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State of Nigeria's Oil Economy and Covid-19 Pandemic: The Agricultural Perspective

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Abstract

This paper on state of Nigeria's oil economy and COVID-19 pandemic: The agricultural perspective focused primarily on the current condition of the economy of Nigeria, its major source(s) of survival and the implications on the growth of the economy as well as the need for diversification. Relying on secondary materials, the paper argues that over the years the Nigerian economy has depended greatly on production and exporting of oil, giving little attention to the development of non-oil sector. These technically plagued the country into recession and affected the economic wellbeing of the nation at different periods. The economy has remained import reliant and undiversified. This has thrown the nation into challenges of slow gross domestic product (GDP), high rate of unemployment, poverty, and poor social services delivery amongst others. The current state of the economy and the future of the economic wellbeing of its population, coupled with COVID-19 pandemic remain elusive. An inclusive economy of both the oil and non-oil sectors performance remains crucial to cushion the effect of volatile economy, complement and provide a balanced growth. Successive governments' economic recovery policy abound, nonetheless, the economy remains unstable and volatile. It is therefore the aim of this paper to propose economic policy that would engender economic growth and development through diversification particularly to the agricultural sector. The sustenance of economic policy by the government and support of stakeholders and professionals, including public administrators and social workers in policy formulation and implementation to achieve sustainable economic growth and development remain crucial.

KEYWORDS: Oil economy, COVID-19, Economic growth, Economic diversification, Agricultural sector
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Introduction

Worldwide, economies continue to experience positive and negative growth at different times. Economic growth prospects remain positive with sustained momentum in advanced economies, such as in the Euro zone, China, among other developed and developing countries **(Afrinvest West Africa, 2018).**

The oil windfall especially in 2014, notably impacted the economies of foremost oil exporters like Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, among others, as well as Middle East unrest and wars aggravated economic downfall **(Kemi, 2016).** Recently, the novel COVID-19 has exacerbated world economies, with its attendant health implications. The oil producing and non-producing countries are grappling with the containment of the virus with huge socio-economic losses, with threatening tendencies for another global meltdown. This development impacts substantially on most developed and developing economies.

In spite of the endowment of Nigeria with mineral and agricultural resources, the country has grossly underperformed in terms of its enormous resource endowment. For instance, it has the 6th ranked gas assets and the 8th largest crude oil assets globally. This endowment is in commercial quantities with
around 37 solid mineral types and has an estimated population of above 150 million people (Collier, Soludo&Pattillo, 2008). These resources are expected to impact on the pattern, character, and nature of a nation's process of economic development **(Center for Distance Learning, 2016),**thus the economy has been weak **(Sanusi, 2010).**In spite of the numerous resources, Nigeria is among the most volatile worldwide. The nature of volatility includes trade, exchange rate, monetary policy, revenue and expenditure. The consequence of the volatility in major economic indicators reduces the country's growth potentials and complicates internal macroeconomic balance **(Collier, Soludo&Pattillo, 2008).**

For decades, Nigerian economy is monolithic. The economy is driven by production and exporting of oil, **(Suberu, Ajala.,Akande, Olure-Bank &Adeyinka, 2015).** As a consequence of fluctuation in the global oil market, oil revenues dried up, and the government experienced massive foreign exchange shortages, aggravating hardship in the economy. The effects of the oil crisis highlight Nigeria's exposure and vulnerability of the broader economy to outside shocks **(Henz& Schaefer, 2018).**This is an indication that in the primary subdivision of the economy which include farming (crop agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishing, lumbering) and mining (oil and gas extraction, solid minerals mining, quarrying), only the oil and gas subdivision thrives more prominently than other sectors. The oil price shock started in mid-2014 and 2016, the country documented its first slump and production volumes. By Q2'17, the country's economy exited its recession. Within this period the underperformance in the oil sector spilled over to the non-oil sector through the exchange rate channel, with the non-oil sector contracting 0.2% y/y to record its worst performance since 1984 **(Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2017).** Furthermore, the Nigeria's recession of 2015-2017 was accompanied by slow economic growth rate of 1.9 per cent in 2018, to 2.3 per cent in 2019, the projection is expected to rise to 2.9 per cent and 3.3 per cent in 2020 and 2021 **(Ogunde, 2020).**However, the spread of COVID-19 with no vaccine or cure, leading to volatile economies across the world, particularly puts the Nigerian oil economy on the edge.

In the 1960s, Nigeria was self-reliant in food production and a net exporter of agrarian produce. During the early 1970s, oil became a foremost foreign exchange earner and contributor to GDP far above other areas of the economy, especially the agriculture and manufacturing **(Eko, Utting&Onun, 2013).** It is evident that oil accounts for above 95 per cent of exports and foreign exchange incomes while the manufacturing sector accounts for less than one percent of total exports. This implies that the system of the economy remains consumption-driven, import- dependent, and undiversified.

In the sixties and seventies, agricultural sub-division provided more than 70 per cent of employment in Nigeria for the population. However, the discovery of oil in the country gradually diverted attention from agriculture to oil business, leading to decline in agriculture business **(Kemi, 2016).**

Furthermore, the production in this sector lead to employment generation, provision of food, foreign exchange earnings, poverty reduction and delivery of raw materials **(Kemi, 2016).**In the country, in over four decades, agricultural sector has been bedeviled with inadequate financing and inputs for farmers; serious threat of climate change; poor access of farming outputs to local and markets in the diaspora; and security threats to investment in agriculture, especially kidnapping, cattle rustling, and destruction of farmlands by herdsmen trespassers **(Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2017).** Most farmers labored to obtain finances in order to remodel or expand their farms, and invest in fruitful assets **(Ministry of Budget & National Planning, 2017).** Nigeria also suffers mismanagement, policy gaps and infrastructural neglect **(Suberu, et al., 2015).**

Accounts for the decline of economic riches of Nigeria, among others include lack of quality leadership, misappropriation and corruption **(Sanusi, 2010).** This has led to the weight of poverty, unemployment and inequality in the country**(Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2017).** More so, the overall implication demonstrates mismanagement of the country's resources through the exercise of power and authority, involving high levels of unemployment and job uncertainties **(Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2017).** This paper, therefore, examines the implications of Nigeria's oil dependent on economic growth and development, the need for agricultural diversification as a road map for sustained economic development, and the significant role of professionals in policy formulation for economic sustainability and progress.

I. COVID-19 pandemic and Nigeria's oil economy

COVID-19 is a contagious and infectious disease which originated from Wuhan Province, China, and has infected over 1.3 million people around the world **(Nnanna, 2020).**The Chinese economy suffered the first casualty in human health and economy. Many lives were lost, while factory productions were disrupted with direct consequences for consumption and raw material processing **(Ogunde, 2020).**

The COVID-19 pandemic create substantial gap in the growth of economies worldwide. The World Trade Organization **(WTO) (2020)** projected a decline in the global trade volumes between 13 per cent and 32 per cent due to COVID-19. This prediction is based on uncertainties accompanying COVID-19.

Furthermore, most countries experience significant consequences of the pandemic in terms of disruption of global supply chains as an outcome of lockdowns, and decline both domestic and international business, travel and tourism **(KPMG, 2020).** It is further predicted that the consequences of low oil demand may dip beyond 2020, if movement of people and goods remain restricted, as well as the closure of airlines and factories **PCW (2020).** More so, the GDP is expected to depreciate by 2.1 per cent worldwide. More revealing is that the GDP of high income countries is projected to decline by 1.9 per cent, while the developing countries share of the decline is 2.5 per cent **(Maliszewska, Mattoo & Mensbrugghe, 2020).** This is a demonstration that the impact is expected to be more felt in developing nations such as Africa.

COVID-19 pandemic has gradually exposed African countries, particularly in business activities. For example, the SMEs which accounted for 80 per cent of employment is seriously affected, thereby leading to hike in consumer goods and living standards **(United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2020).** In sub-Saharan Africa, the disease has sharply declined international export, particularly the natural resources which include metals, mineral ores, and oil. With limited foreign flows, the extractive industry, manufacturing, and among other sectors and sub-sectors are at risk at the moment **(International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank,2020**). Due to the spread of corona virus, world population and economies are confronted with three main channels namely, the business activities, household consumption and international trade and investment. In addition, the global review shows that the sub-Saharan Africa accounted for the largest downward growth with 2.9 per cent to 2.0 per cent due to external shocks **(KPMG, 2020).**

Like other parts of the world, Nigeria population is increasingly been affected by COVID-19, with geometric daily infection and deaths. As a result, the forced lockdown to contain the virus has local and international implications. Within local economy, businesses are put in a halt due to movement restrictions, coupled with health challenges associated with the virus. Beyond the national boundaries, the oil export which is the mainstay of the country's economy is in shambles due to abrupt low demand of oil products. This scenario was predicated by the trade war between the OPEC and OPEC+ nations (OPEC and non-OPEC members), especially the Saudi Arabia and United States and Russia. The impasse between these nations complicated the volatile nature of oil market in the world. To this regard, greater share of the Nigeria revenue is dependent on 2.18 million barrel per day, while the budget benchmark is premised on $57 per barrel. Since the oil price recede downwards below US$30, and given the projections that the situation might further deteriorate, the Nigerian government has taken further steps to adjust its earlier yearly spending. This adjustment is far from achieving its desired outcome since the nation grossly failed to prepare its foundation for future shocks **(Akanmi & Gabriel, 2020).** The implications are that the country's failure to build its local economy and diversify its sources of foreign earnings poses huge setbacks.

Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian was working toward economic recovery with regards to the oil price shock of 2014, with 2.3 per cent GDP growth in 2019 **(Onyekwena & Ekeruche, 2020).**The remarkable achievement relapsed to 2 per cent in February 2020 due to near to the ground oil prices and narrow fiscal space **(IMF, 2020).**The economic space revealed a downward or slow recovery in relation to real incomes and weak investments, and inflation. This is further complicated with external vulnerabilities reflected in higher current account deficit and highly declining reserves associated with volatile capital flow **(Mati, 2020).** Furthermore, notable weak non-oil revenue mobilization culminated to aggravated deterioration of fiscal policy supported by the Central Bank of Nigeria through overdraft **(Mati, 2020).** This is further expressed that in the midst of COVID-19 and Nigeria's oil dependency, if the pandemic is not contained to ease lockdown, the continued low oil sales by Nigeria might lead to negative economic contraction, possible economic recession **(Ezebuike, 2020),** especially in a mono economy like Nigeria.

The uncertainties associated with ups and downs of oil prices spell hard times for Nigerian economy. Statutory obligations, capital and recurrent expenditure projections exacerbate the already existing debt burdens. All are fallout of the country's budget benchmark of $57 per barrel. More so, given that Nigeria's biggest export destinations in Europe and Asia **(United Capital, 2020),** the threat of COVID-19 is likely to weaken foreign earnings and the Nigerian economy at large. For example, China is among the largest consumers of oil with about 23 per cent of production. This implies that the lockdown impacting on manufacturing, air travel, among others, the deadly disease lead cut in oil supplies. The impact has been immediate for member exporting States such as Saudi Arabia, Angola, Nigeria, among others **(KPMG, 2020).** In other words, COVID-19 has seriously affected the currencies of both the oil exporting and importing countries across the world. Thus, Nigeria's economic growth and the future economic wellbeing of the population further exacerbated by the current pandemic remain indefinable.

Economic growth and policy trend in Nigeria

Economic growth connotes positive change. It is seen as a positive and sustained increase in aggregate goods and services in an economy within a specific time period. Considering the population of a country, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is measured in terms of per capita income according to which the aggregate production of goods and services per annum is divided by the population of the country in the given period, and confers benefit which include raising standard of living, reducing poverty, and meeting the basic needs of the people **(Uwakaeme, 2015).** Economic growth also includes preservation of natural resources, encouraging environment, and a comfortable cultural living **(Penn State University, 2008).**

The indicators of economic development include structural change, external influence on government, and environmental conditions. Structural change is the change in the structure of production which manifest in higher economic growth in output and employment opportunities. The external influence impacts significantly in terms of implementation of economic development policies **(Bokhari, & Duca, 2008).** An indicator of economic development is also any change to the environment, whether negative or positive, exclusively or partially resulting from an organization's actions, products or services **(Service Canada, 2005).**

In recent past, Nigeria's GDP is recorded as second behind South Africa. Following years of military regimes and poor economic management the country faces rising poverty levels, decline in public institutions and overall economic stagnation **(Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2007).** Economic development is further explained in terms of economic reforms that stimulates private sector to thrive devoid of infrastructural deficit and mismanagement of resources **(Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2007).**

The return to democratic governance in 1999 introduced series of reforms aimed at redressing the distortions in the economy and targeted to restore economic growth following period of economic decline in Nigeria **(Sanusi, 2010).** To develop an economic policy framework or agenda, the government formally launched the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) of 2004. This economic policy was replicated at the state and local council areas, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). As a result of the return to democracy 1999, the government between 1999 and 2003, dwelt on strengthening political institutions to fight against corruption, while in 2004 effort was made to make a landmark strategy to boost life situation in the country through NEEDS. The primary aim is to ensure that Nigerian has the right to adequate water and sanitation, nutrition, clothing, shelter, basic education, and health care, as well as physical security and the means of making a living **(Nigerian National Planning Commission, 2004).** The policy focus is hinged on promotion of a planned and balanced economic development through wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction, elimination of corruption, and values reorientation **(Nigerian National Planning Commission, 2004).**

Prior to the return to civil rule in the country, Nigerian economy underwent economic reforms of varying dimensions by different policy regimes. **Sanusi (2010)** recounted the trends in Nigerian economic reforms which include the First National Development Plan, 1962-1968, the Second National Development Plan (1970 - 1974), the third National Plan (1975 - 1980), and the Fourth National Development Plan (1981 - 1985). According to **Sanusi (2010),** the First Development Plan was formulated for quick growth of the economy. The plan gave substantial precedence to agriculture and industrial development, including high-level and intermediate manpower training. While other development plans were the Second National Development Plan of 1970-1974, launched primarily to restructure and restore infrastructure that had been damaged in the Nigerian civil war; Third National Development Plan of 1975-1980, was considered during the huge oil revenues to the nation from the mid-1970s; and Fourth National Development Plan of 1981-1985, was hugely affected by the fall in international oil prices. In 1982 the government presented the Economic Stabilization Act in response to decreasing oil earnings and key external sector imbalances.

The most recent economic agenda is the Nigerian Vision 20:2020 beginning from 2009 to 2020. This is an embodiment of NEEDS and the Seven Point **Agenda (2007 - 2011).**The country's development of comprehensive strategic plans for each sector of the economy considers both medium and long term plan by optimizing both human and natural resources for rapid and economic growth, and transmit this growth to social development for meaningful livelihood **(National Planning Commission, 2009).** It is expected that by 2020, the country will have a diversified, sustainable and competitive economy capable of improving the overall quality of living of the people. Despite this plan, the nation has continued to face challenges of slow GDP, high rate of unemployment, poverty, and inadequate social services delivery, high level of insecurity, climate change, and poor agricultural production among others. This situation therefore, necessitates exhaustive review of the nation's economic policy to enhance sustainability and development.

The Agricultural perspective of the Nigerian economy

Every nation strives for sustainable growth and development to improve the overall wellbeing of its population. Sustainable economy of a nation enhances living standards by creating jobs, and wealth, development of novel knowledge, and technology, and stable political climate **(Abouchakra, Moujaes, Najjar, Shediac, 2008). Abouchakra et al., (2008)** further noted that a relationship exists between diversity and sustainability, which in turn reduces a nation's economic volatility, increase productivity and performance. In recent times, the idea toward economic diversification and revenue sources of government is among the government strategies to improve the totality of people's wellbeing in Nigeria. An intention to diversify its revenue base from primary sector revenue generating economy into non-primary sector revenue generating economy, explores the potentials in the non-primary sectors and harnessing them for growth and development **(Obi, 2018).**

The Nigerian economy is composed of the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. The primary sector basically is concerned with natural resources, production of raw materials for manufacturing. It includes petroleum, solid minerals, and agricultural produce. In the secondary sector, covers processing of raw materials and manufacturing of products. In addition it includes other areas such as utility industries such as electricity, water, and gas production, and construction. Under the tertiary sector are health facilities, and finance, hotel business, housing and real estate, communication and other public services. However, since 1970s, successive governments thrust of the economy is the oil sector. According to Ministry of Budget and National Planning (2017), the oil sector accounts for only 10 per cent of Nigeria's GDP, but remains a large contributor to export earnings and government revenues. This monolithic economy is gradually moving toward diversification since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria from 1999.

Due to paradigm shift to the diversification of the economy, the non-oil revenues increased from N1, 357 billion in 2013 to N1, 967 billion in 2015, but this remains low as a share of GDP when compared to other emerging economies. Other developing countries raise an average 16 per cent of GDP from non-resource taxes, while Nigeria raises just 3 per cent (2015) (Ministry of Budget & National Planning, 2017). The overall Nigeria's GDP between 2010 and 2015 grew at an average rate of 4.8 per cent yearly. The non-oil sector, grew 6.2 per cent a year while the oil and gas sector declined by 4.5 per cent. It implies that growth in most sectors has slowed significantly, leading to the inception of the economic collapse in mid-2016 (Ministry of Budget & National Planning, 2017). Explicitly the agricultural sector development and input to industrialization lags behind since it does not produce enough foods and raw materials for locals and industries in marketable quantity **(Yusuf, 2014).** In other words, the peasant farmers are grappling with output that is mostly for local consumption.

Agriculture carries the potential of sustainable development in Nigeria. **The Ministry of Budget & National Planning (2017)** report put services as the largest contributors to Nigerian GDP with 53.2 per cent, including retail and wholesale trade, agriculture (23.1 per cent of GDP), manufacturing (13.3 per cent of GDP) and construction and real estate (3.9 per cent of GDP). Historically growth rates in these sectors have great potential to restore growth and diversify the economic base, while generating foreign exchange and aggregate the resilience of the economy to external shocks, especially in the oil and gas sector **(Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2017).** For instance, with the network of churches in Anambra State, South East of Nigeria, farmers export about $ 5m worth of organic vegetables quarterly, creating over 1,000 jobs directly and indirectly, thereby changing the livelihoods of such famers **(Eribake, 2016).** In the private sector, Germany offers technical cooperation and capacity building in the areas of off-grid renewable energy and business development for small and medium size enterprises in agricultural value chains such as rice **(The Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2017).**

Historically, in the early 1950s and 1960's Nigerian growth and development was driven by agriculture. This early periods accounted for the country's 70 per cent total export. Majorly, exported agricultural products were palm oil, cotton, cocoa, groundnuts and rubber products. Nigeria's annual growth rate then was around 4 per cent **(Daramola, Ehui, Ukeje & McIntire,n.d.).** Furthermore, Daramola, et al. (n.d.) noted that from 1970 – 1996, agricultural exports fell by 2 per cent, thereby shrinking agricultural exports to a net importer of the commodities previously exported to other parts of the world. The sudden discovery of crude oil, and further oil exploration and exploitation brought a swift shift from agriculture economy to oil economy. Although farming activities and food production is much in progress, the overall outcome is within domestic reach, subsistence in nature and less export-driven. Recently, Nigerian government acknowledged fundamental gaps in agricultural sector. The two main gaps points to shortfalls in domestic food production and failure to meet export demands and compete with market forces. While the former shortcoming is driven by input system and farming model that is disorganized, the latter is largely an outcome of incompetent system of organization, as well as limited knowledge of target markets **(Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development [FMARD], (2016).**

In addition, the aging population of farmers with little or no incentive to boost production, coupled with limited knowledge and use of improved seeds, fertilizers, crop protection facilities, institutional support such as food testing centers, weak inspectorate agencies are major drawbacks in the agriculture system **(FMARD, (2016).**The Nigerian Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of 2016-2020 further revealed the shortcomings of the agricultural sector in meeting the both domestic and external demand of agribusiness. Following excerpts from its report, notable existing gaps in demand and supply chain shows the level the nation's commitment to agriculture calling for long overdue attention to non-oil sectors, particularly the agriculture.

Nigeria is known to be the largest populated black nation in the world, with a growing population of over 200 million people with average annual rate of population change of 1.6 per cent **(United Nations [UN], 2019).** The geographical landmass of Nigeria is 923,769 square kilometers (Km^2), consisting of 909,890 Km^2 of land area and 13,879 Km^2 of water area **(National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2010).**The country's climatic environment is favorable for human, plant and animal survival. The environment features high humidity and substantial rainfall, with wet and dry seasons. The rainfall spans from early April to October, while the dry season lasts from November to March of the preceding year **(NBS, 2010).**

Agro-ecological environment of Nigeria is capable of producing wide range of agricultural goods. Leveraging on landmass, population at both rural and urban centers, and viability of the environment, the country's economic planning team is expected to commit practical and fiscal measures to uplift agriculture yet again.

Most policies in the past to cushion the effect of oil shock failed to bear dividends. Programs such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN),Green Revolution Program (the

Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), National Economic, Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DIFFRI), Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), National Accelerated Food Production Program (NAFPP), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), among other laudable but inactive programs of both the military and civilian government were an attempt to complement oil economy with agriculture. These programs and policies failed to generate the desired result up till this present time (2020). However, past experiences showed that there is no better alternative to agriculture due to its coverage in terms food production and industrial supplies. Therefore policy commitment to support this sector will interestingly elevate the economy to measure up with the economies of the developing countries.

The current state of agriculture in the country is appalling with serious anomalies. The prevailing situation is a clarion call for state of emergency in the agricultural sector of Nigeria. Below is a table indicating selected shortcomings that attest to the urgent need for diversification in Nigeria, particularly the agricultural sector.

Table 1: Demand and supply gaps in key crops and livestock production

Crop	Demand (tons)	Supply (tons)	Observations
Rice	**6.3 million**	**2.3 million**	**Insufficient supply chain remains issue**
Wheat	**4.7 million**	**0.06 million**	**Driven by demand for various types of wheat (white, hard, durum), etc. for bread, biscuits and semovita**
Maize/Corn	**7.5 million**	**7.0 million**	**Limited imports required but can shift due to feed demand**
Soya Beans	**0.75 million**	**0.6 million**	**Animal feed and protein cost alt. driving demand**
Chickens	**200 million birds**	**140 million**	**Gap filled by illegal imports that enter market at lower price point than domestic producers (e.g. frozen chicken)**
Fish	**2.7 million**	**0.8 million**	**Fall off in ocean catch and weakness in aquaculture yields due to cost of fish feed a constraint on growth**
Milk / Dairy	**2.0 million**	**0.6 million**	**Driven by insufficient milking cows and low yields.**
Tomato	**2.2 million**	**0.8 million**	**Actual production is 1.5 million tons but 0.7M ton is lost post-harvest**
Yams	**39 million**	**37 million**	**Limited gap today but volumes expected to rise in planning period**

Oil Palm	**8.0 million**	**4.5 million**	**Refers to fresh fruit bunch (FFB) from which oil is extracted at a 10% - 15% efficiency rate**
Cocoa	**3.6 million**	**0.25 million**	**High demand but limited supplies**
Cotton	**0.7 million**	**0.2 million**	**Demand is for seed cotton and could rise to 1.0 1.5 million tons subject to textile sector revival**
Sorghum	**7.0 million**	**6.2 million**	**Demand will rise further as use in feed grows in 2016 – 2020. Import of malt extracts and glucose syrup is currently used to manage gap, hence a commercial threat for Nigerian farmers**

Source: **Modified excerpt from FMARD, 2016**

A critical look at Table 1 showed that demand and supply are remarkably different. It implies that supply is not proportionate with demand. To this regard, evidence revealed that farmers' production in both crop and livestock is limited. According to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations **(FAO) (2018)** about 88 per cent of Nigerian farmers constitute small family farms. With this number, only 2 per cent of their farm lands are not irrigated, subjecting farmers to rely mainly on rain supported farms. In addition, among these set of farmers, only 7 per cent have access to credit. This is considerably poor for a burgeoning population of a country like Nigeria. The contribution of agriculture to local and foreign needs is a means to provide employment, increase productivity and income, and foreign earnings **(Inusa, Daniel, Dayagal, & Chiya, 2018).** To close the identified gaps, adequate financing, open input, access to credit, storage facility procurement, access roads for transport and market access among other relevant inputs will assist to promote and sustain agriculture in Nigeria. To support policy development and economic growth, the professional services of stakeholders, involving public administrators and social workers are invaluable in the proposed regime change toward diversification of the Nigerian economy.

The role of professionals in economic policy and development

The role of relevant actors, especially public administrators and social workers in policy formulation, implementation and economic development cannot be overemphasized. The role of experts in policy change demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills to practical situations for better living, hence roles of public administrators and social workers in the change process.

Public administration role in economic development

Public administrators are essential machinery in policy implementation. The progress of social life enhanced through protective functions such as maintenance of law and order; provision of facilitative functions such as welfare services as in health, employment, education etc., including transportation and communication services lie within the jurisdiction of public administrators. In recognition of the significant role of public administrators in economic development of nations, the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged public administrators as critical elements in the promotion of sustained economic growth, facilitators in social and infrastructural development, environmental protection, management of development programs and legal framework for development **(United Nations, 1996).**There is a valuable connection between public administration and good governance. Good governance cannot be achieved without an organized, effective and efficient public administrative system.

Public administrators are saddled with responsibility of providing efficient public services in a nation and if not effectively done undermines economic growth **(Onder&Ulasan, 2016).** Onder and Ulasan further noted that public administrators have enormous influence in determining the progress of development plan. Skilled and expert administrators are essential for economic planning, policy formulation and implementation. This is because poor economic planning would jeopardize economic growth and development.

Public administrators in developing countries such as Africa are key actors to social change and societal transformation **(Maduabum, 2014).**This is to say therefore, that the success or failure of national economic planning in developing nations depend largely on the effective disposition and capabilities of public administrators in implementing the socio-economic and political policies and reforms that make up the development plan. To further buttress the significance of public administrators as an important element of the development process, **Madunabum (2014)** posits that government and the people are at opposite end of a continuum and at the middle is a channel of communication called public administration. Hence, public administrators serve as a link between the government and its citizens in the provision of essential services geared towards overall development.

Social workers role in economic development

According to **Thin (2002),** it is critical that planners judge the success of the economies in the morally neutral terms of economic activity (measured by GDP), and in normative terms with regards to contributing to quality of life, social equality and happiness. A foundation of social work's profession is the attention to the principles of economic and social justice, as reflected in social work's core values and principles, improves the lives of individual and community well-being (National Association of Social Workers **[NASW], 2008).**Through social policy, social workers initiate programs that are problem-solving focused, support activities that will enhance the coping capacities of a people, be they, individuals, groups, or community. Social work is a resource that is sanctioned by societies to help a people to help themselves in their environment. The social work professionals are much immersed in the interaction of people and their socio-economic environment, which promote or hinder progress.

Nations around the world need both social and economic resources to achieve national development. This is because relationship exists between social and economic development. In the developed societies, social development connotes quality of life and how people ought to live. It implies that social development addresses the need for social services and resources relating to health, housing, education, work and welfare. In these advanced countries, economic development does not receive equal attention with social development. Political and economic pursuits take precedence over care for social needs. While in the developing countries, social development usually include what government and development partners have done to eradicate poverty in the system. In spite of measures taken by government of these countries in terms of amount of resources expended, the people remain poor and underdeveloped **(Gray, 2002).** Social workers in this regard have the professional capacity to mediate the process of national development by enabling individuals and society to attain fulfillment **(Rwomire, 2011),** with much reliance on human and environmental strengths. Social workers engage in promoting the overall welfare of the people through empowerment of capacities and resources of people to ensure quality of life **(Gerovska & Dimitrijoska, 2013).**

The concentration of income generation of a nation on a particular source may jeopardize the chances of economic growth. The people may be affected socially and mentally. The psychosocial effects of the economic crisis endanger both the mental health of families and children. They affect the mental health of vulnerable children directly, through poverty, and indirectly, through the effect of the parent's impaired mental health on their children **(Charis & Teloni, 2017).** With reference to the rising rate of unemployment, volatile economy, debt repayment, inadequate social services, fluctuations in oil prices, corruption and among other challenges of the Nigeria, it hinders growth and development, and people find it difficult to live optimal lives. This is why policy objectives should be broad-based to make for effective and balanced development. More so, the government should ensure that stakeholders, professionals, as well as social workers are fully engaged in the decision making process.

Social workers facilitate the removal of existing obstacles in the way of healthy development. In the strengths perspective, emphasis of social workers are not on deficit, but focuses on abilities in form of human resourcefulness, passion, energy, intelligence, imagination, curiosity, and creativity **(Gray, 2002).**

According to **Gray (2002),** the socio-economic situations that lead to poverty is best addressed through policy initiatives that must help people to invest in human capacity and human resources, that must be linked directly with economic development measures.

In as much as social work profession is immersed with social aspects of individual, group and community challenges, it is also concerned with what happens to the economy of people as individuals and as a group in a country. In this sense, when the economic policy is favorable to a government, it equally affects the peoples' enhanced living standards. The diversification of the economy will open up opportunities for people, raise employment; improve access to health, education, social services and good governance.

Social work establishes link between economy and social justice through sustainable livelihoods **(Lombard, 2008).** As captured by **Thin (2002, 87)**, "If economics is seen as part of society, and as a means of looking at livelihoods in the broad sense, then prospects for social justice are better." Social work has appreciably made input to economic development of a people by integrating human, social and economic development of the vulnerable and the poor **(Lombard, 2008).**The positive contribution of social workers to development is by assisting low-income and special needs of service users to engage in self-employment or productive employment. Self-employment undertakings include small-scale individual and family owned businesses, as well as larger cooperative enterprises **(Midgley,**

1996).

II. Conclusion

The volatility of Nigerian economy continues to undermine both the country and its citizens. In operational terms, trade, monetary, revenue, expenditure and real exchange rate volatility exposed the nation to technical recession in the past. The novel COVID-19 aggravates the poor growth of Nigerian economy and exacerbates unemployment and hardship on the population. The economic downturn may reoccur in the future in the absence of adequate and sustained policy framework, and its implementation at short, medium and long term. The policy of diversifying the country's economic structures to non oilsectors, particularly agriculture and having an inclusive progressive economy involving the oil and non-oil sectors is crucial in the current state of the nation. Policy issues that encompasses policy entrepreneurs involving relevant professionals such as public administrators, social workers and significant others, is likely to impact positively not only to growth and development of the country, but also alleviate the challenges of those at risk of social functioning or the vulnerable population of Nigeria.

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