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Food Security in Nigeria: The Role of Peasant Farmers in Nigeria

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Abstract

Food security has become an issue of global concern in the recent time. Nigeria, with her huge endowed natural and human resources is not spared. Nigerian food crisis is a product of colonial disorientation that has led to neglect of the peasant agriculture and food crops sub-sector as well as over reliance on cash crops production and the oil sector. Nigeria still has the potentials to be food-secure if the following strategies are adopted and implemented: rural development, provision of easy access to basic farm inputs, adequate budgetary allocations to agriculture particularly to the food crop sub-sector, enunciation of appropriate policies for food crop sub-sector, political stability, reduction in rural poverty, and peasant farmers' education.

Key Words: Food security, Disorientation, Peasant farmers, Role, Strategies

Introduction

In the recent time, there have been a lot of concerns expressed over the looming danger of food crisis in many nations, including Nigeria. The Food and Agricultural Organization, among others have been persistent in

expressing these concerns for the global food crisis over the years. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, food security obtains when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). The main goal of food security therefore, is for individuals to be able to obtain adequate food needed at all times, and to be able to utilise the food to meet the body's needs. Food security is multifaceted. The World Bank (2001) identified three pillars underpinning food security. These are food availability, food accessibility, and food utilization. This means that a nation whose food production level is unable to satisfy these three criteria is said to be food insecure. Supporting this assertion, Maxwell (in Nana- Sinkam 1995:111) stated that a country and its people are food secured when their food system operates in such a way as to remove the fear that there will not be enough to eat. He further stressed that food security requires that the poor and vulnerable have secure access to the food they want. The World Food Summit plan of Action (1996) states that food insecurity occurs when;

- People experience a large reduction in their sources of food and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies.
- The prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for most time of the year, and this cannot be accounted for by either health or care factors.
- A large proportion of the population or group is using marginal or unsuitable strategies, and
- People are using “coping” strategies that are damaging to their livelihoods in the longer term or incur some other unacceptable cost, such as acting illegally or immorally.

Nigeria's situation on food security is highly precarious and pernicious as a significant percentage of the Nigerian population is left with only the bilious taste of poverty. Haruna, a member of the House of Representatives in an emotion laden speech in 2005 said, “People are dying and the hunger is simply unbearable. We need to tell ourselves the truth; there is hunger in the Land. Our people go to bed with empty stomachs (TELL: August 22, 2005:23). This lamentation persists till today in Nigeria. Given these criteria

and scenario, Nigeria in the present circumstance can be said to be food insecure.

Consequences of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity and hunger are forerunners to nutritional, health, human and economic development problems. They connote deprivation of basic necessities of life. As such, food security has been considered as a universal indicator of households' and individuals' personal well – being, the consequences of hunger and malnutrition are adversely affecting the livelihood and well - being of a massive number of people and inhibiting the development of many poor countries (Gebremedhin, 2000).

Malnutrition affects one out of every three pre-school age children living in developing countries. This disturbing, yet preventable state of affairs causes untold suffering and presents a major obstacle to the development process. It is associated with more than half of all child deaths worldwide. It is therefore the bane of a major waste of resources and loss of productivity which are common occurrences in developing countries. This is because children who are malnourished are less physically and intellectually productive as adults. As such, malnutrition is violation of the child's human rights (Smith *et. al*, 2003).

More than 800 million people have too little to eat to meet their daily energy needs. Most of the world's hungry people live in rural areas and depend on the consumption and sale of natural products for both their income and food. It tends to be concentrated among the landless or among farmers whose plots are too small to provide for their needs. For young children, lack of food can be perilous since it retards their physical and mental development and threatens their very survival. Over 150 million children under five years of age in the developing world are underweight. In sub - Saharan Africa, the number of underweight children increased from 29 million to 37 million between 1990 and 2003 (United Nations, 2005).

Furthermore, poverty, hunger and malnutrition have been identified as some of the principal causes of increasing and accelerated migration from rural to urban areas in developing countries. Unless these problems are addressed in an appropriate and timely manner, the political, economic and social stability of many countries and regions may well be seriously affected, perhaps even compromising world peace (FAO, 1996). This is because hunger and poverty

can provide a fertile ground for conflict, especially when combined with factors such as unequal difficulty in coping with disasters (United Nations, 2005). Hunger and malnutrition are the major causes of deprivation and suffering targeted by some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This is illustrated by Diouf (2005) in his analysis as follows:

- (i) Hungry children start school later, if at all, drop out sooner and learn less while they do attend, stalling progress towards universal primary and secondary education (MDG 2).
- (ii) Poor nutrition for women is one of the most damaging outcomes of gender inequality. It undermines women's health, stunts their opportunities for education and employment and impedes progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women (MDG 3).
- (iii) As the underlying causes of more than half of all child deaths, hunger and malnutrition are the greatest obstacles to reducing child mortality (MDG 4).
- (iv) Hunger and malnutrition increase both the incidence and the fatality rate of conditions that cause a majority of maternal deaths during pregnancy and childbirth (MDG 5).
- (v) Hunger and poverty compromise people's immune systems, force them to adopt risky survival strategies, and greatly increase the risk of infection and death from HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases (MDG 6).
- (vi) Under the burden of chronic poverty and hunger, livestock herders, subsistence farmers, forest dwellers and fisher folk may use their natural environment in unsustainable ways, leading to further deterioration of their livelihood conditions. Empowering the poor and hungry as custodians of land, waters, forests and biodiversity can advance both food security and environmental sustainability (MDG 7).

Origin of food crisis in Nigeria

Agriculture in Nigeria has been the most important sector of the economy from history and the standpoint of rural employment, food production and fibre, and export earning prior to the discovery of oil. The above assertion is based on the fact that as at independence in 1960, little was known of petroleum as a source of revenue for the Nigerian economy. There was sustained emphasis on agriculture to the extent that Nigeria was a major exporter of such agricultural products as palm produce, cocoa, groundnut, cotton and rubber. In addition to these cash crops, the national agricultural system was able to produce enough of food crops like yam, cassava, maize, millet, sorghum and soya beans to the extent that there was almost no need for food importation. Hitherto, agriculture accounted for over 60% of the Nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, with the advent of petroleum in the early 1970s, petroleum became the country's major foreign exchange earner and agriculture became grossly neglected. (Oni, 2008)

Agriculture has remained the largest sector of the Nigerian economy. It generates employment for about 70% of Nigeria's population and contributes about 40% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with crops accounting for 80%, livestock 13%, forestry 3% and fishery 4%. (International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development: Porto Alegre, 7-10 march 2006 *Nigeria - National Report*). The roles of agricultural sector in the Nigerian economy therefore include:

- i. A major contributor to the country's gross domestic product;
- ii. source of income for a large proportion of the population engaged in the sector;
- iii. provision of adequate food for the people;
- iv. supply of raw materials required by the industrial sector;
- v. a major foreign exchange earner through export;
- vi. provision of employment opportunities for the teeming population.

To say that Nigeria's economy is agrarian does not mean that Nigeria is agriculturally advanced. Peasant farming characterizes agricultural practice in Nigeria. Farming families engage in subsistence farming in which family needs determine the scale of production and wherein small plots of land are

cultivated by individual owners or sub-owners following age-old methods without much control on the yields. Family farming uses mainly family labour which could be augmented with minor hiring of labour and labour exchanges with other farmers at peak seasons. The essential factors of production – land, labour, and capital are provided within the family. This system does not make adequate use of modern farming techniques, capital input, advisory services and market information. The technology of production is not modern and involves a lot of drudgery. Also there is the problem of lack of or inadequate infrastructural facilities. Peasant agriculture takes care mainly of the food needs of the farm family and produces little surplus for sale. This type of peasant agriculture involves about 95% of Nigerian farmers, while farmers employed on corporate and government supported large-scale farms account for only about 5 percent. It is this 5% that has continued to receive priority attention in governments' efforts to promote agriculture in Nigeria. Nigerian agriculture has been dominated by small-scale farming on small farms, family-owned, rented, or leased. The major staple foods produced by the farmers are sorghum, yam, millet, cassava, and maize, as well as live stocks which give a majority of Nigerians the amount of calorie and protein they need.

With the advent of Colonial administration in Nigeria, there was a radical change in orientation in the economy as the activities in the economy were tilted to favour the objectives of the colonial masters. Colonial disorientation of the Nigerian economy and in particular, the Nigerian agriculture, is the primary cause of food insecurity in Nigeria. As rightly observed by Abbas (1993), the Nigerian economy was distorted and integrated into the world capitalist system long before Britain asserted its formal hegemony. This initial distortion and integration of the economy could be traced back to the period of slave raiding, slave trading, commercial relations and other forms of imperial plunder. These events subsequently led to the distortion of the peasant economy followed by the forceful introduction of the colonial economy. The primary objective was to affect and perpetuate colonial cohesion with a view to effectively breaking the reproduction cycle by the penetration of commodity relations. It should be noted that the peasant system of production in Nigeria based entirely on simple tools and family labour, constituted the predominant way of life of the majority of the people.

The primary function of the colonial state was therefore, to supervise the initial and necessary penetration of pre-capitalist formation to organize the

conditions of exploitation as determined by the operation of capital and the state. During the colonial era, different types and patterns of exploitation took place. For instance, land was alienated and appropriated for the production of the desired agricultural commodities. Peasant commodity production was disrupted and hence directed and regimented towards cash crop production for extraction and export. This therefore produced a very fundamental turn of the economy and could be traced back to the period of slave raiding, slave trading, commercial relations and other forms of imperial plunder. These events subsequently led to the distortion of the peasant economy followed by the forceful introduction of the colonial economy. The primary objective was to affect and perpetuate colonial cohesion with a view to effectively breaking the reproduction cycle by the penetration of commodity point in social change as well as the conditions of production and exchange.

The economy was therefore gradually entrenched into the capitalist system. The initial monetization of the economy involved forceful imposition of taxes on all the necessary sources or items of cash incomes, preponderant use of forced labour in public works, forced cultivation of the preferred cash crops, “exchanged” for the new currencies introduced. Ake (1981) explicitly observed that the colonial monetary system should be perceived and crucially understood both as a cause and an effect of the integration of the Nigerian economy into the circuit of the world capitalist production. The above explains why policies and programmes of governments for agriculture have always been in favour of capitalist system of production in the form of capital-intensive mechanized farming, cash crop production, large-scale farming among others at the expense of food crops production.

Be that as it may, the sector has continued to feed the nation and its people. However, the neglect of the agricultural sector as a result of the total dependency of the economy on the oil sector, the sustenance of the colonial system of agriculture and the rising population sufficient food production problematic. This has created disillusionment in agricultural activities that has manifested in massive rural-urban migration. The consequence of which is depletion of labour force required for agricultural sector to play its roles of providing food for the teeming population of Nigeria, and providing raw materials to feed the country’s dwindling agro-industries among others. As a result of this, food insecurity emerged and the agro-industries in both the rural and urban centres were unable to sustain production. This has reduced

in no small measure the output of food per capita, thus making Nigeria the least in the sub-Saharan Africa. There is therefore the threat of hunger and poverty as 70% of the population lives on less than N100 (US\$0.7) per day and youth unemployment is very high (Oni, 2008).

Small holder farmers constitute a significant proportion of all farm holdings in the country but their production system has not been supported through government programmes and policies to produce more farm produce over time. The capitalist system of production which is not meant for domestic food supply but for exports has always been encouraged. Thus, there has been substantial reduction in national domestic food production which, most of the time, is abridged by massive food import. This massive importation of food continued unabated at the detriment of domestic production since local farmers' contributions did not matter anymore. Thus, the peasant farmers' initiatives were killed. The food import bills were easily borne through the huge revenue that was accruing from the oil sector. However, the reality met with Nigeria when there was a downturn in the oil revenue following the oil glut in the world market in the 1970s. Governments' response to this reality were introduction of various capitalist agricultural programmes like Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation, School to Land, Agricultural Development Projects, among others. The evidence of failure of these programmes is the persistent food crisis being experienced in the recent time.

Following from the declaration made at the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome, that every man, woman, and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop their physical and mental faculties (U.N. World Food Conference, 1974:3), and worried by this situation on the African continent, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) met at Maputo in 2003, reviewed the situation and made some declarations on agriculture and food security.

Their declarations are as follow:

We, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), assembled in Maputo at the

Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly, 10 to 12 July, 2003;

Concerned that 30 percent of the population of Africa is chronically and severely undernourished; that the Continent has become a net importer of food; and that it is currently the largest recipient of food aid in the world,

Convinced of the need for Africa to utilize its full potential to increase its food and agricultural production so as to guarantee sustainable food security and ensure economic prosperity for its peoples,

Noting with satisfaction the collaborative effort of the African Union Commission, the NEPAD

Secretariat, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and FAO on the one hand, the Governments of Member States and other Partners on the other, in the preparation of the Comprehensive Africa's Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP),

Recalling the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government, in their capacity as Chairpersons of the Regional Economic Communities in Abuja, Nigeria, December 2002,

Convinced of the need to address the root causes of agricultural crises in Africa, aggravated in particular by inadequate funding, the lack of adequate water control and management, poor rural infrastructure and neglect of agricultural research, as well as the threat of HIV/AIDS,

Recognizing that it is Africa's responsibility to reinvigorate its food and agriculture sector for the economic prosperity and welfare of its people,

Resolve to:

1. **REVITALIZE** the agricultural sector including livestock, forestry and fisheries through special policies and strategies targeted at small scale and traditional farmers in rural areas and the creation of enabling conditions for private sector participation, with emphasis on human capacity development and the removal of constraints to agricultural production and marketing, including soil fertility, poor water management, inadequate infrastructure, pests and diseases;
2. **IMPLEMENT**, as a matter of urgency, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and flagship projects and evolving Action Plans for agricultural development, at the national, regional and continental levels. To this end, we agree to adopt sound policies for agricultural and rural development, and commit ourselves to allocating at least 10% of national budgetary resources for their implementation within five years;

3. **CALL UPON** the African Union Commission, the Steering Committee of NEPAD, the FAO and other partners to continue their cooperation providing effective support to African countries and the RECs in the implementation of the CAADP;
4. **ENGAGE** in consultations at national and regional levels with civil society organizations and other key stakeholders, including the small-scale and traditional farmers, private sector, women and youth associations, etc., aimed at promoting their active participation in all aspects of agricultural and food production;
5. **ENSURE**, through collaborative efforts at the national and regional levels, the preparation of bankable projects under CAADP for the mobilization of resources for investment in agricultural growth and rural development;
6. **ENSURE** the establishment of regional food reserve systems, including food stocks, linked to Africa's own production, and the development of policies and strategies under the African Union and the RECs, to fight hunger and poverty in Africa.
7. **ACCELERATE** the process of establishing the African Investment Bank, as provided for in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which should give priority to investment in agricultural production.
8. **INTENSIFY** cooperation with our development partners to address the effect of their subsidies, to ensure their support to market access for Africa's exports, and to realize the African Union's vision of a prosperous and viable agricultural sector as envisaged under the NEPAD framework and Millennium Development Goals (Maputo Declaration, 2003).

Taking a quick look at the declarations and resolutions, it is easy to note that they are capitalist-oriented. It laid great emphasis on private sector involvement with special focus on exports. The peasant farmers are only to be consulted while their activities are not for consideration and support. The implication is that the food crisis is yet to be addressed so long as the producers of food do not occupy the centre stage of the declaration and resolution.

In an attempt to tackle the problems facing the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria, Government has put in place the National Agricultural Policy, which was jointly formulated by the national stakeholders and International Development Partners and approved by the Federal Government in 2002. The major components of the National Agricultural Policy feed the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document was a response to the demands and strategies of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Specifically, the National Agricultural Policy assigns supportive roles to the government, while investments in the sector are left to the private sector initiative. The broad objectives of the National Agricultural Policy include: Promotion of self-sufficiency in food and raw materials for industries; recognition that agriculture is business, hence a private sector concern where the role of government is to facilitate and support private sector initiatives; promoting reliance on local resources; diversification of the sources of foreign exchange earnings through increased agricultural exports arising from adoption of appropriate technologies in food production and distribution, which specifically responds to the needs of women, bearing in mind that they constitute over 50% of the labour force in agriculture.

The National Agricultural Policy again, does not seem to address the food crisis as there is no deliberate attempt to properly reposition the peasant farmers to facilitate their production activities. As it is observable, what is obvious is the emphasis on the private sector participation, the usual capitalist approach.

Guaranteeing food security in Nigeria

Going by the growing number of food stuff, livestock markets, and sales points in the urban and sub-urban areas (with large quantity of food items offered for sale, though at prohibitive prices), as well as the regular agricultural product shows on television, it is hard to suggest that there is food shortage in the country. In addition, apart from the 1973-74 Sahelian drought, major disasters of short or long duration that could cause transitory food insecurity has not been a recurrent event in Nigeria, which would have made the country to be a recipient of food aid from the international community as it was the case in the 1973-74 Sahelian drought (Idachaba, 2004:4). What has turned out to be food insecurity problem in Nigeria in the

recent time is a consequence of the persistent neglect of the peasant farmers and of the food crop sub-sector. Nigeria possesses the capacity to be food secured if the enabling environment is created for the peasant farmers to operate in their farming activities through the following strategies.

Rural development

Rural development is the quantitative change or upliftment in the standard of living of people in the rural areas, brought about through integrated approach, by both governmental and non-governmental agencies and the people themselves. However, the integrated approach to Rural Development suggests some multi-sectoral efforts by the state which involves the provision of infrastructural facilities like roads, dams, schools, electricity etc., introduction of new techniques, establishment of banks and other service agencies as well as organizing and mobilizing people for productive activities.

Three basic strategies of Rural Development have been suggested and tried in many countries and in between them, there exists different mixtures. These strategies, according to Griffin (1974), are (a) technocratic (b) reformist and (3) radical. The objective of the first strategy is to increase agricultural output within the framework of capitalist ideology. In this strategy, competitions within the free market enterprise with a widely dispersed and guaranteed private property are some of the vital and sufficient conditions for achieving the objective. The beneficiaries of this strategy are primarily the land owning elites bourgeoisie and international agribusiness. Those that pursue this strategy are mostly the under-developed countries.

The reformist strategy aims at redistributing income and increasing agricultural output. The basic ideology here is nationalistic and populist while the major beneficiaries are the middle peasants, 'progressive' farmers and international agribusiness. The eclectic assumption of this option is the fallacy of borrowing certain policies in other countries that are alleged to have been successful. Reformist governments, more often than not, vacillate in their policy options with a lot of inconsistencies and confusion between what they proclaim and what they actually do (Abbas, 1993).

The third strategy is the radical approach with socialist outlook. Its objective is a complete social change, redistribution of political power and factors of production. Essentially, the major beneficiaries are the small peasants and

landless labourers. Since this strategy emphasizes equality of opportunities and collective ownership of the means of production, it aims at rapid economic progress and a more equitable distribution of income and elimination of absolute poverty. It is this very strategy that can guarantee food security in Nigeria of the three.

Of these three strategies, the third is the appropriate for Nigeria to guarantee food security but the agricultural policies of Nigeria are currently largely tilted to the first and the second strategies.

Easy access to basic farm inputs

As noted by IFAD in its country evaluation 2007, agriculture and rural development are crucial to the Nigerian economy. Around 45 per cent of GDP is generated from agriculture and almost 70 per cent of the poor live in rural areas and derive their livelihoods primarily from small-scale agriculture and rural activities. Small farmers account for 90 per cent of national food production. Limited accessibility to inputs, equipment, new technology, and markets has kept agricultural productivity low. Small farmers are also more acutely affected by climate change and commodity price volatility.

Provision of infrastructures, such as linking up the rural areas through new access road sand grading the old ones, supplying energy through rural electrification, distributing farm inputs like seedlings, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, and providing improved storage facilities to reduce post-harvest loss of agricultural products, easy access to markets for the sale of farm produce when desirable and procurement of farm inputs, would go a long way in encouraging farmers to produce more beyond their own needs. The excess of their needs could then be for those who are not engaged in farming. The evaluation report of the IFAD assessment of Nigeria 2007 supports this strategy.

The evaluation recommends that the future IFAD strategy and activities in Nigeria should pay critical attention to addressing the main challenges related to the low productivity of smallholder farmers. This would serve as the main vehicle for improving small farmer competitiveness, including enhancing their incomes and promoting better livelihoods. The heterogeneity of small farmers would require different approaches that cater to the needs of both subsistence and market-oriented individuals and groups. The prime

importance of a value chain-based and commercialized approach to enhancing small farm livelihoods is acknowledged.

As such, particular attention should be given to ensuring more systematic access to markets by adopting a value-chain approach, as well as linkages with the private sector, for example, for the provision of sustainable rural financial services and agro-processing. It is also recognized that, where required, rural finance and micro-enterprise development, adaptive research and extension, environmental management, and improvement of livestock production and marketing are key elements of small farm development. If an International partner in food issue in Nigeria should have this recommendation for itself, then, the country concerned must take a clue from it and act appropriately and timely too.

Adequate budgetary allocations

Governments at all levels should ensure that budgetary allocations reflect the central importance that food and nutrition security have for the welfare of all people, as well as the immense economic benefits they provide for relatively little cost. It would be recalled that Nigeria was among the nations that declared to allocate 10% of their annual budgets to Agriculture in Maputo. In this regard, donor funding should be viewed as a secondary resource, and used to complement the resources allocated by governments.

Appropriate policies for food sub-sector

While an expansive agricultural program is being pursued, there is also the need for a national food policy which seeks to assure all citizens access to food supply that is reasonably priced, relatively safe, adequate in quantity, and nutrition (Claffey and Stucker, 1982:50; Nyangito, 1999:112). There is no food policy in Nigeria at present, probably because there is little appreciation of its complementary role to agricultural system and practices to promote relative self-sufficiency in food production (Adeoti, 1989:126; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2001). Food policy properly formulated will encompass diet policy that shows, for example, the relationship of good diet with good living, as well as the causal link between inappropriate or insufficient diet with major and common debilitating diseases. With the current knowledge of human nutrition, a food policy will be guided by what the human body requires and which particular food items provide it, all of which are pre-requisites for effective food choices by the people.

Agricultural policy-makers and planners will also be guided by food policies to factor good nutrition that leads to healthy food consumption into the food production programs (Hadwiger, 1982:81).

Furthermore, a food policy, unlike agricultural policy, should stipulate safety guidelines for food production in the growing food industry; it will crystallize in food safety regulations, such as the minimum requirements of basic nutrients that must be present in the food, the conditions under which the food is produced, its packaging, and even the advertisement to promote the consumption of the food (Davies, 2009).

Political Stability

For any economic activity to take place, political stability is a necessity. That is why The 1996 World Food Summit reaffirmed that a peaceful, stable and enabling political, social and economic environment is the essential foundation which will enable states to give adequate priority to food security and poverty eradication. Democracy, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development and the full and equal participation of men and women are essential for achieving sustainable food security for all (FAO, 1996). Attaining food security is therefore a primary responsibility which rests with individual governments.

Reduction in poverty rural level

It has been well established in the copious literature on economic development that the problem of hunger and malnutrition is closely linked with poverty and lack of jobs because access to food is contingent on having the means to acquire it (The World Bank, 1991; Olayemi, 1998). This means, in essence, that any government that is desirous of making the country to be food-secure must also strive to create employment opportunities in both the rural and urban areas. This is by no means an easy task because employment creation has always been government's Achilles heel (Sinha, 1976:35).

The most intractable economic and social problem in Nigeria today is unemployment. The situation is getting worse by the day as many more young people are entering the labour market; few are even ready to take up farming. Job opportunities in the commercial, manufacturing, and service sectors are also constricting rapidly; while rural-urban drift is growing at an alarming proportion. Sadly, too, the expectation of economic planners that agriculture would become the largest employer of labour and a key

contributor to wealth creation and poverty alleviation has remained largely unfulfilled. The potentials of the agro-business sector as a major employer of the growing labour force and earner of foreign exchange have, therefore, been seriously undermined (NEEDS, 2004: 76).

The trend above needs to be reversed if the aim of food security is to be realized. And to do so, there is a more compelling need for the government to initiate and implement macro-economic, fiscal, and monetary policies that will expand employment opportunities and promote overall economic growth with equitable distribution of the benefits of growth (Adeoti, 1989:132).

Peasant Farmers' Education

Peasants as the farmers are and rural as their environment may be, there is the need to educate them on how to use the farm inputs that are available to them. They need to be properly informed of the introduction of new improved crops and seedlings, different kinds of fertilizers and their uses as well as timeliness of use, the storage systems under which different post-harvest farm produce can survive over a relatively long period of time, the basic technology that can enhance their farming activities, and the marketing system that they can adopt to dispose their produce at reasonable prices when they want to do so. These would not only boost their farm yields but also boost their income, which could be an attraction for unemployed urban dwellers to return to the rural environment.

Conclusion

The Nigerian economy has what it takes to be food-secure given the enormous natural endowed. What is required is a re-orientation of the agricultural sector by properly repositioning the peasant farmers who are the providers of food in Nigeria. Nigeria could be food-secure if it adopts and faithfully implement the strategies suggested above. This is because these strategies do not only encourage these farmers but also promote their activities.

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