



## Infrastructure and Agricultural Development in Benue State 1999-2019

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### Abstract

This work sets out to assess the state of infrastructure and their effect on agricultural development in Benue state. This is because Benue which hitherto known and addressed as the food basket of the nation cannot longer boast of being among the first ten states in agricultural development in Nigeria today. The research adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. It also embarked on a physical survey and verification of some selected agriculture infrastructural facilities. The theory of the developmental state was adopted. This is because of the efforts made by developing states who have adopted this approach and given them the result of massive and fast economic and most importantly industrial development. The work found out that agricultural policies in Benue state have faced massive failures, like agricultural infrastructure is in massive deficit, hence, inability of the good agricultural environment to positively reproduce itself. Poor government commitment to agricultural activities with limited efforts towards modern agricultural activities, etc. It recommends amongst others that, there is need for a well supported and coordinated private sector driven agriculture supported by government, improved technical support to farmers through provision of agricultural extension services and encouraging and supporting the reactivation and formation of farming cooperative ventures, and for government to sustain the provision of farm inputs like tractor services, fertilizers and seedling and pesticides, etc.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Infrastructure, Economic, Development, State.

### Introduction

In most developing nations, agriculture is the mainstay of their economy. This is mostly because most of the population stays on the land in rural area where they derive their daily livelihood. In Nigeria, a very large percentage of the population live in rural areas and agriculture is the main means of livelihood to them. Agriculture plays an important role in the Nigerian economy. It provides employment opportunities for a larger part of the labour force. Also Agriculture provides raw materials for our manufacturing industries. For example, cotton (used in the manufacture of textiles), Groundnuts (used in the production of animal feeds and groundnut oil), soya beans (used in the production of vegetable oil etc.), Maize (used in the production of animal feeds), hides and skin (used in making shoes) etc. These are mostly produced in northern states of Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Borno and Bauchi. Rubber is largely produced in Edo, Delta, Awaibom, and Cross River States and is used in manufacturing shoes and rubber containers. Cocoa is produced in Oyo, Osun and Ondo States. It must be noted that Agriculture is the bedrock of a growing market for products of Nigeria's manufacturing industries (Burya, 1999).

Agriculture is so central to the Nigerian economy Decades after independence, the country relied on agricultural economy because it served as an engine of growth of the overall economy. From the stand point of occupational distribution and contribution to the GDP, agriculture was the leading sector contributing about 63.4% to the GDP and 85.3% of total export value (Baba, 1998). During this period, Nigeria was the world's largest producer of Cocoa, largest exporter of palm oil, cotton, groundnut, rubber, hides and skins etc. The process which was done by Nigerian peasant farmers on traditional tools and indigenous farming methods, these farmers produced of Nigeria's exports and food needs. These efforts have been mainly from rain-fed agriculture especially in the southern part of the country.

However, in Nigeria, the growth of the agricultural sector has declined drastically since independence with the contribution of agriculture to the national economy dropping from 80% in the 1960s to a mere 17.8% in 2016 (FMARD, 2016) Conscious of the strategic importance of agriculture in the economy, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) formulated and implemented National agricultural programmes aimed at boosting agricultural production since independence in 1960 to date.

There are numerous national agricultural programs in Nigeria in the past many years, While the agricultural policies conceived, Planned and implemented by the colonial masters were geared towards the production of agricultural raw materials for industries in their home countries during the pre-independence era, the post –independence period, on the other hand witnessed the conception, planning and implementation of agricultural policies that tended to focus on among other things job creation, agricultural and rural development and food security for the country, Focus on agricultural success include access roads to move goods out of rural farming areas, hence exhibiting a close relationship between production sites and marketing destination. These include road, rail, air and water etc. also the level of availability and affordability of mechanized equipment like tractors, land clearing equipments, industries for processing and storage, presence of electricity to power these or enhance their performance. Others here are availability and affordability of improved seeds, fertilizers, pastes and insecticides, financial institutions for loans, marketing and training extensions devices.

Benue state is composed mainly of farmers who produce a variety of crops ranging from root crops to cereals and citrus crops. Benue produces yam, potatoes, cassava, and cocoyam among root crops. Also, the following cereals are produced in Benue state: Guinea corn, Millet, rice, maize, and sorghum. Other products in Benue state which are of serious economic value are soya beans, cattle, sheep and goats, banana and plantain, fish, peppers, cashew nuts, ginger, cotton, groundnut, palm products, sheanut, sugarcane, timber, tobacco, okra, and an innumerable list of vegetables, others are citrus fruits, oranges, mangoes, and pineapples. Indeed, the state has a favorable climate conditions and fertile soils for rearing annually and cultivation of virtually all crops grown in Nigeria. The state is located in the middle of Nigeria and derives its name from river Benue which is the second largest river in Nigeria (Burya, 1999, Aliegba 2011). It leads the nation on diversity in agricultural production and grows more soybeans, citrus fruits, mangoes, roots and tubers than any other state, yet it is not producing at full capacity. Benue farmers have the potential to feed all of Nigeria but lack the infrastructure, finance, training, technology, legal structure and other key imputes to produce at that level (Schwale. [www.synergis.org](http://www.synergis.org))

Benue state agriculture is dominated by small scale farming in crops, livestock and fishery sub-sector. There are very few numbers of large scale and/or commercial farms across the state. however, the aggregate productivity from these small scale farming units and the few large scale farms in the state have continued to be the major supply of yam, cassava, rice, groundnuts, soybeans, sesame, citrus, and vegetables as well as animals like pigs, goats, sheep, poultry, and fish to other parts of Nigeria and in some cases for exports.

In order to ensure that the state’s farmers obtain the best from their farming activities and able bodied youths attracted to the agricultural sector, the state government over the years applied numerous and multi-dimensional interventions to support the farmers. Some of these interventions and strategies include the establishment of the Benue state tractor hiring agency, agricultural development corporation, Taraku mills Nigeria Limited, Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority, Benue State Accelerated and Food Production Program, Establishment of Swine Integrated farm Project, Cassava Processing Factory, Yearly supply of Farm inputs (fertilizers, Knap Sack Sprayers, water pumps, Herbicides, etc.) at highly subsidized rates. Also, in a bid to ensure effective mechanization of agriculture in the state through the private sector, also the procurement of horse power tractors that were sold to farmers at 30% subsidy with repayment schedule for the tractors is spread within three (3) years to enhance affordability and repayment by farmers (Aliegba 2011).

Despite all these efforts, the state agriculture is characterized mainly subsistence agriculture with limited mechanization being practiced by farmers, poor crop yield per hectare, little value addition resulting from inadequate/poor processing and storage facilities, poor markets for agricultural produce. Agriculture is very unattractive to the youths, inadequate extension services and farm inputs, non functional agricultural departments in local government areas with poor staffing, poor irrigated agriculture, food processing and preservation remain largely traditional, poor and uncoordinated fish farming and livestock (Ajir, 2011). It is because of this deficit in agricultural infrastructure and limitations in availability of better inputs and sophisticated technology that this research sets out to look at and the need to address the problems so as to enhance agricultural productivity in the state.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite numerous agricultural programme implemented in the state and the state governments numerous agricultural policies, there is however, very little to show that Benue state can continue to claim the name food basket of the country.

This research work therefore, is an attempt to identify infrastructural deficit and the main problem of agriculture in Benue state and to proffer solutions that will enhance the capacity of the state to reposition itself in this sector.

### Research Questions

The research will address the following Questions:

- i) What is the role of agriculture in the Nigerian and Benue state economy?
- ii) Which area of agricultural production does Benue state has a comparative advantage which can be promoted in Nigerian agricultural development?
- iii) How has state and standard of agricultural infrastructure and inputs in the state impacted on agricultural development in the state?
- iv) What efforts has government made in the provision of agricultural infrastructure and inputs in Benue state?
- v) How can Agricultural infrastructure and other inputs be improved upon to reposition Benue state reclaim its position as the food basket of Nigeria?

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to look at the level of agricultural infrastructural and other inputs, and their effect on Agricultural development in Benue state since 1999-2019. The specific objectives include:

- I. Identify the role and position of agriculture in the Nigerian and Benue state economy.
- II. Determine the major agricultural products Benue state has maximum advantage to improve the development of agriculture in Nigeria.
- III. Assess the level/standard of agricultural infrastructure and other inputs in Benue state and their impact on agricultural development in the state.
- IV. Find out the role government has played in the development of agricultural infrastructure in Benue state.
- V. Make necessary recommendation which if implemented will make Benue state to reclaim its position as the food basket of Nigeria.

### Research Propositions

- i) Agriculture when developed well will be of great significance to the Nigerian and Benue Economy.
- ii) An improvement and concentration on certain crops which Benue state has advantage of production that will be of benefit to the development of agriculture in Nigeria.
- iii) The state and level of existing agricultural infrastructure and inputs in Benue state has direct effect on the capacity and state of agricultural production in the state.
- iv) The Benue state and federal government direct involvement in the development of infrastructural deficits and agricultural inputs in Benue state will spur rapid agricultural development in Benue and Nigeria at large.
- v) Recommendations and suggestions made when implemented well will change phase of agricultural development in Benue state and Nigeria at large.

### Significance of Study

Government and Governance is generally about galvanizing human and material resources in an organized manner and setting through Governmental institutions to move the society or people forward (Aliogba, Anshi & Utor, 2011). This study therefore is about the infrastructure of Governance that is required essentially to move or transform the Agricultural sector of a state considered to be cardinal in the agricultural development of this country but seem to be lagging behind. It will therefore, bring up basic issues for which most scholars have not seem to address from an integrated or inter related point of view to help maximize production of the Benue agricultural sector.

Secondly, by bringing out clearly flaws, limitations and non coordination and functional state of affairs in the Benue Agricultural sector, policy makers, present and those seeking to hold political office will be made to know that the state if not arrested by deliberate policy and proper implementation is heading for an Agricultural Recession and oblivion. Moreso, Government officials will be opened to the fact that Benue agriculture can pick some crops and concentrate on to maximize and expand production that will add to the expanding posture of the nation's agricultural sector.

At the wider country level of Agriculture production, it will be revealed the level to which the gap between policy formulation and implementation is wider and the extent to which this is creating insecurity in the agricultural sector.

### Scope of Study

This research aims to focus on areas of Agricultural Infrastructure and other vital inputs as they have affected the development of Agriculture in Benue State. These include: Fertilizer production, procurement and distribution; Machineries and mechanization for improved large scale production; Improvement in crops, quality through improved seeds,

Infrastructural development to facilitate production, roads, electricity, industries for processing, land development and irrigation, and storage facilities; Financial and institutional support to enhance the pace, quality, quantity, and marketing of farmers produce, and integrated farming system. Also, farmers ability to manage post harvest loses, training institutions, etc.

Again, the timing of 1999 to 2023 is the period when democracy came on board and has lasted long in the country and the Governors have been indigenous with programmes focusing on agricultural development.

## Literature Review

### Concept of Agriculture

Agriculture is the cultivation of land and breeding of animals, plants and fungi to provide food, fiber, medicinal plants and other products to sustain and enhance life (Akinsami, 1975). The major agricultural products can be broadly grouped into foods, fibers, fuels and raw materials (such as rubber). The sector has the potential to be the industrial and economic springboard from which a country's development can take off. More often than not, agricultural activities are usually concentrated in the less developed rural areas where there is a critical need for rural transformation, redistribution, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development (Akanni, 2012).

### Agricultural Development and Agro Business

Closely related to Agriculture production and Development is agro business (Roapotorff and Wiggins, 2011). Agribusiness is a broad concept that covers input suppliers, agro-processors, traders, exporters and retailers. Agribusiness provides inputs to farmers and connects them to consumers through the financing, handling, processing, storage, transportation, marketing and distribution of agro-industry products and can be summed further into four main groups:

1. Agricultural input industry for increasing agricultural productivity, such as agricultural machinery, equipment and tools, fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides; irrigation systems and related equipment;
2. Agro-industry: Food and beverages; tobacco products, leather and leather products; textile, footwear and garment; wood and wood products; rubber products; as well as construction industry products based on agricultural materials;
3. Equipment for processing agricultural raw materials, including machinery, tools, storage facilities, cooling technology and spare parts;
4. Various services, financing, marketing and distribution firms, including storage, transport, ICTs, packaging materials and design for better marketing and distribution.

Agribusiness is thus a term used to mean farming plus all the other industries and services that constitute the supply chain from farm through processing, wholesaling and retailing to the consumer (from farm to fork in the case of food products). Issues critical here Agro industry, Agro food system, investment in agro industrial research and extension services, market orientation with comparative advantage, social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Roapotorff and Wiggins, 2011).

In Nigeria, the problems of Nigerian agriculture is that 90 percent of it is dependent rain-fed within 79 million hectares of arable land, of which 32 million hectares are cultivated (FAO, 2016). Both livestock and crop production remain below potentials. The growing population is dependent on imported staple food (e.g rice, beans) exemplified by increase in food import bills depend on market for their food supply and vulnerable to high food prices. Related is a high cost of input which limit yield and production levels that many time lead to sub optimal input utilization.

Again, fertilizer consumption in Nigeria is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa at 71g per hectre (FAO, 2016). Also, inherent characteristics of climate that manifest themselves as changes of climate over a period time affect production significantly in unpredictable ways as a result of their detrimental effect on pests, crops diseases, crop production, animal husbandry, and humans. Changing climatic conditions affect both the physical and the economic availability of certain preferred food items. Changes in the demand for seasonal agricultural labour, consequent upon changes in production practices, will in turn affect income generating capacity. Also, farmers in Nigeria also have limited access to credit, and less than 10 per cent of irrigable land is being irrigated. Fifty, the global economy is knowledge-driven and food system efficiency is dependent heavily and directly on agricultural technological innovations and innovations in relevant sectors. However, the rural poor who are the active stakeholders in food availability percent are mainly involved in subsistence farming.

It must be observed that the inconsistency in government's targeted policy intervention and implementation strategies further compounds the problem of Agriculture production. For instance, weaknesses and threats to Agricultural development in Nigeria include: (a) Poor access to credit, technical inputs, machines and farm implements (i.e fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, tractor, plow, harvesters etc) by farmers (b) Degradation of agricultural natural resources especially soil

and water bodies (c) Poor infrastructure (i.e rural roads, water supply, storage facilities and market infrastructure (d) Bad and inconsistent government policy (e) poor budget allocation to agricultural sector (f) Poor and inadequate irrigation facilities (g) Uncontrolled grazing and livestock migration in some areas and (h) Poaching and settlement within protected areas and bush fires.

Perhaps the greatest negative effect agriculture in Nigeria has experienced is the coming of oil. The advent of commercial exploitation of oil resources, however, turned the trend against agriculture and its downstream industries from the rest of seventies onwards. The oil boom, heralded an era of decay and decline in agricultural output and in the overall distribution of the sector to the economy, evidenced by the Dutch Disease. It lost its foreign exchange earnings capacity, domestic revenue importance, and attracted policy neglect. This neglect turned a threat to national food security leading to massive and continuous food importation with an erosion of value addition gains of the sector as agricultural raw commodities were exported only for finished goods to be imported. Policy neglect affected key indicators of agricultural sector performance, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), amount of guaranteed loan received by farmers under the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF), total bank credit to the agricultural sector and the economy as a whole, capital expenditure of federal government on agriculture and all sectors of the economy and the share of labour force employed in agriculture (Wilson and Wilson, 2013; Jiamaza and Sani, 2003; Aliegba and Omanchi, 2019). Stressing the relevance of Agriculture further, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in its zero oil campaign says Nigeria currently has 22 major products that it can earn up to \$30bn in foreign exchange, there include cotton, rice, leather, gold, soya, sugar, cocoa, fertilizer, palm oil, rubber, tomatoes, cashew, cassava, sesame, spices, ginger, shea butter and cowpea, cement and petro chemicals (Awoynfa, 2020:32).

### **Benue State and Agricultural Development**

The relevance of a study of Benue state and Agricultural Development span from the position that the state is nicknamed the Food Basket of the Nation. On the other hand, it houses major crops that has potential to provide food for the country. Apart from housing the second largest River in the country the Benue River, each of the local government areas has one or two major Rivers that can adequately be utilized for irrigation purposes (Aliegba, Anshi, Uto, 2011; Burya, 1999).

In spite of this, the state has not experienced the needed Agricultural transformation and development. Aliegba and Omachi (2019) have vividly looked at Agriculture as a means of livelihood for reviving concluded that, Agricultural development has not helped the poverty situation because its transformation in content and quality has not been much. Indeed, Agricultural infrastructure and state of Benue looking at past efforts, it is clear that agricultural development in Benue will suffer if good assessment of the entire state of infrastructure and problems of Agriculture are not attended to in good time.

In Benue state, agricultural productivity is low despite the great potential. There is much land dispute and unwillingness to surrender land for mass or large agricultural activities (Burya, 1999). Again, there is the issue of lack of large scale agricultural productivity arising from inconsistency in policies especially land clearing schemes. The Aper Aku regime had developed large scale land development schemes and Agricultural mechanization and maintenance centres all over the state (Aliegba, 2011). Yet subsequent regimes never made use of these infrastructural facilities allowing them to waste and rot away.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research will adopt the use of developmental state as its theoretical framework. The term refers to state-led planning and the notion of state intervention to address structural inadequacies in the economic system Keynes (1936). The structuralist Keynesian welfare state has a central theme which believe that market failure is a pervasive attribute of the underdeveloped economy, with the effect that the state has an important role to play in correcting it. A developmental state is a government with sufficient organization and power to achieve its developmental goals (Chang, 1993).

The developmental state approach became appealing to scholars and policy makers as a model that could hold relevance for developing countries. Indeed, of the policies formulated and implemented by the High Performing Asian Economies enhanced the working of the markets and encouraged a high level of autonomy from political interest. These East Asian developmental states were characterised by strong state intervention, as well as extensive regulation and planning. Governments in these states invest and mobilize the majority of capital into the most promising industrial sector that has maximum spillover effect for the society.

Here the state is operated by a 'plan rational' state, particularly in the developmental state as a focused on economic development and takes necessary policy measures to accomplish that objective. What is interesting and important about theories of the social sciences and their ability to transform a country is that when their prescribed solution are implemented with seriousness and properly then such a system is likely to witness development (Aliegba, 2019). The

shift from import substitution to exported development produced fantastic results. Indeed, the achievements of the Asian tigers came because of the practicalization of this theoretical construct. This expansion led to increase in manufacturing, employment and real wages (Ezenwe, 1998).

Our focus must therefore be on what works well for a country and brings positive results. Thus, we are interested in a state that brings development for:

...the alleged East Asian “miracle” is indeed not a miracle. There is even no single nor unique Asian model. Although the HAPES pursued export drive industrialization, they did it in different ways. They simply allocated efficiently physical and human resources to highly productive investments, applying superior technology... Nigeria should chart its own course .... where the visible hand of the state will provide the direction, pace and pattern of development and resource allocation (Ezenwe, 1998:25).

What we see in the Asian Tigers in particular has been the role of a strong state or developmental state in directing and commanding development process. A developmental state basically state led development or state propelled capitalism. The state exercises control over the economy using it autonomous, stronger and independent political powers. It is characterised by strong state intervention, as well as high and serious regulation and planning (Adrain, 1994).

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Research design is meant to show how the variables of the proposed research will be observed, controlled or manipulated to generate necessary data for the study. The research method adopted for this study is survey research design. As the name implies, survey is a research method which focuses on a representative sample drawn from the entire population of the study.

### **Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The population of this study is the six local government areas across the three senatorial zones in Benue State. These are Logo and Ushongo in Zone A, Gboko and Gwer West in Zone B, Oju and Okpokwu in zone C. To achieve the purpose of this study, random sampling technique was employed. For the population of farmers and cooperative members for effective coverage of the population this is.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Primary method adopted was the distribution of well structured questionnaires Using the survey research provide the best means of collecting the view of respondents from a larger group. Also oral interviews with present and past major actors or stakeholders in the agricultural development in the state was chosen to appreciate and understand more clear issues between policy and implementation. Finally physical visits and inspection of the state of industries, companies, tractor mechanization sites Institutions etc was done to assess what really.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents, analyzes, and discusses the information obtained on Infrastructure and Agricultural Development in Benue State, Nigeria (1999-2019). The findings were interpreted based on the objectives of the study. A set of 40 Questionnaire distributed to the respondents who are residents of six (6) purposively selected local government areas in Benue State, namely: Ushongo and Logo in Zone A, Gboko and Gwer West in Zone B and Okpokwu and Oju in Zone C. out of 60 copies of questionnaire distributed only 50 were retrieved. Also, oral interviews were held with local governments, farmers association officials etc from the aforementioned areas who are knowledgeable in Agricultural affairs.

Both males and females were represented in the sample, with males constituting Thirty Six (36) accounting for seventy two (72%) percent while females scored fourteen (14) with equivalent percentage of twenty eight (46%). Eighty-four percent (84%) which is the highest number of responses from the sampled respondents. The respondents engage in fishing/poultry production have the second highest with two (2) representing eight percent (8%), while those engaging in rearing of animals has none responses.

Data collected shows that respondents have knowledge of the level of agriculture role on economy of Benue state and Nigeria as a whole, majority of the respondents 22(48%) are of the view that agriculture promote economic and infrastructural development in Benue state and Nigeria as a whole, while 12(24%) opines that the role of agriculture is basically on employment opportunities, others respondents' responses on food security and increase revenue generation of both Benue state and Nigeria.

Oral interviews with Doose Precious from Kwande Local Government of Benue state, stated that agriculture accelerate the economic by boosting the economy of both the state and the whole country economy, promoting growth and development of the state and employment opportunism, abundance of food to curb food scarcity in the state and the country, provision of social amenities such as good roads, storage facilities and also food security is guarantee. Similarly interview with ShatseWanger B from Kwande LGA succinctly indicated that the roles of agriculture and infrastructure to economic development in Benue state is very low, according to her, both the state and federal government should step up effective and direct agricultural policies than mere promises, she further suggested that tomatoes and orange facilities should be adequately provided to curb wastage and , agricultural budget should be given more priority and the implementation should be enforced in all areas of agriculture.

Majority of the respondents 24(48%) indicated that tuber crops such as cassava, yam, groundnut and bambara nut are most common and well grow agricultural products in Benue state. 16(32%) said only cereal crops like rice g/Corn, maize, sesemi and millet grow well in Benue state, respondents with 8(16%) said the unique agricultural products that grow well is fruit crops like melon, orange, mango and coconut and 2(4%) indicated that oil crops like palm tree is the only products that grow well in Benue state. The above analysis revealed that tuber crops such as cassava, yam, groundnut and Bambara nut are the common agricultural products that grow well due to the soil texture in Benue state.

Respondents with 2(4%) shared that the infrastructural agricultural tools are very effective and functional in Benue sate agreed, respondents with 12(24%) said they are effective. Furthermore, respondents with 30(60%) which is the highest responses said it is not effective and respondents responded with 06(12%) revealed they are not effective at all. It is deduced that the aforementioned infrastructure mechanism/tools such as electric, water, tractor hiring services, silos et cetera. Also, the challenges facing agricultural infrastructure in Benue state are lack of access roads/unmotorable roads, lack of storage facilities, lack of chemicals such as herbicides, pesticides and lack of fertilizer.

On how effective the role of Benue State is, 02(4%) indicate that the government been playing very impressive role in Benue state, while 42(84%) said the role is unimpressive and 04(8%) said it is leaves a lot to be desired. This manifest in insufficient tractors for the 23 local governments to assist farmers, poor road network, He also appeal to the government to partner in rural areas to help farmers bring out the products from farms, provide irrigation systems, fertilizers and improve seeds for farmers.

As to whether respondents satisfied with the level of agricultural production in Benue state 04(8%) said they are satisfied with the level of agricultural production in Benue state now and respondents with 46(92%) said they are not satisfied with the level of agricultural production in Benue state now. This indicated that there is limited level of satisfaction with the level of agricultural production in Benue state now. Furthermore, in an interview with AkperanOrshi Polytechnic Yandev lecturer, shows dissatisfaction with the level of agricultural production in the state.

Respondents recommend ways that can make the state reclaim its position as “Food Basket of the Nation”, where respondents with 16(32%) said provision of loans to farmers is the only way-forward to reclaim been the food basket of the nation in Benue state, respondents with 20(40%) concentrated on investment on infrastructure such as road, electricity, water, fertilizer and modern storage facility is key to retaining their position as food basket of the nation. However, respondents 10(20%) said provision of adequate security in the state will yield a lot of development agriculturally, socially and politically and respondents with 04(8%) said increase in agricultural budget.

Also, an interview with the same lecturer from Akperan Orshi Polytechni Yande, disclosed that the government should give priority to agriculture by providing low interest loans, introduce mentorship programs for farmers, reduce tax rates/take off completely for start-ups, renovation of bad roads/open new ones and fund research for agricultural base institutions. However, another interviewee Origbo Emmanuel call for the government to heavily intervene on the situations as it is deteriorating in the state. Additional interview with Principal Livestock Superintendent I (Veterinary Section) from Logo lo.

In additional interview with Branch Chairman of All Farmers Association of Nigeria from Logo local government, who has been working to the past 10 year, indicated that government should intervene on the supply of fertilizer on time to farmers, it should also revive the agricultural extension service to make sure that new innovations get to the rural farmers and further stated that government should also set up pricing mechanism i.e. regulate price of food product to ensure that farmers sale at high price to get profit.

In a similarly interview with Assistance Director Agricultural Service Benue state Ministry of Agriculture, stressed that government programmes should not end up at government houses, he expressed that quality hands should be employ to maintain various agricultural sector, revival of agriculture agencies in the state, budget allocated to agricultural sector should be examined to it without diversion and early supply of agricultural inputs and implementation by the government. Ela-Project Grian Seller Association Manger, revealed that construction of good roads, provision of

machineries for farming, provision of agriculture chemicals, provision of adequate security for farmers, steady supply of electricity and access to good marketing. Another interviewee from Ukum local government stated that political office holders should allow the interventions from government and other sponsors to reach the actual beneficiaries and timely.

Another interview conduct at the National Association of Yam Farmers, Processors and Marketers (NAY-FPM) with the Chairman (Gwer-West Branch), he expressed that government should revamp the agricultural sector through the following:-Employment of extension workers, Provision of non-chemical pesticides ,Provision of fertilizers to boost crops and animal production, Roads and storage facilities , Electricity supply should be steady and above all Government should stop the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, because these are causing more harm than good to the human body. Therefore, use of organic fertilizer be encouraged and made available to farmers at affordable rate.

### **Assessment of State of Agricultural Infrastructure in Benue State**

A physical survey of agricultural establishment/institutions in order to ascertain the level/standard or state of their current standing showed the following

1. Taraku Mills Ltd: A gigantic edifice built by the Aper/Aku Regime which commenced production in 1988 as an integrated Agro-Industrial venture with three production lines. The factory had three plants which are integrated into each other namely; Vegetable Oil Mill: Capacity to produce 7,200 metric tons per annum of soya beans into oil (but was producing at 19.7% of instilled capacity), Maize Mill: Capacity to process 120 metric tonnes of maize but was producing at (32.21% of instilled capacity, The Feed Mill: Capacity to process; 172,000 metric tonnes per annum of animal feeds and concentrates but operated at 47.95% installed capacity. The company never operated at its maximal levels because of lack of raw materials, and inability to convert the supposedly waste into other useful products like animals/chicken fields, etc. It gradually stopped production. A visit by the research team to the site (July 2023) saw only security personnel at the gate.
2. Benue state Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA). It was established basically to enhance extension services to farmers, provide input, provide dry season farming through irrigation and to anchor federal and donor agency interventions. At the time of field research visit (July 2023), the projects and programmes has remained very little in action. This is principally because of lack of enough manpower to manage extension work and financing to support its activities.
3. Benue Fruit Company (Ben Fruits): This is a fruit processing plant based in Makurdi, Benue state and owned by Terago Company Limited, the Agro business Subsidiary of transnational Corporations Nigeria (Transcorp), Lagos. It was established in 2011 as a partnership between Terago and the Benue State Government. It is involved in preserving oranges and pineapple concentrates for industrial markets. The plant has the capacity to process 26. Million tons of fruits per year and ensures that the juice extracted meet international quality standard. As of the time of field work (November, 2023) it has stopped production and site deserted with only security personnel around.
4. Agro Millers Nigeria Ltd: This Company was established in 1987 by the Benue State Government and located in Makurdi, it was to harness and process the vast rice but productive capacity in the state. It started production well by milling and bagging rice gradually slided and finally folded up. Attempts were made to take over the Plant Company and Mango by Olam Nig Ltd but that did not last long and Olam packed out.

A critical observation here is that even while the company was on it never operated at more than 40% utilization capacity. The component of converting rice chaffs into ceilings which never ever took off. The plant is still standing, on a vast land close to 25 years without any activity.

5. Benue Fertilizers Company: The Benue Fertilizer Blending and Mixing plant was established to produce inorganic compound fertilizers that are peculiar to Benue State Crops required and soil deficiency, the plant was managed by Tak Continental United on a lease bases. However as of time of this research (July, 2023), the plant has been out of production for over 10 years and premises deserted.
6. Benue Tractor Hiring Company: The Benue State Tractor Hiring company was established as part of the state's agricultural mobilization programme. The programme was to procure tractors and hire them out to farmers to promote modernization of farming services and operations. It developed schemes for encouraging corporative and individuals with the capacity to procure tractors from Government at the affordable subsidized rate of 70%. At the time of survey, it showed the programme has not properly reproduced its self as compared to what the Previous Administrations (2007 – 2015) had done.
7. Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture Yandev: The institute was founded in 1929 as a colonial farm training centre. Its primary function has been to train manpower to Higher National Diploma in the area of Agriculture and related courses. It was renamed a polytechnic but has no accreditation on most of its programmes/Courses as of time of research. it suffers from lack of attention, and poor funding, poor student's intake given that most/programme not accredited.



8. Agricultural Training Centre, Mbatyer, Buruku LGA: Conceived as Manpower Technical Training Centre where all kinds of expertise in Extension and Mechanized Agricultural training takes place, the place was fully functional in the 1970's and 1980's but gradually became nonfunctional 99% of buildings have collapse with no functional activity taken place there.
9. Hule and sons Oil Mill Waunune: This is a private Oil Mill based in Waunune headquarters of Tarkaa Local Government Area of Benue State. Its sole function is the extraction of crude vegetable oil from soya beans and sold to vegetable oil companies. It has in the last three years installed high and recent technology in refining crude to produce vegetable oil and related products from soya beans. The company is doing well as an individual private ownership venture.
10. Naka Rice Milling Market, Gwer West Local Government Area shows a fast-growing rice milling market supported by Rice farms from the Fadama region of the LGA, situated along the banks of the River Benue. However, as of 2023 July time of visit, there was complain of 70% reduction in activities arising from occupation of farm lands by militant herdsmen hence lack of production activities.
11. Gboko Rice Milling Market: Quite a large flourishing Rice Milling Business going on co-ordinate by participating locally private local firms using local technology especially in the boiled system. Needs improved technology and proper utilization of rice chaffs, there are also destroying facilities.
12. Seraph Oil Milling Ltd: It is private company based in Makurdi, Benue State, established in 2014. It produces and distributes refined soya oil, animal feeds and related products with staff strength of 54 and doing well.

### **Benue State Government's Role in the Development of Agriculture is through the Following**

- Applications for registration of business and local acquisition are processes especially cost of land acquisition and support services are very low.
- The state government grants tax exemption during the first Five years of establishment of an agro industry.
- Government has established an industrial layout in Makurdi and plans to establish similar layouts in Gboko, Otukpo and other major towns. The estate in Makurdi is already hosting several agro and agro allied industries.
- Government has cleared parcels of land (21,000 hectares) in different parts of the state, which are suitable for large scale and mechanized farming. Government is willing to partner with interested investors to open more large scale commercial agriculture.
- Government has made efforts to empower and encourage farmers to improve on the production, storage and processing of these products.
- The state government is intensifying efforts at managing a peaceful return of people to their ancestral farm lands to continue agricultural activities.
- In order to ensure that the states farmers obtain the best from their farming activities and able bodied youth attracted to the agricultural sector, the State Government has applied numerous and multidimensional interventions to support the farmers. Some these iclude procuring and supplying tractors, fertilzers, pasticides, etc at subsidize rates.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The following findings were reached;

- i) The findings showed that the overall agricultural policy in Benue state has been facing tremendous failure, due to unsatisfactory, lack of expertise and premature policy implementation.
- ii) The finding deduced that as a result of inadequate agricultural infrastructure in Benue state, it is hard to determine the level of agriculture products development despite the presence of abundant agricultural environment and climate cover in the state.
- iii) The findings also revealed that government poor commitment to agricultural activities and infrastructural development has caused a lot of disconformities in the farming activities in Benue state with limited availability of modern agricultural machineries.
- iv) Finally, the findings established that Benue state government heavily need to concentrate on revamping agricultural sector and infrastructural development to sustained been the "Food Basket of Nation" and provide lasting economic policy implementation and evaluation of odds hindrance through investment on roads, water, electricity, storage and of course inadequate security in the state.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

- a. There is need for well coordinated and driven private sector efforts with government playing regulatory roles and little supportive services in the area and mechanized through the use of appropriate roles and little supportive services in the Mechanized through the use of appropriate farm machinery.
- b. Farmers should be able to access credit facilities on schedule and adequately at one digit interest rate with Government supporting.

- c. There is improved technical capacity through employment and of extension workers in the State
- d. The private sector be encourage to make farm inputs (improved seeds, cuttings and breeds of animals and birds, fertilizers, herbicides, mobile threshers, harvesters, processing machines, animals drugs, etc).
- e. There should be availability of functional agro-processing factories for the use of abundant raw materials; i.e soyabeans, sesame, oranges, tomatoes, rice, etc, in the State.
- f. There should established Produce Marketing Board for stabilization of agricultural produce prices.
- g. There should be all year round agriculture activities through irrigation farming in most of the Fadama areas in the State will be practiced,
- h. There is need to increased number of organized farmer's cooperative societies that can support themselves for profitable agricultural business and Where Benue State agricultural produce and products are exported to the developed countries (Aliegba, 2012). All Agricultural farming activities in the state should be revived, properly funded, drafted and accredited to meet the challenges of modern farming technological needs.

All the Agro-Allied industries moribund should be private/commercialized and made productive and profitable.

However, as of the time of field work (July, 2023) not up to 20% of the above envisaged has been materialized.

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