

Courtney Wright  
North High School  
Des Moines, IA  
Nigeria, Factor 11

Did you know that as of 2000, the life expectancy of the average Nigerian man and woman was about 51 years of age and the infant mortality was 7%, or roughly 74 in every thousand live births? In comparison to North America and other First World Countries, these figures are astounding? What then is the critical difference?

Perhaps we should examine the role of Agriculture as a form of employment within the country to find the answers we seek. In Nigeria, agriculture stands as the greatest sector of the economy with 70% of the labor force being thus engaged. Farming is mainly of the subsistence variety which resorts to simple tools and shifting cultivation. Hence when we think of Nigeria, like most African countries, we think of the typical subsistence farm family.

African farming systems demand that every person in the family or extended family help with farming. Men, women, the elderly, and children all have very important roles in their family; however, different roles will vary from place to place. What we discover about such families and farming societies is that, in many, when children are not in school, they are busy “herding animals, getting the family’s water, scaring away birds that may eat crops, and looking after younger siblings while their parents are busy with physical labor on the farm”. This determines that much of the work on subsistence farms is done together since farmers share the major tasks of cultivation on each other's plots of land. Unlike commercial agriculture, which focuses on the production of agricultural products for sale (mainly), subsistence agriculture concentrates on maintaining family subsistence rather than profit or financial growth. I propose that we need to take a closer look at education in Nigeria, alongside food supplies to determine the best way to help the country meet self- sufficiency.

All Nigerian students are supposed to have access to an elementary school. While boys and girls are to be given an equal opportunity to attend school and learn, it has been found that there are a significantly higher number of boys in school than girls. However, this is all overlooked a lot of the time. Higher education is something that many Nigerians want to obtain and strive for. Demand is higher than supply, though, so many Nigerians cannot get the education that they wish to have. There are forty three universities in Nigeria today, and 125 technical schools. These schools mostly focus on agricultural and polytechnic training, while a few focus on petroleum sciences and health. Investing in education will help Nigerians realize the importance of sanitation.

According to research findings, agricultural holdings are classified into small, medium, and large scale sizes. About 90% of all Nigerian farms are small scale, being less than 25 acres. These small farms produce 98% of the total consumed food, excluding wheat. About 76 million acres, or 33% of Nigeria's land area, are under cultivation. Nigeria's diverse climate, from the warm, tropical areas of the coast to the hot, dry regions of the north, make it possible to produce virtually all agricultural products that can be grown in the tropical and semitropical areas of the world. This makes Nigeria as competitive as the next country. What then creates the deficit that we see Nigeria faced with?

We realize that, in Nigeria, the economic benefits of large-scale agriculture are recognized, and the government encourages industrial agriculture upon the population. Large-scale agriculture, however, is not common. In fact, medium scale is quite rare as well. Despite an abundant water supply, a nice climate, and wide areas of useable land, productivity is restricted because of low soil fertility in many areas and unsuccessful methods of cultivation.

The agricultural products of Nigeria can be divided into two main groups: food crops, produced for home consumption, and export products. Prior to the civil war, the country was self-sufficient in food, but imports of food increased substantially after 1973. Bread, made primarily from U.S wheat, replaced domestic crops as the cheapest staple food for much of the urban population. In the South, corn, yams, and cassava form the base of the Nigerian people's diets. Often times, the foods are blended and turned into a dough that will be served with a stew made from meats and other various vegetables that are accessible. Other common foods in the South are fruits, such as bananas, papaya, pineapple, oranges, coconut, and mangoes. In the North, grains like millet, sorghum, and corn make up base diets. They are boiled into a porridge-like substance and served with a different kind of stew. The North has fewer fruits than the South because of the climates and locations.

Statistics indicate that "in 1999, production of yams was 25.1 million tons (67% of world production); manioc, 33.1 million tons (highest in the world and 20% of global production); coco yams (taro), 3.3 million tons; and sweet potatoes, 1,560,000 tons. The 1999 production estimates for major crops were as follows (in thousands of tons): sorghum, 8,443; millet, 5,457; corn, 5,777; rice, 3,399; peanuts, 2,783; palm oil, 842; sugar cane, 675; palm kernel, 565; soybeans, 405; and cotton lint, 57. Many fruits and vegetables are also grown by Nigerian farmers."

Agricultural exports decreased in quantity after 1970, partly because of the discouraging effect of low world prices. In 1979, the importing of many foods, including fresh milk, vegetables, roots and tubers, fruits, and poultry was banned. The exporting of sugar, flour, milk, skins and hides was also banned. During 1985–87, imports of wheat, corn, rice, and vegetable oil were banned as the declining income from oil encouraged greater attention to the agricultural area. Thanks to cattle farmers, today there is access to fresh milk and yogurt. However, there is no way to keep the dairy cold since there are no refrigerators (<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Nigeria-AGRICULTURE.html#ixzz115BdoEGx>).

Commercial agriculture is the production of agricultural products used mainly for sale or trade. Unlike subsistence agriculture that is oriented towards maintaining family subsistence, the goal of commercial agriculture is to generate income and profit through the sale of agriculture products produced on the farm.

A few methods of producing and getting food in Nigeria are by the hunting and gathering of animals, roots, fruits, subsistence farming, or, producing only enough for family use. Subsistence farming can be broken down into three parts: herding of animals, crop cultivation, and a mixture of the two. Commercial farming is also another way to get and produce food. Commercial farming is producing a surplus of food for trade or sale.

Since Nigeria has such a wide variety of plants and animals, it is easy to see that different things will be grown in different regions, or areas. In the warm, southern part of Nigeria, crops such as yams, corn, and cassava are grown. Some animals are parts of their diets as well, such as goats, chicken, and occasionally, beef. In the North, where it is dryer, and more arid, grains like millet, sorghum, and corn are grown and consumed.

In addition to these root and grain groups, farmers may grow a variety of vegetables which are eaten with the primary foods. Most cultivators in Africa keep some domestic animals such as poultry, goats, and sometimes, cattle. In small scale subsistence farming, cattle can serve various purposes such as providing milk and meat. They are also used for pulling plows. In many farming societies, cattle represent wealth and can be used as gifts of exchange for very important ceremonies, and some marriages.

Farmers in Africa are very skilled when it comes to farming and working around their farms. Hoes, plows and other digging implements made of iron and some other metals are the primary tools of subsistence farming in Africa. In areas where soil is relatively fertile, farmers practice what is called shifting agriculture (when an area of land is used for two or three years after it has been left alone to return to its native state for a few years so that the soil can be renewed). After farming a given area of land for two to three years, farmers will clear another piece of land for planting. Like herders, African cultivators are always open to newer ideas and practices. They draw upon new knowledge and techniques when they can to improve their productivity.

In most African farming systems, all members of the household or extended family are engaged in farming. Women, men, the elderly, and children all have important roles to fulfill, even though the specific roles will vary among households and societies. In many farming societies, children, when not in school, are given the tasks of herding animals, fetching water, scaring away birds, and watching after younger siblings while their parents are busy with more physical labor. Often times, the children being sent to school are boys; education in men is watched more closely than in women. It is very important that the men get a good education. Much of the work on subsistence farms is done communally, as farmers share the major tasks of cultivation on each other's plots of land.

In most African societies, land, used for subsistence farming, is not owned by individuals or by families. Land is owned by the entire community. Each family is given a section of land, which should be good for producing the food needs of said family. The policy of community ownership of land is changing in some African countries to a system of private ownership. Some people are in favor of this new system since it provides security for the families farming the land. Many prefer the traditional system since it guarantees that all families in the community have access to land.

As previously stated, the life expectancy of the average Nigerian was 51 years of age. 7% of every thousand live babies die yearly. In 1999, an estimated 2.7 million people were living with AIDS. By the end of that year, 1.7 million Nigerians were dead because of the disease. The primary mode of HIV transmission in this country, and most, is through sexual intercourse. In fact, most people living with HIV don't even know it.

Currently, government officials are working on improving sanitation and increasing education in Nigeria, but obviously, this is not enough. I have found that if more people were educated in the value of sanitation and if they simply learned how to go about cleaning themselves and surroundings properly, the value of deaths and lives saved would amount to roughly \$3.6 billion every year. That would be a definite improvement. Investment in drinking water and sanitation would also result in 272 million more attended school days each year because children will not be home because of sickness.

If sanitation were increased, more money would be made, resulting in families being able to buy themselves more things, having more money to live off of, and most important, the country itself would be much healthier. Nigeria would be able to invest in better technology to deal with and treat simple diseases, like cholera, that kill many children. Presently, though, sanitation is extremely poor. Millions of people die every year from AIDS, so if simple educational methods, such as explaining safe sex, was explained to children and young teenagers during school hours every year, then disease might be a bit more controlled.

It is important to maintain clean fresh water and to practice ways of being cleaner as a whole. If every person helping these distressed countries were to help educate the younger, and older, children, there would be more people to help on farms also. Agricultural supply may increase, so the economy may go up even further. Another key factor is the government itself. The government of Nigeria is so corrupt, and though they are an independent country, I feel it would be best if another country, such as the United

Kingdom (they ruled Nigeria before they were independent) would step in and help to fix the government and its ways. All that Nigeria needs is a little push to help themselves get going. Right now, they have the highest number of schools in the developing countries of Africa.

I also feel that the United Nations should work a bit harder to make all of this possible for the third world countries. These problems cannot get fixed in one day, or even a year, but if all of the first world countries tried a little harder to better the world, focusing less on themselves and more on the welfare of everyone else, then places like Nigeria will be much better off. Education should be further increased, and another person should step up and help the corrupt government out. Nigeria is poor and has little sanitation or knowledge of safe sex, it appears. It is obvious that these weak points need to be taken care of. If every one of those problems could be taken care of (they're quite simple to fix, really), Nigeria could possibly become as advanced as other countries. More jobs should also be created so more people could work. More jobs, better sanitation, safer sex methods, cleaner water, all are really simple solutions to what seems like a complicated problem. If everybody could make a list of factors and slowly work on one, and then the others from most urgent to the least urgent, one country at a time, every country could quickly be fixed and have their own well functioning economy and government. Things should be a bit more regulated and controlled. I believe it is necessary for the problems we are currently facing. Hopefully within the next hundred years, every country will be thriving and successful. We can only reach that goal, though, if we all do our part in helping better the world and the countries and people inhabiting it.

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