

Providing Philosophical Guidelines for the Development of the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the struggle of framers in Nigeria and make available philosophical guidelines for the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Several policies by the Nigerian government targeted on revamping the agricultural sector have over the years failed. This failure necessitates providing philosophical guidelines for the development of the sector. The paper argued that, the philosophical guidelines include market-driven strategy for agricultural development, making farmers the center of agricultural policies, infrastructural supports for agricultural activities, making new technology innovations available for agricultural activities and human resources development. The paper recommends a holistic pragmatic approach to achieving sustainable development and the development of the sector.

Keywords: agriculture, development, farmers, rural development.

Introduction

Agriculture is a major sector of the Nigeria economy which has decayed over the years. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development (FMAWRRD) have identified several issues that gave rise to the decay of the sector. However, according to Noren (2018), the struggles of farmers in Nigeria which inevitably are the current problems of the agricultural sector which include poor information dissemination, insufficient financial supports, market access and transportation among others. This implies that the development of the agricultural sector needs to identify these current problems and take pragmatic approaches to resolving them.

The pragmatic approaches may include making farmers the center of agricultural policies, infrastructural supports for agricultural activities, making technology innovation tenable in agricultural activities, human resources development (Ake 1996) and market-driven strategy for agricultural development (World Bank 1993). This is because development of a sector is about devising a pragmatic way of proceeding within constraints and possibilities of the realities on the ground (Ake 1996). These approaches constitute philosophical guidelines for the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to examine these guidelines for the development of the sector.

Problem of Nigeria's Agricultural Sector

According to FMAWRRD (2002), the agricultural sector had much potential contributions to Nigeria's development which were taken for granted even decades before 1960 independence. The sector received very little supports from the government. However, the sector was doing so well that there was sufficient food for the increasing population and abundant raw materials for promising industry sector. Foreign exchange and public revenue was increasing and there were employment opportunities for the increasing labour force. Government supports were channeled to exports of palm produce, cocoa, groundnut, cotton and rubber (Yesufu 1996). The aspect of food sufficiency was not considered a problem because there was abundance of food supplies.

However, the problems in the Nigeria's agricultural sector emerged during the first decade of the nation's independence (1960-69). Indications of these problems were already being identified in areas of constant shortfalls in food supply, hiking food prices and drastic decline in foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. The *Agricultural Policy of Nigeria* (2002) acknowledged that, government fiscal and monetary policies, the Nigeria's civil war, several droughts in some parts of the country, and 'oil boom' which accelerated labour migration from agriculture to oil further compounded the emerging problems of the agriculture sector.

Nevertheless, a number of agricultural policies have been put forward by the Nigerian government to remedy the identified problems facing the sector in several rural development plans. Yet, these policies have not been able to recuperate the situation. This creates philosophical concern over the rationale of the various policies that span from 1970 -1974, 1975-1980 and 1981-1985 on rural development plans which were targeted on the recuperation of the agricultural section. Yet, all these policies have all failed to achieve the desired objectives. This failure necessitates providing philosophical guidelines for the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria.

The Philosophical Guidelines for the Development of the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria

In examining the philosophical guidelines for the development of the Nigeria's agricultural sector, there is need to understand what philosophy is. In the view of Onwuama (2012), philosophy is a critical and unbiased reflection on the progress and challenges facing the society with the aims of providing pragmatic principles for advancements. Philosophic reflection is the core foundation on which all disciplines budded. Hence, Philosophy is considered mother of all discipline including agriculture. Therefore, philosophical reflection on the development of Nigeria's agricultural sector is in line with the spirit of philosophy as part of philosophers' contributions to national development.

According to Claude Ake (1996) development is about devising pragmatic ways of proceeding within constraints and possibilities of the realities on the ground. Hence, given the constraints and realities on ground facing the agricultural development in Nigeria, there are five constituting philosophical guidelines for the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. These include a market-driven strategy for agricultural development, making farmers the center of agricultural policies, infrastructural supports for agricultural activities, making technology innovation tenable in agricultural activities and human resources development (World Bank 1993, Ake 1996).

Market-Driven Strategy for Agricultural Development

The market-driven strategy for agricultural development is about profitability being made policy development focus. In corroboration with this strategy, citing a World Bank (1993) report, Efemini (2010) argued that agriculture is a dominant productive sector in Africa. It supplies raw materials for agro-allied industries. It is the largest employment of human resources. It is also, an important strategy to fight extreme hunger and promote food security. Thus, profitability may be considered a pillar in agricultural policies to facilitate development of the sector.

In this case, agriculture policymakers may need take to heart that free competition based on market mechanism of demand and supply in local and global market are the best way to signal to farmers what, how much, and when to produce. In addition, domestic prices of export crops fixed by governments prevent farmers from making economically rational response to changing world market condition. It is however, worthy of note that profitability policing alone may not sufficing developing the sector.

Making Farmers the Center of Agricultural Policies

Furthermore, the Nigeria's agricultural development policies between 1970 -1974, 1975-1980 and 1981-1985 which failed to achieved desired objectives of revamping the agricultural sector is strategically deficient in making farmers the center of agricultural policies. There has been a serious gap in farming policies in Nigeria. Certain non-farming government officials sits in Abuja to make policies guiding agricultural activities in rural places which they themselves have never visited all their lives. This creates very serious policy gap between theory and practice. Consequently, aims of such policies are usually defeated and further contributing to deterioration in the sector generally.

According to this guideline therefore, an essential preliminary is policy dialogue between farmers and officials, and among farmers themselves, on the need, desirability, and means of improving the efficiency and productivity of farmers and increasing the benefits that accrue to them from farming (Ake 1996). Where the farmers are involved in the policy process they would be adequately informed on national agenda for the advancement of their farming activities. The farmers will, in turn take responsibility for agricultural policing and implementation.

Infrastructural Supports for Agricultural Activities

Furthermore, infrastructural supports for agricultural activities are another fundamental key to developing the agricultural sector in Nigeria (Ufiobor 2017). Improving rural infrastructure, especially roads, water supply, electricity, markets, energy and transportation would galvanize the ability of farmers to do what they are already doing more efficiently (Oni 2013). While, agricultural policies in Nigeria acknowledged the importance of infrastructure in agricultural development across the country, efforts aimed at restoring the agricultural sector have been thwarted by politicians who make infrastructural recommendations for certain rural communities that have no need of. The implication is investing in the right thing but at the wrong places. This of course defeats the aim of such activities.

Technology

Agriculture in Nigeria has a problem of slow adoption of technology (Abutu 2014). The impacts of technology in agricultural sector development cannot be overemphasized. Most farmers in Nigeria still use machetes and hoes to cultivate hectares of land in the age where tractors and other sophisticated technologies have drastically reduced human labour (Efemini 2010). Where this scenario continues, Nigeria may never develop the agricultural sector to compete with radically changing world. The best achievable manually is peasantry, large scale farming may not be possible.

Nevertheless, while large scale farming may make more contributions to export services and improving foreign exchange, small and medium scale farming contributes more to the elimination of extreme hunger in rural places cum semi-urban places. Neither too, can achieve sustainable development of food security without modern technologies. A major challenge here is unskilled workers. Where technologies are made available the farmers may be unable to operate it. This goes on to say that, making technology available to farmers is not the issue but the ability to use it. Technology can help in the development of the Nigeria's agricultural sector where there are trained and skill workers in handling modern farming technologies. Until developing such skills becomes a major part of agricultural policies, the sector's development is not on sight.

Human Resources Development

Human resources development is another area of interest. Massive investment in education, especially at the primary school, is advocated (Abutu 2014). Many farmers are unskilled labourers. There is little to what such farmers can do. In other to help, efforts may have to be intensified in this area.

Finally, in the above given philosophical guidelines, neither is capable of developing the agricultural sector in Nigeria without the other. A deficiency in one area will automatically affects other areas. Earlier agricultural policies had given more attention to one aspect more than the others. This paper advocates a holistic pragmatic approach to achieving sustainable agricultural development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the struggles of farmers in Nigeria include lack of appropriate information dissemination, insufficient financial supports, lack of market access and transportation among others. However, these problems are resolvable through philosophical guidelines for the development of the agricultural sector. These guidelines are policy framework and strategies that would engender a transformation from theory to practice that have hitherto bedeviled agricultural policies in Nigeria in times past.

Therefore, the philosophical guidelines include market-driven strategy for agricultural development, making farmers the center of agricultural policies, infrastructural supports for agricultural activities, making technology innovation tenable in agricultural activities and human resources development.

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