



THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A fundamental problem that Nigeria is facing is that of food insecurity. any factors have precipitated food insecurity in Nigeria such as banditry, terrorism, climate change, herdsman-farmers clashes, poor social infrastructures like roads, and underdevelopment of the agricultural sector. This paper argues that not only government have a role to play in agricultural development and food security, but also Christianity or the Christian church has a big role to play. Food security is necessary for the health, well-being, welfare, and survival of any nation. Food insecurities breed a lot of social, economic, and cultural problems such as political instability, youth restiveness, health problems, and so forth. The paper uses critical analytic and hermeneutics methods to unravel the issues involved in the discourse. Hermeneutics is used to interpret and give the meaning of the basic concepts in the paper. Critical analysis is used to diagnose and discuss the issues for better understanding. The paper finds that there is food insecurity and poor development of agriculture in Nigeria. The paper concludes that Christianity or the Christian Church has a role to play in fostering food security and promoting agricultural development.

Keywords: Christianity, church, Agriculture, development, food, security, Nigeria.

Introduction

Agricultural development in many so-called developing societies like Nigeria remains poor and pitiable. Compared with agricultural development in many Western societies, agricultural development in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Because of poor agricultural development, the state of food security is troubling and many persons in Nigeria are experiencing both starvation and hunger. Coupled with harsh and difficult socio-economic turmoil human life in the country has become bleak. Due to hunger, and economic doldrums, many youths and even adults are migrating (“japaing”) out of the country. During these harsh times, there is massive corruption, unemployment, insecurities, and dilapidated infrastructures in the land. Kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery and oil theft are reported daily. At the time of writing this paper, there were protests over bad governance, hunger, starvation, and other injustices in the land. Agricultural development and food security can be used to mitigate some of these problems. The fact is that only the government will not be able to ensure food security and agricultural development. While the government or the state has a serious obligation in this regard, other non-governmental bodies like



Christianity/the church as part of the political society should support or partner with the government to ensure food security and agricultural development.

This paper posits that amid poor agricultural development and food insecurity in the land, the Christian religion has a role to play. All social agents indeed have a role to play but the focus of this paper is on the role of Christianity or the Christian religion or Christian church. These terms shall be used interchangeably. That Christianity has a role to play should not be in dispute. A look through history reveals not only the deep interests and commitments of Christians as individuals and groups in agricultural development and food insecurity; but also actions that Christianity had taken to develop and improve agriculture and enhance food security. The people of Israel in Old Testament times lived essentially in an agrarian or agricultural society (Leviticus 23:22, Ruth 3). The God of the people of Israel encouraged agriculture and equally gave rules on agricultural practices. God also desired and encouraged his people to ensure there was food in the land and that no one was allowed to go hungry or starve. In New Testament times, there were many agricultural activities in the early church, and the early church also ensured that the poor, the widows, and many other disadvantaged in society had their needs met. Many of the parables of Jesus are from the world of agriculture (Matthew 13). In church history, there have been many examples of the development of agriculture in monasteries and the production of food. There has also been engagement in agricultural activities by Christians outside the monasteries. Fahey (2018) writes that: “The Church is greatly interested in farming because it is the most fundamental of all human occupations. Those who work the land are deeply immersed in, and must work in harmony with, the natural rhythms and processes of God’s creative handiwork. The harmony and balance of rural life are profoundly upset by industrialized living, both on and off the land.” It is with the above in mind that this paper argues for more intensive and expansive investment and engagement of Christianity in agricultural development and food security.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following terms guide this paper- agricultural development, food security, and Christianity. Akpomedaye (2010), defines agriculture as “primarily concerned with the cultivation of crops and rearing of livestock...” (p. 121). Ogbazi (1992), defines agriculture in a similar manner as: “...the art, science and practice of cultivating the land for the cardinal purposes of growing crops and rearing animals for the general wellbeing of man” and today it includes cultivation, preparation of plants and animal products for human utility and their marketing (p. 206).



Byjus (2023), states that agricultural development refers to all processes and conditions that foster agriculture fulfilling its potential through knowledge acquisition and the use of technology; this agricultural development can be achieved among many others through better irrigation methods, highly improved seeds, increase of farm area, increase in number of grown crops, etc. Whatever helps to or leads to an increase in agricultural yield and productivity is a process in agricultural development. Agricultural education and extension services can all lead to agricultural development. On the importance of agricultural development, the World Bank Group (2024) writes that agricultural development helps to reduce poverty, improve food security and raise incomes. The Law Insider (n.d) defines agricultural development as: "... activities associated with the production of livestock or use of the land for planting, growing, cultivating, and harvesting crops, or participating in a wildlife management plan. These activities may include clearing and cultivating specified ground areas for crops, construction of fences to contain livestock, construction of stock ponds, and other similar agricultural activities."

Adejoh (2015), writes that the traditionalist/neo-realist position sees security in its military and state-centric approach as the survival of the state and those who control it; while the non-traditionalist school sees security not just as national security of the state but also as welfare and well-being of the citizens, the fostering of the communal and common good; safety from diseases, hunger, life disruption, freedom from repression. Adejoh (2015), cites Elaigwu to affirm that security is "the ability of a state to ward off all forms of threats external to its survival, including ensuring the internal stability and predictability of the system" (p.34). Security is about people and should enhance the good of the people and also their environmental well-being.

Food security is an important aspect of security for without food human beings cannot survive and flourish. Food is necessary for people to live meaningful lives and be productive agents in society. The foregoing helps in understanding food security properly. Ukwusah (2011) writes that: "Developing agriculture and ensuring food security is the best form of defence for any nation desirous of safeguarding security within a competitive global economy. Nwagbara (2019), propounds that security includes freedom from all forms of wants and lack, and is an essential aspect of social living. The United Nations (1994) defines security to include all the following components: food security, economic security, environmental security, health security, political security, community security, personal security, etc. The World Bank (2024) cites the 1996 World Food Summit to state that: "... food security is defined as when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences



for an active and healthy life” (p.1). Food Forward (2023), defines food security as adequate access to healthy food fostering nutritional and healthy outcomes, and it is the opposite of food insecurity (which the USDA sees as inadequate and inequitable consistent access to affordable and healthy food for optimal well-being and health.

Asadu (2021) writes that: “Christianity is one of the largest religions in the world. It is a religious movement entrenched in the life and teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to regulate human behaviour in this life with much emphasis on life after death. Besides, Christianity is an agent of transformation. A critical study of Christianity shows that its influential powers are quite irresistible.” Christianity is a faith-based religion coming from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In the gospel of Matthew 16 verse 18, Jesus promised to build the church, and by his death on the cross, the Christian church was birthed with its public manifestation on the day of Pentecost. The followers of Christ, who are the church were called Christians in Acts 11 verse 26. The followers of Christ, the Christian church went into the whole world preaching the message of God’s love, salvation, and human well-being.

The State of Agricultural Development and Food Security in Nigeria

There are many factors negatively affecting agricultural development and food security in Nigeria. Egbule (2016), has shown that Nigeria is experiencing food insecurity as a result of the increase in population. There are also many other factors causing it that will be revealed in this work. As should be noted when agriculture from which food comes is neglected or poorly developed, it affects the state of food security. Currently in the country with the removal of fuel subsidies and the emergent increase in the price of many goods and services in the land, there are many Nigerians who cannot afford the increase in the prices. You do not need a prophet to prophesy there is food insecurity in Nigeria. Due to banditry, terrorism, and the violent activities of some herdsmen the farmlands and forests have become insecure. Many have abandoned their farmlands. Bassey (2019) writes that the insurgent activities of Boko Haram in places like Borno State and others, together with violent herdsmen with banditry have led to cattle rustling, made farming communities fearful, and hindered economic activities.

International Trade Administration (2023), painfully notes that to meet her food needs Nigeria spends \$10 billion on imports of wheat, poultry, rice, fish, consumer food, and services from Western countries, South America and South Africa; and some of the factors hurting the agriculture sector are-desertification of grazing and cropland, rising insurgencies, regular flooding, conflicts, lack of infrastructure and



finance; and all these have caused food inflation rising to 23-75% in December 2022. In the third quarter of 2022, the agricultural sector grew only 1.3% and since Nigeria imports low-quality wheat from Ukraine the Russia war there can affect Nigeria's security. The Food and Agricultural Organization (2024), reveals that more than 70% of Nigerians engage in subsistence agriculture and agriculture makes a great contribution to the economy though it is bedevilled by problems such as poor irrigation facilities, poor land tenure systems, land degradation, climate change, low technology, heavy production cost, limited financing, post-harvest losses and poor market access; and all these have led to high food importation in which agricultural imports were at N3.35 trillion between 2016 to 2019, 4 times higher compared with the agricultural export of N803 trillion in the same years.

Another factor that has led to the poor development of agriculture and food insecurity is the white-collar job mentality. Many Nigerian youths leave schools and universities thinking only of employment in the oil industry or air-conditioned offices. They see agriculture as meant for old and aged people in the villages. Egbule (2016), supports this claim when he indicates that many young people in Nigeria are not interested in agriculture as they see no future in it and also as farmers are stereotyped as poor people. Even many who have studied vocational courses like agriculture are thinking of entering into the banking sector, engineering companies, etc. But the reality is that as Egbule (2016) notes, youths with their zest, zeal, and talents can be gainfully employed in agriculture to promote food productivity. Ukwumah (2011) rightly notes that before the discovery of oil agriculture provided up to 80% of Nigeria's national income, but over the years agriculture has suffered neglect and decline, and there is no strategic policy on how to improve agriculture and improve food security. Ukwumah (2011), enumerates other problems confronting agriculture and food security in Nigeria including poor allocation to agriculture in the national budget, increasing population without attendant concern for sustainability, failure to take the local environment into consideration, lack of adequate connection between the research institute and farmers, poor application of mechanized facilities, lack of encouraging government agricultural policies, disconnection between agricultural policies and overall development plans of the country. Oyaniran (2020), corroborates some of the above-listed factors when he states that lack of financial access, shortage of resources, insufficient supply to meet food demand, violent conflicts, absence of value addition in the supply chain, and outdated agricultural systems impede the development of agriculture.

Nigeria's oil economy has also affected agricultural development and food security in other ways. The exploration and exploitation of oil have brought about oil spillage,



gas flaring, petroleum fire disasters, etc. All these negatively impact the state of people's farmlands, and the streams and rivers. Endangered birds and animals have been brought to extinction. Oil spillage and fire have killed crops and plants, polluted rivers, etc. Gas flaring also has polluted the air. Eremi and Aboh (2015), from their research on oil spillage and agrobiodiversity in the Niger Delta showed oil spillage has led to a reduction in crops yields, death of wild plants and cultivated crops, death of animals, reduced growth of pasture, damaged crop quality and made animals less resistant to diseases. All these affect food security.

It is painful to note that there is no continuity and sustenance of government economic and agricultural policies and plans in Nigeria. A government comes into power and abandons the policies and plans of the former administration. Programs and projects such as the 1975 National Accelerated Food Production Programme of Yakubu Gowon, Operation Feed the Nation during Obasanjo's regime, the Green Revolution of Shehu Shagari, Ibrahim Babangida's Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), etc. have all been discontinued. Imagine if all these programs were continued and even if there was the need for new ones they were integrated into the old ones. It seems every government wants to be known for a new program. They fail to realize that government is a continuity. According to International Trade Administration (2023), recent government programs include Anchor Borrowers Programme to diversify the nation's economy, the October 2021 approval of a new agricultural policy called ("National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Plan" (NATIP) in 2022 to replace the 2016 Agricultural Promotion Policy; and the 2021 National Development Plan (2021-2025) which gave priority to tackle farmers needs and builds on Nigeria's 20:2020 (Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, and the Economic Sustainability Plan). Regarding this plan, the International Trade Administration (2023) writes that:

The plan also outlines the central role that food security plays in the country's growth and development. The government and various stakeholders have identified food insecurity as a major challenge – especially the fragile state of cereal production. Food security is a prerequisite for development, but the global experience confirms that sufficient food supply alone is not enough. Dietary diversity, food quality, prenatal and paediatric dietary education, access to health services, water, sanitation, and other public health measures are indispensable development needs.

The International Food and Agricultural Organization (2024), states also that:

The Government has implemented several initiatives and programmes to address the situation including the Agriculture



Promotion Policy (APP), Nigeria–Africa Trade and Investment Promotion Programme, Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative, Economic and Export Promotion Incentives and the Zero Reject Initiative, Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+); Nigeria Erosion and Watershed Management Project (NEWMAP); Action Against Desertification (AAD) Programme, among others. All these efforts aim to increase agricultural productivity to provide sufficient quantities of food to meet domestic demand as well as an abundance of commodity crops for export in the international market. Besides, they aim at reversing forest loss and degradation; promoting sustainable management of natural resources; rehabilitation of degraded lands and reducing erosion and climate vulnerability.

For Oyaniran (2020), government efforts to boost agriculture include a promotion policy, the Nigeria-Africa Trade and Investment Promotion, Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative, protection of local producers, etc.

The problem of public corruption in the form of embezzlement and other greedy activities should not be forgotten when discussing agricultural development and food security in Nigeria. Money that should be used to develop agriculture and infrastructure necessary for the sustenance of agriculture and food supply is stolen by some politicians. In Nigerian news, there have been reports of massive corruption in the supply of fertilizers and other types of machinery needed to develop the sector. The poor state of Nigerian roads impedes agricultural development and food security. Because of bad roads, many farm products cannot easily get to the urban markets. There is a lack of appropriate storage facilities for farmers' produce. Many roads have been awarded in Nigeria, but corrupt contractors and politicians failed to do the roads.

Many things can be done to boost agricultural development and productivity and thus ensure food security. Adeola and Oluwafemi (2014) suggest the following to boost agriculture: setting up of agricultural trust fund, micro-credit schemes, acquisition of storage and processing technologies, irrigation, education and extension services, research, budgetary allocation, etc. Bello, Yahaya and Adamu (2024) write: “So how can Nigeria ensure food security? Increasing agricultural productivity, advancing science and technology, empowering farmers, opening up the market, and promoting good governance are some of the solutions that hold the key to the solution. In this instance, there are four categories of strategies to achieve food security: economic, social, environmental, and technological” (p. 57). One thing also that can boost



agricultural development is for the government to sponsor and give grants to the church especially in rural places to promote agricultural productivity, as Kyernum (2022) advocates. Egbule (2016), proposes solutions to enhancing agriculture and boosting food security including: motivating youths into farming, training in agricultural skills, vocationalization of the school curriculum, school-industry partnership, and entrepreneurship, quality delivery of agricultural education programmes, refocusing agriculture, direct incentive schemes, legislative support, and funding imperatives. As the focus of this paper is the role of Christianity, it suffices to list these items. It is to the role that Christianity can play that the paper now turns.

Overview and Role of Christianity in Agricultural Development and Food Security in Nigeria (ADFSN)

The goal of this section is not to trace a chronological history of the involvement of Christianity in ADFSN. It will suffice here to indicate various examples and instances of the involvement in the global community, and Nigeria inclusive to buttress the argument that Christianity should be involved in ADFSN. Nnorom (2018), states that some early Western missionaries to supplement their meagre salaries engaged in farming and encouraged farming among the people. There are strong biblical foundations for Christians' involvement in agriculture. Egbule (2016), rightly argues that in the Christian story, agriculture started with God as God planted a garden filled with plants and animals and gave them to humans to cultivate and care for (Genesis 2:19-20), and King Solomon had extensive gardens for ornamental and instructional purposes in 1015 BC.

Nweke (2019), notes that many Catholic Church institutions in different locations have provided agricultural extension services and micro-credit, provision of wells and boreholes to aid farmers and foster better agricultural inputs. Onaiyekan (1984) lists some of the contributions of the Catholic Church in Nigeria including human management, organizing the farmers into cooperatives such as Ogidi Farmers' Cooperative and Igala Farmers' Cooperative. Weradiootv Media Journalism (2023) writes that some churches in Nigeria have engaged in agriculture for instance, the Catholic Church has farms in Jos, Kaduna South, Ogoja, Ilorin, Ibadan, and Ijebu-Ode. Catholic Relief Services (2024) with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is engaged in better cassava production and helping farmers improve their income in Kogi and Benue States. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) (2024) with funds from the German government and USAID has supported various other agricultural initiatives. Egunjobi and Sanni (2019), studied the Justice, Development, and Peace Movement (JDPM) of the Oyo Catholic Diocese and revealed that the sensitization initiatives and activities of the JDPM made 72.5% of people interviewed



engage in farming, the JDPM also contributed to agricultural seedlings provision and fostering creation of cooperatives among farmers, provision of timely information to farmers on better agricultural practices. In Benue North West, Kyernum (2022) shows that the church has engaged in agricultural training activities which have helped to improve the lives of the people. AMECEA (2024), states that the church has committed herself to fostering food security in Africa by promoting agriculture through the use of underutilized farms owned by the church and has engaged in 40 pilot projects in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia. A look at the Catholic Church of which this author is a member shows that the church all over Africa has vast acres of land in seminaries, parishes, hospitals, and other locations that are underutilized or lying fallow.

Christianity getting seriously involved in ADFSN should not be seen as something unnecessary or an outside the domain of Christianity and churches. The first requirement of Jesus, the founder of Christianity in the parable of the last judgement in Matthew 25 is: "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat." Christianity must give food to the hungry. This being the case, the Christian church has a reason to encourage its members to be engaged in agriculture and as a group engage in agricultural production to ensure there is food in the society. The role of the church is indispensable in agricultural development. Chikwanah (2019), cites Bishop John K Yambasu, of the African College of Bishops who spoke during the United Methodist Africa agricultural summit on Jan. 13-16 in Johannesburg, South Africa to state that the church has vast and enormous lands, especially in rural places in Africa that can be farmed upon to promote agricultural productivity, food security and stop people from encroaching on church land. Webmaster (2016), has also reported that the prelate of the Methodist Church in Nigeria, Dr Samuel Emeka Uche has said that the church will partner with the Osun State government to promote agriculture. Writing on the role the Christian Church can play in agriculture in furthering economic development, Anozie (2013) cites Onuora thus:

Agriculture has gone a long way to produce food for man and animals in Nigeria. And the church has given its support for the benefit of its members and the country at large. Consequently, it is the source of raw materials for the domestic industries and for export. Above all, agriculture has paved the way for entrepreneurs to come in. Owing to this fact, it is important for the church to always teach –all hands on the plough|| for economic development (p. 283).

Agriculture unlike other sectors such as oil, as Nnorom (2018) avers can engage a lot of people and the church has the funds, labour market and resources to engage in massive agriculture. Agriculture is an underdeveloped area in the Church's ministry



compared to education, social services, justice ministry, etc. This is an area with huge potential that the church should tap into. The church should readily encourage its ministers who want to venture into agricultural development. As Nnorom (2018) writes the massive prayer grounds and camps such as those you find along the Lagos-Ibadan Express can be turned into massive agricultural farmlands that will have a massive impact on the people and society. Agriculture can create a lot of opportunities for people, help curb crime in the land, ensure food safety, and contribute to a stable polity. Agriculture can generate employment for drivers who will transport the food, agro-businesses, etc.

The story of priests and other ministers engaged in farming should be told better and amplified. There are quite several priests in the Catholic Church and perhaps other pastors in Pentecostal and non-Catholic churches engaged in agricultural activities. Their stories still need to be told. This will inspire others. Father Zachariah Fufeyin in Bomadi, Father Edmund Emakpor, Father Michael Ubudu, and many other priests who are known to this present writer. The stories of many of these persons are hardly known. Information is a powerful means to instigate and inspire others. These priests-farmers and pastors-farmers should engage all the social media platforms to make their activities known. By this also they are making people know the importance of agriculture and inspiring people to take to agriculture as an occupation. This will help to enhance the production of more food and help promote food security. Priests and pastors participating in agricultural activities, are following in the footsteps of the biblical characters. Asadu (2021), sees these persons as equivalent to missionaries engaged in agriculture to feed the human body which is also an aspect of evangelism. Asadu (2021), notes that the missionaries introduced agricultural science in their school curriculum, taught people about rearing varieties of animals, planting crops, different vegetables, and fruit trees; and it remarkable he notes that Fr. Borghero of the Roman Catholic church established a farm settlement in 1875 in Badagry.

Agricultural education plays a central role in agricultural development and increases food productivity. Ogbazi (1992), states that agricultural education helps to boost food production. Agricultural education should go beyond schools, colleges, and faculties of agriculture or departments of vocational education, there is a grave need for non-governmental bodies like the Christian church to be highly engaged in agricultural education. This is an area where Christianity can do much. Think of the huge number of persons who belong to the Christian religion and who troop to churches, prayer meetings, and bible studies every week. There is a great opportunity to reach out to these people. The biblical stories are filled with stories of farming or



shepherding/husbandry as you find in the stories of Cain and Abel, Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, David, Moses, etc. Adam and Eve were placed in a garden that God planted and they were to till and cultivate the garden. Ezekiel 34 speaks of the shepherds of Israel who did not feed the flock. The parables of Jesus are replete with images of farmers, shepherds' seeds, etc. It is rare to go to church and see preachers emphasizing the importance and need for farming, etc. The stories are often spiritualized without relating them to the need for people to be engaged in agriculture.

There is a need to propagate Christian teaching on stewardship, love, care, hospitality, and sharing. Waste is a serious problem in the Nigerian society. Amid the challenges that we face, there are still Nigerian households that waste food and other material resources. There are still people who live luxurious and extravagant lives. The Christian gospel encourages taking care of resources and sharing. After Jesus fed the multitudes in John 6, he commanded that they pick up the leftovers so that nothing is wasted. In the book of Exodus, one of the most landmark events in biblical history is that a family that was too small to share with another family one lamb to ensure that there is no waste. The world of agriculture is filled with so much waste as a result of a lack of storage facilities, and poor road networks that make it difficult to transport agricultural produce.

It is also imperative that prophetically the church must speak about agriculture. Catholic Rural Life (2024) states that the Catholic church is concerned about injustices and the plights of agricultural and farm workers amid the merciless global capitalist system and shares solicitude with them, the government must make just policies. The issues of injustices that take place in the agricultural sector against hired farm workers, etc should be spoken discouraged. Food is a human right and agriculture should be protected. The rights of agricultural workers in Nigeria should be given priority and protected. The apostle St. James writes: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ... ⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:1,4, RSV).

Conclusion

The paper examined the role of Christianity or the Christian church in fostering agricultural development and food security in Nigeria. It highlighted the importance of food security and agricultural development. The paper found that agriculture is poorly developed in Nigeria and this has also negatively affected food security. It showed that in Nigeria the state of agriculture and food security is affected by factors



such as terrorist activities, herdsman-farmers clashes, poor funding, corruption, discontinuity in government agricultural policies and programmes, youth biases against agriculture, etc. The role of the Christian church was spelled out in the following ways: encouragement of Christian ministers' participation in agriculture, emphasizing the importance of agriculture in church services, utilization of church and seminary lands for agriculture, teaching and avoiding waste in agriculture, promoting prophetic and Christian social teaching on agriculture, etc. If Christians can mobilize and get more engaged in agricultural development, it will help to secure food security.

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