
The Role of Think Tanks in Nigeria Agricultural Policy Processes from 1999 to 2020

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Abstract: Nigeria government have enacted and implemented several policies in the agricultural sector since the inception of the present democratic dispensation that stated in 1999. Some of these policies' objectives were never achieved, due to the non-inclusion of all stakeholders in the policies processes. It is on the above background that this study examined the roles of Think Tanks in the agricultural policy processes in Nigeria from 1999–2000. In examining these roles, the study relied on secondary method of data collection. It conceptualized its major terms which are policy process and Think Tanks. It also analysed the roles played by Think Tanks in the various stages of the agricultural policy processes. The study discovered that Think Tanks have been involved in the agricultural policy processes in Nigeria, but on a small-scale and at times their advices are not properly implemented by government officials; they are also poorly funded and supported by government, thus failures of some of the policies. Think Tanks' little involvement in the agricultural policy processes have resulted in new innovations in agriculture and contributed to the success stories of some of the policies in Nigeria. The study thus, recommended that government should as a matter of priority fund and support Think Tanks to come out with viable researches to proffer solid solutions to agricultural related problems.

Keywords: Think Tanks, Policy Process, Agriculture, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Policies are enacted in order to outline the activities to engage in resolving a particular issue. For a policy to be enacted it has to go through various stages or processes which is referred to as the policy process. For a policy to be successful the different stakeholders like think tanks, etc have to be fully involved at the various stages of the policy process. Over the years the Nigeria government has enacted various policies in all sectors of the economy ranging from health, education, agriculture, among others to better the lot of its teeming population.

Since the present democratic dispensation which started in 1999, after a long period of military rule, Nigeria government have enacted and implemented several policies in the agricultural sector. Some of these policies' objectives were never achieved, while others were achieved. In some of these

policy processes; involvement and adherence to the researched-based advices of Think Tanks contributed to the successes stories. It is on the above background that this study examined the roles of Think Tanks in the agricultural policy processes in Nigeria from 1999–2000. To achieve this, the study conceptualized its major terms which are policy process and Think Tanks. It also analyzed the roles played by Think Tanks in the various stages of agricultural policy processes. The study relied on secondary method of data collection.

Think Tanks' roles in policy processes have been studied and analysed by several scholars over the years. In a 2012 BEPA study, Missiroli and Ioannides argued that think tanks are fostering the development of a common European public sphere as 'they shape both expectations and perceptions regarding policies, with increasing access to old and new media at national, continental and international level' [1].

In examining the role of Think Tanks in developing

countries, Lodge and Paxton opined that Think tanks in developing countries like Nigeria can make an important contribution to driving forward politically savvy reforms upon which effective development depends. Think tanks, which are embedded in their local politics and which exercise a degree of legitimacy outsiders lack, are well placed to influence change [2].

In a 2017 online article, Fashua described a Think Tank as “a critical enabler to economic growth and development with its relevance cutting across the policy process” [3]. Its role in Nigeria agricultural policy processes cannot be over emphasized especially as a developing nation with a rapidly increasing population where agriculture plays a vital role in the economy, not only because of its position as the bedrock of the economy, but also due to its resources needed for agro industries to run. Think tanks assists in ascertaining and finding out varying inputs, adopted technologies tools, techniques in addition to newest ways to combating issues relating to pests and diseases as well as coming up with pest, disease and drought resistant crops in addition to new techniques in biotechnology derived from agricultural products. Thus to attain a state of sustainable agriculture is to utilize the role of Think Tanks and their results as a source of information and regulation needed to formulate a policy [3].

In a paper presentation at the National Horticultural Research Institute in 2012, Olufolaji asserts that Think Tanks in Agricultural sector of Nigeria economy provides information for policy makers and funding agencies and that they provide transfer of research-induced technology to farmers which is the only way to measure research benefits to society. Think tanks’ impact study also provides feedback to scientists on which technologies or technology components are successful at farm levels [4].

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Policy Process

Policy process refers to the different activities, interactions, methods and stages that are involved in producing a policy, that is implemented and impact on the lives of the people [5]. It means how policies are formed, right from when a problem affecting the generality of the citizens is identified to when ideas or actions of ameliorating the problem are adopted and implemented to evaluation of such adopted actions. In other words, policy process is the diverse stages of forming a policy from identification of a problem, to formulation of policy, policy implementation to evaluation of the policy. It explains the intended actions to be undertaken to achieve the aim of a policy.

The policy process involves different actors and stakeholders from government officials, to corporations, private individuals, politicians, and experts in different fields, Think Tanks, among others. These actors play different roles in the policy process; they interact, disagree and agree on issues, each bringing to the fore their own views of particular issues. The policy process is a rigorous and complex process with various intricacies and tussles to arrive at the final policy.

2.2. Think Tank

A Think Tank also referred to as a policy institute is a research body that undertakes researches and advocacies on issues that affect social, economic and political environment. Most Think Tanks are non-profit organisations, which are tax-exempted. Some Think Tanks are financed by governments, activist groups, or corporations; they get funds from rendering consulting services or research works that are related to their projects. Think-tanks are also funded by donations and grants [6]. Think Tanks are mostly experts in their various fields and provide advice and ideas on specific social, political or economic problems.

Think Tanks assemble expertise and provide evidence-based ideas through rigorous and in-depth research on a particular issue they are dealing with. They create innovative change and build networks and interactive population with common interests through which they spread their ideas resulting in positive actions. Some Think Tanks that are supported and funded by government tend to have the legitimacy to intervene in government activities with their knowledge and advice in policy processes.

The present global, national and local fast-paced transformations, complexities of public sector and intertwined challenges create avenues for Think Tanks to engage in innovative, vigorous, and practical policy solutions on concrete issues. Think Tanks make public their evidence-based findings in form of published articles and studies, they also contribute in drafting legislation on policy matters, which are utilized by governments, and organizations or other interest groups as part of their objective [7].

Think Tanks are associated with academic or intellectual activities, they could also be explicitly ideological while advocating for a particular policy using different types of research methods to get their findings or perceived solutions to policy problems [8]. Think Tanks are a body of individuals who engage in communications between governments and their citizens and create environment for governments, research, civil society and media organizations where ideas are shared and tested, plans are deliberated, and future actions are developed. They are characterized by careful evaluation and judgement of events to proffer policy solutions that enables national growth and development which are the relevance of policy formation and implementation.

3. Nigeria Agricultural Policies from 1999-2020

Nigeria Agricultural policy is a statement of activities and an essential instrument used in accomplishing agricultural development in Nigeria. Successive governments in Nigeria from 1999 till date have enacted and implemented several agricultural policies to develop and transform the agricultural sector for food sufficiency and sustainability and to improve the lives of its citizens. This has been eminent because agriculture plays a fundamental role in the nation’s economy because about 70% of the nation’s population is employed in

the agricultural sector. The Central Bank of Nigeria in 2011, asserts that Nigeria's Agriculture Sector has enormous potential, with an opportunity to grow output by 160% from USD99 billion in 2011 to USD256 billion by 2030 [9]. The Nigeria agricultural policy is a framework that explains the

actions government and individuals will engage in developing the agricultural sector of the country. The table below shows agricultural policies formed in Nigeria in the new democratic dispensation from 1999-2020.

Table 1. Nigeria Agricultural Policies 1999-2020.

Policies	Years	Objectives
National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	1999-2001	Eradication of poverty, wealth creation, increase employment and reorientation of values.
National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS)	2002-2003	Increased food production and elimination of rural poverty.
Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP)	2003-2007	Increased food production and resolving rural development problems
7-point Agenda; include Agriculture Production and Food Security	2007-2010	Development of modern technology, research funding, revolutionization of the agricultural sector leading to increase in yield and production.
Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA)	2011-2015	Transformation of agricultural sector by promoting agribusiness, attracts private sector investment in agriculture, improve agricultural productions and create food security.
Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP).	2016-2020	Food security, job creation, substitution of imported agri-machines and economic diversification.

Source: Authors' Research 2020.

3.1. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy was launched in 1999 by the new civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo to correct the negative impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on the economic growth and development of Nigeria. NEEDS initiated several programmes to achieve its objectives of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty alleviation and re-orientation of values; which included privatization, public sector reform, transparency, good governance, liberalization and anti-corruption services delivered by government agencies.

NEEDS aimed at providing the rural poor with easy access to low-interest rate credits, agriculture extension services, and local participation in decision making. NEEDS also aimed at more local participation and resources in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and reduction in importation of goods and services which can be provided locally; avoidance of waste of resources, inefficiency and increase infrastructural and social service investment. In terms of framework and definition; NEEDS' policy was good, but its major challenges that led to its failure was its non-involvement of technocrats and research-based evaluations of the problem on ground and best ways to tackle these problems which are the inputs of Think Tanks.

3.2. National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS)

The National Special Programme on Food Security was launched by the Olusegun Obasanjo democratic administration in 2002 resulting from Nigeria's participation in the world Food Summit of 1996; as an agriculture development programme to improve food production in rural areas and increase their income thereby eliminating rural poverty. NSPFS' mandate was to help farmers improve their

mode of production and storage, leading to increase output and income, supporting research and agriculture scientists in providing new technologies and up-to-date farming practices.

The key approach of NSPFS was to assist small farming communities by providing soft loans, agricultural inputs and technical support services in order to increase their farm outputs and finance on the long run. NSPFS' targeted crops and livestock for improvement are yam, cocoyam, rice, cassava, leafy vegetables, goats, poultry, sheep and swine production [10-11]. The participating farmers are grouped for easy coordination and management. The five programme components of NSPFS are food security, soil fertility initiatives, marketing of agricultural commodities and food security, animal diseases and trans-boundary pest control and agricultural and inland fisheries.

3.3. The Root and Tuber Expansion Program (RTEP)

The Root and Tuber Expansion Programme was developed by a Think Tank (Food and Agricultural organization) in collaboration with the Nigeria government at the conclusion of the success of cassava multiplication project [12]. The main force of RTEP was to organize gains made through cassava multiplication programme in order to increase the nation's food security and finances for local farmers.

The goal of RTEP is to provide a better standard of living, finance and sustainable food security for the local farmer and the nation in general through improvement in RTEP crops' production and better method of processing these crops to ease marketing of agricultural produces. The RTEP Programme's Implementation Manual, stated that the program focused on easily operated and new low-cost technologies on how to improve in terms of production, processing, storage and marketing of root and tuber crops such as yam, cassava, cocoyam varieties, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, melon etc. The main interest group of RTEP is about 5.2 million local farmers with not more than 3 hectares of land held by a household in Nigeria, which transform to about 200,000 local farmers from a participating state [13].

3.4. Seven-Point-Agenda

The Seven-Point-Agenda was launched by the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Aduain 2007; it was the administration's own policy of revamping the nation's economy. The 'seven-point-agenda' targeted major sectors of the economy which included agriculture in terms of food security. The main aim of the food security aspect of the seven-point-agenda was the development of new innovations in technology, support and finance researches; improve agriculture production and storage, which will eventually lead to food security, sufficiency and sustainability in the country [14].

The enthusiasm to accomplish food security and national development as advocated in the seven-point-agenda of the administration makes the support of agricultural production, processing, storage, marketing, research and development crucial. The government stated that the successful implementation of the food-security agenda will ultimately improve the living standard of majority of the population and contribute to increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3.5. Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA)

The Agricultural Transformation Agenda was launched by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2011. It was based on the principle of seeing agriculture as a business, thus driving the economy through agriculture, by making agriculture more competitive, efficient and productive through partnership between government and private investors. Its main aim was to transform the agricultural sector and make it attractive to private investors, thereby diversifying the economy to increase foreign exchange earnings; improve agricultural production and create food security and food sustainability to curb hunger in the country and generate employment. The local farmers were to be empowered to a market oriented/market surplus level to facilitate trade and competitiveness. Priority agricultural commodities that ATA focused on were cassava, rice, cocoa, cotton, sorghum, maize, poultry, beef dairy, leather, oil palm, fisheries and agricultural extension. This was achieved through value chain of the commodities, which were the massive production of these commodities to a shift the demand to these locally produced commodities from imported ones.

The Agricultural Transformation Agenda sought to change the people to a channel for growth and national development [15]. Under the ATA, government was expected to direct the populace to create an industrialized new state that will lead the nation into the first 20 economies of the world by the year 2020 [16].

3.6. Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP)

Agricultural Promotion Policy is the current agricultural policy of the Buhari administration which was launched in 2016. The policy also referred to as 'The Green Alternative' was initiated to correct the errors in the ATA, thus building

on the successes of ATA. The aims of APP were to achieve food security, job creation, diversity the economy and import substitution [17].

APP was built on eleven guiding principles which are;

- a) Viewing agriculture as business
- b) Viewing agriculture as a means to a durable economic growth and security
- c) Ensuring government perform its social responsibility by viewing food as a human right
- d) Promote enterprise development through stages commodities value chains.
- e) Prioritizing improved agricultural production to boost domestic and export markets
- f) Ensuring market-oriented agricultural productions.
- g) Ensuring utilization of natural resources to check climate change and ensure environmental sustainability.
- h) Encourage inclusiveness and participation of all stakeholders
- i) Upholding policy integrity by ensuring accountability and transparency
- j) Encouraging nutrition sensitive agriculture by addressing issues relating to malnutrition and hunger manifestation
- k) Creating a relationship inform of linkage between agriculture and other sectors like power, energy works etc.

The policy also emphasized on the government concentration on providing the enabling environment for stakeholders to play their distinctive roles.

4. Think Tanks' Role in Nigeria Agricultural Policy Processes

Since Think tank's role in policy processes is vital, their roles in agricultural policy processes in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized, because agriculture is a major driver of Nigeria's economy. Agriculture as the bedrock of Nigeria's economy employs a large part of its total population and contributes immensely to the country's socioeconomic growth and development.

Think Tanks play a fundamental role in agricultural policy process by providing information on inputs, technologies, innovations in pest and disease control, techniques in biotechnology which are by-products of agriculture, crops that are resistant to pest, diseases and drought and other viable solutions to agricultural related problems in the country like herders/farmers clash, climate change, cattle rustling, migration, etc.

There are several agricultural-based Think Tanks in Nigeria which include but not limited to International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN), among others.

Policy process is basically made up of approximately six stages and Think Tanks can be incorporated into all stages.

The roles Think Tanks play in the different stages of the agricultural policy processes in Nigeria are analysed below:

4.1. Agenda Setting Stage

This is the first and crucial stage where new issues that affect the citizens or deficiencies of previous policies that may require government actions are identified. It entails compiling a list of important issues to be given priority attention. Think Tanks can provide new scientific results that can be the foundation for forming new policies. In addition, Think Tanks create public awareness through their publications and advocacy of issues and utilize foresight scanning of events as they unfold to identify emerging issues of policy-relevance. They identify case study, stakeholders, weaknesses of past policies and gaps in these policies.

Think Tanks can undertake a foresight study of the increasing rate of food prices, increase in rate of rural-urban migration, which will require a policy of no-interest rate of farmers' loans or a policy of aggressive development of the rural areas by government or a policy of provision of free farm lands and tools to farmers to attract youths into farming.

Think Tanks understudied the decrease in professional agricultural scientists in Nigeria to boost the training of agricultural extension workers to sensitize and re-orientate the local farmers on how to improve their farm produces, they thereafter advised the government on establishing agricultural based institutions mainly to produce professional agricultural scientists leading to the establishments of various Universities of Agriculture that offer BSc, and development of these institutions to offer MSC and PhD programmes in agricultural science after accreditation by the National Universities Commission.

The Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG) was involved in the advocacy for involvement of private sector in the government agricultural activities to make agriculture business-like in the policy process of Agricultural Transformation Agenda. Also during the Yar'Adua Seven Point Agenda, Think Tanks such as the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) among others, advocated for support and funding for most agricultural scientists and extension services providers to be able to reside in the rural areas where poor farmers dwell and to develop the rural areas, but this has not been fully implemented in all the policies from 1999 till date.

4.2. Formulation Stage

This stage describes the structure of the policy. It sets goals for action, the creation of specific plans and proposals to achieve the goals and selection of the means to implement the proposals. Think Tanks are incorporated in this stage through impact assessments, they provide expertise advice on the best means to implement the proposals and also undertake comprehensive assessment of the effect of the proposed policy by studying multiple strategies for optimum policy.

It was the advice of Think Tanks such as the International

Development Research Centre (IDRC), Community Allied Farmers Association of Nigeria (COMAFAS) and others that made the federal government to aim at providing the rural poor with access to low-interest rate credit to boost agricultural production and eradicate rural poverty during the formation of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS) policies. In the agricultural policy process, Think Tanks can advise governments on arriving at a decision whether tax-breaks can be offered to farmers and manufacturers of food items, or provide farm tools and subsidies fertilizers for farmers.

4.3. Adoption Stage

A policy is taken-on once the appropriate governmental, legislative or referendum voting approval is granted. At this stage of the policy process the approving body of a policy consults Think Tanks as external advisers separate from those that drafted the policy, to offer advice within the decision-making process before adopting a policy. A nation-wide policy to increase grazing routes for herders can be formed but the policy approval body will seek the concrete advice of Think Tanks on the formed policy before implementing the said policy. The success of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda could be attributed to the advice of Think Tanks like Nigeria Agribusinesses Group (NABG) to the approval body of the policy to transform agricultural sector by promoting agribusinesses.

4.4. Implementation Stage

This is where the policy document becomes a reality, where actions are taken. It is the execution of the law that has been passed. This is the stage where inputs inform of information, finance, human and material resources are converted into outputs of goods and services. Think Tanks' advice can provide detailed and calculated means by which the adopted policy can be successfully implemented. The advice and advocacy of the National Root Crops Research Institute and other Think Tanks provided methodological guidance to the advisory body and bureaucracy of the Obasanjo's Administration to execute the Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) of 2003-2007.

Think Tanks are involved in implementing the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) while building on the principle of encouraging inclusiveness and participation of all stakeholders and viewing agriculture as a means to a durable economic growth and security, by disseminating knowledge and providing advises to farmers across the country in the N-Power Agro programme established by the Buhari Administration.

4.5. Evaluation Stage

This stage involves all the procedures and institutions associated with assessing the impact of the implementation of a policy and communicating this information to the implementing body and the general public. Think Tanks can

evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of policies to know how the public perceive such policies and if the implementation is yielding the intended results. This can be done independently or in collaboration with the bureaucracy and other executors of these policies. Think Tanks ask citizens how a particular policy is affecting them, through survey research to know the positive and negative impact of such policy and establish the true situation without bias. Think Tanks such as the National Institute of Strategic Studies among others evaluated the policy of closing the Nigeria border to support home grown crops and improve food sustenance, by the Buhari Administration in 2019 as building on the principle of prioritizing improved agricultural production to boost domestic and export market of the Agricultural Promotion Policy.

4.6. Support/Maintenance Stage

This stage deals with how a policy might be improved upon, or provides more support for its continuation. Also a policy can be terminated if considered redundant, ineffective or its aims accomplished. Policy continuance entails Think Tanks' advice on an ad-hoc basis. Think Tanks provide updated feedbacks to policy implementers to maintain and improve policies. Think Tanks can help the policy making body to decide whether a successful policy should still be continued? It was the advices of some Think Tanks such as National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies and others that led the Buhari administration to launch the APP which built on the success of the ATA and to continue the closure of the Nigeria border against importers of food items even after noticing great improvement in agricultural produces in the country.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above analysis, the study found that Think Tanks do play fundamental roles in agricultural policy processes in Nigeria; they offer a supportive role to the policy process and present the current state of scientific knowledge. Think Tanks have been involved in the agricultural policy processes over the years, but on a small scale and at times their advocacies and advices are not properly implemented by government agents due to bureaucratic red-tapism; they have not received the adequate support and funds from government, thus failures of some of the policies. Think Tanks' little involvement in the agricultural policy processes have resulted in new innovations in agriculture, such as agricultural-based-technology like biotechnology leading to development of biogas and biofuel. Their inputs have contributed to improved agricultural production, storage, marketing and enhanced living standard of the populace as well as improved Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation, which is in agreement with Olufolaji's 2012 presentation and Fashua online article of 2017 stating that Think Tanks in Agricultural sector of Nigeria economy provides information for policy makers and funding agencies and that they provide transfer of research-induced technology

to farmers which is the only way to measure research benefits to society. Think tanks also assists in ascertaining and finding out varying inputs, adopted technologies tools, techniques in addition to newest ways to combating issues relating to pests and diseases as well as coming up with pest, disease and drought resistant crops in addition to new techniques in biotechnology derived from agricultural products, respectively.

New agricultural policies are formed as a result of weaknesses of previous policies due to the fact that some stages of the policies' processes were executed without the appropriate consultation and inputs of Think Tanks and other stakeholders. In conforming to this, [18] observed that rural farmers are particularly unable to access microcredits to improve their yields. In the same vein, [19] noted that most agricultural policies in Nigeria have failed due to lack of continuity and enthusiasm to be recognized with a named policy intervention of successive government has been the motive behind most policies formation and not the much desired rural and agricultural development and transformation to guarantee food self-sufficiency. These can be traced to poor involvement, support and funding of Think Tanks and other stakeholders (who must have critically evaluated the actual situation on ground) in agricultural policy processes in Nigeria.

Government's lack of support, funding for Think Tanks and opportunity to participate fully and contribute their knowledge in agricultural policy processes have greatly hampered the successes of these agricultural policies in Nigeria.

The study thus, recommends that government should as a matter of priority fund and support Think Tanks to come out with viable researches to proffer solid solutions to agricultural related problems. Their advices and advocacies should be considered by governments because most of these are products of indepth and empirical analysis of situations, which are presented without bias.

Without Think Tanks some stages of the policy process will be difficult to accomplish. As a developing country, Nigeria will greatly benefit from the inputs of Think Tanks in the agricultural sector that is a major enabler of national growth and development, because Think Tanks are in a position to strengthen the policy process's structure through expert advice and assistance to transform the agricultural sector as other developing nations like Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Ethiopia etc. have done.

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