

**REVIEW OF SOME AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMES IN ZAMFARA STATE:
ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to review three major existing agricultural programmes in Zamfara State and examine their achievements and challenges in order to propose options for improvement in the state. This is necessary in order to enhance food security and reduce poverty to a minimum level in the state. The programmes reviewed were Zamfara State Integrated Development Programme (ZASIDEP), Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP) and International fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). ZASIDEP aims are to revitalize agriculture, provide marketing strategies and education for the masses on the role of agriculture in wealth creation among others. ZACAREP on the other hand was designed to achieve increase in crop production, crop intensification, capacity building, and development of farmers association among others; while IFAD goals are to invest in people and empower them to increase their food security, improve the nutrition of their families and improve their income. Some of these aims were not yet achieved due to some factors such as insecurity, lack of political will by successive governments and large portion of ungoverned spaces where government presence is not yet felt among others. The researcher suggests that insecurity should be addressed and low interest rate loans provided for farmers. Furthermore, terrorism should be reduced within the state and strong political will be exhibited in all territories in the state where governments presence is not felt.

Keywords: Review, Agricultural Programme, Achievements, Challenges, Way forward.

Introduction

Agriculture is the mainstay of most progressive societies. The survival of any society to a large extent depends on agriculture. Agriculture focuses on food production, cultivation of crops and raising of livestock for sustainability of any society. Agricultural programmes are designed to enable people attain food security for an active and healthy life. Achieving food security in any society depends on how committed such a society is towards the well-being of her members. The capacity to produce and conserve food in any society depends on the commitment of such society to agricultural production. As human population grows, there is a corresponding increase in the demand for basic needs of life such as food, clothing and shelter. Non-investment in agricultural production leads to hunger, poverty, and unemployment among other social problems. For instance, the “ENDSARS 2020”, protest against police brutality by many youths in Nigeria was made worse by hungry and angry youths who discovered that food items were stored in some ware houses. They broke the warehouses and carted away food items meant to be shared to the people during the lock down era.

Onazi (2018), noted that prior to the discovery of oil in Nigeria agriculture has been the mainstay of Nigerian economy because it provides food for man, feed for animal and raw materials for industries. In addition, it provides employment and income thereby reducing poverty. In recent times, food prices have been on the increase, and are going beyond the reach of average Nigerian particularly with the removal of fuel subsidy. For instance, prices of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs such as genuine seeds, herbicides, insecticides are extremely high that the peasant farmer is left with no other option than to stay out of job which increases poverty. Similarly, Ekott (2023) pointed out that acute food insecurity is mostly driven by the deterioration of security conditions and conflict in northern states, which as at March 2022 have led to the displacement of about 3.17 million people and are constraining farmer’s accesses to their lands. Unicef (2023), noted that the North-west region, where Zamfara state is located, experiences food insecurity and malnutrition and estimated that about 2.9 million people are currently food insecure and this figure is expected to increase to 4.3 million if urgent actions are not taken. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Bureau of statistics (2023), in the Northern region food inflation surged to 24.32 % in January 2023 from the 23.75 % recorded in December 2022, the highest in the last four years. This was mostly driven by the increase in the prices of common food items such as tomatoes, yam tubers, and vegetables. The rate of inflation has exposed many households in Zamfara and Nigeria as a whole to hunger leading to extreme poverty.

Zamfara State is an agrarian state, about 82% of her population lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture as a means of livelihood (Chonoko, 2022). However, the agricultural sector is largely small and medium scale with majority of the farmers having small land holding. In Zamfara state, traditional foods such as millet, soya bean, maize are produced. However, the level of poverty and hunger is still very high. Sasu (2022), observed that Zamfara State is the 6th poorest state in Nigeria with about 73.98% people living in poverty. This shows that agriculture has not been at the

front burner of economic events otherwise, the level of poverty could not have dropped so low. Hence, the need to review three major agricultural programmes and activities in Zamfara State. The programmes are Zamfara State Integrated Development Programme(ZASIDEP), Zamfara Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Agricultural Programmes and Activities in Zamfara State

Zamfara, as an agrarian state, has as its slogan “Farming is our Pride” which signifies the importance the state attached to agriculture and agricultural activities. According to the 2006 population census, the Zamfara State has an estimated population of about 3,278,873. The state is endowed with fertile land, abundant agricultural resources, adequate rainfall and abundant sunshine coupled with enough human resource to cultivate the land yet, agricultural productivity remains low (Sani, 2018) which could be attributed to inadequate adoption of available technologies, high post-harvest losses, poor storage systems and lack of access to markets. The government realizing that investment in agriculture will enhance food production and security, designed the agricultural programmes to reduce the drudgery of peasant farmers in Zamfara State and improve food production.

Agricultural programmes in Zamfara State as in other states are initiatives designed to facilitate people to provide their own food needs, to have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food; to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The programme usually targets more rural contexts; however, they also exist in urban and semi-urban contexts where land is available. In Zamfara State different agricultural programmes have been introduced and notably among these are Zamfara State Integrated Development Programme(ZASIDEP), Zamfara Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Zamfara State Integrated Development Programme(ZASIDEP)

The Government of Zamfara State of Nigeria, in her effort, determination and desire to improve the living standard of her people, made a commitment and initiated “Zamfara State Integrated Development Programme(ZASIDEP) to act as an instrument for laying a sustainable integrated agricultural development framework in the state. The programme was established under the administration of the first executive governor of Zamfara State His Excellency, Alhaji Sani Ahmed in 1999. The programme was geared toward achieving socio-economic development using local peculiarities and potentials of the State and has the following objectives:

- To revitalise the agricultural sector towards increased output level through the introduction of improved technologies, adoption of appropriate agricultural mechanisation techniques, utilisation of improved seeds and seedlings, appropriate agronomic practices, enhanced processing and storage facilities.
- To provide Marketing strategies for transforming agriculture as a base for rural economic emancipation.

- To enhance educational transformation of all stakeholders in agriculture through aggressive mass education on the importance and role of agriculture in wealth creation, adoption of improved agricultural practices, provision of infrastructure with priorities to reviving farm institutes and strengthening agricultural colleges and vocational centres.
- To establish small and medium scale agro-allied industries geared to provide job opportunities and act as catalyst for the growth of the agricultural sector (Sani, 2018).

Implementation, Achievement and Challenges of ZASIDEP

In order to revolutionize agriculture in the state through a sustainable development frame work, the ZASIDEP adopted a participatory approach through the formation of farmers associations. At the initial stage of the programme, Zamfara State Government targeted 10,000 farmers associations to be used throughout the state, however, this number has increased because many people have developed interest in agriculture and agro related businesses such as agricultural produce and products (Sani, 2018). The programme started with the training of supervisors/enumerators for the conduct of bench mark survey which was completed and the report released by the consultants. This was followed by training of supervisors and technical staff of state and local governments to prepare them for the task ahead. In addition, stakeholders' workshop was organized for suppliers, service providers, financial organisations and marketers of agricultural products. Furthermore, farmers' mobilization tours to all the 44 area development councils in the state was carried out and over 2,322 farmers associations were formed and registered under ZASIDEP.

The programme by all intent and purpose has actually yielded some positive rewards since inception through reversal of the rural-urban drift. This is because the youths have realised the financial gains in farming rather than seeking for menial work in urban areas. According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Urban development (2020) about 70 % of idle youths and 45 % of active adults in Zamfara State were engaged in one form of agricultural activities or the other. In addition, quality of life has improved as many youths have engaged in productive agricultural ventures which provided means of livelihood for them. Currently many families are able to attend to the daily needs of their families with the gains made from agriculture. The improvement in agricultural activities in the state could be attributed to the new farming techniques introduced by the state government through ZASIDEP, for example, hand held plough, tractor and other agricultural implements which made farming much easier towards achieving goal number one of the programme objectives.

However, some of the aims of ZASIDEP are not met yet. For instance, provision of marketing strategies could not be adequately achieved because no organized marketing strategies was enforced, hence, middle men dominate the process and increase prices at will. Furthermore, the establishment of small and medium scale agro-allied industries is still at low ebb in the state, hence, the use of traditional means of agricultural practices still exists alongside mechanized agriculture (Dansadau, 2020). Insecurity is still prevalent in the state, farmer and herder clashes, cattle rustling and of late

banditry seem to have crippled the noble effort by the government. It is widely reported by Chonoko (2022) that in Zamfara State, food security has been threatened by the unrest in different parts of the state. Farmers can no longer do their farming activities in most of the farming areas. This has affected farmers output and caused increasing food insecurity. Nuhu (2019), noted that the prevalence of armed banditry affected economic growth, farming activities and impede on the overall wellbeing of the citizens particularly farmers. According to Nuhu, the lowered farmers output, increasing food insecurity, poverty, hunger and social malice affected ZASIDEP. Though the programme is still in existence, the government initiated another programme known as “Zamfara Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme” (ZACAREP) which runs side by side with ZASIDEP.

Zamfara Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP)

ZACAREP is another agricultural policy of the Zamfara state government which aimed to improve productivity and enhance food security. ZACAREP was commissioned in the year 2004 and it is still in existence. It has the aim of identifying and planning agricultural activities and methods that would be suitable for the development of agro-based economy. ZACAREP focuses on implementation strategies aimed at using agricultural technologies by local farmers to improve productivity and enhance food security in the local communities. It has the following objectives:

- Increasing crop production by small and medium scale farmers of Zamfara through the dissemination of improved and proven crop-based technologies.
- Crop intensification through the promotion of Animal Traction Technology to facilitate area expansion of cultivable land, reduction indrudgery and enhanced sustainable increase in food production
- Routine seasonal capacity building of frontline extension staff along with resourceful farmers to develop quality extension staff for effective technology transfer.
- Promoting development of farmer associations for linkage to saving and loan services, input supply and output marketing.
- Introducing cost-reducing, labour-saving agro processing technologies suitable for micro-enterprise development with priority on identifying new income generating opportunities for women.
- Promoting the establishment of private sector enterprises that will serve the smallholder farmer sector, especially for inputs (improved seed, fertilizer and agrochemicals), marketing and value-adding.
- Increasing meat production through the provision of full package of bulls, rams, goats, feeds, drugs and mineral salts with improved livestock feed management technology to farmers.
- Improvement of the nutritional status of rural populace through the dissemination of improved food processing and utilisation techniques/technologies.

Implementation, Achievements and Challenges of ZACAREP

The first activity that was implemented in the programme was the conduct of Benchmark survey. This is because, for any agricultural development programme to succeed, a careful planning based on accurate information of what is on ground is required. It was therefore imperative to establish a benchmark survey so as to identify the gap that existed between what obtains and the achievable potentials that can be attained. The Ministry of Agriculture and Zamfara State Agricultural Development Project (ADP) provided useful information that guided the conduct of the survey on the status of agriculture in Zamfara State which serves as criteria for monitoring the programme.

After the conduct of the survey, activities were mapped out to achieve the objectives of the programme which include capacity building. Train the Trainers approach was adopted, organised and sponsored by the state government. The objective of this training was to orient the participants towards managing the programme. There was training on organisation and strengthening of farmers' cooperative and field agricultural staff. Furthermore, there was crop based technology training which informed farmers on crop-based technologies, in order to improve their farming technologies. Stakeholders' workshop was also conducted in the state capital which involved suppliers and service providers. After the training, some reputable companies were identified which resulted in the procurement and distribution of improved seeds, fertilizers and agro-chemicals to farmers at a subsidised price.

The Zamfara State Government made arrangement with the First Bank for the disbursement of one billion naira to farmers who were able to open account with a deposit of 25% of their total amount required and belong to registered farmers group. There was also provision of logistics to frontline extension staff. The government in order to ensure that effort made did not encounter any hitch provided all the requirements for staff in terms of mobility for example, motorcycles, spring balance, measuring tapes, ropes, extension bags, raincoats, rain boots and spraying equipments. The government provided enough money for supervisors and adequate arrangements were made for implementation of the programme. There was a buy-back arrangement where the government agreed to buy what was left in case farmers were unable to sell all produced. In other to ensure the success of ZACAREP programme, the state government involved traditional rulers from the onset as the Chairmen of ZACAREP committees in their districts. The entire loans disbursed were guaranteed by traditional rulers and the Chairmen of Local government areas. This was to ensure timely return of the loans and to give other farmers opportunity to access such loans. However, the programme is facing challenges as some of the aims could not be achieved and sustained. For instance, achieving sustainable increase in food production through animal traction technology is becoming a big challenge because animals use for this technology is a special breed that requires special attention in terms of maintenance. The cost of maintenance is high; huge amount of money is needed to feed and maintain the animals. In addition, the issues of cattle rustling and banditry affected the breeding and training of animal for farm; hence, they are in short supply. (Dansadau, 2020).

Cost reducing, labour-saving agro-processing technologies suitable for income generating opportunities for women became difficult due to cultural influence. Majority of the women are

kept in Purdah which restricts them from personal, social and economic activities outside their homes, therefore could not participate fully in agricultural activities. This becomes a setback to agricultural development in the state. Furthermore, routine seasonal capacity training and re-training of frontline extension staff for effective technology transfers was not too effective due to poor funding; this led to the short supply of quality extension workers. Political and ideological difference and corrupt practices also constitute major challenges to the programme. Inability to re-pay loan is another concern which emerged due to stoppage of farming activities and closure of farmers' market. Means of livelihood of so many farmers in the state reduced and many farmers could not meet-up with their financial obligations to repay loans collected through different agricultural programmes they engage in. Some participants relocated to other states and to neighboring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Benin Republic due to insurgency. Furthermore, disbursement of loans was another challenge because loans were disbursed late and the aim of such loans are defeated, hence, it no longer served the purpose for which it was meant.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Projects

IFAD is another agricultural programme embarked upon by the Zamfara State government. It is a specialized agency under the umbrella of the United Nations. IFAD works to educate families in developing regions and to provide them with access to resources for sustainable agricultural practices. The project is an integrated agricultural and rural development programme jointly funded by IFAD, Federal Government Nigeria (FGN) and Zamfara State Government. IFAD in Zamfara State started in 2003. IFAD strategy, in agreement with Zamfara State government covers the period 2016-2021 and is still running, however, the project awaits renewal by the present administration.

Objectives of IFAD Projects in Zamfara

One of the objectives of IFAD in Zamfara State is to invest in rural people by empowering them to increase their food security. Furthermore, it aims to improve the livelihood and living condition of rural poor, with emphasis on women and other vulnerable groups by improving their nutrition and income and by expanding their businesses to enable them take charge of their own development (IFAD-FRN, 2016). The agency works to provide families with low-interest loans and grants used to fund agricultural projects in rural areas. The fund focuses on farmers who cultivate small plots of land and rely on family for their labour (IFAD-FRN, 2016).

Implementation, Achievement and Challenges

The programme at the initial stage commenced operation in the Zamfara State with three participating local governments of Anka, Birnin/Magaji, and Zurmi. However additional six local governments were selected. These include: Bakura, Maradun, Gummi, Tsafe, Bungudu and Shinkafi, making a total of nine local governments that started the programme. There was a three months foundation course for Community Driven Development Team, as well as Train the trainer's workshop, and seminars for household baseline village areas of the participating communities.

IFAD focuses on reducing rural poverty in Zamfara State. This could be seen in the numerous activities it engaged in. For instance, IFAD loans helped to improve outreach on agriculture. Its impact on expertise helps in building capacity, productivity and market participation of rural people in Zamfara. The body aims at reducing rural poverty at all levels in the state; setting up and strengthening farmers' organizations; and supporting empowerment of poor rural people, especially women and young people in Zamfara State. IFAD-FGN (2016) emphasized that currently many women and youths are practicing agriculture for their daily survival and this align with IFAD's goals which is a rural project in which rural farmers benefit from economic growth through developing sustainable, climate-resilient economic and financial inclusion of young people in profitable agribusiness (IFAD-FGN, 2016). However, IFAD's contract with the Zamfara State government expired in 2021 and currently awaits renewal by the present administration.

The programme recorded some challenges which include extreme poverty, hunger. The rural people on which this programme is focused are very poor that are faced with hardship (IFAD-FGN, 2016). Achieving success became a bit difficult because whatever that was given to them, either loan or grant are partly or totally used to cater for their feeding and the remaining if any, will be use for farming and or other agribusinesses. Sani (2018) captured this view when he emphasised that some farmers sold their loan materials such as seeds, fertilizers, agro-chemicals to other people to meet their daily and immediate needs, mostly food items.

Furthermore, frequent policy-changes as a result of change of government and poor performance of agencies assigned to implement food and agriculture policies constitutes serious challenge. The inconsistency in different policies of the government causes decline in productivity and generates programme instability, ineffectiveness and unsustainability of such programme. In addition, misappropriation of priority by most farmers in Zamfara State is a source of concern as many of the farmers empowered with loans to improve their agricultural productivity channeled their loan to frivolities such as adding new wives, buying new cars and building new houses, to mention a few.

Lack of continuity of programmes and political will by the government on agriculture is very retrogressive. Successive government is not always committed and in support of the programmes and policies of the preceding government. As a result, many of the national and international donors were discouraged from investing and empowering farmers in the state. This has led to abandonment of some agricultural programmes that benefited the people in the past. Furthermore, there is large ungoverned spaces which are territories' within the state where government's presence is not felt by the people. Chonoko (2022), observed that large proportion of States in the Northwest region were forest with little or no government presence. These forests became safe haven for banditry and Zamfara is one of such states. In a recent study, Chonoko (2022) expressed that the activities of armed bandits in Northwest region have negatively impacted on agricultural production which threatens food security in Nigeria. According to Chonoko (2022), a number of major local markets in Zamfara State have been shut down due to severe loss of agricultural products. For instance, Shikafi market, a major cross-border market which used to be beehive of commercial activities in

Zamfara State, presently operates at about 30 to 40 % capacity due to armed bandit attack. According to Nuhu (2019) insecurity affects the general human security because the situation promotes fear; furthermore, it limits peoples' ability to work effectively to develop their community.

Conclusion

The study suggests that there are functional agricultural programmes in Zamfara State which have made some impact in the lives of the people of Zamfara and the nation in general; however, the programmes are faced with some challenges. This implies that if the challenges such as insecurity, poor enforcement marketing strategies, cattle rustling, late disbursement of loan among others as discussed in this study will be diligently addressed by the state government, farmers and community member as reported in the recommendations in this paper, Zamfara State will go a long way towards eliminating food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, migration and insecurity in the state for overall growth and development of the state and the nation. The study therefore concluded that agricultural programmes in Zamfara state though fraught with socio-economic and cultural challenges are redeemable and capable of being salvaged in the interest of the people of Zamfara State and the nation as whole.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges, there is the need for secured environment because to ensure food security, the lives and properties of farmers must be safe. Government and all citizens should help and collaborate with security agencies to address and improve the issue of security in Zamfara state. One way of doing this is to actually put a stop to the activities of rural banditry and terrorism by effectively controlling the nation's borders to avoid entry of bandits through our porous borders. Entry and exit from the borders should be closely monitored, making its infiltration by terrorists very difficult.

There should be budgetary increase in military spending to recruit more army and the acquisition of high-caliber weapon from Western countries. Nigeria with a population of over 200 million has about 120 fighters in spite of the multiplicity of bandits and terrorist across the country. In addition, effective control of religious discourse will help to reduce religious extremism. Government should put in place a policy to vet the content of discourse by clerics and the content of the curriculum. These measures have worked in other places such as Algeria and Libya. It was further suggested that the development of grass root policing, enriched by local personnel and intelligence is one of the panaceas to end rural banditry and terrorism.

Agricultural programmes should be designed to provide conditions that will not give room for failure to repay any facility provided to farmers. In addition, loans should be disbursed early enough to enable beneficiaries utilize it as at when due. Moreover, loan should be given to farmers who registered under cooperative societies to ensure that genuine farmers are helped. Additionally, government should introduce loans that are of low interest to enable famers (small, medium and

large scale) to procure farming inputs such as seeds, herbicides, fertilizers, insecticides and so on. Such loans should be disbursed through the traditional institutions and cooperative under strict condition to ensure repayment. There should be a strong monitoring unit that oversees the activities of the beneficiaries to ensure that the loans are actually used for agricultural purpose.

The existing agricultural policies and programmes should be reviewed towards high-tech using information and communication technology for better impact on farm produce, food production, storage and distribution. Efforts should be made to protect facilities put in place for rural farmers' empowerment such as silos, boreholes, dams among others. Boreholes should be serviced regularly to ensure that they function properly. Dams should be open to use after the rainy season; this way dry season farmers will be able to have enough water for their irrigation farming. Government should demonstrate high political will, commitment and continuity in governance to ensure that agricultural policies made by them at all time stands the test of time as well as to ensure that these large proportions of ungoverned spaces are well protected by making government presence felt in the areas.

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