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Nigeria, Factor 20 : Farm to Market

NIGERIA: “GOOD PEOPLE, GREAT NATION”

Nigeria, the largest nation in term of inhabitants in the whole Africa, came into existence in 1914 after the amalgamation of two territories; South and North territories. It was named after the largest river in the country (River Niger), which is the major river of West Africa extending about 4,180km, flowing from the Guinea moorland in Southeastern Guinea, named by Flora Shaw, known as Lady Lugard, a wife to Frederick Lugard (Colonial administrator). Nigeria had been under the dictatorship of many British colonial masters until 1960 when some great people from our great nation fought for our independence. However, Nigeria became a republic in 1963 when the affirmation of independence was signed, but immediately plunged into a civil war that claimed many lives and lasted for several years.

Nigeria lies between latitude 4° and 14° N and longitude 2° and 15° E. It is bordered by the Niger Republic in North, Benin Republic in West, Cameroon and Chad in East and in the South by the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. It has a total land area of $923,768 \text{ km}^2$ ($356,667 \text{ sq mi}$). As from the description, Nigeria was formed from the amalgamation of south and north region, so there is a difference in the cultures and traditions. Regarding the family, most men in the northern part of the country practice a polygamous system of marriage. A family may consist of a husband, who could have up to 2 to 4 wives with an average of 10-30 kids per family. The responsibility of taking care of the family is usually delegated to each wife. Each wife will care for her children by feeding them, paying their school fees, and other social requirements. Many times the family may lack the required diet of three meals per day rather some may only receive two or less because the wives may not have a job that can help them pay for these expenses. This contributes to starvation, malnutrition, and sickness.

For those in south, they usually practice a monogamous system of marriage, except for some minor tribes. They usually have one wife and 2-10 children, but it is still hard for men to meet their full responsibilities because of the nature of limited food in the country. On the other hand, education and health care may not be available to them because of the lack of teaching aids, qualified teachers, suitable environment and specialists to treat and take care of their illnesses in regards to health care. I have witnessed many such cases in my day-to-day activities where you will see a young youth who is capable of going to school, but hanging around the streets helplessly. They don't have anything to eat before going to school. The food that is grown by Nigerian farmers does not get to the people because there is no adequate means of transportation.

Most of the men in poor urban communities run small businesses or are involved in minor jobs and may be paid a daily wage of not more than ₦300 (\$2). Here is a report: “The country's GDP grew from 6 percent in 2008 to 8.4 percent in 2010. Unemployment remains a significant problem, however, with an estimated 50 million youth unemployed” (World Bank 2012). This report shows the percentage of unemployment only, so compare it to those that are under-employed (small paying jobs). Those men use the little money they earn to purchase a small amount of food that is not enough to feed their families. They know nothing about supermarkets or a department store, they usually buy their food stuffs from little shops on the streets. They don't normally have access to private or community gardens because of their small income. Nigeria needs to grow in the areas of employment to help the citizens get hold of good paying jobs.

There are many barriers facing those families in improving agricultural productivity, employment at a living wage and accessing food markets and adequate nutrition. These barriers are explicitly known by the

governments, but they don't know what to do because food is not like water that you can dig to get in a few hours. These barriers include lack of farm input like improved variety of seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, pesticides and herbicides. Others are lack of modern machines to expand the farmers' productivity, and other possible necessities to the farm. The barrier to employment at a living wage is nothing but a lack of knowledge of how to use or operate machinery. Our world today has evolved into a computer society. Most growth and development today involves the use of computer, and most of the people in poor urban communities don't know how to use a computer, let alone own one. All the above barriers lead to a single barrier known as a barrier to access food markets and adequate nutrition. All of these things lead to food shortages and starvation.

Farm to Market (Marketing)

Dr. Adesina (Nigerian Minister of Agriculture) told those who gathered at the World Economic Forum that "the issue of global food security is very important. Nine billion people need to be fed by 2050, and there is no doubt in my mind that we significantly need to increase agricultural productivity. But if we look at where the land really is, most of the land is not in the United States, South Asia, or anywhere in the world. It is in Africa and a bulk of it is in Nigeria. We have 84 million hectares of land." (January 28, 2014). Nigeria is currently producing different kinds of crops. In the North, corn, millet, sorghum, wheat, rice, beans etc are abundant because of the soil type and rainfall. In the South, palm oil, cocoa, rubber and other food stuffs are grown that requires much rainfall. The problem is the marketing system. Usually the northern inhabitants need food stuffs from south and vice versa. Transporting the food within our country is a problem as well as exporting it to other countries by smallholder farmers.

According to World Bank website ICT in Agriculture, "smallholder farmers face the disadvantage of not having the same abundant information resources that larger industrial producers do in their quest for productivity. This is where Information and Communication Technology fills the void." ICT is applied to any form of technological instruments or systems used to convey a vital message to a group of people or community whether illustration, acoustic or both. This technology involves the computers that made the world now a global village, newspapers, magazines, bill boards, and other current using devices. The smallholder farmers are usually left in any restructured method of farming because of the lack of Information and Communication Technology. No business will develop without communication, as no communication will proceed without technology, likewise no technology will improve without research, and no research will advance without education. However, all these are done by movement (transportation) or exchange of ideas and opinions. This is why I deem that food security should be focused on in Nigeria because its population is the greatest of all in the whole of Africa. An article published by Tractor Owner-Operators from a small survey in the states of Kaduna and Nasarawa in June 20, 2014 stated that:

Agricultural mechanization is integral to agricultural transformation in countries like Nigeria. Despite the perceived rise in farm labor costs, most farmers still rely on manual labor or draught animals for farming activities, and tractor users are limited. In Nigeria, private tractor owners, rather than government hiring service units, provide a majority of plowing service. Unlike other more scale-neutral inputs, such as fertilizer and improved seeds, significant economies of scale may exist in tractors, which may justify certain public interventions. Understanding the characteristics of tractor service providers is therefore essential in designing an appropriate agricultural mechanization policy.

This clearly shows the problem of agricultural mechanization since the people working in that section testify to what we are saying: the lack of mechanized tools to smallholder farmers in our communities is detrimental to our nation.

However, farm to market (Agricultural Marketing) is a very problematic issue in Nigerian agriculture. Farmers usually lose their crops due to this problem in one way or the other. First, a farmer has to labor and toil very hard during planting to harvesting, with all the lack of proper farm machinery, pesticides, and rainfall. Also crop loss due to pests and insect infestations and he/she still manages to harvest a small crop, the shock does not set in until the farmers try to take their products to the market. This is a very hard issue, especially for the subsistence farm family. The problem of transportation of agricultural products in Nigeria needs modification. Most of the crops are perishable especially fruits and vegetable. Half of the products will be damaged due to poor road networks, lack of sufficient railways and poor flight policies.

“We understand how farmers feel when their products can’t get to the market. We know how it hurts when you invest and there is no return on investment; we know that colleagues in the Agriculture sector are striving to return the country to the path of sustainable agriculture and we on this part are working to ensure those mangoes, oranges and even fish do not rotten somewhere inside the farm. We are creating cargo airports and encouraging farm to market idea, where farmers can freight their produce without trouble and get reward for their efforts,” said Stella Oduah, Nigeria’s Minister of Aviation at World Economic Forum in 2014).

This factor affects us by reducing the quality of the products and increasing the cost of production, which leads to increase in the cost of the products and sometimes the rupture of diseases like cholera and dysentery. As a result of this factor, many families don’t like to produce crops, especially vegetables and fruits since they don’t have any means to take them to the market. On the other hand, those with money trying to get food will also suffer due to the lack of marketing channels. The groceries wouldn’t reach them in time, or it will reach them in poor quality and that will make them less valuable. The scale of this problem is clear, but the government is still working on the situation as they usually say. For us, to see the transformation is our endeavor. We will not betray government policies toward improving food availability such as the distribution of fertilizer and spraying chemicals by some state and local government areas. We encourage them to continue and never give up. But they should keep in mind that when they are building the bridges, others within their personnel are demolishing it. This is where corruption severely alters our community, economy and even esteem of our dear Nigeria.

Our environment is badly degraded through many ways; deforestation, unlawful hunting, use of unauthorized chemicals to the farmlands, unauthorized mining and many more. These practices introduce our farmlands to erosion and land sliding that may alter the agricultural production. Women or young girls are not disadvantaged in our communities. They usually help with advice to their husbands on relative issues, especially on the family. They are held in high esteem and respected in our societies. Women usually hold positions in our dear Nigeria that they hadn’t held before such as ministers, special advisers and chairpersons in some NGO’s. But still there are some minor communities that see these as disadvantages and try to wipe out education for girls in Nigeria.

The trends of this problem improve very gradually. The reasons for this are some government policies that help the farmers get loans and subsidy in their farm input such as the fertilizers, improved seeds, chemicals, machinery and so on. However, some governments such as mine have brought about irrigation farming systems which help in improving agricultural production. This assists us in getting subsidized food stuffs due to the subsidy the farmer acquired from the government. No doubt, improving this factor will definitely encourage many farmers to produce more products since they know the ways to market their products. To my family, they have ways to get food and to trade it so that they get profit and improve their income. Improving this issue will also enhance and preserve the environment sustainably since everyone has something to do rather than sitting unemployed. This will absolutely lead to economic

development and reduce poverty among the citizens of our country. Additionally, women will get raw materials for their small weaving and sawing industries at home, get crops to sell and earn their living not reliant on the husband at all the times. In general, improving this point will help all!

Furthermore, some major issues may affect the marketing channels of agricultural product and my family in the next few decades ahead. Such problems include climate volatility, population growth, water scarcity, urbanization, energy demand, and pollution. For example, population growth and urbanization may affect marketing and my family when many people come to exist in a community capable of holding 2 million people populated with over 4 million people. Nigeria, the Giant of Africa, may have population growth by 2020 with all the number of people killed and the medical issues upsetting my dear Nigeria. Urbanization will also play a bitter role in our communities when people from rural areas migrate to urban areas and therefore, they need to share the quantity of food the community is getting. The same thing will result if applied to the other major issues.

At this junction, I would like to give my recommendations on the ways that may help to eradicate or reduce the capacity of this problem in Nigeria and other African states. First of all, each country must try to remove or reduce the corruption level in its government offices. The reason why I say this is that, it happens several times whereby, the person in charge of a duty will give adequate materials to be distributed to farmers or lest privilege instead of distribution freely, the people he/she assigned tend to sell the materials. Corruption, as everyone believes, will not allow any country to develop. That is why most of African states are not yet developed.

Secondly, government and NGO's should try to provide farmers with means of transporting their products to the market. Even if they couldn't afford them with motor vehicles, they should try to make a provision of wheelbarrows, animals (donkeys, horses, etc) for rural farmers to push their products to the urban markets. Also, providing additional classes for the farmers to learn about the new developments and the uses of machines for their production from the beginning of their production to harvest would be beneficial, introducing farmers to better production.

Third, for the poor urban communities, the people should be given capital and loans to start minor trades. The more the community is educated and employed, the less the hunger and crime rate. This is happening in some parts of the world where they care for their citizens. Furthermore, the extension of the United Nation Millennium Goals (MDG's) on Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger as stated on their website will absolutely work in reducing the hunger hurt in Nigeria and other African states. If the targets mentioned will be achieved, we will definitely say good bye to poverty and hunger. These targets include:

- Target 1.A: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the percentage of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day.
 - The target of reducing scarcity toll by half was met five years ahead of the 2015 deadline.
 - The global scarcity rate at \$1.25 a day fell in 2010 to than half the 1990 rate. 700 million fewer people lived in situation of intense scarcity in 2010 than in 1990. nevertheless, at the global level 1.2 billion people are still living in excessive scarcity.
- Target 1.B: Achieve full and creative employment and well-mannered work for all, including women and young people
 - Globally, 384 million workers lived below the \$1.25 a day scarcity line in 2011-a drop of 294 million since 2001.
 - The gender gap in employment persists, with a 24.8 proportion point disparity between men and women in the employment-to-population ratio in 2012.
 - Globally, about 842 million people are estimated to be malnourished.
 - More than 99 million children under age five are still undernourished and underweight.

With all these and other targets that are not mentioned here combined together and other self employment projects, we can fight lack of food, hunger, diseases and lack of sufficient income in our society. However, communities that benefit from these targets should try not to be disloyal to the government and NGO's policies. They should try to keep the works done for them on a good vision and avoid damaging them, so that they can continue enjoying the privilege of the United Nations and other helping organizations.

Finally, we have to thank the secretary general of the United Nations in the person of Mr. Ban Ki-Moon for his great job of trying to make our fatherland an ideal place for us and our offspring that may exist in the decades ahead. We also need to thank the following individuals: Martin Sajdik (President, ECOSOC), Irina Georgieva Bokova (Director-general of UNESCO), Anthony Lake (Executive Director of UNICEF), Jim Yong Kim (President of world Bank Group), IRIS (a placement organization in YES Program), MDG's and other NGO's that are helping our great continent. Special thanks to the government of Iowa State under the leadership of Mr. Terry E. Branstad and finally to the government of United States of America. Thanks for permitting us to learn some things new in your great country. Long life IRIS, long life Iowa State, long life United States of America.

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