

# Status of Nigerian Agriculture in the 21st Century: The Problems and Solution Proposals

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## Abstract

The state of our agriculture and food security in Nigeria today is a threat to the masses; in fact it is nothing to cheer about. The country has resorted to the level of importing millions of metric tons of essential food such as rice, wheat, flour, vegetable oil, beefy, chicken, fish, among others from foreign lands, in spite of her great potentials in agriculture. Nigerians were not eating from the dust bin during the era of our founding fathers, but today, Nigeria has got food scavengers that daily monitor dust bin to get their daily food supply. Alas!! Our country is in trouble. There is no concrete policy of the government on agriculture that can make food production a reality. What the government is good at doing is mere slogans and lousy statements that are devoid of action. They assume that all is well in the agricultural sector because a lot of money is being injected into it whereas all is not well. Agricultural inputs that used to be available to farmers as at the inception of Nigeria till early 1980s were a thing of illusions to common farmers since the inception of democracy (1999) to date. The importation and distribution of fertilizers have been so much politicized and bastardized that the product is not imported at the right time and is not given directly to the end users who are the farmers. Instead, the allocations are given to politicians and their cronies who then re-sell them at exorbitant price which most times are unaffordable by the farmers. The various river basins development authority are not functional and do not produce food. They exist as a mirage where there are workers that receive salary every month, but the production of food is absent. However, the River Basin Farm Authority failed because, in Nigeria today, there are many chiefs and not enough Indians. Many Nigerians want to arrive without travel and this seems to be the reasons our economy is in shambles. In view of these, the paper used available literature to review the status of Nigerian agriculture in the 21st century: the problems and solution proposals.

**Keywords:** Nigeran Agriculture; Food Insecurity; Problems and Prospects

## Abbreviations

GDP: Gross Domestic Product; ADPS: Agricultural Development Projects; DFRR: Directorate of Foods, Roads

and Rural Infrastructure; NALDA: National Agricultural and Land Development Authority; NARS: National Agricultural Research Systems.

## Introduction

Agriculture was the pillar of the Nigerian economy that provided more than 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and more than 75% of Nigeria's export earnings before Nigerians' independence in 1960 [1,2]. It recorded for about 62.50% of the nation's GDP between 1960-1964 and thereafter its contribution to GDP started decreasing from 1970 till date as a result of oil boom and corruption in Nigeria. The period was an extensive oil exploration and export of petroleum products which compelled Nigerians to relegate their agricultural base in favour of high dependence on oil for more than 97% of export earnings and 80% of federal revenue with little effort to diversify the economy [2]. Agricultural economy controls other economies, therefore, whatever profession a person belongs to or practice, such a person should know that everybody is a stakeholder in agriculture and such profession should be prioritized for the benefit of mankind. The decay in the agricultural sector has impacted negatively on Nigeria and an urgent remedy has to be taken to get out of the ruins.

The current situation of agriculture in Nigeria is unspeakable, despicable, deplorable, disgraceful, deceptive, tragic, retrogressive and in fact, not even befitting a nation that is rich and endowed with natural resources. Nigerian agricultural research institutes that were established to pilot the affairs of agriculture were not fully equipped and this consequence subjects Nigerians to food insecurity. A pertinent question is, can Nigerian nationalists and founding fathers like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Tafawa Belewa, Sir Ahamadu Bello, among others allow Nigerian agricultural research institute to be in a deplorable state that would compel them to import food abroad if they were still alive? No! They would rather channel the cost of importing such food items to revamp those dilapidated agricultural research institutes.

Agricultural sector has suffered inconsistent and poorly implemented government policy, poor management and lack of basic infrastructure to run agricultural system [1]. Increased foreign exchange earnings of the country from crude oil since 1970 has created negative effects on Nigeria's potential earnings from agriculture. However, it is worthy to know that a lot of hazard is associated with oil dependent economy. Oil prices are subject to perturbation as a result of international politics. From 2013 till date, oil price has depreciated by more than 50%, throwing some countries such as Nigeria that are majorly dependent on oil into economic disarray. Therefore, there is need for Nigerians to return to agriculture as to salvage their people from the shackles of this incessant economic recession [2].

There were more mechanized agriculture than as it is now, as the far back as 1980s. During that time our mechanized

farms were a sight to behold, but today it is no more due to politics and corruptions. Agriculture needs strong support from the government in areas of finance, tax waivers, import duty waivers, allocation of fertilizers, among others to reduce the cost of running the farm, but Nigerian government could not do that, rather they are busy sharing political offices and positions according to quota system and federal character. Farmers need government subsidy and financial support to reduce their losses, but Nigerian government hardly does that, and even if it does, such help does not usually reach the farmers, but end up in private pocket. These are the reasons our farming systems take abnormal shape today [3]. One of the targets of Nigerian agricultural development policy is to provide enough food reserve at household, state and federal government levels as to stop any threat to the level of food security. Because of the domestic agricultural production has failed to meet up with the increasing demand for food, the government had to spend money on importation to feed her teeming population [4]. As a result of this, food import increased from 19.9% in 2000 to 30.6% and 22.7% in 2011 and 2012 respectively while food export is at about 5.3% of merchandise [5,6].

Several dams and irrigation facilities were constructed in various parts of Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s to help farmers plant all year round. Based on the happening now, some of the dams and irrigation have collapsed and no more functioning in their project capacity as a result of corruption and lack of maintenance culture. Agricultural extension services provided by our colonial masters during the period of 1960s and early 1980s have become a thing of history in Nigeria today. These services were made to teach farmers how to adopt best practices for improved crop yield and livelihood. All these have stopped as a result of politics and corruption. Alas! Our country is in shambles, the centre cannot hold anymore. Look at the good things that were done in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s have become moribund now when they are supposed to be improved upon and now we are paying the price of our bad governance. Extension agents help farmers to improve on their yield, but today farmers occasionally see agricultural extension workers. The little extension workers that were employed were not adequately paid as a result of corruption among our leaders [2]. The consequence upon this is the shortage of food in the country. However, our government initiated and instituted Agricultural Development Projects (ADPS) to assist farmers but have no practical benefit to farmers and farming system. Whom are we deceiving? It is better we tell ourselves the truth, the more we stop deceiving ourselves the better for us. Politics and corruption have ruined the economy that survives other nations and this caused dwindling in our agricultural sector today. It is obvious that our agricultural sector is in shambles and food security is presently a mirage.

In the light of the above, President Goodluck Jonathan has expressed concern over the country's reliance on food importation," saying the decline in food production is causing the nation huge import bill". According to him agriculture contributed 40% of GDP and provided 60% of employment in the last five years. He also observed that the outputs have turned the country into a net importer of agricultural produce, including major food products like wheat (N635.5 billion) rice (N356.5 billion), sugar (N217 billion) and fish (N96.9 billion) [2,7]. Before the advent of Nigeria's colonization, our ancestors were sustained primarily on farming as the major occupation with the use of crude implements compared to what is obtained today. Yet, they produced enough food crops to feed themselves like most other Africans. Today at this computer age, Nigeria with her overgrowing population cannot feed her teeming population simply because we have many chiefs and not enough Indians in agricultural terrains, including other limitations to agricultural production. Based on these, the paper used available literature to review the status of Nigerian agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the problems and solution proposals.

### Challenges of Agricultural Sector in the 21st Century: The Case of Nigeria

According to United State (U.S.) Energy Information Administration (2015), Nigeria has the largest natural gas reserves in Africa and is the continent's biggest oil exporter. These wealth of resources have helped it maintain Nigeria's relatively steady economic growth even in the face of recent global financial meltdown. The excessive natural gas in Nigeria also has negative consequences on agriculture which is the pillar of every developing country. Relying so much on oil sector has done more harms than good in our contemporary society because many people want to arrive without travel. Agriculture was the major source of the Nigeria's economy before the era of oil discovery in the country. It was after the discovering of oil that the agricultural production gradually declined and neglected by the federal government and the likes of the youths who are the source of labour force migrated to the commercial cities to earn their living. This led to the challenge of food security, employment and hunger among people [8]. In the light of the above, the challenges of agriculture in Nigeria include;

#### Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is one of the primary driving forces of food insecurity because this is the most important concern of people who are denied access or unable to engage in labour. The vulnerability of women is most pronounced when assessing the effect of food crisis. They constitute the larger ratio of the poverty ridden population especially in Africa. In many parts of the world, when a woman heads a household,

they are often more vulnerable to poverty and hunger than a household headed by a man. Where there is no male income earner, negative consequences on overall income are often suffered by the household since women often times lack the ability to command labor within and outside the household. Families headed by widow-are particularly at disadvantaged position [9]. The role of women in ensuring adequate land use, as well as food production, processing, distribution and marketing cannot be over emphasized. According to Matemilola S, et al. [9], women often deprived of access to agricultural assets, inputs and service when compared to men. To them, if women where to have the similar access as men to productive resources, yield would increase by 20% - 30%, boosting the total agricultural output by 2.5% to 4% in developing countries. This gain in production could have lessened the food insecurity status of most developing nations. If gender inequality is minimized and women are given better access to agricultural facilities, achieving food security will be much easier. It has been established over time by raising women's status, poverty will decline and nutrition will be enhanced.

#### Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Global climate change is another important driver of food insecurity that cannot be underestimated. Amongst other impacts, climate change is responsible for biodiversity loss in the ecosystem as well as other physical access. Climate change has become one of the key divisors that is redefining the global food equation and thus having so much impact on the food security of particularly developing nations. Climate change phenomenon can be seen as a time bomb that is already ticking and waiting to explode. Already, we have begun to see the effect on global temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns and physico-biological systems.

#### Low Technology for Processing and Storage

The use of modern technologies in the production and distribution of agricultural products is very low in Nigeria. The sector depended so much on manual labour for farm activities and this is because of lack of innovation in local technology, particularly as it relate to mechanization of agriculture to improve productivity. However, indigenous farmers can hardly afford imported technologies and maintenance capacity. Inadequate or lack of facilities to preserve food items such as cereals, yam, beans, etc. can result in wastage thereby further deepening the insecurity level of food. Also, lack of food processing apparatus sometime leave farmers with no choice than to consume significant fraction of their harvest within short period. Food processing is an important aspect of agriculture that prevents wastage of food items that cannot be easily stored in their original form by transforming them into other form that can enable their preservation. For an instance, mangos, citrus and pineapple

can easily be preserved when converted into fruit juice. To achieve a sustainable agriculture that brings about food security, effort must be made to avert any wastage.

### **Conflicts and Civil Insecurity**

The spread of war and conflict interrupted production of food thereby displacing people leaving fertile land uncultivated. Also, there are occasional ethno- religious crisis that has had devastating effects on the Nigerian economic development especially in the area of food production. Other conflicts may take the form of physical fighting, structural violence without declaring war which may result from premeditated pervasion of poverty, rich oppression of the poor, police brutality, intimidation of the common citizens by politicians, women and children oppression and monopolization of resources and power .Civil insecurity born out of the Boko Haram conflict has persisted in the extreme northeast, particularly in Borno, Yobe and Kano states, causing population displacement and limiting crop production below average, restricting market and trade activities and causing higher food prices compared to other areas of the country. Borno and Yobe States have been the focal point of the Boko Haram crisis where farmlands have been converted to battle field and farmer are now banished to camps where they have to depend on aids for survival.

### **Inefficient Policies and Corruption**

Food insecurity has persisted in Nigeria and many developing countries because of inefficient policies especially with respect to agriculture and other sectors. Indeed, many countries have failed in their efforts to develop due to failure to properly administer policies and initiatives which has connection to agriculture. This problem arises sometimes when the focus on policies objectives, structures and institutions were designed without adequate consideration of public interest. When policies design which are not inclusive in structure, tend to disenfranchise the exempted rural populace. In this context, production of food locally may not be a priority. Currently, food prices have begun to hit the roof making importation more and expensive thereby bringing about inflation in the local food market.

Frequent policy changes and poor performance of Nigerian monitoring and implementation agencies also has its toll on food crisis. Each time a new government takes power, the previous food and agricultural policies are abandoned and new ones are set-up. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that the new ones are better-off, in fact often times they are worse-off. It is only in a bid to create room for financial manipulations. Similarly, the failure of some of the past intervention initiatives like Operation Feed the Nation, Lower River Basin Development Authorities, Green Revolution and

regulatory bodies such as the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA) have engendered poor agricultural and food productivity in Nigeria . As a result of the successive policy failure, poverty has persisted in Nigeria. Successive governments have thus capitalized on this situation created by the previous government to deceive the electorates.

### **Inadequate good Infrastructure**

In this case, infrastructure will include physical structure, such as health and educational facilities, social services (stable electricity and safe water) and effective communication system. Agriculture in Nigeria suffers greatly because of the lack of developed infrastructure. For example, in the rural area where most of the farmers operate without good infrastructure in place, is a major problem, as it affects investment, trade, and agricultural production. This problem is mostly caused by the government, as the government favours urban development over rural development with a great margin. The lack of infrastructure continues because of bad political leadership, poor governance, government neglect, poor maintenance culture and poor funding. Electricity, safe water and health facilities is often not enough for those living in the rural area, as the urban area is favoured more by the government. For instance, people living in the rural area can be without electricity for up to a week on a regular bases and even the urban area does not have stable electricity. Some places in the villages have one tap for water which does not always work because of lack of electricity, so water used in the farm and houses are gotten from the rivers, and this could take hours to fetch as the river could be far from the houses and the farms.

### **Marketing Problem**

Marketing involves the conveying of agricultural product from farmers to consumers. Some of the problems of marketing affecting the Nigeria agricultural system include poor transportation means, poor packaging and poor quality. If you have poor packaging system (making product look good and attractive to customers) and your competitor have a better packaging system than you, then customers are more likely to buy from your competitor even if the qualities are the same. Good road are needed in order to effectively transport good from one place to another. Unfortunately, the overall marketing system of the country is primitive. Departments that have been assign to build road and railways for transportation takes many years and sometimes up to a decade to get a network constructed because of corruption. Even the little road and rail constructed normally crumbles due to poor maintenance.

## Limited Adoption of Improved Seeds

Small-scale farmers rarely use improved planting materials (clean, healthy seeds), and the sub-sector is dominated by disease-prone local varieties with long maturation periods and low yield potential. IITA and African research institutes have played leading roles in the development of improved cassava varieties that are multiple disease and pest resistant, early maturing, and high yielding. These varieties have the potential to raise productivity by up to 30-40 tons/ha. Thirty-two African countries have released an estimated 384 high yielding varieties between 1970 and 2014. These varieties are high yielding with good levels of multiple disease and pest resistance as well as of acceptable quality for food, feed and industrial uses in Africa. While the combination of these new varieties and better agronomic practices could increase yields per unit area by at least 40%, the rate of adoption by smallholder farmers has been low. The dissemination of these varieties has often suffered from the lack of a reliable planting material distribution system from National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) because of weak extension systems, insufficient quantities of planting material, and delays in distributing the approved planting materials. This compels farmers to continue to grow local, low yielding varieties. This is exacerbated by inadequate location specific knowledge on fertilizer use, and other cultural practices such as weed and pest and disease management for cassava systems and late planting specifically in southern Africa region where maize comes first.

## Solution Proposals

Agriculture is the power house upon which other economic growth depends for its transformation. Agricultural policy in Nigeria has witnessed several changes since the colonial and post-independence years as a result of government's lackadaisical attitude towards farming. The implications subjected Nigeria as a country into economic disarray and food insecurity. Policy inconsistency and administrative instabilities have done more harm than good, especially in agricultural sector that stands the roots of every nation. Therefore, an urgent remedy has to be taken to get out of the mess. In view of these, the following solutions should be strictly adhering to;

- Productivity enhancing measures can be enshrined and implemented in the agricultural sector such that food production can expand at a rate that is commensurate with food deficit. This will involve revitalizing the state of social and economic infrastructures in the rural areas, improving the agricultural extension system which has almost become moribund and encouraging the involvement of the organized private sector in agricultural production especially large scale commercial farming.

- Policy making and agenda-setting process should be assessed objectively to create strategies for improving agriculture and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. This can as well make Nigeria a food security nation. This calls for a need for active government intervention in agricultural sector through the reformation and rehabilitation of all the agricultural firms and infrastructures to boost food security.
- There is need to subsidize agriculture in various forms to make it attractive to farmers and the likes of other people. There is no subsidy that agriculture cannot accommodate because every human being whether poor or rich eats food and every citizen is a stakeholder in agriculture.
- Government at all levels should be encouraged to provide a strong and efficient agricultural sector that would enable a country to feed the growing population, generate employment, earn foreign exchange as well as raw materials for industries.
- Our political system should be restructured and rebuilt for the better, politicians should have a reflected thinking on the likes of Zik of Africa, Amino Kano, M.I. Okpala, among others. These politicians did not prioritize their personal interest before the public one. If we can have something to rely upon from aforesaid politicians, what of our upcoming children? Would they rely on what? Nigerians, lets salvage and restructure this country from these shackles of leadership, otherwise our upcoming children's' life will in no distance time be mortgaged.
- Therefore, to liberate Nigerian from this social morass, there must be unity for moral majority. People who can stand that an evil is evil and speak against it, and people who can see morality and embrace it.
- Collective effort and public opinion should be highly adopted. Fighting corruption does not need one man effort; it is not one man business but a collective one. Our leaders cannot meet this country's challenges alone, but the citizens cannot meet them without our leaders. However, it is not something that can be fought by one agency alone, rather it needs synchronizations. That is, if you synchronize, I synchronize, another person or agencies synchronize, and then, we synchronize together. Therefore, in fighting corruption, all hands should be on deck.

## Conclusion

As far back as 1980s, agricultural activities in Nigeria were more mechanized than as they are today. During that time our mechanized farms were a sight to behold, but today it is no more, due to politics and corruptions. Agriculture needs strong support from the government in areas of finance, tax waivers, import duty waivers, allocation of fertilizers, among others to reduce the cost of running the farm, but

Nigerian government could not do that, rather they are busy sharing political offices and positions according to quota system and federal character. Farmers need government subsidy and financial support to reduce their losses, but Nigerian government hardly does that, and even if it does, such help does not usually reach the farmers, but end up in private pocket. These are the reasons our farming systems take abnormal shape today. Based on these, the paper used available literature to review the status of Nigerian agriculture in the 21st century: the problems and solution proposals.

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