

Hausa Tomatoes Produce Farmers and Generation of Petty Business Opportunities in South Western Nigeria

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Abstract: *Unemployment, underemployment and the concomitant poverty coupled with the high inflation rate in Nigeria has subjected most homes to untold hardship. In fact, the economic situation in the country has practically made it difficult for heads of families to perform their financial obligations. Women are the hardest hit in this respect. Though limited with respect to economic opportunity and domestic burdens; they remained laden with the responsibility for family's food. Hence, to ameliorate this, most women made recourse to tomatoes produce which could easily be procured according to financial strength for petty business activities. This has greatly and positively impacted on the economic and financial status of most women in Southwest Nigeria. In addition, the Hausa tomatoes farmers and suppliers have invariably provided employment opportunities no matter how little or insignificance it seems to appear and unnoticed by the government.*

Keywords: *Farmers, Hausa, Nigeria, Southwest, Tomatoes.*

I. Introduction

Prior to the time Britain formally took over and created the modern geographical entity referred to as Nigeria in 1914, there existed kingdoms and empires such as Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, Kanem-Bornu Empire and some other minor ones. The diverse societies of Nigeria region ruled themselves independently. Although despite the political and socio-cultural differences, there were commercial inter-group connections. Hence, one of the inter-group relationships which existed among them was trade. Meanwhile, one potent factor behind the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates was economic. The financial advantage from the southern protectorate needed to cushion the impact of the financial strait in the administration of northern protectorate engendered the amalgamation. Nigerian communities had intra-national trade relations dating back to the creation of the country in 1914.⁽¹⁾ The river systems, coupled with major roads serving as imperative avenues throughout the region connecting the villages, towns and regions dated back many centuries.⁽²⁾ Though, the different regions which emerged in Nigeria on the eve of the independence had been known for certain agricultural produces. In the words of Hopkins,⁽³⁾ it is ... something of a common place to point out that the conventional 'subsistence economy' in which each household produced its own requirements, had little application in pre-colonial West Africa. More so, the disparity in the vegetation zone necessitated dependency of one zone on the other. That is why Ayittey⁽⁴⁾ contended that market was inevitable even if self-sufficiency was assumed to be strictly operative. 'That is, it was physically impossible for a homestead to produce all its needs on the farm. By necessity, a surplus over its needs was required to exchange for what it could not produce....' Hence, the appearance of marketable surpluses and the development of exchange led to trade relations among the indigenous Nigerian society. Exchange of goods in a local scale and internal exchange between different parts of Nigerian communities then

became characteristic features of the economy. Meanwhile, the theory of comparative cost advantage appeared germane in looking at the agricultural produces peculiar to each of the Nigerian regions. Since it is practically impossible for each region to produce all its agricultural products, and as with the dictate of comparative cost advantage theory; diverse physical endowments trigger the possibility of profitable trade, hence, people usually find it profitable to trade in things they possess in large quantities. This is borne out of the fact that it is not possible for individual to provide all their consumption requirements, they find it profitable to engage in the activities for which they are best suited or have comparative advantage in terms of natural abilities or resource endowments.⁽⁵⁾ It is important to note that, although each region was more or less autonomous prior to British colonial administration, they had contact with each other throughout this period due to developed economic and trade relationship. Howbeit, with formal colonial administration after the revocation of the Royal Niger Company Charter, the regions were administered under protectorates and finally the amalgamation in 1914 which brought all the regions under a single geographical entity known as Nigeria with political and economic integration. Meanwhile, the pre-colonial relationship which existed between the Northern Nigeria and other parts of Nigeria especially the Western parts of Nigeria, precisely, the Yoruba territory in the coastal forest belt was as a result of the Jihad of the 1804 which was carried out by Uthman Dan Fodio to purify Islam. He condemned and criticised the governing elites who were nominally Muslims; condoned polytheism, illegal taxation, enslavement of other Muslims and infidel ceremonial and other social practices.⁽⁶⁾ The Jihad resulted in Sokoto Caliphate, which survived into the colonial era. With the retirement of Uthman Dan Fodio from active political life, his brother Abdullahi and son, Bello Muhammed, who subsequently took over the rein of governance intensified the revolution further which eventually led to the invasion of Ilorin, Oyo empire's northern province; thereby pushing Islam further into the Yoruba territory. This is an indication of the interaction that existed between Northern Nigeria and the Western Nigeria; even though it was compelled by desire to forcefully purify the religion of Islam by the jihadists. The relationship among the pre-colonial Nigerian society was corroborated by Yusuf Bala Usman thus; African states before the advent of colonial rule interacted with one another across time and place. He asserted that in pre-colonial times, the people of Nigerian geographical area were not strange bedfellows. According to him, the geography of the North like the South facilitated the movement of people and commodities exchange from one region to another.⁽⁷⁾ Hence, the 1914 Amalgamation further enhanced the commercial links through the export and import of Northern Nigeria through Western Nigeria Ports. As earlier mentioned, the different regions which eventually became Nigeria at independence had peculiar agricultural produce associated with them. The Northern Nigeria had Groundnut, Cocoa in the Western Nigeria while the Eastern Nigeria had Palm Oil.

II. Economic re-adjustment mechanism and Hausa tomatoes produce merchants' contribution to petty trading activities.

The discovery of crude oil launched Nigeria into an era of great wealth. The accruing wealth from oil made the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon in 1973 said that Nigeria problem was not money but how to spend it. Perhaps, the reason why oil money was wasted on jamboree Festac 77 during General Olusegun Obasanjo administration. Although, a year before the Festac Jamboree, while responding to political and overheated economy, he pointed out that petroleum revenue was not a cure-all, that, though Nigeria had great potential, she was not yet a rich nation...Our resources from oil are not enough to satisfy the yearnings, aspirations and genuine needs of our people, development and social services."⁽⁸⁾ Despite this assertion, he was still not economical in expending the oil money on the Festac Jamboree in 1977.

However, his assertion might appear prophetic or from his vantage position as the Head of State, which gave him insight into the implication of Nigeria economy depending solely on oil product for revenue generation. This is borne out of the fact, that, unfortunately, the oil discovery with the concomitant wealth became more or less a disadvantage to the Nigerian economy as the accruing wealth was mismanaged by the Nigerian leaders; both the civilian administration and the military regime.

Oil revenues increased average material welfare, widened employment opportunities and increased policy option. But...also altered incentives, raised expectations, distorted and destabilized no oil output, frequently agriculture.⁽⁹⁾ This statement is apt of the Nigeria situation. Being awashed with oil money, Nigeria neglected agricultural sector and Nigerians who have access to the state fund developed taste for exotic goods. The effect of the mismanaged wealth by the successive administrations plunged the Nigerian economy into one that impoverished the citizenry to the extent that the means of livelihood becomes a mirage. The various experimental economic policies at the instance of the West by the various Nigerian governments and their Nigerian collaborators in government further subjected the citizenry to abject poverty. For example, Yusuf Bala Usman in his contribution to the debate on Nigeria development crisis with respect to the loan from International Monetary Fund during Ibrahim Babaganda regime condemned that: the “superficial” origins of the economic crisis- unemployment...lack of financial discipline and foreign domination of the economy was a manifestation of the age-old exploitative relationship between the capitalist world and Nigeria.⁽¹⁰⁾ The thesis of Bala’s condemnation is that Nigeria economy and future have been in the hands of Western powers represented by multinational corporations and their local collaborators. This invariably muzzled the economic and technological advancement of the nation. Other experimental economic policies adopted by the Nigerian government included Structural Adjustment Programme which engendered the collapse of many local industries as they could not compete favourably with the multinational countries, especially those who had to import their raw materials for production. The multiplier implication was the loss of job for Nigerian citizens working in those companies. Furthermore, the recent removal of petroleum subsidy further impoverished majority of Nigerians while income distribution and income inequality with its concomitant multifaceted effects on the standard of living in Nigeria further triggered cumulative national paucity. More so, the escalating inflation rate has equally diminished the purchasing power of the earned income which heightens the magnitude of poverty among the people. The resultant relative poverty within the society has resulted in looking elsewhere for additional income. As the case become survival of the fittest, Nigerians resort to economic self help adjustment mechanism by engaging in small scale and petty trading activities. Hence, the Hausa merchants become important to resort to for their produce. Virtually, everyone engaged in petty selling of Tomatoes, Pepper, Onions, Rice, Beans, and some other items in the markets get their supply from the Hausa merchants. Farmers from northern Nigeria are the bulk producers of food stuff. Rice, Tomatoes, Pepper, Wheat, Cucumber, Groundnut, Cabbage, Carrot, Maize, Onions are brought from Northern Nigeria to Western Nigeria. One unique agricultural practices of the northern Nigeria farmers is the irrigation farming system which made some agricultural products available in the off season periods. These agricultural produces become sources of petty trading opportunities for both men and women. The mode of selling is such that as soon as the Hausa product merchants arrived from northern Nigeria into the southern Nigeria markets, the intermediaries who are basically non-Hausas take over the sale of the products. An interesting thing about this arrangement is that the non-Hausa intermediaries take complete control of the marketing of the products, decide the profitable prices which could afford them their own commission. The issue of intermediaries cut across most of the agricultural produces brought from Northern Nigeria. A particular agricultural produce that have highest percentage of generated petty trading activities as a means of livelihood are Tomatoes and Pepper. During Tomatoes and Pepper season as seen in the picture below; a basket of Tomatoes could be sold for N40, 000. Once few buyers are satisfied with the Tomatoes and choose a basket, the next thing is to get “sharer” who keeps announcing and asking for people to join to share in order to spread the price of the Tomatoes basket on several buyers. With this, several buyers thus pulled resources together to buy a basket of Tomatoes which is shared according to the amount of money contributed. In the process, as low as, N500, N1000, N2000 depending on the financial capacity and quantity needed are shared. This system avails petty traders the opportunity to share Tomatoes for retailing. This same method applies to Pepper where a Bag is jointly bought and shared according to the need and financial capabilities of the buyers.



Fig. 1. Baskets of supplied tomatoes in the market

This habit features mainly among both males and females, house wives both young and old and the aged. Elderly women above sixty years are not left out in the trade. For instance, the woman below could be seen joyfully and excitedly displaying the tomatoes and pepper even though in small quantities. It is an indication of the Tomatoes and pepper her finance could share for resale.



Fig. 2. An old woman excitedly displaying her tomatoes for sale in the market

One good thing about the opportunity for the aged women involvement in the petty trading made available through the affordability of Tomatoes their financial capability could share for resale is that; it made them more active than their peers who sit down at home without engaging in any activities. The interaction with both old and young makes them more active and could have positive multiplier effects on their health.

Another dimension, by which the supply of tomatoes and peppers by Hausa agricultural produce merchants from northern engender further petty business opportunity; is the combination of grinding machine with the sale of Tomatoes and other ingredients. This marketing strategy as displayed by the man in the picture below; has the potential to enhance high patronage and boost his financial stand. Those who combined selling of tomatoes and peppers with grinding have double economic advantages with the combination. The strategy equally makes it easier for customers to buy their ingredients and have them ground in one place. This safes time and energy dissipated roaming around the market looking for grinding machines. In Nigeria where electricity supply has remained epileptic, customers with grinding blenders at home always take advantage of this opportunity since there is no guarantee that there would be electricity to power their blenders when they get back home. More so, these grinding machines are most times powered by Petrol and Diesel.



Fig. 3. A male Tomatoes seller that combines grinding machine with the business

In the South Western part of Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba speaking people, there is what is called *Alabaru* (Human carrier) as depicted by the woman carrying tomatoes on her head in the picture below. This is another economic activity engendered by the tomatoes and pepper supply from Northern Nigeria. It is mostly carried out by women. Their mode of operation is hanging around shearers and people buying tomatoes and pepper in order to help convey to Motor Park for agreed price. This activity appears to be the preserve of females. Although there is no strict condition excluding males, however, but females feature prominently in it.



Fig. 4. A woman head carrier called *Alabaru* in Yoruba language

Unemployment and under-employment pervade the Nigerian society. The multiplier effects of this on the society and individual economic status is that people have indirectly been turned to beggars; and equally failing in their responsibilities at the home front while those in self-employments are badly affected with respect to patronage. Pensioners are deprived their entitlements, especially fathers who are the head of the families, thus

making it difficult to fulfil their obligations over their families. The situation in Nigeria is that parents above 60 years of age still struggle daily to cater for their children who are either unemployed or under-employed. The economic situation in the country has made shouldering home responsibilities solely by man as the head of the family practically impossible. Hence, despite the limited economic opportunity and domestic economic rungs, women still remained burdened with the responsibility for family's food and basic home needs. The petty economic opportunities made available by tomatoes business provide a lee-way for re-adjustment to strait financial status of several women and household in South West Nigeria.

III. Conclusion

The economic situation in Nigeria has made it difficult to depend solely on the head of the families to provide all the needs of their homes. The economic reality has eroded the era of a single mean of livelihood for the family. The high inflation rate has gradually reduced the purchasing power of the people. Meanwhile, women who hold fort at the home fronts are most hard hit by the financial strait at homes. Hence, most of them had to re-adjust to alternative means of generating additional income to supplement what is needed in the family. In this wise, resort is made to buying tomatoes at small quantities for resale, while some provide services such as humane carriers and others as shearers. The efforts of the Hausa tomatoes suppliers have indirectly provided petty business opportunities, though it appears insignificant unnoticed by the government. The multiplier effect of their presence is that anywhere they assemble develops into another market place. It always have a pulling effects, people start congregating around such places which eventually metamorphose into traditional market places for further marketing activities and business opportunities. In their little way, the tomatoes produce farmers have contributed greatly to generating petty business opportunities which has gone a long way in enhancing economic status of most women who hitherto depended on the husbands to provide all their needs or whose means of livelihood could not solely meet their financial obligations.

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