

# AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE DISPENSATION OF CHANGE

By

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, Nigerians voted for political change, which implies that they have also voted for policy change including changes in agricultural policy of the country. In this regard, there is no gainsaying the obvious fact that the sequence of changes expected to take place would play important roles to the tertiary education sector as the knowledge infrastructure to make change happen in all sectors of the economy. The aim of this address is to illuminate the interface between political change and policy change in relation to agriculture, and then to demonstrate the role of tertiary education system in the process of change.

First, I am to correlate the political changes in Nigeria's past with the attendant policy changes in agricultural sector in the historical context. Next, I am to present an impressionistic assessment of the last policy change in the sector christened as ATA (Agricultural Transformation Agenda) by the last administration, thereby drawing the implications of the latest political change for agricultural policy under the new government. Last is to demonstrate the role of tertiary education in the dispensation of policy change for agricultural development in the present political dispensation.

## BACKGROUND

In Nigeria, the chronicle of political changes witnessed since independence is as follows: from colonial to civilian (Tafawa Balewa, October 1960); from civilian to military (Aguyi Ironsi, January 1966); from military to military (Yakubu Gowon, July 1966); from military to military (Muritala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo 1975); from military to civilian (Sheu Shagari, 1979); from civilian to military (Mohamadu Buhari, 1984); from military again to military again (Ibrahim Babangida, 1985); from military to civilian (Shonekan, 1994); from civilian to military (Sani Abacha, 1995); from military to military (Abdulsalami Abubakar, 1998); from military to civilian (Olusegun Obasanjo recycled, 1999); from civilian to civilian (Musa Yar'Adua/Goodluck Jonathan, 2007); and now, from civilian to civilian (Mohamadu Buhari recycled, 2015).

In this series of political changes it is noteworthy that the three types of such changes featured - from civil governance to military governance or vice versa (Type 1 - a change of regime); from military governance to military governance (Type 2 - change of administration); and from civil governance to civil governance (also Type 2 - change of administration). Thus a change of regime happens when a government of a type, say civilian changes to a government of a different type (as in January 1966, 1975, 1994, 1999). A change of administration happens when a government of one type, say civilian, changes to a government of a different type, say military or vice versa (as in July 1966, 1979, 1995, 1998, 2007 and 2015).

We note that the Type 2 change (i.e. civil-civil) is the present political dispensation in Nigeria since 1999, the longest period of political resilience thus far. We also notice that this is of two kinds, namely: the Type 1a) when the change of baton takes place between a particular political party to

the same political party (as in 2007 and 2011 that the ruling PDP government handed over to another PDP government to rule (i.e. the Obasanjo and Yar'Adua interchange, and the Yar'Adua and Jonathan interchange respectively); and the Type 1b – when the change of baton takes place between a particular ruling political party and a different political party to rule (as in 2015 that the ruling PDP government handed over to the APC government to rule (i.e. the Jonathan and Buhari interchange)).

Next, we chronicle the series of policy changes in the past correlated to the series of political changes in terms of the programmes of the federal government for developing the agricultural sector: Nationally Coordinated Food Production Programme (NAFPP, 1972); Operation Feed the Nation (OFN, 1976); Green Revolution Programme (GRP, 1980); Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI, 1986); National Agricultural Land Authority (NALDA, 1990); National Programme on Security Programme (NPFS, 2000); National Food Security Programme (NFSP, 2003); National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA, 2004); and, most recently, Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA, 2011). The correlation is nearly perfect as the emergence of one political change of the same or another type often leads to the emergence of another policy change in terms of programmes of the federal government for developing the agricultural sector.

However, the agricultural policy of the last administration, which is of the Type 2b was profound, to which we now turn to assess briefly, as the basis for describing the manner of changes to be expected under the new administration thereby laying the foundation for articulating the role of tertiary education sector in Nigeria's agricultural policy.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AGENDA ATA

Launched in 2011, the ATA symbolized the good intention of the Federal Government of Nigeria to transform the sluggish traditional agricultural sector to a productive modern sector. According to the policy document recently articulated, the ATA is a commodity-focused intervention strategy anchored on a notion of agriculture as a business and not a development activity. Among the many components of ATA, those that reached full implementation stage first were GES (Growth Enhancement Support scheme) and CVC (Commodity Value Chain). The objective of GES was to address the financial leakages that characterized the farm inputs sector, thereby ending corruption in the delivery channel of fertilizer subsidy policy and expanding the reach of the policy benefits to a larger population of farmers in Nigeria. The operational mechanisms of the scheme involved an electronic wallet using mobile phones to deliver agro-inputs at no cost to farmers for seeds and 50% subsidy for fertilizers. The electronic wallets served as vouchers for registered farmers to redeem stipulated quantities of farm inputs from registered agro-dealers at strategic locations

The value chain approach is the policy instrument under ATA for sharpening the focus of policy instruments on specific farm commodities from production in the upstream through storage, processing and marketing in the downstream. Some 24 commodities chains have been developed at different stages of the chain with emphasis on the critical values created in each case. These include crop, livestock and fisheries commodities in different parts of the country with particular emphasis on the comparative as well as competitive advantages of commodities.

Other components of ATA at different stages of implementation include the following:

- a. Staple Crops Processing Zones (SCPZ) – A command area model of infrastructure provision with a view to attracting investments into production, processing and related infrastructure in areas of food production clusters and to driving growth in agricultural areas;

- b. Commodity Market and Trade Corporations for Nigeria – These would be set up to coordinate commodity value chains towards ensuring that farmers are able to secure profitable markets for their commodities, and to organize farmers into production clusters for each commodity value chain and link them to processors;
- c. Agricultural Extension - The aim is, among other roles, to assure participatory extension and advisory service characterized by regular funding and well trained staff;
- d. Institutional Reforms – This featured the establishment of regional in addition to pre-existing state offices of the FMARD, and the establishment of the Agricultural Transformation Implementation Council (ATIC) under the chairmanship of the President, as well as the establishment of the Eminent Persons Group to provide advisory services to ATA;
- e. Gender and Youth – A desk in the ministry to mainstream gender with particular reference to the role of women and youth in the agricultural value chains;
- f. Agribusiness and Investments – A customer oriented one-stop centre of excellence, catering to the agribusiness and investment needs of the private sector, with a view to attract domestic and foreign direct investments into the agricultural sector of Nigeria's economy.
- g. Establishment of the Agricultural Transformation Council (ATIC) under the chairmanship of the President.
- h. Establishment of the Eminent Persons Group to provide advisory services to ATA.

By and large, I have an impression of the ATA implementation as a policy experiment that produced a mixture of good and bad results, thereby providing a set of lessons of experience the policy stakeholders to learn from. On the positive side, we applaud the policy authorities and experts, whose thoughts and actions have helped in curbing fertilizer corruption in the country, which, however, the resource costs of achieving that have not been ascertained. But that seems to be all, as several elements of ATA presents us with a number of bad results as well; these I am to highlight in seven postulates as follows.

1. *That in a rural economy, agriculture is first and foremost a culture, then a science:* This indicates that that the rural economy of Nigeria behaves differently from the urban economies of the industrial countries. The single most important feature of the rural economy is the preponderance of the rural people, who are largely farmers operating on a small scale and who have been trapped in the poverty cycle. Thus, in the circumstance of the rural poor, unless the government comes to their aid to break through the cycle and get them out of it, such people are practically unable to help themselves, so remaining in protracted suffering perpetually. This is the overarching philosophy behind all forms of development, which not only puts the rural people in sharper focus than the glamour of scientific breakthroughs, but also puts the small-scale farmers on the front burner in all rural development efforts. Suffice it to say that the policy instruments of the ATA that relegate the role of small-scale famers to the background should be discontinued by the new administration, to be replaced by other more pro-poor policy instruments in order to focus the rural people sharper and better than ATA has done in the past four years.

2. *That agriculture is not only a business but also a development activity:* Another philosophical flaw of the ATA is the mantra of agriculture as strictly a business and “not development activity”. This notion is most fallacious, heretical and antithetical to all known theories of development; so given the significant cultural character of agriculture alone, one wonders what else is up for development if agriculture is not. Furthermore, the notion manifestly

negates the critical fact of Nigerian development that puts family farming first and the small-scale farmers as the central focus of agricultural development. Nonetheless, we identify with the first phrase of the slogan that characterizes ATA as a business, which, though it makes economic sense, there is nothing innovative about that. Thus the present administration needs a fast-track approach to changing the mindset of the people in favour of the notion of “agriculture is a business” but against the notion of “agriculture is not a development activity”.

3. *That agricultural transformation is not just a single sector affair but that of a constellation of economic and social sectors:* This refers to the view of agricultural development as a multi-sector endeavor, which reflects in the growing client demand for policy change by donor bodies in Nigeria; as illustrated by World Bank that funded AgDPO and SCPZ projects (Agricultural Development Policy Operation and Staple Crops Processing Zone respectively) in support of ATA. Also, the view is depicted in the emerging trends in global practice and in the delivery of assistance to needy countries by international institutions in development, trade and finance, through a multisectoral approach. The observed trend of client’s demand for multisectorality in agricultural policy design and implementation is geared towards ensuring that donor assistance helps to achieve multisectoral cooperation between project components, and among MDAs involved in the implementation of the same project.

Furthermore, the client-driven nature of this demand helps to ensure that projects fit into the development process of the country in a multisectoral pattern. The rationale for multisectoral approach also predicates on the multidimensional nature of the macroeconomic policy environment governing agriculture, including the dimensions of programme accountability, financial transparency as well as policy due process and other due diligence practices required to make multisectorality work for agriculture. In this regard, the multisectorality of agriculture is demonstrated by the instrumentality of several other sectors which jointly determine the performance of agricultural policy but are outside the sphere of agriculture ministry, namely: foreign exchange policies; monetary policies; fiscal policies; income policies; national industrial policies; international trade and balance of payment policies; Thus the new regime needs to strengthen the case for multisectorality as a deliberate principle of the envisaged change of agricultural policy; which contrasts from the approach of ATA that failed to recognize the complexity of agricultural value chains, thereby failing to build a collaborative relationship with other ministries in addressing critical problems facing agriculture in Nigeria.

4. *That the business character of agriculture thrives best in the context of a market economy:* Here we liken the market mechanisms to the centre of a football field, wherein the game starts and wherein the strength of any one side to win the game and anyone side to lose the game lies. In line with the game theory of the market, the prospects of wining or losing or draw (win-lose, or win-win), it is in the market that the strength or weakness of any one side may be tested or determined such that both the seller and buyer may be happy about the outcome of a transaction between them.

Thus, given this role of the market, it is a critical minus for the ATA implementation, which its policy instrument for developing the agricultural market failed to fly within four years; to that extent the transaction in agricultural commodities in terms of buying and selling was not optimized. Even though the idea of market corporations was conceived, this fails to materialize in any perceptible way. This factor was responsible for the inability of ATA authorities to drive incremental output from the market, but from the farm end only. For the new regime to fill this gap an aggressive institutional reform of the market is presently required to stimulate large incremental production of agricultural commodities the demand side of the market. In doing so, the critical lessons of past experiences will be found useful in this regard.

5. *That a solid infrastructure backbone is sine qua non for contemporaneously growing the agricultural and rural sectors.* The critical role of infrastructure as the backbone of agriculture is often underplayed, just as done under ATA. Also under ATA an attempt failed to revitalize the project of the ministry for the systematic collection and analysis of rural infrastructure data. This not only amounts to planning the processing zones project (SCPZ) without facts but also rendered the design and implementation of the project ineffectual. In this regard we recommend to the new administration the redesign and reformulation of the SCPZ projects, based on robust data on rural infrastructures disaggregated into different type as classified by the Rural Infrastructures Survey Projects, namely: Rural physical infrastructures (rural road network, rural water supply schemes, rural storage facilities, rural market facilities, etc.); Rural Social infrastructure (rural health facilities, rural educational institutions, etc. Rural Institutional infrastructure (rural credit societies, rural development associations, rural self-help schemes, etc.). Alternatively rural infrastructures may be classified in the functional sense, namely: Rural production infrastructure, Rural Storage infrastructure; and, Rural Market infrastructure.

6. *That as a best practice in policy due process in agricultural development, the constitutional division of labour between the Federal and State Governments should be honestly observed at both levels of governance*

A perennial aberration of the Nigeria's agricultural policy environment, which also played out under ATA, is the strong tendency for MDAs to operate outside the explicit provisions of the extant constitutional law of the country; which follows directly the strong tendency of Federal and State Governments to do the same. With particular reference to the provision for agriculture, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that agricultural development is on the concurrent legislative list implying that it is a joint federal and state responsibility. Nonetheless, in order to avoid role confusion the constitution also establishes a division of labour between the two levels of agricultural governance, but which is generally overlooked and constantly violated by way of federal trespass beyond the set boundary and also by way of states complacency, or by way of passive acquiescence by both. In the constitution the Federal Government was explicitly assigned specific roles in terms of research, promotion and finance while the state governments were assigned generic roles bordering on the actual implementation of projects on ground.<sup>1</sup> Thus, judging from implementation of ATA and previous strategies of agricultural development in the country, it is obvious that the spirit of the constitution in guiding the relationship between the agricultural sector at the federal and at the state level is observed only in breach; which has serious implications for policy performance by deepening the institutional confusion in managing the multi-sector agricultural economy.

7. *That Rights-based policy instruments are superior to the Needs-based policy instruments for the sustained food security of the nation.*

Traditionally food is perceived as a basic human *need*, which implies that the failure of policies in meeting the food entitlements of the people is practically inconsequential; but not as a basic human *right*, which implies that the failure of the policies to meet the food entitlement of the people is actionable, justiciable and ultimately remediable under the law. The difference between the two notions is not farfetched: while the former notion – food as a human need - views the role of government in formulating and implementing food policies as obligatory only (i.e. mere charity or an act of doing the people a favour), the latter notion – food as a human right - views the role of government in this regard as mandatory (i.e. owed as a duty), so as for people to be able to request

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4 of the constitution (Concurrent Legislative List) specifically assigns the role of federal government as follows: "... (c) the establishment of research centres for agricultural studies, and d) the establishment of institutions and bodies for the promotion and financing of industrial, commercial and agricultural projects" (emphasis mine).

the government to account when its policies fail to meet their food entitlement. Moreover the right to food approach helps to practically induce increased food production through the demand side of the food market, which will in turn trigger a steady supply response from farmers and other rural enterprises.

Thus, contrary to the popular but wrong notion of right to food, it is not an apology of state socialism that implies that government should provide food for the people free of cost. Rather, the kernel of right to food as an obligation of government is three-fold as follows:

1. Obligation to respect the right to food – i.e. to recognize the right of people to nutritious food, which stipulates the state's exercise of power to refrain from acts capable of destroying people's access to food through unfavourable public policies;
2. Obligation to protect the right to food – i. e. to protect the right of people to nutritious food, which entails regulation of the activities of non-state actors or private sector, that are inimical to people's food entitlements.
3. Obligation to fulfill the right to food – i. e. to help people in protracted suffering with provision of food at critical times, which entails the provision of food assistance to vulnerable groups and other such people as those that are temporarily displaced from their natural habitats.

We have paid a lip service to the issue of food as a human right rather than food as a mere human need, the negative consequences of which the ATA is equally culpable so this needs to change under the present administration. In this regard, my organization is implementing the National Campaign on Right to Food, which the twin goals is to introduce the change in mindset of the people from the traditional notion of food as a mere human need to food as a fundamental human right; and to introduce policy and practice changes in policy governance of the agricultural sector that help that government fulfill its sacred obligations to recognize, protect and fulfill the right to food in Nigeria. Towards this end, we are instrumental to the introduction of two legislation in the National Assembly for the amendment of Nigerian constitution, one at the House of Representative in 2010, for giving recognition to right to food in Chapter 2 of the constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy), and the other at the Senate in 2013 for including right to food among the human rights specified in Chapter 4 (Fundamental Human Rights). The two Bills have passed the first reading stage and presently await the next stage when a public hearing will be organized in one or both chambers of the National Assembly. If and when they are passed into law, the Bills will pave the way for introducing the necessary policy and practice changes required for the recognition, protection and fulfillment of the right to food in Nigeria, as it presently operates in other countries of the world that have attained food security of their people.

## **ROLE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

In discussing the role of the tertiary education system in agricultural policy, my analytical spectacle is directed at three aspects namely, role definition, role perception and role performance. The list of institutions involved include, the general-purpose universities with faculties of agriculture; special purpose universities namely the agricultural universities - three of them namely, University of Agriculture Makurdi (UAM established in 1988), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUAAB, established in 1988) -, and the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOU, established in 1993); the Polytechnics as well as Colleges of Agriculture. The role analysis of these institutions is premised on the definition-perception-performance framework as follows.

### **Role definition for Tertiary Education**

With special reference to agriculture, we define the role of tertiary educational institutions in terms of their vision, mission and mandate rendering services in terms of teaching, research and development activities. This is with the view to generating and deploying the knowledge required for growing the sector specifically and improving welfare of the people generally. The critical element of this definition is the knowledge, of tacit and explicit kinds, to be generated and deployed. In this role, the tertiary education sector represents the knowledge infrastructure backbone for uplifting the quality of life of rural people, thereby contributing to development in several ways, and also constituting an important part of the knowledge society. The scope of our definition is quite large, as it ascribes to tertiary educational institutions the role of a change agent in agricultural policy process, wherein the proper management of the knowledge infrastructure is the trigger factor required to pursue agricultural development with other policy instruments.

To develop the agricultural sector on a fast track, the different kinds of specialised knowledge to be managed (i.e. stored, retrieved, shared, or changed) by the tertiary education system include the following:

- Knowledge of the subject matter of agriculture - namely crop science, animal science, soil science, social science including economics, sociology, agricultural engineering, technology, etc.
- Knowledge of the political economy of agriculture - the links between polity and policy, the stages of policy cycle and policy process, the issues underlying political change and policy change; the workings of policy instruments for developing agriculture, etc.
- Knowledge of the business environment for agriculture - the role of private sector, the instrumentality of entrepreneurship, optimum resource use in agriculture, the mechanisms of the market, the connectivity of domestic and international markets, rules governing international trade, etc.

### **Role Perception of Tertiary Education**

The large scope of our role definition of tertiary education system notwithstanding, the way and manner that we perceive this role is also important. That is, how is this role perceived or conceived by the tertiary education system itself and the policy stakeholders themselves in relation to agricultural development? The first point to make is that our role perception sensitivities and sensibilities is a reflection of several factors governing our state of mind. On the part of tertiary education system the institutions themselves appear somewhat inadequate in perceiving their role in the circumstance of their existence and historical antecedents, which affects their activities in packaging the curriculum to teach students, in designing the type of researches conduct and their ability to properly market themselves in the knowledge society.

Suffice it to say that in Nigeria the outcome of this perception in terms of knowledge is mostly demand-driven, in the sense that it is the people that strongly express their desire for education (subject to some exceptions, however) and not supply-driven in the sense that it is not the tertiary education institutions themselves that advertise strongly the knowledge infrastructure to attract students; which falls short of a competitive environment for marketing knowledge as a product of that infrastructure. As a result the cost to knowledge society, in terms of the price of buying and selling of knowledge, is very high relative to what obtains in more competitive markets for knowledge in advanced countries. If we are to count these costs, they include: the poor quality of graduates successively turned out in graduation ceremonies; the high rates of students abuse in terms of sharp and unethical practices among lecturers; the increasing trends of antisocial activities among students in terms of cultism and other deviant behaviours; and, of course, the saturation of

the job market with graduates who cannot apply themselves to realities of life outside the campus, to mention a few.

We perceive the role of educational institutions as policy instruments for agricultural progress through the prism of development communication theory. In this theory there is constant communication between the tertiary institutions as knowledge infrastructure and the general public, whereby the institutions and general public engage each other in transmitting messages to and from each other for the benefit of agriculture sector. In the two-way communication model a given knowledge product originates as a message from the tertiary institutions to be transmitted through a medium and to the general public as the target or used towards increased food security and job security in the Nigerian society. In practical terms the knowledge product is embodied in the set of graduates in different disciplines deployed on a yearly basis to impact society in terms of food security and employment.

In this communication model, the effective delivery and application of the message depends as much on the proper packaging of the message as also on the situation with the source, channel and target of the communication; as highlighted below.

- **Message** – This constitutes the real essence of communication; the critical issues about the message pertain to the nature and adequacy of the message; in which regard the quality of graduates produced by the tertiary institutions is called to question.
- **Source** – That is, the producer of the message; the issues about source being the capacity of the tertiary institutions to properly package the message, with reference to quality of instructions delivered by lecturers through out-dated syllabus, unavailability of fund for running the institutions and other necessary facilities.
- **Medium** (or communication channel) - The medium is the channel which the message flows through on its way to the target, wherefrom many problems of lie, such as unavailability of vacancies for the employment of graduates in the public and private sectors, lack of credit facilities to provide start-up capital for graduates to demonstrate entrepreneurship and practice their profession, etc.
- **Target** - A target is the end point for receiving and implementing the message; whereby the best of message passing through an efficient medium may miss the target partially or completely depending on the disposition of the target to receive, with reference to the bad problems of insecurity that scares the fresh graduates away from certain places so they cannot quickly settle down with their lives let alone apply their knowledge one way or another.

### **Role Performance of Tertiary Education**

We describe performance of the roles of tertiary institutions in agricultural sector in terms of the quality of graduates being produced on a yearly basis to impact the knowledge society generally and the sector specifically. This depends on several factors, which include, quality of instruction passed to these graduates while they were students; the resources and facilities available in tertiary institutions for carrying out their activities; and the disposition of government and other principals to allow the tertiary institutions to manifest the potential inherent in them to do so. In this regard the state of physical, social and institutional facilities available in universities, polytechnics and colleges of agriculture in different parts of the country, is critical, as well as the resilience of the policy authorities in following the law in meeting the mission and mandate of the institutions as originally conceived.

Needless to say that the state of infrastructure available in these institutions at present leaves much to be desired - dilapidated buildings that are not conducive for effective learning; absence of laboratories and teaching/research farms to expose the agriculture students to practical farming; inadequacy of well trained lecturers to deliver instructions to students; etc. The aspect that is not so obvious is lack of resilience on the part of public policy authorities to allow the original role

perception to take its full course before introducing perturbations in the structure and functions of institutions for knowledge delivery in the country.

### Conclusions

The recent political change in Nigeria offers several opportunities for policy change, which the instrumentality of tertiary education may help to maximize to the advantage of agriculture. In this sector, the change we want to see involves fine tuning the policy instruments of the agricultural programme of the last administration, with a view to preserving the desirable features of Nigeria's agriculture, such as preponderance of small-scale farmers who need a sharper focusing of the policy instruments, the cultural character of the rural people who need improved infrastructures for facilitating their enterprises; the sanctity of people's right to food as a philosophy of policy intervention in agriculture which is inalienable, actionable and ultimately justifiable under law; among others.

In the process of the envisaged policy change, the tertiary educational institutions have a critical role to play to continually generate the knowledge product in graduates, packaging this product properly as message for transmission through a conducive policy environment, and effective delivery to the general public in order to impact the lives of the people positively, in terms of incremental food production, poverty reduction and livelihood improvements.

Thank you for listening.

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