



The Youths and Agroprenuership Development: A Public Policy Thrust for the Diversification of the Nigeria Economy through Agriculture

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Abstract: *This paper examined the possibility of diversifying the Nigerian economy through developing youth entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector. This is because Nigeria's crude oil that accounts for 80 percent of government revenue and 97 percent of her export earnings has not alleviated poverty, hunger and youth unemployment. Before now, agriculture used to be the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, accounting for 85 percent of Nigeria foreign exchange earnings and 90 percent of employment generation. Unfortunately, the unemployed Nigerian youths are not willing to venture into agriculture as entrepreneurs. This paper therefore, utilized the primary data source via a well-structured questionnaire administered on 400 randomly selected graduates on the mandatory National Youth Service in Anambra and Enugu states to elicit information on their disposition towards becoming entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector. These information were coded and analysed with STATA. The result showed that the agriculture sector in Nigeria is viable to pilot the diversification project; Nigerian youths are not venturing into the agriculture sector because of the predominantly rudimentary method of agriculture and lack of various basic incentives that make the sector unattractive; and that if the sector is made attractive with incentives such as grants, loans, training and development and enabling business environment, the Nigerian youths will explore the opportunities in the agriculture sector and with their numerical strength, energy, vigour and initiatives, the sector will be revived and the Nigeria economy will soar, while poverty, hunger and youth unemployment will be drastically reduced. This study thus, recommended more financial support to the sector; special welfare scheme for farmers and enabling environment for agro-business to thrive.*

Keywords: *Diversification project Agriculture sector, Entrepreneurship, enticing, youths*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every country dreams to have a strong, growing and sustainable economy where standard of living is admirable, jobs and wealth are created, new knowledge and technology are developed, and a stable political climate is ensured. However, this dream becomes a reality when economies are not restricted to a single sector but are based on a wide range of profitable sectors (Rabih, Chadi, Mazen, & Richard, 2008). Unfortunately, the key benefits of sustainable economy have eluded Nigeria because of her profound reliance on the oil and gas sector as the major source of revenue. As a result, even as the 6th world largest producer of oil, Nigeria is inundated with enormous developmental challenges. Regrettably, these developmental challenges may not abate anytime soon because a substantial part of the resources go on rent-seeking and red-tapism that characterized her bureaucracy and political space (Muhammed, 2014).

Globally, the success of nations like Chile, Belgium, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan is indicative of the fact that effectual management of resources can turn around the wealth status of a nation, and for countries like Nigeria who have lots of natural resources, diligent management is a prime requisite to becoming one of the wealthiest economies of the world. Belgium for example, whose natural resources is coal, is among the top 30 largest economies in the world, because of cautious allocation of resources. Countries that are not only surrounded by land but has no natural resources, but import their raw materials like Japan, South Korea, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and even Switzerland are among the economic world powers because of diligent management of the economy (Rosenberg, 2018; Edom, 2018).

Naturally, in a period of economic instability or slow growth there will be calls for diversification, and the greater the instability the louder the calls for diversification (Trevor & Robert, 2016). The recent global financial and economic crisis has revealed Africa's and Nigeria's vulnerability to external economic shock because of her dependence on single sector or exportation of raw materials without efforts to broaden the horizons of her economy, despite the fact that African countries have for decades been propagating economic diversification. In Nigeria, for instance, economic diversification features prominently in the Seven-point Agenda of the Goodluck Jonathan's Administration and the current administration of Muhammadu Buhari has not hidden its commitment to diversify the economy from oil to other sectors such as agriculture. Indeed, economic diversification holds great potential to increase Africa's chances of achieving and sustaining long term economic growth and development in the continent (OECD, 2011). For instance, Angola, in addition to oil and gas, has huge potential in the mining and timber sectors, has not achieved sustainable growth in her economy. Her initiatives to support economic diversification and improve the general business climate are often not broad-based or well co-ordinated. The revenues earned from oil and gas sales have made the state company SONANGOL the second largest company in Africa in terms of turnover and profits and it essentially acts as a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF). Yet it does not have a well-developed blueprint to guide the use of its funds for sustainable diversification of the economy. The Angola story is typical of Nigeria where the government depends on NNPC to pay worker's salary.

This lack of diligence in management of a country's resources heralds diversification of the economy. Economy diversification is therefore manifested by the availability of an established

variety in exports, production, and sources of income, in order to modify national income sources to reduce the dependence on one particular resource” (Horschig, 2016). Thus, spreading national sources of income through restructuring the economy to raise the level of contribution of the different economic sectors in the income, by building a wide base of local and exported products that do not depend on one resource that becomes subject to economic disturbances when any changes happen to it is economic diversification (Bokhari, 2017). According to Ogbonna (2017), a diversified economy is an economy that has a number of different revenue streams and provides nations with the ability for sustainable growth because there is not a reliance on one particular type of revenue.

This diversification provides nations with the security and reliability that they need so that if one economic revenue stream should fail, the nation knows that they have several other options for revenue. It also creates jobs for the teeming populace and reduces heavy dependence on a revenue source which could ruin a country’s finances if the industry were ever to crash. A case in point is the oil crash of 2015 that rendered many economies broke, with even Dubai implementing a tax initiative for the first time in 2018, due to dwindling income from oil. Even Nigeria went into recession that triggered inflation, and caused millions of people to lose their jobs, while millions other experienced cuts in their salaries and incomes (Amanze-Nwachuku, 2016).

The recession and concomitant sad experiences, which were fallout of fall in oil prices combined with a poorly managed economy, propelled campaign to diversify the economy, and we think that agriculture can act as the major anchor, hence our comparative advantage in landmass, population (market), and young, vibrant and energetic youths. Recall that in the 1960s, when Nigeria was a major producer of palm oil, cocoa, groundnut and rubber, agricultural exports generated about 75% of her foreign-exchange earnings and, taking a cue from this history, the agriculture sector is ripe to lead the Nigeria's next growth story because in agriculture, the opportunity is immense, though much is still required (Amanze-Nwachuku, 2016).

To unravel the much that is still required, this paper seeks to ascertain the viability of the agriculture sector in driving the diversification of Nigeria economy; the factors that has deterred Nigerian youths incursion into the agriculture sector; and measures of making the sector attractive to the youths to venture into.

2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

For enhanced understanding of issues under study, we reviewed works done by other researchers in this field under the following sub-themes: the State of Nigerian Economy, Diversification of Nigerian Economy: Efforts So Far, Issues in Nigerian Agricultural Sector and Agroprenuership Development in Nigeria.

The State of Nigerian Economy

While Nigeria has many natural resources, crude oil is the mainstay of the economy. The oil sector accounts for 81 percent of government revenue and more than 97 percent of her export earnings (Osalar, 2017). Unfortunately, this growth in oil wealth has not improved her human development quest, given the less attention to the erstwhile thriving informal sector that has continued to sustain most of Nigeria’s 200 million populations as estimated by United Nations in 2019.

The unhealthy heavy dependence of the Nigerian economy on the oil sector negates the opportunity inherent in her environment. According to Evbuomwan (2016), Nigeria has topography that supports various crops and livestock possibilities and the earth's crust is rich in so many minerals; from mangrove swampland along the coast to tropical rain forest and savannah to the north. It is painful that despite her rich topography, Nigeria is still ranked among the top five poorest countries of the world despite because prior to the prominence of petroleum industry in the late 70s, Nigerian economy was dependent on agriculture that accounted for about 85 percent of her foreign earnings and constitutes about 90 percent of her GDP. Sadly, the growth of petroleum industry in Nigeria brought about a ripple effect of not developing other sectors of the economy like solid minerals, agriculture, manufacturing industries and service industries, thereby exposing the nation to economic squabbles such as unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership (Anyaehe & Areji 2015).

This concentration on the oil sector, according to Anyaehe & Areji (2015), has led to the non-diversification of the economy to address the needs of the nation. The clear indicator of the mono nature of Nigerian economy and its massive implications were recently felt in the third quarter of 2016 and first quarter of 2017 when Nigeria experienced recession for two (2) consecutive quarters (Yahaya & Abdullahi, 2017). The implication is that following the prediction of the classical theorists that petroleum rich countries would specialize in petroleum products, if such nations fail to embrace diversification as a matter of policy objective to guard against exposure to volatility, they will continue to experience recession (Alshariff & Bhattacharyya, 2016).

The Value of Diversification

Hartmann (2013) identified three main values of economic diversification as: economic growth, systemic stability and a more even distribution of political power. Many development economists seem to agree that economic diversification is a key driver and outcome of economic development. For instance, Schumpeter (1939) illustrated that long-run economic development is driven by creative destruction processes, in which the introduction of novelties (new products, processes, inputs, organization and marketing methods) lead to the rise of new sectors and the decline or reshaping of other sectors. Significant changes in the production system triggered entirely new possibilities for investment, economic growth and job creation (Freeman, 1982). This is the first value of diversification. The value underscores the point that economic diversification is needed to prevent major economic crises on the demand side (Pasinetti, 1983). A capitalist economic system needs to constantly revolutionize itself and innovate to prevent its collapse (Marx, 1867). If the growth of an economy is merely driven by the growth in efficiency of the existing sectors, then over time less and less workers and employees are necessary. First, because routines are created that make the workers more efficient, and second, because the workers are eventually replaced by machines. This tends to lead to unemployment, problems on the demand side and to social instability. This situation becomes aggravated if the markets are saturated by products that the production system currently produces, as it is with oil in the Nigerian case. Hence the introduction of new products and sectors are necessary to overcome systemic crises, create jobs and demand (Saviotti, 1996; Saviotti and Pyka, 2004). A more diversified economy is furthermore more capable in dealing with economic shocks or the decline of particular sectors; thereby it contributes to economic stability and makes an economy more capable of dealing with uncertainty. This is particularly relevant for Nigeria. If Nigeria does not manage to significantly

raise its economic diversification it might run into a deep economic crisis when the oil boom levels out (Hartmann, 2013).

The third reason is that economic diversification tends to favor democracy building and social welfare, by distributing economic and political power among more agents and requiring the establishment of more democratic institutions (Hartmann, 2013). Economies with a varied set of different sectors tend to become more democratic, as different economic groups gain in economic, political and creative power (Hartmann, nd). With these three key values in mind, let us examine the efforts so far in diversification of the Nigerian economy.

Diversification of Nigerian Economy: Efforts So Far

Using petroleum resources to promote a diversified economy has been a challenge especially for petroleum rich developing countries. This is in addition to the challenges faced by these countries in terms of capital constraints, attracting private investments into the petroleum sector, and maintaining a disciplined fiscal regime to capture revenue and reduce macroeconomic volatility (Venables, 2016). Both national and international policy circles acknowledge these challenges and promote economic diversification as a desirable objective (Alshariff & Bhattacharyya, 2016). But the fundamental problem with the Nigerian economy is its failure to diversify. The resulting fragility has been clearly evident during the global economic downturn which impacted on key areas of the Nigerian economy from banking and foreign exchange reserves to the capital market and the mortgage sector (Osolor, 2017).

A recent study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) showed that the significant and prolonged drop in oil prices since mid-2014 has changed the fortunes of Nigeria. And Nigeria needs to create new avenues for economic growth. It involves using the right strategy to boost revenue generated from other sectors of the economy by facilitating growth of other sectors of the economy and through this, reversing the effects of the economic crises and returning the economy to a growth path. It however will not necessitate a neglect of the oil and gas sector but accommodates maximizing revenue derivable from the sector.

Fortunately, Nigeria is better placed to develop a well-diversified economy than any other country in West Africa because the abundance of natural resources, mineral deposits and fertile land it enjoys is unrivalled, as is its substantial human resource pool. However, a range of initiatives devoted to promoting other sectors of the economy is already in place as part of the government's extensive reforms programme. The non-oil economy saw two-fold growth to 7 percent between 2001 and 2006, an encouraging sign in view of Nigeria's vision 2020 goal of accelerated growth and economic consolidation. Economic transformation given past experiences and present realities, Nigeria's resurgence is inseparably tied to business expansion in the small and medium sector. The SMEs have proved to be reliable vehicles of economic transformation across the developing world because of the wide scope of their benefits—employment generation, foreign exchange conservation, optimal resource utilization and equitable wealth distribution. The most convincing benefits of all, however, is the independence among businesses that SMEs foster— a critical consideration in the context of Nigeria's long term ambition (Osolor, 2017). Recent efforts by government to promote a more inter-linked enterprise economy includes: Reinforcing the financial sector with the 2004 bank consolidation programme to improve credit access to the private sector, specifically, small businesses.

Agropreneurship Development in Nigeria

According to Adams (2016), the Agricultural sector has been the leading provider of employment in Nigeria since the sixties and seventies, when the sector provided employment for more than 70 percent of the Nigerian population. Unfortunately, in the wake of oil discovery, the attention on this sector of the economy was gradually and myopically shifted to the oil sector where employment opportunities were very low and the traditional agricultural exports have been on a progressive decline. Regrettably, the scenario has given rise to acute unemployment as oil sector could only employ limited number of the population and worse still, only experts. Ariyo, in Uzonwanne (2015) opined that today, agriculture has suffered from long years of neglect, mismanagement, inconsistent and poorly conceived government policies, lack of government meaningful incentive to farmers, lack of basic infrastructure and a lot of bureaucratic bottlenecks in executing policies and agricultural programmes among government agencies. This situation calls for innovation in agriculture sector within which frame the concept of Agropreneurship emanated

The concept "agropreneurship" emanates from two concepts- agriculture and entrepreneurship. Therefore the merger of both concepts gave birth to agropreneurship. The concept heralds entrepreneurship development in the agricultural sector. It is an important policy thrust to increase the value of agricultural production and open up the sector for businesses. The essence it to embrace a candid departure from what obtains in contemporary agriculture sector where the mundane ways of soil cultivation still prevails.

According to FAO Country Programming Framework (2017), presently, agricultural development in Nigeria is guided by two strategic frameworks that provide broad priorities for development of agriculture to improve food security, create jobs, increase incomes and reduce rural poverty. These strategic frameworks have therefore informed and provided the basis, rationale and legitimacy for the CAADP National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP), the National Agriculture and Food Security Programme and FAO's priority action plans for assistance to the country. These overarching frameworks are: (i) National Agricultural and Food Security Strategy now embedded in the Agriculture Transformation Agenda; (ii) Nigeria Vision 20:2020 Economic Transformation Blueprint, which is Government's overarching national plan for economic growth. Vision 20:2020 is an expression of Nigeria's intent to improve the living standards of her citizens and place the country among the top 20 economies in the world with a minimum GDP of USD 900 billion and a per capita income of no less than USD 4000 per annum by the year 2020. The Nigerian Vision 20:2020 (NV20:2020) aims to transform agriculture to a sustainable profitable sector with focus on increasing agricultural productivity and production for direct consumption and processing for local market and export. To this end, the Vision seeks to attract large-scale investments for mechanized production/processing of agricultural produce in which Nigeria has comparative advantage (e.g. tubers, cereals, oil palm, cocoa), as well as agricultural produce that serves as inputs to processing plants (e.g. citrus fruits, pineapple, hide and skin). This Vision is a harmonized view of the key principles and thrusts of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), MDGs, and the Seven-Point Agenda within a common perspective that is consistent with Nigeria's long-term national aspirations. The country's sector objectives and goals are clearly linked to FAO's own Strategic Objectives as indicated in Table 1. In order to achieve the broad objectives, a National Implementation Plan (NIP) 2010-2013 (the first of its

kind) has been launched with specific goals and key strategies to enable accelerated pro-poor growth, achieve an average GDP growth rate of 13 per cent, raise the GDP per capita from USD 1,075 in 2009 to USD 2,009 by 2013, generate jobs, improve the nation's global competitiveness and raise public confidence in governance and the political system. These are geared towards attaining the MDGs by 2015, and moving the nation towards achieving its Vision. This development paradigm shift has macro, socio-economic and environmental implications. FAO can bring its global experience and play a crucial role in advising about the pros and cons of the various development paradigms being adopted by the country

The transformation agenda sets out to create over 3.5 million jobs from rice, cassava, sorghum and cotton value chains, with many more jobs to come from other value chains under implementation. The programme also aims at putting over 300 billion Naira (USD 2 billion) of additional income in the hands of Nigerian farmers. Over 60 billion Naira (USD 380 million) is to be injected into the economy from the substitution of 20 percent of bread wheat flour with high quality cassava flour. Consequently, Nigeria would be enabled to become food secure by increasing the productivity and production of key staples. Currently the FMARD and other involved ministries have very limited capacity of well-trained and skilled policy officers who can effectively drive policy processes to meet the objectives of the ATA, and more generally to achieve sustainable development, food security and inclusive growth. FAO is already responding to Government request for technical assistance in capacity building for National staff to be equipped with better and up-to-date tools and analytical skills, specially designed to provide policy guidance and to help effective implementation and monitoring of programs in the agricultural sector and rural development. In addition to increasing productivity levels, the policies also need to address in a concrete manner issues of sustainable use of natural resources and equity as essential elements of good governance. FAO is also responding to Government requests for technical assistance and support in designing and formulating a Youth employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP).

THE ECONOMIC THEORY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIVERSIFICATION OF ECONOMY

We anchored our analysis on Mark Casson's economic theory of entrepreneurship was propounded in 1998. The theory holds that entrepreneurship exists for conducive economic conditions because when economic condition is not conducive, the demand for change becomes inevitable. This may be the reason Carson stated, in his book "Entrepreneurship, an Economic theory", that the demand for entrepreneurship arises from the demand for change, and that the economic factors that encourage or discourage entrepreneurship include but not limited to taxation policy, industrial policy, easy availability of raw materials, easy access to finance on favourable terms, access to information about market conditions, availability of technology and infrastructure, and marketing opportunities. The theory revolves around the following tenets: entrepreneurship ecosystem, Creative-destruction innovative drive; success target; and Jobs and Wealth Creation.

1. Entrepreneurship ecosystem. The assumption is that the system propels or stifles entrepreneurship. This ecosystem includes government programmes and services that promote entrepreneurship and support entrepreneurs and start-ups; non-governmental organizations such as small business associations and organizations that offer advice and mentoring to

entrepreneurs (e.g., through entrepreneurship centers or websites); small business advocacy organizations that lobby the government for increased support for entrepreneurship programmes and more small business-friendly laws and regulations; entrepreneurship resources and facilities (e.g., business incubators and seed accelerators); entrepreneurship education and training programmes offered by schools, colleges and universities; and financing (e.g., bank loans, venture capital financing, angel investing, and government and private foundation grants). The availability of these factors propels entrepreneurship but lack of these factors stifles entrepreneurship development in any country. But most importantly, the state of the economy is the core of the “exist or exit” options of entrepreneurship.

2. Creative-destruction innovative drive. Entrepreneurship launches innovations based on their innovative ideas in a “creative-destruction” manner. Their process of establishing new industries simultaneously destroys old industries and approaches. This reaffirms the norm of a healthy economy. Indeed, any healthy economy embraces innovations and strategic changes to the detriment of the old ways of doing things. In the Nigerian agriculture sector parlance, a mention of farmer will signal a picture of a haggard old frail looking man or woman with hoe and machete. Sometimes with yields not enough to carter for his family and so for him/her to earn some money, he/she will sell the best and serve the rest to his family for meal. But things have changed and are still evolving in the Nigerian agriculture sector such that creative ideas/innovation in soil cultivation, seed planting, weed control, animal rearing, harvesting and processing as well as market have emerged. In Nigeria today, you can sell your agricultural products online. Herbicides control weeds, improved seedlings are available and fertilizer is available and affordable as well as breeding for animal rearing.

3. Success Target. Entrepreneurship is the process by which an individual (or team) identifies a business opportunity and acquires and deploys the necessary resources required for its exploitation. The exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities may include actions such as developing a business plan, hiring the human resources, acquiring financial and material resources, providing leadership, and being responsible for the venture's success or failure. In as much as the entrepreneur is responsible for success or failure of the venture, his main target is success. In Nigeria, government enterprises have been accused of inefficiency and effectiveness. This includes the agricultural sector. Hence the introduction of entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector will improve efficiency and effectiveness of the sector because of the skills and innovations they will bring to the sector.

4. Jobs and Wealth Creation. The Nigeria agriculture sector was once lucrative in wealth and job creation. It is still believed that it still has the potentials to create wealth for the nation and jobs for individual members of the nation. In contemporary times entrepreneurship builds on how and why some individuals (or teams) identify opportunities, evaluate them as viable, and then decide to exploit them, whereas others do not, and, in turn, how entrepreneurs use these opportunities to develop new products or services, launch new firms or even new industries and create wealth. This is what is needed in the agriculture sector to avert food importation and loss of opportunities to grow our economy.

Applying the Casson’s economic theory of entrepreneurship to the study, the paper assumes that creation of entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector of the economy will facilitate the diversification of Nigeria economy. The importance of the economic theory of entrepreneurship

to this study rests on the fact that Nigeria has an historic opportunity for economic catch-up through agriculture and technological development, which entrepreneurship has the potentials to deliver. This is because, from the tenets of the theory, the entrepreneurship ecosystem, innovative breakthroughs, success targets and wealth/jobs creation, are in tandem with Hartmann, (nd) assertion that empirical and theoretical studies in development economics testify to the indispensability of diversification for sustained economic growth. Such scholars include Imbs and Wacziarg (2003) who illustrates that countries diversify their economy for most of their development path. Again, Klinger and Hausmann, (2006), and Hidalgo et al., (2007) documented that sectoral diversification is key explanatory factors for the economic growth of countries over time. Hence the most competitive economies are capable of producing and exporting a huge variety of products; thereby also providing their people with a big variety of occupational choices. This, according to Ihugba et al (2013) citing Casson (1982), is because entrepreneurs will have different skills to make judgments towards co-ordination of scarce resources effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the survey research design. A respondent friendly well constructed questionnaire was developed and used to elicit information from the selected respondents. The purposive random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents enumerated. 400 graduates currently on their mandatory National Youth Service in Anambra and Enugu states of Nigeria were enumerated. The choice of graduate was based on the focus of this paper on (youth) agropreneurs. Since 2007, the Nigerian University Commission made it compulsory for all undergraduates in Nigerian university to pass through entrepreneurship development programme before graduating from the university. The aim was to make graduates job creators with value addition and innovation especially in the agriculture sector instead of job seekers. The knowledge of entrepreneurship among these graduates when practiced in agriculture will boost the agricultural sector in Nigeria. The elicited information was analysed with STATA. Simple percentages and mean with decision for the acceptance of mean based on 2.5 minimum mean for acceptance for the standard 4 points likert scaled instrument.

RESULT PRESENTATION

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Decision for Viability of Agricultural Sector

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
Achieving food security	3.21	0.32	Accepted
Increased revenue	3.05	0.52	Accepted
High employment generation	3.41	0.28	Accepted
Price stability	2.94	0.72	Accepted
Economic growth and development	2.97	0.53	Accepted
Cluster mean	3.12	0.42	Accepted

Source: Field Work, 2023

The result on table one showed the viability of the agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy. From the table, it could be seen that the respondents accepted all the items. This was because the mean of all the items were above the minimum mean for acceptance of 2.50. Specifically, the respondents with means of 3.21, 3.05, 3.41, 2.94 and 2.97 accepted that agriculture can help the nation achieve food security, increased revenue, employment generation, price stability and

economic growth and development respectively. On the other hand, the combined mean of their responses herein of 3.12 was as expected accepted. It therefore signifies that the agricultural sector is a viable sector that if diversification is done towards it, it can help the nation achieve food security, increased revenue and employment generation, price stability and economic growth and development.

Table 2 Frequencies and Percentages on willingness of graduates with entrepreneurship training to engage in agriculture

Response options	Frequencies	Percentages
Willing to practice your entrepreneurship training if supported in agriculture after the youth service irrespective of job opportunities		
Yes	187	46.75
No	213	53.25
Total	400	100.00
Willing to engage in agriculture if unemployed after a year of youth service		
Yes	178	83.57
No	35	16.43
Total	213	100.00
Graduates if supported that will engage in agriculture after a year of youth service		
Yes	365	91.25
No	35	8.75
Total	400	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 2 showcases the willingness of graduates who passed through entrepreneurship education during their undergraduate days to practice their entrepreneurship knowledge in agricultural activities. The result showed that 46.75% of the respondents accepted that if given the desired support they will engage in agriculture irrespective of job opportunities. However, more than 50% (precisely 53.25%) declined to engaging in agriculture if given the support required.

Considering that one of the reasons for projecting diversification via agriculture is its capacity to absorb the teeming unemployed Nigerians, the study inquired from those that declined that if supported they would not engage in agriculture, their willingness to engage in agriculture after one year of no job. The result for this showed that as many as 83.57% of them agreed to engage in agriculture if they could not get job a year after their national youth service. The result here showed that as much as 91.25% of the sampled respondent would be willing to practice their entrepreneurship knowledge in agriculture if given the support. The prospects of this are very important for the nation considering the value addition to agriculture from these graduates of entrepreneurship programmes (agropreneurs).

Table 3 Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Decision for factors that can increase Youth Participation in Agriculture

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Decision
Provision of grants for agricultural activities	3.88	0.12	Accepted
Provision of loan at very low interest rate for graduates	3.63	0.27	Accepted
Provision of infrastructure	3.86	0.14	Accepted
Leasing equipment to farmers at an affordable rates	3.14	0.46	Accepted
Increased extension services	2.63	0.62	Accepted
Provision of improved varieties of crops	3.41	0.48	Accepted
Concession in business registration for graduate farmers	3.07	0.35	Accepted
Ease of land acquisition for graduates willing to engage in farming activities	2.94	0.44	Accepted
Tax holiday at the early stage of the farming business	2.99	0.47	Accepted
Provision of adequate markets for the produced agricultural products	3.48	0.23	Accepted

Source: Field Work, 2023

The result on table 3 highlighted the factors that can increase the participation of youths in agriculture. The result on the table showed that all the items were accepted. This means that they were not less than the minimum mean for acceptance of 2.50. In specific term, the sampled graduates accepted that if given grants, low interest loan, provided with adequate infrastructure, equipment for leasing and extension services they would engage in agricultural activities. More so, they accepted that if provided with improved varieties of seed to plant, given concession during business registration, tax holiday, provided with adequate market and made the acquisition of land for agricultural activity easy, they will engage in agriculture.

DISCUSSIONS

The following findings were made and subsequently discussed under each heading

The Agriculture Sector can pilot the Diversification of the Nigerian Economy

In the past, agriculture was the largest industry in Nigeria, driven by cocoa in the Western Region, groundnut in the Northern Region, and oil palm in the Eastern Region. Agricultural sector was the leading provider of employment in Nigeria in the sixties and seventies, when the sector provided employment for more than 70 percent of the Nigerian population. Unfortunately, in the wake of oil discovery, attention was gradually shifted to the oil sector where employment opportunities were very low and the traditional agricultural exports began to progressively decline. Regrettably, the scenario has given rise to acute unemployment as oil sector could not absolve the teeming population. In the 1960's, the Agricultural sector was the most important one in terms of its contribution to domestic production, employment and foreign exchange earnings. During the oil boom decade of the 1970's the sector remained largely stagnated and this accounts largely for the declining share of its contribution these days.

The Nigerian agricultural sector is presently characterized by limited competition and mechanization, unfavorable environmental conditions in the midst of large and growing demands for raw materials for industries. With trade deficit in agricultural products where demands continue to rise, the agricultural sector in Nigeria presents immense opportunity for

investment in revitalizing and diversifying the economy. Although, the sector is yet to harness its potential in crop and livestock production as well as value chain development, existing measures have not supported the development of the sector. As a result, Nigeria, once a net exporter of food has now become a net importer spending over \$4.2 billion on food in 2010 with import rising exponentially to feed the growing population (Saraki, 2016).

Unfortunately, Nigeria loses about \$10bn worth of export in agriculture annually due to the absence of value addition to our agricultural produce. Agriculture productivity in Nigeria has remained low and stagnant. This is despite Okolo's (2004) description of the agricultural sector as the most important sector of the Nigeria economy which holds a lot of potentials for future economic development and growth. Hence Nigeria is blessed with abundant land and water resources that reflects that growth potentials of the agricultural sector. Recall that in the 1960s, before it turned to oil, Nigeria was one of the most promising agricultural producers in the world. Between 1962 and 1968, export crops were the country's main foreign exchange earner. Recognizing this fact, Agriculture Policy for Nigeria (2002) observed that agriculture has traditionally been characterized as the "mainstay" of the Nigerian economy with many assigned roles to perform in the course of the country's economic development. Among the roles conventionally ascribed to the agricultural sector in a growing economy are those of

- i. Providing adequate food for an increasing population
- ii. Supplying adequate raw materials to a growing industrial sector
- iii. Constituting the major source of employment
- iv. Constituting a major source of foreign exchange earnings: and
- v. Providing a market for the products of the industrial sector

Similarly, the international development community recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor (World Bank, 2007), contributing over 28% of GDP and holds the key for the accelerated growth and diversification and job creation for African economies. More importantly, no region of the world has moved to industrialized economy status without passing through the transformation of the agriculture sector (Adesina, 2016). Agriculture provides the basic raw materials needed for industrial development. Recall also that also that food accounts for the highest share of consumer price index and providing affordable food is key to taming inflation. When inflation is low, interest rates decline and it brings greater private sector investment. A more productive, efficient and competitive agriculture sector is critical for boosting rural economies where majority of the population live in Nigeria. Therefore, the future of the Nigerian economy depends on agriculture (Adesina 2016).

Entrepreneurship Development in the Nigerian Agriculture Sector is cogent

To effectively diversify the Nigerian economy through the agriculture sector, the Creative and innovative drive of entrepreneurship with assistance from the ecosystem is required (Casson, 1982). This is because farming system in Nigeria is still predominantly subsistence-based and seasonal. The country's vast irrigation potential remains largely unexploited. Most farmers produce mainly food crops using traditional extensive cultivation methods, while commercial agriculture based on modern technologies and purchased inputs remains underdeveloped. This is the core of the problem of agriculture sector of Nigeria.

Sometimes, even when improved technologies are available, often they fail to reach farmers. Farmers' lack of technical knowledge is compounded by deficiencies in input distribution systems, which limit the timely availability of improved seed, fertilizer, crop chemicals, and machinery. For instance, with Nigeria's current fish production output estimated as 0.5 million tons, its true potential is 2.5 million tons annually with opportunities for investments going beyond direct production (Mhlanga, 2010).

From the foregoing, it is glaring that the growth and development of agriculture sector is grossly undermined. Thus, Azih (2008) identified the following as some of the bottlenecks of agribusiness growth and development in Nigeria and we adopted them.

- a. Policy incapacity, instability and implementation inefficiency
- b. Non-competitive input subsidy administration system
- c. Poor agricultural technology and service delivery environment (inputs, extension, etc)
- d. Weak Infrastructural Base
- e. Absence of long term finance window for agriculture (credit facility)
- f. Weak Market base

The Policy issues in agrobusiness development in Nigeria demand active government engagement

Recognizing these challenges, the Federal Government of Nigeria has identified the modernization of the agricultural sector as a major priority. Former President Obasanjo, one of the founding members of the New Economic Partnership for Africa (NEPAD), repeatedly expressed a commitment to meeting the NEPAD goal of investing at least 10 percent of the national budget in agriculture and related activities. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) also explicitly recognize the strategic importance of the agricultural sector and lists a number of special initiatives that the Federal Government employ to promote increased food and agricultural production.

The Yar'Adua administration also identified food security and agriculture as one of its seven-point agenda. The Goodluck Jonathan administration also put forward the Agriculture transformation agenda among others to ensure growth and envelopment of the agriculture sector. The current government intends to diversify the country's resource base and also to increase the level of export of primary products with some emphasis on adding value to primary products. More generally, the Federal Government has set an agenda for developing this sector, first through the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) and now, through the Economic Recovery & Growth Plan (ERGP). Both policies are expected to run through the next four years. In addition, the government also introduced Growth Enhancement Scheme (GESS), which is a public-private-partnership, aimed at increasing fertilizer use in the country. The programme's goal is to eventually shift the government's role from directly providing fertilizer to facilitating and regulating the fertilizer value chain, allowing the private sector to undertake the development and distribution. However, the programme has been confronted with some challenges revolving around poor utilization of technology for the programme, funding gaps, and product shortages.

This funding gap which manifests in low credit availability or lack of access to credit is an even greater challenge to agricultural sector growth and development. This is because most farming in Nigeria is done on smallholder that fails to exploit potential economies of scale. Given the upfront

costs required for agriculture investment and the long gestation periods, access to long-term finance is crucial. But as the ERGP puts it, “Most farmers struggle to obtain financing to modernise or expand their farms, invest in productive assets or buy inputs.”

Indeed, Nigeria must turn agriculture into wealth and move out of exporting basic raw materials. Achieving this require a coordinated strategy comprising policy reforms, institutional restructuring and well-targeted strategic investments to upgrade degraded rural infrastructure, boost productivity, and stimulate increased competitiveness (World Bank 2005).

RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS

In order to maximally tap the potentials of Agroprenuership in Nigeria this study recommends:

1. Creation of Conducive Business Environment: For Nigeria to tap profitably into the available resources in the Agro-industry there should be good focusing and re-focusing on agricultural policies that ensures unrestricted access to improved inputs, high demand for products (that is market availability), and availability of transport facilities, availability of raw materials etc. Recall that about three decades ago the Malaysian government came to Nigeria looking for new agricultural products. They took some oil palm seeds, and applied science and technology to it. At that time, Nigeria was Africa’s number one and among the top five palm oil exporters in the world. With science and technology, and sound management, produces more than 30 products from oil palm and tree, and is exporting a refined version of palm oil as bio-fuel (Kormawa, 2011). With conducive business environment, the Nigerian agricultural sector can still achieve that feat if well repositioned.

2. Private sector led agricultural revolution: The government has done much to promote growth and development of the agriculture sector, but the truth is that one cannot give what one does not have. The Nigerian political elites are allegedly corrupt. The public sector/bureaucracies are daily accused of corruption. This corrupt tendencies and practices will not allow any government-led meaningful investment in agriculture for onward growth and development to stand. This is because, even when brilliant policies are made, the implementations have always been truncated. Thus, a private sector-led agricultural revolution under the care of self motivated and government assisted entrepreneurs is what we need. To achieve this revolution, there is need for the provision of grants to energetic and educated youths who are encouraged to embrace improved biotechnology and modern farming. Apart from the grants, training and retraining is highly needed. In this training and development, they will learn how to manage a business and make it work. Grant alone cannot ensure the future of agricultural sector in the hands of individual entrepreneurs, but with well intended and executed training and development, they will survive and succeed.

3. Special Welfare Schemes for Farmers: one of the major drives of civil servants is the gratuity and pension that they enjoy after work. These funds serve as a future assurance for the civil servants. Therefore, to attract youths into the agriculture sector, the question of future assurance will always pull them out and send them to the unemployment queue with the conviction that anytime they get the job, their future is, at least, secured. Hence, it is imperative to provide special welfare schemes for farmers that will entice them into the sector. This scheme can be embedded into the agriculture revolutionary project, where interested individuals will be trained, given grants and access to land and then enrolled into an insurance policy that will serve as the special welfare package or scheme for farmers.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, petroleum rich countries specialize in petroleum products and end up being a mono-economy. The volatility of such economies has made the call for economic diversification a desirable policy objective for petroleum rich nations like Nigeria because it reduces exposure to economic volatility what Bugaje, (2015) called the “boom-bust cycles. Unfortunately, the call for economic diversification has also itself become volatile because countries that dependent on a few resource-exploiting economic sectors tend to establish and reproduce very hierarchic power structure, resulting in lack of economic incentives to diversify sources of income. In Nigeria, the political elites are feeding fat on oil deals and will not want to divert the oil wealth to other sectors especially as it gives fast and huge income. The rich have no incentive to change the system, the poor and low educated are not able to and the small fraction of the middle class searches for social stability and is driven into opportunistic rent-seeking and risk minimizing behaviour. This leads to a vicious circle of poverty. The solution resides in creating entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector who will bring innovative ideas needed to diversify the country’s export goods. Before to the issue of exportation, the entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector will produce enough food, create more markets/demand and supply, create jobs and wealth especially among the teeming millions of Nigerian youths who are smart, energetic and educated to chart a course for agricultural advancement in Nigeria. At the end, Nigeria will achieve what Hartmann (2013) called the most important positive effects of economic diversification- economic growth, systemic stability and a more even distribution of political power.

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