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The Implication of Nigeria-China Relations on the Actualization of Sustainable Food Security in Nigeria

Oluwabiya, Ademola David¹, Duruji, Moses Metumara²

Abstract. This study examines Nigeria-China relations and sustainable food security in Nigeria. The recognized and actual bilateral relations between both countries, established since 1971, have been among the largest in Africa with both parties providing a humongous market structure for each other. However, the nature of their bilateral relationship has been largely unequal, with China enjoying the largest share of profits. Despite the interest accorded to this configuration in International Studies, the implication of the same on Nigeria's quest for food security and its sustainability has not been given much attention. This paper, therefore, seeks to investigate and establish the relationship, if any, between Nigeria-China bilateralism and sustainable food security in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the research adopts qualitative and descriptive methods. Also, data is sourced from secondary outlets. This study finds that although there exists an unequal bilateral relationship between Nigeria and China, this relationship is relatively balanced compared to the relationship with the west. Ultimately, the paper recommends that Nigeria should improve its competitiveness through the diversification of its oil-dependent economy.

Keywords: Africa, agriculture, bilateral, power

¹ Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Nigeria, Address: KM 10 Idiroko Rd, Ota, Nigeria, Corresponding author: ademola.oluwabiyipgs@stu.cu.edu.ng

² Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Nigeria, Address: KM 10 Idiroko Rd, Ota, Nigeria, E-mail: moses.duruji@covenantuniversity.edu.ng.

1. Introduction

Over several decades, the integrative forces of globalization have progressively brought and tied countries of the world together, and the interaction between Nigeria and China is no exception (Gimba & Ibrahim, 2018). The origin of recognized and actual bilateral relations between both countries could be traced back to 1971 (Oke, Oshinfowokan & Okonoda, 2019; Utomi, 2008). Since this period, the bilateral relationship surrounding Nigeria and China has been among the largest in Africa, with both parties providing a humongous market structure for each other. Also, several Chinese companies pooling Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into the Nigerian economy have strengthened bilateral ties over time, amongst other factors. In return, Nigeria, since 1971, has been an avid ally of China, especially through her support of the One-China policy (Gimba & Ibrahim, 2018).

Despite the perceived symbiotic relations that characterize this bilateralism, the complex dynamics underscoring the (somewhat unequal) relationship between Nigeria and China have made scholars to inquire, on the one hand, whether this interaction can be likened to a tale of two great powers or, on the other hand, whether it is a tale where Nigeria – one of many small third-world powers – serves to sustain the interests and status of China – a great power (Mthembu-Salter, 2009). Consequently, an answer to this relationship structure, particularly concerning economics, agriculture, and trade, will help reveal to an appreciable extent the impact of the same on Nigeria's quest for sustainable food security.

It is on this background that the bulk of the work rests as a retrospective view of Nigeria-China bilateral relations serve as a platform for understanding present outcomes. However, in accordance with the aforementioned background to the study and the statement of the problem, the following questions would be relevant to this work:

- i. Is there any relationship between Nigeria-China bilateralism and sustainable food security in Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent has the Nigeria-China bilateral relationship impacted on the actualization of sustainable food security in Nigeria?

Sequel to the underlying research questions, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the relationship between Nigeria-China bilateralism and sustainable food security in Nigeria.
- ii. To explain the extent to which the Nigeria-China bilateral relationship has impacted on the actualization of sustainable food security in Nigeria.

In an effort to achieve holistic progress in research, this work is broken down into five parts, including a review of relevant literature, research methods adopted in execution of the research, analysis and presentation of data, with viable recommendations, and then a concluding remark. However, satisfactory success of this paper will be impossible without first putting the various concepts in the next section in proper perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Clarification

Bilateralism as a Concept:

According to Thompson (2013), bilateralism simply connotes interactions (whether economic, political or cultural,) occurring between two countries with sovereignty. This form of interaction is distinct from multilateral or unilateral subjects. Often, economic/trade interest is the common denominator for countries entering into bilateral relations, although these interests might shift to other political and socio-cultural concerns over time. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this intellectual piece, bilateralism refers to economic relations between Nigeria and China.

The Concept of Sustainable Food Security:

Food security subsists in a condition where there is unimpeded accessibility – whether physically, socially, or economically – to adequate, secure, and healthy food for everyone. The concept is hinged on the availableness, accessibility, management, and stability of food (Capone, Bilali, Debs, Cardone & Driouech, 2014). Food security, however, becomes sustainable when these outcomes are reached, maintained, and perpetuated to meet the demand of the growing population – particularly with future generations in view (Godfray et al., 2010). Furthermore, zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, and responsible consumption and production, which are included among the seventeen SDGs as Goal(s) 2, 6, and 12 respectively (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], n.d.), reveal the growing importance of the concept of sustainable food security.

2.2. Nigeria-China Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations between Nigeria and China did not start on the right footing as the largely pro-western bent Nigeria took following her independence obstructively influenced her external policy with China. Evidently, this led to the initial refusal of a China-proposed diplomatic intercourse in 1964 – implying that unlike some of her African counterparts which had embraced China, Nigeria turned a blind eye to the infrastructural and other advantages attached to relations with China (Utomi, 2008; Bukarambe, 2005). Additionally, China on the other hand which had backed the Biafran secessionists during the Nigerian Civil War, severed the yet-existent tie between both countries. Despite the cold relations that initially characterized both countries, this narrative did not hold for long as the tables turned in the years following the fall of Biafra, which marked the end of the war in 1970 (Porter, 1986).

It has been recorded that although some unofficial (and predominantly sour) contact existed between Nigeria and China since the late 50s, it was not until 1971 that recognized and actual bilateral relations between both countries commenced (Oke, Oshinfowokan & Okonoda, 2019; Gimba & Ibrahim, 2018; Utomi, 2008). Since then, trade relations between them have grown in leaps and bounds. According to Ibrahim and Sari (2019), the trade relationship between Nigeria and China – which evolved from early cooperation on the subjects of science and technology to other subjects, – boasts itself as one of the top in Africa as Nigeria serves as a viable market for China. Additionally, China has established countless companies in Nigeria, thereby strengthening bilateralism (Ibrahim & Sari, 2019). Nigeria's strong ties with China, especially in her oil export, have also solidified the connection between Nigeria and BRICS – a conglomerate of economic giants with China as a member (Abiodun, 2011).

Chinese involvement in Nigeria's economic matters has made political scientists predict that there will be a repetition of westernized exploitation (Thompson & Olusegun, 2014). However, a relationship as sophisticated and complex as Nigeria and China points to a more balanced form of interactions compared to the west, though these interactions are still considered unequal. Resultantly, scholars have much recently observed a gradual shift of Nigerian patronage from the west towards China and the other BRICS countries of Asia and Latin America. Nevertheless, there is still doubt as to the viability of the relationship between Nigeria and China (Ibrahim & Sari, 2019; Ogunkola, Bankole & Adewuyi, 2008).

In a similar vein, the dynamics underscoring the relationship between Nigeria and China have made scholars inquire, on the one hand, whether this interaction can be likened to a tale of two great powers, or, on the other hand, whether it is a tale where Nigeria – one of many small third-world powers – serves to sustain the interests and status of China – a great power (Mthembu-Salter, 2009). Consequently, an answer to this relationship structure, particularly concerning economics, agriculture, and trade, will help reveal to an appreciable extent the impact of the same on Nigeria's quest for sustainable food security.

Both Nigeria and China are giants in their own right, although the power of one may comparatively exceed another; for instance, Nigeria is the most populated country on the African continent but China is the most populated in the world. Again, Nigeria and China similarly boast of heavy economic capabilities in their respective continents, but when considered in relative terms, China's economy far exceeds that of Nigeria (Ekesiobi, Ifebi, Ibekilo & Onochie, 2011). For a clearer picture, while Nigeria's GDP was ranked at \$448.12 billion in 2019, Chinese GDP was ranked at a whopping \$14.343 trillion in the same fiscal year (World Bank Group [WBG], 2020).

In terms of bilateral trading, the trade balance is tilted to China's advantage and this status quo is likely to subsist and deepen if Nigeria does not improve her competitive advantage in the global market. More so, the inefficiency in Nigeria's trading system could be traced to Nigeria's focus on crude oil export while China focuses on manufacturing which promotes diversification of manufactured and exported goods (Mathias, Iwayanwu, Drenkat & Rong, 2012). In the opinion of Ubi (2019), the agricultural sector is considered one of the most viable sectors in helping to diversify Nigeria's economy from oil dependency.

3. Research Methods

In order to achieve a breakthrough in this research, the research employs qualitative methods rather than quantitative because it is going to adopt descriptive and interpretive techniques of analyzing data. The data collection process is based on literature reviews and sources from other media. Addressing daunting gaps in secondary data search would have required the use of primary sources, such as investigation of spoken discourses by undertaking interviews and, or use of questionnaires. But feasibility restraints may obstruct their use in this research,

particularly the alternatives to search for academic journals, technical papers, and published newspapers and articles. Thus, the data collection process is basically obtained via secondary data sources.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

A large share of Nigeria's export is oil-dependent. For instance, a 2015 report of overall Nigeria's export to China revealed that \$273.7 million out of overall \$307.3 million trade value was oil-based, whereas, total cocoa and cotton export – the two biggest China export products following crude oil – were valued at a meager \$0.1 million and \$0.2 million respectively in the following year (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

Despite recurring policies by succeeding administrations to revamp the agricultural sector and aid diversification of the Nigerian economy, none has yielded desirable fruits as these policies are often either short-lived by governmental change or corruption and lack of political will on the part of leaders (Ubi, 2019). China, however, being the second-largest investor in agriculture following the US, could prove instrumental to Nigeria in terms of assistance for the attainment of economic self-sufficiency and food security (Ubi, 2019).

4.1. Positive Implications

i. Facilitation of Skill and Knowledge Transfer:

With just a meager 9 percent overall fertile land, China's formidability exemplified in her agricultural and food policies has afforded her the capacity to feed about 20 percent of the global population. Similarly, China was able to successfully utilize the agrarian sector in its quest for development (Udoh, 2014). Chinese policy recommendations combined with skills acquisition, knowledge transfer, and training could prove effective in controlling the direction of farmers' practices to strengthen overall production, organization, and consumption of food (Angelou, 2016). Between 2007-2009, China supplied 104 personnel experienced in the agricultural sector to 33 African countries, including Nigeria, for technical aid and training in the building of agricultural plants (Daniel & Maiwada, 2015). African countries, including Nigeria, also received about 500 agricultural personnel from China for training in 2009 – the training covered matters on economic development of suburbs,

food productivity, proper utilization of agricultural technology, and so on (Sun, 2011).

ii. The Inflow of Capital:

The relations with China have helped to secure access to financing aimed at revamping Nigeria's agricultural sector and overall food production. For example, the China-Exim Bank has funded the development of sophisticated cassava flour plants in Nigeria (Ubi, 2019). Also, in January 2018, Chinese investors announced their intention to invest huge amounts into the energy, agriculture, and infrastructural sectors (Adepegba, 2018). Nigeria became the second-highest beneficiary of Chinese FDI after South Africa between 2003 and 2009 (Egbula & Zheng, 2011).

iii. Provision of Market for Export:

Bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and China have opened huge trade doors to Nigeria. For instance, China has shown increasing interest in the agricultural produce of Africa, particularly Nigeria, e.g., in her cassava products. This trade deal has made the Nigerian government invest huge amounts into the agricultural sector and various programs to meet up with China's cassava demand (Ubi, 2019). In terms of cassava exports to China, Nigeria is ranked first. Interestingly, China as the world's largest purchaser of cassava ultimately provides a lucrative market for Nigeria. According to Sun (2011), Nigeria exports about 5,000 tons of cassava to China on an annual basis.

4.2. Negative Implications

i. Dumping:

Oftentimes, the nature of Nigeria-Chinese relations opens Nigeria's economic gates to large chunks of cheaply-made, low-quality and inferior products (Ogunsanwo, 2008). This not only threatens and displaces Nigerian industries but also effectively displaces workers from such industries, leading to unemployment and thus limiting the capability of persons to afford good and nutritious food (Campbell, 2011).

ii. Deepening of Economic and Agricultural Dependence:

Although Nigeria is West Africa's largest beneficiary of Chinese FDI, she is still largely dependent on the importation of China's manufactured goods while she supplies low-value products. This endless cycle has intensified Nigeria's attachment

to her trading partner. In the same vein, the heavy Chinese loans are gradually pulling Nigeria into a pool of debt and, eventually, a helpless form of dependence where Nigeria is actively used by China as a puppet in the quest for achieving her national interest (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

iii. Neglect of the Agricultural Sector:

Chinese agricultural investment in Nigeria is meager in comparison to her investment in other sectors of the Nigerian economy. Initial Chinese investments in Nigerian oil and manufacturing sectors were largely inspired by China's need to harness essential minerals for the growth of her economy. This condition led to a continued pooling of capital into more exploitative sectors, thereby leading to a gradual neglect of the less exploitative ones, including agriculture (Daniel & Maiwada, 2015; Manji, 2008). Furthermore, the overall attitude of Chinese companies to Nigerian development is lackadaisical due to the fact that these companies prefer to repatriate the profits made in Nigeria back to their parent country. As a result, questions have arisen around the true nature of Chinese investments, which might be heavy in magnitude but weightless in developmental results (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

iv. Trade Disequilibrium:

Political analysts have observed a negative trade balance over time characterizing Nigeria-China relations, with favours tilting towards the Chinese space (Bukarambe, 2005). In fact, as Azaiki (2006) puts it, the relationship between Nigeria and China is one where raw materials are being supplied to China, and finished products are being imported from the same; it is one where elements of western exploitation are present but in more subtle and dangerous forms.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

The large and diversified Chinese investments in Nigeria have created a chasm that will only get wider if Nigeria continues with the manner of approach that placed her in a state of undiversified and weak external investments, especially with China. Nigeria is in dire need of an economic revamping to improve its competitive advantage with China and the world. Therefore, if sustainable food security must be attained, then Nigeria must attain some reasonable level of trade parity through the following means.

First of all, the Nigerian government must improve the quality of imported goods by consolidating monitoring frameworks like the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON). This will help coordinate and streamline imports from China, thus, limiting dumping and unhealthy consumption. Additionally, the solidification of already-existent frameworks will be more cost-effective than the focus on building new ones. In tandem with this, the government should ensure that these consolidated bodies are adequately empowered to oversee all interactions between Nigeria and China independently.

More so, the government should aim at diversifying its oil-dependent, monocultural economy through encouraging FDIs from China. However, this must be checked, and transactions here must be streamlined to avoid foul play on the part of investors. Nigeria should also learn from China in strengthening its agricultural sector, which will significantly boost the production of various products. This should be done by establishing capacity-building programs to help Nigerians utilize technical aid and other knowledge transfers effectively. Relatedly, Nigerian leaders should learn from big shots like the US in conducting relations with China.

Conclusively, while the importance of China to Nigeria's food security cannot be overemphasized, Nigeria needs to equally embrace the two-dimensional approach, characterized by the employment of tact in drawing Chinese investors on the one hand, and on the other hand, not forgetting the support of her local industries.

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