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## MAXIMIZING ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF RURAL LANDS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: THE VISION 20:2020 PERSPECTIVE

**Falana, F. Florence**  
*Department of Estate Management*  
*Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State*  
*E-mail: florencefalana@yahoo.com*

### ABSTRACT

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This paper highlights the need for development of appropriate, (harmonized) policy intervention strategies towards meeting food and raw materials requirements by maximizing rural land resources to reduce poverty. This involves practical and profit oriented agricultural practices as well as the possibility to enhance regeneration of plantation agriculture and active involvement of youths by making farming an attractive venture. The aim of this paper is to identify strategies to support and regulate agriculture in order to promote employment, productivity, income to the poor at the same time ensure a safe, healthy and socially acceptable rural environment. The paper explains how other sectors (formal and informal) have affected agriculture since oil discovery, the effect to which government policies and programs have facilitated or hampered agricultural sector with emphasis on contemporary challenges of agriculture from "Oil Boom period of 1970s" to the economic crises and adjustments of the 1980 and 1990 which weakened agricultural practices and blurred the prospect of agriculture. This article suggests as a conclusion that what is needed is not less government deregulation of economic activities but rather a more enlightened, more participatory and more equitable form of state intervention that will bring about good governance, poverty reduction and economic recovery in Nigeria.

**Key word:** *Rural Land, Sustainable Agriculture, Poverty Reduction. Economic Recovery.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is no important question before us today than that of sustainable agriculture and agricultural production to cater for the ever increasing world population. John Stuart Mills, the celebrated English philosopher comments on agriculture and remark that "the society can feed the necessitous if it takes its population into consideration, he cannot with impunity take feeding upon himself while living the multiplying free". Today over five billion people are living in the world and agricultural production has suffered a serious setback that unless a radical solution are introduced, the world in future will suffer severe malnutrition (Olatunji & Akintan 2007).

### VISION 20:2020

According to Nigeria Vision 2020 (2008), the National Council on Vision 2020 (NCV2020) is the apex body of the operational and institutional arrangements for Nigeria's Vision 2020 with the Nigerian President and Commander-in-Chief as the Chairman. Its role is to provide leadership and direction to galvanize the nation through a bottom-up strategic planning involving all stakeholders. Other terms of reference for the NCV2020 have been clearly spelt out to include approving the core national priorities to guide the process; ensuring the quality of plan document, appropriateness of targets and practicality of strategies; review of progress and giving further direction; ensuring the active

involvement of all stakeholders in the visioning process; approving the framework for resource mobilization from private and other stakeholders; approving a comprehensive planning framework for annual budgets and medium-term plans and issuing of any other directives considered desirable by the council. According to Onyenekenwa (2011), the National Steering Committee on Vision 2020 (NSC2020) which is the engine for the visioning process is headed by the Honourable Minister/Deputy Chairman of the National Planning Commission as the Chairman. Its terms of reference have been marshalled out as developing methodology and guidelines for all MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies), private sector and other stakeholders to facilitate the Vision; proposing a comprehensive plan; proposing appropriate goals, targets and strategies; identifying and recommending overall national goals and priorities; guiding and assisting all States and MDAs; arranging nationwide dissemination of programme for widest buy-in by stakeholders; developing a template for the preparation of a result-oriented communication strategy and monitoring of annual progress at national, MDAs and State levels; undertaking comparative studies of best practices; examining the linkages among perspective plan, medium-term plan and annual budget; recommending an inclusive monitoring and evaluation (M and E) mechanism; commissioning in-depth research; undertaking any other assignments from NCV2020 and making any other recommendations (Nigeria Vision2020,2008).

## **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**

Nigeria is endowed with good arable land suited for multifarious agricultural production encompassing crop production, livestock, forestry, wildlife and fisheries which are mainly the fields of primary production. According to Larkin (1980) our land that we inherit from our fathers to give to our children should sustain us and we owe a duty to conserve it. Based on the above focus and Nigeria vision 20:2020, our rural land should be used in such a way to benefit us and to be self-reliant in food and raw material production with less dependence on importation.

According to Iwena, (2008), agriculture is the deliberate effort made by man to till soil, cultivate crops and rear animals for food and other purposes. Sustainable agriculture is the practice in such a way that little or no damage is done to land and putting the future generations to consideration. Sustainable agriculture is farming activity which entails the production of crops for sales rather than consumption alone. This involves large scale farm units that the capital needed for their implementation is huge, planting, maintenance and harvesting of crops are usually mechanized and farmer are able to attract and employ skilled labour (Afolabi, 2005) The farm are large and compact, land is also used with little or no adverse damage to the soil.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Many problems confront the agricultural sector especially in Nigeria. This include poor land tenure, poor technology that is applied in most cases, weather fluctuations (i.e drought and flood), problem of storage facilities, poor soil fertility, shortage of skilled man power, inadequate capital, poor transport facilities, low yield, long maturing and non disease resistance varieties and illiteracy among others. These problems are not peculiar to Nigeria alone neither are they insurmountable.

In the World Bank's classification system, 206 economies (each with at least 30,000 population) are ranked by their levels of Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. By the 2003 classification, 59 nations or 28.6% (including Nigeria) are low-income countries (LICs) with GNI of \$765 or less; 57 nations (27.7%) are low middle-income countries (LMCs) with GNI of between \$766 and \$3,035; thirty-five nations (17.0%) are upper middle-income countries (UMCs) with GNI of between \$3,036; AND \$9,385; thirty-five nations (17.0) are Other high-income countries with GNI of \$9,386 or more and 24 nations (11.7%) constitute the High-income OECD countries. Accordingly, nation broadly divided into 2 groups: the developing countries formed by LICs, LMCS and UMCs and the other high-income countries and the developed countries (High-income OECD countries) (Todaro and Smith, 2002; African Development Bank, 2007).

The Other high-income countries are developing countries with one or two highly developed export sectors that enable them earn GNI of \$9,386 or more (like the developed countries), but in which significant parts of the population remain relatively uneducated or in poor health for the country's income level. Examples include the petroleum oil exporters, such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The upper middle-income economies also include some tourism-dependent islands with lingering development problems. Some upper middle-income countries are designated newly industrialized countries for having achieved relatively advanced manufacturing sectors. Also, a few of the high-income OECD member countries, notably Portugal and Greece, are viewed as developing countries at least until recently. Another way to classify the nations of the developing world is through their degree of international indebtedness. Thus, the World Bank classifies countries as severely indebted, moderately indebted and less indebted. Also, the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) classifies countries according to their level of human development, including health and education attainments. As at 2007/2008, Nigeria was rated 158th out of 175 United Nations member countries using the UNDP human development rating (Todaro and Smith, 2002 and UNDP, 2007).

The developing world is made up of sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, Asia (except Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean and the transition countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (including the former Soviet Union). In contrast, the developed world constitutes the core of the high-income OECD nations and is comprised of countries of Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand (Todaro and Smith, 2002). Most developing nations share a set of well-defined goals. These include a reduction in poverty and unemployment; the provision of minimum levels of education, health, housing and food to every citizen; the broadening of social and economic opportunities and the forging of a cohesive nation state. Related to these economic, social and political goals are the common development challenges shared in varying degrees by most developing countries: widespread and chronic absolute poverty, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, wide and growing disparities in the distribution of income, low level of agricultural productivity, sizeable and growing imbalances between urban and rural levels of living and economic opportunities, serious and worsening environmental decay, antiquated and inappropriate educational and health system, severe balance of payments and international debt problems and substantial and increasing dependence on foreign technologies, institutions and value systems (Todaro

and Smith, 2007). Absolute poverty – not relative poverty – is more important in assessing developing economies. Absolute poverty is measured not only by low income, but also by malnutrition, poor health, clothing, shelter and lack of education. Thus, absolute poverty is reflected in the low living standards of the people in developing countries. In such countries, food is the major item of consumption. About 80% of the income is spent on food, as compared with 20% in advanced countries. People mostly take cereals and other starches to the total absence of nutritional foods, such as meat, eggs, fish and dairy products. For instance, the per capital consumption of protein in LICs is 52 grammes per day, as compared with 105 grammes in developed countries. The per capita fat consumption in LICs is 83grammes daily, as against 133 grammes in developed countries. As a result, the average daily calorie intake per capita hardly exceeds 2,000 in underdeveloped countries, as compared with more than 3,300 to be found in the diets of the people of advanced countries (Jhingan, 2007)

### **IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture is so importance that even at creation, the first man created was a farmer. According to the Holy Bible, God took the man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order. In this millennium, the importance of agriculture cannot be over emphasized. To achieve the vision 20:2020, agriculture will have to play a pivotal role. Agriculture is important for the following reasons: provision of food, raw Material, provision of employment, foreign reserve earning.

#### **Food**

Man started his search for food as gatherer of fruit, as population increases, settlement was established and man started planting his food-No meaningful development can be achieved by hungry man “A hungry man is an angry man” an angry man cannot think straight, talk less of inventing something for the growth of humanity. According to Afolabi Op cit (2005), there are two types of food: Metabolic food and cultural food. Metabolic foods are meant for the growth and renewal of human body. It includes protein, fat, carbohydrates and vitamins. The nutritional requirements vary from person to person depending on age and nature of activities undertaken. Cultural foods are determined by the background one finds himself, these include dog’s meat, kola, tobacco, lizard and others which some people relish while others preclude. Be it as it may, all these important food take their source from land (terrestrial agriculture).

#### **Raw Material**

Agriculture and forest resources provide our necessary raw materials for houses and ship construction, health/medicine, clothing, books. The above are very important for nation development and less dependence for export products.

#### **Employment**

Agriculture provide source of both skilled and unskilled labour. Planters, harvesters, harrowers, cleaners and processors are needed in agricultural sector. Each category of stages mention above needs both skilled and unskilled personnel. Agriculture can absorb good percentage of population and increase per capital income of individual.

### **Foreign Reserve Earning**

Agricultural products such as cocoa, groundnut, coffee, rubber, soya, beni seed are of high demand internationally. Improvement in the production of these for exportation and local processing to finished products will reduce our dependence on importation, boost our export and increase Nigeria external reserve.

### **PAST NIGERIA AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES SINCE 1950**

Nigeria has made agriculture a priority sector for development. These were large scale cultivation of crops to supply new domestic agricultural produce processing industries with raw materials as well as to produce for export. All along, this sector has experienced a number of failure in government development efforts. To correct the traditional techniques of agriculture believed to be decided by rural poverty and low productivity, programmes designed by the government include Farm Settlement Scheme, the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the River Basin, under Integrated Rural Development Project, the Green Revolution, Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure, the Agricultural Development Programme.

#### **The Farm Settlement**

This programme initiated in 1950 and designed to create productive employment for young school leavers who were expected to take farming as a profession that is honourable and rewarding. The youth were given two years training in modern techniques of farming management. They were each allotted a piece of farmland ranges from 25 -70 acres on which to settle permanently. The settlements were provided central pool of modern agricultural implements, credit facilities, high quality seeds and other inputs. The programme was to aim at solving the problem of rural urban migration and serve as demonstration centres of new models of production to peasant farmers around the settlement. The scheme though laudable failed to achieve the set goal, and objectives as most settlers deserted due to reasons ranging from inadequate return on their efforts and investment, indebtedness to the government, small farm size which does not justify the use of modern farm techniques, inability to pay for infrastructure, and inadequate funding thereby leading to the abandonment of the scheme in 1966.

#### **The Integrated Rural/Agricultural Development Project**

In 1972, the Federal Government came up with the programme aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and transforming the sector. New technology and intensive project management were the focus. The programme was World Bank assisted and financed by State and Federal Governments with the sole aim of bringing an end to rural poverty life. Improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides were provided. In March 1984, the Federal Government restructured the basin authorities. Out of a total of 2.28 billion dollars received from the World Bank between 1964 and 1983, 1.1 billion dollars was spent on agriculture but the programme suffered from improper financial management, shortage of man power and machinery.

#### **Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)**

The Federal Government made a giant leap to curtail the rising food prices between 1976 and 1979. The programme was aimed to promote self reliance in food production, labour was mobilized with provision of fertilizer, seeds, pesticides and fishing materials.

Although it was analyzed and showed that amount spent on food importation was growing exponentially.

Table I: Amount spent on food importation from 1970 to 1980

Year	₦
1970	88.0 Million
1975	330.0 Million
1976	450.0 Million
1980	1.1 Billion

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance, (1980)

The programme failed because they claimed "it was a hurried political initiative by military regime with no solid foundation but to please student and urban group. Out of a total of N9.5 million committed to the programme, N6.5 million went for students' wages.

### **Green Revolution**

Green revolution was first used in Mexico in 1943 by Rockefeller Foundation in the finance of introduction of new maize and wheat seeds in large farms with the assistance of American plant scientists. It was also used in Philippines, India, Pakistan and Turkey. In 1980, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched Green Revaluation with partial finance from the World Bank. It was aimed at National Accelerated Food Production Programme (N.A.F.P.P.), large scale irrigation schemes, grain production, foreign investors and integrated rural development. Like the previous programmes, it created absentee farmers because the beneficiaries of the loan were predominantly businessmen, civil servants and politicians who diverted the loan to other ventures. All these programmes are aimed at reducing the poverty level of rural area.

Table II: Trends in poverty level by zone 1980 – 2004

Zone	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
South-South	13.2	45.7	45.7	58.2	35.1
South-East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
South West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
N/Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
North East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
North West	37.7	52.7	36.5	77.2	71.1

Source: Soludo (2007)

### **THE SETBACK**

Between 1963 and 1968, Nigeria's highest foreign exchange earner was agricultural sector. The discovery of crude oil in Nigeria dealt a deadly blow on Agricultural sector. Due to lack of incentives to practicing farmers and the state of their poverty, farmer encouraged their children to go to school thereby leaving Agricultural Sector to the aged. White Collar job replaced blue collar and oil boom push the youths from rural areas to a more urban area to enjoy better parts of life.

Table III: Out-put of Principal Agricultural Commodities 1000 ton

Year	Cocoa	Cotton	Groundnut	Palm Kernel	Palm Oil
1970	305	358	1581	315	488
1975	216	313	449	295	300
1980	153	77	674	279	650
1985	160	114	621	360	615
1986	100	100	640	350	650
1987	105	80	696	353	680
1988	230	194	686	545	700
1989	256	185	815	600	70

Source: The Nigerian Economist Vol. 4, No 16, 1991

Other formal sectors and informal sectors in the urban area absorbed the teeming youths populations and finished products were freely imported. The few farmers were abandoned by Government were wallowing in poverty to the extent that nobody wishes to practice agriculture. The marketing Board Policy of 1960 – 1977 made all exportable agricultural products to be purchased by the government at prices far lower than the world prices.

The Austerity Measure and the Structural Adjustment Programme period of 1986 – 1993 including trade liberalization enhanced export prices part due to the devaluation of Naira. The percentage of people engaged in agriculture has drastically reduced, no new plantation was cultivated. The groundnut pyramid was gone, the cocoa store were partially opened. In 1993 – 1995 the production of groundnut, cocoa, rubber, palm has gradually reduced. Low-input agricultural system on poor moderately fertile soils led to loss of topsoil, terrain deformation, loss/excess nutrients, acidification and soil compaction and pesticide residue. Prices of fertilizer, pesticides and labour increased.

Table IV: Agric Export and Labour % vis-à-vis other sectors

Year	Export %	Employment
1970	70	75
1975	6.4	64
1980	3.7	60
1985	2.3	58
1990	2.2	56
1995	1.6	55
1996	1.3	54
1997	1.6	55
1998	-	53
1999	-	52

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, 2000

## WAY FORWARD

For agricultural sector to regain its lost glory, the following workable suggestions are made:

1. It is advocated that a strong political will for the revival of the agricultural sector is necessary to bring Nigeria back to its position as an agriculturally vibrant nation as at

the days we had the Kano Groundnut Pyramid, Ibadan Cocoa House, Rinso Palm in Port-Harcourt, Rubber in Edo and Cotton Production;

2. Other suggestions for sustainable agriculture include farm mechanization, irrigation facilities, storage facilities for perishable farm produce, the use of eco-friendly fertilizers, herbicide, and pesticide;
3. Introduction of disease resistant variety of crops and livestock, early ripening varieties of plants, and high yielding (VHY) genetic strains of crops, livestock, poultry and fisheries will be a welcome development;
4. Credit facilities should be made available to practicing farmers and these should be monitored to ensure it reaches the farmers;
5. Export promotion for agricultural and agro-allied products to encourage farming business;
6. Active involvement of the private sector in the production and processing of agro-based products as fruit processing, beverages and diary;
7. Provision of infrastructure in form of rural electrification, roads, transportation facilities, water and agricultural extension services for rural framers;
8. Encouraging the youths to take to farming as a viable occupation with international trade benefits attached; and
9. Small margin between the produce prices of exportable crop and world prices to enable farmer benefit from international trade.

## **CONCLUSION**

The above way forward are pivotal to sustainable agricultural; practice that will maximize economic benefits of our rural land. Any nation that is aspiring to bring economic recovery and self reliant should imbibe the above way forward.

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