

# Agricultural Development in Rural Nigeria: A Review of Approaches

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## **Abstract**

Given Nigeria's abundant resources and expected future population rise, the country's very low human development indicators, particularly in the rural areas, is a serious cause of concern. Researchers and development stakeholders however persistently approached Nigeria's development from the classical point of view - one that trickles from a central government and benefits members of a community. The apparent failure of this type of approach in Nigeria, particularly in the post-colonial era presents a need for a critical rethink into what the nation has been through all the way, with a view to identifying the most fitting approach to rural agricultural development. This paper reflects on Nigeria's rural agricultural development from pre through to the post-colonial eras and identifies a people-driven entrepreneurial approach, such as practiced during the precolonial era to have worked best for rural Nigeria so far. In light of current global trends, it is recommended that researchers and development stakeholders work to revive this strategy in order to reposition rural agriculture on the path to progress and prosperity and thereby put an end to food importation in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, rural development, entrepreneurship, food importation

## Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors in Nigeria's economy. It provides the basis for life and sustains continuity for the citizens of the nation. Without agriculture in the country, there would be hunger as well as starvation and the general well-being of the nation would be undermined. Agriculture has been an integral part of Nigeria's economy from time immemorial and it has served as the fuel that drove development and brought about industrialisation. The country might have begun to rely more on her oil sector but agriculture has always been the backbone and support of the nation right from the pre-colonial era. Agriculture is famous in Nigeria not only because it is a means of sustenance but also because it fosters economic growth, increases the standard of living of the people and provides employment, thereby increasing the labour force.

A projection in the population growth of Nigeria is expected to be up to 900 million people by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (UN, 2013)<sup>1</sup>hence, the role of agriculture will continue to increase in providing food, fiber and employment for the people. Considering the role agriculture has played and is still playing in the Nigerian economy, there is need to evaluate the developmental strides agriculture has achieved across the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era of the country. The lessons we learn from these eras, with respect to the successes and failures of various agricultural development programmes will let us identify the most fitting approach for the country, and indicate what direction development stakeholders should be headed towards.

About half of the population living in rural areas, of which 80 percent live below the poverty line<sup>2</sup> rural Nigeria is characterized by high levels of poverty and underdevelopment. Despite the many government interventions of the post-colonial era in the country's history, rural regions are continuously underdeveloped. With researchers and developers consistently viewing development from the classical point, one which

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2013). *World population projected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050 with most growth in developing regions, especially Africa – says United Nations*. Press Release

<sup>2</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development (2012). Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty in Nigeria. URL: <http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pa/factsheets/ng.pdf>. [Accessed: 22nd March, 2014.

trickles from a central government, the need to look in other directions becomes imperative.

A review of the approaches of agricultural development before, during and after colonialism is therefore essential to understand the shifting approaches and identify more workable and sustainable options. This will enable repositioning the industry on the path to progress and prosperity. It is instructive therefore, to ask these questions; a) what are the strategies for agricultural development before, during and after the colonial period, and b) which of those strategies worked best, and c) given the present and future challenges facing the country, which could be a better approach to sustainable agricultural development? The main objective is to trace and analyse agricultural development efforts before, during and after the colonial period, which worked best and identify the most fitting future approach given the Nigeria's contemporary challenges.

Besides viewing development the classical way, this paper examines the various approaches to development in the nations history and identifies what worked best, before looking to the stakeholders-end to identify what may be done. In the subsequent sections, discussions of the different approaches over the eras of the country's history were made before conclusions and recommendations.

## **Methodology**

The approach used for this paper is a critical and contextual discourse analysis from existing scholarly literature, including governmental and inter-governmental reports, research papers, books and other scholarly publications.

## **Analysis of Nigeria's Agricultural Development Efforts**

### *Pre-Colonial Agricultural Development in Nigeria*

Since the on-set of colonialism, agriculture has been Nigeria's mainstay and has aided many secondary occupations such as pottery, hunting, fishing, blacksmithing, and weaving, which altogether significantly shaped the culture of Nigerians. Farmers allocated portions of land to cultivation of agricultural produce and rearing of animals.

One of the key constraints of production then, was not an insufficient supply of land but an insufficient supply of manpower. Plenty of strong young people were needed to work the land and open new fields. Without a big labour force, farmers were limited in their use of extensive agriculture<sup>3</sup>. In those days therefore, labour was very valued, and institutions that regulated it, such as the family, kinship and slavery institutions played a crucial role in Africa's pre-colonial economic history.

Another common feature was the pattern of organisation that existed among the people according to age, occupation and interests. The pre-colonial society was structured in such a way that forming groups was not a difficult task (Baker 1974)<sup>4</sup>. Given the role of networking and dynamism to creativity, this less stratified system of social interactions would naturally make entrepreneurship an important driver of development for the farmers of this era.

With respect to developing production and standard of living, precolonial farmers used to conduct group labour on a given day for one particular member of the community to ease the tedious nature of the job, and work for another farmer the next day<sup>5</sup>. Besides, farming and fishing competitions were held seasonally to identify enterprising farmers and fishermen who win community prizes and earn recognition.

To summarize the effectiveness of precolonial agricultural development in Nigeria, Thomas G. Emeagwali concluded that developments in many areas of Nigeria's precolonial economy, such as agriculture, currencies, transport, crafts and industries, and trade, motivated the people to produce far in excess of their immediate needs, and facilitated their capacity, through the highly organised trading system, for disposing off the

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Green (2004) Production systems in pre-colonial Africa chapter 3. URL: <http://www.aehnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Ch.-3.pdf> [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2014]

<sup>4</sup> Baker, P.H. (1974). Urbansation and Political Change: The Politics of Lagos 1917-1967. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>5</sup> Akhuemonkhan, I. A., Raimi, L., Sofoluwe, A. O (2013). Entrepreneurship education and Employment stimulation in Nigeria. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*. Volume 4, No. 4.1 Quarter I 2013. ISSN: 2229 – 5313

surplus<sup>6a</sup>. Also, due to the aforementioned growth indicator, food importation was rare because most of the food needs of the population then was adequately catered for through the structure of communal and family farming efforts<sup>6b</sup>. While it is not possible for precolonial production technology to work in present day without the colonial and post colonial technologies and systems, the environment of production and approach can be seen to have worked for the Nigerian society.

As per many of the generic conceptions of entrepreneurship among scholars, such as Bruce Barringer (2011)<sup>7</sup>, it would not be out of place to infer from the foregoing that many elements of entrepreneurship, such as creativity, innovation and thrift to succeed had been the key instruments used by farmers then to develop their lives and occupations, in precolonial Nigeria. It is important to note also that authorities then only assisted the process, but were never involved in the planning and implementation of policies and programmes for the farmers.

#### *Colonial agricultural development in Nigeria - 1860 to 1960*

During the colonial era, Nigeria was buoyant agriculturally, the planting of cash crops such as cocoa, palm trees, cotton and the likes were prevalent and this led to development in which harbours and railways were built as means of transporting agricultural produce from one point to the next. This era was characterized by ad-hoc attention to agricultural development; more research and extension mechanisms were put in place to enlarge the productivity of agriculture in the country. It is important to note however, that the development that happened over this period was designed mainly to satisfy the interests of colonial administrators, and not

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<sup>6a</sup> Emeagwali, G.T (ND) "Class Formation in Pre-colonial Nigeria", Mimeo p.4. Cited in Njoku (2011). Pre Colonial Economic History of Nigeria. URL: <https://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/aghainoso/Aghaino%20trade%20currencies%20in%20pre-Colonial%20nigeria.pdf>. [Accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2014].

<sup>6b</sup> Attah, Ademu Wada, Ph.D “ **Food Security in Nigeria: The Role of Peasant Farmers in Nigeria** (Pp.173-190) An International *Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 6 (4), Serial No. 27, October, 2012* ISSN 1994-9057

<sup>7</sup> Bruce R. Barringer and Duane Ireland, *Entrepreneurship: Successfully Launching New Ventures*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Pearson Higher Education, 2011

to provide Nigerians with a lasting means of employment generation and welfare of the population.

One of the prominent achievements of the colonial era in agriculture was the establishment of a botanical research station in Lagos state by Sir Claude McDonald in 1893. This was swiftly followed by the 1899 acquisition of about 10.4 km<sup>2</sup> of land by the British Cotton Growing Association, for the sole purpose of cotton growing experimentation in Ibadan. The area subsequently became named 'The Moor Plantation'. In the 1990's the use of green manure, fertiliser, rotational crop planting and livestock feeding grew and agriculture expanded<sup>8</sup>.

Many other specialized development schemes were initiated over the colonial period, including the Forest Policy (1937), Agricultural Policy (1946), Policy for the Marketing of Oils, Oil Seeds and Cotton (1948), Forest Policy for Western Region (1952), Agricultural Policy (1952), Nigeria Policy of Agricultural and Natural Resources (1959), and Farm Settlement Scheme (1959). These developmental strides were seen as a big contrast to the pre-colonial agricultural development where much emphasis was laid on export of cash crops, though, a good step for economic growth but a retrogressive one with respect to the production of food crops as the government cared less about food crop production<sup>9a</sup>. In all, the era focused on forest and other cash crop matters, with less emphasis on food and animal production. One of the key drawbacks of these development policies, is that they were largely made without proper institutional arrangement, and specific programmes, projects, strategies, goals or targets and objectives geared towards their implementation.<sup>9b</sup>

The institutions setup over the period are termed 'Extractive' and principally worked to transfer wealth to colonial countries and have the

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<sup>8</sup> Njoku, O. N. (2002). Chapter One Towards An Agricultural History Of West Africa: The Igbo Example. Pre-colonial economic history of Nigeria, pg 7

<sup>9a</sup> Pearce (1986), In: Ayoola, G.B. (2001), *Essays on the Agricultural Economic: A book of Readings on Agricultural Development Policy and Administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: T.M.A. Publishers.

<sup>9b</sup> Ajayi G 1999. **Internal Politics of Decolonization and the Emergence of Neo-Colonialism in Post-Independence Nigeria**. In: G Ajayi (Ed.): *Critical Perspectives on Nigeria's Socio-Political Development in the 20th Century*. Lagos: Stebak Books, pp. 21-28.

nature of persisting for decades<sup>10</sup>. Extractive institutions orient a country towards relying on foreign, finished products rather than locally producing qualitative products. A good example of Nigeria's dependence on foreign products is despite being the second country in Africa in crude oil production, over 80% of the processed kerosene is imported from the United States<sup>11</sup>.

### *Post-colonial agricultural development in Nigeria (1960 to date)*

By 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence, agriculture accounted for over half of the gross domestic product in the nation and it was the main source of export earnings. Sadly this is not the case in present day Nigeria. Oil and gas industry has taken over and the government is not paying much needed attention to the agricultural sector<sup>12</sup>. In 1998, agriculture, which includes hunting, forestry, fishery and other diverse forms contributed about 32% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the nation. This provided food for the populace and in addition about 32.5% of the populace were employed.

In general however, agricultural development over this period has largely been government-driven through many policies and programmes that have not yet achieved the desired aims. Despite the many government interventions, the growth of human development indicators in Nigeria are lower than others in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>13</sup> and the GDP has remained below

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<sup>10</sup> Abhijeet Benerjee and Duflo, Esther (2011). *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the way to fight Global Poverty*. Public Affairs™. New York. ISBN 978-1-58648-798-0

<sup>11</sup> Femi Asu (2014). *Nigeria Emerges Biggest Importer of Kerosene From US* URL: <http://businessdayonline.com/2014/05/nigeria-emerges-biggest-importer-of-kerosene-from-us/#.U-FedkBiI8k> [Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2014]

<sup>12</sup> Agbamu U. J. (2006). *Essentials of Agricultural communications in Nigeria*. Ibadan. L.K Opeke. (2006). *Essentials of crop farming*

<sup>13</sup> Bassey Udoh (2013) *Nigeria's human development index growth not as high as others in sub-Saharan Africa- UNDP*. URL: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/124844-nigerias-human-development-index-growth-not-as-high-as-others-in-sub-saharan-africa-undp.html> [Accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2014]

2010 level and is forecasted to remain so through to the half of this decade<sup>14</sup>.

This era of Nigeria's history witnessed a plethora of agricultural policies and programmes which according to Iwuchukwu and Igbokwe (2012)<sup>14</sup> had no direct follow up with respect to the adequate framework needed to implement the policies designed. As expected these programmes and policies were designed by the Federal government for implementation at the rural level. Some of these agricultural programmes include: National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) 1972, Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) 1974 and 1989, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) 1976, and Green Revolution (GR) 1980. Others include the Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) 1986, Better Life Programme (BLP) For Rural Women 1987, National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) 1992, National Fadama Development Project (NFDP-1) 1990s, National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS) 2002, and Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) 2003.

**Fig 1: Table showing trend of food imports into Nigeria from 1962 - 2011**

Year	1962	1964	1966	1968	1970	1972	1974	1976	1978	1981	1984	1986	1996	1998	2000	2002	2006	2011
Food import (%)	14.13	9.24	11.02	8.10	8.24	10.14	9.53	10.11	14.13	15.54	21.29	15.77	17.51	19.60	19.92	19.58	17.95	30.56

Source: World Bank staff estimates from the Comtrade database maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division URL : <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/nigeria/food-imports>

These programmes had representation in all the 36 states of the Federation and sometimes in fewer states depending on their nature<sup>15a</sup>. Fig 1 attests to the fact that food importation into Nigeria has been on the rise since 1970 despite all the agricultural programmes established by the Federal government and came to an all high level of 30.56% in 2011<sup>15b</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> The World Bank (2014). *Sub-Saharan Africa*. URL: [http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects/regional-outlooks/ssa#grid-15-par\\_tabctrl-0-1](http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects/regional-outlooks/ssa#grid-15-par_tabctrl-0-1) [Accessed: 23rd March, 2014]



To a large extent however, these programmes are considered to have failed. Basil and Nwankwo (2010) for instance discovered that the more efforts the government claims to make on rural development, the worse the level of poverty in the rural areas turns out to be<sup>15c</sup>. Rural Nigerians have particularly remained poor, with the lowest standards of living in the country. Many scholars have tried to understand the reasons behind the failure of government-driven rural agricultural development and their findings in general suggest that the inherent corruption in the government coupled with inefficiency of the top-bottom approach to development had been the key constraints to the progress of rural farmers.

Okafor (2003)<sup>16</sup> for instance associated the failure of these programmes with lack of sustainability arising from the abandonment of programmes across successive regimes, lack of total commitment from the government on the programme, the top-down approach to project formulation, with little or no involvement of the Non-Governmental Organizations or other parties concerned in the development projects. Olatunji (2005)<sup>17</sup> on the other hand believes that the non-interaction between and among stakeholders, short duration of agricultural policies and programmes and lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation of programmes/projects have been key barriers to the progress of the programmes and policies of the government.

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<sup>15a</sup> Stephen O and Basil C. N (2010). Analysis and Critical Review of Rural Development Efforts in Nigeria, 1960-2010. *Studies in Sociology of Science*. Vol. 3, No. 3, 2012, pp. 48-56. DOI:10.3968/j.sss.1923018420120303.1933

<sup>15b</sup> <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/nigeria/food-imports> [ Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2014]

<sup>15c</sup> Iwuchukwu J .C. and Igbokwe E.M. (2012). ***Lessons from Agricultural Policies and Programmes in Nigeria***. Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization www.iiste.org. ISSN 2224-3240 (Paper) ISSN 2224-3259 (Online) Vol 5, 2012

<sup>16</sup> Okafor, A.O. (2003). Roles, Strategies and Instrument for Government and Public Bodies. Paper presented at the Second Regional International Conference of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Yaounde, Cameroon, 14<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> July 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Olatunji, S.O. (2005). Monitoring And Evaluation of Agricultural Extension Programmes. In ; Nwachukwu.I.and Onuekwusi G. (eds.) *Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology*. Enugu: Snap press Ltd. 287-306.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Nigeria as a nation has been through so many phases of agricultural development from the pre-colonial era, through to the post colonial era. The growth and subsequent down fall of the agricultural sector in Nigeria is of tremendous interest and the decision the nation takes from here on would be a determinant to the development and prosperity of the nation. Agriculture is undoubtedly a treasure that should be protected and revered in the nation considering how it thrived in times past.

Squaring in experiences from the precolonial era, the lessons learnt from the failures of development programmes, particularly the low level of involvement of the people and top-down approach to development, it is concluded that the precolonial development strategy appeared to have been the most effective. With a re-fashion to take cognisance of global development trends and challenges, it is strongly believed that the precolonial, people-driven development strategy will put the people in the driver's seat and adequately encourage the requisite level of entrepreneurship needed to empower the rural agricultural industry. The role of the government must only be supportive and not ultimately determinant of how farmers go about their own activities and lives.

Economists have researched and have theorized without a shadow of doubt that agriculture is the best tool implementable to reduce poverty and induce economic development in the country as historical research has shown that every time poverty rates reduced in a country, it had more to do with agricultural increase than anything else. It is in this light we propose a paradigm shift from the usual top-bottom approach of implementing agricultural policies and programmes which is more of elites participation rather than the rural farmers. Afterall, it is said that he who wears the shoes knows where it pinches.

It is recommended that researchers and development stakeholders work to carefully redevelop and implement this approach, with full involvement of the local people. The people's contributions will serve as a motivating factor for them to see to the complete success of the programme. The factor is that the local people know and understand their environment and conditions better than the policy formulators and decision makers who operate from outside.

It is also recommended that the local, state and federal governments should support the conception, development and implementation of this strategy. It is equally important that the government does not politicize the new strategy, which will only stifle entrepreneurship and subvert the strategy from achieving its age-old objectives.