



The Nigerian Agricultural Sector: Analysis of Influential Impediment Factors to Its Growth, Development and Prospects for Improvements

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Abstract

This work interrogates the nature and structure of the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria, focusing on the historical trend of its growth, development, decline, and prospects of improving the sector in due course. The study further embarked on a comparative analysis of the country's agricultural patterns with those of the advanced economies in order to articulate/draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional practices which to a large extent have affected its long-term potentiality of not just feeding the nation's citizenry but equally attracting measurable contribution to the nation's economic development and improving the GDP of the country. The work progresses analytically by probing into the influential impediment factors which have affected its growth and development over the years through a historical methodology. In the long run, the work trails to an end by envisaging the prospects of the sector, and efforts made by the federal government of Nigeria as well as the private sector to ensure the steady revival of the sector. The work is structured into (i) Introduction, (ii) Nigeria's Agricultural Sector in Historical Perspective (iii) Importance of Agricultural Sector to the Nigerian Economy (iv) A comparative Analysis between Production/Manufacturing Potentiality of Agricultural Products in EDCs and LDCs (v) Research Findings: Factors of Influential Impediments to Growth and Development of the Agricultural Sector Challenges (vi) Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.

Keywords: Nigerian agricultural sector; Impediment factors; Growth; Development and prospects.

1. Introduction

Given the location of the Nigerian economy on the global spectrum and its associated climatology, it is not surprising to find the country endowed with an expensive fertile agriculture land, diverse forests of several types, streams, lakes and rivers, forests of varying types and grasslands. These resources create an impression which indicates that if these enormous resources are well manage and maintained there could emerge in the country, a vibrant agriculture sector supportive of food and raw materials self-adequacy for the huge population and industrial sector in addition to other roles [1].

Agriculture has been defined as the art or science of cultivating crops and rearing of animals for the benefit of man. It has been further defined as the science, art or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops and raising livestock of the resulting products [2]. Essentially, in agriculture, both food and cash crops are cultivated and different kinds of animals are reared in order to produce food for man and raw materials for the agro-allied industries. As Bukunola Aremu, et al has noted, the most important role of agriculture in any nation is the provision of food which equally needed by man for the supply of energy, body building, repair of damaged cells and body protection [3]. Food crops consist of vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes (including dried beans, spices herbs, seeds and nuts, beverage plants such as tea Cassava, Maize potatoes, rice, sorghum, soya beans, sweet potatoes, wheat and yams. Cash crops, on the other hand are agricultural crops cultivated with the main aim of selling them either to local industries or for export to make profit. It is also called a profit crop and is typically purchased by parties separate from a farm. The term is used to differentiate marketed crops from subsistence crops which are those for consumption.

By use, crops fall into six categories: food crops for human consumption (e.g wheat potatoes, feed crops, for livestock consumption, e.g oats, alfalfa, fibre crops, for cordage and textiles e.g. cotton, hemp oil crops for consumption or industrial uses (e.g cotton seed, corn); ornamental crops for landscape gardening e.g dogwood, azalea, aid industrial and secondary crops for various personal and industrial uses (e.g rubber, tobacco) timber (Mohagany Obeche, Mazonia for furniture, house building and so on [3].

2. Nigeria's Agricultural Sector in Historical Perspective

2.1. Agriculture in Pre-colonial Nigeria

In pre-colonial Nigeria, subsistence agriculture was the order of the day—that is the type of practice which emphasized cultivation and production of food crops by a farmer to feed himself and his family. Although, the structure was not static, yet it required family, good land area, where members of the family used simple and crude tools to plant the family food needs. Environmental and climatic factors determined the farming practices in the prevalent communities.

As Faluyi has noted, the origins of Agriculture and its spread are not very clear, but it is generally accepted that the knowledge of agriculture started in Egypt, in the latter part of the Sixth or during the early part of the fifth millennium B.C. [4]. He further noted that the early Egyptians probably got the knowledge of domestication of crops and animals from the people of Syria and Mesopotamia, who had been practicing the art in the early period. However, not all scholars agree with this position, that Agriculture in West Africa was from North Africa, often regarded as connected to the Hamitic hypothesis. Wickins, for instance, posit that Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa developed independently of that of Egypt, even though with a time lag of some three millennia [5]. The previous version claims that once agriculture became established in Egypt, it became a new centre from where its knowledge spread southward to other communities like Nigeria. The same source asserted that cereal cultivation particularly wheat and Barley, originated in the Near East 10,000 years ago, and spread up the Nile Valley and Westwards along the Savannah Corridor to West Africa about 1500 years before the Christian era [6].

Wickins in his contention further argued that the conducive environment with abundant resources of the tropical savannah provided the small realistic hunting communities with all what they needed in food supply and gave them almost the same living standard and therefore did not see the need to develop cereals and domesticate flocks, hence a time lag in agricultural advance [7]. Whatever the controversy concerning the domestication of crops and settlement to an agrarian economy as distinct from the hunting period, Africans, particularly people of Sub-Saharan Africa at an early date, apart from evolving agriculture independently, also borrowed and adapted several crops, including several types of millet, yams, an indigenous form of groundnut, oil palms and rice [8].

All these are pointers to the fact agriculture evolved gradually and took a long time to develop into the elaborate agricultural system that is practiced today. The earliest sets of crops cultivated in Nigeria are equally in doubt. Yam which has about 13 varieties is considered one of the oldest tubers in the Guinea forest. Domestication of animals was the next agricultural venture embarked upon by these early Nigerians and this was affected by ecological factors. The crops could also be divided into categories, those that were indigenous and those believed to have originated from Asia and the latter imports from America [9]. Crops believed to be indigenous to Africa include, rice, millet, wild cotton, guinea yam, palm tree and kolanuts. The second categories of crops were diffused to Africa from Asia and these include Asian yams, cocoyams, coconut palms and sugar cane. These are also called indo-Malaysian crops. The third group came from America, pineapple, pawpaw, guava, potato, tobacco, maize and cassava which has become one of Africa's staple foods [9].

Land has always been an important factor of production and is fundamental to farming and is seen as a source of life. Land was communally owned and distributed according to needs as determined by the family head. As population increased, the communal land was constantly redistributed. Farming was supplemented by other activities such as animal husbandry hunting, fishing, manufacturing and gathering agriculture in due course became the primary occupation of all Nigeria's ethnic groups. For the Igbo, agriculture was described as "the Igbo staff of life". Every Igbo man and woman was a farmer. Most families produced enough of such staples as yam, cocoyam, cassava and vegetables [10]. The same with the Yorubas and the Hausas, the Edos, Igala, Nupe, Isan, Ibibio and the Efik etc all took farming as their major pre-occupation.

The structure of the Nigerian economy was predicated on the vegetation and the main components were agriculture, hand crafts, trade and transportation system. One key factor to favorable agricultural practice was the availability of good climatic conditions, free of epidemics, fertile land suitable for cultivation and grazing, coastal environment attractive for fishing and safety, such as absence of pestilences and wars. Rainfall as well sunshine support fertile land to ensure good productivity cultivation and harvests crop production was mainly by shifting cultivation and crop rotation as a result of land tenure and lack of knowledge of highly mechanized agriculture.

Natural issues such as drought, pests and diseases were checked through wetting of farms and irrigational practices was part and parcel of the agricultural methods which aided the traditional society of Nigeria's pre-colonial period. Fishing was prominent in the Niger-Delta regions and the coastal regions of Lagos, Badagry and Calabar. Hunting was essentially a supplementary occupation for the farmers, even though it was a full time pre-occupation for some. Grazing was practiced mainly by the Fulani people in the Savannah region of Northern Nigeria. Livestock production was equally source of meat for the forest dwellers while the animal skins were used to produce leather shoes, sandals and skin containers.

A key factor favorable to agriculture practice in Nigeria during the pre-colonial period was the availability of good climatic conditions, free of epidemics, fertile land suitable for cultivation and grazing for those with animal husbandry as their agricultural occupation. Rainfall and adequate sunshine supported fertile land, despite the restrictions placed on yields through shifting cultivation and crop rotation and lack of the knowledge of mechanized agriculture them. The Hausa-Fulani's who kept their cows and sheep for their upkeep and for hides and skin production for leather shoes, sandals and their byproducts. Considered properly, economic activities in pre-colonial Nigeria should be seen as a continuum and not in terms of definitive watersheds which would have been arbitrary.

Although crafts and commerce engaged the attention of some people, by far the greatest single concentration of human activities centered on agriculture [11]. Just as there were hill farmers and valley farmers, the plains and the

swamps also supported agriculture in their own way. There were both nearby farms and distant farms. For the former, garden-like farms would be kept around the settlements for the cultivation of more immediate food crops such as maize, yams, cassava and vegetables. The latter could be four or more kilometers away from the village while extended farms could also be located across the locality quite some distance-away, sometimes around another village or town altogether. Such farms would be for both food crops and cash crops but more particularly for the latter. The farther the farm, the greater the need for establishing a temporary home in its neighborhood so that the farmer and his working family could concentrate at work for several days away from the home roots and the attendant social demands particularly during planting and harvesting seasons where a lot of effort would be needed on the farms and considerable urgency could be required. For example, all planting should be completed before the rains stopped for a while, just as all harvesting should be effected before insects and rodents eroded the basis of the farmers hope [11].

As Oyemakinde further pointed out, “Apart from cultivation, the farmers of the different Nigerian communities engaged in the domestication of animals and birds-chickens, fowls, while those in the Savannah zones raised livestock and those in the river areas practiced fishing. Generally, the pattern was to respond to the environmental challenges within which the people found themselves. Whereas women only assisted their husbands in farm work in most areas of Northern Nigeria and the South West, their counterparts in the South East kept farms of their own and competed with their husbands. Somehow, it may be asserted that there were no sharp differences in the levels of economic growth attained by the various communities in Nigeria since they were neither isolated nor self-sufficient cultural and economic ties existed between them and within each group [11].

2.2. Agriculture in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Period in Nigeria

Much as the colonial authorities wanted to achieve supreme mastery, the practical realities of the situations forced them to let Nigerians have some initiatives in the direction of their economic affairs. Infrastructural changes such as rail and road construction, certain export crops like cocoa, coffee, electricity and currency did the traditional economy some good by strengthening its connections with the world economy, but at the same time made it susceptible to global perils like the economic depression of the 1930s. It must also be observed that the colonial phase ushered in the use of currency as the British government introduced pounds, shillings, pence and new agricultural incentives to boost production.

As Akindele has further noted; for a long time and up till the end of the 1960s, Nigeria’s economic growth and development received its stimuli and driving force largely from agricultural production for export. Since over 70 percent of the Nigerian working population is engaged in peasant and non-mechanized agriculture, no economic historian can ignore the nerve-centeredness and multi-dimensional cruciality of the agricultural sector in the social and economic life of the Nigerian nation, notwithstanding the fact that the share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product has been declining constantly since 1960 [12]. Nigeria’s agricultural resource strength and potentialities as earlier noted are defined and determined by the country’s geographical location, topography, climate, soil and vegetation. The characteristic diversification of the agricultural resources of the country, ranging as it does from 4⁰ to 14⁰ North of the equator. This geographical location permits the existence of a good spread of distinct and diverse ecological zones –the mangrove swamp, the high forest, the guinea savannah and the dry Savannah-which have contributed to and made possible the existence of a variety of agricultural production for both domestic consumption and export.

It is of utmost importance to equally observe that the agricultural commodity structure of Nigeria’s economic relations with the external world has been deliberately promoted, nurtured and strengthened by the compelling logic of the British imperial interest which, among other things sought to secure and protect the agricultural raw material base of the British industrial production and prosperity [13]. During the colonial era, Nigeria depended heavily on the agricultural export earnings for meeting its foreign exchange obligations and financing its social and economic programs after independence in 1960 and in the 1970s. Thus, it may be argued that the production and marketing of Nigeria’s agricultural crops have been the *raison deter* for continued foreign (British) interest in Nigeria.

Nigeria’s domestic economic landscape for agricultural production for export has been historically dominated by the following primary commodities: cocoa, palm oil, palm kernels, groundnuts, cotton and natural rubber. Statistical data on the production of these commodities for the period 1958-1986 are presented in Table 1. During this period, cocoa economy was generally characterized by increasing productivity up till 1975-1976 when declining productivity set in and from which the export economy has not recovered. The same could also be said of the cash crop, groundnut whose production in the early colonial years was buoyant and which distinguished the nation’s export economy since independence had by the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 had started manifesting declining tendencies as well. The performance profile of palm produce showed an upward trend up till the beginning of the civil war in 1967. After the civil war, both palm kernels and palm oil continued to experience decline as composed to the colonial years when it was a major carrier for Nigeria’s economy. Cotton growth and production experienced impressive performance record between 1960 and 1970s. However, in the 1980s, cotton production witnessed a stagnant growth as decline also set in the following years. At independence, as earlier noted, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria’s economy as it still remains. Agriculture contributed more than 60 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Nigeria their accounted for about 16.1 percent of world trade in cocoa, 41 percent of world trade in palm produce and 30 percent of world groundnut export [14].

Nigerian agriculture has traditionally suffered from a general problem of low productivity resulting from non-mechanisation, low level of agricultural technology, insufficient or misapplication of fertilizers and pesticides, poor production techniques, archaic system of land tenure and under investment, notwithstanding the launching of the agriculture revolution schemes it is obvious with the state of the dwindling fortunes of the country in the agricultural

sector, there is a need for a much greater allocation and a more spirited mobilization for the agricultural sector of the economy.

In the search for an explanation for the decline in productivity in the country's agricultural economy, no one including the economic historian, can justifiably and realistically ignore the coincidence since the early 1970s, between the "oil boom" and "agricultural doom" particularly, the effect of the former on the latter. It is no understatement to assert that the oil boom of the early 1970s disrupted and depressed the agricultural economy by attracting labour away from the farms to the cities [15]. As a result of this neglect and abandonment of the agricultural sector between 1970 and the 1980s, the annual production of Nigeria's cocoa fell sharply by 43 percent, groundnuts by 64 percent, cotton by 65 percent and rubber by 29 percent, while the country's share agricultural imports in total imports increased from about 3 percent in the late 1960s to about 7 percent in the early 1980s. World Bank [16].

The reliance on oil and gas resources continued dominance in Nigeria's economy as from the 1980s stretching into the 1990s and 2000s [17].

Table-1. Production of Principal Agricultural Commodities, 1958-1986
(Purchase by Commodity Boards in Metric Tons)

Crop Year	Cocoa	Groundnuts	Palm Kernels	Palm Oil	Cotton
1958-59	134,350	533,362	455,345	184,355	89,122
1959-60	149,001	445,520	425,863	190,243	88,538
1960-61	186,258	631,432	431,681	193,907	153,578
1961-62	194,684	699,250	438,833	176,901	84,339
1962-63	174,417	888,954	369,392	131,116	148,682
1963-64	220,415	802,662	421,321	152,002	131,949
1964-65	299,464	692,514	409,506	150,843	133,427
1965-66	185,347	997,649	458,216	167,441	129,269
1966-67	268,306	1,046,961	422,438	131,886	150,727
1967-68	239,463	692,989	221,896	32,592	80,747
1968-69	218,259	778,515	194,360	4,561	165,638
1969-70	218,970	658,289	235,719	13,895	195,371
1970-71	301,868	286,948	296,166	25,532	115,056
1971-72	256,603	307,142	309,927	31,524	110,895
1972-73	241,290	559,047	268,758	20,914	143,490
1973-74	214,394	44,039	230,450	13,864	86,110
1974-75	214,461	161,927	302,125	24,772	140,026
1975-76	217,493	100,050	278,116	6,189	70,125
1976-77	166,378	148,200	282,059	9,488	212,376
1977-78	204,419	140,000	175,320	3,215	115,029
1978-79	133,436	388	238,479	-	117,291
1979-80	159,509	18,231	230,762	912	117,399
1980-81	146,454	10,812	193,780	n.a.	80,903
1981-82	173,854	5,724	193,865	n.a.	62,513
1982-83	150,309	n.a.	197,708	1,091	56,268
1983	144,664	91	153,506	2,091	61,839
1984	124,588	-	94,173	2,376	37,887
1985	86,257	-	163,397	-	44,235
1986	39,600	-	41,694	-	30,338

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, Annual Abstract of Statistics 1965, 1975 and 1981; Central Bank of Nigeria, Economic and Financial Review, Vol. 22, No. 3, September 1984; Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report, 1986, 27.

Table-2. Contribution of agriculture to GDP in Nigeria from the 3rd quarter of 2019 to the 3rd quarter of 2021

Characteristics	Share of GDP
Q3 2021	29.94%
Q2 2021	23.78%
Q1 2021	22.35%
Q4 2020	26.95%
Q3 2020	30.77%
Q2 2020	24.65%
Q1 2020	21.96%
Q4 2019	26.09%
Q3 2019	29.25%

Source: Simona Varrella, Agriculture in Nigeria-Statistics and Facts, September 28, 2021

During this period, Nigerian agricultural produce was characterized by increasing productivity up till the 1970s and thereafter when declining production reached an embarrassing low level as a result of oil boom and reliance on it thereafter and harvest. To some extent, some forms of mechanisation were introduced into the agricultural sector such as tractors, pesticides and fertilizers to increase crop yields and production. The period saw the boost in the cultivation of cash products such as cocoa, palm oil groundnuts rubber cotton, hides and skins beniseed etc exported as raw materials for the home government factories to produce other manufacturing by products. The agricultural sector became more capital intensive during the colonial period with Great Britain in command of the administration with an economic exploitative motive.

3. Importance of the Agricultural Sector to the Nigerian Economy

The agricultural sector has been identified as a major player in the development of the Nigerian economy despite the overriding impact of the oil and gas industry in recent times. Despite the fact that the government of Nigeria shifted its dependence on the agricultural sector as from the 1970s when the oil boom led Nigeria into the importation of food products, yet on the whole, it can still be asserted that majority of Nigerians especially in the rural areas still depend on agriculture, not only for their subsistence but for commercial purposes as well.

Thus, the agricultural sector is the source for the provision of food for the teeming population of not the Nigerian society but the world over. Both food crops and the cash crops produce beneficial energy supply to the human body system. Between 1960 and 1970, the agricultural sector supplied about 90% of the total food supply in the country.

According to Ayodele, the goal of agriculture sector in Nigeria is as follows:

- I. The promotion of self-sufficiency in food for the teeming and fast expanding population and also for the supply of inputs (raw materials) into the industries, especially the manufacturing firms.
- II. The generation of employment opportunities for the country's labour force
- III. The diversification of the source of foreign exchange earnings through increased agricultural exports arising from the adoption of appropriate technologies in production and distribution.
- IV. Improvement of the socio-economic welfare of people engaged in agriculture, particularly, the rural people through the generation of regular income [18].

As from the late 1970s, food importation began to grow from to about 30 percent in 2000. The sector through its various byproducts has contributed immensely to the improvement of living conditions of Nigerians. Agriculture provides material which are made into clothing's-cotton plants and sheep which provides woolen materials to protect our nakedness and keep us warm. Agriculture provides raw materials for agro-allied industries which are processed into useful and products e.g latex from Rubber trees can be processed into tyres, tubes, rubber shoes etc. Paper is also produced from soft wood trees such as *Gmelina aborea*, sugar from sugar canes, pencils, rulers, chairs and furniture from hardened timber. It is evidently clear that since these agricultural products can be put to industrial use, then obviously there must be a work force to translate such products into by products.

Thus, employment and job opportunity is another of such important contributions of the agricultural sector to the society while some are employed by factories making shoes from leather, hides and skins generated from animal husbandry; others are busy in Cadbury Nigeria Plc turning cocoa into Bournvita or Ovaltine. Also, milk from the cows is being formed into refined milk or powered milk by some workforce. It goes on and on and that is to show that a lot of employment opportunities are generated from the agricultural sector, apart from those who are duly engaged directly or primarily in the agricultural sector.

More importantly, agricultural produce generate foreign exchange earnings through international trade, especially when the agricultural produce are exported to other countries. Through such external commercial ventures, the country's economy is boosted to upgrade the standard of living of the people. When the nation (Nigeria) as the case study is earning at the central level, the citizenry who accumulated such products are generally a source of income to themselves. Through active involvement in agricultural ventures, the citizenry can also improve, their lives, family necessities such as payment of the children school fees, building of houses and other important activities. In due course, it would be discerned also that a lot of agricultural products help in making our lives more comfortable such as the provision of shelter. Timbers are slashed into planks to ensure houses are built and to make exercise books, paper for other educational and publication purposes.

It must also be noted that the agricultural sector provides a ready market for industrial goods such as tractors; insecticides, fertilizers and fungi cides, plastic products etc which are generated by the agricultural sector. Infact, the list is almost endless, from products made from crops cassava, yam, potatoes, plantain, soya bean, maize; gunea corn which all could be turned to flour of each of the crops mentioned. All these products eventually help to build the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For example, as at 1929, the sector accounted for about 57% of Nigeria's GDP, however by independence in 1960, agriculture contributed about 70% of Nigeria's GDP. As at 2018, the Agricultural sector contributed 23.08% to nominal GDP in Q4 2018, which is higher than its contribution in Q4 2017 (21.93%) but lower than it was in Q3 2018 (25.52%). On an annual basis, the sector contributed 21.42 to nominal GDP in 2018.

4. A Comparative Analysis between Production/Manufacturing Potentiality of Agricultural Produce in EDCs and LDCs

Nigeria is a leading developing country in Africa. As a result of its potentiality, it plays an important role in the calculations of the economies of the least developed countries (LDCs). Although, LDCs are low income countries

confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development, yet they are vitally required for the production and manufacturing requirements of the economically developed countries of the world (EDCs). As Falola has noted, “compared with the developed countries, Africa is economically poor, and in fact, eighteen of the least developed twenty-eight countries of the world are in Africa” the LDCs are generally dependent in trade, finance technology, military and even in social consciousness and scholarship of development. Even where lands are fertile, one finds that they are inadequately and inefficiently utilized. The reasons for this are not unconnected with poor health, lack of education and ignorance of modern farming techniques. Although Nigerians are predominantly farmers and herders, they underutilize their lands or overwork them with farming methods such as slash-and-burn cultivation which depletes the fertility of the soil. Overgrazing by the pastoralists results in deforestation and aggravates the hardship of their already difficult way of life [17].

Although rich in natural, economic and human resources, the LDCs fundamentally lack the technological capacity and have to depend unavoidably on the technologically advanced countries for resources development. In this way, the foreign economic powers and other interests continue to shape, influence and manipulate development policies and effort of the LDCs of which Nigeria is still largely a part of. Inadequate economic infrastructure is another obstacle to development. This is because raw materials (agricultural produce) should constantly flow from the farms and factories to the households. This is not efficiently carried out in that manner in the LDCs. Many agricultural incomes in the EDCs come from subsidies. The United States is on the low end of the subsidization, scale, providing 18% of all agricultural receipts. The European Union (EU) at 33% of receipts is about average and Japan at 56% on the high end. Some LDCs also give subsidies but they are not as effective as those from the EDCs [19].

Traditionally, analysts have divided the world's countries into two spheres. One the North consists of the generally prosperous EDCs (Economically Developed Countries). The other sphere, the South is composed of the relatively, and in some cases absolutely poor LDCs (Low income developing Countries) and in some cases Least developed countries (LLDCs). Despite some imprecision, the North-South Dichotomy is used in this analysis because it captures the reality that there is a great divide in the world pattern of economic and social circumstances.

In the EDCs composed of United States, European countries and Japan a lot of tax breaks are given, low cost energy services and transportation and other forms of financial support to subsidize domestic producers, who can then lower the price than charge for their products [20].

Agriculture is the most heavily subsidized economic sector in the EDCs. The EDCs provide an estimated \$280 billion annually in support of agricultural business (agri-business) in those countries. On average, 30% of products spoil because they cannot be easily transported from where they are plentiful to places where they are scarce. In essence, mobility of labour is restricted [21].

In the same manner that there are fertile lands in Nigeria, is also manner in which there is the scarcity of fertile land in some arid areas of the Northern parts of Nigeria. Particularly in the Sahel region of Nigeria, rainfall is often inadequate or irregular and drought could be a regular part of life where the land is plentiful and fertile, it may be fragmented and shared among many family members because of the inheritance system of land tenure. This limits the exploitation of the land to its maximum potential. In addition, land is not effectively utilized because of bad management and lack of information about ways to affect the effective utilization of lands for agricultural purposes. Most Nigerian farmers are unwilling to surrender their lands for development purposes, since the family is the farming unit and it is primarily concerned with meeting its own immediate needs. Farming implement are outmoded and inefficient; there is a limit to what hoes and cutlasses can do [21].

Falola has further noted that population growth is a great obstacle to the social economic development of developing countries. While birth rates are low in the developed countries, they are high in the LDCs [21]. This of course has serious implications for economic and social development. It increases rural poverty because population pressure on the land diminishes the quantity and quality of land available to an individual. It also encourages the drift from rural areas to the urban centers of persons in search of profitable employment. The rural-urban migration, it has also been noted affects the availability and quality of education, health services and most importantly, food cultivation and supply. The pressure of population on food supply means that food production per capita in Nigeria is actually diminishing.

Thus, as Nkem Onyekpe has earlier demonstrated the difference between agriculture in the LDCs and the developed countries is that while 65-80% of the peoples are engaged in it in the LDCs, only about 5-15% of the population is engaged in it in the developed countries (EDCs) [22]. It must also be noted that the technology of production in the LDCs is labour intensive, while it is capital intensive in the developed economics (EDCs). Despite the account of people involved in agricultural production in the LDCs, it is still observed that agriculture is more efficient, productivity is higher and scientific planned.

Thus, while population increases in the LDCs, available land is fixed and increasing population on limited land will result in fixed land-man-ratio. The more pressure that is exerted on land, the more reduced is the land man-ratio for the purpose of agriculture especially in the rural areas of developing countries like Nigeria. The problem becomes more complex when the population of available land is limited and nothing can be done in the short run to increase soil fertility to increase productivity, hence the need for reducing the size of line population of such countries. And such a downsizing situation is never tolerated or enforceable in Nigeria.

Compared to the advanced economies where about 3-5 percent of the population engages in agriculture, what enhances agricultural productivity in the advanced countries is the widespread use of scientific and technological knowledge and skill over the years. Also, it must be noted that agriculture productivity in the EDCs involves investment of huge resources beyond the reach of developing countries. Igben further argues that even, if the LDCs

could afford the modern facilities for increasing agricultural production, the tropical climate and vegetation constitute imponderable obstacles [23]. The prevalent phenomenon is therefore subsistence agriculture which is capable of feeding an increasing population but not much for manufacturing productivity. With such situations, the government would have no option in the short run, than to resort to importation of food items which consume much of foreign exchange. Consequently, a good part of the foreign exchange earnings of the LDCs is spent on the settlement of food import bills.

Although, this is not to say that the federal government of Nigeria has been inactive about agricultural development in the past. Apart from setting up a number of agricultural research institutes devoted to methods of increasing Nigeria's food supplies, a lot of funds had been spent on mechanisation of agriculture through other foreign aids and cooperative initiatives. Previous national programs include the Green revolution, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the services rendered by the Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRI). However, these programs met with minimum successes due to mismanagement and continuity by succeeding regimes or governments. The effort to produce distributes and later import fertilizers also met with recurrent scandal investigation of corrupt officials and malfunctioning of fertilizer plants.

In the light of all these constraints, Aboyade has pointed out that given the fact that agriculture is the major occupation of the Nigerian people; predominantly a rural occupation and inefficient and therefore unable to meet domestic needs, a cardinal part of development should, as a matter of top priority, be the transformation of the rural communities through an integrated rural development program. He further opined that the goal of such a program should be: the development of agriculture through provision inputs, extension services, new methods and systems adapted to local conditions, experimental centres and ultimately, the development of cooperatives in the organization of production and marketing [24]. Secondly, the provision of public utilities and social amenities such as electricity, roads, water, education, healthcare and lastly, the establishment of industries based on agricultural production in the communities should be the focus of the sector.

Thus, in the long-run, a national program of expansion in agriculture output that will compare with those of the advanced economies must entail a large outlay of investments in importation of fertilizers and appropriate agricultural implement, particularly the mechanisation and technological inputs to increase productivity. However, from the past experiences, depleted balances of foreign loans used to implement this process, interests on such loans and the endemic corrupt and inflation tendencies contribution to its failure. These failures are in the next section.

5. Research Findings/Results: Analysis of Influential Impediments to Growth and Development of the Agricultural Sector

In light of the research conducted on the agricultural sector in Nigeria, it was discovered that development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria is confronted by a number of influential impediments. In light of the research carried out in this study, the following submissions will suffice: one of the major findings of the study is that of inadequate funding and lack of credit facilities. Agriculture in Nigeria is still in the main at the peasant level where most of the farmers, except for a few, are poor due to the subsistence level of production. Although a few big time farmers such as Obasanjo farms, Ajanla and Adedoyin farms etc have been trying to change the practice by investing adequate capital in the sector in order to generate more yields from their agricultural venture, yet not all can have access to such funds before they practice. Banks and financial institutions do not want to risk giving loans to the poor farmers, except to the more enlightened and connected. The federal government has embarked on small scale loan initiatives which will favor some but not always the majority. The banks are fearful of the default of their loans which attracts high interest rates which the farmers can least afford. Farmers cannot also afford to buy farm implements and other agricultural inputs like fertilizers, pesticides which can increase their farm yields.

Another major challenge impeding development of agriculture in Nigeria is the usage of Poor farming tools and implements by farmers. Invariably, the provision of this factor is another key area for investment for both government and private individuals. Most Nigerian farmers still rely on crude farming implements such as hoes, and cutlasses to cultivate their lands. This is rather time consuming and energy-sapping and slower to achieve targets. Problems of land tenure system have earlier been highlighted and were discovered to be an area that requires enhancement if the agricultural sector in Nigeria is to improve. The land tenure system in Nigeria restricts and restrains a lot of farmers to acquire land to carry out their basic need. Land tenure system by inheritance leads to land fragmentation where mechanisation cannot be practiced. In commercial land tenure system farmers who are not members of the community cannot have access to such land.

The problem of poor storage and processing facilities should be given attention as it constitutes a major setback for growth and development. In addition to the previous factor, most farm produce spoil quickly and are easily attacked by pests and diseases due to poor or inadequate storage and processing facilities. A poor transportation network affects the conveyance of agricultural products to their destination point for sales. A larger percentage of agricultural products are from the rural areas where there are no food roads which makes it difficult to transport farm produce to the city centers where they can be sold. This results into high loss of highly perishable crops like tomatoes, oranges, mangoes, plantains, pawpaw etc. It must also be reiterated that poor weather conditions cannot but be mentioned in the factors that constitute retardation of farming investments and potentialities

Inadequate rainfall affects good crops production, thus affecting livestock production as well as problem of diseases and pests often causes damages and infest crops and animals in the farms. Poor soil conditions arise due to continuous cropping of the land and as such the soil can no longer support crop production as it loses its fertility. It must also be emphasized that illiteracy of farmers constitutes a major problem in development of the sector in

Nigeria. Farmers find it difficult to adopt new farming skills and innovations. Lack of rural infrastructures is another constraint on growth and development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Most of the rural areas where the bulk of the food in Nigeria are produced lack rural amenities such as good roads, electricity, pipe borne water, healthcare etc. This leads to the movement of able bodied men from the rural areas to urban centers in search of these amenities leaving behind women who cannot do much in the farms.

Good marketing facilities/system actually helps farmers to reap more gains in their farming produce. Farmers produce are exploited at local and export markets and deprive their produce their true value. This, at times, is due to the fact that they have no better options and often recourse to selling off their produce at the available markets whereas better prices could be achieved, if the middle men exploitation is checkmated by government.

Another important constraining factor is the Attitude of People towards farming. Many believe that farming is a profession for poor people and dropouts. Farmers are not recognized in the society as other professionals like medical doctors, lawyers, engineers. This directly affects the involvement of young people in agriculture.

Finally, natural disasters and Environmental degradation such as erosion, pollution, burning, and deforestation affects agricultural land and thereby reduce production on such lands. Bush burning and fire disasters also add more damage to these lands as it reduces its nutrients.

Employment: This research also discovered that the agricultural sector filled the employment gap of Nigeria, it produced about 80% of Nigeria's employment. However, the situation changed as from the late 1950s, when oil was discovered and continued to be drilled to replace the instance of agriculture. Export earnings both in the colonial eras, and post-colonial, agriculture contributed Nigeria's external earnings through export production and sales. In 1960, at independence, agriculture contributed no less than ₦282.4 million accounting for about 62% of total export. As of 1995, agricultural produce contributed only about 1.8% of the total export. It fell to 1.3% in 1996 and to 1% in 2000.

Retrospectively, contribution to GDP as at 1929, in the sector accounted for about 57% of the total GDP with oil palm contributing about 85% of this share. In 1960, the sector contributed about 70 of GDP. This however strongly dropped with the discovery of the petroleum resources.

Sources of Market for Industries: Agricultural sector serve as a market for industrial activities providing them with raw materials as well as market for industrial activities with the provision of raw materials. Nigeria has about 79 million hectares of available land, of which 32 million hectares are cultivated. There has been lack of consistency in the growth pattern in the agriculture sector. In sum, factors constraining Agricultural performance include the following: Technical constraint, Lack of labour resources, Inadequate extension service, Low growth of internally derived raw materials, Combined use of rudimentary equipment, Small scale production, Poor state of rural infrastructure, especially roads, pipeline, Inadequate credit facilities, Policy instability and regime change and Efforts at overhauling.

6. Conclusions

This article has brought into focus the agricultural sector in Nigeria and attempted an analysis of the impediment factors to its growth and development in a historical perspective. Certainly, the work is not exhaustive as the agricultural sector is quite a large expense and with various sections. However, the work has shown the developmental phases of agricultural growth and development and its decline which has phenomenally been affected by the concentration by the Nigerian government of the petroleum resources as a replacement for the role played by agricultural produce in the heydays of the country.

Despite the relegation of agricultural produce to the background, the sector still continues to dominate in the production of major farming products till date practice crop farming. In the South-South Nigeria, 7.3 percent of households practice fishing, while 69.3 percent of households own or raise livestock in the Northern part of the country [25].

In the third quarter of 2019, the sector grew by 14.88% year-on-year in normal terms with a decline of 3.44% from the third quarter of 2018. The largest driver of the sector remains crop production as it account for 91.6% of the sector in the first quarter of 2019 with a quarterly growth which stood at 44.12%. It must also be noted that the agricultural sector contribute 29.5 of overall GDP during the third quarter of 2019 [1]. It can also be surmised that the sector is being transformed by the federal, state and state governments as part of their resolve to resuscitate agriculture to its once enduring and enviable position of the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Thus despite the several challenges, a greater part of which has been highlighted in the work, the sector is being transformed at the small, medium and large scale commercialization which altogether has been able to increase the value of Nigeria's economy till date. Potentialities of Nigeria's agricultural productivity cannot be overemphasize as it accounts for about 20 percent of the world production of cassava, 47.5 million tons of yams (largest producer in the world), 10.1 million tons of maize 14th largest producer in the world; 7.8 million tons of palm oil (4th largest producer in the world after Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand 6.8 million tons of rice, one of the largest producer on Africa and 14th largest producer in the world, 4 million ton of tomatoes, and the 11th largest producer in the world, 2.6 million tons of cowpea, second in the world to India, Niger and Sudan.

Several tons of melons, papaya, onions ground pepper, guava, potato, okra, peanut plantain and 3 million tons of taro-largest producers in the world. The list is almost inexhaustible. It is also important to note that agricultural products has been utilized in manufacturing industries, such as cocoa to Coca-Cola, Bounvita, cotton for clothing and textiles, timber for construction of houses, bridges, canoes etc rubber for latex, coffee for beverages, sugarcane for sugar, cereals for food meals, kolanut, citrus for drinks, hides and skins, products from plants and trees. More importantly, the major challenges affecting the growth and developments of the agricultural sector in Nigeria

include: inadequate funding, credit and associated challenges, inadequate infrastructure, land ownership and tenure, poor agricultural production system, low quality of private sector investment, low productivity, non-competitiveness, weak domestic policies, institutional and unspecified roles of government, manpower skill challenges, and environmental/ecological/edaphic [1].

Recommendations

Thus, based on findings, following recommendations are germane for improvement.

- The federal, states and the local governments should give loans and encourage banks to do the same for farmers. Beneficiaries of such loans should however be monitored in order not to divert the funds to other uses, which is often the case. When poor farmers get such loans, they utilize the money to an extent, but at times are forced by circumstances of their living conditions utilize such funds for their personal maintenance, which has made banks to be cautious of handling such request subsequently. The implication of this is that the loans should go to the best and tested farmers who have demonstrated a high sense of commitment to productivity.
- It would be worthwhile, if these governments should import appropriate farm machineries and implements which can be bought by farmers at subsidized rates. Further, government can set up a tractor/equipment living facilities to cater for farmers plugging the land or those harvesting at affordable rates.
- The problem of land tenure system can be resolved by enforcing the land use Act of 1978. This will encourage willing farmers to have access to land for agricultural production. The land use Act of 1978 states that all landed properties belongs to the federal government.
- No doubt, the creation of affordable pesticides centers where farmers can get them at reasonable prices would be invaluable. The government should find means of education through extension workers the farmers with technical skills scientific farming knowledge/skills such as bush falling, crop rotation, grooming of cover crops and erosion control.

The government should also provide modern processing and storage facilities for the farmers at affordable prices.

- The problem of transportation networks can be resolved by improving the old roads and constructing new ones for easy transportation of agricultural products from rural to urban centers.

To solve the problem of inadequate rainfall, irrigation should be practiced as this would help farmer to produce more crops even during off seasons (dry seasons) when water is not readily available. Irrigation is the artificial supply of water to an area of land through pipes or channels to enrich the crops.

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