

Agricultural development: A panacea to economic challenges in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The paper expatiated on the salient matters of the economy development in Africa through Agriculture in the following three sub-headings; food security, health and employment opportunity. It is imperative to know that agriculture is the backbone of Africa's economy. About 70% of Africans and roughly 80% of the continent's poor live in rural areas and depends mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. Furthermore, the Current and emerging research in Africa focuses on most critical issue on agriculture related health problems such as; malnutrition, water-related diseases, health effects of pesticide use, food safety, livestock-related health and zoonotic diseases, aflatoxins, and medicinal plant production and when well managed could save the nation from excessive spendings which bounce back on national economy. Another reason why agriculture needs to be developed is that it has a way of providing an employment opportunity and curbs the problems that might want to spring forth from unemployment vogue in the economy. The unemployment problem has increased poverty rate, prostitution, ethnic conflicts, dejection, increase in crime as well as family disputes and broken marriages. Unemployed individuals become more and more dissatisfied and resort to riots and demonstrations. Due to unemployment, the economy's GNP will be less than the potential GNP. Therefore it is then recommended that, more effort should be made on Agricultural sector because of the strategic relevance of the sector to the nation's economy especially in the areas of health, food security and employment generation.

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Introduction:

Agriculture contributes to the world economy development in a diverse ways; like, provision of food for the growing population; eradicating poverty and hunger, boosting intra-Africa trade and investments, economic diversification, sustainable resource and environmental management, human security, provision of sufficient raw materials to a growing industrial sector; a major source of employment and, provision of a market for the products of the industrial sector among others. Nchuchuwe, etal (2012)

According to Economic Commission for Africa (2007) 'Agriculture is the backbone of Africa's economy. About 70% of Africans and roughly 80% of the continent's poor live in rural areas and depends mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. The sector accounts for about 20 % of Africa's GDP, 60% of its labour force and 20% of the total merchandise exports. Agriculture is the

main source of income for 90% of rural population in Africa'.

It is in the light of these aforementioned fact that this paper is advocating to elucidate why the Agricultural development should be given precedence, since it remain the sustainable means of improving development and transformation of Africa economy.

It is on this note that this paper will be expatiating the salient matters of economy development in Africa through Agriculture in the following three dimensions: food security, health and employment opportunity.

Economy development through Food Security provisions by Agriculture:

Agricultural sector remain the largest employer in developing countries and its growth has enormously been felt on poverty eradication, lowering food prices for both rural and urban poor consumers. Whenever there is food security, nutrition and health will also improve, which in

turn promotes productivity. This will also liberate countries from depending on imported foods.

Furthermore, Kwadwo (2012) stated in his work that meeting the demand for food is an essential precondition for successful economy, social, and political development, and it can be achieved through domestic production or imports. In Africa, there is insufficient domestic production, and the continent spends about \$30 billion to \$50 billion a year to import food. This deprives the continent of funds for needed expenditures on infrastructure, social and economic amenities. It is estimated that if continental food supplies do not increase, Africa will spend about \$150 billion on food imports by 2030.

The recent high global food prices have captured the attention of stakeholders, and the recent milestone reached on October 30, 2011, of a world population of 7 billion has awakened many people to the obligation of increasing food production and productivity in the world. It is expected that the world's population will grow to 9 billion by 2050, at which time Africa's portion will be 2.3 billion. In order to satisfy the world's food needs, it is estimated that production will have to grow by 70 percent to 100 percent. Despite the effort of Millennium Development Goals since 1990 most of the countries are yet to meet up with MDGs 2015 food security target. Jason (2012)

The place of Agriculture in Health as part of economy developmental processes:

Agriculture and health sector are relative to each other in many ways, Agriculture will not be productive if the farmers are not healthy and the people are not eating

nutritious foods. Both agriculture and health are essential tools for boosting economy and fighting poverty Africa.

In 2005, IFPRI hosted a workshop on the linkages between agriculture and health, bringing together experts in the field. They emphasize and discuss on the need to improve health related work in the CGIAR in other to unite the researchers working in agriculture-health linkages. The Current and emerging research in CGIAR focuses on most critical issue on agriculture related health problems such as; malnutrition, water-related diseases, health effects of pesticide use, food safety, livestock-related health and zoonotic diseases, aflatoxins, and medicinal plant production. Some centers are also working on the links between specific agricultural systems such as agroforestry, agrobiodiverse farming, forestry, and fish production and nutrition and health. IFPRI (2008)

Zoonotic Disease (e.g., avian influenza) and Livelihoods: zoonotic disease is one of the deadly diseases in animal and can be passed on to humans. This disease is putting man health at risk. It increases the risk of certain diseases, which can lead to serious illness in humans and may be fatal. As we consume more animal products, particularly chicken and pig meat, there is greater risk of exposure to these illnesses.

Recently Ebola Virus Disease was detected in some West African countries and this has drastically jeopardized the region wellbeing and economy. This disease has also pose risk to eating of some animals especially the bush meat in the region, below are the broad channel of short term impact of Ebola Virus Disease:

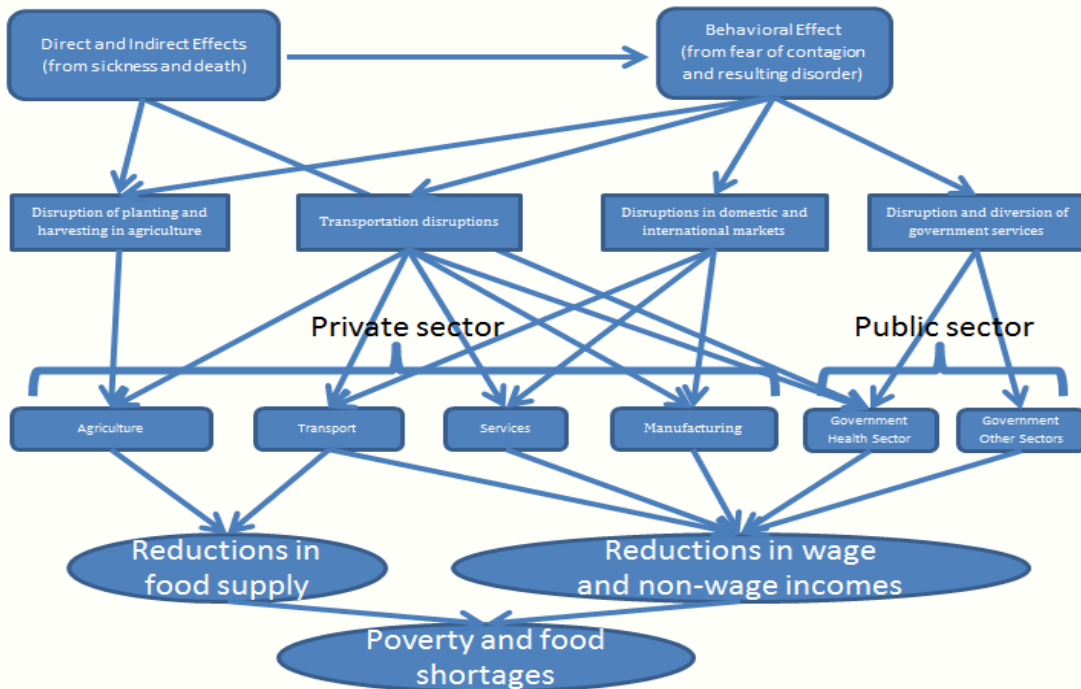


Fig. 1: The broad channel of short term impact of Ebola Virus Disease

Source: World Bank (2014):

Nutrition, Diet, and Health: nutrition creates an inter-relationship between health and Agriculture because if food is secured it will ensure dietary quality and improve mineral and nutrient deficiencies. Through agriculture adequate nutrition, diet and good health can be secure starting from having backyard garden.

One major prerequisite for the maintenance of health is that there is optimal dietary intake of a number of chemicals; the chief of these are vitamins, certain amino acids, certain fatty acids, various minerals, and water. Robert et al (2003).

Employment Opportunity through Agriculture:

With the strong growth record, African economies remain to face significant economic and social challenges. For example, an increasing number of young people entering the labour market, thus requiring economies to create more and better employment opportunities. It is therefore crucial to examine the extent to which the recent economic performance and structural shifts in production were accompanied by adequate improvements in the quantity and quality of employment. Pedro (2013)

The sky-scraping and persistent increase in unemployment has caused a lot of challenges for the economy. The unemployment problem has increased poverty rate, prostitution, conflicts, dejection, increase in crime as well as family disputes and broken marriages. Unemployed individuals become more and more dissatisfied and resort to uprising and demonstrations. Due to unemployment, the economy's GNP will be less than the potential GNP. Manggoel (2012)

In Nigeria, before the advent of crude oil, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. Then, the country's economy thrived; food was available and affordable. People, therefore, did not go hungry, except in extreme cases occasioned by a serious factor. With the oil boom era, the country and its people shifted attention from agriculture to oil and gas. Subsequently, graduates of Agricultural Science, Soil Science, Agricultural Extension, Agricultural Economics etc., looked for white-collar jobs in banks and other seemingly lucrative areas, including oil and gas. Little did people know that those who remained in agriculture would today be raking in millions and billions of naira, as their products now grace both local and international markets.

For example Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is not only a retired army officer, former head of state and politician; he is also a successful farmer. He owns the biggest Farm in Nigeria, which is called Obasanjo Farms. This large farm was formally opened on October 8, 1979, a week after Obasanjo handed over power to a civilian administration on October 1, 1979. Also the richest man in Africa Aliko Dangote makes his money from

Agricultural produce because almost all of his company depends on agricultural raw materials for production. In Africa today he's the major producer of cement, sugar, wheat, flour, rice and salt. There are so many rich people like that that they do engage in agricultural enterprises.

It is pertinent to know that no nation can have a buoyant economy while its rate of unemployment it's at peak. According to African Economic Outlook (2012) Hundreds of millions of Africans youth will be leaving school in the next decades, at every level, and looking for jobs. Africa's youth population is not only growing rapidly, it is also getting better educated. Based on current trends, 59% of 20-24 year olds will have had secondary education in 2030, compared to 42% at present. To turn this rapid growth in human resources into a labour force, Africa needs to tackle youth employment. Past growth has not been sufficiently employment-intensive. A stronger focus has to be put on job creation for better economy.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

This paper has examined the significant of Agricultural development in alleviating economic challenges in Africa. The paper dwell much on three germane areas of Agriculture that is food security, health and employment generation and the fact has been revealed on how these three areas contribute immensely to the growth and development of economy in Africa.

However, based on the finding from this study, it is recommended that effort should be concentrated more on Agricultural sector because of the strategic relevance of the sector to the nation's economy especially in the areas of health, food security and employment generation.

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