

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN SECURITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA IN A DIGITAL INFORMATION AGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores ways of using agriculture as a tool for reviving Nigeria's socio-economic sector to ensure national security and power for the overall wellbeing of the citizenry. Agriculture and its derivable benefits are instruments for sustenance and development of Nigeria's socio-economic and security transformation in the present digital age. As such farmers play active and leading role in making the positive contributions of agriculture felt by all and sundry in the society. Information and communication technology (ICT) has transform how businesses, people and governments work. They reduced transaction cost and facilitate communication.

Keywords: *Agriculture, Transformation, ICT, Food security, Employment Creation.*

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is defined by Sam Okunade and Okunade (2014) as the art, science and industry of managing the growth of plants and animals for human use and enjoyment. It is the practice of cultivation of soil, growing and harvesting of crops, breeding and raising of livestock, dairy and forestry with the purpose of improving the livelihood of crops handlers. The first people to be created on earth, Adam and Eve, were farmers in the gardens of Eden. Agriculture being the first and oldest occupation on earth must have begun about 6,000 BC. The introduction of tillage equipment helped agricultural production as it involves turning the soil to bring nutrients closer to the surface soil and make the scattered seeds take root more easily than manual tillage. Agriculture has passed through various stages of development to bring out the more advanced, scientific, industrial and mechanical age. Agriculture is of paramount importance to man such that in 2003, it was estimated that 44% of the world's labour force was engaged in agriculture as means of livelihood. Agriculture provides food security, employment/income, raw material for industry, source of socio-cultural activity, source of national security and power etc. Agriculture and security relates in such a way that when agriculture is fully developed, herders will not clash with farmers which as a result will lead to national security and social-economic transformation of the nation. No country survives when they is low productivity as a result of food insecurity and unemployment.

Roles that Agriculture Play in the Security and Socio-economic transformation of the Nation in the Digital Age are as follows:

- a) **Sources of National Security and Power:** Agriculture is the source of food for man and livestock. Without food hunger sets in. A hungry man is an angry man, an angry man is frustrated. Frustrated people are desperate and desperate people do desperate things Okunade and Okunade (2014). When agriculture is fully developed, a country becomes secured in terms of food. The spate of violence, clashes, insurgencies and security will be abated significantly, since people will learn to stay peacefully and gainfully employed. This will curtail spate of societal vices.
- b) **Sources of Raw Materials for Industries:** There are quite a number of agro based industries that cannot do without Agriculture. Agro-based industries that depend on agricultural raw materials includes producers of Coca-cola preparations (butter, powder, cosmetics, flours, vegetable oils, cotton seeds, palm oil, palm kernel cakes for feed, soya beans, groundnut, maize, etc. Beverages, malt drinks, beer, spirits, tobacco products, leather products, wood, pulp, cotton textiles, clothing, canned food processors etc. Thus without agriculture, these products will not exist.
- c) **Source of Business Venture:** Most of our clothing materials today are products of agricultural practices. The cotton materials comes from cotton seeds plants harvested while wools are obtained from furs of some livestock and silks from insects that have been trapped by entomologists. Moreover, hides and skins from livestock are used in manufacturing of shoes, bags, leather, furniture etc. Again, timber and thatched obtained from forest reserves serves as suitable materials for roofing of houses etc.

- d) **Sources of Employment/Income:** According to Stock 2009 in Sam Okunade & Okunade (2014), quite a number of people are gainfully employed by participating in one agricultural activity or the other. This ranges from peasant poor farmers to trained-policy makers in agriculture. It was estimated earlier in the text that 44% of the world's labour force between 16-65 years of age engages in agriculture as source of their livelihood.
- e) **Source of socio-cultural activity:** Drawn from the ideas of traditional societies where the members of the community recognizes themselves according to their age groups popularly known as age grades. Each age grade unifies and socializes together to work and benefit in turns through grouped agricultural activities till all members of the age group gains turns. This benefit exist during the period of farming session by each member inviting each of her age group to come and work for him where the benefiting member cooks the food the group contributes. This interaction gives room for more farming output, higher income earning and promotes socio-cultural/economic activity through agriculture.
- f) **Source of Food and Life:** Every living organism (thing) requires food for survival and continuous existence on earth. There is no gain saying that “No Food, No Life”. Food is the product of agricultural practices and without it, there will be no life. Food provides for carbohydrate (for energy) and power, protein for growth, fats and oil for energy.

Beaming the Ray of Hope in transformation of Economy through Agriculture: Economic Way to Success

According to *International Webster Comprehensive Dictionary* (2013), transformation means “to give a different form, to change the character of, alter the

nature, convert”. And so relating transformation to the role that agriculture plays in security, socio-economic in the digital age, it means that agriculture has the capacity to convert the Nation's natural resources to change the re-occurrent economic recession which is the state of Nigeria as a nation.

According to *Tell* (2010), it is glaring that Nigeria's socio-economic problem does not stem from incapacity of potentials, but it is well acknowledged that Nigeria exists among the few countries that have the enormous potentials and vast natural resources endowed with. Blessed with good climate, fertile soil, abundant supply of various mineral deposits, a population of over Two hundred and twenty million people that could translate to huge market for domestic productions, the nation qualifies to be described as “a land flowing with milk and honey”. But rather than harness such resources, the nation has been teetering on the brink of poverty and “stunted” development. And so on, Nigeria remains a potential economic superior power, but in reality it is still struggling to provide basic amenities and products for its citizens.

But while the country is grappling with the problem converting (transforming) its potentials into real achievements, other countries with fewer resources have scaled that hurdle. A case in point is Singapore, a country which has no natural resources, and a population of about five million people. Even though Nigeria attained independence before Singapore and was rated to perform better, four decades later, Singapore has transformed from an economy with a per capita income of \$1000 in 1965 to cover \$530,000 in the 2000. Conversely, Nigeria's per capital income \$1000 and the economy is still grappling with the problems of a double-digit inflation, double-digit interest rate and high youth unemployment skill, at the micro-economic level, things are not faring better. Businesses and shops are closing due to the prohibiting high cost of doing business in the country. Apart from the fact that businesses are faced with the prospect of borrowing capital at very

high rates, they also have to provide infrastructure and power.

Sadly, this has led to some companies relocating to neighboring African countries resulting in capital flight for economy at such critical period when capital is scarce.

Restoring the Economy through Agriculture for Job Creation

The benefit of restoring the economy through agriculture are too numerous for instance, it will curtail the rural youth migration to cities in search for job. The future of farming to meeting the demands of rapidly growing urban population cannot be assured without the youth, moreover the writer of young professionals for agriculture development (2019) advocates for youth inclusion. According to him the growing youth unemployment, aging farmers, declining crops yield under traditional farming systems means engaging youth in agriculture should be a priority. The youth being the life wire of the society needs to be encouraged into agriculture. Incentives like free interest capital, direct information repackaging from agricultural extension agent that teaches best practices on methodologies to be used in planting, harvesting and storage of crops should be made available for the growing youth.

Reviving Transformational Agenda through Employment and Industrialization

President Jonathan lavished praise on Dangote for his contributions to the transformation of the country. “*When I gave him the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger (GCON) award, people asked questions, saying why did I give an award usually reserved for Vice Presidents to a businessman? People who have not done up to 50 percent in terms of importance compared to what Dangote has done were given GCON. So why, not Dangote? Our greatest problem in Nigeria is employment but his factory will employ 7,000 Nigerians and it could be up to 10,000.*”

We will continue to encourage people like Dangote who are committed to transformation of the country. We cannot achieve vision 2020 without industrialization, we need to multiply people like Dangote in Nigeria” Former president Jonathan said.

Continuing, he said Dangote would soon enter the business book of world records of the biggest cement manufacturing company and be recognized in Nigeria as a net exporter of cement just like crude oil (Tell, 2012).

Apart from the enumerated findings that agriculture performs in making the citizenry healthy and hearty is the fact that in the present digital information age, the citizenry expects more like converting these information's in hard copy to soft copy such that it could be listened to, seen in audio, visual forms so that he who cannot hear can see them in form of podcast, and video cast for easy digest by the average farmer/user of information.

Conclusion

One of the central goals of every developing country is to reach high-income status. Agriculture plays a critical role in transforming economic to reach the goal, along with achieving other essential development goals like ensuring food security and improving nutrition. Therefore, in order to end hunger and under-nutrition while accelerating economic growth, agricultural transformation must become a reality. Nearly all continents started off poor, and only a handful has achieved high-income status.

However, the ones that achieved it started with agriculture and went through an economic transformation that accelerated growth and reduced human and under nutrition, for example, China and Singapore.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Every family should have at least family garden to ensure food security.
2. Cultivation of seasonal crops e.g. cucumber, melon, water melon, okro, vegetables etc. is encouraged.
3. Planting of cash crops e.g. bitter cola, avocado pear, plantain, banana etc. is advocated.
4. Investing soft loans on farmers if one cannot be directly involved.
5. The work of Agric extension services should be facilitated.
6. Government interventions in the form of incentives to farmers e.g. fertilizer should be promoted.
7. Rearing animals for meat should be encouraged.
8. The government should improve on the railway infrastructure for easy carriage of Agricultural goods.
9. The government should create Agricultural industries for more employment.
10. Making the country a business friendly environment by reducing high rate of taxes-placed on business entrepreneurs.

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