

## MAPUTO Declaration on agriculture: Is Nigeria measuring up?

Written by FEPSAN

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 15:03 -

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At Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, leaders of African countries in one of their ordinary sessions, made several declarations on many of the challenges that threaten the existence of the continent. On agriculture, they made a commitment in a document “Assembly/AU/Decl.7 (II),” which many experts consider laudable in revitalizing the agricultural sector. Part of the document reads: “We, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), assembled in Maputo at the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly, 10 to 12 July, 2003; Convinced of the need to address the root causes of agricultural crisis in Africa, aggravated in particular by inadequate funding, the lack of adequate water control and management, poor rural infrastructure and neglect of agricultural research, as well as the threat of HIV/AIDS, resolve to: implement as a matter of urgency, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and flagship evolving action plans for agricultural development, at the national, regional and continental levels. To this end, we agree to adopt sound policies for agricultural and rural development, and commit ourselves to allocating at least 10% of national budgetary resources for their implementation within five years.” Ten years down the line, Nigeria has somersaulted in that most-important sector of the economy. The budgetary allocation in 2008 was indeed a laudable respect for the Maputo Declaration. That step however, was thwarted by the current government revising the little progress made in terms of budgetary allocation. In this year’s budget, about N83 billion was allocated to the sector. This figure represents only a negligible 1.7% of a budget of about N4 trillion! The question is: will the current Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) succeed with 1.7% budget allocation? Considering the souring unemployment figure in Nigeria, that sector is the only sector of the economy that can absorb the millions of hungry-looking graduates roaming our streets everyday with large envelopes of credentials looking for jobs, when a sector that could call their attention is allocated meagre resources. Government has always paid lip service to the development of agriculture in the country. There is lack of commitment and lot of rhetoric and propaganda about the importance of agriculture, but when it comes to where the resources are to be allocated, very little is accorded the sector. The 10% guideline stems from a commitment made by African countries, which Nigeria is signatory to, to increase public investment in agriculture by a minimum of 10% of their national budgets and to raise agricultural productivity by at least 6%. In the last two years, the agriculture sector remained among the lowest ranked sectors in the national budget. The sector did not receive more than 2% allocation of the country’s resources. This kind of resources makes it extremely difficult for anybody, no matter how good, to make any meaningful impact in the sector. Senator Abdullahi Adamu (Nasarawa State) commenting on the 2013 budget allocation to agriculture recently, said “there is a limit to what anyone can do no matter how good he is with this kind of meagre resources.” It is due to this lack of total commitment to the Maputo declaration on agriculture by this government that some civil society groups consider the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) a mirage. The civil society Coalition For Poverty Eradication (CISCOPE) expressed their concern in the following words: “The inconsistency of the budgetary allocation is an issue; Nigeria was able to surpass the 10% minimum benchmark in 2008, as the sector got 12% of the budget allocation; since then it has always gone below 2%! Concern is rife at different fora by

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stakeholders on this imbalance and lip service approach towards the development of the sector.” The programme coordinator of the group, Peter Michael Egwudah stressed that, “agriculture still remains the largest sector of the Nigerian economy accounting for 40.2% of the GDP as against 15.8% for oil and gas; and employs 2/3 of the entire labour force.” Egwudah believes that over the past 20 years, value added per capita in agriculture has risen by less than 1% annually. It is estimated that Nigeria has lost 10 billion US dollars annual export opportunity from groundnut, palm oil, cocoa and cotton alone due to continuous decline in their production. Many organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), African Development Bank, including the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development warn that food crop production in Nigeria has not being in consonance with the rate of population growth, which is largely responsible for the staggering figures about food import every year. The fact is that the statistics are growing by the day.

For Nigeria to develop and attain sufficient growth in the agric sector, the country must commit a minimum of 10% of her annual budgetary allocation, which was agreed on by the African leaders at the Mozambican capital, Maputo, to continuously for at least six years align it with our population growth, which is likely to be 200 million by 2020.

The Federal Government’s effort towards the transformation of the sector as highlighted succinctly in the current Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) cannot be sustained by the meagre 1.7% budget allocation. Seeking funding from the World Bank assistance, African Development Bank and other donor agencies will not yield any positive result as well. The Federal Government must read the writing clearly on the wall concerning unemployment, food shortages, and the dwindling oil prices at the international markets. It is time to begin to develop the agric sector to ease the other over-stretched sectors of the economy. The sector, if given adequate attention and allocation of resources, has the potential to generate billions of naira as revenue from exports, and create employment opportunities for millions of farmers in the country and attract direct foreign investments.

If African leaders fail to take a critical look at the Maputo Declaration with the view to implementing the recommendations, we may be heading to a future where food security will be unrealizable and food crisis will do more damage to our existence than what the HIV/AIDS pandemic has done already to us in the country and Africa at large. It is time to implement the Maputo Declaration on agriculture.

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