Introduction

Nigeria is a country with a population of over 160 million people. The nation is undergoing security and environmental challenges that is unprecedented in the history of the country. This has been a source of worry both among the citizens and the international community. The international community is worried because of the position occupied by the country among the comity of nations. According to Isaac (2004), Nigeria is going through a period of unprecedented security challenges. However, this seems to be degenerating by the day in view of daily occurrences of crime in different parts of the country. The extent and geographical spread of this problem was graphically illustrated by the General Officer Commanding the Second Mechanized Division, Ibadan, Major-General Muhammad Abubakar, in Osogbo on 6th August 2012 during the launch of a new security outfit for the state, Swift Action Squad (SAS). He observed that the military directly support the police in security operations in the 32 states of the federation and the FCT.

This is a worrisome situation in the quest for Nigeria’s resolve to reposition itself as one of the economic giants of the world. This is further aggravated by the debilitating effect of the worsening environmental problem facing the country. These have had an untold effect on the economic well being of the country. All these combined made realization of the goals of the transformation agenda of the government look bleak and unachievable.

Some of the security challenges being experienced by the country are communal violence, Political Assassination, Electoral violence, Youth militancy in the Niger Delta, Oil theft, illegal oil bunkering and sea piracy. Others are kidnapping and hostage taking, NURTW crisis in some part of the country, ethno religious crisis etc. Environmental challenges have manifested itself in urbanization caused by rural urban migration and is characterized by city slums with high environmental consequences, overpopulation which is major issue in environmental related issue, deforestation, desertification, environmental pollution etc.
Real and Imagined Causes of Security and Environmental Challenges

Attempts have been made by successive government to solve these challenges that face the nation. However, there seems to be no solution considering the magnitude of these challenges that are still being experienced across the length and breadth of the country. Some the causes of the persistent unrest include: Lack of adequate resources for all, inequality in the allocation of available resources, loss of core values for the dignity of labour, promotion of ethnicity and idle religiosity; and corruption among the elites and political leaders. Another issue that is germane to the analysis of these challenges is the massive unemployment that has pervaded all the facets of the nation. This seems to be core reason for the unabated criminal activities. The youths then engage in desperate activities to survive the harsh economic situation.

Impact

These challenges have impacted negatively in the area of the safety of the citizenries, fracturing of ethnic and religious relationships, Nigeria gradually becoming a militarized society, capital flights from Nigeria to neighboring countries, reduction in new foreign investments and business environment etc. It is therefore not an understatement that the Nigerian state is gradually declining into a state of anarchy under which no meaningful growth development can be achieved.

The Way Out

Government at all levels has tried all possible means to address these challenges. These include military intervention in areas prone to serious security challenges, dialogue when the government deems fit and other ways the government feels the situation could be addressed. However, all the intervention has not yielded the desired result since the crises are still being experienced and at an alarming rate. The government has not been able to meet up with the required employment generation to keep the citizens away from crime.

The most probable solution to these security and environmental challenges is by engaging the citizenries in gainful activities. It is however wise to look beyond oil money and engaging the citizen in gainful employment. One of the best ways of doing this is by promoting of productive agricultural activities more especially among the teeming youth which constitute the largest percentage of the nation’s population. This group is very vulnerable and constitutes the nations reserve of labour for productive activity like agriculture. They are being used to perpetrate crimes in the country. However, this critical sector has been neglected since the oil boom of the 1970s. To achieve a re-awakening in this sector, there will be need to intensify efforts through agricultural education which makes this conference very critical and important.

The benefit of Agriculture cannot be overemphasized. It has the capacity of engaging the teeming population productively. Growth in agriculture usually generates the greatest improvements for the poorest people – particularly in poor, agriculture-based economies. This report recognizes that agriculture, if better suited to meeting new environmental and market risks and opportunities facing
smallholders, can remain a primary engine of rural growth and poverty reduction and this is particularly true in the poorest countries.

In all countries, however, creating new opportunities for rural poverty reduction and economic growth requires a broad approach to rural development, which includes the rural non-farm economy as well as agriculture. A healthy agricultural sector is often critical for stimulating diversified rural growth. But there are also new, non-agricultural drivers of rural growth emerging in many contexts, which can be harnessed. There is the need of poor rural people to manage the multiple risks they face which constrain their ability to take up new opportunities in agriculture and the on-farm economy alike. Although, Nigeria today depends heavily on oil industry for its revenue, it is still predominantly an agrarian society.

According to Ogbalubi and Wokocha (2013), agriculture remains a key sector of the economy providing employment for about 70% of the population. The bulk of this population is engaged in agricultural production at a subsistent level; the holdings are generally small and scattered. The Federal office of statistics in its’ 1999 reports indicated that the agriculture sector provided 41% of Nigeria’s total gross domestic product (GDP) in that year. This represented a decrease of 24.7 % from its contribution of 65.7 % to the GDP in 1957.

It should however be noted that the capacity of the agricultural sector has not been fully utilized. For the full capacity utilization of this sector, there must be intensive agricultural education among the teeming populace.

According to Rogers, (1996, p.86) "poor training of agricultural extension staff has been identified as part of the problem of the relative ineffectiveness of much of extension in the field." This applies not only to extension staff, but to agricultural professionals in general. Unfortunately, the training of human resources in agriculture is often not a high priority in the development plans of countries. As a result, curricula and teaching programmes are not particularly relevant to the production needs and employment demands of the agricultural sector. The importance of education for human and national development cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, all other aspects of development depend on educational development. This central importance of education has been underscored by the emergence of knowledge-based economy facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT). There is therefore the need for research in agricultural education that would prepare current and future citizens for the new global and knowledge-agricultural world.

Education and skills are particularly important, because they enable rural youths and adults to access good employment opportunities, and enhance their capacity to start and run their own businesses. Technical and vocational skills development in agriculture to be expanded, strengthened and better tailored to the current needs of rural people. Strengthening capabilities on all these fronts requires various, often innovative forms of collaboration, in which governments play effective roles as facilitators, catalysts and mediators; and the private sector, NGOs and donors are significantly engaged.

**Objectives of Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria**
These objectives according to NCCE (2002) include:

a) To develop leadership, character, thrift, scholarship, cooperation, citizenship and patriotism by participation in experiences and activities of the green revolution.

b) To develop the ability to secure satisfactory placement and to advance in an agricultural occupation through a programme of continuing education.

c) To develop competence in the broad and highly scientific field of Agriculture which encompasses production, processing, distribution, sales and services in crop production, animal husbandry, fishery, soils and surveying.

d) To develop agricultural competences needed by individuals engaged in or preparing to engage in production agriculture.

e) To develop an understanding and appreciation of career opportunities in agriculture and of the preparation needed to progress in production agriculture, ‘agribusiness’ occupation or other careers in agriculture.

f) To develop the abilities in human relationships which are essential in agricultural occupations.

Role of Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria

The National policy on Education as cited in Usman and Sulaiman (2006), states the following roles of vocational agricultural education:

a) Development of machinery and other equipment like tractors, cultivators, riggers, planters and combined harvesters to replace the old tools like hoe and cutlass.

b) Development of modern methods of processing plant and animal products like shelling and canning.

c) Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.

d) Provision of nutritionists who could help in developing different types of food stuff for animals and chemicals like fertilizer for plants.

e) Provision of building engineers to develop farm buildings like pens for livestock, pens for poultry and pig, silos, cribs for storage etc.
Problems of Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria

The process of vocational agricultural education is plagued with a number of problems limiting its effectiveness. The problems include:

a) Poor funding: The inadequate and erratic funding of agricultural education in the country is inconsistent with the developmental role ascribed to the sector (Ayoola, 2001). This is perhaps a major problem confronting vocational education in Nigeria.

b) Problem of qualified man power: There is a general negative attitude towards vocational agricultural education. It is a belief among many people that vocational agricultural education is meant for those who do not have the brainpower for vigorous academic demands of the traditional secondary school system. To those who hold this view and belief, they think that the vocational school leavers are drop-outs, or never do-wells who can only learn skills for vocation. This situation tends to adversely affect those who have chosen to acquire vocational agricultural education and would like to settle down for a functional out-of-school occupation in agriculture (Usman and Sulaiman, 2006)

c) Inadequate equipment and tools for vocational Agricultural education as well as societal apathy are also part of problems

Enhancing Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria

Having enumerated some of the problems inhibiting the success of Vocational Agricultural Education, the following are measures that could be taken to enhance Vocational Agricultural Education in Nigeria.
1) Government should adequately fund Agricultural Colleges.

2) Teaching materials should be made available.

3) There is need to intensify awareness campaign on the prospect of agriculture.

Conclusion

The solution to the security and environmental challenges will be a thing of the past if the government is to approach employment through agricultural education. The masses will be gainfully engaged, and the nation will experience peace.