POLICY DIMENSIONS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has vital roles to play in the development of many Less Developed Countries, including Nigeria. It constitutes a source of factor endowment that can be tapped into to stimulate the much desired economic development. Unfortunately however, the sector has for much of the post independent life of the country, failed to significantly impact on the progress of the nation and the well being of its people, largely, according to many experts, due to the policy course it has pursued since. Consequently, this paper reviews the thrusts of Nigeria's policy framework as they relate to the agricultural sector. It also provides an overview of the effects of these policies on the nation's agriculture and suggests probable policy choices that can help to move the nation's agricultural sector forward.

Keyword: Policy, Agricultural Development

INTRODUCTION

The place of agriculture in an agrarian society cannot be over estimated given the vital roles it plays in the provision of food and employment opportunities for the vast population, in foreign exchange generation, raw materials provision for industries and provision of markets for the products of the industrial sector. Indeed, it is often contended in development literature that most Less Developed Countries (L.D.Cs) can only develop if the agricultural sector is first developed. This is the basis of the so called unbalanced growth strategy. Agriculture has the potential to make factor and market contributions needed for the development of other sectors of the economy. In fact, in most developing countries, agricultural progress has been a prerequisite for economic development; stagnation in agriculture emerging as the principal explanation for poor economic performance and rising agricultural productivity being an important cause of industrialization (Abayomi, 1997).

Given these vital roles of agriculture in the development process of the L.D.Cs, most government in these countries accord the sector a high priority rating and often divert significant effort and resources towards the development of the sector. Governments affect agriculture directly through sector specific policy measures such as subsidization of production inputs, investment in agricultural research and infrastructures, and preferential treatment of the sector in government expenditure policies. Aside of these however, government policies outside agriculture often have unplanned effects on agriculture. Often, agriculture's ability to compete for resources domestically and globally is directly and indirectly affected by these economy-wide or macro policies, which through their effects on the real exchange rate and similar variables affect relative agricultural prices and other agricultural incentives. In fact, empirical assessments by several experts have tended to suggest that the effects of these macro-economic policies on agriculture outweigh those of direct or sectoral agricultural policies (Schiff and Valdes, 1998).

At independence, agriculture constituted the dominant sector of the Nigerian economy providing over 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P), 85% of foreign exchange earnings and 75% of total employment (Adebayo, 2002). In the 1970s however, the contribution of agriculture to economic progress in Nigeria declined significantly due to the discovery of crude oil and concomitant neglect of agriculture. Its importance as a major earner of income and foreign exchange declined with agriculture, by the 1980s, contributing only 30% of the GDP and 6% of foreign exchange earnings. Since then the potential of agriculture to generate resources required for industrial development has remained under exploited and productivity in the agricultural sector has remained poor. Despite initial response to the direct and indirect effects of economic deregulation and trade liberalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a combination of low investment in the sector and poor/ poorly implemented macroeconomic and agricultural policies weakened its capacity for growth and induced changes in the overall economy.

Given this scenario and the claim that the failure of the agricultural sector was principally policy induced (Daramola, 2004; Fashola, 2005), this paper seeks to examine the policy framework within which agricultural development is conceived in Nigeria and the extent to which these constrain the development of the sector.

Nature of Agricultural Development Problems in Nigeria

Agricultural development connotes a state of sustained improvement in farm productivity and income, with attendant improvement in the standard of living of farmers and farm workers. For this to occur, there must be the availability of a constantly changing agricultural technology, sufficient and accessible inputs and technology, adequate social and rural infrastructures including storage, processing and marketing facilities, suitable agricultural and rural finance mechanisms and a policy framework that is favourable to agriculture.

Within this context, Olayide et al (1980) categorized the problems facing Nigerian agriculture into five namely, productivity problems; input problems; price problems; structural problems and income problems. Given this categorization the problems constraining agricultural development in Nigeria can be grouped into;

1. Land and environmental problems in terms of harsh climate which limits effective working hours of farm labour, high incidence of pests and diseases, drought in some places, pollution of farm lands in some areas by industrial activities especially oil companies, low soil fertility, erosion and conservation and unprogressive land tenure system.
2. Labour and manpower constraints in terms of high labour cost and low labour productivity, poor and inadequate extension delivery mechanism, poor research situations and inadequate research – extension linkages, shortage of experienced professional and technical agricultural personnel especially in relation to agricultural mechanization.
3. Capital and economic constraints reflecting as low relative government spending on agriculture, misdirection of government funds and inadequate / lopsided distribution of credit facilities, shortage and high cost of critical inputs, inadequate agricultural credit especially to resource poor farmers that constitute the bulk of agricultural producers, high interest rates, poor farm – industry linkages, low organized private sector participation in agriculture.
4. Technological and infrastructural constraints arising from ineffective agricultural research and extension and low adoption of modern inputs, inadequate road networks and poor feeder roads, lack of appropriate on- farm and off farm storage facilities, inadequate and unreliable rural electric power supply, poor irrigation facilities inadequate education and health facilities in rural areas.
5. Socio-cultural constraints in form of unprogressive land tenure system, superstitious traditions and belief system which inhibits rate of innovation and technology adoption, constraining cultural and religious perspectives on women's role in economic activities.
6. Marketing and price constraints in terms of their inability to provide an effective link between producers and consumers of agricultural commodities, inadequacy of processing, storage and marketing facilities and consequent low value added in marketing of agricultural commodities, poor price policy etc.
7. Politico-administrative and regulatory policies' ineffectiveness. These reflects in the form of numerous and often un-implement able / poorly implemented agricultural policies, frequent changes / abolition of policies often for political reasons, weak planning framework and insufficient inducement of foreign investment in the sector (Ojo, 1994; Famoriyo, 1998; Okuneye, 2002 and Adebayo, 2002).

Dimensions of Nigeria's Agricultural Development Policies

Agricultural policy can be conceived as a plan of actions based on aims, ideals and beliefs of a government or a political party in respect of effecting a positive change in the structure, conduct and performance of the nation's agriculture (Adubi, 1996). It is the synthesis of the framework and action plans of government designed to achieve overall agricultural growth and development. It indicates the aims, goals and objectives of agricultural development programmes and the means of achieving these programmes. The scope of agricultural policy is wide depending on the specific role expected of agriculture in the economy. Typical categories include production policies, processing policies, mechanization policies, credit policies, extension policies and institutional development policies. Olayide (1973) further identified ten typologies of agricultural policies namely developmental, compensatory, remedial, regulatory, punitive, educational, demonstrative, supervisory, supportive, and organizational.

Beyond direct sectoral policies such as that for agriculture, governments also adopt some economy wide or macroeconomic policies to move the economy in a desired direction. Such macro policies deal with the various actions of policy makers to change the levels of employment, the price level, income distribution and external balance in the appropriate directions through the manipulation of relevant policy instruments (Anyanwu, 1996). The dominant categories of such policies include trade and exchange rate, incomes, monetary, fiscal and financial policies. Most macro policies are not specifically targeted at agriculture, but many have vital direct and indirect impact on the sector. Government's pricing policy, for example, determines prices of agricultural products and farm income while trade and exchange rate policies (trade liberalization, tariffs and export incentives) affect the structure and competitiveness of the nation's products including agricultural products in the world market. Indeed, empirical revelations since the 1980s suggest that the indirect effects of these economy-wide policies on agricultural incentives are greater than the impacts of direct agricultural policies (Schiff and Valdes, 1998; Bautista, Thomas, Muir-Leresche and Lofgren, 2002).

Nigeria has had several sector-specific agricultural development policies in the course of its post independent history but only two were consciously planned. The Pre-SAP era policies (1960 - 1985) merely constituted chapters in the nation's first four Development Plans. The earlier of these plans viewed agriculture as a source of surplus to be taxed (through Marketing Boards) for the financing of national development (Idachaba, 2000). The agricultural policies of this period were rooted in the then dominant Keynesian thesis of extensive government intervention in economic activities largely through fiscal measures. Prominent among the policy instruments during this era were:

- Government investment in and reorganization of agricultural research
- Government involvement in direct production activities
- Subsidization of key agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, seeds and machinery
- Government regulation of agricultural trade and finance and direct taxation of agriculture through marketing boards
- Preferential treatment of agriculture in credit policy
- Incisive institutional reforms especially land reform, and
- Establishment of specialized agricultural institutions and programmes / projects such as Farm Settlements, River Basin Development Authorities (1973), Agricultural Development Programmes (1974), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (1973), Operation Feed the Nation (1976), Green Revolution (1980) etc.

The first consciously planned National Policy on Agriculture (N.P.A.) was adopted in 1988 and was expected to remain valid till year 2000. The ultimate aim of the policy was the attainment of self sustaining growth in all the sub-sectors of agriculture and the realization of the structural transformation necessary for the overall socio-economic development of the rural areas. The specific objectives of the policy include:

(i) attainment of self-sufficiency in basic food commodities with particular reference to those which consume considerable shares of Nigeria's foreign exchange and for which the country has comparative advantage in local production;
(ii) increase in production of agricultural raw materials to meet the growth of an expanding industrial sector;
(iii) increase in production and processing of exportable commodities with a view to increasing their foreign exchange earning capacity and further diversifying the country's export base and sources of foreign exchange earnings;
(iv) modernization of agricultural production, processing, storage and distribution through the infusion of improved technologies and management so that agriculture can be more responsive to the demands of other sectors of the Nigerian economy;
(v) creation of more agricultural and rural employment opportunities to increase the income of farmers and rural dwellers and to productively absorb an increasing labour force in the nation;
(vi) protection and improvement of agricultural land resources and preservation of the environment for sustainable agricultural production;
(vii) establishment of appropriate institutions and creation of administrative organs to facilitate the integrated development and realization of the country's agricultural potentials.

The agricultural policy was supported by a number of sub-policies covering issues relating to input supply and utilization in the various sub-sectors of agriculture as well as agricultural support activities; research, extension, mechanization, storage, processing, marketing, financing, etc.

The 1988 policy was a consequence of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which the nation had adopted in 1986. SAP was rooted in the classical / monetarist thesis of *laissez*-faire and limited government intervention in economic activities. Hence, the cardinal element of SAP was extensive deregulation of the economy and liberalization of trade. This constituted a significant shift in economic policy from direct public intervention in economic activities to reliance on the mechanisms of market forces. The main policy thrust of SAP was:

- Deregulation of the domestic economy
- Export promotion, trade liberalization and exchange rate deregulation
- Devaluation of the local currency
- Deregulation of interest rate and liberalization of the financial sector
- Fiscal policy reform to reduce public expenditure and budget deficits; and

- Privatization of public enterprises and promotion of private sector participation in commercial activities

The specific policy measures for the agricultural sector include the abolition of marketing boards and liberalization of agricultural exports, removal of producer and consumer subsidies on agricultural commodities, withdrawal / reduction of public agricultural support services in credit, research and extension, and privatization and commercialization of public agro-based enterprises.

It has been noted that these policies were largely ineffective and at times anti-agricultural development (Daramola, 2004; Fashola, 2005; Adubi, 1996). The principal causes of these policy failures include:

- Lack of proper definition of government's role in agricultural development, which is often mis-specified as government's direct involvement in production activities;
- Failure to properly define the roles of the different tiers of government leading to duplication of efforts and occasional conflicts;
- Non-conducive enabling environment where macro-economic policies and the agricultural policy are in disharmony thus resulting in escalating costs of production and reduced purchasing power of farmers;
- Inconsistency and instability in macro-economic policies which do not engender confidence in the economy and tend to discourage medium and long term investments in agriculture;
- Poor targeting of beneficiaries resulting in the capture of government-provided production incentives by unintended beneficiaries;
- Inadequate database for policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation as well as impact assessment;
- Poor translation and articulation of policy prescription into implementable programmes and poor targeting of programmes and projects;
- Poor budgeting and considerable lag between project costs and budgetary provision resulting in sub-optimal allocation;
- inadequate attention to monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment parameters in project designs;
- Lack of involvement of beneficiaries in programme design, monitoring and evaluation and implementation arising from the under-rating of the knowledge, ability, capability and sensitivity of the small scale and rural farmers;
- Poor policy managerial capability, and institutional instability;
- Use of political/social consideration rather technical/economic viability criteria in programme choice and location; and,
- Policy instability and reversals often due to political rather than economic reasons, and inability to minimize policy errors (Idachaba, 2000; Ministry of Agriculture, 2004; Adebayo, 2004)

The return to democracy led to the adoption of new development policy framework for the nation largely anchored on the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), a medium term development strategy of the new government. NEEDS was the main economic reform programme of the Obasanjo administration and has the principal objectives of economic stability and its sustained diversification and growth. The macro policy instruments were budgetary process reforms and accountability initiatives, anti corruption initiatives, debt management, monetary management and sectoral initiatives for priority sectors such as agriculture, and these were complemented by structural reforms including further privatization of public enterprises, civil service and expenditure policy reforms, reform and consolidation of the financial sector and reforms in the trade policy consisting of further liberalization of import tariff that was hitherto considered one of the highest in the world (Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaako, 2007; I.M.F, 2005) .

In reality, the macroeconomic policy initiative of this period was a further extension of the deregulatory and liberalization initiatives of the 1990s. Thus, the thrusts of agricultural policy direction in this period were:

- Creating the conducive macro-environment to stimulate greater private sector investment in agriculture so that the private sector can assume its appropriate role as the lead and main actor in agriculture;
- Rationalising the roles of the three tiers of government in their promotional and supportive activities to stimulate growth;
- Reorganising the institutional framework for government intervention in the sector to facilitate smooth and integrated development of agricultural potentials;
- Articulating and implementing integrated rural development as a priority national programme to raise the quality of life of the rural people;
- Increasing agricultural production through increased budgetary allocation and promotion of the necessary developmental, supportive and service-oriented activities to enhance production and productivity and marketing opportunities;
- Increasing fiscal incentives to agriculture among other sectors, and reviewing import waiver anomalies with appropriate tariff enforcement of agricultural imports;
- Promoting increased use of agricultural machinery and inputs through favourable tariff policy (Ministry of Agriculture, 2004; FGN, 2003).

Although some efforts were made to stimulate agricultural development via means that goes beyond liberalization initiatives – for example, fertilizer subsidy was re-introduced at 25%, a higher level of protection was offered to agriculture via high tariffs (total ban in some cases) on agricultural imports, the fact remains that these initiatives were largely ad-hoc and inadequate. Thus, beyond some changes in the institutional framework for agricultural administration, the policy choices for this era were largely in line with those of the deregulation period of the late 1980s and early 1990s and governed by the same neo-liberal philosophy.

Effects of Policy On Agriculture

The ultimate test of any policy is in how far it leads to the attainment of its objectives. Hence, the assessment of the propriety of the nation's policies with respect to agriculture is in how far those policies facilitate the development of the sector in terms of food and raw material provision, growth in agricultural value added and enhancement of exports among others.

The effect of policy on output is captured in Tables 1 & 2 below which show the trends in, and annual rate of growth of agricultural production for different periods corresponding to the differing phases of agricultural policy. The tables show that there was significant increase in agricultural output post liberalization, relative to the pre liberalization period. This growth cuts across all the various sub-sectors of agriculture but was most significant in the crop sub-sector. This sub-sector constitutes over 70% of the whole agricultural sector. Worthy of note however, is the fact that the agricultural sector constituted a greater proportion of the economy in the pre- liberalization period than in the post liberalization period. This suggests that the various policy measures embedded in SAP had more significant impact on the rest of the economy than on agriculture.

Table 1: Agricultural Output (Value Added) Selected Years, 1969/70 – 2000

Agricultural Output	1969/70	1985	1990	2000
Aggregate	1530.5	27794.3	35277.2	48990
Crops	1212.0	20977.0	27206.7	39130
Livestock	133.4	4793.0	5174.8	6200
Forestry	75.5	1286.8	1196.7	1420
Fishing	109.6	737.5	1699.0	2240
G.D.P	3225.5	68916.3	90342.1	125350.0
Agric as % of total G. D. P	47.45	40.33	39.05	39.08

Source: Adapted from Fashola (2005) p. 68

Table 2: Annual Growth Rate in Agricultural Production, Selected Periods, 1970 - 1997

Period	Aggregate Index	Crops	Staples	L/stock	Fishery
1970-85	-0.6	-1.6	-2.4	2.4	-2.0
1986-93	8.8	11.3	12.8	6.1	1.3
1994-97	3.6	3.6	3.7	2.9	12.3

Source: Okuneye, 2000 p. 11

Table 2 shows that there was negative or insignificant growth in agricultural production before deregulation. The initial impact of deregulation seemed to have been a rapid increase in agricultural output, but, this could not be sustained suggesting that the problem of the agricultural sector goes beyond mere deregulation and liberalization policies. Instructive in this regard is the fact that beyond the immediate post deregulation period agricultural growth was lower than overall growth of the economy - about 5 – 6 %, planned targets (around 7%), and World Bank's recommended agricultural growth rate for African economies (4%).

The failure of deregulatory policies to sustain its initial impact on agriculture is further revealed in Table 3 which shows the trends in key agricultural input prices and usage for the different policy periods. The table reveals that the main impact of preferred policy in the deregulation period i.e. 1986 and after, was to raise the cost of agricultural inputs and reduce the quantum of their usage. The 1999/00 agricultural wage rate was 400% of the 1985/86 level; pesticide price was about 200% while over 1300% increase was achieved in fertilizer prices between these two periods. This sharp increase in input prices were largely the result of government removal of subsidy on agricultural inputs, deregulation of agricultural (input) markets and liberalization of the financial system.

One of the key thrusts of post SAP agricultural policy in Nigeria was the deregulation of agricultural pricing mechanism in favour of market forces. The impact of this in the immediate post-deregulation period was a significant rise in prices of agricultural products, especially that of export commodities. It has however been noted that a major part of this increase in price was due to the effects of inflation rather than liberalization. Real price indices for the various commodities were much less than the nominal prices. The 1993 nominal price of cocoa, for example, was over 1600% higher than the 1985 level while for palm oil it was over 3400%. Producer prices of exportable moved closer to export prices and in some cases even exceeded it. Similar increase took place in producer income for agricultural commodities especially export commodities (Adubi, 1996).

It could thus be synthesized from the foregoing that:

i. the shift in macroeconomic policy from a regime of regulation to deregulation had significant impact on the agricultural sector in the immediate period following the deregulation process.
ii. this effect was most evident in the pricing of agricultural inputs and outputs which witnessed an upward trend following deregulation.
iii. initial positive effects of policy shift on agricultural output was however unsustainable and subsequent agricultural growth following further deregulation measures were unimpressive and below growth in the overall economy.

Table 3: Effect of Policy on Agricultural Resource Prices and their Usage.

Parameters	Pre-Deregulation (1985/86)	Early Deregulation (1992/93)	Late Deregulation (1999/00)
1a. Labour wage rate (₦/man days)	50.00	100.00	200.00
b. Labour Use (man days/ha)	71.70	76.40	57.00
2a. Fertilizer Price (₦/tonne)	2820.00	2560.00	37,700.00
b. Fertilizer Use (kg/ha)	12.57	1.21	0.00
3a. Pesticide Price (₦/litre)	271.00	375.00	534.00
b. Pesticide Use (litre/ha)	1.66	1.35	1.09

Source: Compiled from Okuneye, 2002

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective policy constitutes one of the crucial ingredients of a sustained development of the agricultural sector. It is thus important that appropriate structures be developed for ensuring that appropriate agricultural policies are not only formulated but also to make these policies work. Redefining the thrust of agricultural policy in Nigeria is essential in order to correct the policy errors of the past.

A key thrust of such policy should be the development of an appropriate institutional framework for the formulation and analysis of the nation's agricultural policy including gaining better understanding of the interwoven linkages between the macro-economy and the agricultural sector. To this end, a National Institute of Agricultural and Macro-economic Policy may be established to coordinate the policy process between agriculture and the rest of the economy.

There is also the need to re-design the policy framework for capital formation (human and capital), and technology development in the agricultural sector. The agricultural development paradigms of the country need to focus on bringing in, on an increasing rate, a better educated agricultural producer base since these hold the greatest potential for increasing agricultural productivity. Technology and scale development are also essential if the effects of a decreasing agricultural workforce is to be overcome.

Given the nature of the agricultural industry, there may be a need to fine tune the grey areas of extant policy especially with respect to the effective roles of government in agricultural development, and thus redefine the scope of liberalization of agriculture. Private sector participation should be promoted, no doubt, especially in the areas of agro-processing, marketing and input supply, in line with the liberalization goal of the government and current world trend. The process should however not be completely left to the dictates of the market forces since, given the features of the agricultural sector, this may work against rather than in favour of agriculture.

Consequently, the subsidization policy on agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers and machineries may need to be revisited. At least in the short run, strategic inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds, etc. may need to be subsidized at a higher level especially with regard to the small holder peasant farmers who constitute the majority of the producers. The campaign against subsidization of agriculture in the Less Developed Countries is on a second best basis. While the removal of subsidy could have been effective if an efficient agricultural credit system exist and if an efficient linkage exist between credit, extension and agricultural technology, the present situation in Nigeria is far from efficient. An unsubsidized input price system in a financial system like ours that is biased against agriculture exposes farmers to higher production cost and lowered profit margin (Adebayo, 2002). That agriculture remains a highly protected industry in the developed countries despite the claim that such protection are sources of inefficiency is suggestive of the fact that efficiency considerations may not be the sole nor most important consideration with regard to the subsidization issue.

The capital budget for agriculture must be increased if productivity is to increase. This is basically to be used in implementing high impacts investments such as in providing rural infrastructures, subsidizing technologies, training and agricultural education programmes, the agricultural research system and natural resources management among others. Efforts must be made to reach the Organisation of Africa Unity's target that 25% of government budgets should be devoted to agriculture.

Beyond these, the policy process must be made participatory, not just in words but also in deed. An efficient control system must be put in place to ensure that policies are truthfully and efficiently implemented and that fund meant for developmental projects do not end up in private pockets and foreign accounts. The goal must be to achieve real agricultural growth well above the 4% annually recommended by the World Bank through increased productivity while simultaneously empowering farmers to reduce the poverty level in the agricultural population.

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