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CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE AGRICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria craves for sustainable development but the approach to accomplishing this is over dependent on the oil sector. Hence, less effective. Considering the fact that prior to the discovery of oil in 1959 agriculture was the main stay of the nation's economy, this paper discusses the banished status as well as the potency of the agricultural sector and offers that concerted and conscious effort should be made at revitalizing the agricultural sector. This is with the view to enabling the sector to complement the role of the oil sector in challenges of sustainable development in Nigeria. It is, therefore, a vote for the need to diversify the nation's economy towards enhancing an enduring improvement of the quality of all human lives in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

One concept, which has over the years attracted global attention, is the concept of development¹. It has regards to questions bordering on poverty, unemployment, inequality, social amenities and public utilities, stratification realities, etc. To this end, development could be seen as a multi-dimensional process involving qualitative and quantitative changes in the structures and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth.

Thus development is the "process of improving the quality of all human lives..." within a particular setting². In other words, it is the "...process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize high levels of civilizations in accordance with their own choices and values"³. Thus it could be said that development "occurs when individuals or societies confront their problem and attempt to solve them and become able to control their environment"⁴.

If the above passes for development, sustainable development is "...development that fulfils the needs of the present without limiting potentials for meeting the needs of the future generation"⁵. Put differently, it is:

"...a notion, a movement, and an approach which has developed into a global wave of concerns, study, political mobilization, and organization..."and "...seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future ...the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspiration"⁶.

This paper views a strong and virile economy as a prime source of development and that Nigeria's economy which prior to oil discovery was strong is now (though oil-driven) weak. The rest of this paper is organised as follows: objectives, historical realities, the current state, the way forward, and conclusion.

OBJECTIVES

From the foregoing, and with particular reference to the title of this article: "Challenges of Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Agricultural Perspective" there is an

undertone that oil-driven economy has failed to ensure Nigeria's sustained development as such the agricultural sector has a prime role to play. Yet the sector is paralytic as evident in the growing scarcity of food availability in Nigeria. Abasiokong (2000)⁷.

The thrust of this paper is to show the need and ways of developing the sector and place it on a sound footing to enable it contribute more effectively to the nation's sustainable development. It should be noted that limiting the indices of sustainable development to the economic and agricultural sectors alone are parochial and erroneous. Rather the indices should be seen as a complex of ideas and issues covering cultural, societal, historical, social and human values⁸. In other words, the concept of sustainable development must contribute to the eradication of loss of skills and self-reliance (socio-economic); plunder over natural resources (agricultural and environmental); the erosion of cultural values (socio-cultural); and the violation of human dignity and rights (socio-political). If these and many more are combined with the economic, a more encompassing and correct conceptualization of the term shall be appreciated.

This paper thus is a lent voice for the need to diversify the economy.

HISTORICAL REALITIES

Prior to the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta frontiers of Nigeria in late 1950's the economy was largely agrarian. Agriculture then was the main stay of the economy. Indeed, it could be said that the dominant role in Nigeria's economy was taken for granted. History holds that with little agricultural credit schemes and some support from government, the Nigerian agriculture grew at a rate sufficient to effect products beyond subsistence to a level of appreciable public revenue and foreign reserve for government as well as employment opportunities for an expanding labour force.

It is now common knowledge that (in those days) crops like groundnut, rubber, cotton, palm produce, and cocoa boosted export, and food sufficiency was a foregone reality. However, upon the attainment of political independence in 1960 and, more importantly, the discovery of oil at Oloibiri in 1959, there came scarcity of food followed by rising costs of food items, and a reduction in the sector's contribution to the Gross National product (GNP).

It is also on record that while the features of the oil boom of the 1970's were "...evident in the areas of housing, transportation, electricity, industrial production and commerce..."⁹, contracts and foreign affairs/assistance; the process of the agricultural sector was nose-diving tangibly as a result of neglect.

Having observed the damage the negligence caused, successive governments have frantically and desperately initiated programme and policies aimed at reviving the very paralyzed agricultural sector. The appellations include:

- (i) **The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) by the Olusegun Obsanjo military (1976-1979):** this was launched in 1976 with a view to highlighting the deteriorating food situation in Nigeria and to promoting the involvement of the citizens in agriculture and food production. It was also meant to provide infrastructural facilities for food production, transportation and storage;
- (ii) **The Green Revolution by the Shehu Shagari regime (1979-1983):** aimed at increased food production for the achievement of self-sufficiency in food production as well as the promotion of cash crops which would aid export. The regrettable thing is the contraction involved. While it targeted self-reliance towards the export of food on the one hand, it was importing food on

the other hand;

- (iii) **The directorate of Food, Roads and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI) - the Integrated Rural Development Scheme by the Ibrahim Babangida military regime (1985-1993):** The DFRRI was informed by the need to focus on small scale framers as the pivot of the nation's food and fibre production; the creation of Agro-ecological zones; States and Local Governments were to be responsible for the implementation of programmes with the support of the Federal government, among others;
- (iv) **The vision 2010 initiated by the Sani Abacha military regime (1993-1998):** This was a hydra-headed programme that sought to better virtually all the spheres of national life. The cumbersome nature of the scheme made it look appalling and repulsive. Hence out of focus and less serious; and
- (v) **The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) initiated by the Olusegun Obasanjo democratic government. (1999-):** Here a series of programmes is conceived to enhance food sufficiency, employment, wealth creation, and general alleviation. This, however, has been accused of being a mere political jingle.

The argument goes that the above appellations are mere grand titles with little or no grains to show¹⁰.

Regardless of the appellations, it could be said that even a cursory look at the afore-mentioned policies and programmes would indicate that they were aimed at revamping the agricultural sector to the status of being able to among others:

- (i) Provide enough food to meet the demands of the population;
- (ii) Provide enough raw materials to meet the demand of industrialization;
- (iii) Provide the market for the output of the industries;
- (iv) provide a sizeable percentage of the nation's foreign exchange earning;
- (v) provide a significant complement to other sectors in the fight against unemployment; and
- (vi) provide (summarily) a base for a sound and sustainable economic development which will transform into a sustainable development in Nigeria.

THE CURRENT STATE OF AGRICULTURE:

In a developed economy like the United States of America (USA) less than 3% of the population are involved in Agriculture yet produce enough for domestic and external demands. It is however regrettable that the Nigerian situation cannot be vouched for the same perspective. This is traceable to the fact that the Nigerian Agricultural sector is characterized by: small scale/family farmers; low capitalization, small farm size (1.5 to hectares plots) crude implementation; rudimentary mixed farming; permanent cultivation based on manning and rudimentary crop rotation; shifting cultivation; isolated/negligible irrigation cultivation; and low yield per-hectare¹².

The 1985 Organization of African unity's (OAU) summit rose with the resolve by African leaders that at

least 20% of yearly budget be allocated to the agricultural sector. The realities of today have shown that the resolution was a mere academic exercise. For instance, the allocation to the sector in the 2001 National budget was paltry. While power and steel had N69.8 billion as the lion share; the Agricultural and Rural Development sector had N10 billion¹³.

Perhaps it is challenging to know that four countries presently account for 50% of the world's agricultural (grain) output. These include: the US, farmer soviet Union, China and India. Nigeria is not amongst. This is informed by poor policies and hypocritical commitment to revitalizing the sector. Hence there is food scarcity in the country as evident in the importation of beans from Burkina Faso. ¹⁴

Indeed, the sector is bedeviled with:

- (i) Absence of market -oriented production;
- (ii) Inadequate funding;
- (iii) Poor scientific education to farmers and inadequate agricultural infrastructure;
- (iv) Cropland degradation;
- (v) Reduced quality of the soil;
- (vi) Continuously directional changes of rivers and streams;
- (vii) Continuous desertification of the areas; and
- (viii) The dreaded global warming ¹⁵

Suffice it to state that the Nigerian Agricultural sector is still largely very traditional and there seems to be no genuine commitment to improving the situation. To this end, its full potentials are not brought to bare. In which case, the expected gain of the economy from the sector remains a mirage.

THE WAY FORWARD

"It is not a matter of national pride that Malaysia which obtained oil palm seedlings from Nigeria in the sixties should become the main suppliers of vegetable oil to our country"¹⁶. Should this be challenging enough, then it should be noted that the current state of the Agricultural sector in Nigeria is largely traditional and leaves much to be desired. Thus call for the need to modernize agricultural effects becomes infallible. To achieve the state of modernization, as Sumner indicates is dependent on the technologies, which include:

- (i) plant (and animal) breeding;
- (ii) plant (and animal) protection
- (iii) fertilization;
- (iv) mechanization; and
- (v) water resources development and utilization;¹⁷.

Curiously, one may ask: "why is it necessary to modernize farming?" "This, is aimed at:

- (i) providing adequate food for the population and raw-materials for the non-agricultural sector(s) of the economy; and
- (ii) providing employment for the able-bodied and educated young men and women in the area."¹⁸

To survive the above challenge: "A farmer who has access to and knows how to use what science knows about soils, plants, animals and machines can produce an abundance of food though the land be poor nor need he work nearly as hard and long. He can produce so much that his brothers and some of his neighbours will move to town to earn their living"¹⁹.

In the light of the above, it could be deduced that

the adoption of technological innovations in the area of agriculture is valuable²⁰. Other valuable variables include:

- (i) Availability of/ accessibility to storage, land, and marketing facilities; and
- (ii) Finance: which suggests that for the farmer to be able to purchase the new implements for mechanization he needs efficient and sufficient sources of production credit and educational background²¹.

By extension, it should be noted that the need for accessibility to agricultural products brings to mind the attendant problems of rural transportation, which include: scanty traffics; deplorable nature of roads; the imbalance of direction of traffic-evident in the tendency for rural - urban drift; etc.

The operators of the sector should diversify their operation. This should be done with regards to the time. In which case, land cultivators could expand their frontiers by investing on livestock farming overtime and the use of new facilities to farm through all seasons.

Finally, since land is of relative fixation, legislation should be effected to induce incremental evaluations of land acquisition by farmers. This will help stem dissipation of agricultural energies and investments on farm sizes. Thus, Murtala Nyako in proffering for the way forward identifies numerous conditions which include; prioritization of commodity based on scale of demand to meet food security needs and export orders; setting up of appropriate commodity development, quality control and marketing companies to supply farmers at home and abroad; reactivation of existing and provision of new processing and storage facilities; lending rate for agricultural and food enterprises not exceeding five percent (with seven percent becoming intolerable) and recovery measures guaranteed; construction of pollution control embankment; and initiation of actions to counter threats to the realization of Ni-

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geria's agricultural policy objectives²². These among several others could be summarized into the immediate, short, and medium term factors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the concept of development and more importantly, sustainable development. It has observed that the Nigerian economy is oil-driven with very negligible inclination to diversification. Yet prior to the petroleum boom era, the economy was built around agricultural produce.

It has also posited that the agricultural sector is paralytic but (if revived) could be potent enough to play considerable role in the drive for sustainable development in Nigeria. This will be seen in the areas of food sufficiency, significant export/foreign exchange complements, enhancement of employment and insurance of raw materials. In order to achieve this, large scale agricultural mechanization is recommended. This will involve among others; the agricultural education of operator; their accessibility to funds; availability of market; improvement or rural transportation (since most farmers in Nigeria dwell in the rural areas), and the re-introduction of an Integrated Agricultural Development Scheme - a similitude of the defunct Directorate of food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).

Perhaps it is expedient to conclude that for Nigeria's sustainable development to be achieved, agricultural development is a necessity. And for agricultural development to be attained, Ray Ekpu argues that policy makers and operator "...must return to an exacting application of the four I's of agricultural development of:

- (a) Incentives (fair prices);
- (b) Inputs (fertilizers, improved seedlings, mechanization);
- (c) Institutions (research, extension agents, and co-operatives) and

- (d) Infrastructure (roads, railways, and ports)" ²³.

In sum, apart from compulsorily appreciating the above suggestions, the hope of the economic sector's gain from the potentials of agriculture towards accomplishing sustainable development shall remain as farcical as a mirage.

NOTES

- ¹ Brown, Aniekan, S. (1997) "Developmental Neglect: The Case of Upenekang in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State". Unpublished M. Sc. Thesis, University of Uyo, Uyo. P. 1.
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- ⁴ Idode, J. B. (1989) *Rural Development and Bureaucracy in Nigeria* Ikeja: Longman. P. 22
- ⁵ Abasiokong, Edet M. and Modo, Innocent V. O. (eds) (1994) *High Points in Development*. Uyo: Durand Publishers.
- ⁶ Aina, T. A. and Salau, A. T. (1992) *The Challenge of sustainable Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Nigeria Environmental study/Action Term (NEST) p.2
- ⁷ Haucher, Ingomar (1994) "Crisis and New Orientations of Development Policy" D+C5/E of

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⁸ Akpan, Imo and Ayandele, I. "Conservation versus Aggressiveness: A Review of Banking Development in Nigeria, 1980 - 1995". In *International Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (June, 1999) pp. 76-94.

⁹ Akpan, Nseabasi "Rural Development Strategies in Nigerian (1965-1999): A Critical Appraisal and the Way Forward" *Castilia* Vol, 3 No II (2000) p 138.

¹⁰ *The Punch* March 10, 2001. P 8

¹¹ Ekpu, Ray (2001) "The Beans Brouhala" *Newswatch* Vol. 33, No. 21 May 28. P. 10

¹² Abasiokong, Edet M. (2000) "New frontiers in Rural Farming: Venturing into unexplored Areas". A paper presented at the Jonudokes Consultant on Agricultural Extension Services and the Adoption of Innovative Method of production in Local Government Areas, SUA Management Guest House, Uyo, Nigeria. 5th - 7th September.

¹³ *The Punch*, December 1, 2000 p. 6

¹⁴ Ekpu, Ray, (2001)2 p. 10

¹⁵ Nyako, Murtala (2001) "Thoughts on Nigeria Agriculture" *Newswatch* Vol. 33, No. 19, May 14. Pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p17

¹⁷ Summer, E. (1973) "Irrigation Development". In *Lectures on Agriculture Planning*. AERLS. Zaria Tohal Consultatants, 1982.

¹⁸ Nwa, E. U. "Modernization of Agriculture in Akwa Ibom State" in Ukpong, I. I. And Iniodu, P. U. eds (1991) *Priorities for the Development of Akwa State*. Uyo: University of Cross River State. P. 133

¹⁹ Shultz, T. W. (1964) *Transforming Traditional Agriculture* New Heaven: Yale University Press

²⁰ Ekong, Ekong E. (1988) *Introduction to Rural Sociology* Ibadan: Jumak Publishers. Pp. 325 - 326

²¹ Abasiokong, Edet M. *Ibid*

²² Nyako, Murtala *Op cit* p. 18

²³ Ekpu, Ray. *Op. Cit* p. 10