

THE ROLE OF ZAMFARA COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION PROGRAMME IN PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY IN THE STATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of Zamfara comprehensive agricultural revolution programme (ZACAREP) in achieving food security in Zamfara State. ZACAREP was created with an emphasis to identify, and plan agricultural activities and methods that would be suitable for the development of Agro-based economy. The paper identified ZACAREP as a government policy to address food insufficiency in Zamfara state with a view to reducing poverty rate which stood at about 73,98% (Sasu, 2022). The paper enumerated some steps the government of Zamfara state took towards promoting food security in the state such as conduct of benchmark survey which was aimed at identifying the gap that exists between what obtains in the present and the achievable potentials that can be attained in the future, capacity building aimed at training over 10000 participants, granting of up to 5-10 million naira loans through the banks for various categories of farmers, provision of logistics to frontline extension staff worth 2.8million on monthly basis among others. The paper went further to outline some challenges facing ZACAREP in promoting food security in the State to include among others banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping. The paper suggested that Zamfara State government should increase its support to farmers in the areas of modern agricultural technologies and innovations, step-up efforts to address the insecurity issues to ensure security of food in the State.

Keywords: ZACAREP, Food, food security, challenges

Introduction

Agriculture in its natural sense is the life supporting activity that keeps the society on the wheel of progress and 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. Achieving food security in any society depends on how committed such society is towards the well-being of her members. Food is one of the basic needs of every human being. Not only is more food needed by individuals, quality and nutritious food is needed by individuals to live, stay health and enjoy a happy and productive life (FAO, 2022). The right to food is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR Article 25(1) as

part of the right to adequate standard of living and is enshrined in the 1996 International Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations Human Right (UNHR), 2019). The convention proclaimed that all human being, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality, birth or other status, have the right to adequate food and to be free from hunger. (FAO, 2022)

According to the World Food Summit as cited by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2023), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food required to live healthy life. Achieving food security has become a top priority of many nations including Nigeria. Many organizations such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and World Health Organization (WHO) are collaborating with different governments with the aim to alleviate hunger, reduce the population of malnourished people and achieve global food security(Matemilola & Elegbede, 2017).

In the context of this write up, food security refers to a condition where farmers in Zamfara State produce adequate food for all the population, and the population has access to adequate means (resources) to acquire foods, and utilize them to reach a state of nutritional well-being. Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme is an agricultural policy of the Zamfara State government which is aimed at improving productivity and enhances food security. ZACAREP was commissioned in 2004 and it is still in existence. Its major emphasis is to identify and plan agricultural activities and methods that would be suitable for the development of agro-based economy focusing on implementation strategies using agricultural technology by local farmers to improve productivity and enhance food security in the local communities (Zamfara State Government, 2021). It has the following objectives according to Sani, (2018):

- a) Increase crop production by small and medium scale farmers of Zamfara through the dissemination of improved and proven crop-based technology,
- b) Crop intensification through the promotion of animal traction technology to facilitate area expansion of cultivable land, reduction in drudgery and enhanced sustainable increase in food production,
- c) Routine seasonal capacity building of frontline extension staff along with resourceful farmers to develop quality extension staff for effective technology transfer,
- d) Promoting development of farmers association for linkages to saving and loan services, input supply and output marketing,
- e) Introducing cost-reducing, labour-saving agro-processing technologies suitable for micro-enterprise development with priority on identifying new income generating opportunities for women,
- f) 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,

- g) Increasing meat production through the provision of full package of bulls, rams, goats etc., feeds, drugs and mineral salt with improved livestock feed management technology to farmers,
- h) Improvement of the nutritional status of rural populace through the dissemination of improved food processing and utilization techniques.

Zamfara State is known for its agricultural potentials. It's an agrarian state that prides itself as the home of agriculture with a slogan "Farming is our pride" About 82% of her population are living in rural areas and depending on agriculture as a means of livelihood (Chonoko, 2022). However the agricultural sector is mostly small and medium scale with majority of the farmers having small land holding (Sani 2018). According to Sani (2018), traditional foods such as millet, soya bean, maize and other cash crops such as cotton are produced in the State. Given the role of agriculture in stimulating the economic growth and development of Zamfara State, the government recognizes that investing in agriculture can increase crop production and promote food security. The Zamfara Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP) was therefore created to bring about a total revolution of the agricultural sector so as to increase food production and promote food security in the State. Creating the agency, government envisaged that high economic growth rate is possible when agricultural production is significantly increased, and higher output will directly reduce hunger and bring down cost of foods (Sani, 2018). Another postulation that encouraged the establishment of ZACAREP is that it is community driven, and relies on the participation of private sector and lead investment in production activities. It is also technology-driven with government playing a leading role in the agricultural development efforts (Zamfara State Government, 2021). Therefore, the vision of ZACAREP was indeed timely and all important to a State whose poverty rate stood at 73.98% with 6th position in the poverty ladder of states in Nigeria (Ekott, 2023).

Promoting food security

The first activity that was implemented in the programme towards promoting food security was the conduct of Bench mark survey. This is because, for any agricultural development programme to succeed, requires a careful planning based on accurate information on what is on ground. It was therefore imperative to establish a bench mark survey so as to allow for the identification of the gap that existed between what obtains at present and the achievable potentials that can be attained in the future which serves as criteria for monitoring the programme's efficiency. After the conduct of the survey, activities were mapped out to achieve the objectives of the programme which include capacity building which trained about 560 technical supervisors, 320 field agricultural staff and training of about 10,000 target farmers. The objective of this train-the-trainer training was to orient the participant towards managing the programme. There was also training on organization and strengthening of farmers' cooperative and field agricultural staff for better management operations Furthermore, there was crop-based technology training which trains about 360 farmers on crop-based technologies, in order to improve their farming technologies. Stakeholders' workshop was also conducted in the State capital involving 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 subsidized prices.

(Comprehensive Agricultural Revolution Programme (ZACAREP: Working Document for Agriculture, UD).

Under the ZACAREP programme, credit facilities were granted to farmers of different categories. In some it was in form of cash and kind such as, fertilizers, improved seeds, and agrochemicals, money for labour and insurance cover which benefited about 6000 farmers. Another category of farmers, 142000 in number, received 2 bags of fertilizer to pay back after harvesting their crops. On the other hand, the medium and large scale farmers were granted loans ranging from 1-5 million to 5-50 million respectively but with stringent conditions attached, one of which was to open account with a deposit of 25% of their total amount required and belonged to farmers groups.

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, 320 motorcycles were provided to field officers at a subsidized price, payment of over 2.8 million on monthly basis to field officers as project allowance, provision of working materials such as spring balance, measuring tapes. Others are ropes, extension bags, rain coats, rain boots and spraying equipment (Zamfara state government, 2020). The government provided enough money for supervisors and adequate arrangements were made for them to monitor the various activities that promote food increase in the state.

In the area of marketing strategies, there was a buy-back arrangement where the government agreed to buy what is left in case of any bad market from the farmers produce. In order to ensure the success of ZACAREP in promoting food security in the State, government involved traditional rulers as the chairmen of ZACAREP committee in their districts. The entire loans disbursed were guaranteed by traditional rulers and chairmen of the Local government areas. This was to ensure timely return of the loans to allow other farmers opportunity to access such loans.

Looking at the programme, it is evident that appreciable progress had been made in the area of food security in the state, since there are increase in crop production and income of farmers from 12-15% at the initial stage and 48-60% in the subsequent years, cultivation of additional 56,000 hectares of farm land for crop production, a lot of youths in the rural areas were also gainfully employed on farms to provide the needed labour for farm operations. About 420 frontline extension staff received training to improve their technology extension delivery approach with a total of 10,000 farmer groups formed as against 1000 at the beginning with a projection of about 40,000 farmer groups in three years. However this does not mean that there were no challenges.

Challenges

The significant roles that ZACAREP played in promoting food security, was met with certain challenges. Such challenges include among others, animal traction technology. Animals used 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 case of cattle rustling and armed banditry have affected the breeding and training of animals for farm; hence they are in short supply. Zamfara State Emergency Management Agency, reported by Chinoko (2022) that about 548,502 animals were rustled from the 14 LGA of Zamfara State while about 14,404 persons kidnapped from 2021 to 2022. Income generating opportunities for

women was difficult to achieve due to cultural influences. Majority of the women are in purdah, therefore could not participate fully in agricultural activities. Many researches have shown that women in purdah often have reduced access to credit extension services and agricultural training programmes and disruption in knowledge transfer. This is a setback to agricultural development in the state (Musa, 2018). Furthermore, routine seasonal capacity training and re-training of frontline extension staff for effective technology transfers suffered a setback due to poor funding as a result of the prevailing economic hardship in the country, this led to the short supply of quality extension workers. Political and ideological differences and corrupt practices also constitute major challenges to the programme. Inability of farmers to re-pay loan was another concern which emerged due to stoppage of farming activities and closure of farmer's market. Means of livelihood of so many farmer beneficiaries in the state reduced and many farmers could not meet up in their financial obligations to repay loans collected through ZACREP(ZACAREP: Working Document for Agriculture, UD). Some participants relocated to other states and some to neighboring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Benin republic due to insurgency (Nuhu, 2019). Others are late disbursement of loans to farmers. When loans are disbursed late, such loans will not be utilized for agricultural purposes again. Added to this is giving loan to non-genuine farmers. All these will certainly contribute to food insufficiency in the state.

Conclusion

Achieving food security has become a top priority of many nations including Nigeria. Food security entails a condition where farmers in Zamfara State produces adequate food for all the population at all times, and the population have access to adequate means (resources) to acquire food and utilize them to reach a state of nutrition well-being. Zamfara State being an agrarian state with its agricultural potentials needs to preserve the process and products so that food will be available and at the same time affordable at all times. The sustained effort of Zamfara State government through ZACAREP in promoting food security will improve food production, crop intensification; promote development of farmers association for linkage to saving and loan services, input supply and output marketing and other benefits in the state. Of course these are possible if all the highlighted challenges are ameliorated.

Suggestions

Realizing the importance of securing food for use as at when due. The writer suggests that government of Zamfara state, should increase its support to farmers in terms of provision of necessary modern agricultural technological innovations that can improve agricultural development and promote food security in the state in the areas of improved varieties of crops, capacity building and provision of financial services to farmers. Furthermore, security issues should be handled with utmost importance because food security is not possible with human and environmental insecurity. Also government policies on agriculture should be a continuous one so as to avoid politicizations of issues to the detriment of the populace.

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