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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION AND THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN NIGERIA, 2014–2024

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Abstract
This paper appraises the role of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Nigeria's agricultural sector between 2014 and 2024, with emphasis on food security, resilience-building, and sustainable agricultural development. Nigeria's agricultural sector, historically central to employment, food production, and economic growth, has faced challenges of climate change, insecurity, infrastructural deficits, and policy inconsistency, which have undermined its full potential. Against this background, FAO interventions were assessed to determine their impact on improving productivity, enhancing farmer capacity, and strengthening food systems. The paper is anchored on the dependency theory, global governance theory and liberal institutionalism. Drawing from secondary sources, including FAO reports, government policy documents, and scholarly literature, the paper employed a qualitative analytical approach to evaluate the organization's contributions. The key contribution of the paper is that it critically assesses how FAO's interventions have shaped Nigeria's agricultural sector by highlighting both their positive impact on food security, resilience-building, and farmer support, as well as the persistent structural challenges that hinder sustainable agricultural transformation. Findings indicate that FAO has significantly supported Nigeria through technical assistance, promotion of climate-smart agriculture, emergency relief in conflict-affected regions, pest and disease management, and policy advisory services. Despite these contributions, structural challenges such as weak institutional capacity, limited mechanization, and poor adoption of modern farming technologies remain constraints. The paper recommends deeper collaboration between FAO, government institutions, and private stakeholders to ensure agriculture serves as a resilient driver of food security, poverty reduction, and economic growth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Agricultural sector, Food security, Nigeria, Donor agencies

Introduction

The food and agricultural sector remains one of the most critical components of global development. It not only ensures food availability and sustains human existence but also contributes significantly to national economies, particularly in developing countries. With the world's population projected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, the demand for food continues to rise, placing tremendous pressure on agricultural systems to be both productive and sustainable (FAO, 2022). Agriculture is historically the earliest sector of economic activity in human civilization. Its origins trace back to the era when early humans roamed from place to place, gathering fruits and hunting animals to meet their immediate nutritional needs. At that stage of development, humans depended on three basic necessities: air, water, and food. While air and water were readily provided by nature, food had to be sourced and produced by human effort, often under varying environmental conditions (Nwankpa, 2017).

Economically, agriculture plays a vital role in national development, especially in low- and middle-income countries where it serves as a primary source of employment and income. Globally, agriculture employs more than 27% of the labour force (FAO, 2022). In many regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, it contributes up to 30% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Also, the agro-industrial value chain which includes input supply, production, storage, processing, and marketing creates numerous jobs and enhances rural

livelihoods. This sector is therefore not only central to national economies but also to poverty reduction and economic stability. The agricultural sector is also indispensable in achieving global food security and improving nutrition outcomes. However, despite improvements in agricultural productivity, global hunger remains a persistent challenge. According to FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO (2023), approximately 735 million people were undernourished in 2023. Agricultural growth, especially in the smallholder subsector, has a direct impact on reducing hunger and improving access to nutritious food. In regions where agriculture is supported with access to inputs, credit, extension services, and infrastructure, significant strides have been made toward reducing food insecurity and malnutrition.

According to Adegbite and Afolabi (2018), agriculture is the largest employer of labour in many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, employing as much as 60% of sub-Sahara Africa labour force. The entire agricultural industry and its various subsidiary activities contribute significantly to the GDP and foreign exchange earnings through commodity export. According to NEPAD-OECD report (2010), Agriculture contributes 12.7% of sub-Sahara Africa economies GDP compared to an average of 3.2% globally. Vast areas of fertile land combined with ideal weather make agriculture a goldmine that Africa can exploit to lift its people out of poverty and bring about the much-needed development that the continent needs. Nigeria and other Sub Sahara countries have the potential to become the food basket of the world providing both crop and cash crops all year round.

In the case of Nigeria in particular, agriculture remains a critical sector in its economy, accounting for a significant portion of employment and contributing to food security, rural development, and poverty alleviation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), agriculture employs over 35% of Nigeria's labour force and contributes about 25% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Despite its immense potential, the sector is hindered by numerous challenges including inadequate infrastructure, low productivity, poor access to credit and inputs, weak extension services, erratic climate conditions, and inconsistent government policies (Olomola, 2018). These constraints have necessitated the support of donor agencies to improve Nigeria's agricultural capacity and ensure food security. Among the key international organizations playing this role, such as International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, International Development Association (IDA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations stands out.

The FAO has been actively engaged in Nigeria's agricultural development since its establishment in the country. Over the years, the organization has expanded its interventions to include technical assistance, emergency food aid, climate-smart agriculture, capacity building, and policy advocacy (FAO, 2022). From 2014 to 2024, FAO implemented numerous initiatives that aim to improve food systems, strengthen value chains, and promote rural livelihoods, especially among vulnerable communities in northern Nigeria affected by conflict and displacement (Akinyele, 2020). These programs are aligned with both Nigeria's Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2, which seeks to end hunger and promote sustainable agriculture (UNDP, 2023).

However, despite the proliferation of donor-driven agricultural programs, questions remain about their actual impact and sustainability. While donor agencies like the FAO have provided substantial funding and expertise, concerns such as poor coordination with national institutions, limited community participation, and weak accountability mechanisms often undermine the effectiveness of these interventions (Oni & Yusuf, 2019). These concerns raise critical questions about the efficiency, relevance, and long-term value of donor assistance in Nigeria's agricultural development.

Understanding the nature, scale, and outcomes of FAO's engagement in Nigeria's food and agriculture sector is essential for policy direction and development planning. By assessing the interventions of FAO from 2014 to 2024, this paper provides empirical insights into how donor assistance influences agricultural performance, food security, and rural development in Nigeria. It also seeks to inform strategies for enhancing the alignment of donor efforts with national priorities and ensuring the sustainability of agricultural development interventions.

Statement of the Problem

Agriculture remains vital to Nigeria's development, but the sector continues to underperform despite vast arable land and favorable climatic conditions. Food insecurity is widespread, compounded by poverty, weak infrastructure, low productivity, poor access to inputs, and the effects of climate change. The neglect of agriculture following the discovery of crude oil deepened reliance on food imports and weakened rural livelihoods. In response, Nigeria has turned to international partners, with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) emerging as a key player through technical assistance, emergency support, and resilience-building programs between 2014 and 2024.

Yet, persistent food insecurity and sluggish agricultural growth raise questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of FAO's interventions. Existing research has been either too broad or narrowly focused, offering little assessment of FAO's long-term engagement, its alignment with Nigeria's agricultural policies, or the structural challenges that limit impact. Issues such as program duplication, weak coordination with government agencies, poor community ownership, and lack of locally adapted models remain underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by evaluating the decade-long role of FAO in Nigeria's agricultural sector, with the goal of understanding its contributions and offering insights into how donor support can be better aligned with national priorities and local realities.

Conceptual Clarification

Food Security

Over the last decade, the concept of food security has undergone significant transformation, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on food availability and access to a broader systems-based approach. The global food security discourse now integrates interlinked issues such as climate change, conflict, urbanization, economic inequality, and food system governance (FAO, 2021). Scholars increasingly argue that food security remains one of the most complex and evolving concepts in development discourse.

Without necessarily aiming at a strict definition, this section seeks to clarify the concept of *food security*, which has become an "essentially contested concept." The term is employed in diverse ways across disciplines, policy domains, and geopolitical contexts, reflecting its multidimensional nature. At its core, food security refers to the access of all individuals to the food required for a healthy and active life at all times (FAO & WHO, 1992, cited in Eide, 1999:3). In more practical terms, a country is considered food-secure when the majority of its population can consistently access food of sufficient quantity and acceptable nutritional quality necessary for a decent standard of living (Idachaba, 2004:2).

This definition implies three essential dimensions: availability, accessibility, and adequacy. First, food must be available in adequate quantity and quality to meet basic nutritional needs - particularly calories, proteins, vitamins, and essential minerals. Second, individuals must possess the means - economic, physical, and social - to acquire such food (Davies, 2009:4). Third, there must be continuity and consistency in food supply to avoid intermittent shortages, which can undermine human health and national stability.

Thus, food security is best understood as encompassing access by all people, at all times, to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life (Reutlinger, 1985). The two core pillars of this concept remain: (a) the physical availability of food, and (b) the ability to acquire it.

In the 1996 Rome declaration on world food security, food security according to (FAO, 1996) is defined as:

> food that is available at all times, to which all persons have means of access, there is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety, and is acceptable within the given culture (FAO, 1996:1).

Food security was initially defined by the World Food Summit (1996) as a condition where "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This definition, although widely accepted, has been critiqued for its normative generalization, prompting scholars to expand and deepen the concept through multidimensional analyses. Maxwell and Smith (1992) earlier proposed a shift from a purely food supply perspective to a broader framework that includes access, utilization, and vulnerability. Their work laid the foundation for the now conventional four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability.

Abdullahi (2008) defines *sustainable food security* as a condition in which individuals have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life - both in the present and the future. This definition emphasizes the dual temporal focus of food security: it is not only about current sufficiency but also about ensuring continuity over time. The core indices implied in this definition include: adequate national food supply, nutritional content, accessibility, affordability, and environmental sustainability.

Food security is generally conceptualized at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, National Food Security (NFS) refers to a nation's capacity to produce or import enough food to feed its population. This is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving Household Food Security or Individual Food Security. A country may have enough food at the national level, but households and individuals may still suffer food insecurity due to structural barriers such as weak market systems, poor infrastructure, information gaps, and inequalities in income and resource distribution. According to Adebayo et al. (2016), food security is a vital aspect of human well-being, encompassing not only the availability of food but also access, utilization, and stability. It is defined as having reliable access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life.

The current widely accepted definition of food security came from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) annual report on food security *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001*: Food security is "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2002, p. 49). The last revision to this definition happened at the 2009 World Summit on Food Security, which added a fourth dimension – stability – as the short-term indicator of the ability of food systems to withstand shocks, whether natural or man-made (FAO, 2009). It is built on four key pillars: availability (adequate food production and supply), accessibility (affordability and ease of obtaining food), utilization (proper nutrition and food safety), and stability (consistent food supply without disruptions).

In view of the above, the paper's perception opined that food security should not only be treated as a technical or economic issue but also as a human rights and governance concern. Beyond availability, access, utilization, and stability, food security also entails agency—the ability of individuals and communities to make choices about what they eat, how it is produced, and how it fits within their cultural values. Without agency, food systems risk becoming externally imposed solutions that fail to resonate with local realities. For Nigeria, where agriculture employs a significant share of the population, true food security must combine productivity gains with equity, environmental sustainability, and empowerment of smallholder farmers. In this sense, food security is as much about dignity, participation, and justice as it is about calories and nutrients.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the most encompassing term used to describe the diverse methods by which cultivated plants and domesticated animals support human life globally, primarily through the provision of food, raw materials, and other essential products. The English term *agriculture* originates from the Latin words *ager* (meaning "field") and *colo* (meaning "to cultivate"), which combine to form *agricultura* - literally, the cultivation of land or fields. Over time, the concept of agriculture has evolved far beyond its etymological roots to include a broad spectrum of practices. These include cultivation, domestication, horticulture, arboriculture, vegeculture, and various forms of livestock management, such as mixed crop-livestock systems, pastoralism, and transhumance. Also, agriculture is frequently modified by descriptors such as *incipient*, *proto*, *shifting*, *extensive*, and *intensive* - terms whose meanings are context-dependent and often require clarification. Agricultural systems may also be distinguished by specific attributes such as soil type, frequency of cultivation, climatic conditions, and the dominant crops or animal species. In some contexts, the term agriculture is narrowly applied to crop production alone, excluding animal husbandry. However, in most scholarly and practical usage, agriculture encompasses both plant and animal production.

Agriculture as a concept can be defined as *"the science and art of cultivating the soil, including the allied pursuits of gathering in the crops and rearing livestock; tillage, husbandry, farming (in the widest sense)."* Scholars such as Altieri (2002) and Pretty (2008) conceptualized agriculture as not just an economic activity but as an ecological process deeply embedded in environmental systems. Their work on agroecology challenges the dominant industrial agriculture model by promoting biodiversity, local knowledge, and sustainability. Altieri, in particular, argued that conventional farming degrades ecosystems and increases vulnerability to pests, climate change, and market fluctuations. These ecological perspectives have gained global traction, especially in debates around climate-resilient agriculture. However, some have criticized agroecological models as less scalable in regions with food deficits, where immediate productivity is prioritized over long-term sustainability.

From my perspective, agriculture should be understood as more than a means of subsistence or economic advancement; it is a dynamic intersection of culture, technology, and environmental stewardship. Modern agriculture must be viewed not only in terms of production efficiency but also through the lens of social equity, food sovereignty, and intergenerational responsibility. This means balancing short-term imperatives such as food availability with long-term goals of ecological health and resilience. Agricultural development, therefore, goes beyond increased yields to include innovations, institutions, and policy frameworks that enhance sustainability, empower rural communities, and integrate traditional knowledge with scientific advancements. In this way, agriculture evolves as both a

livelihood system and a strategic foundation for national development and global food security.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is drawn from liberal institutionalism. This framework provide a lens through which to examine the role and impact of donor agencies, particularly the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in shaping agricultural and food security outcomes in Nigeria between 2014 and 2024.

Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal Institutionalism, also known as neoliberal institutionalism, is a prominent theory in international relations that emphasizes the importance of international institutions in fostering cooperation among states in an anarchic international system. Unlike realist theories that view international politics primarily as a struggle for power and security, Liberal Institutionalism posits that despite an absence of a central authority, states can work together effectively through rules, norms, and institutions to achieve mutual benefits (Keohane, 1984; Axelrod, 1984).

Robert O. Keohane is often credited as a foundational figure in Liberal Institutionalism. In his seminal work, *After Hegemony* (1984), Keohane argued that international cooperation is possible and sustainable even in the absence of a hegemonic power. He contended that institutions reduce uncertainty by providing information, creating expectations of reciprocity, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. These functions lower the transaction costs of cooperation and help states overcome collective action problems such as the prisoner's dilemma, where short-term individual interests might undermine long-term collective gains.

Building on Keohane's framework, Robert Axelrod (1984) employed game theory to demonstrate how repeated interactions among states foster trust and cooperation. Axelrod's work highlighted the importance of the shadow of the future - the expectation that states will continue interacting over time as a key factor encouraging compliance with institutional rules. His research suggested that cooperation is more likely to emerge and persist when states anticipate ongoing relationships, which incentivizes reciprocal behavior and punishes defection.

Liberal Institutionalism also emphasizes the role of international institutions in shaping state preferences and facilitating negotiation and conflict resolution. Institutions act as forums for dialogue, help coordinate policies, and provide technical expertise that states individually may lack. This theory stresses that cooperation is not merely a function of power but also of shared interests and institutional design (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

While Liberal Institutionalism recognizes the persistence of an anarchic international system, it rejects the notion that this condition inevitably leads to conflict or power struggles. Instead, it envisions a more optimistic international order where institutions foster interdependence, transparency, and rule-based interactions. The theory has been influential in explaining the growth of international regimes, multilateral organizations, and global governance frameworks.

Application of Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal Institutionalism provides a framework for understanding the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) role in Nigeria's agricultural sector between 2014 and 2024. The theory argues that even in an anarchic global system, cooperation is possible through international institutions that establish rules, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate coordination.

In this light, FAO acts as a platform for collaboration between Nigeria and the global community to tackle challenges like food insecurity, climate variability, pest invasions, and price fluctuations. By offering technical assistance, data collection, and capacity building, FAO reduces transaction costs and enables evidence-based policymaking. It also acts as a knowledge broker by introducing best practices, innovations, and international standards, thereby strengthening institutional coordination. The concept of the "shadow of the future" further explains FAO's long-term engagement in Nigeria, as seen in multi-year Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) that build mutual trust and align global support with Nigeria's agricultural policies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Equally, the theory highlights FAO's role in promoting rules-based cooperation that links Nigeria's national priorities with international norms on sustainable agriculture, gender inclusion, and climate-smart practices. Well-designed institutions like FAO foster compliance, transparency, and accountability while shaping Nigeria's agricultural agenda. Moreover, FAO works within a multilateral network involving other donor agencies, government bodies, and civil society organizations to ensure complementary outcomes, avoid duplication, and enhance effectiveness in addressing Nigeria's agricultural challenges. In summary, Liberal Institutionalism explains how FAO sustains cooperation, knowledge sharing, and alignment between global objectives and national strategies, underscoring the importance of sustained engagement and institutional design in driving impactful outcomes in Nigeria's food and agricultural sector.

Overview of Food and Agricultural Sector in Nigeria

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, employing over 35% of the labour force and contributing significantly to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), despite the dominance of the oil sector (World Bank, 2020). The sector plays a vital role in ensuring food security, providing raw materials for industries, generating foreign exchange, and creating employment opportunities across rural communities (FAO, 2021). Nigeria is endowed with vast arable land, favourable climatic conditions, and diverse ecological zones, making it one of the most agriculturally endowed countries in Africa (NBS, 2022).

In pre-colonial Nigeria, the economy was largely agrarian, shaped by favourable climatic conditions, fertile land, and abundant natural resources that supported farming, grazing, hunting, and fishing. Agriculture dominated economic life, with crop production sustained through shifting cultivation and crop rotation, while irrigation and other traditional practices helped mitigate droughts, pests, and diseases. Regional specializations emerged: the Niger-Delta and coastal areas excelled in fishing, the Fulani practiced grazing in the savannah, and forest dwellers combined farming with livestock rearing for meat and leather. Farming occurred both near settlements for subsistence crops like yam, maize, cassava, and vegetables, and on distant farms for cash crops, often requiring temporary residences during planting and harvesting seasons. Alongside agriculture, crafts and trade flourished, while gender roles varied, with women in the South East maintaining their own farms compared to their supportive roles in other regions. Overall, economic activities were interconnected, with communities responding to environmental conditions and maintaining cultural and economic ties that ensured relatively balanced development across regions.

During the colonial period, Nigeria's agricultural economy became deeply integrated into the global system through infrastructural developments like railroads, roads, and the introduction of export crops such as cocoa and coffee, alongside new agricultural incentives and the use of British currency. While these changes boosted productivity and linked Nigeria to international markets, they also exposed the economy to global shocks, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s. Agriculture remained the backbone of Nigeria's economic growth

up to the 1960s, engaging over 70% of the workforce, with its strength shaped by the country's diverse ecological zones from mangrove swamps to savannahs that supported varied production for domestic use and export. However, this agricultural orientation was largely driven by British imperial interests, which sought to secure raw materials for industrial production in Britain. Consequently, Nigeria's dependence on agricultural export earnings not only sustained colonial economic structures but also financed post-independence development and foreign exchange needs well into the 1970s.

Nigeria's agricultural sector has historically served as a backbone of the economy, sustaining food supply, employment, income generation, and industrialization. From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, it was the primary source of foreign exchange and GDP contribution, employing over 70% of the labour force and driving household food security through regionally focused crop policies. The sector is characterized by four major sub-sectors: crop production, livestock, fisheries, and forestry. Crop production dominates, accounting for more than 80% of the sector's contribution to GDP, with staples such as cassava, yam, maize, rice, and sorghum widely cultivated (NBS, 2022). Livestock production - including cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry provides essential sources of protein and livelihoods, while fisheries and aquaculture have expanded in recent years to meet rising domestic demand for fish, which remains Nigeria's most consumed animal protein (Adewumi & Adebayo, 2021). Forestry, though less emphasized, contributes to environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods through timber and non-timber forest products.

However, the discovery and commercialization of oil resources triggered a sharp decline in agricultural output, with the oil boom leading to policy neglect, reduced foreign exchange earnings, and rising food imports, a classic case of Dutch Disease. This neglect eroded value addition in the sector as raw commodities were exported while finished goods were imported. Key indicators such as agricultural GDP share, credit access, and government expenditure on agriculture fell, undermining growth potential (Azih, 2008). Despite its potential, the sector faces numerous structural challenges. These include low mechanization, poor rural infrastructure, inadequate access to credit, weak extension services, post-harvest losses, and heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture (FMARD, 2020). Climate change further exacerbates productivity constraints, particularly in northern Nigeria where desertification and drought undermine crop and livestock production (Ezeh et al., 2020). Additionally, insecurity in parts of the country, particularly farmer-herder conflicts and insurgency in the North-East has disrupted farming activities, reducing output and threatening food security.

Over the past decade, successive governments have sought to revitalize the sector through policies and initiatives such as the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA, 2011–2015), the Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP, 2016–2020), and the current National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP, 2021–2025) (FMARD, 2021). These programs emphasize import substitution, food self-sufficiency, private sector participation, and sustainable practices. Donor agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Bank have also played a critical role by providing technical assistance, policy support, and financial interventions (FAO, 2021).

While these initiatives reflect commendable efforts toward building resilience in Nigeria's agricultural sector, their impact has often been undermined by weak institutional frameworks, inconsistent implementation, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. Policies tend to shift with political administrations, creating gaps in continuity that hinder long-term progress. Moreover, while donor support has been vital in bridging funding and knowledge gaps, an overreliance on external actors risks limiting homegrown innovation and ownership of

development processes. For Nigeria to achieve genuine transformation, there is a need for stronger accountability systems, investment in rural infrastructure, and deliberate empowerment of smallholder farmers who form the backbone of the sector. Integrating digital technologies, strengthening local value chains, and fostering public-private partnerships will also be essential in translating these policy blueprints into tangible and sustainable outcomes for food security and economic development.

The Impact of the FAO on the Agricultural Sector

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been making significant impacts on Nigeria's agricultural sector through various initiatives and collaborations. Here are some of the key areas where FAO is influencing Nigeria's agriculture:

Digital Transformation: FAO is working with the Nigerian government to establish the Nigeria Agri-Innovation and Digital Agriculture Platform. This aims to digitize agricultural value chains, improve market access, and enhance productivity through data analytics and smart farming techniques (FGN, 2025; FAO, 2025).

Policy Monitoring and Review: FAO has launched the 2025 Nigeria Food and Agriculture Policy Monitoring Review. This report provides critical insights into public expenditure on food and agriculture, commodity price incentives, and policy coherence for staple crops and export commodities like rice, maize, cocoa, and cashew (FAO, 2025). Such monitoring exercises are not only valuable for assessing government performance but also crucial for aligning agricultural policies with global best practices. However, their effectiveness depends on whether policymakers are willing to act on the findings rather than treating them as routine reports. Stronger integration of civil society, farmers' unions, and private sector actors into policy feedback loops would make these reviews more impactful.

Food Security and Nutrition: FAO's efforts aim to improve food security and nutrition in Nigeria, especially in the face of challenges like climate change, conflict, and economic instability. From this paper's perspective, while FAO's interventions have improved access to nutritious food in vulnerable communities, there is still a pressing need to bridge the gap between emergency food support and long-term agricultural sustainability. Local ownership of food security programs—through cooperatives, community-based nutrition initiatives, and youth engagement—would make FAO's efforts more enduring and less dependent on external support.

Agricultural Productivity and Resilience: Through initiatives like the Digital Village Initiative, FAO promotes digitalization in rural areas to enhance economic livelihoods, individual well-being, and social cohesion (FGN, 2025; FAO, 2025). In view of the above, this initiative is a game-changer for rural development, as digital tools can connect farmers to markets, provide real-time climate and pest management information, and reduce middlemen exploitation. Nonetheless, digital inclusion must go hand-in-hand with infrastructural development such as electricity, rural internet penetration, and literacy training, without which the benefits of digitalization may remain limited to a privileged few.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer: A core contribution of FAO is in capacity building and knowledge transfer. By equipping farmers and institutions with technical knowledge on pest and disease control, irrigation systems, and post-harvest management, FAO has helped reduce crop losses and increase yields. Notably, FAO provided critical support in combating the Fall Armyworm and desert locust invasions that threatened Nigeria's food security (FAO, 2020). Beyond technical support, FAO has acted as a

knowledge broker, introducing best practices and international standards that have improved agricultural policy formulation and evidence-based decision-making (World Bank, 2019).

Emergency Response and Resilience Building: FAO has also played a key role in emergency response and resilience building, particularly in the conflict-affected North-East. The organization has supported internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable households through seed and tool distribution, livestock restocking, and livelihood support, enabling communities disrupted by insurgency to resume food production (FAO, 2017; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2021). These interventions have complemented broader humanitarian responses while fostering resilience against future shocks.

Policy Support and Evidence-Based Decision Making: FAO's policy monitoring and review reports provide evidence-based recommendations for inclusive growth, improved food security, and sustainable development in Nigeria's agricultural sector (FAO, 2025).

Inclusive Agricultural Development: FAO emphasizes inclusive agricultural development, promoting gender-sensitive interventions and youth empowerment. It has supported policies that ensure women and marginalized groups have access to productive resources, thereby advancing equity in the agricultural sector (FAO, 2019). Such approaches align with global commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 on zero hunger and SDG 13 on climate action (United Nations, 2015). Overall, FAO's interventions from 2014 to 2024 demonstrate a balance between immediate humanitarian relief and long-term structural transformation, consolidating its role as a critical partner in Nigeria's agricultural development.

Challenges in Nigeria's Agricultural Sector

The following are the identified challenges faced in the Nigeria's agricultural sector:

Policy Inconsistencies and Weak Institutional Frameworks: A major challenge to FAO's work in Nigeria is the frequent change of agricultural policies and weak institutional frameworks at federal and state levels. Policies such as the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), Green Alternative, and Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) lacked continuity, leading to disruptions in project alignment and sustainability (Oni, 2019; FAO, 2018). Weak coordination between ministries, donor agencies, and local governments often results in duplication of efforts and inefficiency.

Funding Constraints and Donor Dependence: Although FAO provides technical and financial support, its interventions often depend on external donor funding, which can be inconsistent. Delays in disbursement, competing donor priorities, and limited national budget allocations for agriculture weaken the impact of FAO projects. This challenge is particularly evident in emergency programs in the North-East, where funding gaps constrain humanitarian and livelihood support (UNOCHA, 2021; FAO, 2022).

Security Challenges and Insurgency: Insecurity, especially in the North-East due to Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in the North-West has limited FAO's field operations. Farmers are displaced from their lands, extension services disrupted, and FAO staff face mobility restrictions in conflict zones. These conditions undermine food production and complicate the delivery of FAO's resilience-building programs (Audu, 2020; FAO, 2017).

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation: Increasing droughts, desertification, floods, and irregular rainfall patterns present serious barriers to FAO's agricultural interventions. Climate change has reduced arable land, worsened pest invasions, and increased vulnerability of smallholder farmers. While FAO has promoted climate-smart

agriculture, the pace of adoption is slow due to limited infrastructure and awareness (World Bank, 2019; FAO, 2020).

Limited Adoption of Technology and Innovation: Nigeria's agricultural sector still relies heavily on subsistence farming and traditional methods. Low mechanization, poor irrigation infrastructure, and inadequate access to modern inputs reduce the effectiveness of FAO's technical programs. Limited digital literacy and infrastructural deficits also hinder the scaling of FAO's innovations such as data-driven farming and pest monitoring systems (Adenle, 2020; FAO, 2018).

Socio-Cultural and Gender Barriers: Despite FAO's efforts to promote gender equality in agriculture, cultural norms in some regions limit women's access to land, credit, and extension services. This exclusion reduces the inclusiveness and impact of FAO's interventions, particularly in rural communities where women form a significant share of the agricultural workforce (FAO, 2019; Akinola, 2021).

Poor Infrastructure and Market Access: Weak rural infrastructure including poor roads, inadequate storage facilities, and unreliable electricity - hampers the ability of farmers to benefit fully from FAO programs. Even when production is increased, lack of access to markets and storage leads to post-harvest losses, undermining FAO's objectives of improving food security (World Bank, 2019; Ajakaiye & Olayiwola, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The appraisal of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) role in Nigeria's agricultural sector from 2014 to 2024 reveals that the organization has made significant contributions to food security, resilience-building, and capacity development. Through the promotion of climate-smart agriculture, provision of technical assistance, and emergency interventions in conflict-affected regions such as the North-East, FAO has strengthened smallholder farmers' access to knowledge, inputs, and sustainable practices. These interventions have reinforced the agricultural sector's relevance to food supply, rural livelihoods, and national economic development. However, persistent challenges such as weak institutional capacity, policy inconsistency, insecurity, climate change, poor infrastructure, and low adoption of modern technologies have hindered the full realization of FAO's objectives. The persistence of these challenges suggests that while FAO has made progress, deeper systemic reforms and stronger local ownership remain critical to achieving lasting agricultural transformation in Nigeria.

Moving forward, Nigeria's agricultural sector requires a more integrated and coordinated partnership between FAO, government institutions, and private actors to address structural barriers and unlock its full potential. Policy consistency and institutional strengthening must be prioritized to align FAO programs with national agricultural strategies, while greater investment in rural infrastructure, mechanization, and irrigation is needed to reduce post-harvest losses and boost productivity. Addressing insecurity is vital to safeguard farming communities, especially in conflict-prone regions, and FAO's support for climate-smart agriculture and digital innovation should be deepened to help farmers adapt to environmental challenges. Inclusion of women and youth in agricultural initiatives is also essential for equity and long-term sustainability. Ultimately, a balanced synergy between FAO's technical expertise, Nigeria's policy reforms, and private sector participation will be pivotal in ensuring that agriculture becomes a resilient engine of growth, food security, and national development.

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