementation was with its attendant weaknesses, with the government crowding out the private sector in roles originally earmarked for the private sector, most especially input distribution. The implication was that critical productivity enhancing inputs like fertilizers and improved seeds did not reach majority of the farmers. According to the FGN (2011), only 11% of targeted farmers had access to subsidized fertilizers. The Minister of Agriculture further noted that the government distribution of fertilizer was costly, inefficient and terribly corrupt. The 2001 policy also operated with little strategic focus with the emergence of numerous overlapping and isolated small holder focused donor supported programmes and projects, which lacked effective coordination at the center, with no strong contribution to the agriculture sector. This era for instance prompted the implementation of pluralistic extension approaches, with little effect on the farmers. Aside this, the agriculture sector was generally viewed from the development angle with little emphasis on agribusiness. The immediate past policy further operated without a pragmatic financial service support to the farmers, in spite of

the obvious fact that no effective agricultural production can take place without investible funds, especially with regards to our own peculiar situation. Loans from the formal sector were generally at double digit interest rates, and most times beyond the reach of the small scale farmers, while the volume from the informal sources were generally too meager to create appreciable impact at the farmer level. According to the Nigeria Agriculture Digest (2012), most banks preferred to pay the penalty for non-compliance with stipulated credit limits for the purpose, than to lend money to agriculture as conceived. The often changing national macroeconomic policy which impinges on prices and money flow into the sector was also an issue. For instance, the high import dependency at the expense of local production was not without its own negative effect. In 2010 alone, about 635 billion and 365 billion naira were spent on the importation of wheat and rice respectively, implying that about 1.7 million and 1.0 million were spent daily on these commodities only. Coupled with low domestic production, this led to rising prices and by extension, rising inflation. A key issue however was that the weak macroeconomic environment limited effective private sector investment in the agriculture sector.

#### KEY RESULTANT CONSTRAINTS OF AGRICULTURE (2001-2011)

Agriculture has always played a key role in the nation's economy, currently contributing about 41% of Gross Domestic Product as against 16 % for Crude Petroleum & Natural Gas; and employing two thirds of the entire labour force (NBS 2012). However, growth in the sector has not kept pace with the needs and expectations of the nation. During the review period, FGN (2009) noted that value added per capita in agriculture rose by less than 1 percent annually, while food production increase failed to keep pace with population growth (except in recent times), resulting in rising food imports and declining levels of national food self-sufficiency. Generally, several factors were observed to have accounted for this performance, ranging from; low mechanization, subsistence small scale holdings, outdated land tenure system, low adoption of research findings and technologies, high cost of farm inputs, poor access to credit, overemphasis on inefficient fertilizer procurement and distribution, inadequate irrigation and storage and poor access to markets. In a related dimension, the FGN (2012) particularly highlighted the lack of a strong marketing organization that linked farmers to markets as a key constraint, coupled with the non-competitiveness of Nigeria's agriculture. This development hindered market access and prompted price uncertainties, with the farmers largely at the receiving end. Other challenges noted were the limited research and development to develop higher yielding varieties (See Table 5), low improved technologies and international best practices to meet global market requirement; weak gender mainstreaming, inadequate rural infrastructure to support agri-business. Further constraints hindering the attainment of the policy objectives included the unstable macroeconomic policy environment which impinges on prices and money flow in the economy, inconsistencies in the implementation strategies of the micro-agricultural policies which have often been inclement to the practice of agriculture and policy implementation failures. Worthy of mention too is that the funding support to the agriculture sector has been generally low to drive meaningful growth. FGN (2009) noted that the share of agriculture in the Federal Government's annual budget only ranged between 1.3% and 7.4% from 2000 to 2007 which was far below the Maputo agreement of 10% of the national budget. This was an indication of the low priority positioning of agriculture at the expense of the other key sectors.

**Table 5: Estimated Current Yield vs. Potential Yield (Selected Crops-Mt/ha)**

S/N	Crop	Current Yield	Potential Yield
1.	Cassava	12.3	28.4
2.	Yam	12.3	18.0
3.	Rice	1.9	7.0
4.	Maize	1.4	4.0
5.	Sorghum	1.1	3.2
6.	Millet	1.1	2.4

Source: Current Yield from FMARD/NPFS; Potential yield from ReSAKSS (2009)



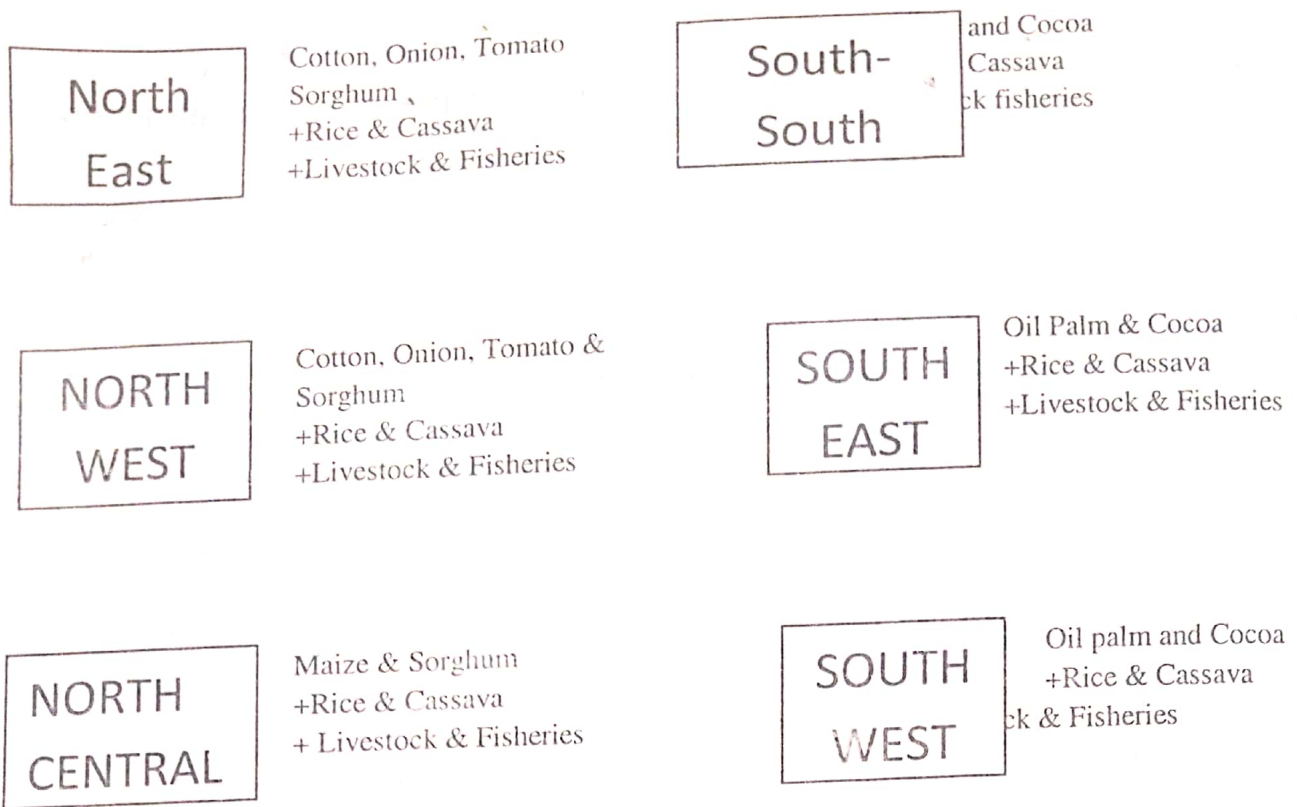
## ASSESSMENT OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH ATA POLICY THRUST IS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED

The Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) was launched against the backdrop of the resultant constraint hindering the country's agricultural development, arising from the weak implementation of the past policies. ATA is a strategy for transforming the agriculture sector in its structural and functional elements through the systematic development of commodity and financial value chains. The Agenda supersedes the pre existing strategies and structures of the immediate past administration, while the focus is to grow agriculture faster, from its present level of low performance to a higher level performance. The operations of the Agenda are based on the following principles and implementation arrangement:

- i. prioritization of Commodity Value Chains (CVC) along comparative advantage in the six geo-political zones of the country;
- ii. reform in the input supply sector to stop direct government involvement in the procurement, supply and distribution of fertilizers and seeds to farmers;
- iii. private sector led Commodity Trade and Market Development Corporations for the various commodity value chains which will coordinate the entire value chain in Nigeria, and enhance Nigeria's competitiveness, while expanding and stabilizing the income of the farmers;
- iv. introduction of the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing system for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) to de-risk agricultural financing and mitigate against the impact of natural disasters on losses of agricultural investments by facilitating low interest credits to farmers through commercial bank and the liberalization of the insurance sector;
- v. establishment of 18 Staple Crop Processing Zones (SCPZ) all over the country as a cluster based value chain strategy to attract private investors set up food processing plants in areas of high food production, link farmers in cluster to food manufacturing plants, create jobs and rapid rural economic growth;
- vi. establishment of a National Farmers Data Base through the registration of farmers and implementation of growth enhancement support using the e-wallet system;
- vii. use of Guaranteed Minimum Price (GMP) to stabilize prices and to absorb excess output of agricultural produce and encourage increased production.
- viii. promotion of agricultural mechanization through the use of farm machinery, implements, processing machines, etc.
- ix. revitalization and modernization of agricultural extension to empower farmers on adoption and application of research results.

Top amongst the key emphasis of ATA in addressing the gaps and resultant challenges which hindered the effective implementation of the immediate past policy included the sharp focus on the commodity value chains of specific commodities, namely cassava, rice, cotton, onion, tomato, sorghum, maize, soya bean, oil palm, cocoa, livestock and fisheries (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Target commodity Value Chains by Geopolitical Zones



**Adapted from:** Presidential Brief: Agricultural Transformation Agenda

Nigeria Agriculture Digest (2012) noted that while the past strategies had focused more on the upstream sector than the subsequent stages of the supply chain, ATA places emphasis on every stage of the commodity value chain, with a view to unlocking the latent values at each stage of production, given that every commodity has its own peculiarity. Thus, it is worthy of mention here that the failure of the Presidential Initiative of the President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration in adequately taking cognizance of the downstream sector led to the unprecedented glut in the cassava output, without off-take points in the market for its disposal. The double headed approach of commodity-focused value chain is thus a credible strategy which is bound to address the peculiar constraints of the targeted crops.

To facilitate the commercialization of agriculture, ATA is also promoting the business aspect of agriculture above the other objectives. The move is aimed at modernizing and up-scaling the agriculture sector from its present small holder focus, while moving it away from its development perception. This move is bound to enhance technology utilization, improve production scale and increase productivity and food security amongst the teeming population of Nigerians. Arrangement is also being put in place to have marketing corporations in place of the existing commodity and marketing corporations. This development will go a long way in addressing the marketing problems and limited competitiveness of the country's agriculture. Thus, it is envisaged that these corporations will coordinate the production and export of target commodities and encourage investment into the sector from research and development to processing, in addition to stimulating the development of tailored financial services to grow the sector.

With regards to investment creation, the agenda is to support private sector in setting up processing plants in zones of high food production through putting in place appropriate fiscal, investment and infrastructure for staple crop processing zones. Agricultural Investment Codes are also to be developed in partnership with Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Trade and Investments and CBN (Presidential Brief, 2011). In the area of input administration, the government has already moved out of input procurement and distribution, while the private sector are presently

selling seeds and fertilizers to farmers through the electronic wallet Scheme. As at July, data base of about 4.5 million farmers have been established, while 500,000 Mt of assorted fertilizers have been supplied, in addition to free improved seeds. However, all has not been rosy, given the problems being witnessed on the field. This ranged from the inability to effectively operationalize the electronic scheme in some states/locations, due to limited access of farmers to mobile phones, delay in the supply of inputs by the dealers and limited supervision and monitoring. From the political angle, the President is already providing oversight for the Agricultural Transformation Implementation Council; similar to what obtains in countries like Malawi, Ghana, India, Thailand, etc. Furthermore, to engender smooth implementation of the Agenda, numerous policies are being pushed, with the view to reducing the downstream risks during the implementation of the Agenda. These border on input distribution, incentive for commercial farming, marketing and financial policy support, revised land use act, expansion of irrigation facilities, fiscal policies, amongst others.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Generally, the performance of the Nigerian agricultural sector during the immediate past policy era was uneven, with key performance relating to output growth, productivity and food security yet to be achieved. This development is not unconnected to policy gaps and resultant constraints hindering the development of the sector. To reverse this trend however, the following are recommended:

There is the need for sustained and continued political commitment and drive from the President. Efforts at this level should be directed at effective coordination and fast tracking the approval of key policies and legislation required under the Agenda. It is worthy of mention that successful transformation policies in countries like Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia received sustained support from the political leaders.

Effective synergy is paramount to the success of the Agenda. Thus, it is necessary to ensure greater harmony in the operations of the value chains. Efforts should also be made to strengthen linkage with the on-going donors supported programmes and projects, given their experiences in value chain implementation and the available human capacities.

Given the policy focus on specific commodities under ATA, there is the need to facilitate the deployment of more resources into ATA implementation, considering the scope of intended support. This could come by getting effective commitment from the other tiers of government and exploring the benefits of special and dedicated funds.

Towards ensuring effective implementation of the Agenda, there is the need for continuous re-orientation and capacity building of staff, with the view to properly equipping them for the task ahead.

To ensure the success of the on-going Growth Enhancement Support Scheme, there is the need for a permanent mechanism to ensure continuous registration of farmers through the establishment of registration centers in the Local Government Councils. It has also become imperative to urgently complement the e-wallet scheme with the paper voucher as currently being proposed, while the proposals to distribute free mobile phones to farmers and partner with additional e- wallet scheme service providers is a welcome development.

The withdrawal of government from input procurement and distribution is a step in the right direction. However, there is the need to put in place viable legislation to sustain this policy.

For effective monitoring and assessment of programme implementation, there is the need to institutionalize a viable M&E system within the ATA framework, with a view to capturing the performance of the various value chains viz-a-viz the ATA performance targets agreed with the National Planning Commission. To give effect to this, reporting formats should be articulated and periodicity of reporting and monitoring be ascertained. Decentralizing the M&E system will further enhance implementation.

Finally, some of the thematic targets set under the on-going ATA seem to be on the high side. There is the need to review and focus on areas of prompt and greater growth, quick wins and impact, within available resources, with the view to meeting the goals and aspirations of Nigerians within a very short time.

## CONCLUSION

The study has been able to identify some of the structural weaknesses in the 2001 updated agricultural policy and the resultant constraints from the agriculture sector, while assessing the extent to which ATA policy thrust is in the right direction. With the adjustments proposed, the authors are convinced that ATA will enhance agricultural productivity, return the country's lost glory in the world trade, enhance job creation and achieve food security for the generality of Nigerians.

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