



THE AGRICULTURE PROMOTION POLICY (APP) AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA, 2016-2020

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ABSTRACT

It is habitual for every in-coming administration in Nigeria to design its own policies in order to meet set targets in different sectors. The case of the civilian administration of Muhammadu Buhari is no different as it introduced the Agriculture Transformation Policy (APP), in order to, among other things, address rising food security challenges. This paper, therefore, examined how the APP, while it lasted, impacted on food security in the country. Data for the paper were generated from secondary sources, and analysed quantitatively. The paper argues that the APP introduced a number of commendable initiatives, but these did not do much to improve food security in Nigeria. Consequently, it was recommended, among other things, that policies should be made with realistic targets, so as to avoid frequent cases of policy failure.

Key words: Agriculture, farming, food security, food insecurity, policy.

Introduction

Confronted by an increasing population growth rate, and an unstable food production capacity, the need to enhance agricultural productivity becomes all the more glaring. In fact, this challenge is one that previous administrations tried to surmount by introducing several policies and programmes, but failed woefully – the latest being the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of the administration of Goodluck Jonathan. Among other things, the ATA mapped out precise targets to guide the agricultural sector to increased productivity between 2011 and 2015. The ATA exhausted its lifespan without meeting its major objective of transforming agriculture into a profitable business which can, through competitive foreign exchange, add to Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP).

Muhammadu Buhari, having taken over from Goodluck Jonathan in May 2015, expressed a vision to “anchor Nigeria’s economic growth on agriculture by reducing focus on oil dependence and making significant investment in agriculture-led economy” (ActionAid, 2017). Thus, the government introduced the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP), to be active between 2016 and 2020. The APP was designed to bring to an end, years of failed agricultural development policies. It was also aimed at creating a sustainable plan that can be used in advancing the agricultural sector. To a large extent, the APP can be said to be a continuation of the defunct ATA, albeit after thorough re-examination and fine-tuning for enhanced delivery ((FMARD, 2016).

The APP aimed at bridging the gap between food importation and Nigeria’s inability to earn significant foreign exchange via agriculture. Thus, the APP was designed in such a way that it will showcase a more disciplined approach towards building a solid agribusiness ecosystem that can address this gap. To do this, the private sector was expected to be at the forefront, while the government facilitates and provides the needed infrastructural and other needed support. Again, it was indicated in the APP policy document that there would be several levels of engagement involving states, marketers, farmers, investors, financial institutions, and communities. Other key stakeholders include researchers, the Nigeria Customs Service (NIS), as well as donors. Through the concerted efforts of these stakeholders, a boost in domestic food production is expected, as well as an improvement in Nigeria’s earning through the exportation of agricultural produce.

Food security has to do with the availability of food, and also with accessibility and affordability. With Nigeria’s teeming population, food security deserves utmost attention. The crux of this paper, therefore, is to examine how the APP affected food security between 2016 and 2020.

Agriculture in Nigeria

Climate variations and arable land ensure that a variety of crops, both for local consumption and for exports, are cultivated in Nigeria. Staple crops cultivated in Nigeria include wheat, maize, cassava, millet, beans, cowpeas, sweet potatoes, cocoyam, plantain, rice, sorghum, among others. Cash crops cultivated in Nigeria include rubber, palm kernel, cotton, cocoa, citrus, groundnuts, etc. These are mostly exported to Britain, the United States, Canada, France and Germany (Nations Encyclopaedia, 2021). In addition to the crops cultivated, cattle herding, poultry farming, fishing, and lumbering constitute a significant chunk of Nigeria’s agricultural sector.

Thus, despite the heavy dependence on proceeds from oil for Nigeria’s revenue, therefore, Nigeria can still be described as an agrarian society. Indeed, 70% of Nigerians engage in agricultural production, albeit at a subsistence level (Eme et al, 2014). Subsistence farmers make use of old, outdated farm implements which makes it almost impossible to produce significant quantity of food. A lot has been said about how the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the 1970s distorted Nigeria’s agricultural development trajectory (Anyanwu, 2015; Okuneye & Ayinde, 2011; etc.). It would be germane to add that at present, low productivity in the agricultural sector can be traced to policy inconsistencies, insecurity, inadequate technology, climate change-induced drought, trade barriers, poor road/transportation infrastructure, among others. Addressing these issues is at the centre of solving Nigeria’s food security challenge.

Food Security

According to the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (cited in IFPRI, 2020), food security means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. Going by this definition, access is an important aspect of food security. A

family is food secure when its members do not live in hunger or fear of hunger (USAID, 2020). The opposite is food insecurity, which is often rooted in poverty and has long-term impacts on the ability of families, communities and countries to develop and prosper. Prolonged undernourishment stunts growth, slows cognitive development and increases susceptibility to illness. More than 800 million people across the globe go to bed hungry every night, most of them smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture to make a living and feed their families. Despite an explosion in the growth of urban slums over the last decade, nearly 75 percent of poor people in developing countries live in rural areas (USAID, 2020).

The US International Trade Administration [USITA] (2021) estimates that Nigeria relies on \$10 billion of imports to meet its food and agricultural production shortfalls (mostly wheat, rice, poultry, fish, food services, and consumer-oriented foods). Continuing, USITA noted that Nigeria's agricultural sector has been hurt by several shocks: sporadic flooding, Boko Haram insurgencies, and conflicts between herdsmen and local farmers. Food processing continues to suffer from a lack of financing and infrastructure.

Scorecard of the APP

As earlier stated, the APP replaced the ATA with the intention of building on its strengths. Through the APP, the Buhari administration was able to initiate other complementing agricultural programmes – which would serve as special vehicles for the realisation of food security and enhanced foreign exchange earnings. Included here are: Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP), Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI), Youth Farm Lab (YFL), Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative (PEDI), and the National Food Security Council (NFSC).

The Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP), established by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), was launched by President Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR) on November 17, 2015. It is intended to create a linkage between anchor companies involved in the processing and small holder farmers (SHFs) of the required key agricultural commodities. The ABP provides farm inputs in kind and cash (for farm labour) to small holder farmers to boost production of these commodities. At harvest, the SHF supplies his/her produce to the Agro-processor (Anchor) who pays the cash equivalent to the farmer's account. The Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP) of the Central Bank of Nigeria under the Buhari-led administration has made available N82 billion in funding to 350,000 farmers of rice, wheat, maize, cotton, cassava, poultry, soy beans and groundnut; who have cultivated about 400,000 hectares of land (Vanguard, 2018). The Buhari-led administration has made provision of agricultural credit for financing the production of rice, wheat, ginger, maize and soybeans in Kebbi, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Enugu, Benue, Zamfara, Anambra and Kwara States. The ABP provided quantum of money for dry season farming in 2015, wet season rice and wheat farming in 2016, and supports the 2016 dry season farming in many states. CBN Governor, Godwin Emefiele, in February 2018, disclosed that since commencement of the (Anchor Borrowers) Programme in November 2015, the CBN in partnership with state governments and several private sector groups, have disbursed a cumulative sum of N55.526 billion to over 250,000 farmers who cultivated almost 300,000 hectares of farmland for rice, wheat, maize, cotton, soybeans, cassava, etc. (Aso Rock Newsletter, 2018). From what the CBN Governor stated, two years into the implementation, the programme has contributed to the creation of an estimated 890,000 direct and 2.6 million indirect jobs.

In the same vein, the PFI was launched in December 2016 as the outcome of a partnership between the Governments of Nigeria and Morocco, and implemented as a Public-Private Partnership in Nigeria, led by the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority (NSIA) and the Fertilizer Producers and Suppliers Association of Nigeria (FEPSAN). The Presidential Fertilizer

Initiative (PFI) was set up to deliver commercially significant quantities of affordable and high-quality fertilizer to Nigerian farmers at the right time. The Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI) under the President Buhari administration has resulted in the revitalisation of 14 blending plants across the country, with a total installed capacity in excess of 2 million MT (Aso Rock Newsletter, 2018). The Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI) under the President Buhari administration has resulted in benefits which will include annual savings of US\$200 million in foreign exchange, and N60 billion annually in budgetary provisions for Fertilizer subsidies. In 2017, Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI) delivered 10 million 50kg bags (500,000MT) of NPK 20:10:10 fertilizer at a price of N5,500 in time for the wet season which is down from the price of N9,000 per 50kg bag in 2016, a 40% reduction in price (Vanguard, 2018). The Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI) has been able to create 60,000 direct jobs and even a higher number of indirect jobs.

Also, the Youth Farm Lab is an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in conjunction with Synergos, to train Nigerian youths on livestock production and sustainable urban agriculture. It is tailored for Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are interested in agriculture and believe in its profitability potentials.

As for the Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative (PEDI), it was launched in July 2017 to support the revival of moribund industries (especially in Agro-processing), by facilitating new investments, reducing regulatory bottlenecks and enabling access to credit. PEDI has made breakthroughs in the agribusiness sector in Imo and Ondo States (Aso Rock Newsletter, 2018).

The Food Security Council, chaired by the President, was inaugurated on Monday, March 26, 2018. Its members include: Governors of Kebbi, Taraba, Plateau, Lagos, Ebonyi and Delta States; Secretary to the Government of the Federation; Chief of Staff to the President; National Security Adviser; Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development; Finance; Interior; Industry, Trade and Investment; Water Resources; Environment; and Budget and National Planning; Chief of Defence Staff; Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria; Directors-General of the Department of State Services and the National Intelligence Agency; and the Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Immigration Service (Aso Rock Newsletter, 2018). The broad objectives of the Council include developing sustainable solutions to the farmers-herdsmen clashes; climate change and desertification and their impact on farmland; grazing areas and lakes, rivers and other water bodies; oil spillage and its impact on Niger Delta fishing communities; piracy and banditry; agricultural research institutions and extension services and the problem of smuggling. The Council will also take interest in regional and global policies and trends that bear implications for food security in Nigeria.

The agricultural sector grew at an average of 15% in the past five years of the government (Mojeed, 2021). This is relatively low compared to what previous administrations recorded: the sector grew by 133% under the Obasanjo administration; 19.1% under President Musa Yar'Adua's, and 22.2% under Jonathan's government. In terms of agricultural sector's contribution to the GDP, the Buhari administration has so far done better than only the Jonathan administration, based on an analysis by the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ, 2020). Data evaluated by PTCIJ shows that the sector contributed an average of 27.5% under President Obasanjo, 25.6% under President Yar'Adua, 21.75% under President Jonathan, and 21.90% under President Buhari.

It should be stated that Nigeria's rice production increased between 2016 and 2020. The national presidents of Maize Growers, Processors and Marketers Association of Nigeria (MGPMAN), Uche

Edwin, and Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RFAN), Aminu Goronyo, attributed the rise to investment in agriculture by the Buhari administration, through the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP). He further stated that just for 2020 alone, the ABP was able to empower over 150,000 farmers in advancing loans, inputs and cash to farmers. On his part, Goronyo averred that the ABP helped in advancing technology and mechanisation with a view to support smallholders' farmers. Be that as it may, the cost of food under the administration has been at the highest levels ever, leaving millions struggling to buy food.

Indeed, the implementation of the APP between 2016 and 2020 did not too much to address food insecurity in Nigeria. Food insecurity, according to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 2010), refers to the consequences of inadequate consumption of nutritious food, considering the physiological use of food by the body as being within the domain of nutrition and health. Also, there is said to be food insecurity "when people are undernourished as a result of the physical unavailability of food, their lack of social or economic access to adequate food. Food insecure people are those whose food intake falls below their minimum energy requirements as well as those who exhibit physical symptoms caused by energy and nutrient deficiencies resulting from an inadequate or unbalanced diet or from the body's inability to use food effectively because of infection or disease" (Otaha, 2013, p.30). Food insecurity is likely to persist in Nigeria, at least, until the issue of rampaging killer herdsmen and bandits are solved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is a fact that the most viable and effective way to improve the lives of millions of Nigerians living in poverty is to support agriculture. Most of Nigeria's poor are farmers, and those who are not spend much of their income on food. A functioning agricultural sector can create jobs, raise incomes, reduce malnutrition, and kick-start the economy on a path to income growth. To do this, the government must focus on how well millions of smallholders and small and medium-scale enterprises can be helped to change farming practices as quickly and effectively as possible. Here, what is required is the mechanisation of agriculture, not necessarily herding people into the farm to engage in one form of farming, or another. In this sense, policy-makers should invest in making use of existing data and analytics to comparatively assess the costs and likely outcomes of different potential agricultural policies and programmes. In so doing, effort should be made to limit the targets to what is realistic, with the given timeframe.

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