

Agropreneur Development: A Framework for Sustainable Food Security and Rural Livelihood

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Abstract

Increasing population of hungry and malnourished people, and expected doubling of worldwide demand for food by 2050 as population, incomes, and consumption of animal products grow, necessitate need to support a paradigm shift that focuses energy increasingly on promoting agropreneurs. As agropreneurs through adoption of innovation and assumption of risk of uncertainty improve productivity, transform traditional indigenous agriculture industry into a modern enterprise, and strongly impacts food security, quality of life, economic growth, and political stability. To this effect, this paper posited that bolstering food security and sustainability is not just a matter of helping existing rural small-holder farmers but also recruitment of innovative new ones. The paper identified challenges to agropreneurs development to include restricted market access, poor management practices, low entrepreneurial skills, poor infrastructural facilities, non access to information, land, money and capital market etc. Therefore, to promote agropreneurs development the paper recommended creation of an enabling agribusiness environment, adoption of consistent and enduring government protection policies and risk sharing strategies, mentoring and establishment of agricultural parks and incubation centers.

Key words: *agropreneur, food security, emergence, innovation, sustainability*

Introduction,

Three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas where they depend on agriculture and related activities for their livelihoods, with more than two-third of the world poorest relying solely on agriculture and related activities women (Madeley, 2008). World Bank/IFC/MIGA, (2011) reported that one billion people around the world are still chronically poor and undernourished, and these people are concentrated in rural areas. In the same vein, Nwaze (2010) while reporting on the progress made by the International Fund for Agricultural Development in 2009 in eliminating poverty and hunger in the developing countries pointed out that lack of food security and sustainability are probably the clear and present dangers which assail most developing countries of the world today. Therefore, ensuring food security and sustainability is one of the greatest challenges facing the world community. However, these challenges are most critical in low-income and food-deficit African countries (FAO, 2007; IFT, 2008).

Globally, it has been reported that worlds poorest now spend over 80 percent of their income on food due to rising food prices, climate insecurities, underinvestment in rural small food producers, insufficient land and resources amongst others. With the world population projected to be 9.1 billion in 2050, enhanced agricultural growth and productivity are essential if we are to meet the worldwide demand for food and reduce poverty, particularly in the poorest developing

countries (World Bank/IFC/MIGA, 2011). To this effect, support of a paradigm shift that seeks to make agriculture profitable and attractive business to the teeming population of rural people, most especially women, and young farmers and entrepreneurs, who will innovatively engage in agribusiness, becomes inevitable (Nwaze (2010).

Presently, Nigeria faces huge challenges in the food sector these are obvious in the fact that about 65 per cent of Nigerians are food insecure (FMA&WR, 2010). That is lacking sufficient access to the amount and variety of food for a healthy living and productive life. In spite of all the efforts at developing food and agricultural sector, the country still spent billions of dollars annually on importation of various food items such as rice, frozen fish, wheat, sugar etc. a disturbing development for a country with about 79 million hectares of highly fertile, arable land. Therefore, to ensure sustainable food security for a population estimated to be presently above 170 million and projected to be 400 million in 2050, there is need to increase the rate at which food of various types is produced through improved farmers' productivity and recruitments of new enterprising and innovative agribusiness men to bridge generational gap in the sector (Owoade, 2014). Hence this paper reviewed the challenges to food security in Nigeria; examine perceived roles of agropreneurs in sustainable food security and rural livelihood, and challenges to agropreneurs development in Nigeria, with the intention of suggesting necessary supports and skills required for sustainable development of agropreneurs.

A Review of Challenges to Food Security and Agricultural Development in Nigeria

Food security is defined as physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs (FAO, 1996). Generally, food security relates to the status of food supply to people in a defined territory. Thus, food security as a concept relates to a defined region be it a local government area, state, geo-political zone, nation, an urban or a rural area, and the numbers of people that have enough and safe food to eat to meet their daily requirements are counted as a proportion of the total population (Akoroda, 2010). Hence, food security is a desirable state which every sovereign state or society strives to attain.

Nigeria agricultural sector is largely subsistent. It is dominated by rural small-holder farmers that are about 90 per cent of the farming sub-sector. Majority of them engaged in traditional multiple farming, while the average yield of major staple crops remains far below most of the other developing countries that share common economic indices with the country (FMA&WR, 2010). Unsurprisingly, lack of sufficient investment in new technologies as well as in research and extension is reflected in continuing low yields and income to the farmers. Thus, in recent years, food production has failed to keep up with population growth, making food imports necessary. Interestingly, Nigeria has natural endowment to end hunger, ensure food security, and drive agriculture towards export and ceases being a net food importer.

Although, in recent time, appreciable real output growth rates had been achieved in the agricultural sector but it was discovered that Nigeria is currently unable to meet its huge potential due to a combination of dismal factors affecting the productivity and profitability of rural small-holder farmers (FMA&WR, 2010). Consequently, the sector had been unable to keep pace with the increasing population, and this had resulted in reported cases of infant malnutrition and an increasing food prices and import bill. Meanwhile, the identified major constrains to agricultural development visa-vis food security in Nigeria among others include:

- ✓ Inadequate supply and high cost of inputs which had limited their adoption and subsequent impact on yield and rural farmers' productivity (FMA&WR, 2010).

Unfortunately, farm inputs play very critical role in the modernisation of agriculture. Government efforts to develop efficient and effective input procurement and distribution systems that will ensure timely delivery of adequate quantity and quality of farm inputs to farmers had not been successful. Despite the large sums of money that had been spent on procurement and subsidisation of farm inputs, the problems of availability, accessibility, stability and sustainability still persist. The persistence of the problem had been attributed largely to the issue of subsidy and its administration, as evidenced in the procurement and distribution of fertiliser by the government (Hartwich, Kormawa, Bisallah, Odufote & Polycarp, 2010). The result of all these is that many farmers do not have access to adequate supply of inputs, to enable them use required inputs at the desired level to optimise their benefits to increase food production and productivity.

- ✓ Paucity of fund or working capital (World Bank/IFC/MIGA, 2011), small scale farmers do not have adequate capital to expand their scale of operations or take them out of subsistence and take advantage of profitable packages of technology to boost productivity. The bulk of capital injection by this category of farmers comes from owner's equity and informal credit sources. Again, the long and cumbersome bureaucratic processes have prevented the flow of official credit through the government established credit schemes to the farmers. Hartwich, Kormawa, Bisallah, Odufote & Polycarp (2010) observed that this problem is more pronounced for the female headed household who had nothing to offer as collateral. Then if objective of food security is to be attained, the issues of women empowerment should be taken seriously, as well as the formation and growth of farmers' cooperatives to assist in accessing credit, using the group for the mobilization and guarantee.
- ✓ Poor development of infrastructural facilities and social amenities in rural areas (World Bank/IFC/MIGA, 2011), the agricultural base of the country which had increased cost of production, transportation, and had resulted in the massive movement of able bodied men and women and most importantly youths from rural to urban areas.
- ✓ Lack of appropriate on-farm and off-farm storage and processing facilities resulting into the country losing a whopping 50 per cent of the total vegetables and fruits, 30 percent of tubers and roots crops, and 20 percent of grains after harvest (FMA&WR, 2010). The problem of inadequate storage facilities has compounded the problem of food security. This situation is made worse by the dearth of agro-processing industries in the country. It also has a discouraging effect on the farmers as the struggle to sell most of their crops immediately after harvest results in cut throat competition and lower prices.
- ✓ Inadequate irrigation facilities (World Bank/IFC/MIGA, 2011), making agricultural production in the country to be still rain dependent most especially in the southern Nigeria, and farmers idle during off-eason. This situation thereby exposed the farmers to vagaries of weather, as the irrigation facilities are still very poor and not adequate despite the existence of river basins.
- ✓ Weak agricultural extension services, this is one of the biggest threat to Nigeria's ability to realize its huge potential to meets its food needs There is inadequate number of

extension men and women to take information to the farmers and get feedbacks. The few ones that are in place lack mobility to improve on extension-farmer contact while women extensionists are few to handle gender issues.

- ✓ Lack of marketing information and business capacity among small holder rural farmers, such as knowledge of market prices, available volume and projection of future demand and supply.
- ✓ Lack of local technicians especially for farm mechanization and on and off farm processing. This couple with massive migration of able bodied people from farming and rural areas had impacted negatively on labour availability, productivity and production, thereby increasing the cost of production.
- ✓ The existing land tenure systems had limited land availability for commercial farming, would be farmers, women and the landless (World Bank/IFC/MIGA, 2011).
- ✓ Inconsistent government policies as a result of frequent changes in government had resulted in policy summersault, and discouraged active participation of private business men (agropreneurs) in the agricultural sector.
- ✓ The low level of education of small scale farmers, especially women who form the bulk of the agricultural labour force had remained a major constraint to the adoption of modern farming techniques and the ability to access information and other inputs necessary for increased productivity and income in the sector.
- ✓ Communal/Religious Crisis The frequent communal/religious crisis in some region of the country is a major constraint to food security. The crises occur either during planting, weeding or harvesting period and with the flight of farmers from the areas irrespective of the stage of farming, food security is threatened as most, if not all the crops are lost. Examples abound in Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram menace
- ✓ Environmental Hazards/climate change: The problems of drought/desertification, as well as, soil erosion had remained very serious for Nigerian agriculture. These problems often manifest in the forms of soil degradation, crop failure and reduced farmers' productivity. While some of these are caused by natural forces, unsustainable cultural practices such as over-grazing, over-cultivation, bush burning and deforestation associated with increased population and poor conservation practices are important.
- ✓ Inadequate Capital Expenditure: Although, the challenges identified above had persisted over the years largely as a result of poor funding of the agricultural sector by the successive governments (Owoade, 2011). The volume of capital allocation to agriculture and the quality spending over the years had been low and poor. The share of agriculture in total capital expenditure which averaged about 2.5 per cent need to be increased (FMA&WR, 2010). The adequacy of capital and effective implementation of projects will ensure the effective provision of infrastructure and encourage research into crop and animal production.

Roles of Agropreneurs in Sustainable Rural Livelihood and Food Security

The concept of agropreneur or agripreneur represents new breed of agricultural enterpriser who is creative, innovative and enterprising, and whose business motive involves application of scientific and technological knowledge to profitable management of agricultural enterprise (Owoade, Omogoye & Olaniyan, 2011). To put more clearly, an agropreneur is an innovator and a businessman all combined together in one individual. Basically, agropreneurs are involved in agribusiness activities such as manufacture and distribution of farm supplies, genetics and breeding, production and the storage–processing–distribution of farm commodities and the items made from them.

Owoade, (2014) stated that agropreneurs through their active participation in the food and agricultural sector strongly impacts food security, industrialisation efforts, quality of life, economic growth, and political stability and, to a certain extent, a nation's position in international relations and trade. The author posited that agropreneurs also turn inherent challenges in the sector to opportunities (wealth and value) through adoption of creativity and innovation and assumption of risk of uncertainty associated with the sector. Specifically some of the socio-economic and technological roles of agropreneurs in sustainable food security and rural livelihood include:

1. Transformation of traditional indigenous agriculture industry into a modern enterprise.
2. Stabilization of rural communities through creation of strategic rural–urban economic turnaround opportunities and sustainable jobs or employment creation.
3. Marshalling the financial resources or mobilizing savings necessary for agricultural value chain development
4. Reduction of food import bill and saving of foreign exchange needed for development
5. Bearing the ultimate risk of uncertainty associated with agricultural industry
6. Provision of avenue for the dispersal and diversification of economic activities
7. Utilization of local raw materials and human resources
8. Wealth creation in the society through improved productivity and accruable income to participating actors in the food and agricultural value chain
9. Stemming the tide of out-migration (rural-urban drift), a pressing issue in rural Nigeria the agricultural base of the country, through creation of jobs and wealth.
10. Stimulation and adaptation of indigenous technology to modern agricultural system
11. Adaptation of imported technology to local environment
12. Development and adoption of appropriate technology to maximize output and sustain production system

Challenges to Agricultural-Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

The challenges that confront agropreneurs in Nigeria are not too different from the ones that constrain SMEs and small-holder rural farmers combined together. The fact that has emerged from the appraisal of the various past and policy initiatives on the promotion of agribusiness in Nigeria is that although finance is a major constraint to the development of agribusiness in Nigeria, it is by no means the only or most important constraint (Owoade, 1998; Hartwich, Kormawa, Bisallah, Odufote, & Polycarp 2010; Owoade, 2011). In the same vein, Chibundu (2006) observed that effective utilization of substantial financial resources provided under the various past SMEs development programmes, was constrained by such factors as lack of adequate entrepreneurship and managerial skills as well as absence of the enabling environment for investment in small and medium scale industries.

Although, there are some amazing achievements made by the government and entrepreneurship development agencies, many challenges and issues were also found during the development of agricultural enterprises. On the final analysis, the following among others are the identified constraints or challenges to agricultural-entrepreneurship development in Nigeria: -

- ✓ Non-access to money and capital market: - Access to finance, and to a lesser degree cost of finance, were found to be the second most constraining factor on businesses in Nigeria after electricity (Chibundu, 2006) . In effect most businesses rely on internal financing, through retained earnings, to meet their needs, with the situation most pronounced for smaller enterprises (World Bank, 2008). Hartwich, Kormawa, Bisallah, Odufote, & Polycarp (2010) observed that the banking sector tends to be lukewarm in meeting the credit requirements of agricultural enterprises due to poor preparation of project proposals, as well as the inability of the most enterpriser to raise the required equity contribution. Also, the authors stated that banks regard many agricultural enterprises as high risk ventures due to nature of agribusiness and absence of succession plan in the event of the death of the proprietor. As a result, start-up and working capital are still major constraints on agricultural-entrepreneurship, as most agropreneurs are restricted to funds from relatives and personal savings. Therefore, unable to respond to opportunities and unanticipated challenges in a timely manner.
- ✓ Inadequate supply and high cost of inputs such as feeds, fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, improved initial stock etc which has limited their adoption and subsequent impact on yield, production levels and profits of farmers. The persistence of the problem has been attributed largely to the issue of subsidy and its administration, as evidenced in the procurement and distribution of fertilizer by the government (Hartwich, Kormawa, Bisallah, Odufote & Polycarp, 2010). Since, farm inputs play very critical role in the modernization of agriculture, this issue need to be properly addressed. Then the way forward is the active involvement of private sector in the production and distribution of farm inputs as evident in the Growth Enhancement Scheme (GES) of federal government of Nigeria.
- ✓ Lack of infrastructural facilities: inadequate provision of essential services such as access roads, electricity, water supply in rural areas, as well as irrigation and storage facilities constitute one of the greatest constraints to agricultural enterprise development (FMA&WR, 2010). Most agropreneurs resort to private provision of these at great expense. A World Bank study (1989) estimated that such cost accounted for 15-20 percent of the cost of establishing a manufacturing enterprise in Nigeria. Contemporary evidence has shown that the relative burden of private provision of infrastructural facilities is much heavier on SMEs than on large-scale enterprise (Chibundu, 2006).
- ✓ Inconsistent or poor implementation of government policies: - The poor implementation of policies including administration of incentives and measures aimed at facilitating agribusiness growth and development have had unintended effects on the sub-sector (Owoade, 2011). Also, the persistence of unstable macro-economic environment arising mainly from fiscal policy excesses and frequent changes in government policies has often resulted in demise of many agricultural enterprises, most especially agro-processing enterprises. This had resulted for instance, into confusion and uncertainty in business decisions and planning as well as weakened the confidence by the agropreneurs on government capacity to execute faithfully its program.

- ✓ Poor management practices and low entrepreneurial skills, lack of relevant educational background and business exposure constrains agropreneurs ability to seize business opportunities and introduce innovations that may lead to growth and expansion (Chibundu, 2006).
- ✓ Restricted market access: inability to compete with other market products because of small scale production, couple with the people's belief that imported products are better than locally produced ones, often imposes constraints on the sector growth. This is further compounded by the absence of knowledge about the existence or requirements of fringe/export markets by agropreneurs. Although, many agropreneurs produced inputs or raw materials for larger industrial enterprises, the non-standardization of their products, the problem of quality assurance as well as weak purchasing power, arising from consumers dwindling real incomes, effectively restrict their market access.
- ✓ Lack of information on branding, certification and recognized standards for products to ensure that products are produced organically, traded fairly and are environmentally sustainable. Again, lack of quality assurance facilities at the local level, thereby creating the problem of having to carry the product to another place to have it inspected and standardized also hindered agricultural-entrepreneurship development.
- ✓ Overbearing regulations and operational environment: The plethora of regulatory agencies, multiple taxes, cumbersome importation procedures, and high port charges have continued to exert pressures on the industrial sector in general and agro-processing industry in particular (Owoade, 1998; Chibundu, 2006).
- ✓ Insecurity: there is high level of insecurity in the country that atimes disrupts agribusiness activities and loss of valuable production time resources. This makes most of the agropreneurs abandoned their farms, operate below installed capacity, make provision for insurance, private security, fortified there business premises and eventually close shops. This increase the over head cost and further, increases the cost of doing business in the country and eventual early demise of enterprises.
- ✓ The existing land tenure systems and land use planning have limited land availability for large scale farming and commercial agriculture. Hence, there is urgent need for the immediate review of land use decree of 1978, as it is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to acquire land for commercial agriculture purposes.

Needed Supports and Skills for Agropreneurs Development

Generally, entrepreneurial emergence is a focus on the processes of coming into existence of new enterprise while the process of emergence is an entrepreneurial function (Ogundele, 2007). Owoade, Omogoye & Olaniyan (2011) highlighted the essential elements of the agropreneurial emergence to include agropreneur's vision, values, motivation, skills or competence, interpersonal relationship, social network and interaction. Furthermore, EMPRETEC (2004) noted that although, entrepreneurship (emergence, behaviour and performance) is induced by an individual's attitudes or motives, skills and psychological endowments, yet the entrepreneur is not undertaking entrepreneurial activities in a timeless and spaceless vacuum, but is affected by the context in which he or she is acting, the environment. Hence conducive agribusiness environment is essential for emergence, behavior and performance of agropreneurs.

With regards to entrepreneur performance, Okaka (1990) and Ogundele (2007) observed that entrepreneurial success depends on development of certain qualities in addition to skills and knowledge concerned with the technical aspect of owning a business; and such skills are

acquired through purposeful and organised education, training and development. In the same vein Rao, Wright & Mukherje (1990) and Chibundu (2006) noted that the success of an entrepreneur depends on possession of certain entrepreneurship skills. To these authors, these skills include: (1) Development of entrepreneurial spirit, characteristics and personality (2) Development of technical, technological and professional competencies (3) Development of enterprise-building and small business development, capabilities to initiate and start one's own business (4) Development of managerial capability to run the business successfully.

Therefore, agropreneurs like any other entrepreneurs required some essential skills and supports to successfully navigate the difficult agribusiness environment and macroeconomic conditions. However, these skills and supports are more important to agropreneurs considering the nature and inherent risks in agribusiness. Hence, to be profitably engaged in agribusiness major skills and supports that an agropreneur needs to enhance performance, reduce risks of uncertainty and rate of early demise associated with businesses in Nigeria are:

1. Agropreneurs required business management skills and a fair knowledge of the business processes as well as the skills and know-how, to successfully develop and apply innovative methods (Chibundu, 2006; Owoade, 2014). This entails development of skills in preparation and implementation of agribusiness plan, human resources management, and finance sourcing skill and a good marketing strategy, etc. Again, agropreneurs trying to bring a new technology to market need to know how to assess market feasibility, protect intellectual property and raise investment (Owoade, 2014). However, these skills can be fostered on the agropreneurs by a purposeful and well organised agricultural-entrepreneurship education, training and development at **agricultural-entrepreneurship development parks or incubation centers** that will be established and located at various agro-ecological zones.
2. Again, agropreneurs need quality support services on business development and management, marketing and market linkages, access to finance and information, regulatory requirements, quality and safety standards, and proper equipment and maintenance services (Owoade, 2014). These can be provided by organized private sector through contract farming and government agencies.
3. Agropreneurs needed **protection against risk of uncertainty** associated with agribusiness. Entrepreneurial risks and uncertainties can be reduced by large scale enterprises that finance generation and commercialization of innovative ideas. At the same time adoption of risk sharing strategies, tax holiday, and consistent and enduring government protection policies should be considered etc.
4. **Formal and informal mentoring**, an agropreneur just starting up a new enterprise will need mentoring to bridge the asymmetrical relationship between theoretical training at any form of school and the practical business life realities (Owoade, 2014). Through mentoring permanent and flexible learning processes could be undertaken for the simple advantage of socializing the agropreneur to the expected attitudinal modification and in coping with the daily challenges of agribusiness. Mentoring may be what the new enterpriser needed to reduce risk of uncertainty associated with agriculture and cost at start-up or reduce challenges that confront new agribusinesses. Hence, agglomeration and network of agropreneurs or better still incubation centers should be created, promoted and encouraged for peer tutoring and sharing of experiences.
5. Agropreneurs need a clear understanding of the farming occupation, global best practices, emerging challenges in the sector and agricultural value chains development. Hence

establishment of agricultural incubation centres should be considered in each ecological zone to put interested individuals through rudiments and technicalities of agriculture.

6. Entrepreneurship as a process involves recognizing opportunities and mobilizing resources in the environment to create value for the consumers in the environment. Thus, an agropreneur is regarded as the individual who are created by the environment and nurtured by the environment. Hence, good infrastructure and security, effective policies and regulations and access to appropriate financing, markets and information are essential and needed to be provided by organized private sector, development agencies and government at all levels. To this effect, government and private sector investment should be enhanced for agribusiness development, allowing for the mass production needed to address market demands and ensure business sustainability.
7. A nationwide feasibility study should be carried out in various agro-ecological zones on the choice of farm enterprise to be promoted based on soil testing and local climatic conditions to ensure environmental and business sustainability. Based on the report the nation should be delineated to various ecological zones and lands acquired for commercial agricultural purposes. These lands should be made available for intended organized private sector at a fee to ease difficulties and cost of acquiring land for commercial agriculture.

Conclusion

The ascribed roles of agropreneurs in modernizing agriculture and ensuring sustainable livelihood and food security necessitate the need to recruit technically savvy and innovative entrepreneurs in agribusiness. Interestingly, these agropreneurs need a system of mentorship, handholding, and bridging support to launch them into higher-value food production using modern agriculture and agribusiness methods. To this end, it is imperative to develop a holistic approach that will ensure that government investment and policies created sustainable agribusiness environment and battery of agropreneurs that will transform the sector. Again, creation of agricultural incubation centers and parks, and reinvigoration of farm settlements in various agro-ecological zones through a public-private partnership should be considered. This is to nurture and enable agropreneurs acquire necessary skills and supports to transform and create wealth in the sector, end hunger, improve nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture and rural livelihood and meet the food needs of increasing population.

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