

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).

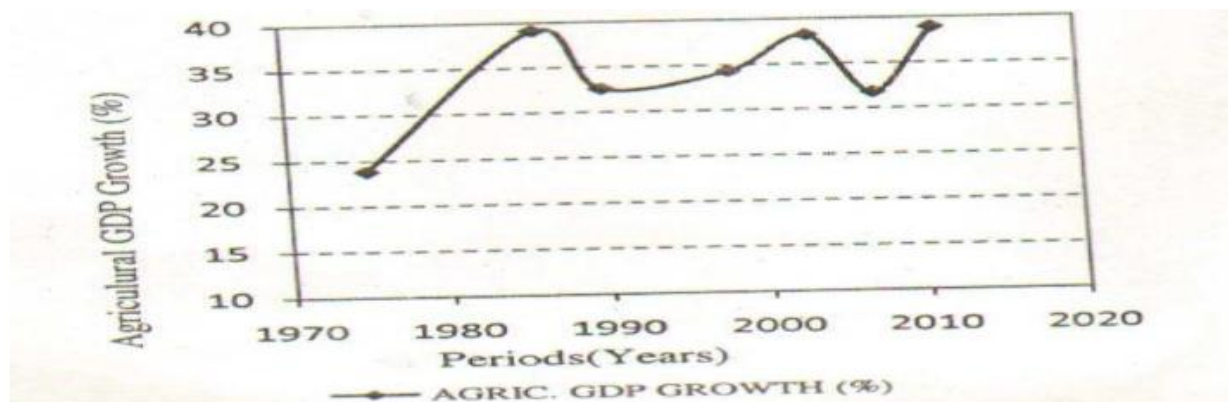


Figure 1: AGRICULTURAL GDP GROWTH TRENDS from 1970-2020

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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