

taking land use into account in projects and planning for small-holder development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

An attempt has been made to analyse the smallholder objective and mode of land use in addition to pointing out his four main problems as follows : (a) persistent labour shortage, (b) crop/livestock losses, failures and wastes, (c) increasing income uncertainty and (d) government policies affecting land use. A suggestion was made to the effect that only very little is, at present, known about the smallholder's ways of life, organisation of production and the numerous problems he faces from day to day. The need, therefore, arises for comprehensive research into all possible aspects of the smallholder's land use development problems and prospects.

RÉSUMÉ

On a tenté d'analyser les objectifs et les modalités de l'utilisation de l'espace par les petits paysans, en attirant l'attention sur leurs quatre principaux problèmes :

- rareté persistante du facteur travail*
- pertes, échecs et gaspillage de récoltes/bétail*
- incertitude croissante en matière de revenus*
- politiques gouvernementales concernant l'utilisation de l'espace.*

Il est suggéré que les connaissances sont insuffisantes en ce qui concerne le mode de vie des petits paysans, l'organisation de la production et les problèmes qu'ils affrontent quotidiennement. Aussi est-il nécessaire d'entreprendre des recherches détaillées sur tous les aspects des problèmes et des perspectives de l'utilisation de l'espace par les petits paysans.

For the purpose of this paper the small holder is regarded as a farmer or a farming household cultivating small fields and producing farm outputs commensurate with (a) size and composition of household, (b) farm size and fertility, (c) the degree of labour effort and management, (d) output inducement, and (e) waste prevention efforts. The smallholder is also taken to be rational economically but subjected to such

environmental forces as may aid or prevent his land use and output objectives.

SMALLHOLDER OBJECTIVE AND MODE OF LAND USE

It is still safe to say that almost all Nigerian farmers are in

the category of smallholder producers. The few that may form exceptions are government institutions, commercial firms and some individuals engaging in capital-intensive farming operations. The smallholder farmers are, therefore, expected to satisfy the nation's requirements for food and fibre. It thus becomes necessary to develop, improve and expand the operations of the smallholder farmers as the country's population increases.

The smallholder's main objective is to cultivate enough land to satisfy the needs of his household. But in doing so he has to produce for household consumption and for the market in order to earn money to meet other household requirements not being produced on his farm. Similarly he has to pay his annual income tax, children's education, family health care, religious or community commitments. The types of crops or livestock produced are largely traditional, i.e., the types produced by generations of his small-holder-farmer ancestors and are determined to a great extent by nature's physical and environmental forces such as topography, drainage, humidity, presence or absence of pests, etc.

Land and labour are the principal ingredients in smallholder farming operations since capital contribution is mainly in the areas of provision of simple hand tools and seeds or seedlings. The size of land that can be effectively held and used may be positively related to the household labour supply and this compels the small holder farmer to limit his types of crops to those that can be accommodated within his labour supply. He has to divide the available labour between the competing demands of producing for household consumption and for cash on the one hand and the need to protect from insect pests the seeds, the plants and the products in order to obtain maximum yield from labour and land investment on the other. Sometimes a significant portion of his labour supply may have to be deployed from time to time into making farm routes, building bridges, providing drainage or irrigation and to build settlements in cluster for the survival of the group. It is to be accepted that infrastructural facilities are necessary for the small holder's efforts to be turned to rewarding outputs.

Other land use requirements, even though very important in the life of the smallholder farmer, consume much less land than the agricultural needs discussed earlier. For example, in a village of two to five hundred people it is expected that some land would be set aside for the following use purposes : meeting place, religious worship, market, housing, mining, recreation, hunting and cemeteries. As the population increases the land use requirements in respect of the purposes just mentioned should automatically increase thereby causing the withdrawal of agriculturally useful land from farming. The decision to allocate to or withdraw land for many of these uses is generally taken by the community and not by smallholder farmer alone (1).

SMALL HOLDER'S LAND USE PROBLEMS

It is generally agreed that there are innumerable land use problems facing the smallholder farmer but, for purposes of brevity, it may be necessary to highlight only four as follows :

Persistent labour shortage
Crop/Livestock losses, failures and wastes
Increasing income uncertainty
and Government land use policies

Persistent labour shortage

It is becoming abundantly clear that the village environment, in its present form, is no longer able to sustain the varying and expanding interests of the Nigerian youth. There has, therefore, been an incessant migration of young men and women from rural to urban areas for wage labour. They cannot reconcile individual sacrifices i.e.; drudgery on the farm, with communal compensation, i.e., food and fibre for all at reasonable prices. Even with the introduction of free primary education and with schools located evenly in the villages the products of such schools cannot find reasons (jobs, entertainment, vocation training etc.) to keep them in the villages any time longer than is necessary to complete the primary school training. Besides most parents would consider it a failure if their children could not migrate to the urban areas after acquiring basic education. The story is similar for those without education since the newly established factories and expanding construction works in the cities can always readily absorb unskilled labour at higher wages and shorter working hours than they can ever enjoy on the farms. Labour shortage has, therefore, become a very major problem for rural land use. It is, sometimes, difficult to find good teachers, artisans and the like to accept job offers in the village environment.

Crop/livestock losses, failures and wastes

The vagaries of weather conditions plus the activities of pests are enough to discourage the small holder farmer from farming operations since his risk bearing capacity is usually limited. The drought of recent years is still a caution to many farmers in that they always feel that the drought situation would soon be repeated. In many of the Nigerian farm areas I visited in the last two years, the farmers constantly brought into discussion the possible repeat of drought. As for wastes it is not yet clear if Nigeria is not losing more than half of its output potential to problems associated with waste. Seeds and seedlings do not get to be plants because of either poor treatment or inclement weather conditions. Bats, birds, rodents, insects, fungi and human beings destroy and devastate fields. Excessive or infrequent rainfalls have caused untold hardships to the smallholder's realisation of his output objectives. The harvesting hand tools have bruised or battered such tubers, fruits, nuts as constituted the smallholder's income hope. Devastating diseases have wiped out herds of cattle, flocks of birds and lots of beehives. Sometimes a smallholder has to keep many hours per day in his rice fields in order to keep birds away, the time he would have gainfully expended opening up new fields to tending other crops or livestock. All these have put a physical and, perhaps, psychological limit to the small holder's land use development effort.

(1) ADEGBOYE R.O., Public Acquisition of Land. Proceedings of the IITA/Ford Foundation/IRAT Conference on Aspects of Land Tenure. IBADAN, Nigeria, 1972.

Increasing income uncertainty

The ever-present food shortage in Nigeria can, in part, be traced to the increasing income uncertainty being experienced by the vast majority of Nigerian farmers — the smallholder farmers — who in their struggle to keep a minimum income level, had to put increasingly larger fractions of their land into such export crops as cocoa, coffee and rubber, in total disregard for the likely and inescapable consequence — the shortage of land for food production which definitely would be followed by starvation or massive food importation both which Nigeria has experienced in varying degrees in the last few years. But a price rise in one section of the economy would definitely spread to other sections. The food shortage which caused higher prices for foodstuffs to the urban dwellers also made them review the prices of their products up, thereby causing the farmer further untold hardships. The prices of farm inputs — tools, labour, chemicals, tractor or machine hire — jumped up. This was complicated by the invasion of the rural areas by the middlemen who always were ready to exploit the inadequacy or complete absence of storage facilities for the crops produced by the smallholder farmers. These farmers were always forced to sell their farm produce at the time of harvest and along with all other sellers of their kind, thereby having to sell at « give-away » or « rock bottom » prices.

Government Policies/Projects affecting land use

It is agreed that each time the Government exercises its power of eminent domain, i.e., the right of taking over possession and entering into a piece of rural land, at least in Nigeria, a smallholder farmer's livelihood is affected positively or adversely. Taking land to build irrigation dam would immensely benefit a farmer while the construction of an airport or a super high-way may spell doom to the farmer's occupation plans. People, in general, do not share the communal compensation in proportion to each individual's sacrifice.

Similarly, the Nigerian government policy with respect to encouraging the increased production of export crop can clearly be seen as the need to earn foreign exchange. In so doing the government organised, financed and maintained strong marketing boards for the export crops such as cocoa, rubber and groundnut. The farmers were paid promptly and a number of middlemen the licenced buying agents — also took advantage of the situation. But, as mentioned earlier, the more land the smallholder farmer put into the production of the export crop the less land was available for the production of the much-needed local foodstuffs. There developed a preference for putting land into export crop and a neglect for food crops. This has somehow affected the foodstuff composition of Nigerians over the last few years as people depended

more on imported wheat to make bread and consume less of their yams, maize, guinea corn and millets.

In a different situation and as part of its awareness to revitalize agriculture the government of the former Western Region of Nigeria started in the mid. 1950s to train young farmers and to set up farm settlements to which these young farmers were invited to begin and practise modern agriculture. This was meant, in part, to serve as demonstration to other farmers who did not have the advantage of being trained for farming, who have for years been on their own. It has never been agreed that this « modern agriculture » policy of the government gained enough grounds in the rural communities to pull farmers into the orbit of national economic development. There have been similar policies of settling up cooperative or group farms with guaranteed loans from banks but the main identifiable problem has been the difficulty in human management, i.e., how to implement a programme with the best interpretation of the proposer's wish.

Government's exercise of its power of acquisition often carries the public purpose project together with compensation paid to the affected land owner but the delay in paying the agreed compensation is a common experience for the Nigerian smallholder farmer. There are examples of land owners waiting for as long as five to ten years before any compensation is paid. This period of waiting can disrupt immensely the planning horizon of the small holder farmer. There is a similar period of waiting for those whose farmlands are on the fringe of the city, in which case the land development wave may take the land from agriculture into non-agricultural use at short notice. Farming on such land is, therefore, subjected to constant review and adjustment with very little conservation practices.

RECOMMENDATION

Before any meaningful recommendation could be made the most logical thing to do is to embark upon comprehensive research into all aspects of smallholder land use development. Such research would cover among other things the following :

- present size and composition of labour
- training and management of additional labour
- the state of technology
- waste prevention strategies
- resettlement of displaced smallholder farmers
- smallholder/middleman percentage share of consumer food expenditure
- state and nature of agroallied industries
- conservation and afforestation
- soil-water-plant relationships
- environmental forces affecting land use and output objectives.