AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA SINCE 1914

Anas Mohammed Abdullahi
Department of History,
Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria
Email Address: abdullahianasmohammed@gmail.com
Phone Number: +2348032571812, +2348038627208
and
Usman Aliyu
Department of General Studies,
Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Adamawa State
Email Address: usmanaliyuseptember1976@gmail.com
Phone Number: +2348034677929
and
Jibrin Muhammaed-Amin
Federal College of Education (T), Gombe, Gombe State
Email Address: muhammedaminjibrin@gmail.com
Phone Number: 070650347, 09053802937

ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to examine the significant role played by agriculture in the stimulation of economic development in Nigeria since 1914, and unveils the major quandary that contributed to the sudden setback that befalls the agricultural sector in post-colonial Nigeria. Indeed, it is very paradoxical and pathetic that a country recognized as "the Giant of Africa" finds itself in a rather retrogressive and inglorious situation. Nigeria was hitherto ranked as one of the major exporters of numerous agricultural crops such as cotton, groundnut, cocoa, rubber, palm produce, to mention but a few. In fact, agriculture contributed more than 75% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation during the colonial period. Numerous policies and measures were taken by the British administration to facilitate the production of surplus cash crops to meet the demand of international markets. This made agriculture the cornerstone of the colonial economy. From the 1970s, especially with the oil boom, the agricultural sector began to suffer a serious setback, thereby relegating the country to a mere importer of foodstuffs to sustain its ever-increasing population. Efforts were made by successive governments through different national and international institutions and other private organisations to revitalise the diminution glory of the agricultural sector, but little success was recorded (because most of the programmes were only in theory without practical implementation). But in spite of these predicaments, more than 75% of the Nigerian population is engaged in agricultural production as a full-time or part-time occupation at a small-scale level of production. This paper, therefore, examines the major conundrum bedevilling the agricultural sector in Nigeria and offers some important measures for the revitalisation of the sector

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with total figure of 140, 431, 790 people according to 2006 population census and has enormous natural resources. Throughout the 1950, 1960, and the early part of the 1970, agriculture constituted the major economic activities in Nigeria contributing about seventy percent (70%) of Gross Development Product (GDP), employing about the same percentage of the labour force, and accounting for about ninety percent (90%) of foreign exchange and Federal Government Revenue. This made agriculture the cornerstone and the most enterprising sector of Nigeria economy.

However, with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities during the oil boom of the 1970s, agricultural production especially for export was greatly jeopardized. The government shifted attention from agricultural production to the booming and dollar--earning oil. This generated many problems and transformed the country into mono-commodity exporter (depended solely on oil for revenue generation).

The concept of agriculture is very broad; it encompasses all processes involved in land cultivation, animal husbandry, water management, forestry utilization, among other related activities. The concept agriculture is derived from two words "ager" meaning field, and "cultural" meaning cultivation-which means field cultivation.[100] However, this is not a complete meaning of agriculture since it also has to do with other activities like animal production, water resources management, among others. Agriculture therefore simply refers to the science and or art dealing with farm production, including soil cultivation, water control, crop growing and harvesting, animal husbandry, the processing of plant and animal product and other related matters. In other words, agriculture is seen as the deliberate effort made by man to till the soil, cultivate crops and rear animals for food and other purposes; it also involves the sale of the produce from agriculture, because production is not complete until the produce gets to the final consumer.

Until recently, it had been generally accepted that the idea of agriculture diffused southwards into Africa from a centre of origin in Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt about 3500 years ago. However, recent works by historians and archaeologists confirmed that the knowledge of crop production and probably animal domestication as well, was independently evolved in the tropics (Africa inclusive) at a much earlier period, possibly as much as 10,000 years ago or even earlier. This suggested that African agriculture has its own specific history and course of development and not merely the territorial

[100]. Carl Eicher and Lawrence Witt, (eds.) Agriculture in Economic Development, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964

extension of discoveries and system worked out elsewhere in other part of the world.[101]

The antiquity of agriculture in Nigeria is dated back to period before 3000BC. This suggested that the art of agriculture was practiced by the Late Stone Age people in the Nigerian area. It is argued that:

> *The domestication of crops in Nigeria did not necessarily follow the introduction of technique of cultivation from outside. Many food crops grew wild in the Nigerian environment and were exploited by Late Stone Age people in the fertile river valleys of the Sudan area and edge of the forest to the south. From gathering these in the wild, there was tendency to protect them. The transition from protect and observation of those reproducing themselves vegetatively to domestication was a distinct possibility in the more open areas on the edge of the forests. It has been pointed out that both yam and the oil palm were susceptible to this…..some of the evidence from Iwo Eleru suggests that Late Stone Age man in the forest possessed pottery and stone implements with which he could cultivate yam as early as 3000BC.*[102]

The above quotation indicates that agriculture (crops production and domestication and rearing of livestock) was indigenous to Nigerian society.

Nation Building on the other hand, is the process whereby a society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dimensions, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols, values, as equal to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustice of the past, to foster unity and promote countrywide conscious sense of oneness.

The term is used severally by scholars to describe the process of national integration and consolidation that led up to the establishment of the modern nation state as distinct from various form of traditional states such as feudal and dynastic states, among others. However, as often used by historians and political scientists, the concept covers not only conscious strategies initiated by state leaders but also unplanned societal change. Nation Building therefore aims at unification of the people within a state so that it may remain socially, politically, and economically stable, viable, and integrated.

This paper documents the enormous contributions played by agriculture in developing and complementing other sectors of Nigeria economy since 1914. It contends that in spite of the setbacks suffered by agriculture from 1970s, it continuous to

[101] . John Levi and Michael Havinden, Economics of African Agriculture, London, Longman Group Ltd. 1982. Pp.27-28

[102] . Obaro Ikime (ed), Groundwork of Nigerian history……

support immensely in integrating and developing the country's economy.

Geography of Nigeria

Geographical information is necessary in any meaningful study on agriculture not only in relation to its influence on the nature of production but also the pattern of exchange and other economic activities among various societies in Nigeria. The name Nigeria is officially applied today to that territory which comprises all the states under British protection between the western Sudan and the Bight of Benin.[103] The country is located mainly between latitude 4^0 S and 14^0 N of the equator, and between longitude 2^0 and 15^0 east of the Greenwich Meridian. The country has the total area of approximately 356,669, square miles which is equivalent to more than three times the size of the United Kingdom. It shares border lines with the Republic of Benin, Niger and Cameroun in the west, north and east respectively. In the south, it is bounded by the Gulf of Guinea, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean.

The climatic conditions along the coastal areas in the south are more stable than for the rest of the country. There are two main seasons in the year, the dry and the wet seasons. In the southern half of the country, the rainy season lasts for about nine months-from March to November while the northern half of the country has a shorter period of rain, however in the far north it lasts for only four and a half months (mid-May to early September). The dry season, which is of a longer duration in the north, brings with it the dry northeasterly cold wind, the harmattan.

The agricultural production and other economic activities in various parts of the country are influences by the incidence and distribution of rainfall and other environmental factors in the country. It is as a result of difference in climate that the people of the north cultivate grains such as millet, guinea corn, beans, and acha, while the forest people cultivate root crops such as yams, cassava and cocoyam. The Middle Belt which has a transitional climate between north and south stands as a zone of mixed culture in which the food crops of the south are cultivated side by side with those of the north.[104]

The two major types of vegetation in the country are the forest and the savanna. The forests are found mainly in the south where there is high rainfall and along the river courses in the north. The three types of forests are: Mangrove swamp forest, fresh-water swamp forest, and tropical rain forest. The savanna on the other hand covers most parts outside the forest region. The vegetation consists of grassland and scattered trees growing singly or as woodland. The savanna, too, falls into three

[103] . Wilson Haffenden, The Red Men of Nigeria, London, Seeley and co. Ltd, 1930. P.17

[104] . Obaro Ikime (ed), Groundwork of Nigerian history, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc. 1980. P.11

major zones, from south to north: Guinea, Sudan, and Sahel savanna.[105]

The soils and topography of the different regions are aligned with the nature of the vegetation and climate in the areas. They supported the production of particular crops suitable to each environmental condition in the country.

Agriculture in Pre-colonial Nigeria

Agriculture constituted an important economic activity in the pre-colonial Nigeria. It integrated almost all the other sectors of the economy. Food crops were produced in large quantities to support families, clans and for the general societal consumption and raw material for industrial purposes.

Pastoralism was another important sector of the pre-colonial agriculture in Nigeria, predominantly in the Savanna region. Large livestock were kept by the nomads who wandered from place to place searching for good pasture and water for their herds. There were also considerable number of cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry among the semi-nomadic and the few sedentary people in the savanna and forest zone. Beside provision of milk and protein, hides and skins was in great demand locally for production of leather materials. In the 19th century there was a remarkable increase in the degree of integration between the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy which was accompanied by growth in specialization between various sectors of the economy and even between different kingdoms and empires.

As earlier demonstrated, increase in the agricultural productivity supported and sustained the industrial development in several important ways. First, it enabled agriculture to release part of its labour force to take part in industrial activity as part-time enterprise, while meeting the increasing food needs of the society. Secondly, it raised agricultural incomes, thereby enhancing the people's purchasing power which enabled them to buy the new industrial goods and other needed materials, and rural savings, which may then be mobilized, by direct or indirect means, to finance both agricultural and industrial development. Carl Eicher stressed that:

> *Every economy has an agricultural and non-agricultural sector, and one of the important aspects of development is the changing, complex but always intimate relation between the two.*[106]

The expansion in the agricultural and industrial sectors stimulated the development of internal and external markets. Barter transaction (*ban gishiri nabaka manda/ furfure*) was the major medium of exchange, in addition to the use of cowries; textile materials, iron bars, and

[105] . Toyin Falola et'al, History of Nigeria (Vol.1) Lagos, Learn Africa Plc, 1989 p.14

[106] . Carl Eicher, and Laurance Witt (eds), *Agriculture in Economic Development*, New York, Mcgraw-Hill Book Company, 1964, p. 9

other precious materials used for economic exchange.

The expansion and consolidation of many kingdoms, empires and societies in pre-colonial Nigeria was partly attained through the efforts of the rulers to control and provide security on the trade routes, construct markets, regulate business transaction and encourage agricultural production. This partly explains the reason why production of large *Gandaye* (agricultural estates), sometimes covering hundreds of hectres was an important feature of agriculture in Hausa states and the Kanem-Borno kingdom.[107]

Agriculture during the Colonial period

In spite of the heated debates, the 1914 amalgamation was a turning point in the development of Nigeria as a nation.[108] The policies initiated and maintained by the British colonialists after the 1914 amalgamation directly contributed to the development of cash crops production in Nigeria. During this period (colonial period), Nigerians were compelled through colonial economic policies on land, taxation, marketing, etc. to produce "export crops" such as Groundnut, Cotton, Palm Oil, Cocoa, Beni-seed, Rubber, Gum-Arabic etc.[109] at the detriment of food crops production which was only emphasised during the time of the First and Second World Wars.[110]

The development of cash crops production during colonial period had the effects of persuading each region (community) to specialize in the production of a particular agricultural crop/ (s). For example, palm produce, cocoa, groundnut and cotton accounted for about 70 percent of the total export of Eastern, Western and Northern Regions of Nigeria, respectively. Marketing boards were established between 1947 and 1949 to regulate the price of commodities and provide needed funds for the purposes of sponsoring agricultural research. Therefore, approval was granted for the establishment of not only regional marketing boards (for Western, Eastern and Northern Regions) but also central marketing board to coordinate marketing of export crops.

[107] . Toyin Falola et'al, History of Nigeria (Vol.1).....Pp.15-16

[108] . The main reasons for the British amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates as single administrative entity in 1914 were for economic and administrative advantages. See Fwatshak S.U and Olayemi Akinwumi (eds.) The House that Lugard Built: Perspective on Nigeria's First Centenary: The Pains, the Gains, and the Agenda for the Future, Jos, Jos University Press Limited, 2014. Pp. 1-34

[109] . These raw materials were needed by the British industries in Britain for the manufacture of clothes, soap, chocolate, edible oil among other finished good.

[110] . System of grain requisitioning was introduced by the British in order to supply their army in battle front with food during the first and the second world wars. Also substantial part of the confiscated grains from the north was taken to the mining labourers in Jos. See Umar Bappah, "The Impact of British Colonial Rule on Agriculture in Gombe Division 1900-1945", (Unpublished M.A Thesis, ABU Zaria) Pp 45-50, For detail on British Economic Policies in Nigeria see Mahdi, A. and Falola Toyin (et 'al) *History of Nigeria Vol.3, (Nigeria in the Twentieth Century)*, Lagos State, Nigeria, Longman Nigeria Plc., 1991

The primary motive for the British colonization of Nigeria as indicated above was to exploit the perceived enormous potential for agriculture and other natural resources.[111] Therefore new agricultural policies were promulgated to encourage the production of export crops. The colonial development plans of 1946-1955 and 1955-1960, financial allocation accrued more than 11% of the budgetary allocation to agriculture, higher than any other sector in the colonial Nigeria. Agriculture therefore became the cornerstone for the development of the colonial economy. It accounted for more than 75% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as stated earlier.

Agriculture in the post-Independence Era

Agriculture continued to play a tremendous role in the economic development of Nigeria throughout the first decade of Nigeria's independence. The first Development plan after independence, 1962-1968, tried to increase production of export crops through the distribution of better seeds and modern methods of cultivation; expanding of area of cultivation through farm settlements, co-operations, plantations, and the provision of improved farm implements, such as a hydraulic hand press for the extraction of palm oil.[112] Between 1962 and 1968, export crops were the country's main foreign exchange earner generating huge profit for the development of the other sectors of the economy. The country was the world largest exporter of palm produce and groundnut and the second exporter of cocoa. Cotton, rubber, and timber were also important export crops.[113] The export of agricultural crops was so remarkable that the term "cash crop" was still sometimes used to mean a crop produced (or formerly produced) for export.These crops also contributed significantly in stimulating the development of the indigenous textile, soap-making and other manufacturing industries, and enhanced the "standard of living" of the rural community through the acquisition of large capital from the sale of the commodities.

This trend of economic development based on agricultural export began to suffer a setback from 1970 as a result of tripartite factors, notably the oil boom of the 1970s, the drought of 1972-1974, and other internal factors. One of the major setbacks that affected the production of export crops, especially groundnut production in Northern Nigeria, was the drought of 1972-1974. Report has it that the drought affected mostly the groundnut-producing Areas of Northern Nigeria.[114] In Kano, for instance, the loss of the groundnut crops in 1973 was put at approximately 115,000 tonnes, worth

[111] . Abdullahi Mahadi et'al (eds.) Nigeria: the State of the Nation and the ay Forward, Zaria, ABU Press, 1994. P.132

[112] . Zara E. Kwaghe, Replacement of Agriculture with Black Gold in Post-Independent Nigeria: A Critical Review, A Paper presented at National Conference on the Economy, Society and Social Change in Nigeria, 1800-2016, held at Kaduna State University from 4th to 7th September, 2016. P.6

[113]. Toyin Falola et'al, History of Nigeria (Vol.1)……

[114]. Report from Federal Ministry of Agriculture, 1997-2011. The report outlined some of the major factors that affected agricultural production in Nigeria since 1970.

about ₦6 million.[115] Price of groundnuts in Gombe area among other parts of Northern Nigeria skyrocketed from ₦ 76 in 1970 to over ₦1550 in 1990 per ton. The rise in the price was due to relative shortage of the groundnut crops owing to decrease in the yield and land area devoted under its production. When groundnuts cake became important diet used as poultry feed the price hiked from ₦16,000 to nearly ₦70,000 per ton.[116]

There was also heavy reliance of Nigerian Government on the booming oil at the expense of agriculture sector. For instance, the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, in the Niger Delta, by Shell-BP in 1957 led to the commercialization and commoditization of petroleum products as the major source of revenue for the Nigerian government.[117] In 1958, the production commenced with about 1,530,000 barrels of crude oil sold at the rate of 5,000 barrels per day (b/d).[118] This was doubled in the following year. From then, the production rose annually as evidenced from the following figures: 1.5,500 b/d in 1963, 200,000 b/d in 1964 and 237,000 b/d. By 1970, the production of crude oil was above one million b/d and it increased to 651.4 million barrels, an average of 1.78 million b/d in 1975 and over 2.15 million b/d in 1978.[119] This put crude oil at the centre of Nigeria's economy and the primary export commodity as CBN Ogbogbo observed that,

> *Crude oil was soon to become a significant contributor to the Nigerian economy after the Oloibiri finding…. By 1979, Nigeria became the 7th largest oil producer in the world with over 20,000 workforces engaged in the industry. In fact within three decades the oil industry dominated the Nigerian economic scene, such that eighty to ninety percent (80-90%) of the country's Gross National Product…come from the oil sector alone.*[120]

[115]. Oguntoyinbo J.S. and Richards, P., "The Extent and Intensity of the 1969-1973 Drought in Nigeria: A Provisional Analysis" in David Dalby and R.J. Harrison (eds.), *Drought in Africa Vol.2,* London, International African Institute, 1977, Pp.114-125

[116] . Compiled from Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Report and Statement of Account (1985, 1991 and 1994) and Tiffen, M., *The Enterprising Peasant: Economic Development in Gombe Emirate, North-Eastern State, Nigeria, 1900-1968*. Overseas Research Publication, No. 21,.1974 p. 123

[117]. Ibrahim Khaleel Abdussalam, "The Historical Development of the Nigerian Oil Industry and Government Policy" Paper Presented at the Departmental Seminar, Department of History, Bayero University Kano, on 10th May, 1983 p.8

[118]. Ibrahim Khaleel Abdussalam, "The Historical Development of the Nigerian Oil Industry and Government Policy……..

[119]. Ibrahim Khaleel Abdussalam, "The Historical Development of the Nigerian Oil Industry and Government Policy

[120]. Ogbogbo, C.B.N., "Nigeria-Niger Delta Relations 1960-1988" in O. Akinwumi et' al (eds) *Intergroup Relations in Nigeria During the*

The development of the petroleum industry has serious implication on the production of some export crops in Northern Nigeria. The export of crops such as cotton and groundnuts fell woefully from 80% in the 1960s to 46% in 1971; 41% in 1975; and less than 20% by 1985. Michael Watts maintained that "The post-oil-boom political-economy of Nigeria is perhaps made even more distinctive by the sluggish performance of agriculture, more especially the collapse of export produces, the stagnation of food production and spiralling food imports".[121]

The situation became more nauseating that the groundnut pyramids of the north, rubber plantations in the Edo axis, cocoa and Kola nut in the western region, among other commodities, have become things of the past.

Clarification of Misconception

The common misconception which needs to be clarified is the erroneous notion that people in the north solely depended on the profit generated from oil revenue with little or no contribution to the economic development of the country. It should be noted that the dynamic of economic activities in the country, including the oil exploration, has been sponsored by the revenue generated from agricultural export. While we acknowledge the role of oil in the economy of the nation, we should know that it is playing only complementary role in terms of the overall economy. Many countries in the world developed not because of their foreign exchange but because of their internal strength and it is this internal strength in the economy of Nigeria that so far sustained its people rather than its foreign trade.[122] Agriculture provides the basis for this internal strength in the country for centuries. Indeed, Northern Region is the food basket of the country; it provides food that is sustaining the ever-increasing Nigeria population and raw material for industrial development. It is obvious that increasing agricultural productivity makes important contributions to general economic development and that, within considerable limits at least, it is one of the preconditions which must be established before a take-off into self-sustained economic growth becomes possible.[123]

This paper argues that the decline in the production of export crops did not mean a general decline in agricultural production. This is because many farmers did not quit agricultural enterprises but shifted their attention to the production of the more profitable food crops, such as maize, millet, and guinea corn, among others. The World Bank report of 1970 estimated that the agricultural sector employed about 71% (seventy one percent) of the total labour

19th and 20th Centuries, Makurdi, Aboki Publishers, 2007, p.562

[121]. Michael W., *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, London, University of California Press

[122] . Abdullahi Mahadi et'al (eds.) Nigeria: The State of the Nation and The Way Forward….Pp.137-138

[123] . Carl Eicher and Lawrence Witt (eds.) Agriculture in Economic Development, New York, Mcgraw-Hill Book Company, 1964 Pp.12-13

force in Nigeria. This roughly indicated the extent to which agricultural enterprises absorbed the large number of the labour force, as at 1970 when the export of some crops was declining. Although Poor farmers, particularly those in the Northern part of Nigeria suffered some impediments, especially when in 1970s the "oil syndrome" coincided with the drought[124] of 1972-74 which left many families impoverished and indebted. It is reported that the 1972 harvest was below normal because of poor rainfall that began late and ended earlier in many parts of the North Eastern State.[125] The prices of food crops increased astronomically to about 400 percent of the normal price. For instance, the prices of beans increased from ₦ 0.25-0.30 to ₦ 0.55-0.70 a measure, and that of rice from ₦0.33-0.40 to ₦ 0.80-0.90.[126] On the other hand, the prices of livestock especially cows plummeted from ₦ 60-100 to as low as ₦ 4 in the North Eastern State, because they lost weight as a result of starvation.[127] Many farmers were said to have little or no seed reserved for consumption and sowing in the next farming season; they also had no animals to sell, most either died or had already been sold; and to be selling household goods had to be sold in order to raise cash to carter for the needs of household members. Even rich farmers suffered a great difficulty and very few had enough to spare, which was used to support their relatives and friends.[128]

All these obstacles did not in any important way hampered peasant farmers from agricultural production. In fact, the output of food crops cultivated in Northern Nigeria in the 1970s nearly doubled the production during the peak of the British colonial administration in the area. Larger quantities of grains and livestock are often taken from the north to other regions in exchange for other commodities. Therefore, the predicaments bedevilling cash crops production are therefore intrinsically connected to the changes in the nature and organizational structure of the major factors

[124] . Drought is simply a period in which moisture availability falls below the current requirement of some or all the living communities in an area and below their ability to sustain the deficit without damage, destruction or excessive cost. The general implication of the droughts in northern Nigeria was its attendant famine and draining of agricultural labour force.

[125]. Michael Mortimore, "Famine in Hausaland, 1973", in *Savanna, A Journal of the Environmental and Social Sciences vol.2*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1973 p.104

[126] . Michael Mortimore, "Famine in Hausaland, 1973" p.104……

[127] . Livestock were dying of starvation because of the scarcity of pasture and water, most of the surface water had dried up and many of the cattle population (especially owned by the sedentary Fulani) therefore relied on the available boreholes and wells to drink water. The situation became compounded when cattle tax (Jangali) was collected at the time which accentuated the already acute distress of the peasants. See Michael Mortimore, "Famine in Hausaland, 1973" Pp. 104-108

[128] . Michael Mortimore, "Famine in Hausaland, 1973" Pp. 104-108,

of production and other administrative and technical factors.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role played by agriculture in the development of Nigeria economy. It demonstrated that agriculture has been instrumental in complementing other sectors of Nigeria economy since pre-colonial period. The colonial government in Nigeria also made agriculture the cornerstone of its economy. Agriculture continued to be the main export earner to the country throughout the first decade after independence.

The finding of the paper indicated that two major obstacles befell agriculture in 1970s. The first one was the drought of 1972-1974 which not only affected local food production but also reduced drastically the country's export of groundnut and cotton. Second, the oil boom of 1970 which diverted the attention of government from agriculture to the dollar-earning oil. These were compounded by subsequent neglect of the sector by successive military and civilian governments, bad policies and poor implementations.

Contrary to the arguments of other scholars, this paper indicated that in spite of the general decline in the share of agriculture on GDP, it continues to play a significant role in the development of the economy and society. It provides a large number of job opportunities, produces food, raw materials, and contributes immensely to the food security of the country, poverty reduction, and facilitates the development of trade and the economy as a whole.