

# ***Current Situation of Farmers, Peasants' Movement, and Ecological Agriculture in Nigeria.***

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For an activist who has spent the better part of the last four decades accompanying smallholder farmers in their struggle for justice, fairness and equity, the chosen theme is both a temptation and a difficult challenge.... both of which must be carefully navigated if this contribution is to pass the test of objectivity. I have decided to try.

In this contribution, I have chosen to avoid the debates that the use of the term, Peasants/Peasantry might provoke, since it is not my intention to dwell on such matters. For those interested in this debate, which would be quite out of the interest spectrum of this theme, some references are provided.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes in this discussion, suffice it to substitute 'smallholder farmers' for 'peasants', wherever it seems more appropriate. Nothing significant would be lost as a result of this switch.

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<sup>1</sup> (a) Ezeh, P. J.; *Poverty and Peasantry: The Problem of Concept Cloning in Nigeria.*

(b) Abercrombie, N., Hill, S. and Turner, B. (2000). *The Penguin dictionary of sociology.* London: Penguin.

(c) Goldthorpe, John. (1985). *An introduction to sociology.* London: Heinemann.

(d) Malinowski, B. (1944) *A scientific theory of culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(e) Shenton, R. (1986). *The development of capitalism in northern Nigeria.* London: James Currey

(f) Radcliffe-Brown, A. (1952). *Structure and function in primitive society.* London: Cohen & West.

(g) Shenton, R. (1986). *The development of capitalism in northern Nigeria.* London: James Currey.

(h) Kohnert, Dirk (1979): *Rural class differentiation in Nigeria: Theory and practice - a quantitative approach in the case of Nupeland.* Published in: *Afrika-Spectrum* , Vol. 14, No. 3 (1979): pp. 295-315.

For a start, it is necessary to demystify the “illiterate – backward- supine” profile painted of the Nigerian smallholder farmer by a plethora of elite commentators, both academic and political. Having lived amongst them and shared their struggles and cultural life for many years, I have come to respect these resilient producers who have borne on their shoulders, the weight of the country called Nigeria, in terms of confrontation with and resistance to the colonising British as well as ensuring food security for fellow citizens, against great odds. Indeed, as my smallholder farmer sisters and brothers would often say and sing: “No (smallholder) farmer, No Nation”.

From pre-colonial times to the present, Nigeria has been an Agrarian country, relying on extraction of surplus from both the smallholder farmers and the rural areas of the country in which they live. Easily 70% of those who toil and produce value in the country are smallholder farmers and, in the rural areas themselves, more than 90% of citizens are either smallholder farmers or dependent on farming for their livelihood. It is therefore not out of place to be concerned about the livelihood of such an important segment/category of the country.

As an agrarian country, Nigeria is very well endowed with all that it should take to provide a secure foundation for an economy that could, basing itself on efficient food and raw materials production, later develop a robust industrial capability. The country, the largest collection of black people in the world, comes blessed with the following:

1. As Africa’s most populous country, it is believed to have a current population of 167 million<sup>2</sup>, hence a promise of a potentially large market to support production.
2. A land mass of 923,768 sq. km split into 13,000 sq. km., and 910,768 sq. km. for water and land respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> The correct population figure for the country has always been a contentious one, given the peculiar difficulty that the ruling elites of the country have in being able to conduct a correct uncontested national census. We have, therefore had to rely on more or less intelligent guesstimates, often produced by the International Development related Agencies, seeking to establish figures that they could utilise in their work..... often extrapolating from previous guesstimates! The last such guesstimate stands at 167 million.

3. Of its total expanse, 79 million hectares are suitable for agriculture; 267.7 billion m<sup>3</sup> of surface water, 57.9 billion m<sup>3</sup> of underground water and a potential irrigable land area of 3.14 million hectares. Annual rainfall ranges from 300 to 400mm.
4. From South to North, the country exhibits Equatorial, Tropical as well as Guinea Savannah ecological conditions, an agro-ecological diversification allowing the country to produce an incredibly wide range of agricultural products, and support a heavy population of livestock.
5. Nigeria possesses an extensive coastal belt, an 853 km. long coastline, rich in fish and other marine products.
6. Except with the present advance of climate change and a creeping desert encroachment in the north, the country's agriculture suffers no serious natural threat.

This then, is the country that the British ravaged in the Atlantic Slave trade, directly colonised, and raped for centuries, brutally extracting surplus from the peasants who produced cash crops for export under duress, in addition to producing staples for the citizens' food security. The colonial masters, of course, showed no concern with ensuring, let alone defending, the livelihood of this 'cash cow' that it milked so mercilessly. In the period therefore, of colonialism, there was no thought of defending the livelihood of this largely non-literate citizenry, unorganised for National revolutionary and class struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Rather than enjoy any defence, the livelihood of these resource-poor farmers and their rural communities, suffered from a ravaging external force determined to extract as much as it could to support its own country's development.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, important to emphasise that these farmers were not the limp, submissive and helpless victims of British intrusion into their country, the way some commentators would have us believe. Indeed, incessant and vigorous resistance to the invader was the order of the day. And, of all social categories in the country, it was, perhaps the small-holder farmers who led the massive struggles against the rampaging British administrators, traders and military forces.

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<sup>3</sup> Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture.

*Punitive expeditions crushed the Ekumeku (league of the silent ones) among the Igbo peasants of Asaba and its environs, which had carried on a quasi-guerrilla struggle against colonial control and exploitation of the peasantry. A similar expedition crushed the Aros of south-eastern Nigeria, the Dancing Women's Movement, a general protest movement against colonialism in the areas from the Calabar to Okigwe. Poor peasants also rose up in arms over the widespread introduction of taxation in the rural areas. These protests included the Iseyin uprising of 1916, the Egba uprising of 1918, the market toll uprising in Calabar in 1925, similar protests in Sapele and Warri in 1927, culminating in the famous Aba riots of 1929. In 1903 the Gwari of Gussoro attacked a British political officer and released some prisoners in his custody. In 1908 the Dakarkari attacked the police, and in 1916 the Montol of the Central Plateau rebelled. These uprisings were ruthlessly suppressed by punitive expeditions sent by the colonialists against the peasants and their movements.<sup>4</sup>*

As stated in: “Anti-colonial rebellions and emergence of political parties in Nigeria” – Nigeria between the First and Second World wars:

*The people of Nigeria did not submit meekly to colonial bondage. Rebellion against the British authorities and their servitors from among the feudal elements and tribal chiefs continued incessantly in the southern provinces. Large punitive expeditions were sent to crush the rebels, and the colonial authorities instituted regular military patrolling of the areas in the interior.*

*The liberation movement in Nigeria advanced after the First World War. In 1918, a peasant uprising flared up in the small Egba Kingdom. The immediate cause was the introduction of direct taxation. The insurgents destroyed the railway and telegraph lines linking the*

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<sup>4</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli; “The Poor and Politics in Nigeria: An explanatory Note”, pp.: 44.

*towns of Baro and Minna. The troops sent to the area killed and wounded hundreds of people, sparing neither women nor children. In the 1920s, Onitsha and Calabar province<sup>3</sup>s were the scenes of disturbances and miners struck at Enugu. Particularly large were the anti-tax peasant demonstrations in Warri province.*

*In the Muslim districts of northern Nigeria, popular unrest usually assumed the form of religious movements. Local “prophets”, who proclaimed themselves to be “Mardis” and rallied thousands of peasants, appeared now in one, now in another province. The colonialists used troops to crush these move<sup>3</sup>ments.*

*But the popular actions both in the south and in the north were of a spontaneous, unorganised nature; they were not interconnected and the colonial authorities crushed them with relative ease.*

The popular resistance and self-defensive posture of smallholder farmers of Nigeria was by no means a mainly male affair either, as the women, played a major role in resisting the British, losing their lives to ward off the invader and even collectively stripping in public to deploy a formidable cultural weapon in their struggle.

The Aba Women’s Riot is one of the most popular examples of the heroic role played by Nigerian peasant women in the drive to defend their own interests and livelihood.

***‘The Aba Women’s Riot’** started in November 1929, when thousands of Igbo women from the Bende District of Nigeria, the nearby Umuahia and other places in eastern Nigeria traveled to Oloko to protest against the Warrant Chiefs, whom they accused of restricting the role of women in the government. This incident became known as the Igbo Women’s War of 1929 (or*

*"Ogu Ndem," Women's War, in Igbo). It was organized and led by the rural women of Owerri and Calabar provinces. During the events, many Warrant Chiefs were forced to resign and sixteen Native Courts were attacked, most of which were destroyed. The war was led by a mysterious leader called 'Ezinma.* <sup>5</sup>

We might therefore say, with all justification that, from infancy, right through to maturity of the colonising adventure of the British, smallholder farmers needed no externally derived defence, as they were able to defend themselves and the entire country.<sup>6</sup> The fact that they lost to the better equipped and organised invasion force does not in any way detract from the heroic effort made by them to not only continue feeding the country whilst confronting colonial banditry and, for the women, reproducing and sustaining the race.

Whilst struggling to moderate the wholesale pillage of the nation's economy through brutal expatriation of farmers' surplus, smallholder farmers established, though not yet in a sophisticated or properly networked organisational sense, various groups for resistance. In response to the establishment of Local Commodity Depots in the 1950s by the Colonial government, and in view of the potentially exploitative nature of these depots, the peasantry established an organisation to take care of their interests within the new marketing system. Called Agbekoya Parapo, this organisation sprang from a predecessor, the Maiyegun ("Life Abundance") League which itself was a coalition of peer groups and guilds that protected the interests of their members in situations that required collective action. As the contradictions between the peasants and government deepened and became more widespread, these peasant organisations grew more militant as popular defensive mechanisms to counter erosion of peasant and general citizens' interests and livelihood.<sup>7</sup> And, as an incipient comprador bourgeoisie developed and entered into unholy alliances

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<sup>5</sup> Aborisade, Oladimeji, Mundt, Robert J. Politics in Nigeria. Longhorn (2002) [New York, United States](#)

<sup>6</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli; *"The Poor and Politics in Nigeria: An explanatory Note"*, pp.: 44 – 45: "These uprisings were ruthlessly suppressed by punitive expeditions sent by the colonialists against the peasants and their movements. The colonialists were able to crush the militant workers and poor peasants because of the inadequacies of the latter's organisations. And these inadequacies stemmed essentially from their low level of political consciousness."

<sup>7</sup> Tunde Adeniran: *"The dynamics of Peasant Revolt: A Conceptual Analysis of the Agbekoya Parapo Uprising in the Western State of Nigeria"*. Journal of Black Studies. Jun; 1974.

with the invading British, traders and rulers, it was the smallholder farmers who mounted resistance also to this fifth columnists in the country.

### **Revolutionary options for the defence of Peasant Livelihood:**

Given the strong militancy demonstrated by the peasants and other marginalised classes in Nigeria against the intrusion of the British into our history over some 6 decades, one must wonder why today, there is such sepulchral silence amongst the oppressed classes in the country. What happened to so thoroughly douse the flame of resistance to livelihood threats, both foreign and national, that neither the working class nor the peasantry, urban nor rural poor citizens, progressive professional bodies nor Youth organisations, is today raising any challenge to the deepening impoverishment of the peasantry and other subjugated social categories? As we already established, the Nigerian people are certainly not timid or apathetic about issues that impinge on their well-being. Indeed, at certain points in the political history of the country, they have waged serious battle against even military regimes. Speaking specifically about the livelihood and interests of the peasantry, is it possible that the rest of society, including their fellow poor, believe that the peasants are really relics of the past that would be better eradicated and whose livelihood should be of no concern to serious-minded fellow citizens? Very definitely not!

If as a result of a curious kind of collective amnesia or ignorance, the exploits of the peasantry and their role in defending the general economic, political and cultural integrity of the country could be forgotten, is it likely that fellow citizens do not know which social category makes it possible for all of us to have access to food? Again, certainly not likely. It is quite likely that the fact is unknown to most citizens, even relatively schooled ones, that from pre-colonial, through the ordeal of the colonial decades, the peasants have been responsible for providing, not only food for human beings but also the raw materials that have underpinned our rather anaemic import substitution effort. Today responsibility for production falls almost exclusively on agricultural smallholders with very limited resources. And despite the many shortcomings of agricultural planning and implementation in the country, which makes it necessary for Nigeria that was once food sufficient to become a food importing

country, staple production by peasant producers still provides 60 – 70% of our food requirement.<sup>8</sup> All the cocoa produced in the country in the late 1960s to 1970s was from 300,000 smallholdings, covering 1,200,000 acres in the western and Midwest regions, which together produced 97.3% of all Nigeria's cocoa. Ninety per cent of palm oil and palm kernels were from natural palm groves that received little or no maintenance and 95-98% of rubber was produced by small peasants farms; groundnuts were grown by small producers on one- or two-acre plots, to mount up to the famous Groundnut Pyramids of the past!<sup>9</sup> It means therefore that, up till today, the peasants have maintained the country on what Samir Amin has described as the pre-capitalist 'tributary mode of production'. Capital accumulation, by both governments and the bourgeoisie at home and abroad, has been carried on on the back of these peasants, in what Gray has described as 'taxing agriculture to finance other sectors',<sup>10</sup> thereby bleeding the rural areas to fatten the urban areas and the so-called modern sectors of the economy. Y. A. Abdullahi sums up the same relationship as: 'accumulation without responsibility'.<sup>11</sup> In short, these resilient peasants have been responsible for sustaining us and receiving for it, no more than an ever deepening exploitation. It is therefore surprising that the social category that performs such huge functions for the country, seemingly does not deserve a clearly formalised and closely implemented plan for its own livelihood and general interest defence.

The State and the political parties that most benefit from it, have consistently had nothing but electoral lies, fraud and corruption of every imaginable kind to offer these peasants in return. The plethora of pronouncements, programmes and schemes churned out by the machinery of State, amounts to more and more impoverishment for the peasants who ensure that these rulers are not driven out of office by hordes of hungry citizens, particularly the working class in the urban areas.

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<sup>8</sup> Rigobert Oladiran Ladipo, ... In *African agriculture: The Critical Choices' Nigeria and the Ivory coast: commercial and Export Crops since 1960*.

<sup>9</sup> See: C. K. Laurent. *Investment in Nigerian Tree Crops: Smallholder production*. NISER. University of Ibadan 1968, pp. 2 and 11; Gray, op, cit.. pp. 202 and 209. Olayide and Olatunbosun, op, cit.. pp. 12-13, 19 and 39; Jude Ejeke Njoku, 'The Nigerian ground-nut marketing scheme: the role of licensed buying agents'. M,Sc, thesis. Ahmadu Bello University. June 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Samir Amin. 'Le capitalisme et la rente foncière (la domination du capitalisme sur l'agriculture)', in *La Question paysanne e, le capitalisme*. Editions Anthropos. Paris 1974, pp. 37-8.

<sup>11</sup> Yahaya A. Abdullahi, 'Anatomy of Nigerian agricultural crisis', *The Triumph*. Vol. 1. No. 5. 5 October 1985, pp. 11-12.



Speaking about the working class itself, which should lead the struggle of the oppressed, impoverished citizens of all classes, one must wonder why, in Nigeria, it has been unable to fulfil the inherent leadership responsibility with which it is imbued. One does not have to be a Marxist revolutionary to recognise the immense power that a conscious and well-led working class can exert over the State in class societies. And given the manner in which the dominant classes have trampled the rights and interests of the rest of society in Nigeria, and the militant capacity already demonstrated by the poor classes, it would be correct to expect the working class to be more consistently revolutionary in demanding justice for itself and the rest of the citizenry. A brief examination of this phenomenon would be needed to help us understand the dilemma faced by peasants who seem to have been abandoned to their collective fate in defence of their dwindling livelihood.

From the beginning of the criminal adventure of the British in Nigeria, and as the colonial administration felt the need for and actually began developing a peripheral capitalist system in the country for its exploitative purpose, the working class began its development also. The baton, as it were, was easily transferred by the peasants who confronted the invaders on arrival, to the working class whose relations with capital prepared it to receive the task. The workers of Nigeria, took on the confrontation with the colonisers in a very vigorous way, often losing limbs and lives to a very ruthless and criminally intentioned enemy. Whereas its French counterpart preferred to use assimilation into the ~French Empire as its mode of colonising the countries that came to its share, the British decidedly chose violence, subterfuge of every kind including setting sections of the population against one another with the use of deliberate lies , wholesale slaughter of unarmed citizens whose only sin was that they dared protest, including women and children, banishment and other alienation of leaders, infiltration of popular organisations of self-defence in order to take over and corrupt their leadership; and, indeed, torture of leaders and those unfortunate enough to be arrested!! Besides these horrendous methods of containing the people, the British also used cultural weapons that have left an indelible injury on the nation they later called Nigeria. From their entry into the country, the British, sought out the most reactionary forces and instruments for deployment in their war of destruction of a people who did not declare war on them but offered them warmth and friendship. They gave their

tactic the name; DIVIDE AND RULE, based, mostly on class differences and antagonisms and, most tellingly, ethnic differences. The severely debilitating ethno-religious and ethno-political divisions sewn in the country by British rule, have remained with us, 52 years later, and proved extremely difficult to overcome. In order to control a legitimate strike action of railway workers, seeking justice and fairness, the way their own working class in Britain have often done, the British rulers exploited ethnic differences and fears which they fanned into a roaring flame of hatred and violent animosity, in the famous Jos conflict between Northern workers and their compatriots from the Eastern part of the country, the Igbos. By peddling the falsehood that the shortage of food that the North was experiencing in the wake of the stoppage of rail transport of all goods by striking workers, was actually a planned attack by Igbos on the people of the north. Consequently, workers in the north declined to join the strike and went further to unleash mayhem of a very violent kind on Igbos in Jos in 1945. The British had thus caused internecine conflict and blood-letting in order to quell a workers strike. Would such barbaric methods have been contemplated let alone deployed in quelling workers' strikes in Britain?

It is well argued that such horrendous violence, coupled with extremely slow-healing, if ever at all, ethno religious injury to a people's history and development, drove back the revolutionary zeal of the working class at the hands of the British. And when, such profound setback was soon followed by the brutality of the Nigerian military who not only precipitated a terrible civil war but also, during the Buhari – Idiagbon as well as the Babangida juntas, destroyed the confidence left in the class was further decimated through enacting and enforcing various decrees to suppress the class. Mass retrenchment of workers that could not be successfully resisted, destroyed the credibility of workers' leaders, who were soon replaced by hand-picked 'agents' of government. In the face of such severe routing, the class could barely manage to tamely defend its own economic interests and working conditions. It had very little steam left to defend the livelihood and interests of peasants who were also receiving their own deadly blows from the military state.

It is not difficult to see how the combination of forces and events, between the attainment of flag independence, punctuated by a serious civil war and two decades altogether, of a most vicious military interregnum can so empty the

energies of a class and all other categories that would have received help from it.

Those other social categories, members of the 'nation of the poor' from whom the peasantry might have received assistance in a comprehensive alliance building and revolutionary networking, were also brought under the heavy boots of particularly, the military in governance. Normally, the alliance of the working class and peasantry would need further strengthening from elements of the middle class, especially those who manage to commit, more or less, class suicide. These elements are expected to play the critical role of providing 'assimilated leadership' for the struggle such that the interests and livelihood of the toiling classes become their very own. In Nigeria of the immediate post-colonial era, elements of this extraction, came into high demand in the country, to fill the many positions of authority that self-governance threw up. It became very lucrative, especially in the northern part of the country, to be a member of this fraction of the petty-bourgeois class. Opportunities, so to say, were limitless and it took young Nigerians, male and female but more the latter, of the most outstanding character and commitment, to abandon the lucre of a good and comfortable job, to commit class suicide and join up with the underprivileged. With these juicy openings for a career and comfortable life, the psychological self-distancing from poverty and the poor, that young people from rural homes experience, became even more compelling. Even amongst those who finally commit themselves to the struggles of the poor, like in other facets of the society, the rural sub-sector received the least attention. Most of the revolution-inclined youths who opted out of the system, would rather elect to work in urban areas, amongst the working class. This choice was not difficult to justify since doctrinal canons would seem to support the choice: to concentrate on the working class which is, in orthodox parlance, the revolutionary class per excellence. It was therefore not difficult to twist doctrine to support the abandonment of the peasantry and their rural communities. After all, the peasants are supposed to be "towed into the proletarian state" by a victorious working class once the revolution was consummated. Indeed, this unfortunate misunderstanding of the basics of Marxist doctrine, greatly impoverished the struggle of not only the peasantry but also of the entire 'nation of the poor'. Rather than vigorously prosecute the struggle, cadres were busy warring against one another, in their different mini-camps and one was either a Marx-

ist-Leninist or a Maoist revisionist; a Leninist or a Trotskyite adventurer; etc. And the peasants were left wondering how members of the same family that is facing grave odds, can afford to fight against themselves more viciously than they do the common enemy. A grievous loss of leadership, of direction, of theoretical cohesion and clarity, of strategic unity thus ensued, with grave consequences for the enterprise of defending the livelihood of peasants and all other downtrodden classes. With such a debilitation eating away at the inwards of the enterprise, it was rather easy for the state to contain any threat that the struggle might have posed to bourgeois rule. The general youth movement, usually a dynamic arm of the revolutionary enterprise, was brought to confusion and atomisation by this and other factors. It was not difficult for the state to tempt members of this volatile category and co-opt their most vibrant leaders, thus taking over the movement and silencing it. Today, the Youth movement in the country has lost its direction and become a vassal of various petty bourgeois organisations, both political and economic. It has therefore stopped being a force to be reckoned with in the task of defending the livelihood and interests of the peasants and other impoverished classes in society... until it is completely overhauled and re-built.

A relatively new layer of social actors and actresses whose intervention might be expected to contribute to the defence of peasant livelihood is the Non-Governmental or Civil Society Organisations (NGOs/CSOs). Indeed, an active segment of this group lays claim to this task of defending peasant livelihood within what they refer to as Farmers' Organisations, FOs, even though many of the members are anything but farmers themselves. These organisations are very important to the credibility of the farmer-focussed international/multilateral Agencies: UNFAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations), and, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), particularly. In order to earn their keeps, these agencies must demonstrate that they collaborate with and consult civil society organisations, to accord their perspectives credibility and relevance. These organisations and other funding bodies, individual, bilateral, and multilateral, have taken upon themselves, or in response to their founding remits, the task of working to guarantee food security to the world, especially to the less privileged who live in the now neglected rural world. They therefore, put up a strong show of working with NGOs/CSOs who are regarded as representing the interests of the ordi-

nary people, particularly the marginalised, from a citizens' perspective. The impression that is often given is that of equality-in-partnership of these agencies with the non-governmental ones. However, there is much more to this than meets the ordinary eye and people are assisted to believe what it is good for them to believe. Indeed, just as it cannot be seriously denied that the very phenomenon of NGOs/CSOs, as a social sector that must be given pride of place in how society is manipulated, is a deliberately diversionary one. Indeed, these non-State actors/actresses have often been placed on a higher pedestal than sovereign governments! It is quite obvious that when society is brutalised by bourgeois misrule and subjected to ever deepening impoverishment, concerned citizens must be stimulated into action, in various parts of the world and in respect of a variety of concerns. For those who worry about managing the world for bourgeois exploitation, it is important that the direction in which citizens choose to make their voluntary contribution, often developing from very deep concerns with justice, fairness, equity, freedoms, etc., must needs be controlled, in order to prevent a too-militant 'deviation'. Post-1968 Europe, this 'control of concerned action' has become very important, if young people particularly, are not to act against the interests of bourgeois domination of society. This approach to social engineering has worked well for and in the Northern hemisphere. It soon became an export commodity that must be brought to the troubled peoples of the receiving South. In order for it to take quickly and effectively, it had to be backed with substantial monetary incentive, since anyhow, money is in short supply in the receiving zones. A critical and dispassionate assessment of the sector must lead to the conclusion that it is in fact a 'beggar'-conduit sector. The next myth that needed to be propagated was that the voice of the voiceless is actually effectively amplified by the elements in this sector, thus giving the process of social construction a balanced, just and fair nature. But is this actually so? From our experience with it in the last three decades or more, we must answer this question in the negative. The truth is that the Agencies and their Governing Councils; the funding and donor agencies and their various Boards of Directors; the National Governments which stand behind National funders and donors and their ruling elites, etc., all belonging to the ruling classes of the world, determine the limits to which and never beyond which these recipients of the largesse of funding can go. A look at the ease with which these ostensibly class neutral Agencies

make common cause with organisations of global governance and manipulation of the world like the World Bank, IMF, etc., and how often they manage to prescribe the same medicines to the rest of us, would easily persuade doubters of this not-always-well-hidden connection. When issues of serious concern to the underprivileged call for militant political action of citizens, these Agencies are quick to remind their civil society collaborators that it is unacceptable to politicise development issues. The attempt is constantly made to turn social actors into collaborators with governments and their agencies who are the very causes of the difficulties in the first place – always seeking a middle ground for what is now quaintly called: a win win situation. The expanding promotion of these social organisations represents yet another withdrawal of those who might have been truly committed to the cause of the peasants without any fetters of so-called gentlemanliness. Although these NGOs/CSOs are often very loud in all fora at which peasant livelihood is considered, on balance, they are hardly more than pacifiers/domesticators of peasant justified resistance — unless they are actually SOCIAL MOVEMENTS which are fighting arms of the oppressed.

Religious institutions that are conceived to ring from the very bed of committed and unselfish concern for the underprivileged, are hardly concerned, in most parts of the world, with the plight of peasants and their nose-diving livelihood. This is the situation in Nigeria, where religious institutions are busy fending for themselves and praying for the rest. So, what are we left with, a marooned peasantry and their tattered livelihood and denied interests?

The result of the sustained failure of the peasantry to build effective and durable alliances with other social categories, as it struggles to defend its livelihood and interests is that the class is indeed waning. Peasants have responded to this situation by forming cooperatives amongst themselves and at the instance of governments but these constructs have not stood the test of time. The many failed promises of state support, group poverty, challenges of collective production, etc., have wrecked many cooperative efforts of peasants. The cruel logic of the market, sharply tilted against the smallholder farmer, has ensured that no matter how these farmers try, so long as the bourgeoisie remains in control of society, success will continue to elude them. Poverty is all

they can hope to harvest from the ‘capitalist farm’, even though they do the most work to sustain the enterprise.

Many commentators have insisted that the peasantry is an anachronism, and that they have no recourse but to disappear from society. True, direct observation shows that smallholder farmers are gradually ageing and becoming ineffectual in the sector. Although normal succession would lead us to expect that they would be replaced by younger farmers, who would continue to give rural Nigeria vigour. But this is certainly not the case. What we see is the rejection of farming as vocation by younger citizens and even the children of farmers would do anything to ensure that they do not themselves replace their parents on the farm. Indeed, their parents would pray that their children do not succeed them either. So, who loses, society or the peasantry?

Evidence mounts steadily that the direction in which society must go is toward smallholdings for sustainable production of food and the sustenance of citizens. Food security must gravitate more and more toward food sovereignty and the choice of agro-ecology as the dominant farming system must be taken seriously. All the best minds in agricultural science and the practice of farming, for feeding people rather than markets or machines, are agreed that the small farming option remains the best for sustainable food sovereignty and poverty eradication.<sup>12</sup> The small producer must indeed become Queen and King — as Nigerian Yoruba farmers would say: “Agbe loba”, as wise counsel prevails over the illogic of unending profit maximisation and industrial agriculture. In a practical way and on an everyday basis, it is becoming increasingly clear to concerned citizens that unless we are able to make farming attractive to our

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<sup>12</sup> IAASTAD — The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development — a three-year collaborative effort (2005–2007) that assessed AKST with respect to meeting development and sustainability goals of reducing hunger and poverty, improving nutrition, health and rural livelihoods, and facilitating social and environmental sustainability.

SHENGGEN — “Investing in agriculture and rural development, with a focus on smallholder farmers, is the best bet for achieving global food security, alleviating poverty, and improving human wellbeing in developing countries; IDN – InDepth News, June 15, 2011.

KANAYO F. NWANZE — “Smallholder farms .... Are often very efficient in terms of production per hectare, and they have tremendous potential for growth. Experience shows that helping smallholder farmers can contribute to a country’s economic growth and food security; We believe that the voices of smallholder farmers must be heard because we have empirical evidence how agriculture, how economies have been transformed in China, in India, in Brazil, in Vietnam and today even in Ghana. Smallholders in developing countries — the majority of them women — manage to feed 2 billion people despite working on ecologically and climatically precarious land, with difficult or no access to infrastructures and institutional services, and often lacking land tenure rights that farmers in developed countries take for granted.”

youths, especially the millions of them now unemployed or underemployed, this country would become a beggar country, actually dependent on food hand-outs from other nations. However, it is also quite obvious that unless we are able to drastically improve the livelihood of today's peasant farmers, who are the parents of the youths we look to for the future sustenance of the country, no sensible young person would agree to take farming as vocation. So, like it or not, we must attend to defending the livelihood of peasants, if we are to have a future at all.

In view of the above, it is clear that Nigeria needs to make plans to deal with the chronic neglect of the peasants who have fed the country and sustained it in other ways, before severe food insecurity and the consequent social disruption whose consequences might be too grave to contemplate. It is clearly primarily the duty of governments to support the producers of food for its citizens, and not that of so-called donors or international agencies. Undoubtedly, Nigeria must still suffer bourgeois rule for some time in the future, hence it is important that governments in class society no matter how thoroughly they might believe themselves immune from popular anger, come to recognise that a hungry and hence angry people, united in the determination to eliminate the source of their impoverishment, might prove too much for even the largest armies in the world to keep down. Examples abound in history, contemporary as well as distant, of seemingly powerless masses of people, do vanquish strong armies. It is not too late for governments in the country to make amends, and genuinely begin to defend the livelihood of their farmers, especially the smallholder/peasant farmers. It would be serious self-deceit to believe that since these farmers are ageing rapidly and approaching their natural extinction, not being replaced by a fresh set of peasants, time is on the side of the rulers who can afford to wait out the end of this troublesome anachronism. Such dangerously selfish predictions in other countries have failed to be borne out and the deluge of popular counter violence has often caught up with recalcitrant rulers. Scientific knowledge today, emphasises the importance of defending the livelihood of peasants to make their social role easier to discharge, if for no other reasons. (1) Mounting data and a wealth of actual field experience in many parts of the world, have indicated that smallholder farming is the future of sustainable food sovereignty, eradication of poverty and protection of the environment, including effective mitigation of further climate



change. Therefore, nations of the world, including Nigeria, must move in this direction, class power or not, to ensure that their peoples will not become food beggars and that the young ones can, with confidence, elect to become food producers for their nations and the world. The exercise of power in society, must be negotiated with those over whom this power is exercised, if cataclysm is not to annihilate both rulers and the ruled in a final holocaust.

Those of us who have chosen to accompany the marginalised majority in our country, must, as an historic duty, determine precisely where and how this commitment is to be best deployed. It would be futile for us to allow our energies to be swallowed by dubious social engineering devices that emanate from the domination of one category in society, especially the minority elite, over the majority who actually further the interests of the society at large. Food security and sovereignty cannot be petrified into a-political, so-called developmental issues. Determining who gets fed and who does not; what food is available to some and not to others; how much and what quality of food shall be available to some and not to other, etc., are profoundly political matters. Poverty and hunger cannot be eradicated in society without 'persuading' those who sow these dilemmas amongst the majority of the people to desist from such heinous activities. It would surely take strong revolutionary politics to achieve this persuasion.

As we have proposed in other writings, the movement of the poor in Nigeria, in order to defend smallholder livelihoods and interests, should unite with activists globally, especially in China, to promote an **Alternative Peoples' Globalisation Programme** on a world scale. Some of the tasks towards this end are:

- the development and continuous upgrading of **Nodal Knowledge Banks** (NKBs) on Free Market Globalisation (FMG) as well as on Alternative Peoples' Globalisation Initiatives (APGIs), regionally and sub-regionally. This is designed to give those who see the defense of smallholder livelihoods and interests as an important task for humanity, access to wider family and hence, empowerment;
- the development and vigorous pursuit of an ever widening programme of civil society stimulation with the material in our NKBs, targeting, not only the traditional NGOs but also, and more importantly, POs (Peoples' organi-

sations), Social Movements — particularly women’s movements, given their incredible energy and tenacity, Youth Associations and Clubs; etc.

- the establishment, of a **Peoples’ Global Solidarity Initiative** (PGSI) to bring together, at regular intervals, representatives of ordinary citizens of the world as we develop a **Peoples’ Global Forum** of the future;
- the establishment of a Peoples’ Globalisation Development Fund (PGDF) earmarked for the strengthening and general support of peoples= initiatives that foster the basic characteristics of APGIs:
  - promotion of the self-reliant, self-fulfillment enhancing, micro-livelihood supporting initiatives of the people;
  - promotion of people-people solidarity in mutual respect, sharing, caring and mutual celebration;
  - promotion of hope-renewal for the Youth of the world;
  - promotion of stimulation-through-learning experiences and exchanges among peoples;
  - promotion of justice, fairness and equity among peoples of the world irrespective of race, creed, age, physical status, or sex;
  - promotion of humaneness and sustainability rather than mere profit maximization;
  - a strong sense of responsibility to the rights of unborn generations and of their future world;
  - celebration of variety and ‘difference’ rather than discrimination and exclusion; and,
  - Establishment of people-people, actual grassroots, friendship associations in different countries of the world; etc., etc.

The struggle to promote the defence of smallholder/peasant livelihoods and interests against the current overdrive of elite minority exploitation and marginalisation, is certainly not limited to Nigeria, a country that is presently greatly handicapped in this respect. It is a global task and one that is mandatory if we are truly to achieve rural regeneration and sustainability for our world.