

# AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICY ON AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Agriculture has been a priority programme of successive national development plans in Nigeria since independence but the country stands out as one of the worst fed countries in Africa. With the economy recession in the country, the Buhari Administration has placed even a greater emphasis on this sector as a way to diversify the economy. The main objective of this study therefore, is to review the national policy on agriculture via the planning of the sector during the first four national development plans with a view to making recommendations for improvement. Analysis by our leading experts indicates our problem is one of availability of output through better handling, storage and distribution. The recommendations made include the production of agricultural machinery and tools, coming to terms with peasant farmers and encouraging initiatives in the processing, storage and preservation of local foods.*

**KEYWORDS:** Policy, Agriculture, Planning, Federal Constitution, Food Security

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria places agriculture on the concurrent legislative list, thereby making the development of this leading sector of the economy the responsibility of the federal, state, and local governments. Agriculture has been a priority programme of successive national development plans (1962-68, 1970-74, 1975-80, and 1981-85 plans) since independence but somehow neglected when oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the country. However, successive governments have criss-crossed the country preaching one or

other form of agricultural revolution from Operation Feed the Nation through the Green Revolution to the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure. But existing analysis by experts such as Idachaba, Olayide, Okigbo, indicates that our problem is less a matter of production than availability of output through better handling, storage and distribution.

In terms of food availability (which is the relevant parameter), Nigeria fares much worse than Senegal, Togo, Niger and even Tanzania, ... therefore, in effective food availability, measured

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by calories per head per day (the country) stands out as one of the worst fed countries in Africa (Okigbo, 1989). This study examines the roles of governments of the Federation in the planning of agriculture during the first four national development plans with a view to making recommendations for improvement.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology employed in this study consists of critical appraisal of planning of agricultural activities in the first four National Development plans (1962-68, 1970-74, 1975-80, and 1981-85) in Nigeria.

## **3. GOVERNMENT ROLE IN AGRICULTURE, 1962-68**

After examining the problem of balance between food crops and other farm production in their respective plans, the governments of the Federation chose to recognize agriculture by leaving peasants in satellite communities around large farms run directly by regional governments. These farms were called Farm settlements in the Western Region and nucleus plantations in the Eastern Region. Each government saw the food problem as being soluble, within a framework of peasant farms situated around large - scale farms producing cash for export.

The plan of the Western Region for agriculture was explicit on the need for raising food output. The rising population and increasing standard of living, the Western Region's plan (1962-68) called for improvement in the quality and variety of food production. It saw the answer in diversification within agriculture. The basic objective of the agricultural programme, the document continued is still increased productivity in respect of both food and export crops.

Nigeria is presented as a unified economy. The aim, the plan document explains is not to make the Region self-sufficient in food but to increase the protein content of the diet and to raise and diversify the production of those crops for which the region has natural advantages - namely, palm produce, cocoa and other export crops.

The plan for the Eastern Region in the same vein, declared that in agriculture, the main

emphasis is the rapid expansion of tree crops. This policy was designed to lead to an early increase in cash farm income, government revenues from purchase taxes and export duties, and Marketing Board profits.

The regional governments depended to a large extent for their resources on the marketing boards which bought and exported cash crops. Governments were thus driven by revenue consideration towards giving increased attention to export crop agriculture including improvements in its organization. Conversely, food crop agriculture was neglected. Institutional arrangements for the supply of seedlings, extension services, technical assistance, handling and storage, credit and sales were given to farmers to expand export crops but not for food crops.

The role of government can thus be filled in one of two ways or both; either by direct intervention in production or by facilitating improvement in production through aids to farmers. Direct intervention in production was inspired by the belief that radical changes were urgent and that the present system could not be relied upon to carry through the changes. Facilitating improvement involved providing the necessary infrastructure (such as irrigation, roads, necessary inputs, weather information and most important of all, extension services). Wells (1967) argued that these two approaches represent two different development strategies: transformation or improvement. Direct investment accounted for 40 % of the total investment in agriculture by all governments while facilitating improvements, including research and investigations combined (of which the Federal component was 53 % of total federal expenditure) accounted for 38 %, with education and training accounting for 2 %. Extension services represented 25 %. However, the Northern Region devoted as much as 55 % of its allocation to extension services compared with the Eastern Region's 23 % of the Western Region's 18 %. The high proportion of the provision in the Northern Region reflected the lower original base of the services there, as well as the enormous distances to be covered by such services. If the

federal government was taken out on the grounds that its responsibilities were limited to research by the constitution, the provisions for direct investment of the regions (amounting to ₦ 49.37 million) represented nearly 64 % of their agricultural capital programme.

The Eastern and Western Regions saw their role as promoting the reorganization of agriculture by creating and directly managing large-scale farms, often at a cost of at least ₦40,000 per farm settler. The consequence was that by 1962 there were already many examplecostly failures .... (ILO, 1981). The neglect of extension services with lower capital requirements and of agricultural credit for peasant farmers reflects the philosophy of the governments of the day which aimed generally to change the structure of agriculture from peasant to government - run enterprises.

The Northern Region, driven by the practical necessity of stimulating production over a wide area but with limited funds, concentrated its attention on irrigation projects and extension services. The North was thus in a position to have an impact on production capacity far more readily than the South, given the same disbursement of resources per unit of area.

#### **4. AGRICULTURE, 1970 - 74**

After the coups of January and July 1966, economic planning (including planning of agriculture) lost its relevance. The economy was seriously disrupted while political crises and military preparations which accompanied them, dominated government activity. However, the 1970 - 74 plan accurately summarized the focus of the federal government and regional plans for agriculture in the period 1962-68, the federal government had made grants for research, the Northern Region plan had been concerned with increases in output per farmer or per acre through extension services, fertilizer subsidy, tractor hiring and fisheries development. The Eastern Region devoted its attention to improvements in techniques via facilities, improved seedlings and changes in land tenure. The Western Region focused both on Food and

cash crops via increased acreage, rehabilitation and replanting of cocoa, and farm settlements.

In the 1970-74 plan, the federal government devoted its funds to research in such areas as rice, horticulture, cocoa and oil plan. Of more interest (Okigbo, 1989) was the forms of the states' plans for agriculture, especially with respect to differences in emphasis placed by the different states on various agricultural activities. The Northern states placed the greatest emphasis on extension services and irrigation. Benue-Plateau 67.2 % and 9.7 % respectively of its total outlay on agriculture; Kano 40.7 % and 43.3 % respectively, North-Central 46.6 % and 30.3 % respectively, North-Eastern 29.9 % and 26.7 % respectively, North-Western 28.7 % and 52.0 % respectively.

The emphasis placed on various agricultural activities in the southern states was different. East-Central State placed its emphasis on export crops, food crops and research, thus it devoted 52.7 % of its outlay to agriculture and export crop promotion and 22.1 % to food crops. Mid-West devoted 48.5 per of its allocation to export crops, 21.8 % to Fibres for local industries and 21% .6 to food crops. The South-Eastern state devoted 29.1 % to export crops, 15.3 % to farm institutes, and about the same to extension services.

In summary, while the southern states were concerned with export crops, the northern ntates concentrated their attention on the increase in agricultural production by peasant farmers through devices for incentives to farmers. The result of this disparity in approach was to be felt many years later when, in the late 1970s, the North found itself the main producer of food for the whole country: grains, legumes, vegetables, tubers, meat and fish.

#### **5. AGRICULTURE, 1975-80**

The minimum calories recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) was 2191 calories and 53.80 grains of protein. It wascalculated in 1974 that the average Nigerian took 2024 calories and 56.46 grams of protein per day. The average Nigerian was therefore

dangerously close to the minimum. The planners set their target at 2261 calories and 63.2 grams within five years (1975-80), equivalent to an increase of 10 % and 12 % respectively (Okigbo, 1989). In the main staples, this was translated into an increase of 22 % of sugar, 16 % for wheat, 14.5 % for rice and 7.5 % for maize.

It has been asserted that given biological, mechanical and management improvements in peasant farming, rice yields can be raised within the remaining years of the twentieth century by as much as 130 % (ILO, 1981). This figure should be put together with the increased yield deemed possible for other crops in the same study: yam, 71 %; sorghum, 100 %, millet, 33 %; maize, 135 %, cowpea, 220 %, Cassava, 87 % (ILO, 1981).

It is clearly evident that neither from the point of view of the nutritional requirements of the average Nigerian, nor of the production possibilities, can the target set be deemed appropriate on the basis of increases of yield estimated to be possible in rice, maize and the tubers (as against what the plan actually postulated), the calorie intake would have been targeted not at 2261 calories (a 10 % increase) but at well over 3200 calories (a 150 % increase). The danger of setting targets that are too low is that it does not call forth the effort required to optimize output, that the authorities get satisfied too early or too soon with their achievement and that therefore production possibilities are not fully realized.

Admittedly, the planners had their eyes on schemes which were, in their view more significant: irrigation schemes designed mainly for large-scale farming partly by direct government activity and partly by large-scale private farmers, comprising altogether some 440,000 ha during the plan period with additional 270,000 ha to be further investigated during the plan period. In addition, there were schemes for tree crop development that were meant to engage the peasants but these schemes all seemed paltry since they involved so few farmers who were, as it were, left to fend for themselves. In the final analysis, the production possibilities were not fully examined, articulated and evaluated with a view to seeing how far food production could be expanded and at what cost.

**6. AGRICULTURE, 1981 – 85**

Towards the end of the military administration in 1979 the Federal Military Government issued the Guidelines for the Fourth National Development Planning but the five-year plan could not be launched until January 1, 1991. The reason for the delay was to enable the new civilian administration which was installed on October 1, 1979 to Participate in the formulation of policies and programmes of a development plan that it was to implement (Anyebe, 2014).

For the period as a whole the plan projected a 7.2 % growth rate per annum but in practice it attained only 2.9 % (see table 1).

**Table 1: 1981-85 Plan Targets and Actual Growth Rates**

	<b>Plan Target (P.A.)</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Agriculture	4.0	1.2
Mining and Quarrying	2.0	8.5
Manufacturing	15.0	2.5
Utilities	15.0	-8.0
Construction	5.0	-15.4
Transportation	12.0	-12.0
Communications	15.0	-5.5
Commerce	10.0	-5.5
Housing	8.0	-9.3
Services	2.0	4.3
GDP 9at Factor Cost)	7.2	2.9

Source: Federal Ministry of National Planning

Much of the decline from 7.2 % to 2.9 % is due to the sharp fall in the growth rate of some of the large sectors: For example, agriculture registered only a 1.2 % growth instead of 4.0 %, consequently pulling down the overall growth rate because of its weight in the economy. The data in the table able have shown clearly that there was lack of realism of plan targets.

There was a general lack of discipline amongst the various institutions responsible for Green Revolution (a team used to refer to the technological breakthrough in agricultural production) during the 1981 - 85 plan (Abalu, 1981). Occasionally, as in Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation, the Government made loud noises about Green Revolution and agricultural production. The disbursement went more into the pockets of merchants of agricultural inputs than the producers of agricultural output. The programme therefore ended where it started: on paper and as slogans. The eleven River Basin Development Authorities which were created to serve as the vehicle for realizing the objectives of the Green Revolution were not effective in the execution of their mandate and by 1985 Nigerian economy was still a net importer of foods. These basins became moribund but the present administration has decided to reactivate them to facilitate food security as a way of diversifying the economy.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Slogans and jingles may tickle the ear; they cannot be themselves fill the stomach. The direct production of food by government in government-owned or government sponsored farms should not be encouraged because the governments in Nigeria have pursued relentlessly this course for over thirty years with varying degrees of failure. Specialized institutions should be utilized for agricultural researches: Institutions like IAR, NAPRI, NAERLS (all in Zaria) Moor Plantation (Ibadan), etc.

It is important for a country as large as Nigeria to be able to feed itself to the best of its ability. For the next generations of plans

demographic pressure will continue to exercise pressure on foreign exchange resources. It follows that unless the food problem is tackled urgently, more and more of the declining foreign exchange resources will be applied to food imports. To facilitate the expansion of food production, the production of agricultural machinery and tools which should cover the requirements of land preparation, harvesting, storage and handling is necessary. As peasant production provided in 1984, close to 98 % of all the home-grown food (Okigbo 1988) it is necessary therefore that the public authorities should come to terms with peasant farmers. The effort of the State governments should be directed over the space of the next twenty years towards grouping farm families into large units without disturbing ownership and offering incentives to them in the form of farm inputs and assistance in land preparation.

To make maximum use of the seasonal surplus of food, it is necessary to encourage initiative in the processing, storage and preservation of local goods so as to provide an industrial base for food crop agriculture. This development cannot, however, succeed unless electricity is generally available in the rural areas. Since these activities are basically labour intensive, they offer the best avenues for the absorption of young men and women thereby reducing unemployment.

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