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AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE PHILOSOPHY, IMPLEMENTATION AND POLITICS OF THE RIVERS STATE SCHOOL-TO-LAND PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, Nigerian governments have shown concern for agricultural development by adopting various agricultural development programmes. Until the early 1980s, these programmes failed to make the right impact in the sector. Subsequently, the global economic recession which had pronounced effects in the developing countries worsened the situation. Its particular expressions became, inter alia, an undeniable food crisis and massive unemployment. The potential for social dislocation posed by these 'twin phenomena' apparently emphasized the need for continued state intervention. Under the Buhari-Idiagbon dispensation (1984-85), State governments, in particular, initiated various "revolutionary" programmes. Arguably the most prominent of these was the Rivers State School-to-Land Programme.

As declining national economic prospects once again force state officials to sharpen their focus on the agricultural sector, this study assesses the philosophy, implementation and politics of agricultural development in Nigeria as represented in the school-to-land programme, and points to the limits of state intervention in the sector.

INTRODUCTION

The persistence of the agricultural crisis in Nigeria is revealed, at least, in escalating prices of agricultural produce, especially, food, relatively diminishing quantities put up for sale, and general malnutrition among the poor. The crisis has been a source of concern for Nigerian governments. In the 1970s, the failure of huge investments in agricultural development to make the right impact in the face of oil boom left the state little alternative than the economically and politically unhealthy option of massive food importation. This was then aided by the availability of petro-dollars. As from the 1980s, however, this option could no longer be sustained both because of the global recessionary crisis which directly affected crude oil sales — Nigeria's main foreign exchange earner — and the recklessness of politicians in the use of domestic resources which could otherwise have been channelled into agricultural development. As the economy deteriorated, both the public and private sectors shed weight by retrenching workers in their thousands. School leavers at both secondary and tertiary levels were caught in the ensuing unemployment mesh, thus escalating the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed.

When the military therefore seized political power on 31 December 1983, they perceived an objective situation which called for a vigorous return to land. The government reminded Nigerians that a recourse to agriculture would partly stave off the unemployment crisis as much as it would provide badly needed food (Buahri 1984). Over the years, certain programmes and policies have stood out prominently as official response to the problem of agricultural development in Nigeria. These include various Agricultural Extension Services, Farm Settlement Schemes, Integrated Agricultural Development Projects, National Accelerated Food Production Programme, Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution, and the River Basin and Rural Development Programmes, among other schemes (Forest 1981). More recently the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures and the Better Life for Rural Women Programme were established. These programmes have so far failed to make the desired impression in the sector.

It was in the above context that both federal and state governments initiated relevant agricultural projects in the mid-1980s. In Kwara State, a Food-For-All Programme was announced simultaneously with the Rivers State School-to-Land Programme (SLP) in 1984. In the former Bendel State, there was the Rapid Food Production Programme. Anambra, Ogun and Oyo States, among others also launched parallel programmes. Among these, the Rivers State SLP drew national acclaim as a committed state policy to transform the agrarian sector and reshape the mechanisms of food production. Specifically, the programme was designed to kill two birds with

one stone by providing employment for the youths and at the same time attacking hunger directly by massive food production (Oyakhilome 1985a). This was to be achieved by replacing peasants with educated trainees, the hoe and cutlass with machines, and small plots with large-scale farms—in fact, a transformation of agricultural development as organized and pursued, at least initially, by the state.

In 1985, barely a year after its take-off, the SLP recorded bumper harvests in maize production. Ogun and Anambra States sent high-powered government delegations to Rivers State to understudy the programme for adoption. In fact, the programmes in most of the other States came to be modelled after the Rivers State experiment. By its second year, the SLP had already commanded so much national attention that the then President, General Ibrahim Babangida, paid a visit to Rivers State to see things for himself. A decade after its establishment, the spirit of the school-to-land programme lives on. In February 1994, the agriculture ministry in Kwara State announced its plans to begin a school-to-land programme in all secondary schools as part of measures to boost food production. As before, it was also expected that the programme would boost employment and reduce the rural-urban migration among young school leavers (*The Guardian*, Lagos, 21/2/94:4). As crisis persists in the sector which force* state officials to translate their concern for the development of agriculture into other programmes inspired by past experiments, it is essential to revisit the Rivers State experiment, *inter alia*, to determine its implication for the role of the state in agricultural development. This is all the more essential because there have been few scientific studies of the programme (cf. Ewuruigwe 1986; Roberts 1989). The major objectives of this study, therefore, are to:

- i. establish the theoretical connection between politics and agriculture, and against this background;
- ii. evaluate the school-to-land programme, its philosophy and implementation, in relation to its declared goals; and
- iii. discuss the incidence of politics in the programme. These intentions might be treated differently, but they are not mutually exclusive.

A Methodological Note

The data base for this article is derived from a study conducted by the author under the auspices of the Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, between 1987 and 1989, and subsequently updated. The study relied on both primary and secondary data. Documented information, including programme documents, were obtained through desk research, while primary information was

sourced from participants in the programme, programme officials and local farmers in the area, through the administration of questionnaires and indepth interviews. A total of 232 questionnaires were administered on trainees in the most developed of the farms, the 500-hectare farm at Iriebe near Port Harcourt. Planned systematic sampling was made unnecessary by the fact that the questionnaires went round all the young farmers in the farm. However, whereas the collection of micro-level data was limited to the Iriebe farm, attempt was made to cover the other farms in other aspects of data sourcing, including interviews with farm officials.

Ideally, the efficiency of the School-to-Land Programme would be evaluated by comparing the ratio of output to input expended (in naira terms). On the other hand, programme effectiveness calls for an assessment of the degree of attainment of the target end of food production for self-sufficiency. Since the SLP itself did not adopt a baseline measure to determine this, the assessment is done by comparing subsequent production output to first-year output. Beyond this, the evaluation is largely qualitative (cf. Rutman 1984; Walker 1985).

Limitations of the Study

The study encountered poor state of statistics and records in respect of the SLP, which was due in part to the unplanned take-off of the programme. Secondly, as public servants, officials showed a certain reluctance to reveal what they know even after admitting that they have valuable information. Thirdly, the state of development of the ten farms varied greatly. The farms nearer to the state capital got better state attention and were, therefore, better developed. This made it difficult to obtain uniform data to enable comparison between the farms on certain crucial variables including output of the farms. Fourthly, as explained below, the programme was partly conceived as a public service rather than a commercial service. This undermined attempt to objectively evaluate its cost efficiency. The above limitations cumulatively preclude the elaboration of a complete picture, as necessary as this is. However, the evidence available is considered sufficient for the purpose of this article.

POLITICS AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Agriculture is an economic activity which relates to the management of biological life by farmers, fishermen, herdsman, among other agrarian population. Agricultural development means positive qualitative and quantitative changes in agricultural

production (Ekpere 1984). The battery of decisions and actions taken by government to influence the agricultural process constitutes agricultural policy (cf. Bates 1980). The state of agricultural development, apart from its implications for food security, has a critical relation to contemporary social problems such as rural-urban migration, urban-rural income differentials, and the skewed distribution of the gains of development. In Nigeria, this has been inherent in the concern of policy makers for the movement of young school leavers to urban centres (Wells 1974).

Conceptually, politics broadly concerns the modalities for the distribution of advantages and disadvantages among people. Thus, as Karl Deutsch would say, through politics, societies protect and modify their institutions, the allocation and reallocation of their resources, the distribution of values, incentives, rewards among their population and the patterns of teamwork in which people cooperate in production and reproduction. The underlying processes are prone to conflict and even practices capable of being described as "dirty". Isaac DTsraeli, hence offers the instructive but cynical definition of politics as "the art of governing mankind through deceiving them", while Marxists simply see it as the outcome of conflict of classes in society (Scruton 1982). Politics exists wherever power relationships or conflict situations exist, which implies that the political scientist can legitimately study the politics of agriculture.

Can it then be stated that there is a relationship between politics and agricultural development? No doubt, there is a dialectical relationship between politics and agrarian change. Political decisions invariably affect agricultural development. State intervention affects the various levels of decision making that pervades the agricultural system, from the family level up to governmental level. The farmer's fate, as he grows his crops, is ultimately determined by government policy. On the other hand, the state of agricultural development has implications for politics. As the saying goes in Swahili, *siasa ni kilimo*, which means: politics is agriculture. Thus, the fate of government, or at least, its agricultural policy is affected by the willingness of farmers to cooperate (Timmer 1983:78). This dialectical relationship makes the subject a politically sensitive one, especially when the issue is about food (Sano 1983).

In the literature, the incidence of politics in matters of agriculture is hardly in dispute. In Africa, the connection has been explained from various perspectives (Barker 1984). For instance, Bates (1980;1981), blames political intervention into markets for the agricultural crisis. Similarly, Barker (1985) emphasizes the importance of the nature of power relations between the state and rural producers and within production units in explaining falling agricultural production. Again, an edited collection of articles on 17 African countries actually relates agricultural policies to

Types of states, whether it is "merchant" or "rentier" (Mkandawire 1987). At the extreme there is the intriguing but somewhat convoluted argument which tries to establish connection between militarization and famine in Africa (Shindo 1985). Elsewhere, Bayart (1992), refers to the "politics of the belly" which although is not a treatise on the politics of agriculture, identifies the amoral, self-seeking behavior which underlies the historic flaw of statesmanship in Africa, and which as will be in this article, is also a factor in the politics of agriculture.

In practice, the incidence of politics in agriculture has assumed many dimensions. Firstly, there is the crucial political question of whose responsibility it is to develop agriculture and feed citizens, is it the responsibility of the citizens themselves or the government? Secondly, there is the issue of wrong policies, especially the emergence of government policy as a major disincentive to farmers when such policies prove harmful to their economic interests. Thirdly, the political will to implement even those policies that appear to be politically correct is often lacking. Fourthly, many, in the national and international systems, have used the failings of the agricultural or in Africa to achieve political gains either through plain corruption and maladministration and/or through the tendency for official aid to be accompanied by self-righteous pontifications and conditionalities which are ultimately beneficial to donor nations and their agencies.

It yet remains that most discussions in the agricultural development literature have been unable to adequately capture the relationship between politics and agriculture (Valde 1981). Most of the existing frameworks, including some sustainable development approaches, have the common weakness that they tend to look at structures technically rather than in their social context (Nzimiro 1985). A framework which captures political reality becomes necessary (Sano 1983:7).

Politics is operationalized in this article in relation both to the behaviour of the state and the private sector — corporate and individual, for in strict terms, only those with considerable economic clout can play politics. The political framework considers the development of production and the principal contradictions in the social relations of production in relation to specific developments at the political level. Such considerations include the role of specific agencies, including the state, in the exploitation of state power for private ends at the expense of a large dispossessed section of the population in the agro-rural sector.

THE CASE OF THE SCHOOL-TO-LAND PROGRAMME

Philosophy of the Programme

The philosophy of the School-to-Land Programme (SLP) was articulated against the background of national economic crisis, in Rivers State, the effects were recognized

as constituting the "twin frightening dangers of imminent famine and mounting unemployment" (Oyakilome 1985b). The philosophy was centred on the mobilization of young school leavers to create a new kind of modern, if capitalist farmers; hence the explicit desire "to teach the young farmers the American scientific farming system" (Rivers State n.d:8).

The SLP option derived from a rejection of two alternative solutions to the agricultural development problem, namely, direct government participation in large-scale farming, and inducing the small-scale farmer to increase his holding and improving his productivity. The first was rejected because, "quite apart from the not-too-impressive track record of previous government endeavours in food production" (Rivers State n.d:9), direct state participation would not produce capitalist farmers as intended. The second was rejected on the basis that the number of the peasantry

have been severely depleted in aid of the education of their children, that they are getting old and feeble, and that they are mostly illiterate and uneducated They are [thus] completely unable to cope with demands of producing more and more food for our already large and rapidly rising population (Rivers State, n.d:19).

It was contended that 'the small farmer, through no fault of his, is no longer able to cope with feeding the nation' (SLA 1986:2). It was imperative to sidetrack him as his displacement by the natural act of historical elimination seemed to have failed. The denunciation of the peasantry and its mode of production was, therefore, a prominent pillar of the SLP. This lack of faith in the peasantry by government officials in Rivers State was not new (cf. Rivers State 1975:12).

The broad objectives of the SLP included (i) to increase the domestic production of food and agricultural raw materials to enhance the drive towards self-sufficiency with surplus for export; (ii) to create a new breed of young and educated farmers; (iii) to provide alternative employment opportunities to young school leavers of Rivers State origin; and (iv) to forestall any possible social unrest that may otherwise occur as a result of a large and increasing number of unemployed persons. Ultimately, the aims of the SLP are reducible to two, namely providing employment opportunities and increasing food production (Rivers State 1986).

OPERATIONAL MODEL

The intentions of the SLP were contained within an elaborate operational framework. Government would acquire and prepare large hectares of land of not less than 100

Hectares. A maximum of 500 hectares was considered an economic unit. Volunteer school leavers were to be recruited and given necessary training and equipment. To qualify for recruitment, a volunteer among other criteria, must have spent years in a secondary school, had at least two credit passes in the WASC/GCE, and shown genuine interest in farming as a vocation.

After selection, candidates were expected to receive a two-to-three weeks intensive theoretical and practical training to be followed by an additional National-Youth-Service-Corps-type orientation which included citizenship and leadership training. Training was to be in batches. At the end of the training, each farmer was expected to get his plot of about four hectares to manage with due packages of inputs and supportive infrastructure including accommodation, water supply, electricity, road networks (to link the farms), and recreational facilities. For accommodation, a 6 million housing units was planned. For the time being, it was intended that government would make machinery available to the farmers to be used in turns. With the maturity of the programme, the farmers were expected to pay hiring fees for the machines.

A stipend of N60 (later N100) was to be paid each participant monthly until the first harvest as part of an overall long-term loan package which also included costs of land, land preparation, infrastructures and supervision. It was the expectation that the loans would be repaid in "small convenient installments" until the participant attained independent ability and off-set the balance.

The marketing division of the School-to-Land Authority (SLA) would sell the produce from the farms and share the proceeds between the SLA and the young farmer in a proportion that justified farming as a profitable business, namely, 85 per cent to the young farmer's account and 15 per cent to the government. Three per cent of the latter was to go to the farm supervisors while 12 per cent was intended for use in defraying government expenditure. The monitoring and evaluation unit of the SLA was to undertake regular continuous assessment of all project sites. The organizational framework was placed outside the agriculture ministry to avoid governmental bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the semi-autonomous implementation unit was still to be governed by a board chaired by the State agriculture commissioner. This means that the programme might have been placed outside the ministry; yet it was effectively within the public service, and was indeed conceived as having a public service character.

Finally, it was proposed that to achieve its objectives, the SLA would establish relationships with banks and other financial Institutions, and enter into contract with persons, firms or agencies the board considered necessary. This way, tremendous scope was built into the philosophy of the SLP for private sector involvement while

Table 1 Distribution of School-to-Land Farms, 1987

Name of Farm	LGA	Hectarage	No of Farmers	No of Staff	Farmers/Ha
Agbeta	Okrika/Tai				
	Eleme	3,000	130	1	23.08
Bori Town	New Bori	260	114	6	2.28
Bukuma	Degema	500	88	NA	5.68
Bunu-Tai	Okrika/Tai				
	Eleme	314	276	14	1.14
Egbeka	Ikwerre/Etch	500	202	14	2.48
Nwuba	e				
Inebe	Port Harcourt	500	267	17	1.87
Kpaa	Bori	355.5	199	16	1.79
Ogbia	Brass	300	64	NA	4.69
Okordia	Yenagoa	350	137	8	2.55
Sagbama	Sagbama	205	60	1	3.42
Total		6,284.5	1,537	77	4.09

Source: School-to-Land Authority, Headquarters, Port Harcourt.

the programme itself remained a potential ground for future private agriculturalist, 5,000 of whom would have been groomed by the end of the programme's fifth year (Interview 29/10/87).

Programme Implementation

Following the announcement of the SLP in September 1984, 22,442 unemployed young school leavers registered within two months. About 12,000 were shortlisted out of which 864 were initially selected and trained for placement on the farms. By 1986, ten farms had been established in eight of the ten Local Government Areas (LGAs). Three new farms were planned for Ahoada LGA, Bori LGA and Bonny LGA. The young farmers, then about 1,537, were mainly but not exclusively deployed to farms in their LGA. Four of the farms at Ogbia, Bukuma, Sagbama and Okordia were located in the riverine terrain and grew only plantain. The other six farms were in the upland area of the State and planted assorted crops including maize, cassava, telfaria, yam, pineapple, pepper, okro, sweet potato, vegetable, ginger, melon cowpea, and bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), among other crops. Table 1 shows the distribution of the farms.

Both male and female participants, the latter constituting about 25 per cent, were involved in the same projects and work processes. Routine farm activities ranged

from land preparation, by operators using bulldozers and tractors, to planting and fertilizer application, farm maintenance — weeding, pruning, pest control, and the like and harvesting and processing by the young farmers. These were mostly done manually but occasionally with machines. Beyond this, the crops were then weighed and bagged for sale.

It is doubtful that the promise of the development of modern farming in the SLP was fulfilled in its implementation. In particular, the anticipated mechanization of the programme tended, firstly, to make it dependent on foreign machineries and spares. Secondly, the inadequacy of available machines and other inputs undermined the due implementation of the programme. Thirdly, the rising costs of these inputs, especially in foreign exchange terms meant that attempts to improve their supply directly infringed on the ability of the farms to pay for them from their returns, and fourthly, mechanization, therefore, had a doubtful impact on the alteration of factor proportions. How did these problems of implementation affect the central goals of the SLP, namely, food production and employment creation?

Table 2
Shortfall in Land Preparation and Cultivation in Selected Farms, 1986/87

Farm	Crops Planted	Target Set	Achievement	in Shortfall
			Land Preparation	
Egbeke Nwuba	Maize	270.31	92	178.31 not planted
	Cassava	75.10	8	67 not planted
	Yam	3	0.2	2.8 not planted
Iriebe	Maize	150.2	94	56.2 not planted
	Cassava	69.5	4	65.5 not planted
Plantain Farms				
Bukuma	Plantain	93.4	33.5	59.9 not planted
Ogbia	Plantain	63.95	45	Nothing planted
Okordia	Plantain	51.25	44.17	No increase
Sagbama	Plantain	52.3	30	No increase

Source: Farm Management Unit, School-to-Land Authority, Port Hacourt

Evaluation of the Programme

The evaluation of the SLP is conducted by relating the programme achievements to its intended goals. For a start, there is need to assess the extent to which targets were met in cultivation and production.

Food Production: The SLP was touted in the press as "education for production". State officials acknowledged that under the programme, the extent of planting of crops was unprecedented in the history of Rivers State agricultural programmes. To take only the examples of maize and plantain in 1986, the extent of hectareage of maize planting was distributed as follows: Bunu-Tai (225), Iriebe (195), Kpaa (134), Bori New Town (167), and Egbeke-Nwuba (150). That of plantain was as follows: Okordia (35), Ogbia (40), Sagbama (24.5) and Bukuma (29).

Table 1 indicates that on the average, the farmer/hectare ratio was about 1:4.09 which apparently meets the programme objective of apportioning a plot of about four hectares to each of the young farmers at the end of the training. However, the ratio varies greatly between farms, from 1:1.14 for Bunu-Tai to 1:23.08 for Agbeta. This leaves the impression that in some of the farms there was pressure on land while in others there might have been land without commensurate number of farmers to do business on it. However, this tells us little more than that the farms developed at different paces. In the first place, training had not been completed and the young farmers yet worked in groups and batches rather than as individuals on designated private plots. Accordingly, and this is the second point, the average distribution of

Table 3 Crop Yield in Plantain Farms, June 1987

Farm	Area (Hectares)	Planted Expected (Bunches)	Yield Actual (Bunches)	Yield
Bukuma	40.2	44,662	601	
Ogbia	45	49,995	166	
Okordia	65.7	72,992	840	
Sagbama	30	33,330	1,901	

Source: Farm Management Unit, School-to-Land Authority, Port Harcourt.

farm hectarages bore little relationship with the reality on the ground, including the number of farmers, number of crops planted, and crop output. Even so, the evidence in Table 2 shows that shortfalls were recorded in land preparation and especially in cultivation.

The state of available data precluded adequate comparison of the food gaps between projections and actual returns as well as of unit cost of farm produce with public market price of equivalent quantities from the peasant sector. Nevertheless, although programme officials assessed the food production capacity of the programme as "moderate", it was clear that beyond the shortfall in the farm to farm cropping, there were corresponding shortfalls in yields obtained. Weather conditions remaining constant, the generally poor performance was particularly glaring in the case of the plantain farms for which uniform data was available (Table 3).

In terms of returns, it was estimated that with a total production cost of N7.90 million, and a first year income from crop yield of Nil.02 million, a net profit of N3.2 million would be made, hi reality, the cost of establishing the ten farms was N5.056 million. On the other hand, only about N1 ,000,000 was realised from sales during the first year, N643,969 of which was realized from sales of maize alone (Okwakpam 1986; Usen, *et al*, 1987; Roberts 1989).

By 1988, most of the farms were in a decrepit state. Only the Ireibe farm was functional, and even here, only 32.5 of the 500 hectares was cultivated. The other farms were simply overgrown with weeds. By that year too, all the eight bulldozers in the programme were grounded, while 27 out of the fleet of 31 tractors were not in usable condition. Inevitably, the SLP which produced about 1,573 tonnes of maize in 1986 had to buy maize from small farmers to feed its poultry birds (Fabunmi 1988). The continuation of this trend is evident in the fact that by 1994, the SLP bought cassava from local farmers for processing into gari. As its advertisement on radio aptly put it, no quantity of cassava from local farmers was too much to be purchased. The only programme still fairly going by the end of 1994 was the poultry programme. And by 1995, the SLP existed merely as an agricultural programme, the meagre produce of which went solely to feed top government officials.

Employment: The SLP was partially conceptualized as a modern high-technology programme simultaneously intended to create employment opportunities in addition to producing abundant food. Contrary to the assumptions regarding the tendency for the advancement in the technical facilities of production to lead to labour redundancy, reflecting thereby the deeply contradictory nature of the use of machinery under capitalism (Marx 1954), in the SLP, the shortages or outright unavailability of desired machines seemed to have removed the basis for a relative diminution in

demand for labour on the farms. This provides a convenient background to assess how the, SLP met the adjunct goal of providing gainful employment and thereby checking the rising rural-urban drift among youths.

As originally conceived, part of the broad objectives of the SLP was to forestall any possible social unrest that might occur as a result of a large number of unemployed persons. This was borne out of concern for political order. To arrest the situation or even reverse the trend, the government "decided... to lure these young school leavers into farming" through the SLP (Rivers State n.d.; and 1986:6). Beyond their employment, it was also anticipated that the young farmers "will eventually be able to provide jobs for thousands of [other] young school leavers" (*Nigerian Tide* 5/27 85:8).

However, the expressed concern for the employment of youths was shrouded in profound ambiguity and contradictions. Theoretically, the phenomenon of unemployment reflects the existence of a relative surplus population over the requirements of employers. This is not always antithetical to their interest as it constitutes a source of cheap labour, it is unwanted only when it threatens the political and business environment. A dogged pursuit of the employment goal would have contradicted this interest, which is by definition the interest of the private sector sponsors of the programme.

Whether because of the above reasons or not. the State government was decidedly ambivalent on the issue. Thus, while the SLP was still conceptualized as serving a complementary role towards combatting the frightening rate of unemployment, care was taken to distinguish between mere job seekers and those genuinely interested in farming (Rivers State n.d. 13 and 17). The agriculture commissioner conceded that "it has to be emphasized that ... we are not providing regular employment ... The youths do not qualify for salary" (Rivers State n.d.:8). Thus, even though the young farmers were in a contractual relationship with the state, the commissioner reiterated: "We are not employing them as such, we are creating farmers" (*Newswatch*, Lagos, 29/7/85). Official conception of the SLP soon changed to "a farming career programme that ensures the cultivation of large hectares of land by the help of young school leavers" (Okwakpam 1986). The state's vacillations on the issue duly contradicted what should have been the employment posturing of the programme. It was, hence, not surprising that out of over 22,000 youths who volunteered—reflecting the magnitude of the unemployment crisis in Rivers State — only a mere seven per cent of this number were recruited, while planned periodic recruitment after the first batch was hardly implemented.

The full import of the situation can be appreciated against the background that most of the young farmers actually registered for the SLP because they saw it as a job opportunity. About 75 per cent of this category had been retrenched from previous

jobs. Only 8.1 per cent of the sample population registered because of interest in farming while only 37 per cent intended to go into farming on full-time basis if reality forced them to do so. This underscores defects in the initial screening which should have eliminated those not interested in farming. Evidently disappointed, many volunteers backed out when they discovered that the SLP was not a salaried job. About 75 per cent of those who stayed on clearly indicated preference for alternative job with pay. Generally, young farmers expressed their disenchantment by mounting indifference and absenteeism, as well as the quest for subsidiary itinerant employment. Some of them simply abandoned the programme. It was officially reported that: "some have abdicated and have been found working with other establishments, some are in school studying further" (Gbaragba 1987). The result was that by July 1987, about 239 young farmers had left the programme and the indications were that many more would follow suit.

Evidently, in spite of politically motivated claims by officials that the programme was helping employment creation, the scheme was not planned to provide regular employment, but in its attempt to boost food production, it would provide some employment. The foregoing result suggests that it was a costly mistake on the part of state officials to have latched employment provision onto the emblematic motto of the programme in an attempt to reap political capital from it. The SLP should have been "sold" for what it was, namely, a programme to boost agricultural production. Clarity at this level would have been a more effective screening mechanism.

POLITICS IN THE SCHOOL-TO-LAND PROGRAMME

Local Government Areas and Regime Changes

Politics in the SLP had various expressions. There was, for instance, the politics based on LGAs which revolved around the land question (see below) and effectively affected recruitment. At the inception of the programme, it was the policy that the bulk of the participants was to come from the LGA in which the particular SLP farm was located. This was because such individuals were part owners of the land. At the Iriebe farm only four LGAs were represented as follows: Port Harcourt (41.4 per cent), Ikwerre/Etche (32.9 per cent), Okrika/Tai/Eleme (17.1 per cent), and Bori (8.6 per cent). This recruitment policy was thus used to discriminate against non-indigenes of the particular or contiguous LGAs who might otherwise be interested in the programme or in a particular farm. This way, there was a state-wide non-recruitment of participants from Ahoada LGA because the local government authority refused to donate land.

Another pertinent expression of politicking was the response of the first two administrations that presided over the SLP both of which were military administrations. These were the administrations of Fidelis Oyakhilome and Anthony Ukpoko, respectively. The SLP was the brainchild of the Oyakhilome administration. The governor, therefore, took personal interest in its success. With his redeployment in 1987 and the subsequent assumption of power of Ukpoko, the change in political leadership had determinative effect on the programme. On assumption of duty, Ukpoko took a tour of agricultural projects in Rivers State, including SLP farms, and concluded that "a more effective system" of agricultural development had to be found. Scathing references to the SLP were embedded in the position that Rivers State did not need "another experiment" (Ukpoko 1987).

Although much of the arguments of Governor Ukpoko were seemingly objective in the light of the going problems of the SLP, yet it fits well the trend in Nigerian politics whereby:

government officials come to office with the impression that everything about the government they replaced was bad and must be changed. At the expense of the taxpayer's money, they set about dismantling or frustrating whatever programmes or projects were initiated by the ousted government if only to justify the replacement of that government (Usen *et al*, 1987).

Governor Ukpoko could not simply scrap the SLP without political costs. Popular and spontaneous angry protests had followed the announcement in January 1987 of government's intention to close down some of the farms, his alternative, the governor re-channelled state energies and funding into two new pet programmes introduced by his administration, namely, the Rivers State Accelerated Integrated Rural Development Programme (RAIRDEP) and the Rivers State Agricultural Development Programme, to the neglect of the SLP. This response tremendously deflated the SLP of even a facade of vibrancy. It was left for the succeeding military administration of Governor Ernest Adeyemi to vote about 6 million for the "renovation" of the SLP in 1989/90 agricultural season. Since then, the SLP has just been sustained at a mere level of existence by the subsequent administrations in the State.

Traditional Agriculture and the Land Question

In every location where a school-to-land farm was established, it was intended that a free offer of land would be made to prepare a miniature farm for the community. The farm would be prepared in the same way as the SLP farms, and the villagers

would be "helped" to farm the same way. This was intended to provide a demonstration effect: the level of the villagers' appreciation would have been raised such that in their own private farms they would farm "slightly better" than before. Again, it was intended to extend facilities of the SLP farms to the surrounding villages as much as possible and contribute to raising the level of farming and life in the villages (*West Africa* 1/7/85). Hardly any of these anticipated benefits materialized.

From the outset, it was doubtful that the SLP would achieve the stated intentions relative to traditional agriculture because the peasantry and local communities were alienated from the programme, *ab initio*, as indicated above. The alienated farmers were rendered *hors de combat*, while the crisis of agriculture deepened.

It remained that the SLP had little demonstration effects. The involvement of local farmers in the programme appeared limited to the 1985 maize bumper harvests when village women were drafted to help in the harvest. Instructively, the women were paid a highly exploitative wage of three naira per day. Given the clear lack of positive spread effects, local farmers did not enjoy any service benefits as promised. Rather, the programme had some adverse effects by creating land hunger in Rivers State, a State in which three-quarters of the area is covered by water. Thus, at Egbeke Nwuba, a local farmer said of the programme. "It affected my method of farming ... insufficient farmland and condition of living is poor as a result". State officials frequently acknowledged the sensitivity of the Rivers State people to the issue of land.

By 1988, the SLA grappled with the problem of passing out the trainees. The original idea of passing the younger farmers out and giving them money (loan) and land to farm revealed a myopic foresight on the part of the initiators of the programme. Assuming it was possible to fulfil these intentions for the first batch of trainees, it was unlikely that subsequent batches would be so favoured for it was impossible to sustain 1,500 young farmers a year with provision of four to five hectares of land each. If that was done, there would be no more land in Rivers State after only three years (*Newswatch* Lagos, 16/5/88:8).

The SLP ignored the complexity of the structure of tenancy in Rivers State at the basis of which there was land scarcity. The programme resulted in the alienation of about 6,284.5 hectares of farmland (SLA 1986:5). Helpless against the expropriation of their land, local farmers demanded for compensation. At Egbeke Nwuba, the crops of local farmers displaced to establish the 500-hectare farm were neither costed nor paid for. The land scarcity created in the area forced most of the erstwhile farmers to switch to trading, and facing stiff adjustment problems in the process.

In the other SLP farms, there were even cases of litigations in the law courts challenging the conscription of local community land. This was the case at Bunu-Tai. However, while some communities laid formal complaints, others simply took their matchets and attacked and destroyed SLP farms and property. In fact, by 1988 when the government was contemplating if and how to share out land among the young farmers, trouble began in the various communities. To cite just one example, the Ikwerre and Etche people maintained that participants from Brass LGA should go to their LGA to get land there. Brass LGA, being mainly water, had no such land. The programme thus failed in this crucial aspect. As the second military governor of Rivers State to preside over the SLP puts it, the going dictum became: "go find your own land and farm" (Ukpo 1988).

It is evident that the SLP pitted the new-breed "career farmers" against local farmers in competition for land and other agricultural inputs. Neither group gained from the competition while the agricultural crisis deepened.

Corruption and Maladministration

It is on record that by 1988, the problems plaguing the SLP had come to include incompetence, maladministration and financial mismanagement (Fabunmi 1988). Corruption was rife in the implementation of the SLP. The avenues for private gain included direct appropriation of state funds for private accumulation; officials fronting as import agents for the various inputs into the programme; control of the distribution channels for SLP produce and the appropriation of same in the process; and direct provision of jobs for "experts" to man the SLP's ten functional units at state expense. In one instance, funds set aside for the repair of grounded farm equipment were diverted and used for the purchase of three official cars for top functionaries of the SLP. One of the board members was also known to have sold a non-functional battery cage to the SLA at a cost of N50,000 (Fabunmi 1988). Instructively, the board of directors of the SLP was drawn mainly from government ministries and the consortia of private firms represented in the chamber of commerce, construction and oil companies, and banks. There was only a marginal representation of labour interests, and none at all of traditional agrarian interest. Among other things, these irregularities were facilitated by legal provisions in the enabling edict permitting board members to participate in their private capacity in contracts, undertakings or companies of the SLP.

As conditions deteriorated, the directorship of the programme was changed — from an "agriculture expert" to an economist, while the agriculture commissioner and one of the 'moving spirits' of the programme was removed as board chairman and a part-time chairman was appointed. There was also 'fighting' between the

agriculture ministry and the School-to-Land Authority for superintendence over the programme, given its perceived lucrative benefits to officials. With these wrangling, the problems of the SLP were exacerbated while its future became cloudy.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite its acclaimed novelty, the SLP was hardly an improvement on previous agricultural development programmes in Nigeria, both in articulation and implementation. In particular, to the extent that it was similarly used to displace and alienate local farmers from their land and consolidate their pauperism, the programme was simply an old solution in new garbs. The programme also suffered grave political problems, not least of which was that regardless of its declared objectives and its going problems, its dynamics was stunted by regime change. The programme was also bogged with administrative problems bothering on corruption, hi all these, the interests ultimately served by the programme were not those of farmers, young or old, but of non-farming classes, especially those who controlled inputs delivery and produce distribution.

The evidence from this study reveals that in the Rivers State School-to-Land Programme, the language of philosophical explanation was appropriated to justify the widening interventionist role of the state in the reorganization of conditions for "primitive accumulation" in the agricultural sector. From the unthrilling outcome of the SLP, the scope of intervention remains highly questionable. At best, it is advisable that the state should provide the enabling conditions for agricultural development and leave farming to those who know how to farm, namely, the local farmers.

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