



OVERCOMING FOOD IMPORTATION: A PANACEA TO FOOD INSECURITY, POVERTY REDUCTION AND JOB CREATION AMONG RURAL FARMING POPULATIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The greatest potential for sustainable growth lies in the agricultural sector; this sector has suffered extremely low productivity due to over-reliance on food importation, oil and gas, etc. In the 60s and 70s, agriculture, produces abundant food for Nigerian citizenry, and formed the largest part of the country's GDP. Various kinds of agricultural produce, food and cash crops were exported from Nigeria to other countries. Today, Nigeria now imports a significant amount of food to sustain her rapidly population growth. Agricultural imports in the country has reached an all-time high in the year 2016 compared to when Nigeria's food imports bill rose to ₦ 6.6 trillion Naira. The efforts of the present Government has shifted positive and encouraging attention to agriculture through the diversification of the economy from the oil and gas to agriculture and other resources. This research work seek to examine various ways of achieving more successes on food sufficiency, import substitution, economy diversification and job creation; as it translates to reduced poverty amidst rural populations and increasing the contribution of agriculture to the annual GDP. Some of the challenges identified in the cause of the study were: criminal neglect of the agricultural sector as a whole; rapid population growth, urban-rural migration, neglect of extension providers, defective agricultural policies, and poor execution. Conclusively, the study recommended among other things the fiscal and monetary policies: lower interest rate, import restriction on agricultural products which should be adopted by relevant authorities; alongside other measures that may improve local production content in other to meet both local and international demands, promote agricultural export, employment opportunities, incorporation of private-public partnership, strengthening of micro-finance institutions or other credit facilitators with single digit interest, provision of more lands for agricultural and industrial production; raising foreign exchange earnings etc. All these are expected to translate into sustainable economic growth and a permanent exit to the country's economic downturn.

Keywords: food importation, poverty alleviation, job creation, rural farming populations, agricultural policies

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the world population will reach 9.1 billion by 2050, and to feed that number of people, global food production will need to grow by 70%. For Africa, which is projected to be home to about 2 billion people by then, farm productivity must accelerate at a faster rate than the global average to avoid continued mass hunger, food scarcity, and insecurity.

The challenges of food insecurity and poverty in Nigeria are multi-faceted; nonetheless, rising population, is a greatest threat to low farm productivity; worsened by weather/climate changes; shorter fallow periods, overpopulation and rural-urban migration that deprives farming communities of young people. Hence, the combination of higher food demand, stunted yield potential, and increasingly worse farmland must stimulate a redesigned agro-sector for assured food security.

Nevertheless, Agriculture still accounts for more than 30% of the continent's GDP and employs more than 60% of its working population which cannot move or produced for his over teeming populations (Ekekwe, 2017). This was corroborates by Akinbamijo (2015), who reported that the shift in focus away from agriculture to petroleum is brought about severe underinvestment in the sector by the public and private sectors which was further accentuated by weak, unenforced, poorly implemented and often conflicting policies at all levels of the country's governance structures (Nwuneli, 2010). However, the over-reliance on food importation, oil and gas exploration in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized.

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2017), Agriculture is the most significant sector in the Nigerian economy as it employs about 38.0 percent of Nigerians and consequently contributes 23.1 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Products (GDP). The sector later grew by 4.88 percent in the third quarter of 2016; to as much as 13 percent in previous years, suggesting immense unrealized potentials; this was caused by inconsistency and or flux from subsequent government reforms, programs and agendas.

FMARD, (2011) also affirmed that the performance of the sector at the international trade over the years depicts declines and stagnation, having lost its position in the export of key commodities. Following the shift from agriculture to crude oil and gas in the late 1960s; Nigeria's growth has continued to be driven by consumption of high oil prices. Consequently, the structure of Nigeria economy is largely import dependent, consumption driven and undiversified. Oil accounts for more than 95 percent of export and foreign exchange earnings while the manufacturing sector accounts for less than one percent of total exports (FRN, 2017).

According to United Nation reports (2017), about 75% of food produced in Nigeria are wasted due to improper food processing and handling; technical know-how of improved technologies; lack of fertilizer application and or improved inputs which causes poor growth and harvesting. In strict relations, imports of food (agric products) to Nigeria dropped from 7.5% in the previous year to N844. 0 million in June, 2017; other crude oil products (-14.8%) and manufactured goods (-23.3%). Hence, Nigeria is a net importer of agricultural produce with import of above N630 billion (Anonymous, 2017).

Bakare (2011) also agrees with the agriculture export shrank from the traditional 12-15 commodities of the 1960s when Nigeria became the net importer of the basic food it normally exported. Presently, majority of Nigerians remained under the burden of poverty, inequality, underemployment or and unemployment. Similarly, FMARD (2011) revealed that Nigeria which was a leading exporter of groundnut with a world's share of 42%, had 27% of the world's palm oil export, 18% of cocoa and 14% of cotton respectively. The economic performance is also undermined by deplorable infrastructure, consumption and mismanagement of public finances (FRN, 2017). This glory however declined significantly over the years, with the dominance eclipsed by its competitor. Aside these, youth unemployment became rife particularly in the Niger Delta (**about 27 % i.e. 22 million**) and North East Region (**about 29%? i.e. 26 million?**) **are youths unemployed while transition from school to unemployment has been difficult (IFAD, 2017).**

Furthermore, in order to address illegal smuggling of agricultural products accompanied with at least equal measures to ensuring the sustainable growth of agricultural products and other mono-cultural products in the country. However, these developments are not unconnected to limited access to technical skills, insufficient, inappropriate and inaccessible finance, and negative effect of climate change and the perception of agriculture as unattractive for generating income and sustaining life. However, as desirable as agriculture is to economic well-being in many countries, Nigeria is yet to optimize their potentials. Comparatively, all these challenges are not unconnected to the relegation of agriculture to subsistence farming, non-prioritization of agribusiness at the different levels of governance, lack of infrastructure, poor storage facilities, poor research, and poor disjointed value chains occasioned by discovery of oil (Anaebonam, 2015).

Currently, the Green Alternatives (Agricultural Promotion Policy) of President Muhammad Buhari has been putting things together in other to have a new breaking ground on agriculture: food security, job opportunities, economic diversification, import substitution, boosting of GDP and foreign reserves, and promotion of raw materials or agro-industries etc.

We hope by year 2030, Agriculture will be Africa's new oil spinner and critical solution to myriads of problem confronting her since economic recession in the late 2000s. **The negligence of agriculture by successive government has invited a number of repercussions such as decline in agriculture's contribution to national GDP from 60 percent in the early 1960s to 48 percent in the 1970s and 22 percent in the 1980s (World Food Summit, 1996) and vulnerability of the nation to hunger and a net importer of food agricultural transformation Agenda (ATA), 2011 and Onwualu, 2012; coupled with less than 10 percent budgeted on agriculture in the past two decades.** Conversely, this is far from Maputo declaration of 2003 which was all pledged by African countries leaders to contribute minimum of 10% of government spending on agriculture. Fourteen years after, many countries have not even reached 7%.

Therefore, this study is to look into ways of overcoming food importation and achieving more on food sufficiency, scarcity of agricultural products and inputs, insecurity, and other challenges confronting agricultural development; thereby creating of more jobs and reducing poverty amidst rural farming populations and hence making Nigeria's agriculture a major contributor to the annual GDPs and export earner's.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF FOOD IMPORTATION AND ITS POLICIES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria, like some other developing countries is principally an agrarian nation who still face an ever increasing food crisis as the level of food production is yet to keep pace with demand. There is

worsening food insecurity, even with massive food importation as evidenced by rising food import bill (Okoye, et al, 2008). In Akinsanmi (2009) remarks/**noted**, Nigeria is one of the worst hit countries globally given her unprecedented level of acute food shortage and its accompanying ravaging malnutrition. Though endowed with vast expanse of arable land for crop production and fresh waters for fish breeding, reports still show that Africa's largest country cannot produce food crops required for her rising populations and had thus been depending on food importation to meet her domestic demands (Adepoju and Awodunmuyila, 2008). Agricultural economy was the basic economic feature of the long and short distance traders who traded substantially across the trans-Saharan trade routes. Nigeria could not boast of sustainable local food production which was essentially subsistence alongside the cash crop production among its contemporaries after trade liberalization. The major issue here was that subsequent government's administration does not favour agriculture and local contents although, in part, has disarticulated and disorientated the local agricultural and food production philosophy, and eliminate the primary objectives of food production (Adebowale, 2013). This corroborates Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, the Governor of Osun State who claimed that statistics reveals that over 80 percent of the foods in the state are imported (The Nation, 2011). This experience appears worrisome as Nigeria, the greater part of the African continent imports its food. Nigeria which was known for surplus agricultural and food production in the early 60's is now deficient in production and other line of food postharvest handling. A country that was at a time able to point to a history of food sufficiency even in the colonial era appears to continue to pay lip services to the dreadful problems of food shortages, scarcity, hunger and undernourishment.

For instance, there is a growing advocacy for improving Nigeria agricultural production so as to achieve sustainable food security. These was in line with Eze (2009) who noted that a lot of efforts has been directed at finding appropriate institutions for organizing millions of small scale farmers towards achieving food security (through increased food production) which has been described as the appropriate vehicle for harnessing and polling the resources of millions of smallholder farmers for both producers and processors together in other to enjoy the benefits of large scale production. However, numbers of studies have indicated that agricultural production in Nigeria is still characterized by small farm holders (Onugu, 2008; Obinyan, 2000; Ijere and Mbanasor, 2000). According to (Guy, 2001; Obinyan, 2000; Olujenyo, N. D) food production could be affected by the farmers age, access to credit, gender, farm size, educational level, farming experience etc. it is on record that 50% of world's population is dependent on subsistence agriculture. Considering the prime importance of agricultural production to achieving food security and its crucial role in the nation's socio-economic transformation in terms of its contribution to the GDP and the fact that domestic supply has not been able to meet up with its demand. In spite of successive governments efforts over the years to achieve food security in the country, through the setting up of a number of agricultural development institutions and policies such as special programmes and projects which include: National Accelerated Food Production Programme, NAFPP (1972/73); Agricultural Development Programme, ADP (1975); Operation Feed the Nation, OFN (1976); National Seed Service, NSS (1977); Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme ACGS (1977); Rural Banking Programme, RBP (1977-1991); Green Revolution Programme GRP (1979/80); Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure, DFRRI (1986); Community Banking Programmes, CBP (1991–2007); National Agriculture Land Development Authority, NALDA (1992); Root and Tuber Expansion Programmes, RTEP (2000); National Fadama Development Project, NFDPI, II, and III (1992, 1999 and 2008 respectively); Nigeria Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank, NACRDB (2000); National Agricultural Development Fund, NADF (2002); National Special Programme on Food Security, NSPFS (2002); Commodity Marketing and Development Companies, CMDC (2003); the Presidential Initiatives on selected crops (2004-2005); 7 Points Agenda with emphasis on Food Security

(2009); the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (2012) **and more recently; The Green Alternative: Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016-2020), which is the continuation of Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of the former President Goodluck Jonathan.**

Nigeria has witnessed several policies aimed at addressing and resolving problems in agricultural practices and food production e.g. Microfinance policy, Presidential Initiative on Agriculture, 2002 (cassava, maize, sorghum, wheat, groundnut, rice, etc.); Presidential Initiative on Cassava Production and Marketing Reports, (2003); Preferred Sector Allocation of Credit; Civil Service Reform (2004). Unfortunately, the large proportions of Nigerians are still poor, starved, abandoned, deprived of food availability, shelter, and improved healthy environment.

On the contrary, the recent crisis between farmers and Fulani's herdsman, inter-communal crises has further threaten the relative peace which the farmers has been according to the herders in the past; this claim has continue to bring conflict/ drift between the cattle rustlers, farmers farm and his community which is a greatest challenge to food production and productivity among farmers populace and further threaten the relative peace; and hence leads to scarcity of food increment in the staple food prices. This situation is not different in some Nigerian states such as Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Abia, Enugu, Niger, Oyo, Ogun, etc); as this causes insecurity to farmers and hence slow down the production of food in all this crises states.

3.0 CHALLENGES POSED BY IMPORT DEPENDENCY ON AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

In reviewing agricultural development in Africa, Lynn (1989) noted that a quarter of a century after independence, few would dispute that the African industrial sector was in crisis. His survey revealed that 343 factories in over 16 countries, spanning sectors as diverse as beverages, textiles, pulp and paper, flour milling, sugar refining and cement, 23 percent of the companies were found to have ceased production and a further 57 percent were functioning at less than 70 percent of nominal capacity-well below their break-even point. It appears that no African country has been spared.

The slight dropped in food production has resulted to increase in food importation in other to clear the excess demand over supply of food in the country. **In 2016/17, The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development estimated that over 68 million people in Nigeria are hungry, which is about 33 percent of the country's total population of approximately 180 million; and 52 percent live under the poverty line (Anonymous, 2017). Nigeria has attained self-sufficient in food production and a net exporter of food to other regions of the continent in the 1950s and 1960s.** Hence, this picture of steady decay explained why a formerly sufficient continent in food production now imports almost all its food to prevent hunger and starvation among its poor people. Nigeria is not excluded from this general picture of backwardness, policy somersault, local content and steady decay in food production, importation and industrialization.

Over the years, previous Nigerian government have attempted (through various programme initiatives and policies), to addressed the challenges facing agriculture, moreover to ensure its development. This is posited by Okuneye (1995) in his inaugural lecture titled "Nigerian agriculture on the run: yet refuses to move", he reported that it is paradoxical to note that with its abundant resources, Nigeria still exhibits high levels of food insecurity. The number of hungry people in Nigeria is put at over 53 million which is about 30 per cent of the country's total population of about 150 million. Consequently, the incomes of most families are not adequate for the basic sustenance of life. Moreover, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute, Global Hunger Index classified Nigeria's hunger situation as "serious". It further posited that Nigeria is also one of the five countries with half of the world's malnourished

children (IFPRI, 2010). Adewumi et al. (2010) also mentioned that in 2009, about 6 million children are said to be malnourished in Nigeria. They both added that malnutrition is a major cause of child mortality, which tends to reduce labour availability for farm work. This in turn leads to low farm output causing higher food prices. The yearly loss of about 6 million children may reduce the number of farmers in our villages/communities, since majority of the rural dwellers in Nigeria are not poor but uninformed about their nutritional status. Despite huge resources from oil, Nigeria is characterized by hunger, high rate of youth unemployment, insecurity, food crises, job cuts and high food imports with the attendant result that more than 50 percent of the population is living below the poverty line of \$2.75 per day. Hunger and malnutrition continues to outbreak in Nigeria's population. During the period 1970-1979, the average annual deficit in per capita daily calories intake was 24.4 per cent. This declined to 23.58 per cent within 1980-1989. By 2006, it fell to as low as 11.34 per cent (CBN, 1993; ADB, 2007). However, this trend has rose to 17% in the first-quarter of 2018.

The growth of Nigerian economy with reference to agriculture has been import-driven rather production-driven. This challenge confronting Nigeria's agriculture is related to the problem of low productivity in production resulting from inefficient use of resources and crude implements. Munack, (2002) also reported that in the world today, the demands on agriculture was imposed by different groups are numerous; the society asks agriculture for competitiveness, protection of the environment and social compatibility; while the consumer wants qualitatively excellent products at low prices, all over the year; palatable, healthy and nutritious foods (Spore, 2006); landscaping with no disturbance by noise or odour; the industry demands are: high-quality, low-cost food and raw materials; renewable resources; pharmaceutical products; while the farmers demand for increase in their incomes; labour safety and reduction in working time; clear and reliable legal principles for future development of the farm. Comparatively, Oni (2013) also identified various challenges affecting agricultural development; this includes policy framework, political commitment, agricultural technology, and infrastructure deficit, finance and risk management, and institutional realignment etc. However, from the listed above challenges; Nigeria is facing two key gaps in the agricultural sector namely inability to meet domestic food requirements and to export quality products required for market success. Therefore putting Nigeria's agricultural sector on the lifeline. There's need to boost agricultural production which will impact significantly on growth and development. In swift reaction or addressing this challenges, government should evolve market based policy that is anchored on three main pillars, in line with the constitutional provision for the role of the Federal Government in agricultural development; these are promotion of agricultural investment; financing of agricultural development programs; research for agricultural innovations and productivity.

Aside petroleum exploration, agricultural productivity is a major component of the nation's gross domestic products. The sector contributed 41.59% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Nigerian economy in the second quarter of year 2011 (CBN, 2011). On the average, the trends in the sector's contribution to the nation's GDP hovered around 35% between 2010 and first quarter of 2015. Consequently, the sector later grew by 4.88 percent in the third quarter of 2016 and by as much as 13 percent in previous years, suggesting immense unrealized potentials (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017). Although, survey statistics showed a slight increase in per capita daily calorie intake with decline in the proportion of undernourished people from 13 per cent in 1990-1992 to 9 per cent in 2000-2002 and 7 per cent in 2002-2004 (FAO), 2005; IFPRI, 2006). The fact however remains that domestic production of most food commodities, urbanization, inflation and demand from neighboring countries are among some of the factors that continued to affect food availability and accessibility to most Nigerians (Vision 20:2020, 2009). The noted improvement could therefore be traceable to the continued dependence of the country. Furthermore, All Farmers

Association of Nigeria (AFAN) reported that Nigerian Government spend over \$ 6 billion dollars to import fish and frozen chicken annually, this is very sad for 'giant of Africa'. This has further increased to about N2.2 trillion (Anonymous, 2015). In later development of the last quarter 2016; Agro-Info (2015) reported that Nigeria spends an estimated 125 Billion Naira in importing fish every year. This means that Nigerian farmers can therefore decide to be a major player in the farming sector. It further corroborates the problems facing poor households in Nigeria. The cost of inadequate diets to families and nations which are considerably high. These include increased vulnerability to diseases and parasites, reduced strength for tasks which requires physical efforts, reduction of the benefit from schooling and training programmes, lack of vigor, alertness and vitality. The outcomes of these are reduction in the productivity of people in the short and long terms, sacrifice in output and incomes, and increasing difficulties for families and nations to escape the cycle (Omotesho, et.al, 2006).

On this note, Agricultural sector must not only be seen to grow but must match the per capita needs of the population of that society (Weblow, 1997). These concerns were further aggravated by the global economic downturn of 2008 which led to the collapse of many developed and developing economies.

4.0 OVERCOMING FOOD IMPORTATION THROUGH HOLISTIC AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Nigeria has witnessed several policies aimed at addressing and resolving problems in agricultural practices and food production. Regrettably, the large proportions of Nigerians are still under abject poverty, starved, abandoned, deprived of food availability, shelter, and improved healthy environment. To increase food production and alleviate the widespread poverty in sub-Saharan Africa given the incidence of galloping growth in population and limited possibility for expansion of cultivated area, there is a need for green revolution (Diao et.al, 2008). Green revolution enhances crop yield per unit of land by using high-yielding varieties, irrigation technology, fertilizer and agro-chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides but the speed and scale at which this technology solved the food problem were remarkable and unprecedented; this however, contributed a substantial reduction in poverty and launching of broader economic growth in many Asian countries (Otsuka and Kijima, 2010). Nigeria as a state is not left out of this information. **According to (FAO, 2013) the main barriers in adoption of agricultural technology are large investment costs, the perceived risk of a technology, long gestation period for the perceived benefits of the technology to materialize, access to information and extension services, land tenure system, culture and recent outcomes of the technology. Likewise, socio-economic status such as family income, educational level, parental occupation and social status all affect adoption (Demarest, et. al., 1993).**

Agriculture still remained the mainstay of the economy of most African states, yet current estimates indicates that some 200 million or 28 percent of Africa's population are chronically hungry (Iheke, 2008). The high population growth rate has led to increase in the demand for agricultural products, natural and human disaster (drought, flood, fuel, food scarcities, land degradation) as well as civil conflicts in some parts of Africa which contributes to this alarming situation and accounted for high imports and dependence on food aids by most African countries thereby posing huge problem of food insecurity (NEPAD 2004), fuel and food scarcities.

However, for agricultural development to be meaningful and impactful, it must of necessity be holistic and sustainable. Without belabouring the fact, the bulk of Nigerian imports are on agricultural commodities. For this trend to be reversed and to turn Nigeria to a net exporter of agricultural commodities, urgent action must be taken on several fronts to ensure a quantum leap in agricultural productivity.

The Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA-2011) of the immediate past administration is a laudable initiative, whose potential have been tampered with by the perennial Nigerian factor syndrome. Being that as it may, giant strides have been made to jump-start development in the agricultural sector. Contributions of this sector to the GDP, as earlier noted, have increased appreciably. The numbers of jobs created under this agenda (about 58 million) have been massive; even though the actual numbers may not be as claimed. Also, President Goodluck Jonathan noted that the country's food production has expanded by 21 million metric tons within three years. It also reported that a food import bill has declined from N1.1 trillion in 2009 to N634 billion by 2013 and continues to decline. It should be recalled that before now, Nigeria with over 84 million hectares of arable land was spending billions of naira importing basic food items which it can produce. Of recent, the number of seed companies has increased from 11 to 134 within the past three years, making high quality seeds available to farmers. The fertilizer sector is booming accordingly (former President Jonathan) with N900 billion naira (\$5 billion dollars) of new investments that can make Nigeria self-sufficient in fertilizer and turn us into a net exporter of fertilizer. The price of fertilizers is expected to decline and farmers will be able to afford more fertilizers to boost their food production since more private sector investors are into fertilizer production. Within the past three years (2012-2015), over 14.5 million famers have been reached through the Growth Enhancement Scheme (GES) program (Tribune, 2015). This GES arm of the ATA of the former administration has major positives that should be supported and promoted. It is a holistic approach of providing inputs to farmers at subsidized and affordable rates compared to others. Relatively, State Government partnerships with foreign investors must be encouraged and monitored to give the desired objectives. For example, Taraba state is in partnership with US investor-Dominion Farms to produce rice on 30,000 ha of land; Ekiti, Enugu, Kaduna, Rivers and Ogun States are also in partnership with Agricultural Industry Companies (AGCO) the manufacturers of Massey Ferguson in an investment worth over \$100 million in new tractor assembly plants, (tractor parts) and supply services (Olomola, et.al, 2014). Partnerships between FMARD and states that have promoted the development of both crops and livestock's under the growth enhancement support (GES) scheme needs to be fostered and encouraged. The cooperation of these three tiers of government in the area of value chain development of fruits concentrates which are produced in Benue and Cross River States; while Tomatoes and sorghum processing plants are in Kano and Jigawa States respectively. This value addition cooperation if well sustained and up-scaled across the country it will encourage import substitution and invariably increases production (Olomola, et.al, 2014). The momentum must be sustained and even increased in other to achieve more of the several targets set under the ATA initiative.

Conclusively, cassava, maize and rice sub-sectors have particularly enjoyed massive investment which if sustained, will in the not too distant future drive down the import bills incurred by the country on food by about 70% with government commitment to world food supply and inputs to agriculturally standard. In view of these, Matanmi (1991) advocated that the main problem facing the developing world today particularly Nigeria, is not the lack of efficient technologies and scientific discoveries needed for economic growth and rural change but that of their effective utilization for the social and economic transformation of the country. This, he contended would depend to a great extent, on the speed with which the technology is transferred from the source (Agricultural Universities, Research Institutes, Technologies Development Centre's and Extension Agencies) to the ultimate users so that they clearly understand, accept (adopt) and apply it in their day-to-day agricultural practices. However, with the very high population growth trends in the country (about 3.5% per annum) coupled with the crude agricultural production methods employed, there is the fear that the resultant low productivity cannot match the food demand of the nation. This situation may worsen in the nearest future if drastic measures

are not taken immediately to arrest the imminent food crisis or insecurities. The place of agriculture in the development and growth of the Nigerian economy was summarized in the Technical Reports of the Committee on Vision 20: 2020 (Vision 2020; 2009). Firstly, the committee recognized the fundamentals of food production and the need for agricultural development. Secondly, it was obvious that policies should be directed towards financing, irrigation, mechanization, infrastructures, and provision of inputs. Thirdly, institutions were also created to meet the needs for the provision of surplus food in order to avert poverty, malnutrition, hunger and climate change. The Tables (1, 2) and chart (figure 1) that follow shows the trend of the steady decline of the contribution of agriculture to Nigeria's GDP especially since the discovery of oil in the 70s. This downward trend was checked and the GDP hovered around 35 % for most of the years especially after year 2000. The present realities of the dwindling oil revenues and the economic recession makes the reversal of this trend a top priority of the Nigerian government. This has been enunciated by no less a personality than President Muhammadu Buhari who stated that agriculture will be one of the main focuses of his administration since inception which is tagged as **"The Green Alternatives"** i.e. Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016-2020).

Table 1: Sectorial contributions to gross domestic products (GDP) in Nigeria (1960-2002)

Sector	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2002
	← (%) →					
Agriculture	64.1	47.6	30.8	39.0	35.7	28.35
Manufacturing	4.8	8.2	8.1	8.2	3.4	5.5
Crude petroleum	0.3	7.1	22.0	12.8	47.5	40.6
Others	30.8	37.1	39.1	40.0	13.4	25.55

Source: (CBN, 2000).

Table 2: Food production and demand with shortfalls and importation (Million Mt)

Description	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Production	86.70	89.25	93.35	95.64	98.74	100.41	102.12	103.86
Food demand	87.23	89.55	96.26	99.03	101.87	104.63	107.46	110.37
Shortfall	(0.53)	(0.30)	(2.91)	(3.43)	(3.13)	(4.22)	(5.34)	(6.51)
Food import	0.67	0.58	2.95	3.47	3.24	4.48	5.59	6.91

Source: (FOS, 2002).

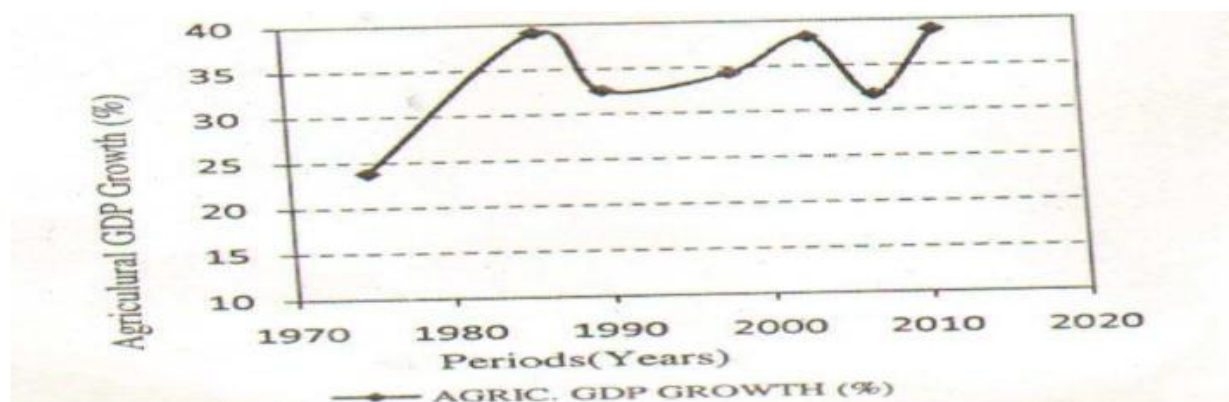


Figure 1: AGRICULTURAL GDP GROWTH TRENDS from 1970-2020

AGRICULTURAL EXPORT PROMOTION THROUGH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The food policy of Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has been hinged on the principle of self-sufficiency in all major staple food items. For this policy to generate the desired impact, food items should be readily available throughout the year, in quantity and quality, time and space and at competitive prices that are within the reach of her citizenry. This policy was almost a success until the 1970's when domestic food production witnessed a drastic downturn as a result of the shift from agriculture to oil exploration (CBN, 1997).

Achieving food security as a people is priority if we are to make the needed savings on massive food imports. This will ensure that funds are available for infrastructural development needed to boost the Nigerian economy. We however, need to look beyond this and aim to promote our agriculture to a level where we become a major exporter of food and agricultural raw materials. This is achievable because we were once there. The right combination of political will, appropriate and workable policies, as well as establishment and strengthening of relevant institutions will make this a reality. The mention of political will as the first in the right mix of ingredients of transforming Nigeria to an exporter of agricultural commodities is deliberate. It is a well-known fact that well-crafted policies and establishment of well-designed institutions have not been our major challenge as a people. Where we seemed to have missed it consistently is in the area of having the right political will to see these laudable programmes scale through. It is hoped that the present government led by President Muhammadu Buhari will provide the much needed political will to return Nigeria to the golden era where agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. With respects to formulating the right policies, the President has stated that, the goal of his administration is for Nigeria to attain self-sufficiency in food production and export over 10 million metric tonnes of grains and processed foods to the ECOWAS region and beyond 2020 during one of his commendation speech at the ECOWAS summit in 2015 (Nigerian Dailies, 2015). Policies need well established, well-funded, monitored and well-motivated institutions to drive and execute them. Existing Institutions such as Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture, Universities and other Research Institutes, Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC), Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM), CBN, Anchored Borrowers Scheme, Bank of Industry (BOI), Bank of Agriculture (BOA), Marketing Boards, NIRSAL, ACGSF, National Quarantine Services, IFAD, IITA, ICRISAT, USAID and other agencies, need to be strengthened and given the needed support to carry out their statutory

responsibilities. Other institutions may be established to cater for other areas not covered by these institutions.

The Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP: 2016-2020) strategy was evolved overtime to solve the core issues of limited food production and delivery of quality standards which was thrust on partnering of private-public investors across farmers groups and companies, to develop end to end value chain solutions that will improve supply of inputs as well as increase use of high yielding technologies, leading to improved distribution system of products and produce. Between 1999 and 2007; there was a policy focus on inclusion of 20% cassava flour in bakery and confectionary production in Nigeria, through cassava initiative programme of former President Obasanjo's administration. This was meant to reduce foreign earnings spent on wheat importation and at the same time stimulate local economy; regrettably, despite the huge or massive vision of the programs; failure was manifested in lack of preparation to take care of the gluts arising from massive cassava cultivation from the then Federal Government. We hope President Muhammad Buhari will look into this grey areas especially aftermath of Agricultural Promotion Policy (Green alternatives) syndrome.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In other to meet the global competitiveness, there exist sustainable agricultural development in food production and productivity for rural households. Nigeria's agricultural potential is one of the highest that can be obtained on the planet. The over-reliance on food importation, oil and gas is greatly causing a setback to rural farmer's production and population as it risen poverty and job insecurity in Nigeria. Agriculture, which produces abundant food to its citizenry and exported excess food to other countries now imports a significant amount of food to sustain its rapidly growth and population. Having acknowledged that our main food challenge began with the discovery of the black gold (petroleum) in the late 1960s. The present reality where oil prices have nosedived requires that we return to our first love; Agriculture. Agricultural imports in the country has reached an all-time high in the year 2016 compared to when Nigeria's food imports bill rose to ₦ 6.6 trillion Naira (about three-quarter of the country's annual budget 6.06t). The paradox however, is that with these huge agricultural resources, by 2030, agriculture will be the new oil spinners as well as the way out to Nigeria myriads of problem.

The agricultural sector in Nigeria and other developing countries suffers extremely low productivity due to financial aids, unimproved seeds, agrochemicals, fertilizers, climate change and poor weather conditions, improved technologies, irrigation. The identified challenges were criminal neglect of the agricultural sector such as rapid population growth, urban-rural migration, neglect of extension providers, defective agricultural policies, and poor execution etc. The efforts of President Buhari has being yielding a number of positive results especially in agriculture and diversified economy.

The study further recommends among others the fiscal and monetary policies such as lower interest rate, import restriction on agricultural products and other agribusiness/agrobusiness should be adopted by relevant authorities; alongside other measures which may improve local production content in other to meet both local and international demands thereby promoting agricultural export, employment opportunities, incorporation of private-public partnership, strengthening of micro-finance institutions, provision of more lands for agricultural production, industrial production, raising foreign exchange earnings which can translate to sustainable economic growth and thus lead the country out of recession. A holistic approach must be taken to agricultural development through the formulation of appropriate policies supported by strong institutions. All stakeholders in the agricultural sector must brace up to this challenge.

We can then reclaim our position of becoming the giant of Africa in agricultural production and export if we are all committed to it.

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