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Innovative Strategies toward Nigeria Growth and Development: Agricultural Perspectives

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Abstract: This paper advocates that the agricultural sector provides a veritable solution for Nigerian growth and development. It presents some of the key innovative strategies for Nigeria, namely; Extensive Learning Process from other Country's strategies; Pragmatic Input Supply Strategy; Extensive Deployment of Research in Agriculture and Extension; Extensive Use of Strategic Grains Reserves (SGRs); Massive Crop Adoption and Production Strategy; Value Chain Addition to Agricultural Process/Products/Commodities; Promotion of Gender Equality in Agriculture. Others include Extensive Deployment and Employment of Youth in Agriculture; Policy Formulation and Consistency in Agriculture; Adoption, Application of Agricultural Technologies and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); and Provision of security for farming and farmers. It is envisaged that good combination of these innovative strategies would serve as catalysts for propelling Nigeria from recession and propelling her into agricultural revolution and ultimately economic diversification.

Keywords: Agriculture, Development, Extension, ICT, adoption, Invention, Recession, Diversification.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa, with highly diversified agro-ecological condition (Okoye & Ademede, 2016). The country is endowed with abundance of many resources which serves as prospects for production of a wide range of agricultural products. However, most of the available resources are unexploited and are being wasted (Mesagan & Adenuga, 2019). Some of these resources include the sun, the air/the wind, the ecology, the land, the manpower/population, capital, and other natural resources, just to mention a few. The foregoing statistics raised reasons to call for national re-awakening. In this connection, we intend to highlight those areas in agriculture which Nigeria should focus on as catalysts for transformation of our fortunes, realizing economic development and emerging from the current economic predicaments and hardships.

Some of these strategies cum approaches are discussed as follows:

Extensive Learning Process from Good Examples of Countries that are Developed or Developing

Several countries (both in advanced and developed parts of the world) could serve as good examples and impetus for Nigerian growth, including USA, China, Russia, China, India, Taiwan, Brazil, and Malaysia. These countries have variously demonstrated

outstanding production of agricultural produce/product like; rice, maize, sorghum, palm oil, fish, poultry, livestock and dairy, etc. Their agricultural output has made them to be relatively food secured and earners of huge foreign exchange due to exportation of their produce/products. The methods and techniques these countries have employed to enhance their agricultural production should be explored by Nigeria Government and agricultural research institutions. The capacity building of farmers in these area of crop production could salvage her economy in a time like this.

Massive Crop Adoption and Production Strategy

It is high time Nigeria engage in massive adoption of crop production strategies, especially in parts of Nigeria with comparative advantage in huge production of commodities such as cotton, rice, cocoa, cassava, soyabean, Gum Arabic, sesame, cowpea, sugarcane, yam, sorghum, maize, ginger, benniseed, tomato, onion, rubber, poultry, cattle, pigs, fish and aqua-culture. In this connection, the states in Nigeria with high capacities for production of these crops (both for domestic consumption and export), should be identified, selected and encouraged through an intensive training on technical know-how.

For example, about 24 States of the Federation including Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto,

Yobe and Zamfara produce cotton abundantly (NAERLS, 2013). The adoption of the improved crop production strategies will propel her to be able to export and earn foreign exchange through massive production of various crops and livestock. Ultimately, the country's currency (Naira) will be strong enough to regain strength over international currencies, especially US Dollars.

Expansive Value Chain Addition to Agricultural Process/ Products/Commodities

An expansive value addition of Agricultural products is very essential to take advantage of their economic value. For example, records have it that Nigeria is a leading country producing cassava above other countries like Thailand, Brazil and Indonesia. Yet, these countries have become leaders in the export of cassava products due to value additions and marketing strategies employed by them (Export Magazine, 2015) while more than 90% of the cassava produced in Nigeria is only consumed locally (Ikuemonisan *et al.*, 2020). It is high time Nigeria learn and adopt the approach/strategies these countries have deployed. Also, there is need to disembark from the traditional approach (which involve mainly supply driven push) and embrace a market-oriented mechanism to be introduced into the production process, taking into cognizance the process of storage, processing, sale and marketing, and possibly manufacturing of the products. Thus, because of this improvement, they would be eventually turned into marketable products.

Pragmatic Input Supply Strategy

A nation that waits for delivery of essential farming inputs at the middle of the farming season or end of it, is certainly NOT ready for an accelerated food production. Thus, more plans, policies and initiatives should be geared towards making farming inputs readily and affordably made available to farmers ahead of the time they are needed. Inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, tractors, planters etc should be readily made accessible to farmers. This will ensure an adequate preparation and provision for the needs of farmers and farming season for smooth production and realization of abundant quality produce/yield.

Extensive Deployment of Research in both Agricultural Production and Extension

It is an understatement to state that most research and studies undertaken in many of her higher institutions and research centers usually end up in the libraries and are kept in the archives. Efforts should be made to turn research that are noteworthy into productive ventures or celebrated.

Articulately, empirical research are designed to find solution to life circumstances, and observed problem(s). In advanced countries, research are funded by organizations in order to solve problems or improve on existing practice(s) with a view to helping

themselves and the society. Thus, this is a culture we should imbibe henceforth if we truly must emerge from the excruciating economic quagmire, we have found ourselves. ADPs need to be rejuvenated and reactivated. Similarly, the World Bank Training and Visit (T&V) approach to extension activities and delivery as encapsulated by Benor and Baxter (1984) should be revisited and revived.

Extensive Utilization of Strategic Grains Reserves (SGRs)

Records (NAERLS, 2013), has it that Nigerian Strategic Grains Reserves (SGRs) was only able to store, at least 5% of total food grains produced in 2012/2013 farming season. Indeed, prior this, the reserves has provided food intervention during the flood of 2012 and has been a kind of last resort to food chain supply in times of food shortage. Of recent however, there are indications that the grain reserves have gone into "comatose" in various parts of the country. This trend is unfortunate and should be reversed. Consequently, we should engage in massive storage of grains during bumper harvests to cater for time of scarcity and possible famine. Appeal is hereby made to Government to endeavor to reactivate, mobilize and utilize extensively the 32 silos locations across the country.

Extensive Deployment and Employment of Youth in Agriculture

The Guardian publication on 24th March 2022 shows 40% of the nation are unemployed with Nigeria ranked second on the global list of countries unemployment rate. The youths are faced with the high degrees of unemployment. In fact, a preponderance of the army of our unemployed youth succumb, out of frustration, to receiving so-called meager salaries as low as Eight thousand Naira (₦8,000.00) whereas the national minimum wage is Eighteen thousand Naira only (₦18,000.00) which was reviewed upward to ₦30,000.00 in April, 2019.

Consequently, these youth are involved in many of the social malaise like; gangsterism, occult practice, pickpocketing, armed robbery, banditry, insurgencies, kidnapping, sex-slavery, political vendetta, hooliganism, etc. An adage says: "An idle hand is the Devil's workshop". This is pathetic and dangerous for our society.

Hence, it is advocated that agricultural sector should be a medium of reducing the unemployment rate of youths. Therefore, youth empowerment directed toward agricultural production and sustenance should be embraced and championed by all tiers of our Government (Federal, State and Local). Interestingly, we note that the Buhari/Osinbanjo Administration is employing about 200,000 youths annually, in her current N-POWER Programme to be engaged in

extension activities. This development should be scaled-up at State levels, sustained and well-funded.

Promotion of Gender Equality in Agriculture

There has been a misconception for many decades that men are more actively engaged in production of crops than women while women merely play supportive role in harvesting, processing and storage. This idea is old, archaic, anti-progressive, gender bias and mediocre. Empirical studies have shown the contrary i.e. women are also actively engaged in crop production like men (Uzokwe *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it should be impressed on appropriate quarters and avenue that both male and female are needed, required and useful in the production of commodities in agriculture. To this end equal opportunities should be given to them as drivers of agricultural business, farming and entrepreneurs. Access to such facilities as loans and farm inputs should be equally distributed or allocated as the case may be. After all, we say: "Whatever is good for goose is good for gander".

Adoption, Application and Invention of Information and Communication Technologies/Agricultural Technologies

From many indications, we are now in a world driven largely by the instrumentality of technologies of various dimensions. For hard times like this, Nigeria should be able to adopt agricultural technologies aimed at realizing massive agricultural production. These technologies should include, but not limited to; cultivation, clearing, rigging, planting, weeding, maintenance, harvesting, processing, storage etc.

International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan has developed her cream trainees on dispensing and active cultivation, without traditional hoes and cutlasses, from cultivation to harvest, using only technologies. For long, Japan and Israel have developed the use of hydrophic techniques in producing some crops which we can also adopt as a country. More so, the use of smart agriculture and climate change is becoming an upcoming adoption for agricultural production and upscaling.

Furthermore, some arrays of available Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) relevant for agricultural practice and related productive ventures should be made available, introduced and applied by all stakeholders in agricultural research, extension and production.

A case in point is the introduction of E-Wallet System of GES (Growth Enhancement Support Scheme) under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) by the former administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. The E-Wallet provided a platform for purchase and distribution of inputs among farmers seamlessly, and recorded successes in 2012-2014. This

laudable approach should be revisited, continued and improved upon for the benefits of our teeming enterprising farmers.

According to the then Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Adewunmi Adesina, (Spore, 2015), the impact of E-Wallet on Nigeria's agricultural sector was;

"Since 2011, we have reached about 20 million small-holder farmers. Fertilizer companies have sold E100 million and seed companies E10 million to agro-dealers and the default rate has been 0%".

This is impressive and remarkable and obviously from most indications, it should be revisited for future performance and practice.

Policy formulation and Consistency in Agriculture

Policy summersault, inconsistency and changes has been attributed to the bane of our development. This has been facilitated mostly and usually by the changes in administration/Government; as each Government tries to play to the gallery, seeking for the attention and approval of the people. The effect is the jettisoning of probably well-conceived policy almost reaching its fully realization. We, therefore, contend that an appropriate mechanism be put in place such that good policies are sustained, continued and improved upon.

Furthermore, the price control on agricultural commodities can hardly work nor actualize food security/sufficiency. The current Government attempted this late last year, but the result is not visible. Hence, in the interim, we advise that supply should be in abundance to drive down inflation correspondingly. The supply chain should be boosted pro-actively.

Provision of Security for Farming and Farmers

Apart from the recurring farmers-harders crisis, the spate of insecurity in Nigeria is alarming. Banditry, kidnapping, killings and stealing of farm produce is at alarming rate. Hence, this has left farmers reducing or abandoning agricultural production. In order to assuage farmers plight, the Government should deploy the arsenal of security architecture at her disposal adequately to tame the perpetrators so as to allow Nigerians carry out their agricultural activities without hindrance.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing innovative strategies could be embraced at individual (micro level) or at collective (macro level) to achieve the desired goals of accelerated food production, economic revival, emergence from recession and ultimately contribute to diversification of the economy of Nigeria. A nation that cannot feed itself is not secured and therefore is vulnerable to all vagaries of internal and external

shocks, pressures and insecurities. This, from all indications, must be avoided like a plague.

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