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THE CHANGING RURAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract

That rural social organizations, structures and institutions are changing and have brought great implication for agricultural development strategies is no news, but the critical issue is about the direction of change and the response of rural sociologists and agriculturists to these changes within the context of agricultural practice. It is an established fact that over 60% of agricultural activities in the Sub-Saharan Africa are domiciled in the rural areas and is associated with crude methods of resource utilization (machetes and hoes, etc) and that agriculture accounts for 20% of Sub-Sahara Africa's GDP (Vyas & Casley, 1998). This paper identifies enormous and fundamental challenges that hinder effective agricultural practice in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of these challenges are ecological, socio-demographic and institutional in nature. It therefore, argues that circumventing these challenges become a panacea to improved agricultural practice in the region.

Introduction

Rural social organizations, structures and institutions are truly changing and there is no doubt that these changes have brought

great implications for agricultural development strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa. But, what is critical here is about the direction of change and the response of social scientists particularly the rural sociologists to the changes within the context of agricultural practice. The fundamental question here remains: is the change all positive or does it have some negative connotations? If negative, what could be done to influence the direction of this change? Given that agriculture today is being dictated by the changing circumstances of this global climate known as climate change, how would rural agriculturists and rural sociologists in sub-Saharan Africa respond to minimize or effectively control its negative impact?

The core issue here is "change" which has invaded every known institutional and organizational structure as well as the general livelihoods of the people. These changes pose tremendous challenges to traditional institutional structures and organizations as well as opening up numerous opportunities and approaches to doing things.

Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa no doubt has enormous potentials for growth due to the presence of abundant natural resources including land and water. New market opportunities for agricultural exports are also emerging from the global demand for biomass feedstocks for bioenergy and biofuel production. However, FAO (2009) asserted that agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa faces enormous challenges which fall within the growing technology challenge, slow development of input and output markets and associated market services, with slow progress in regional integration, governance and institutional challenges, conflict, HIV and other diseases. It is against this background that the focus of this paper became imperative and desirable.

The economic performance and livelihood activities in Sub-Saharan Africa largely depend on agricultural development. It is on record that over 60 percent of agricultural activities in Sub-Saharan Africa is domiciled in the rural areas and is associated with crude methods of resource utilization (machetes and hoes, etc). World Bank Reports (2000) indicated that agriculture accounts for 20 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP. Dixon et al (2001) observed that it employs about 67 percent of the total labour force and is still the most dependable source of international exports. The global

export trend is such that agriculture dominates the export sector for East Africa (47 percent of total exports), and a significant source of exports in other areas of the region (14 percent of exports in Southern Africa and 10 percent in West Africa) according to World Bank (2008) and Dixon et al, (2008).

Chauvin et al (2012) in their working paper titled 'Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector, had lots to say about the state of agricultural productivity in the region. Its introduction enhances the understanding of the background and current situation of agricultural productivity and development in the region. According to the paper, as the poorest region in the world, the average real per capita income for Sub-Saharan Africa in 2010 was \$688 (constant 2000 US dollars value) compared to \$1717 in the rest of the developing world. And over the past 30 years, GDP growth per capital income in Sub-Saharan Africa has averaged 0.16 percent per annum. This failure of growth over the long term has resulted in high levels of poverty in the region.

One also finds the same picture of stagnation when one looks at the structures of African economies. In almost all of them, production is dominated by the primary sector in either agriculture or minerals. In the primary sector, agriculture is marked by low productivity with little application of science and technology, and in the mining sector, almost all the operations using modern technology are foreign owned enclaves with little linkages with the rest of the economies. In foreign trade the production structure: exports are dominated by primary commodities incorporating little application of science and technology while the bulk of manufactures and knowledge based services are imported. For the majority of African countries, the agricultural sector still provides a relatively large share of GDP but productivity in the sector has lagged considerably behind that of other continents. On the average agriculture employs 65 percent of Africa's labour force, it accounts for about 32 percent of gross domestic product, reflecting the relatively low productivity in the sector. For Africa therefore, the rural population has been able to transform their basic economic activity which is agriculture.

Chauvin et al (2012) categorizes Sub-Saharan African countries by the extent to which they are net food importers or exporters. The study compares average trade balance to Gross Domestic Production (GDP) for the different SSA countries over the past 10 years. Based on the proportion of the trade balance to GDP, the countries were categorized as strong Net Food Exporter (if trade balance is more than 10 percent of GDP), Moderate Net Food Exporter (if trade balance is between 5-10 percent of GDP). Weak Net Food Exporter (if trade balance is between 0-5 percent of GDP). Moderate Net Food Importer (if trade balance is between negative Net 5 – 10 percent of GDP) and strong Net Food Importer (if trade balance is more than negative 10 percent of GDP).

COUNTRY	CATEGORIES
Benin	Moderate Net Food Importer (between 5-10% of GDP)
Burkina Faso	Weak Net Food Importer (between negative 0-5% of GDP)
Burundi	Weak Net Food Exporter (between 0-5% of GDP)
Cameroon	Weak Net Food Importer (between negative 0-5% of GDP)
Cote d'Ivoire	Strong Net Food Exporter (More than 10% of GDP)
DRC	Moderate Net Food Importer (between negative 5-10% of GDP)
Ethiopia	Weak Net Food Exporter (between 0-5% of GDP)
Gambia	Strong Net Food Importer (more than negative 10% of GDP)
Ghana	Strong Net Food Exporter (more than 10% of GDP)
Guinea-Bissau	Strong Net Food Exporter (more than 10% of GDP)
Kenya	Weak Net Food Exporter (between 0-5% of GDP)
Madagascar	Weak Net Food Exporter (between 0-5% of GDP)
Malawi	Strong Net Food Exporter (more than 10% of GDP)
Mali	Moderate Net Food Importer (between negative 5-10% of GDP)
Nigeria	Weak Net Food Importer (between negative 0-5% of GDP)

Rwanda	Weak Net Food Importer (between negative 0-5% of GDP)
Senegal	Moderate Net Food Importer (between negative 5% of GDP)
South Africa	Weak Net Food Exporter (between negative 0-5% of GDP)
Uganda	Weak Net Food Exporter (between negative 0-5% of GDP)
United Republic of Tanzania	Weak Net Food Exporter (between negative 0-5% of GDP)

Source: UNCTAD & WDI as cited in Chauvin et'al (2012).

The Weak Net Food Importing countries are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Rwanda. The Weak Net Food Exporting countries are Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, Uganda, and Tanzania. The only strong Net Food importing country is Gambia. The Strong Net Food Exporting countries are Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Malawi. The moderate Net Food Importing countries are Benin, DRC, Malawi and Senegal. SSA is predominantly classified as net importer of food because the value of imported food is higher than the value of exported food. The most vulnerable countries are those in the first categories (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria, Rwanda).

Yu and Nin-Praft (2011) observed that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the most important development challenge of the 21st century. The region has been lagging behind the rest of the developing world in terms of economic growth and poverty alleviation, widening the gap between Sub-Saharan Africa and emerging developing countries. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was only \$612 (constant 2000 US dollar value) in 2009, which is less than one third of the level in developing East Asia. As a result, 29 of the world's 40 low-income countries are in this sub continent, and countries with the highest rates of malnutrition can be found here as well.

It is clear that agriculture is important in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the challenges of agricultural practices are enormous and fundamentally border on a range of factors including ecological,

socio-demographic and institutional challenges. It is also important to briefly discuss these challenges.

(i) Ecological challenges and climate change

Sub-Saharan Africa is located in the tropics and thus poor soil scenario, excessive heat, acidic soil and so on constitute the greatest environmental challenges to agricultural practice and development. The region called Sub-Saharan Africa is strongly influenced by the rainfall regime of the inter-tropical convergence zone (ITCZ). This location condition and the influence of the ITCZ produce features such as major deserts, unstable weather conditions of droughts and floods. According to Vyas and Casley (1988), the implications of these climatic variations across Africa manifest in many dimensions. And more importantly, agricultural performance depends on these factors. They argued further that only 53 percent of Africa's land area is capable of sustained production of rain fed agriculture within such contexts.

The problem however, is that the land area capable of sustained production remains further limited by poor soil condition. In, fact, when the constraints caused by shallow-retention soils and heavy clays are taken into account, only 30 percent of the land area is either marginally or eminently available for agricultural venture, (Vyas and Casley, 1988).

Also, one has to consider the unevenness in the distribution of these cultivable lands where some lands are more fertile for cultivation than others. Looking at the challenge from the perspective of the global climate change, there are lots of issues. Although climate change impacts have been researched at different levels, the interest of this paper is on its impact on agricultural practice. Extremes in temperatures and rainfall have always been important parameters in measuring the impact of climate change. As a result of these ecological problems, Africa is projected as the region most likely to be vulnerable to negative impact of climate change especially on food production (Kangalawe et' al, 2011; Chahinor et' al, 2007). It is also seen as the region that is most likely to suffer from the impact of climate change (IPCC, 2001). And according to Lobell, et' al (2008), the region has reportedly been

mentioned as a high food insecure region given the worsening impact of climate change.

(ii) Socio-demographic challenges

The rising level of urbanization and its attendant population growth rate of over 3 percent per annum have confronted the Sub-Saharan Africa with the challenge of not only feeding its teeming population but shrinking spaces for agricultural practice (consequent upon a rapid urban expansion). The Malthusian concept of population pressure seems to apply mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa for these reasons. Given the present low level of technological development, Sub-Saharan Africa is already in need of serious capacity to surmount Malthus's prediction of hunger and starvation on its population.

Many countries in Sub Saharan Africa, one would agree with this paper, are still at a very low agricultural input level (manual labour, without soil conservation, fertilizers, pesticides or improved crop varieties) while some areas of some countries have moved to an intermediate level characterized by the use of improved crop varieties and efforts to reduce soil erosion.

Vyas and Casley (1998) classified the levels of agricultural inputs based on the capacities of Sub-Saharan Africa at various levels of agricultural development. By these classifications, the only major reserves of carrying capacity for human populations lie in the hot, humid rainforests of control region and in the cereal-growing regions of the southern region. The major highlights in the estimates observed that three quarters of Sub-Saharan Africa's reserves of unused cultivable land are located in these two climatic regions. This seems a great potential if appropriate modern methods are engaged in their developments.

Countries in the southern region such as Angola and Northern parts of Zambia and Tanzania are not overcrowded and can produce high yields of rain fed cereal crops. In the dry land Southern African region, the problem of agricultural development is predominantly one of nutrient supply. The

vast humid center of Africa is currently very sparsely populated area in which the land remains highly constrained by heavy forests and which when cleared yields poorly due to the acidic, highly leached soils.

Agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot take place in the context of political instability. Ethnic, religious and political crises have turned the Sub-Saharan Africa into refugee camps in addition to accompanying ecological problems induced by such crises. Boko Haram in the Northern Nigeria has displaced many who would otherwise have been available for agricultural activities. There are also serious cases of environmental refugees occasioned by internal militia activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Stories of internet displacement and refugee phenomenon as well as ethnic and religious conflicts are still a problem in countries within Sub-Saharan Africa. Agrarian productivity and food security depends on socio-political stability to guarantee investments and trades in the region.

(iii) Institutional Challenges

Accessibility to land or land availability is based on traditional customs and norms. Therefore, one fundamental institutional factor to agrarian expansion and development in Sub-Saharan Africa borders on access to land. As agricultural practices are mostly rural-based subsistent occupation, access to available land resources is nested in traditional customs and norms. This presents tenure challenges as security of tenure is a major determinant of farmer response to development and investment incentives for the improvement of such land. In some countries, rights to land are bundled and or classified into a right to use land, right to plant trees, right to inherit land, right to transfer land property etc. some lands are communally-owned and may not easily be freed for commercial and market agriculture as well as investment purposes.

Within the contexts of traditional norms and customs, some concerns of equity in access to land resources become problems for rural women who suffer various degrees of

deprivation despite their potential for transforming the real agricultural economy. In Nigeria, attempt at land reforms still revolve around the land use Act of 1978, which to a large extent only serves the needs of government when major developments or resource exploitation are at the center of interest.

CHALLENGING RURAL INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND IMPLICATION FOR RURAL AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

In simple terms, social organization is a sociological concept defined as a pattern of relationships between and among individuals and groups. Characteristics of social organization can include qualities like size, sexual composition, spatio-temporal cohesion, leadership structure, division of labour, communication systems and so on. Although there are various definitions of social institutions, but for the purpose of this papers, social institution represent the social structure and machinery through which human society, organizes, direct and executes the multifarious activities, requires to satisfy human needs.

Social structure simply means the patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of the individuals. Various levels of analysis have shown that on a macro scale, social institution can refer to the system of socio-economic stratification (e.g. the class structure), or other patterned relations between large social groups. On a micro scale, it can refer to the structure of social networks ties between individuals or organizations. On the micro scale, shape the behavior of actors within the social system.

Social organization could be market or community-oriented. Based on the activities undertaken, market-oriented organizations are involves in supporting the income generating activities of their members, farmers unions and groups. In Nigeria we have many across North and South. In broad categories, activities commonly supported by market-oriented social organization include processing and marketing agricultural products. Livestock breeding and animal husbandry horticulture and irrigated crop producer etc. In the Southern Nigeria, market oriented social organization may not

produce unions which provide opportunity for marketing farm products, some farmers also belong to some general credit co-operative to raise capital for activities which may not be limited to agriculture.

Some other countries within Sub-Sahara Africa have many well developed market oriented agricultural organizations. This of course, will depend on the socio-political and ecological contexts as petroleum oil exploration in Southern Nigeria is hindering agricultural development. This may explain relative disparities in the evolution and development of market oriented social organizations for agricultural development.

Community-oriented social organizations are organizations that provide local public goods. Their activities may include cultivation of a collective field, casual labour exchange, local co-operatives (e.g. Osusu), management of the environment and upkeep of the village and social activities (Uphoff, 1993 and Collion and Rondot, 1998).

The ongoing democratization of the political system and process in Sub-Saharan Africa has contributed in opening more spaces and opportunities to enhance the role of social organizations in agricultural production. Through free debates and aggregation of interests, the voices of local agricultural practitioners could contribute in shaping the course of agricultural reforms in Sub-Sahara Africa. Rural social organizations (be it formal or informal), have often performed the mediatory roles between the state and rural agriculturists. These roles are dynamic and change with time depending on changes in the wider social and political systems.

The process of transmitting state policies to rural agriculturists have always moved in a top-down or button-up manner depending on the changing socio-political system. In Nigeria, for instance, such organizations (farmer organizations/associations etc) have often been preferred when government loan schemes are to be implemented. Fostering interest groups as well as pooling resources together have helped rural agricultural practitioners constitute rural development partners with the state in areas of agricultural productivity.

Sub-Sahara Africa of today is increasingly confronted with neo liberal practices and realities of globalization. State services are increasingly privatized. These of course, pose heavy challenge on rural agriculture. The existence of rural social organizations represents amalgamation of diverse interest, knowledge, needs and enterprise. Such structures are important learning, management and coordinative platforms that could serve as basis for ensuring effective service quality and provision to account for diverse levels of needs. Rural social organization could serve as bridging and bonding channels between rural agriculturists and policy makers by way of influencing policies through the opportunity of the democratic processes. They could fulfill functions such as:

- a. Advocating and lobbying for policies and necessary reforms in the rural agricultural sectors. Some challenges of land rights, access to land resources and land reforms, among other relevant agricultural policies could constitute crucial agenda for the rural social organization.
- b. Representation at policy, legislative and advisory council levels. Such representations could contribute to bringing the experiences of the wider agricultural practitioners to the attention of policy makers, legislators and other relevant agencies.
- c. Providing technical and economic services. Their role could be strengthened and broadened to enable the rural social organizations contribute to providing necessary and relevant social, technical and economic services to local agriculturists. Such services could range from input supplies, product marketing for access to local and national markets. Although, this to a large extent holds in the Nigerian context, what seems rather problematic is the low participation of members (especially in some specialized associations) due to educational limitations. But of all these, the greatest challenge to rural social organization in Sub-Saharan Africa comes from available social structure and social institutions. There is no doubt that these social and institutional structures have inversely contributed in building and strengthening rural social capital. As our society changes, new demands and new wages of doing things emerge. This is the more reason

available social structures and institutions should be sensitive to changing situations. The question now is how rural social and institutional structures can be made more socially adaptable to changing global economic and development trajectories.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the Sub-Sahara Africa, a sound socio-economic performance and the livelihood activities are largely dependent on agricultural development. But this region has continued to remain the poorest in the world as its average real per capital income in 2010 was \$688 compared to \$1717 in the rest of the developing world. The truth about Sub-Sahara Africa is that they import more than they export which poses a serious problem to the region's developmental Strides. Agricultural practice in the Sub-Saharan Africa faces numerous challenges which according to FAO (2009), fall within the growing technology challenges, slow development of input and output markets associated services, slow progress in regional integration and governance. The locational characteristics of sub-tropical Africa constitute one of the greatest environmental challenges to agricultural practices and development. Other challenges include socio-demographic like the rising population growth and institutional challenges.

One fundamental institutional factor to agrarian expansion and development in the Sub-Sahara Africa border on access to land which is nested in traditional customs and norms. The changing rural institutional structures have very serious implications on rural agricultural practice in the sub-Sahara Africa and must be carefully articulated to serve as bridging and bonding channels between rural agriculturists and policy makers for the good interest of the region's agricultural practice.

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