

Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery: Practical Solution to Transit from Pandemic to Prosperity in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract - *The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the latest global emergencies affecting all countries as it relates to health hazards, human consequences, economic uncertainties and disruptions that have resulted in significant cost to the global economy. To return to normal, actions requiring immediate and sustained collective local and international efforts are needed to curtail its effect on all fronts. It is currently unclear to what extent this virus will take hold of interruptions in health, human, educational, political and ultimately socio-economic toll. The subject of the performance of economy after COVID-19 has raised debates in various field and discipline. Many factors in spoken and written words have been identified by extant literature that may be responsible for the poor performance of economic recovery in mostly the developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. These economic recoveries aimed at ensuring economic diversification and reflation strategies, SME development and survival concepts, innovation, science and technology, self-sustaining food production and poverty reduction. The pandemic as no doubt cause a serious economic slowdown that can threaten the lives and livelihoods of most vulnerable people in southwestern Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this article tends to launch a sustainable economic recovery using Agriculture and Food Security as a viable practical solution to transit from pandemic to economic prosperity in southwestern states. The article employed descriptive survey research design using Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo and Osun state as clusters out of the present six states in the zone. Also, primary (observation) and secondary (GDP per Capital, Shared Spending and Nigerian Economic Growth) data were collected with focus on qualitative analysis. The article was concluded by offering economic managers and policymakers set priorities to alternative sector such as agriculture and food security which must be intensified as reliable practical solutions to transit from pandemic to prosperity. These were with a view to creating a future with great and strong economy and provide means of survival to the people through provision of direct and indirect agriculture related employment.*

Keywords: COVID-19, Economic Growth, Gross Domestic Product, Agriculture and Food Security

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, coronavirus has been an issue of great concern, as it continues mitigating the terrible human, health, educational, political and socio-economic toll worldwide. According to [1], there were globally more than 2,500,000 documented cases, 178,371 deaths with country specific mortality of more than 10% in Spain, Italy, France and the UK. This has been attracting attention at various degrees requiring immediate and sustained national and international action towards putting an end to it.

As discretionary spending by citizens continues to sharply decline, organizations, businesses, firms,

companies, hotels and general hospitality are facing declining demand and patronage. The slowdown in the global economy and lockdown in major cities and villages across Asia, Europe and most Afrizone economies such as China, India, Italy, Spain, Nigeria, South Africa and beyond, as a result, COVID-19 has also taken its toll on the global demand for crude oil and Nigeria among the major dependant on oil as a source of revenue [2]. There is the need to be gravely concerned about the underlying problems this emergency exposes Nigerians to, especially for those that are mostly at risk for severe consequences like older people, poor households, less privilege and vulnerable, the

undernourished and those who live in remote rural areas without or limited access to services or help. These problems heighten the risks of the current pandemic and must not be neglected to consume all.

The spread of this illness can devastate the poor rural communities and the small-scale food producers who already face challenges such as weak resilience, poor nutrition and limited access to resources and services [3], [4]. At the beginning of millennium it was reported that Africa has 13% of the world population but with 3% of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [5]. Today, this statistics largely remains the same with the huge gap between the population share and income share in the world. Therefore, Africa is not only the poorest continent but Nigeria as a country solely depend on exportation of crude oil which is an unprocessed natural resources and the prices are also determined by the international market, a practice that has further expose Nigeria weaknesses and in return having its toll on the general economy of the country due to lack of influence and over dependent on it for revenue survival.

From Table 1, findings showed that Nigeria population has grown tremendously but output per head remains stagnant. The population is continuously increasing but the output is on the reverse. It is evident that Nigeria performance over the years is on the decline but have started picking up recently due to government relentless effort towards reviving the economy away from heavy dependant on oil and reduction of youth unemployment (23.1%) and underemployment (20.21%) which is currently put at average of 55.4% due to establishment of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), a programme design to lift millions of people away from abject poverty and reduce unemployment rate [6]. This giant stride may now be on the verge of collapse with the emergence of COVID-19. Despite the obvious that Nigeria still depend on her poor rural communities for

food security. Nevertheless, the pandemic and related disruptions of trade, vehicular movement and travel as well as general markets could reduce food production and availability. It is currently unclear to what extent COVID-19 will take hold among rural populations. However, given the focus on the poorest of the poor, the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be pronounced [7].

Despite that Nigeria policymakers try to encourage diversification of the economy but the country is still heavily reliant of oil export earnings [8]. This means that Nigeria economic growth is fragile and can be abruptly reversed if oil prices drop. This outcome is now very real and with high possibility amid the coronavirus outbreak hitting the global economy and pushing oil prices lower than Nigeria’s budgetary benchmark of \$57 per barrel for the year. For example, in the first quarter of 2020, Nigeria recorded average daily oil production of 2.07 million barrels per day (mbpd). This output was higher than the daily average production in the same quarter of 2019 by 0.08mbpd and fourth quarter of 2019 by 0.06mbpd but now it is a different scenario because production has drastically been reduces to save cost [6].

With this reduction Nigeria is now at risk of another recession that may be greater and even surpass what the country witnessed in year 2016 given it’s over reliance on oil sector proceeds. If oil demand continues to fall with no Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) intervention in the form of production cuts and tightening supply as reported by the Presidential Task Force (PTF), no doubt Nigeria will be negatively impacted by the downward price trend [9]; [10]. Therefore, for any government to flourish, great importance is attached to the economic development of such government and reflects on their ability to have the economic strength to be in control of its national and international affairs.

Table 1. Statistical Development of Nigeria (1950-2008) using Maddison’s Average Output Data

Year	Population (000)	Output (\$)	Output per head	World average output per head	Nigeria output per head as % of world average output per head
1950	31,397	23,933	753	2,111	36
1960	41,547	34,081	820	2,773	30
1970	55,586	60,814	1,094	3,729	29
1980	74,821	97,646	1,305	4,512	29
1990	96,604	107,459	1,112	5,150	22
2000	123,179	143,018	1,161	6,038	19
2008	146,255	222,958	1,524	7,614	20

Source: Adopted from [5] using Maddison Data: Statistics on World Population, GDP, and GDP per Capital

Economic development is about the sovereignty of a nation and how independent it is from outsiders' intrusions in economic and other policy decisions that directly or indirectly affect the day to day lives of its people. For the citizens of a country, development is about human welfare like food and shelter, literacy, access to information, access to social services such as health, education, social protection and sanitation [5].

The advantages accruing to economic development potentially range from a good standard of living, better quality of life and longer life expectancy, ability of the people to make choices regarding their social lives, welfare and future. It allows people to decide on issues that directly or indirectly affect their day to day living. They can choose for themselves what to eat, who and who to relate with, the location to reside, the types and kind of school to attend, what to wear, among others. There are varieties of things available to make their choices from [11].

Daily news report from different media and online outlets such as radio stations, television stations, social media and news dallies have reported that, market men and women were unable to purchase farm produces, markets with goods were closed and supply chains were restricted, truck drivers were sick and tired, border closures, trade and human restrictions due to quarantines and isolations order of Nigerian Government arising from PTF recommendations. Furthermore, this lockdown reduced incomes, limit farmers' ability to hire farm labours which ordinarily were cheaply available before the pandemic, but is now highly restricted because collective work was banned in fields hence, area cultivated decreased along with rural incomes. This practice has significant implications on food security.

Majority of the population in southwestern states are classified as low-income earners [12] except for Lagos and Ogun states due to heavy presence of industries are regarded as high- and middle-income earners. Therefore, other states like Ekiti, Ondo, Osun and Oyo are referred to as low income earners because farming is seen as their major source of livelihood. Hence, they work in various sector of agriculture majorly crop production and animal husbandry, with the overwhelming majority on small farms. Most of the poorest, hungriest, and most marginalized people in these states live in rural areas and that is where the development needs to be focus on terms of mid to long-term efforts during and after COVID-19.

From survey, current situation observed within the aforementioned states after the outbreak of COVID-19

as shown that price of staple foods like Rice and Beans have increased by 60% and 30% respectively. For example, a Congo of Rice before the virus was sold around #500 - #600 but in present market it is now selling between #800 - #1000. Also, Beans was sold between #200 - #250 before the pandemic but now selling between #350 - #500 per Congo depending on the type and quality. The price of Sugar has also reach 100% increment, for example, Sugar was sold for around #14,500 - #15,000 per bag but presently, a bag is now selling at #28,000-#30,000 while Cassava prices on the other hand has rose astronomically by 150%, for example, a Congo of Garri was initially sold between #100 - #150 and now it is selling between #250 - #350.

Table 2. Price of Commodity in Naira before and during COVID-19

Food Items	Old Price (#)	New Price (#)	Increment (%)
Staple			
Rice	500-600	800-1000	60
Beans	200-250	350-500	30
Gari	100-150	250-350	150
Others			
Sugar	14000-15000	28,000-30,000	100
Seasonings (Knorr & Maggi)	450-500	600-650	45
Egg	700-800	850-1000	22
Butter	200-250	300	23

Source: Field Survey (2020).

In the wake of COVID-19 it is observed from the survey that, other consumable foods like, Seasonings, Butter and Eggs have increased by an average of 30%, all this may be attributed to the current trade restrictions that have been imposed by virtually all the 36 states in Nigeria especially the southwestern states which seems to be hardly hit by the pandemic. This may be as a result of restriction and embargo placed on major exporters and importers of essential commodities (Wheat, Beans, and Rice; Pepper, Tomatoes and Onions; Palm Oil, Vegetable Oil and Frozen Foods) and agricultural labour migrations have been adversely disrupted. Trade restrictions obviously impact food prices, disproportionately affecting poor consumers, while shortages of labour seem to reduce the overall production and food viability. Therefore, southwestern states must quickly mobilize efforts to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 using agriculture, most importantly to protect the food security of vulnerable

people and set the foot of their states back on prosperity. Basically, they must lead in agricultural evolution which happens to be a viable and practicable solution to saddle through the current economic uncertainties and instabilities.

In Nigeria, agriculture, and food security in terms of policy is seen as the combination of framework and action plans of the federal government designed to achieve overall agricultural growth and development [13]. Agricultural and food security policy is a roadmap towards solving identified national, state or local problems that affect the performance of agricultural activities and their role in the bigger economy. Good policies, if well planned and implemented, no doubt should lead to better standards of living for all farmers and their wider target groups [14]. However, Nigeria does not have a good history here. The policies on agriculture and food security in Nigeria since its inception have promised so much on paper but in reality, have delivered little. For instance, the lack of political will and various government lip services on soft loans and fertilizer subsidy for rural farmers from regime to regime never become a reality after so many years of independence. As laudable as policies on agriculture and food security have been on documentation, their impact has often not been felt by the rural farmers many of whom are still practicing the traditional methods of farming. In this system, the traditional means of increasing productivity has been by increasing hectares of land cultivated with no corresponding loans and subsidy on inputs [15].

Governments at various levels have been sluggish at the implementation stage which has hampered serious economic growth and development [16]. They have still not taken their policies down to the grassroots [17]. The result has been a rapid turnover of various agriculture and food security policies with no zeal of making it workable or practicable in the real sense of it. Therefore, with the current effect of COVID-19 concerted efforts should be made towards creating an enabling environment for ease implementation of the good plans so as to make the policies workable and achievable with the desired results in no distance time.

The Economy of Nigeria during Democracy

Since 1999, when the civilian regime came on board, the Nigerian economy has experienced apparently steady and strong growth. This growth has been argued to be as a result of the rise in the price of crude oil but not necessarily as a result of more productive activities or the performance of the other sectors in the country. Even when there was a global recession in 2008, Nigeria experienced a growth rate of 6.2%. In 1999, when the civilian regime took over the leadership of the country, the growth rate was less than 1% (0.5%) but in the year 2004, Nigeria experienced its highest growth of 33.7%. On an average from 1999 to 2014, Nigeria experienced growth of 6% - 7% per year [18]; [19]; [20].

In 2014, Nigeria was announced as having the largest economy in Africa [20]; [21]. The GDP placed Nigeria as the 26th largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2014), with a GDP of \$510 billion. But the growth that Nigeria enjoyed was threatened by another fall in the price of crude oil. As at December 2015, economic growth declined to 2.7% from 6.2% in 2014. Poverty has only reduced by 1% in 6 years from 64% in 2004 to 63% in 2010 [12] while unemployment is on the rise.

However, Nigeria government tried her best to reduce the unemployment rate before the end of 2016 through the launching of NSIP a scheme that gives room for the recruitment of teeming unemployed graduate to be engaged in different areas of education, health, agriculture, infrastructural development and entrepreneur. This singular act of massive employment which engage more than 500, 000 youths as direct beneficiary has put the country on the fast lane of repositioning and setting precedence of good governance, a decision that saw many graduates having for the first time a sense of belonging and national inclusion [22].

In 2016, the economy of Nigeria also went into recession due to the continuous fall in crude oil price. The recession was said to have been over in the last quota of 2017. However, the impact of being out of recession is yet to be felt by most Nigerians. In mid-2018, the country was declared to be the poverty capital of the world and a year after Nigeria is still referred to as the world poverty capital closely followed by India and Brazil [23].

Table 3: Fluctuations in Nigerian Economic Growth from 2010-2020 (%)

2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)
7.8	4.9	4.3	5.4	6.2	2.7	-1.6	0.8	1.9	2.1	1.9

Source: Adapted from [20]; [25]; [6].

Data from World Bank [24] revealed that the number of extreme poor people in Nigeria had skyrocketed to 94.5million. Nigeria poor index value constitutes 47.2% of the current estimated population of 200million [6]. Since suffering a recession and full year of negative growth in 2016, Nigeria, Africa's largest economy has recovered slowly. Data from Nigeria's statistics bureau shows the pace of recovery remains slow, gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 2.1% the highest growth rate since the 2016 recession. Overall, Nigeria's economy was 0.8% in 2017, slightly higher than it did in the preceding year and even higher in 2018 with 1.9%. As is often the case, Nigeria's economic growth was anchored on its oil exports with production levels remaining stable throughout 2019. This account for the visible increase recently witnessed and now the dream is about to be truncated with this COVID-19 pandemic and something is needed to be done to prevent the looming economic crises.

In the underdeveloped economies, the rights of the people are limited or abused due to high level of poverty and illiteracy characterized by poor governance, low economic growth, dis-empowering institutions, weak community organization, macro and micro economic shocks and policy failure, unemployment, problems in social relationship and urbanization, lack of investment in human capital, violence and insecurity and the politics of exclusion. Government generally tends to manipulate and take decisions on behalf of the people which in turn aggravate the condition of the poor by robbing them those resources that could have improved their livelihood while excluding them from participation in those decision that shape their future and that of their children [23]. The people are left with few options or with no options at all. Governments have often led and ruled by imposition, intimidation, dictatorship, limitation of human rights and choices denied [26]; [27]; [28].

The gap between the rich and the poor nations is still growing significantly. [3] indicates that the inequality gap has grown from 1960 when most African countries gained their independence from colonial regimes. It is worthy of note that African states have established trade relations with each other based on colonial integration [29]. Regional blocs were also introduced for inter and intra-regional trading activities. Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) is one of the most important of these regional trading blocs with Nigeria at its center. But despite integration within the regions, the volume of trade is still very low as Africans trade more with countries outside the trading bloc than those within it [30]. With this description, the emergence of COVID-19 may certainly make things worse with signs of

extreme hunger, indiscriminate job loss across sectors, collapse of business enterprise and many unpalatable happenings. Hence, adequate and practicable preparation void of past practice on crude oil dependant must be put in place to cushion the aftermath effect of the pandemic which is already on the mission of ravaging the economy.

If Nigeria as a developing country is to achieve the goal of being a top economy by 2030, the need for strategic plans to support the most vulnerable in the society and catalyze productivity through sustainable agriculture. Therefore, to move outside the recession that has obviously set in due to COVID-19 pandemic the volume of trade within the regional blocs must be strengthened. There is no reason why Nigeria should look too largely towards export for its future economy. The vastness of its population and the variation in its climate and productive capacity give a wide field for the development of sound and progressive internal economy.

Food Security and Economic Development in Nigeria

The agriculture sector has no doubt played a vital role in the Nigerian economy long before Nigeria gained independence. The sector has contributed to the GDP, provided raw materials to many industries (like textile industry, beverage industry and paper mill), a source of employment to many rural dwellers (crop producers and animal husbandry) and a source of food to households [20]. On an average, the percentage of people employed in the agricultural sector is put at 56.4%. On either account, this makes the agricultural and food security sector the largest employer of labour in Nigeria. It shows how important the sector is in creating employment for most Nigerians [18]; [20].

Despite this, it is still a big problem to know how much the Nigerian government spends. In 2014, the International Food Policy Research Institute had a major project on the Analysis of Agricultural Public Expenditures in Nigeria. Table 4 shows the average share of the federal government budget allocation and the actual spending. It can be observed that agriculture is not a high priority sector and that the government is more focused on other sectors than on the agricultural sector. More, in the case of agriculture, the amount spent was less than the amount allocated to the sector. While the table shows that there were other sectors where the government under spent, the percentage of under-spend was higher in agricultural spending and in some other sectors, the government overspends.

While the sector was allocated an average of 5.45% in the total budget for 2008-2012, only 4.61% of the budget went to the sector. The actual amount spend was significantly less than the budgeted.

Table 4: Average Share of Federal Spending by Sector (2008-2012)

Sector	Budget	Actual	+/-	(%) Average
Economic Affairs	21.82	24.20	+2.85	+11.8
Public order and safety	15.52	15.26	-0.26	-1.7
General Public Service	14.52	13.26	-1.26	-8.7
Defence	9.13	8.90	-0.23	-2.5
Education	6.2	7.40	+1.2	+19.4
Agriculture	5.45	4.61	-0.8	-15.5
Environmental protection	1.76	2.24	+0.48	+27.2
Health	4.4	5.38	+0.98	+22.2
Housing and community	0.44	0.42	-0.02	-4.5
Recreation culture and religion	0.83	0.98	+0.15	+18.1
Social Protection	1.23	2.06	+0.83	+67.5
Other	18.66	16.97	-1.69	-9.1
Total	99.96	101.88	+1.92	+124.3

Source: Adopted from [31].

The gap in agriculture under-spending is proportionately the biggest. This case of under-spending in the agricultural sector can be compared against an overspending in social protection with a 67.5% increase in spending. This supports the argument of [21] that, “The importance given to peasants in political speeches was matched by ambitions in national account blueprints. But in both cases, there were serious shortcomings when it came to practical application”.

Against this backdrop, agriculture and food security has contributed to the social welfare of farmers and the society [32]. For example, over time agriculture as serve as a safety net and an economic stabilizer during crisis. During a period of uncertainty, agriculture generally stands out as an insurance which provides employment for the unemployed, retirees and those who lose their jobs due to structural adjustments among others. This trying time, agriculture will again serve as a panacea by catering for individual and national needs. The 2008 World Bank report showed that agricultural improvement reduced poverty in the rural areas by about 80% while rural-urban migration was only able to reduce poverty by 20%. For agriculture to serve such developmental purposes in an economy, [33] and [34], have suggested that governments should improve infrastructure, spend money on research and development and engage the grassroots farmers in policy formulation and implementation, to make agriculture more attractive and to motivate educated youths who can handle modern tools and techniques to participate in the venture.

In support of the above suggestion by [33] and [34] the government can overhaul infrastructural facilities, increase government subventions to higher institutions to improve on qualitative research and development and integrate her huge number of educated youths who have

undergone training and are already empowered under the NSIP which comprise of N-Agro, N-Teach, N-Health, N-Build and N-Tech and are still actively delivering qualitative services and community development must be partner with and key into engaging grassroots farmers to achieve the transformation agenda. Therefore, a quick understanding of intervention using agriculture and food security is important in improving the economy. The following actions can be taking for repositioning and achieving economic prosperity:

Massive Support to Small, Medium and Large Agric-businesses

Globally, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the bedrock of any economy, representing an estimated 95% of private sector companies. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa countries like Bostwana and Cape Verde, micro and small enterprises employ almost 80% of the workforce [7]. Agriculture SMEs are extremely vulnerable to shocks, as they have limited cash reserves and little access to risk-finance tools. Many firms may die a natural death because most of the owners of SMEs will probably consume their business capital during this period with no distinct helpline afterwards. It is certain that it would not take long that business owners may not be able to sustain the work from home or pay salaries. These effects are already manifesting in the banking industry and education sector especially in private nursery and primary schools where workers were urge to take pay cut or be laid off.

States should partner and engage commercial banks in recovery lending, credit lines, grants and other tools that could help cushion the impacts of COVID-19 and make SMEs to be in a stronger position to support broader economic recovery. Among such partnership is the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for

Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL). To achieve this, the governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) is already putting different borrowers' scheme with the management of NIRSAL Micro Finance Ltd for the citizens to obtain loan with a single digit interest rate [35]; [36]. The NIRSAL COVID-19 palliatives are for households with verifiable evidence of livelihood adversely impacted by COVID-19 and existing micro, small and medium enterprises with verifiable evidence of activities adversely affected because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, concerned states and local government areas should partner and engage commercial and other micro finance banks in recovery lending, credit lines, grants and other tools that could help cushion the impacts of COVID-19 and make agro SMEs to be in a stronger position to support broader economic recovery. Also, development actors should be well positioned to work with private sector partners to support business continuity planning, develop digital marketing platforms and enact other measures that can help SMEs keep afloat and become more resilient [37].

Innovation in Supply Chains and Markets

Disruptions to supply chains and markets due to lockdown have widespread impacts on food security. Innovative efforts, such as the reintroduction of several agricultural policies like National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP, 1972-1973), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN, 1976-1980), Green Revolution Programme (GRP 1981-1983), Go Back to Land Programme (1983-1985), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA, 1976), National Fadama Development Project (NFDP, 1990s), Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA, 1992), Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP, 2003) and Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA, 2011) [38]; [39]; [40]; [41]; [42]. These have made several agriculture policies workable in Nigeria. Therefore, agricultural policies should be specific and spelt out for the masses.

The history of agriculture in Nigeria can be considered as the history of the people. No wonder that agriculture served as the mainstay of the economy during the early decades after independence, and accounting for about 71% of Nigerian foreign exchange earnings. The first half of the 1960's thus witnessed the era of the groundnut pyramids of the North, the palm-oil of the East, and the cocoa plantation of South-West Nigeria [38]. However, today's situation has indicated that the past national agricultural development policies and

programmes have failed to improve the standard of living of millions of Nigerians and economic development of the country. Nevertheless, to avoid a repeat, evaluation must be purposely done to determine achievements of rural and agriculture development programmes vis-à-vis the set policy objectives.

Also, policy template at this time of economic recovery should have strategy, targets, goals, specific objectives and most importantly programmes or projects geared toward their accomplishment. To avoid failure of re-introduction there should be a proper interaction between all stakeholders both at the time of planning and implementing agricultural programmes [43]. Hence, agriculturists, researchers and more importantly the farmers and rural dwellers that are commonly ignored during planning and implementation stage should all be taken on board since they are in a better position to identify the policies and programmes that will be tailored to the need of the farmers and masses. The lack of full non-participation of these groups of stakeholders has led to the programmes failure, increased poverty and inaccessibility of essential social features with dwindling economic success and failure of agriculture policies. Finally, there should be continuity and perpetual implementation of agriculture development policies by the current and future administration for the impact of the policies to be felt in Nigeria economy.

Increase Assessments of the impacts of COVID-19 on Agriculture and Food Security

Just as increased testing for COVID-19 is critical for public health, so also is measuring its impact on agriculture and food security. The use of cutting edge and remote sensing tools, combined with machine learning, offers a promising approach to map disruptions in crop production. Data collection using cell phones and social media can be deployed at scale to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on farmers and consumers across local government areas.

The above as prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in collaboration with States' Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) to inaugurate the technical committee on the revitalization of 75,000 extension services workers. This is because agricultural development in Nigeria requires an integrated approach to revive extension advisory services. The programme is expected to stimulate technology adoption and embed Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) towards improving food requirements and industrial expectations [44]. According to [44] the programme is 'to design a system of training agricultural extension workers in the next 2

years and to recommend measures for the upgrading and retooling of extension training institutions across the country”. [44] stressed the need to review extension services training modules and practices implemented in Nigeria with a view to making them more effective and efficient.

The aim of the programme are to: examine proposals submitted and international best practices in extension services and draw key learning points; recommend an immediately actionable model of training of 75,000 extension workers in 2020; develop a workable framework for engaging and working with the states in the continuous training and retraining of extension services workers; recommend how to integrate and use the national farmers’ helpline centre with 6 zonal centres for real-time information dissemination, updates, feedbacks, and capacity of farmers and relevant stakeholders; developing mechanisms for the implementation of recommendations, including monitoring and evaluation; to make other recommendation that would help in fast-tracking the complete transformation of extension services in Nigeria [45]. Although the programme is tailored towards using the graduate scheme of NSIP especially the N-Agro division as extension agents to collect data of farm from farmers. Although the focus needs to be on understanding the immediate impacts on food and agriculture, the long-term impacts require careful consideration.

Supporting Farmers to Continue Producing and Marketing Food

There is the need of finding ways of supporting farmers to keep producing food and to remain connected to markets is essential. For example, farms institute such as International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) which is a non-profit institution that generates agricultural innovations to meet Africa’s most pressing challenges of hunger, malnutrition, poverty and natural resource degradation; Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN), an organization with research mandate on tree crops like Cocoa, Kola, Coffee, Cashew and Tea. Working with these partners can help improve and generate agricultural innovations to meet most pressing challenges of hunger, malnutrition, poverty and natural resource livelihoods, enhance food and nutrition security, increase employment, and preserve natural resource integrity [46]; [47].

Also working closely with states ministries of agriculture and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can be of help to safe labour practices, increase

access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves and hand sanitizers that are in high demand due to needs in the health care system and reduce contact with packaging and produce. Taking measures such as these can reduce the spread of COVID-19; promote continued production of food and restrictions on the movement of people to producers’ fields.

Deployment of Relevant Agricultural Technologies and Digital Agriculture Solutions

Agricultural technologies, especially digital agriculture solutions, offer a range of important opportunities to address the impacts of COVID-19 on agricultural production, labour availability, input supply and logistics. For example, Nigerian states can adopt China agricultural system where drone are used to address labour constraints and to reduce human contact amid COVID-19 [48]. Drones and other digital extension tools can also help farmers to adopt labour and input saving practices, while digital agriculture solutions that link farmers to buyers and logistics services could help reduce the impacts of control measures related to COVID-19 [48]. Also, shared mechanization services can mitigate reductions in cropped areas caused by labour shortages while increasing per-hectare productivity. Public and private partnerships as well as investments in existing agricultural technology programs could help scale up these solutions faster to help more people manage the impacts of COVID-19. Therefore, introduction of mechanization services can help to mitigate reductions in cropped areas caused by labour shortages and in return increasing per-hectare productivity.

Local Policy Dialogues Support to help Address Food Shortages

Southwestern states need to innovate and collaborate around food security and agriculture policy. This will allow each local area to better manage their agric-food imports and export, reduce the risks of food trade bans and ultimately ensure their populations have access to food. Good practices in transport and food safety can also build confidence in local trade systems and help improve the flow of food to where it needs to go within and outside the state. The FGN have devise means of special public works in the rural areas as an employment-intensive technique acquired and adapted by National Directorate of Employment (NDE) from one of the capacity building collaborations with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) [49]. A programme designed towards ILO/NDE Labour

Based/Light Equipment Methods of Construction, Rehabilitation and Maintenance of public infrastructure. The idea of special public works programme was derived from several historical templates.

According to Development and Technical Labour Department of International Labour Organisation [50], these types of programmes were used during the great depression by industrialized nations to immediately respond to grinding poverty at the lowest level of the society that normally bore the brunt of economic upheavals. The programme was so effective during colonial Africa to quickly respond to situations such as drought and famine by mobilising the unskilled populace to engage in other labour-intensive infrastructure projects as a means of immediately alleviating their situation. The concept was later adopted by most Asian countries like India, China, and Bangladesh to lift their countries out of the league of poor nations [49]; [51]. This programme was one of the main reasons India quickly dropped in the poverty index and Nigeria overtook India at a point.

CONCLUSION

What the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic should offer southwestern states economic managers and policymakers is that the exploitation and the concentration on oil revenue have denied the people the benefit of being economically productive. This has caused the Nigerian economy to remain distorted when compared with other countries that have sources of revenue coming from wider productive activities. Therefore, the indiscriminate falling of global crude oil price and the merger called revenue giving to the states from the federal government might not be forthcoming as expected especially at a time when concerted efforts are on for a possible slash and significant reduction in the year budget in order to meet up with current realities. On this premise, southwestern states must set priorities to alternative sector such as agriculture and food security which must be intensified as reliable practical solutions to transit from pandemic to prosperity.

For an effective and efficient agricultural and food security that will drive the economic development from pandemic to prosperity, the southwestern states must be modest, precise and target the real audience who are directly or indirectly connected with the recovery through agricultural channel such as agricultural research institutes like IITA, CRIN; institutions like universities, polytechnics and colleges; agricultural extension workers through NSIP (N-Agro, N-Health, N-Teach, N-Build and N-Tech) as well as Agro-business developers,

financial institutions and the farmers. This is because every line of communication with concerned persons matters in achieving recovery and increasing growth and development.

This study is limited to southwestern states; however, the article has tremendous consequential effects in the area of study owing to the historical background. Another important limitation of this study is the cross-sectional nature of the data. Because all of the data were collected from different sources, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that any observed association might be explainable by extraneous variables that influence the variables of interest.

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