FOOD PRODUCTION, HUNGER AND POVERTY OF PUBLIC POLICY IN NIGERIA: A POLITICAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Food production, hunger are two alien concepts in pre-colonial Nigerian communities. This paper establishes the theoretical nexus between hunger, agricultural practices and policies. The colonial era recorded a successful story in cash crops production. The post colonial Nigeria had a negative story to tell. This paper therefore examines the agricultural policies of Nigerian government, the character of the neo-colonial politics in Nigeria and concluded that decline in food production, hunger and retrogressing agricultural practices in Nigeria have been enabled by bad public policy. This work articulates the problems within the context of political economy.

Keywords - Food Production, Hunger, Poverty, Public Policy

Introduction

The National bourgeoisie which takes power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped bourgeoisie with practically no economic power … not oriented towards production, invention, construction, work … Despite declarations which are fine in form, but empty in content, it is proving its incapacity to make a minimum humanist ideal triumph (Fanon, Franz, 1965).

The problems of food production and hunger in Africa have been seen essentially to be a colonial creation. (Swendhen:1972, Eirikhaneh:1975, Hughor:1999, Brendhem: 2004 and more recently Stranseer: 2004). The post-colonial Africa appears to have offered no revolutionary policy alternative neither has there been empirically thorough process of re-enacting the African subsistence past in food production within the context of availability and surplus (Konsachi :1996, Wallace:2004, Hardler, 2009, Herikel: 2010).

A quarter of a century after independence, few would dispute that African industrial sector is in crisis. It appears that no African country has been spared. In 1985, a survey of “343 factories in over 16 countries, spanning sectors as diverse as beverages, textiles, pulp and paper, flour milling, sugar refining and cement, 23 percent of the companies were found to have ceased production and a further 57 percent were functioning at less than 70 percent of nominal capacity – well below their break-even point (Lynn, 1989:79). The post 1990’s and recently published 2010 situation gives a gory picture of future uncertainty (Lewis, 2011:17). This picture of steady decay partly explains why a formerly sufficient continent in food production now imports almost all its food to prevent starvation. Nigeria is not excluded from this general picture of backwardness, policy somersault and steady decay in food production and industrialization. The only seeming lucrative enterprise appears to be “the kingdom of God industry” with non taxable billions of naira and churches built on former agricultural lands(empirical observation).

This paper examines how agricultural policy in Nigeria impacted not only on the general economy but how it encourages hunger and poverty. It critically examines the philosophy of food production policy and principles of the government of Nigeria and amplifies reasons for the lack of alternative . This work is however divided into five parts. The first is the introduction while the second aspect examines agricultural and food production policy in Nigeria.
policy within the context of survival and development. The fourth is the conclusion while the fifth aspect contains the bibliography.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION POLICY IN NIGERIA

In the black world, agricultural practices and food production are inseparable concepts. The rural Nigeria where the largest percentage of her population resides has agriculture as its only economic mainstay. Thus, in Nigeria, agrarian sector has a strong rural base; hence agricultural practices and rural development becomes intertwined. That agriculture contributes greatly to the Nigerian economy in various ways is a settled debate; it is a source of food for the increasing population, source of raw materials; a major source of employment; source of foreign exchange generation (Okumadewa, 1997:11; World Bank, 1998:18, FAO, 2006:18).

Agricultural economy was the basic economic features of the pre-colonial Nigeria’s pre-colonial kingdoms, chiefdoms and empires. The long and short distance traders trade substantially in agricultural produces even across the trans-Saharan trade routes. The colonial Nigeria could pride itself of sustainable local food production which was essentially subsistence alongside the cash crop production for the imperial masters. The fundamental issue here was that colonial agricultural orientation which though, in part, disarticulated and disorientated the local agricultural and food production philosophy, did not eliminate the primary objectives of food production in the colonial societies – elimination of hunger, sustenance and war against poverty.

The post colonial Nigeria appears to have different story to tell. Nigeria in fact, the greater parts of African continent import foods. The Nigeria’s experience appears worrisome. On September 17th, 2011, a governor of Osun state in the south-west of Nigeria claimed that statistics reveals that over eighty (80) percent of the foods in the state are imported. (Arebegbasa, 2011:3). The pre-colonial and colonial history of Nigeria revealed that that part of Nigeria was known for surplus agricultural and food production. That area also sustained great Yoruba empires and kingdoms. (Akinfe, 2004:18) Crisis of food scarcity and the destruction of local food production initiatives is not limited to Osun state in Nigeria but rather, a national problem which has continued to fuel the sky-rocketing inflationary problem. A country that was at a time able to point to a history of food sufficiency even in the colonial era appears to continue to pay lip services to the dreadful problems of food shortages, scarcity, hunger and neglect of agricultural practices. Food shortages and hunger cannot be a function of underdevelopment as scholars have posited (Fanu, 1998:18, Fahrer 2004:12; Oluade, 2009:12, Williams 2010:8).

Underdevelopment is not limited to Nigeria. Malaysia negotiated an enduring public development policy and solved fundamental problems of food production and agricultural backwardness (Nhejong, 2006:17).

The most difficult problem in releasing the ‘hidden productive forces’ of Nigeria is a human one. On the whole, Nigerians have been degraded by western intervention, from slavery to colonialism and its aftermath, economic exploitation. A grandiose administrative superstructure was imposed on a backward economy that could not support the weight; and a trade structure which benefits industrial countries but constrained Nigeria’s growth. The specific nature of Nigeria’s problems must be taken into account with the greatest care, even if this involves hesitations and constantly changing and evolving formulas. The Nigerian situation appears to be in the more general framework of retarded economies. This scenario underscores the retardation in agricultural practices and food production. The neo-colonial Nigerian state and its prostrate compradorial leadership have come up with peripheral policy solutions coupled with seeming visionlessness that have further worsened the food production philosophy rather than ameliorating it.

Since 1972, Nigeria state and its successive governments have come up with programmes and policies aimed at promoting agricultural practices and food production. The programmes and policies are basically infrastructural, financial and structural in orientation and texture. In 1972, National Accelerated Food Production Programmes (NAFFP) was formulated but it was largely financed by USAID (United States Agency for International Development). This also explains the possible limitation of the
In 1975, it was Agricultural Development Programme while in 1976, the country embraced Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). 1980 saw Green Revolution Programme (GRP). In 1977 to 1991, it was Rural Banking Programme (RBP). Community Banking Programmes of 1991 – 2007. Root and Tuber Expansion Programmes – (2000). Between 2000 to 2007, Nigeria also witnessed several policies aimed at addressing and resolving problems in agricultural practices and food production, e.g. Microfinance policy, Agriculture Presidential Initiative, Preferred Sector Allocation of Credit etc. The new regime of President Jonathan Goodluck is yet to come up with a clear policy position on food production and agricultural practices in Nigeria. As policies were formulated, institutions were also created for the same purposes.

In 1972, Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) was created. It was formerly known as Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB). In 1977 River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) was established with Nine RBDA.

This was part of the Third National Development Plan (1975 – 80). It all became eleven with the hitherto existing Sokoto and Rima RBDA. N32.8 billion was budgeted for this plan. This was however the first plan on rural development especially in the area of electrification, development of water resources through the creation of irrigation scheme. This was with the primary aim of encouraging an all-year-round agricultural production to solve the problems of hunger.

Within this period, precisely in 1979, National Grain Production Company was created with the sole intention of providing improved seeds as credit to the farmers. Between 1986 – 1993, Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC)(1987), The Peoples Bank (1990), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (1991) were established. DFRRI alone which its basic philosophy was food production had the development of the rural economy as secondary objective because the two ideas appear inseparable. In 1986, N43 million was budgeted and N500 million in 1987 and N1 billion in 1988 (CBN, 1992:17).

The Nigerian state and its governments recognized the fundamentals of food production and the need for agricultural practices and development. Secondly, it was obvious that policies were directed towards financing, irrigation, infrastructures, seedlings and roads.

Thirdly, institutions were also created to assist the needs for the provision of surplus food to avert poverty and hunger.

Fourthly and more critically too, the polices appear less informed relative to best agricultural policies known elsewhere e.g. Malaysia, Singapore, China, etc. Clear, no nexus between technological dash, critical research funded by the private and the public sectors and enough budgetary allocation.

To achieve these schemes, programmes and institutions, the government over the years made budgetary allocations to agriculture which when compared with the total budget, fall short of meeting policy intentions (Eze et al, 2010).

On insecurity and the lack of political will to ensure the policy success, even on the part of the policy initiators, Eze, Lemechi, Ugochukwu, Awulonu, Eze and Okon (2010) remarked that; During the first to third (1962 – 1980) development plan period, the federal government budgeted N3.57 billion but only N2.41 billion was actually released for the sector. In the first plan, 11.6 percent of the budget was allocated but only 9.8 percent was released, in the second plan, 9.9 percent was budgeted … in the third plan 7.2 percent allocation was budgeted and 7.2 of this amount were released for the period.

It is clear from the above that the allocations to the agriculture sector and food production continue to fall between the period 1962 – 1980.
Secondly, total allocations were not released and unaccounted for. This scenario partly explains the problems of hunger, poverty and food insufficiency in Nigeria. The Democratic regime between 1999 till date has not done any better. The Nigerian story today is that of importation by substitution (Lynn, K.M. 1989).

Agricultural polices in Nigeria, have largely been less holistic in its development objectives. In fact, aside from what agriculture could contribute to the Gross Domestic Product of the country, its sustaining capacity as eradicator of hunger and booster of National dignity, no serious nexus between rural and urban development programmes than self-serving image laundering dispositions. To Nigerian government, it is essentially a rural problem. The infrastructures were less intended to promote agriculture agricultural practices and resolve the problems of food scarcity and hunger This obviously explain why large chunk of the budget for agriculture was either stolen or not released. Rural development and agricultural practice sophistication are both different issues but though have point of convergence.

**Contributions of Agriculture to Gross Domestic Product 2001 – 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total GDP (N Billion)</th>
<th>Agric Share Of GDP</th>
<th>% Share of Agric in total GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>431.78</td>
<td>182.66</td>
<td>42.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>451.71</td>
<td>190.37</td>
<td>42.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>495.01</td>
<td>203.01</td>
<td>41.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>527.58</td>
<td>216.21</td>
<td>40.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>561.83</td>
<td>231.46</td>
<td>41.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>595.82</td>
<td>248.46</td>
<td>41.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>632.86</td>
<td>267.06</td>
<td>42.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** (BN Reports, 2001, 2005, 2007)

This was the only period of little respite. This however had no impact on hunger and food production which continue to worsen. The focus then was not hunger amelioration but export crops production for importation.

The institutions so created were just for the compensation of political cronies, jobless politicians and their stalwarts. Most of the institutions were baits for political patronages (Osoba, 2004:2). Over 80% of the directors and managers of those institutions are politicians who have no business in agricultural practices but see the avenues for self aggrandisement and primitive looting (Ososanya, 2008:10).

More disturbing aspect is the politics of demoralization and indignity that comes with the policies. Nigerian political Elites seldom see public policies as the harbinger of the public goods but rather as compensation for votes casted for them. The lack of relationship between intention, purpose and national goals underscores the paralyzed policies of the Nigerian government towards the agricultural sector. Modern agricultural practices have its own ‘gods’ – technology, articulated polices and service for National development.
Conclusion

In order for development goals to be achieved in Nigeria, fundamental problems of hunger, food scarcity and poverty must be addressed properly and resolved. Primarily, agricultural growth for development must be achieved (Obasi, 2001:9).

Of the 49 least developed countries of the world, Africa hosts 34. In 46 percent of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the undernourished have an average deficit of more than 300 kilocalories per person per day. Africa is also the only region of the developing world where the regional average of food production per person has been declining over the last 40 years. Food production in most of sun-Saharan Africa has not kept abreast with the population increase. In Africa as a whole, food consumption exceeded domestic production by 50 percent during the mid 1980s and more than 30 percent in the 1990s (UN Report, July, 2001).

This is a gory picture of gradual human extinction through hunger enabled by bad policies.

In Nigeria, it is a settled debate that agricultural practices and policies have been rather issue begging for a nexus. This is because the modern practices can only be embarked upon by a post colonial revolutionary government and a truly sovereign state that can engender progressive but sovereign policies for the annexation of domestic development energies backed up by policies flowing from the same basis. Agriculture and agro-allied practices remained the only visible, enduring and reliable source of Nigeria’s sustenance and in the words of Adewole, 2003:27

If a country allow such a sector to suffer, then, hunger and poverty as we are witnessing remains the only consequence of a retrogressive political economic public policy. Even, in the area of Science and Technology, the UNESCO model which limits national Science and Technology policy to Research and Development have no serious impact on agriculture and food production in Nigeria. It has also created a dualistic technological structure of equally limited usefulness and yet no serious nationalistic policy to negotiate alternative

BIBLOGRAPHY