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LARGE-SCALE RICE FARMS AND THE LAND QUESTION IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA, 1991-2023

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Abstract

Nigeria being the leading producer of rice in Africa involving both large-scale farms, and the peasantry, is still unable to meet its consumption demands. Nigeria's rice production capacity fluctuates between 3-4 million metric tons, and the consumption requirements is about 7.9 million metric tons, with a shortfall of about 3 million metric tons. This means that Nigeria is only capable to supply less than 50 percent of its rice requirements; thereby depending on importing about 3 million metric tons amounting to over 50 percent, to meet local demands. It is for this reason that the government now engaged large scale farms in what it is called "development investment" to boost the agricultural economy. This paper therefore, interrogates the large-scale rice farms in Taraba State, and the massive land deals involved in the production, together with other variables such as labour and the market for such products. The historical methodology was deployed for the study, adopting the thematic approach of data presentation for in-depth analysis, while David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession provided the theoretical anchorage. Revelation emerged that the acquisition of massive land for agricultural production is largely associated with these farms. Besides, rice farming involved both hired and migrant labour which led to dispossession of land and the surplus thereof, from the peasant. More disturbing is the fact that the shortfalls in supply of rice is yet to be meet. In the end, the study suggests a better approach in the management of the agricultural policy involving large-scale rice farming in order to ensure the rights of the land owners and masses is well protected.

Keywords: Large-Scale Farms, Land, Labour, Rice Production, Marketing

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Introduction

Large scale farms generally are seen as a means of development investment to boost the growing demand for food across the country. Nigeria at the moment is still unable to meet food requirement in the country especially rice. So, large scale rice farms are meant to cover such gaps, hence, the establishment of large-scale farms in the state to boost production. Both local and other large-scale farmers from outside Taraba State have now established their presence in the state. The reason for their presence is the fact that Taraba State has a huge potential in terms of staple crop production especially rice amongst others. The presence of the tributary of river Benue in the state is also an added advantage, so that both wet and dry season farming are carried out. What this suggests is that the state offers the opportunity to address the question of food insecurity in the country. Hence, many large-scale rice farmers flock in particularly to boost the rice economy which hardly meet demand in Nigeria, and so it has to be imported every year to meet local demand. It is for this reason that a number of large-scale rice farms are in the state. Large scale farms are not peculiar to Taraba State; it is a global trend. So, this study interrogates the development of large-scale farms in Nigeria, and examined its evolution in Taraba State, particularly the rice economy focusing on variables such as it access to land resources in the production and marketing of rice in the state.

An overview of Large-Scale Farms in Nigeria

The idea of commercial agriculture in the form of large-scale farms or plantations came as an alternative to boost agricultural production. The idea had its root from the imperial international division of labour, targeted at global accumulation by Britain and her western allies (Onimode, 1982:42). This brought about specialisation in primary production imposed on Africans, and the monopolisation of manufacturing by the imperialist. This mode of production chained the colonial population to land in abysmal ignorance, poverty and backwardness. Their cheap food supply helped to maximise the exploitation of the European labour force with wages, while the abundant cheap raw materials ensured enormous profit for the exploiters who dumped shoddy manufactures on the colonies. This fraudulent activity was covered in the intellectual gab of the so-called theory of comparative advantage and free trade; thus, the processes of primary production in the colonial economy were dictated by private capitalist calculations for which the colonial administration provided the propitious environment. Hence, between 1990 -1929, Nigeria became an agricultural estate, with various products being experimented (Onimode, 1982:46). In this way, raw materials for British factories were being produced, thereby generating the purchasing power to enable Nigerians buy the manufactured products of these expatriate firms. This ensured the transfer of economic surpluses from Nigeria to Britain. One of the earliest plantations established was the Cocoa Plantation in eastern Nigeria in 1880 by Squiss Benego near Bonny by Chief David Henshaw at Calabar. Thus by 1929, there were 27 plantation owners in Nigeria. These were anchored by Elder Dempster & Co; the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA); the United African Company and Dunlop (Nigeria) Plantation Ltd; and the Royal Niger Company amongst

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others. Elder Dempster & Co, and the BCGA established in 1901 and 1902 respectively, anchored the production of cotton and cocoa across the country and they established railways in the north to mobilise cotton resources. Example of such plantation was the Moore Plantation at Ibadan. Just to buttress how important these plantations are to the British, the Chairman of the Moor plantation once posited that:

> We have pursued our enquiries throughout the British Empire and the one place which offers the greatest possibility of providing the millions of bales of cotton which are required is Northern Nigeria. We are absolutely convinced that in Northern Nigeria alone lies the salvation of Lancashire (and the cotton industry), it is not impossible that at some future date northern Nigeria will produce at least seven million bales – sufficient to supply the whole requirement of Great Britain, and to leave an equal quantity over for other cotton consuming countries (Onimode, 1982:46).

The United Africa Company (UAC), in the same vein took the lead in rubber production, and its presence was all over eastern Nigeria where it established large scale rubber plantation (Onimode, 1982:51-52). Rice along with other crops such as maize, beans, etc were part of the agricultural products consumed internally in colonial Nigeria. It consisted the much traditional or subsistence production.

After independence, most African States including Nigeria nationalised these plantations (Smalley, 2013:4). African states thereafter experimented with alternative farming systems namely: cooperatives, resettlement schemes, large-scale irrigation projects, and mechanised state
farms. But in most cases, they ended up only achieving monopolies through state marketing boards and parastatal processing. Since being nationalised, many plantations had struggled with managerial problems, run-down infrastructure, commodity price decline and the rising labour costs. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, when the wind of the market forces blew through the structural adjustment reforms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), African agriculture was liberalised, and states lost their monopoly marketing power as parastatals and marketing boards were dismantled.

However, the current wave of large-scale farms began towards the end of 2007 when the global food crisis generated concerns over supplies in countries that consume more food than they produced (Attah, 2013:215). The current global food crisis began side by side with the global financial crisis in 2007. Due to the global food crisis, food import-dependent countries including China, Saudi Arabia and South Korea began to acquire hectares of farmland from poor countries, especially in Africa in order to bolster their food security. The trend of the new large-scale farms and the accompanying land grabbing is thus likened to the nineteenth century scramble for Africa. These farms engaged in the production of variety of crops across Africa and Nigeria in particular. Though, Nigeria's agriculture has not been dominated by foreign monopoly capital, but has been structurally integrated into the neo-colonial capitalist system, which in any case are the same because it

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sustains the foreign monopoly capital relations of productions (Onimode, 1982:159-160). Thus, capitalist farmers or large-scale farmers owning several hundred hectares of farms or plantations have broadened since independence. These farmers engaged in the production of cocoa, palm and rubber in the south, and cotton and ground estate in the north. Prominent among such farmers are politicians, police and the military who later got interested in politics since 1966-1979. Hence, their strategic position in power placed them at an advantage against the peasants whose lands were grabbed, and access to large agricultural credit was made easy. Such large-scale farmers included Olusegun Obasanjo, Michael Ibru, Murtala Nyako, and Aliko Dangote amongst others. This market led or capitalist orientation makes the agricultural sector one of the basis generating causes of underdevelopment, poverty, and hunger in the country

Large Scale Farms in the Rice Economy of Taraba State

One of the large-scale rice farms in the state is Dominion Farms. The Farms is an American-owned, Kenyan- registered company that is diversified in the production of long grain rice, fish and other agricultural products under the Prime Harvest Brand (www.dominion-farms.com, 2016). It has invested in 30,000 ha of land, and has trained 75 young commercial farmers from Taraba State for 5 months in Kenya. Dominion farms was owned by Calvin Burgess- an American investor from Gortri Aucklahoma (George, personal interview, 2024). He secured the connection for the farm land in Nigeria through Raila Odinga of Kenya, who linked him up with Olusegun Obasanjo the former President of Nigeria. Obasanjo then facilitated his meeting with Gen. Theophilus Y. Danjuma, who made it easy for Calvin to secure farm land in Gassol, Taraba State. The initial survey took place in Karim-Lamido, and Bali Local Government Areas of the state, but finally it settled for Gassol. So, by 2012, Dominion Farms took hold of Gassol in Taraba State. The Gassol land deal was tripartite involving Calvin Burgess having 80 percent, Gen. T.Y. Danjuma 10 percent, and the Taraba State government with another 10 percent. It was on this basis that 75 Nigerians from Taraba State were sponsored by the Taraba State government on modern farm technology in Kenya. However, in 2016, Gen. T.Y. Danjuma took over the ownership of Dominion farms from Calvin Burges, and own 90 percent shares, while the state government maintains 10 percent. Thus, the farm came to be known as Gassol Integrated Farms Ltd (George, personal interview, 2024).

Al-Uma Lau Rice Enterprise is another large-scale rice firm in the state. It is a private limited liability company incorporated in Nigeria under the company and allied matters decree 1990. The company is situated behind Taraba State Universal Basic Education Board Jalingo. Board Members are seasoned farmers in crops and rice production in particular. It is a large-scale rice production and processing firm. The firm was involved with the Federal Government Rice Transformation Agenda implemented by His Excellency President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan administration that supported out growers on rice. Other large scale rice firms in the state are the Alganzaki and Muphido rice firms (Noma, Personal Information, 2016).

Similarly, UMZA, producers of the Sarauniyya Golden Rice brand, owned by a Kano-based industrialist; and Popular Farms & Mills Limited Kumbotso Kano State - producers of the Stallion rice brand have established their presence in Taraba State. They have partnered with USAID MARKETS II, to raise farmers' capacity based on USAID modules on Rice Package of Practices to increase their productivity and produce quality paddy that will attract better prices for the farmers (Third National Fadama Development Project, 2015). Stallion brand of rice which is today sold all over the country as foreign rice, is partly a product of the rice paddy from Taraba State. It is being milled and processed by popular farms based in Kano. Dominion farms, UMZA, and Popular farms have been in Taraba State since 2012 (Yavalla, personal information, 2016). Dominion farms came sometimes in the second regime of the Governor Danbaba led administration which began in 2011, Popular farms was established in 2012, and UMZA appeared in 2014 and they have been buying rice paddy from the farmers at the farm gate since then.

Also, Aliko Dangote is another large-scale farmer in Taraba State. Though he is not involved in the farming of rice, but has obtained about 1000 ha of land used in the farming of rice, for sugar cane farming. In May 2013, the then Acting Governor of Taraba State, Alh. Garba Umar disclosed that the business tycoon would be establishing a sugar processing company in Lau LGA of the State (www.leadership.ng, 2016). This is with a view to increase internally generated revenue and create jobs for the youths. Dangote procured with the approval of then Acting Governor, about 1000 hectares of sugarcane plantation for the processing and production of sugar in the area.

Access to Land Resources and Labour

Agricultural production depends on a number of essential factors particularly land, labour and capital. Already what we are dealing with in this study is the activities of large capitals in agricultural production. This section focused on how these capitals accessed land and labour for agricultural production particularly rice. Of course, the nature of land tenure, and labour systems changes over time. The nature of land access in pre-colonial Nigeria was not associated with large scale land acquisition, but the introduction of plantation agriculture during the colonial periods introduced large scale land acquisition for cocoa, cotton, and the palm oil production. This section examined the access to land over time land, and the labour systems involved.

Land Tenure

Land tenure in this regards deals with how lands are acquired for agricultural purposes (Famoriyo, n.d:71-73). It enables the farmer to gain access to land in order to feed himself, members of his family and for commercial purposes in some instances. Broadly speaking, Land tenure is both the legal and customary relationship among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land (Food and Agricultural Organisation [FAO], n.d). In simple terms, land tenure systems determine who can use what resources for how long, and under what conditions. Osemi (2012) put it as the system of land holding in any given society which also mean the holding of land or the right to hold land.

In the pre-colonial era, access to land was largely customary. This consisted of practices such as lease holding, family holdings, communal holdings, and purchase in little instances (Onimode, 1982:160). By this, descendants of the families that first cleared or conquered it are the owners (Koopman & Faye, n.d:3). The land rights include permanent rights to cultivate the land and to pass it on to patrilineal or matrilineal descendants. Others such as slaves or migrants from other areas can only access land via borrowing, leasing or labour payments amongst others. So, the customary land tenure gives the first occupiers of land the usufructuary right. The basic unit of land holding is the family who either decides to lease out, or sell – a practice which was not wide spread in pre-colonial times. The next bloc of holdings is the community comprising of a clan who collectively own a land. Therefore, the family and the community are the basic authorities in the customary land tenure system (Adebayo, personal information, 2024).

However, the customary form of ownership or access to land came to be altered during colonial rule with the introduction of plantation agriculture or large-scale farms (Zakariya, 1998:60). This was made possible by the colonial land laws of 1902 and 1910 respectively which enabled the colonial government take over control of land, so as to provide for private ownership of land. Lands came be to be hired, rented or outrightly purchased. It was under these laws that private individuals and various expatriate firms easily accessed land for cocoa, cotton and oil palm plantation across Nigeria. In this way, the root of private appropriation of land, in deprivation of the peasant/masses of their farmland was planted. This laid the background for the 1978 Land decree which vested all land in the hand of the government, which gave large scale farmers immense new opportunities as they can now apply to government and be allocated almost unlimited land in rural areas.

The Land Use Act of 1978

In a way, customary laws of land tenure have in the past given the farmer a feeling of reasonable permanence on the land he cultivates. But this position came under threat with the introduction of the Land Use Act of 1978 (Ike, 1984:469-480). The Land Use Act No. 6 of 1978 was promulgated into law with effect from 29th March, 1978 as the nation's land policy document. Since then, it has remained so in the country till date. The Act now regulates all matters in relation to land within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 1 of the Land Use Act vests all land comprised in the territory of each state in the Federation of Nigeria in the Governor of that state and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of the Act. As part of the objectives, the state governors are to remove main cause of social and economic inequality; provide an incentive to development by providing easy access to land for the State and the people amongst others. What this means is that the ownership, alienation, acquisition, administration and management of land is now in the hands of the government. It is through this window that large scale farmers now access land without hurdles.

Therefore, land tenure system generally can be classified into two: customary rights and statutory rights (Ike, 1984:469-480). Leasehold, freehold and rights of occupancy are examples of statutory rights, which are clearly stated by laws/ regulations. Customary rights include usufructuary rights, grazing rights, communal rights, property rights etc, are derivatives of customs and traditions. However, some of these rights also have their places in both statutory and customary rights. The importance of the discussion so far, is to provide us with the understanding of the nature and trends in the agricultural land access in Taraba State. Thus, the acquisition or access to land for agricultural purposes is a combination of both the statutory and the customary rights. Before the 1978 Land Use Act, access to land for agricultural purposes have largely been characterised by the customary land tenure in Taraba State, but when the 1978 Land Use Act came into law, other forms of tenure emerged such as hired and purchased which were part of the customary right but at a minimal level. Hence, the duality of the Nigerian legal systems as captured in both the customary laws and the received English Laws with respect to land has resulted in the existence of customary and non-customary land tenure systems in Taraba State and Nigeria at large.

The customary system as practiced in Taraba is not different with most parts of the country. The land holding group is the family, clan, village or community. The position of a member which includes: the dead, the few living and countless others unborn who in customary law are the owners of the land - is that of entitlement to a block of land for cultivation. Access to the land in this context must be done only with the consent of the principal members of the family or community concerned. The role of the chief is that of a trustee of the land for community and a facilitator in terms of transaction in land. The chief does not give away any right to the land such as permanent usufructuary right without the consent of those involved as that would mean betrayal of a trust. He only acts as an agent in terms of transaction, representing not only his own interest but other interest as well. The agricultural performance survey conducted in 2013, in Taraba State reveals that ownership of land for agricultural purposes is on the family/clan or inheritance representing 86%, however sales by government as covered by the 1978 Act, is now wide spread (National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services [NAERLS], 2013:1). It is under this circumstance that the large-scale farmers are now taking advantage to access massive land at the detriment of the peasant farmers.

Labour Systems

Agriculture is a key economic activity in Taraba State and Nigeria at large. So, the mobilisation and organisation of labour is very central to production. Therefore, agricultural production has been organised around various forms of labour systems over time. This can better be understood across pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Essentially the basic forms of labour in pre-colonial periods were the household, co-

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operative, and hired labour. Wage labour was on a small scale due to predominance of other forms of labour (Zakariya, 1998:59). Family labour therefore requires that household head coordinate the production process by using his capacity to mobilise the labour of the male and female household dependants together with other members of the family(Koopman & Faye, n.d. :4-6) In a typical customary setting, control over land provides household heads with access to family labour. Patriarchs can also demand labour from their male dependants for field clearing, planting, and harvesting. The dependants are motivated by the fact that it was part of the practice that a young man will receive a parcel of land that he can farm with his own family dependants. But this practice is now being extinct due to the increasing pressure on land, thereby leading to rural urban migration.

Largely, the household and cooperative labours were peasant based. This involves the production of food using traditional systems of cultivation which usually revolves around small holdings of about 1-2 hectares per farmer using simple tools such as hoe and cutlasses (Onimode, 1982:161). The dominant products of this traditional agriculture are food products, which exceed export production and constitute about 80% of total agricultural output. These products included yam, cassava, maize, rice, sorghum, millet and cowpeas. Crops like cocoyam, sweet potato, wheat and melon are also grown amongst others.

The colonial periods brought about the proletarianisation of labour across Nigeria. Old forms of labour such as family and cooperative labour were either replaced or modified (Zakariya, 1998:60). The changes in the labour system during these periods were as a result of a number of factors that are intertwined. One of the factors was the introduction of the British coin and tax system. The British coin was the means for tax payment, and so for the peasant to pay tax they have to either sell their products or labour to the various expatriate firms involved in the export crops production so they could have access to the coin. The signing of forced labour convention under the auspices of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1932, which forbade the use of forced labour for most purposes including agricultural production, and the enrollment of children in schools created labour shortages, thereby making the commercialisation of labour attractive. Also, the colonial land laws of 1902, and 1910 respectively which allowed the colonial government took over control of land, forced those who were dispossessed of their land to seek for wage labour in order to earn a means of livelihood. Other forms of labour such as hired and wage labour gained prominence during the colonial periods (Zakariya, 1998:61). As earlier pointed out, the abolition of slavery and enrollment of the young ones into schools created a vacuum for agricultural labour among not only the rural producers, but even the plantation owners. Therefore, peasantry which depended largely on the family involving children, wives, dependants and kinsmen who worked without pay, had to now employ the services of hired and migrant labour for payment. Therefore, the colonial periods intensified wage, hired and migrant labour. Thus, by the 1930s, these forms of labour had become major sources of labour in many rural communities. In hausa land for example, hired labour became dominant during the 1942 famine known as *Yan Balange*. In another instance, hired labour emerged in the Plateau province in the 1940s, to meet the need for extra labour following the introduction of export crops such as cotton, rice and groundnut amongst others which are labour–intensive (Zakariya, 1998).

The same pattern is also associated with the migrant labour. In this case, migrant labour could either be seasonal or permanent, commonly known in local parlance or in Hausa as *cin-rani* and *kaura* respectively. However, migrant labour as noted earlier was not only a feature of the colonial agricultural labour system, but was intensified during the colonial periods. This was prompted and concentrated in areas such as the cocoa belt, the timber and rubber areas, the palm oil belt, all in the south; the tin fields of Jos; and the groundnut and cotton growing areas of Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto States. Again, migrant labour was largely associated with colonial tax, introduction of export crops, and the abolition of slave labour (Zakariya, 1998).

By the end of the colonial periods, the family and cooperative system of labour had been weakened. This was made possible with the introduction of the cash economy. Other factors included: the introduction of British coin, tax systems, land laws, and export crops combined to weaken the pre-colonial labour systems (Zakariya, 1998:65). So, the inability of the household heads to meet the basic needs of its members such as tax payments, clothings etc. compelled other members of the family to be engaged in either hired or wage labour to earn a living. These factors reduced the ability of some members to expand their farms as a result of shortage of labour. Also, the deviation from food to export crop production collapsed the household labour. This undermined the spirit of communalism and egalitarianism that had sustained and shielded the peasants during crises. Hence the weakening of the "moral economy" had adversely affected the very basis of the traditional African societies, and rendered them vulnerable to the market forces.

The implication of all these is that the agricultural labour system in Taraba State came to be largely commercialised. Hired, wage and migrant labour dominate agricultural production on both large-scale farms and other small-scale farms. Another labour system is the community labour – a situation where large scale farmers leverage on the services of the communities where they hire or purchase land for the rice production which they are involved across the state. This system came to replace or modify the cooperative labour that dominated agricultural labour in the pre-colonial times.

Rice Production and Marketing

Despite the fact that Nigeria is the largest producer of rice in Africa, it still depends on importation to meet its growing demand of rice consumption in the country. This suggests that what is being produced fall short of quantity demanded in terms of metric tons. It is against this background that rice production in Nigeria and Taraba sSate in particular were evaluated.

Rice Production in Nigeria

Rice is the second most consumed food crop in the world after maize, yet its production hardly meets demand. The Asian continent dominates in terms of global rice production, with China and India as the largest producers each with a share of 29.6 percent and 22.6 percent of global production respectively (Udemeze, 2018:305). Rice constitutes the three leading food crops in the world, along with maize (corn) and wheat. The three combined together provide about 42% of the world's required caloric intake. Rice provides 19 percent of global human per capita energy and 13 percent of per capita protein. It is also grown on more than 144 million rice farms, mostly smaller than 1 hectare. Hence, rice production is not only critical to global food security, but also serves as important source of employment, income, and food supply particularly for the rural people (PriceWaterHouseCoopers[PWC], 2018:4). In 2009, human consumption alone accounted for 78 percent of the total usage of produced rice. Rice is also a staple for more than 3.5 billion of the world's population which translates to at least half of the people living in the world. Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East are major destinations of rice consumption and demand, with leading rice producing countries such as China, India and other countries in Asia combine to account for about 90 percent of the world's rice consumption. China alone accounted for 210 million metric tons in 2017, followed by India with a total global consumption amounting to approximately 477.77 million metric tons in 2016/2017 (Udemeze, 2018:3).

The Rice economy in Nigeria can best be described as good, bad and ugly. Nigeria tripled as the largest producer of rice in Africa, leading consumer, and simultaneously the world's third largest rice importer (Thrive Agric., 2020). In 2019, Africa had a total production volume of 14.6M - Nigeria had about 55 percent of that share, ranking as the 14th largest producer of rice in the world with China being the top producing country. Rice is one of the most consumed staples in Nigeria, with consumption increasing by 4.7 percent in the last decade amounting to almost four times the global consumption growth, and reaching 6.4 million tons in 2017 – accounting for 20 percent of Africa's consumption (PriceWaterHouseCoopers[PWC], 2018:4). Today, rice is no longer a luxury food to millions of Nigerians but has become the cereal that constitutes a major source of calories for the rural and urban poor with demand growing at an annual rate of 5 percent. Urbanisation changes in employment patterns, income levels, and rapid population growth have significantly contributed to widening the gap between supply and demand for rice in Nigeria (Oikeh & Nwilene et. al., n.d).

However, despite being the largest producer of rice in Africa, Nigeria is still unable to meet its consumption demands. Though, rice production rose from 3.7 million metric tons in 2017 to 4.0 million metric tons in 2018 (Kamai & Omoigui et. al., 2020:1), the consumption rate now is 7.9 million tones, and the demand for rice is expected to keep rising to a projected figure of 555 million metric tons in the year 2035. Today, Nigeria is only capable to supply only 49% of domestic demand; it relies on importation to make up for the remaining 51 percent (Udemeze, 2018:2). Hence, the country's rice importation is over 3 million tons annually, equivalent to over US$480 million in scarce foreign exchange

(Kamai & Omoigui et. al., 2020:1). The inability of the country to meet local demand is being linked with shortfalls in production and processing technologies. Rice demand is indeed growing faster than supply, driven by factors including population growth and urbanisation (Tobias & Castro, 2020:1).

Rice Production in Taraba State

Rice is a predominant staple crop in Nigeria, produced in over 18 states including Taraba (PriceWaterHouseCoopers[PWC], 2018:6). Against the backdrop that Nigeria is struggling to meet up with the 51 percent shortfall in rice production, amounting to about 3 million metric tons; rice production in Taraba State as one of the leading producers of rice in the country is examined.

Taraba State enjoys a tropical climate marked by dry and rainy seasons. The rainy season starts by early April and ends by October. The dry season begins around November and terminates by March. The average rainfall is 1,350mm in the Southern part of the State and reduces gradually to about 750mm towards the Northern part. The climate allows the cultivation of most staple food crops, grazing land, fresh water fishing and forestry. This gives the state a very unique position, as producer of several crops on a very large scale compared to other neighbouring states. Taraba State has 4 million hectares of arable land which comprises of 2.5 million hectares of upland ecologies and 1.5 million hectares of lowland ecologies which is dedicated principally to lowland rice and sugarcane production but presently only 25% of the arable land is put to use in the State (Taraba State Agricultural Development Programme[TADP], 2015:2).

Available statistic from the Ministry of Agriculture and the NBS suggest that rain fed lowland rice is the most predominant rice production system, accounting for nearly 50% of the total rice-growing area in Nigeria; 30% of production is rain fed upland rice, while just 16% is high yielding irrigated systems (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2009:16). Other production systems (deep water rice and mangrove swamp rice) make up the remaining 4%. Many rice varieties are grown presently in these different ecologies. These include traditional varieties and improved varieties. The improved varieties include: Nerica 1 (Faro 55), Nerica 2 (Faro 56), Ita 150 (Faro 46), Cisadane (Faro 51), Wita 4 (Faro 52), Ita 321 (Faro 53), Sipi (Faro 44), Wab 189 (Faro 54) and Tox 4004-43-1-2-1 (Faro 57). The ecology of the area supports production in various ways for example, the average yield (ha) is 1.69 t ha-1, with lowland rice giving the highest yield of 3.9 t ha-1, followed by irrigated rice (3.19 t ha-1), and upland with ground water (2.10 ha-1) (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2009).

Based on report by the National Bureau of Statistics, Taraba State is one of the major rice producers in the country, with Kogi State taking the lead. At the moment Kogi is leading with over 8000 metric tons based on the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 farming seasons. States like Benue, Kaduna, Kebbi, Kwara, and Nasarawa falls in the second category with over 6000 metric tons in the same period of time. The third category is Kano and Niger States recording over 5000 Metric tons. Taraba State along with Adamawa, Bauchi, Plateau and the Federal Capital Territory belong to the fourth category with over 4000 metric tons in those farming seasons. Find below the table showing major rice producing states in Nigeria.

Table I. Showing rice production in major rice producing states in Nigeria in terms of metric tons and areas cultivated in hectares, 2017/2018 farming season

	State	Area Per Hectare	Production (MT)
1	Adamawa	161.864.94	465.976.53
2	Bauchi	155.268.86	401.890.53
3	Benue	206.338.73	601.678.98
4	Gombe	134.560.31	301.226.30
5	Kaduna	268.583.56	623.499.13
6	Kano	216.206.14	569.217.21
7	Kebbi	219.700.38	624.332.82
8	Kogi	311.761.60	801.615.82
9	Kwara	272.467.43	650.205.34
10	Nasarawa	229.975.77	600.115.38
11	Niger	224.407.37	539.854.46
12	Plateau	174.868.90	406.772.16
13	Taraba	205.101.66.	432.704.91
14	FCT	207.290.67	423.492.83

Source: National Bureau of Statistics "National Survey on Exportable Agricultural Commodities in Nigeria" 2017-2019

Table II. Showing rice production in major rice producing states in Nigeria in terms of metric tons and areas cultivated in hectares, 2018/2019 farming season

	State	Area Per Hectare	Production (MT)
1	Adamawa	166.720.88	470.935.12
2	Bauchi	158.926.92	420.003.96
3	Benue	202.528.89	597.779.72
4	Gombe	134.560.31	301.226.30
5	Kaduna	272.641.07	650.909.08
6	Kano	224.691.29	588.370.25
7	Kebbi	230.291.39	674.792.79
8	Kogi	307.114.45	789.712.77
9	Kwara	264.641.45	659.217.66
10	Nasarawa	234.875.04	646.122.31
11	Niger	227.139.59	587.245.73
12	Plateau	185.114.96	442.178.49
13	Taraba	197.254.71	421.667.20
14	FCT	201.093.90	413.902.40

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Source: National Bureau of Statistics "National Survey on Exportable Agricultural Commodities in Nigeria" 2017-2019

Documents on rice production in Taraba state since 1991 up to 2001 are difficult to find; however, available records on rice production in the state between 2002-2023 shows steady but insignificant level of growth – a situation being attributed to scanty application of modern farming technology(TADP, 2024). The Table III, below shows rice production in Taraba State since 2002.

Table III. Showing rice production in Taraba State, 2002-2023

	Year	Area Per Hectare	Production (000 mt)
1	2002	124.28	202.81
2	2003	136.68	226.24
3	2004	144.11	240.00
4	2005	150.00	258.00
5	2006	156.23	306.13
6	2007	150.15	315.31
7	2008	147.77	224,93
8	2009	157.77	331,31
9	2010	203.77	294.00
10	2011	203.00	294.23
11	2012	157.70	289.30
12	2013	160.73	309.30
13	2014	121.80	328.30
14	2015	127.21	390.10
15	2016	160.83	324.14
16	2017	173.83	366.12
17	2018	189.46	417.34
18	2019	190.64	405.72
19	2020	191.85	386.54
20	2021	194.08	388.16
21	2022	183.13	402.89
22	2023	229.03	526.78

Source: Taraba State Agricultural Development Project (TADP), 2024

Rice Marketing

This is an important chain in the production industry in Taraba State. Rice marketing is the performance of all business activities in the flow of paddy and milled rice, from the point of initial rice production until they are in the hands of the ultimate consumers at the right time, in the right place and as convenient as possible, at a profit margin so as to keep the farmer in his farming operations (Akande & Akpokodje, 2013:2). The marketing of rice in Taraba State involves four stages with a change of product ownership occurring between

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each pair of stages. The first stage is production through harvesting. Stage two concerns movement from the farms to processing centers while stage three involves moving the milled rice from processing areas to urban consumption centers. The fourth stage encompasses wholesaling and retailing in the urban centers.

Like in all other trades, distribution of manufactured goods is so critical in the marketing system. Rice is one among the highly demanded products across the markets in Taraba State (NBS, 2007). But what is even amazing is the demand for rice even from some rice producing states such as Ebonyi, Adamawa, Gombe, Borno and Yobe States. Other states include Cross River and Akwa-Ibom. Prominent actors in the rice production in the state also get involved in the market (NBS, 2007). These actors who doubled as millers and producers include: Al'uma Rice and Alganzaki, and Muphido amongst others (Yavalla, personal information, 2016). Alhaji Rabiu, of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, opined that rice marketing is a viable business in Taraba State generally. He maintained that more than six local off-takers exist in Taraba State. Amongst them are Al'uma rice mill Ltd., Alganzaki rice mill, and Muphido rice with all of them having factories in Jalingo, the state capital because of proximity to urban areas and market accessibility (Lau, personal information, 2016).

Also on his part, Aliyu, owner of the Alganzaki rice brand, disclosed that rice production and marketing flourish in Taraba State. Apart from rice processing, that the company also gets involved in rice farming because of the short fall in rice production demand in terms of supply of paddy rice to the company, and milled rice supply to the market. That supply of a lorry of rice to the market does not take long to be sold indicating high demand, and supply shortfalls (Noma, 2024). According to him, the failure to meet production demand is as a result of inadequate or lack of farm input and funds to the farmers. But that he, who is also a farmer and owner of the Alganzaki rice mill, provide farm input to farmers in the nature of fertiliser, money as loan, and rice variety particularly Faro 44, which he said, was first introduced to the farmers in the area by him. Currently he said, there are over one thousand farmers under him.

Conclusion

In summary, the trajectory of large-scale farms began during the colonial era especially in the 1920s and 1930s. The dawn of independence envisaged their nationalisation in most African countries including Nigeria. However, several factors such as mismanagement, and fall in the prices of products e.t.c led to the collapse the plantations in the 1980s and 1990s. However, by 2007, the current waves of large-scale agricultural commercial farms began as a result of global food prices. Hence, states within the Nigeria federation like Taraba State became attractive for large-scale farms which focused on rice production. This would later lead to land grabbing by the large-scale farms in several Taraba LGAs. Large-scale farms such as Dominion Farms, Al-Uma Lau Rice Enterprise, Alganzaki and Muphido Rice Farms among others began operating in Taraba State.

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By and large the activities of large-scale rice farms are still unable to address the shortfalls in the supply of rice in the state and the country at large. Part of the reasons for this is the massive land deals involved in the production of rice, which dispossessed significant number of the peasant farmers. Other forms of the land deals such as hiring equally compounded the situation because, it now converted the peasant farmers to agricultural labour force that largely constitute either hired or migrant labour in the large-scale farms. In the end, the study suggests a better approach in the management of the agricultural policy involving large-scale rice farming in order to ensure the rights of the land owners and masses is well protected.

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