

Agripreneurship Development as a Tool for Revitalizing the Agricultural Sector Performance of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Over-reliance on crude oil as a currency exchange has resulted in a steady decline in the performance of the agricultural sector, which was Nigeria's mainstay before the oil boom of the 1970's. At present, the Nigerian economy continues to struggle to retain its title of 'Africa's largest economy', with recent fluctuations in oil prices having negatively impacted the economy, reflected in the low standard of living and increased rise in the cost of goods and services. Scholars agree that the Nigerian economy should be diversified through agriculture and that agripreneurship could improve the nation's current economic situation. Therefore, enhanced performance of the agricultural sector could lead to economic recovery and sustainable development. Despite the fact that many awareness programs, workshops, seminars and presentations have also been organized by private and governmental bodies and organizations, strategies and support systems have been created by the government at both the state and federal levels to improve the agricultural sector, but results are still pointing. Recent studies indicate that the performance of the agricultural sector in Nigeria is poor. This indicates that perhaps agripreneurship has not really been embraced and there appear to be some bottlenecks or obstacles that are hampering the improvement in the performance of the country's agricultural sector. Agriculture is still practiced at the subsistence level. Accordingly, the focus of this study is to examine agripreneurship development as a tool for revitalizing the Agricultural sector performance of the economy which will in turn lead to economic growth and development.

KEYWORDS: export, foreign exchange, agriculture, agripreneurship, economic growth

INTRODUCTION

Increasing the performance of the agricultural sector through improved productivity is one of the most important ways to reduce poverty in developing countries (Nebo G.N. et al., 2017). It has been pointed out that increasing agricultural productivity and output is linked to poverty reduction. Thirstle et al. (2013) suggest that improved agricultural sector performance is associated with lower incidences of poverty. Consequently, studies by Food and Agricultural Statistics (2004) have found that poverty reduction occurs mainly in areas where there have been significant productivity gains in agricultural sector performance (as in the case of South Korea).

The agricultural sector has been described as the engine of economic development in so many economies (Food and Agricultural Statistics, 2004). History has consistently shown that no country has ever been successfully industrialized without first achieving a significant improvement in the performance of the agricultural sector (Nebo GN et al., 2017).

However, the agricultural sector in the Nigerian economy has not performed as expected given the continued decline in its contribution to the country's GDP and foreign exchange earnings. Before the discovery of crude oil in the 1970's, the sector

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provided foreign exchange, income, fuel, jobs, food and raw materials for industry. However, with the advent of petroleum leading to a neglect of agriculture in the early 1970s, this led to a steady decline in the percentage contribution of agriculture to the country's economic growth. The country's current economic situation has been attributed to the poor performance of the agricultural sector and over-reliance on crude oil as the main source of foreign exchange earnings (Ojo, 2001). Recognizing this fact has prompted the Nigerian government to push hard for improving the performance of the agricultural sector and diversifying the economy from crude oil to non-oil exports. Past and present governments have made a number of attempts to improve agriculture, but the sector has continued to perform poorly. Researchers have also made various contributions to how to improve the performance of the agricultural sector. Ahungwa et al. (2014) suggested that in order to revitalize Nigeria's agricultural sector and make it a sustainable means of economic development, there must be a shift from agriculture to agripreneurship. Agripreneurship is a new concept in global agriculture that aims to transform agriculture from its largely subsistence level into a competitive enterprise (Nwankwo E.C et al., 2021). The concept of agripreneurship in the fields of entrepreneurship and agriculture is practically new. Accordingly, there is a lack of literature on agripreneurship and agripreneurship development. This research therefore bridges the literature gap. It builds on the little existing literature on agripreneurship. Furthermore, in view of the current economic recession Nigeria is experiencing, previous research offered different solutions ranging from structural to economic reforms. However, this study attempted to explicitly recommend the development of agripreneurship as a strategic tool for economic growth and development. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine the development of agripreneurship as a strategic tool for economic recovery and sustainable development in Nigeria.

History and Significance of Agriculture in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country lavishly endowed with abundant natural resources. With access to the vast workforce and natural resources, Nigeria has the potential to build a prosperous economy and afford the sheer need of the populace. Nigeria's rich human heritage and extensive reserve heritage give it the potential to become not only Africa's most important economy, but also the most important player in the global economy. However, this is only possible if these resources are well managed and fully utilized. These resources include 84 million hectares of arable land, a skilled workforce and two main rivers in Africa

known as the Niger and Benue. On par with other African, European and Asian countries, Nigeria's economic expansion has nonetheless been below average and the inability to tap into much of the abundant human and material wealth has left Nigeria a degenerating economy whose residents suffer from deprivation and poverty. In the 1960s, agriculture accounted for over 75% of Nigeria's occupation and export earnings, over 50% of government revenue and over 60% of the country's GDP (gross domestic product). Thus, a reflective look at the Nigerian economy places agriculture (which accounts for 26.8% of GDP and two-thirds of employment) as the mainstay, and the main foreign exchange earner has seen its efficiency deteriorate due to years of neglect (Global Citizen, 2012). Agriculture has been seen as the sector that will propel Nigeria to become the most industrialized economy; However, this remarkable role of agriculture has deteriorated over the years (Kilby, 1969). Despite the increasing attention paid to crude oil production and refining, the agricultural sector's GDP has remained relatively stable. Even though agriculture is no longer the most important contributor to Nigeria's gross national product and the main foreign exchange earner due to the exceptional growth in the petroleum segment of the economy, agriculture has nevertheless managed to be the central economic activity in terms of employment in the market.

Agripreneurship

Agripreneurship implies Agricultural entrepreneurship is the alliance of various business sectors that can all be enhancers to boosting the Agricultural sector performance of an economy. Such industry incorporates the Information innovation area, the innovation area, the banking and money area, the business area, the monetary area, and the labour area. All these business sectors work in cohesion.

Concepts of Agripreneurship

Agripreneurship encompasses the entire value chain from the input of the raw materials to the end product, where the finished products reach the end consumer. Agripreneurship is farming; However, it operates with a new form, a new scope, a new platform and a new direction. It not only involves growing crops, but involves the combination of farming and entrepreneurship that transforms farming into a business and therefore makes it attractive to the modern and technologically advanced stakeholders. Agricultural entrepreneurship transcends old farming and evolves into agribusiness (the addition of business to agriculture), which further evolves into agricultural entrepreneurship (the addition of entrepreneurial principles to agribusiness).

Agripreneurship creates a business opportunity (e.g. value creation, global commercialization of high-tech agriculture) that can be used to boost job creation, increase productivity and generate foreign income.

Agripreneurship in Nigeria

Nigeria possesses the ability to advance its economy through agripreneurship, its development, maintenance and sustainability, however, the economic benefits of many agricultural products in Nigeria lack improvement and adaptation due to limited knowledge of value creation. There are other mitigating factors such as low technology, poor infrastructure and inconsistent government policies. As a result, Nigeria suffers from two fundamental agricultural violations, namely a failure to meet domestic food needs and an inability to export quality products vital to a thriving market economy (Olatunji T. A, 2019).

Integrating agripreneurship into the Nigerian economy

The history of farming in Nigeria has shown that farming can be a massive income generator for the country if the right strategies are put in place. For agriculture to be successful in Nigeria, agripreneurship is key. The idea and concept of farming among today's youth is having adverse effects and is widely seen as a weak and dirty occupation that no one wants to give up. However, agripreneurship can engage young people from different backgrounds and sectors to work together in all aspects of agricultural value chains. Young and prospective graduates can be involved in training to become future agripreneurs. Along with their developed skills and education, Nigeria may have a fighting chance to fight the recession and stimulate Nigeria's growth and development from its current outdated position.

Benefits of Agripreneurship in Nigeria

- Agripreneurship fights the recession
- It offers a solution to the massive unemployment rate
- Increase in foreign exchange earnings
- Agripreneurship contributes to social and economic development
- Nigeria's poverty index has fallen immensely
- It ensures adequate nutrition and food security
- Agripreneurship as a business entity diversifies Nigeria's economy and income base
- Providing business opportunities
- Increase in agricultural productivity
- Creation of new ventures
- Development of innovative products and services

Disadvantages of agripreneurship in Nigeria

- Inadequate infrastructure (lack of modern equipment) Lack of training for farmers
- Farmers' ignorance of the benefits offered by the system
- Limitations of knowledge about modern agricultural techniques
- Ridiculous technologies
- Unstable political environment
- Poor communication and transport networks
- Expensive IT services
- Corrupt government agencies
- The absence of Farmers Cooperatives
- Poorly managed financial institutions
- Lack of funding for the research organization
- Institutional weaknesses

Constraints on Agripreneurship Development in Nigeria

Many obstacles speak against a successful development of agripreneurship. Some of the limitations are as follows:

Insufficient funds speak against the development of agripreneurship. On the government side, this could mean insufficient funds to set up agripreneurship development centers and/or organize agripreneurship development programs (ADPs) to educate and develop both current and potential agripreneurs. It could mean that there is not enough capital to start an agribusiness of their choice.

People's attitudes towards agriculture and agribusiness are also a challenge. So many people, especially young people, are reluctant to choose the agribusiness profession. Many graduates have given up farming in favor of white-collar jobs. Some people mistakenly believe that agriculture is for the people in the rural areas.

Poor agricultural infrastructure counteracts the successful development of agripreneurship. The agricultural infrastructures mentioned are: agricultural machinery, storage facilities, improved seeds and agrochemicals, irrigation systems, energy, transport and marketing infrastructure. The lack of agriculture-related policies and laws can hinder the development of agripreneurship. In many countries, there are no agriculture-related policies and laws that encourage people to get involved in farming and the agribusiness.

The lack of agricultural specialists with modern agripreneurial knowledge and skills speaks against the development of agripreneurship. It should be noted once again that agriculture has developed enormously in recent times. Therefore, people who are already involved in farming or intend to engage in

it in the future need to be equipped with the knowledge of the modern farming techniques and practices. Where people are willing to be trained, the unavailability or lack of professionals with modern agriprenurial expertise impacts negatively on their training.

Expected results from agriprenurship

If agriprenurship is successfully integrated in Nigeria, agriprenurs can provide their families with affordable, nutritious food, medical supplies and other essentials. Nigerians currently suffer from a high poverty rate that depleted their resources, but with the advent of agriprenurship, Nigeria can build, replenish and rescue its resources safely and quickly.

Conclusion

In order to ensure that agriprenurship is successful and well-received, Nigeria needs to make agriculture prominent and attractive with a focus on agriprenurship as a current and viable lifeline for the economy. Nigeria's current economic experience calls for diversification where petroleum is not the only source of foreign income for the country but can be managed in a way that ensures that agribusiness entrepreneurship plays a vital role in reviving its dying economy. Based on the research, Nigeria has a tremendous opportunity for agribusiness entrepreneurship that can be optimally harnessed to benefit its economy, increasing the per capita income and living standards of its citizens.

Recommendation and proposed solution for successful agriprenurship cooperation

For agriprenurship to be a successful project in Nigeria, all hands must be on deck (Nigerian government and its citizens) to take practical steps to cultivate, nurture and develop the economy. On the one hand, governmental organizations need to transform the agricultural sector by providing enough funds needed for the transformation of the agricultural sector. Also, it is important that the government establish well-resourced agriprenurship progress platforms and set up intermittent agriprenurship improvement programs. These platforms ensure that both current and potential agriprenurs are trained in unison to better serve and develop agriprenurship as a whole. With these training courses, agricultural entrepreneurs in Nigeria will be able to apply the knowledge and techniques acquired to ensure the success of the agribusiness and economy. Agriprenurship can be incorporated into the education system of Nigeria as a model or course where young students can learn from their youth and develop the mindset of agriprenurship. On the other hand, Nigeria should also make agriculture and agriprenurship the linchpin of its economic

revitalization. Agriprenurs should focus more on mitigating the compelling influences against agriculture and entrepreneurship development.

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