Risk and Risk Management in the Agricultural Economy: Urgent Call for Political Will to Secure Nigeria's Farmlands and Food Future

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Abstract

Nigeria's agricultural sector, a cornerstone of its economy and a significant employer, faces severe and complex challenges, primarily stemming from pervasive insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of consistent political commitment. This paper argues that an unwavering political will is indispensable for transforming the agricultural landscape, ensuring food security, and fostering broader economic development. It highlights critical risks such as widespread farmer insecurity, limited access to modern tools and inputs, market distortions by middlemen, and a communication gap between policy and practice. Drawing on observations from the Federal Capital Territory and beyond, the paper proposes a multi-faceted approach to risk management, emphasizing robust farmer protection, strategic guidance, accessible agricultural services, technological support, expanded financial mechanisms, and crucial private sector partnerships. Ultimately, it advocates for comprehensive master plans and sustained political action to unlock Nigeria's agricultural potential and secure its food future.

Keywords: Agricultural Economy, Risk Management, Food Security, Political Will, Nigeria, Farmland Security, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Nigeria's agricultural sector stands as a pivotal pillar of its economy, serving as a primary source of employment, raw materials for industries, and a fundamental driver of national development. Its immense potential to ensure food security for a rapidly growing population and to stimulate diverse forms of economic growth cannot be overstated. However, this vital sector is currently grappling with a confluence of multifaceted challenges that demand immediate and decisive political action. This paper asserts that a renewed and unwavering political commitment is not merely beneficial but indispensable to truly advance Nigeria's agricultural industries and alleviate the persistent security threats that plague its farming communities. Without such resolve, the nation's aspirations for a thriving farm sector, capable of underpinning sustainable economic growth and ensuring a stable food supply, will remain unfulfilled.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper analyzes the challenges and proposes solutions for Nigeria's agricultural economy through the combined lenses of the **Political Economy of Agriculture** and the **Human Security Framework**.

The **Political Economy of Agriculture** provides a robust framework for understanding how political forces, power structures, and economic policies interact to shape agricultural production,

distribution, and consumption. It moves beyond purely technical considerations to examine the roles of the state, various interest groups, and global economic dynamics in influencing agricultural outcomes. In the Nigerian context, this framework helps to dissect the impact of government policies (or lack thereof), the influence of middlemen, and the allocation of resources on farming practices and farmer welfare. It highlights how political will, or its absence, can either enable or constrain the expansion and modernization of the agricultural sector, affecting land access, input availability, and market fairness.

Complementing this, the **Human Security Framework** broadens the traditional concept of national security to include the safety and well-being of individuals and communities. It emphasizes freedom from fear (e.g., violence, crime) and freedom from want (e.g., food insecurity, poverty). This framework is particularly pertinent to Nigeria's agricultural sector, where farmers face direct threats to their lives, property, and livelihoods due to insecurity. It underscores that food security is inextricably linked to the physical security of farmers and their ability to access and cultivate land without fear. By applying this framework, the paper argues that securing farmlands is not just an economic necessity but a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development and national stability. The breakdown of security in agricultural zones directly impacts food availability, access, and stability, leading to widespread food shortages and price hikes.

Together, these frameworks allow for a comprehensive analysis of how macro-level political decisions and security dynamics profoundly affect the micro-level realities of farming, underscoring the urgent need for integrated, politically-backed solutions.

3. Challenges and Risks in Nigeria's Agricultural Economy

Nigeria's agricultural sector is currently navigating a complex web of risks that undermine its potential and threaten the nation's food future. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing security, economic, and systemic issues.

3.1. Pervasive Insecurity in Farming Communities A stark and heartbreaking reality is the pervasive sense of insecurity that stifles agricultural expansion and deters new entrants. Farmers, their families, and their ancestral homes are subjected to brutal attacks, ransacking, and destruction of farm products and barns by bandits and nomadic herders. This includes:

- **Direct Violence:** Murders, kidnappings, and harassment of farmers and their families.
- **Crop Destruction:** Deliberate destruction of mature crops by cattle, particularly during harvest season, leading to immense losses and severe food shortages.
- **Forced Displacement and Arson:** Farmers are often unable to access their fields, or return to find their farms ravaged by arson or forceful takeover. This varying level of insecurity has made it increasingly difficult for farmers to access their farms, directly impacting production, causing widespread disruptions, and consequently affecting food demand and drastically reducing supply.

3.2. Limited Farmland Expansion and Low Coverage Cultivation Many farmers, particularly smallholders engaged in scattered, low-coverage cultivation, face immense difficulty expanding their farmlands. This is exacerbated by the fear of insecurity, which prevents them from investing in larger plots or adopting more efficient, large-scale farming methods. The current land culture of farming remains largely unmechanized, relying on crude implements and disparate cultivation methods that hinder efficient transportation and scale.

3.3. Unfulfilled Government Promises and Lack of Clear Guidance Despite the articulation of various commitments to support the agricultural sector's growth by successive administrations, many remain unfulfilled. There is a noticeable silence from visionary leaders within the current administration, failing to provide clear guidance or demonstrate the necessary steps farmers must take to secure the nation's food supply. This lack of visible commitment, coupled with an unpredictable approach to planting seasons, undermines trust and hinders progress.

3.4. High Cost and Inaccessibility of Modern Tools and Inputs The absence of contemporary farming tools and readily available agricultural inputs compounds farmers' woes. They are often forced to purchase supplies at exorbitant prices, sometimes even paying levies demanded by bandits, which severely impacts early farming operations and places farmers at constant risk. This struggle to acquire inputs is a significant obstacle, particularly when it comes time to harvest their crops.

3.5. Exploitation by Middlemen and Price Disparities The competitive advantage of Nigeria's peasant farmers, despite their ingenuity, is undermined by the use of crude implements and disparate, scattered cultivation methods that hinder efficient transportation. This creates a vacuum exploited by middlemen who profit from price disparities, selling goods at inflated rates while farmers receive minimal returns for their arduous labor.

3.6. Communication Gaps between Policy and Practice There is a significant disconnect between government agricultural policies and their effective implementation at the grassroots level. This gap is often due to insufficient direct communication with farmers, leading to a lack of understanding of government plans and projects, and hindering the adoption of improved agricultural methods and extension services in remote areas.

4. Strategies for Risk Management and Agricultural Transformation

Addressing the multifaceted challenges in Nigeria's agricultural economy requires a comprehensive and unwavering commitment to strategic interventions. The following approaches are crucial for effective risk management and sustainable transformation:

4.1. Robust Farmer Protection and Security The foremost priority must be to ensure the safety and security of farmers across all value chains of production. This requires:

- **Increased Security Presence:** Deploying well-trained and adequately equipped security forces, including specialized forest guards, to agricultural zones.

- **Intelligence Gathering:** Establishing effective intelligence networks with local communities to pre-empt attacks and respond rapidly to threats.
- **Justice and Accountability:** Ensuring that perpetrators of violence against farmers are apprehended and prosecuted to deter further attacks.

4.2. Strategic Guidance and Planning The government must collaborate with agricultural experts, research institutions, and farmer associations to provide sound plans and guidance. This includes:

- **Market-Driven Production:** Guiding farmers on what crops to produce based on real-time market demand and ecological suitability, ensuring profitability and reducing post-harvest losses.
- **Climate-Smart Planning:** Integrating climate data and weather forecasting into planting schedules and crop selection to enhance resilience against environmental shocks.
- **Master Plans:** Developing comprehensive national and state-level master plans for agricultural development that are clear, actionable, and consistently implemented.

4.3. Accessible Agricultural Services and Technology Making agricultural services readily available and promoting modern practices is essential to pivot the sector towards sustainable growth and stability. This involves:

- **Revitalized Extension Services:** Proactively deploying well-resourced extension agents to remote areas to provide technical advice, training on modern farming techniques, and support for input utilization.
- **Technology Adoption:** Assisting farmers with access to contemporary farming tools, machinery, and digital solutions (e.g., mobile apps for market information, pest alerts).
- **Subsidized Inputs:** Ensuring the efficient and timely distribution of quality agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) to farmers at subsidized rates to reduce their financial burden and risk.

4.4. Improved Communication and Farmer Engagement Direct and consistent communication with farmers is paramount for building trust and ensuring policy effectiveness. This includes:

- **Structured Dialogues:** Establishing solid interactions to exchange diverse viewpoints, allowing farmers to voice their challenges and contribute to solutions.
- **Transparent Information Flow:** Effectively conveying government plans, projects, and support mechanisms to bridge the gap between policy and practice.
- **Frequent Meetings:** Organizing regular community meetings and agricultural forums to foster knowledge sharing and address emerging issues.

4.5. Expanded Financial Mechanisms and Land Access To truly bolster farming operations, proactive measures must be taken to empower smallholder farmers to cultivate larger land areas. This necessitates:

- **Accessible Financing:** Expanding financial mechanisms (e.g., low-interest loans, grants) tailored to the needs of smallholder farmers.
- **Streamlined Land Acquisition:** Simplifying processes for land acquisition and tenure security, potentially considering the donation of vast land parcels in multiple locations for large-scale agricultural use, especially for cooperative farming.
- **Social Welfare Packages:** Implementing social welfare packages that support farmers, particularly those affected by insecurity, to ensure their resilience and continued engagement in agriculture.

4.6. Private Sector Partnerships and Investment Incentives Unlocking the full potential of Nigeria's agricultural sector requires robust partnerships with the private sector. The government must:

- **Targeted Tax Breaks:** Provide incentives such as tax breaks and other financial benefits to draw the private sector into agriculture, encouraging investment across the value chain.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Collaborate with the private sector to develop necessary infrastructure, including storage facilities, processing plants, and transportation networks, to reduce post-harvest losses and add value to produce.
- **Awareness Drives:** Promote awareness campaigns to encourage greater participation and investment from both local and international private entities.

5. Conclusion

Nigeria's agricultural sector stands at a critical juncture, facing existential threats from insecurity, systemic inefficiencies, and a fluctuating commitment from leadership. The current trajectory, marked by widespread food shortages and soaring prices, is unsustainable and directly undermines national development and human security.

This paper has argued that a renewed, unwavering political will is the singular most critical factor required to navigate these challenges. This political will must translate into tangible actions: providing robust security for farmers, implementing strategic guidance, ensuring accessible services and technology, fostering direct communication, expanding financial mechanisms, and actively championing private sector partnerships.

The human cost of inaction is immense, with farmers enduring brutal violence and economic devastation. The competitive advantage of our ingenious peasant farmers is currently undermined by crude implements and fragmented cultivation. By embracing a comprehensive approach, prioritizing increased land use, supported by social welfare packages and strategic economic programs, Nigeria can unlock its vast agricultural potential. Only through this sustained and integrated effort, driven by decisive political commitment, can Nigeria secure the prosperity of its land and its people, ensuring food security for all, year after year.

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