



## **COMBINING GOVERNMENT WAGE EMPLOYMENT WITH AGRIBUSINESS IN OMOKU, RIVERS STATE OF NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS**

**ALLISON, DIMKPA SOLOMON**

*Student Affairs Unit, Federal College of Education (Tech.),  
Omoku, Rivers State, Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

*The study centered on combining government wage employment with agribusiness in Omoku, River State of Nigeria; implication for administrators. Some documents were analysed for facts while other materials were used for information of agribusiness. Human capital theory and the code of conduct for public officers were the frameworks that guided the study. Stagflation which is stagnated income at inflated cost of commodities and commitment to service on one hand and better quality life on the other hand were presented as some of the rationale and prospect of such combination respectively. Likely problems such as occupational stress which may hamper family relationship and recommendations like re-orientation and creation of awareness for such employees with release of more accessible venture capital by government were postulated.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Combining, Government wage employment, Agribusiness, Stagflation.*

### **Introduction**

The art of handling different activities, even in the realm of agriculture is not a strange thing to man. The Holy Bible records that God created the first man called Adam and put him in the garden called Eden to dress and keep it. The enormity of both dressing and keeping the different plants and animals in Eden took Adam to different aspects of agriculture like horticulture, forestry, fishery, livestock, to mention a few. Woman was later created by God to be a help meet to the man due to the volume of task carried out (Genesis 2).

Aham (1999) identified wage employment, self-employment or entrepreneurship and the combination of both wage and self-employment as the three available options in terms of employment to any individual. He further listed poor salary structure, early retirement of workers, sudden retrenchment and non-payment of retirement benefits as some of the rationale for choosing the third option, which is combining wage employment with self-employment in Nigeria. To him, such combination will cushion the common problems associated with total reliance on wage-employment.

Every government employee is regulated by time. In the core civil service, work begins and terminates by 8am and 4pm respectively, Mondays to Fridays of each week, except for government approved holidays or authorized leave. Furthermore, all public officers (government employees) are retired from active service after putting thirty-five



(35) years of service or on attaining 60 years for core civil service, 65 years for those in the judiciary and 70 years for those in academics. According to Allison and Ojedapo (2012:41), “time, if seen as an umpire, is both unbiased and impartial”. What this portends is that nobody, apart from God, have the power to conserve time. The best we can do is to make the best use of our time to avoid regrets in the future.

At present, the nation’s economy is in recession. Recession, which is a period in which a nation experiences negative economic growth characterized by mass sacking of workers in the public and private sectors, redundancy in most businesses, downsizing of staff, dramatic fall in production output and increased borrowing by the Government. Sadly too, the Government finds it difficult to meet up with the monthly salary bills. Despite all efforts by economic experts to revamp the economy of the nation, Nigeria, our naira has continued to freely fall. The effect of such uncontrollable free fall is that the cost of living is increasing in geometric progression and income is not increasing in the same proportion to cushion the adverse effect on the populace. This is called **Stagflation** in macro-economics.

The conversion rate at the Parallel market is on an average of four hundred naira (₦400) to a dollar (\$1) as at October, 2016. The minimum wage for public officers (government employees) is still fastened at eighteen thousand naira (₦18,000), equivalent to forty-five dollars (\$45) monthly, for a country that imports almost all things. This makes it practically impossible to depend on government wage alone. The condition of most government wage employees, more especially at the State and Local Government Area levels is pitiable. Some of the employees at the States and Local Government Areas go without pay for months and even years now.

To rely on government wage employment alone could be likened to the adage that any rat with a single exit point does not live long. In essence, the longevity of employees to a great extent depends at meeting up their needs, which alternative means of income, which needs to be in tandem with the provisions of the law contained in the code of conduct for government wage employees, permits. It is on this premise that the study: “Combining Government Wage Employment with Agribusiness in Omoku, Rivers State of Nigeria: Implications for Administrators” is presented.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Total reliance on government monthly wage as the only source of income is no longer fashionable as it does not sustain nor is it sufficient for her teeming employees. It is even more unfortunate that most take home (net wage) do not get home with the employees. Most of the time, such net wage (or simply, wages) are slashed (not paid in full) and in some cases, payments are belated.



Obamuyi (2011) revealed from a research conducted among 880 public officers that government wage employees with other business(es) showed more commitment to the job, less occupational stress and achieved better quality life than their colleagues without additional source of income. What this means is that combining government wage employment with other business(es) (especially agribusiness) will yield greater commitment to the work, have less occupational stress and bring enhanced quality life, even in the midst of slashed or inconsistent payment of wages.

However, it is very vital to emphasize the need for education/training before embarking on such combination. A very vital path to tread in this case is Human Capital Development (Theory), which also forms the first theoretical framework of this study.

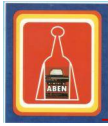
According to Becker (1993), Human Capital Theory which is also a macro-economy development theory, posits that all expenditures on education, training, medical care, etc are investments in capital. By this, knowledge gained in education and training is the most important investment in human beings. To buttress on this in relation to the study, Olorunni (2016) identified five mistakes to avoid while embarking on agribusiness in Nigeria, He said that agribusiness requires proper handling with sufficient information, knowledge and tactics. He therefore urged all prospective investors in agribusiness to spend quality time on research before embarking on ones chosen area of agribusiness.

The second theoretical framework for this study is derived from the code of conduct for public officers (wage employees) in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), fifth schedule, part 1, Section 2B, which stipulates that “except where he is not employed on full time basis, he cannot engage or participate in the management or running of any private business, profession or trade but **nothing in this sub-paragraph shall prevent a public officer from engaging in farming**”

This position gives a lee – way to government wage employees to combine their work with agribusiness although at their spare time without going against the law.

### **Description of Omoku in Rivers State of Nigeria**

Omoku is an Urban Area that serves as both the administrative and commercial headquarters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, also known as ONELGA in Rivers State. ONELGA is one of the twenty three (23) Local Government Areas of Rivers State. It is the second largest town after Obio-Akpor and Port Harcourt, which have merged as a joint-single city (Abali, 2016). The population of Omoku is an admixture of government wage employees (public officers), farmers, traders, which consists of traditional craft-makers and petroleum sector workers from all parts of Nigeria and beyond (foreign expatriates). It is a coastal area, having good topography and rich



soil. The land is arable for various agricultural activities. It is also blessed with large deposits of crude oil and natural gas.

Government Wage employees, otherwise known as public officers in Omoku include all the services promoted wholly or mainly with funds from public revenue like the Civil Service, Teaching Service, Public Corporation, State-Owned Companies, Local Government Service, Nigeria Police Force, Judiciary, University Staff and the Armed Forces (Akpan in Obamuyi, 2011).

### **Government Wage Institutions in Omoku, Rivers State of Nigeria include:**

1. **University Staff:** Teaching and non-teaching staff of Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in Affiliation with University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State and Subsidiaries.
2. **Judiciary:** Three (3) different courts namely the Customary Court, the Magistrate Court and High Court with Chairman, Magistrate and Judge, respectively, Registrars, Lawyers and other employees.
3. **Armed Forces:** There is a Joint-Task Force (J.T.F) unit with various check-points manned by military personnel.
4. **Nigeria Police Force:** There is Nigeria Police Force Stations in Omoku and surrounding towns and villages with different policemen/women.
5. **Local Government Service:** There is the Local Government Service Headquarters in Omoku with varying departments staffed with employees.
6. **Teaching service:** There are various number of teachers deployed to the various Primary Schools, Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) schools, Senior Secondary Schools and other schools like the Kindergarten, etc.
7. **Public Corporations:** The different Ministries have their offices in Omoku.

### **Rationale for Combining Government Wage Employment with Agribusiness**

Although, agribusiness is relatively recent in Nigeria, yet, it is not totally new. The term, **agribusiness** was first coined in 1957 by Goldberg and Davis (Wikipedia). Agribusiness is an acronym which stands for agricultural business. In other word, it means business of agriculture. It is agriculture, mostly carried out on large-scale for commercial purpose.

Nwankwo in Adesope, Ukpongson, Nwankwo and Oguzor (1997) considered agriculture to be broadly grouped into subsistence and commercial agriculture, that is, small and large-scale agriculture.

Some of the reasons for combining Government Wage Employment with Agribusiness are:



1. Poor Salary, early retirement of employees, sudden retrenchment and in most cases, non-payment of retirement benefits which are associated with government wage employment nowadays. With investment in agribusiness, such employee is secured.
2. There is inflation of commodities against a fixed income (stagflation). Promotion and yearly incremental pay are not added in some cases. Agribusiness remains the alternative choice to cushion the hand weather.
3. The code of conduct for public officers permits the combination of government wage employment with agribusiness.
4. The Governor of Benue State, Mr. Samuel Ortom declared all Fridays of the week between Friday, June 10, 2016 to the end of July, 2016, as public holidays to enable the state workers till the land for agricultural produce. Similarly, Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State declared every Thursdays and Fridays from the month of August, 2016 for Imo State workers to go to Farms to produce food to assist the state economy. Governor Okorocha termed it, 'Back to Land for Agriculture. He gave no time line in his own case. From the above, government wage employees will have to combine their jobs with agriculture, which is the position of this study.
5. There are great opportunities in agribusiness that are yet to be harnessed. Moreso, with an economy that is already in recession, the future looks bleak with only one source of income.
6. More than one source of income like salary and self-employment will cushion the hard time and also afford employment opportunities to other job seekers.
7. Nigeria's soil is good, the climate is favourable and the land is arable for agribusiness. Only 40% out of 75% of the entire arable soil in Nigeria has been cultivated. (Omorogiuwa, Zivlovic and Ademoh, 2014).
8. The present federal and state governments are aware of the possibilities of agribusiness. They are in partnership with some financial institutions to give loans to farmers. An example of such is Rivers State Government.
9. Government wage employees can save for start-up capital or easily access loans from banks as the employment can serve as surety.
10. Although agribusiness is considered in terms of large-scale agriculture, yet, an employee can start small and grow with undivided focus and attention.



### **Different Agribusiness that can be combined with Government Wage Employment:**

Below are various types of agribusiness that can be combined with government wage employment. They are as follows:

- (a) **Farming** which involves the cultivation of cash crops like cocoa (cacao), oil palm, coffee, kola, etc and cultivation of edible crops like cassava, plantain, banana, maize, etc.
- (b) **Livestock** raising like chicken for meat and eggs, cattle for diary, meat, hides and skin, pigs for meat, sheep for wool and meat, rabbit for meat, etc.
- (c) **Horticulture** like fruits growing including pears, citrus and stone fruits, vegetable crops including tomatoes, carrots and potatoes, plant nurseries including flowers, shrubs and trees, vineyards specializing in grapes for wine, etc.
- (d) **Grain Growing** like wheat, barley, oats and cereal.
- (e) **Agricultural Services** such as sheep, fruit picking, aerial spraying, fertilizer spreading and pests extermination
- (f) **Forestry** involving afforestation, deforestation, saw-mills operation venture, all manner of wood and timber production, wildlife like forest reserves, games reserves or wildlife conservation like Yankari Games Reserve, Bauchi State, etc.
- (g) **Fishery** involving either artificial or natural means of producing fishes and aquatic animals. It deals with hatchery, breeding, rearing, harvesting, handling, processing and distribution of fishes like catfish, shellfish, etc and other aquatic creations. It also involves the raising and selling of aquaria.
- (h) **Agro-Allied** industries which work in symbiosis with agricultural industries, that is, those industries that depend on agricultural produce for raw materials and whose finished products also aid to blossom agricultural yield. Examples include Beverage industries which use coffee, cocoa and tea; soap industry uses oil seeds/oil; feed mill uses cereal and grain; tyre industry uses rubber latex; sugar industry uses sugar cane; paper industry uses pulp wood; starch industry uses cassava and maize; fruit canning industry uses fruits and leather/shoe industry uses hides and skin from animals.



### **Problems Associated with Combining Government Wage Employment with Agribusiness**

Nothing good, they say comes easily. Similarly, good things are not cheap and cheap things are not good. There are bound to be likely problems that will be associated with such combination. Some of them are:

1. Such combination will lead to occupational stress, hamper family relationship and likely affect such employee's commitment to duty (Obamuyi 2011), especially at the beginning stage.
2. The Holy Bible in Matthew 6:24 states that "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". The possibility to have divided attention, focus and commitment to the employment is there.
3. Poor state of the country's infrastructure like no or at best epileptic power supply, no good road, bad road network, etc. is another impediment.
4. Difficulty in assessing start-up capital from financial institutions.
5. Inconsistent government policies.
6. The slow pace of returns from investment.
7. Insecurity like herdsmen attack, robbery, etc.

### **Prospect of Combining Wage Employment with Agribusiness**

The future is bright if one decides to embark on such combination. Apart from initial challenges, the prospect of such combination includes:

1. **Commitment to Service:** Research reveals that government employees with other business(es) (agribusiness in this case) demonstrate more commitment to their employment (government work) and exhibit less stress compared to their counterparts without additional source of income (Obamuyi, 2011).
2. **Better Quality of Life:** Such combination will bring better quality of life. (Obamuyi, 2011).
3. **Economic Development:** Profits from such agribusiness will flow in as an increase into the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
4. **Creation of Employment and Reduction of Unemployment:** Such combination will create employment opportunities on one hand and reduce unemployment on the other.
5. **Conservation of Foreign Exchange:** Investment in Agribusiness will reduce the importation of raw materials, machineries, equipment and the use of foreign expatriates who are paid in hard currencies.
6. **Reduction in Rural –Urban Migration:** Agribusiness will afford employment opportunities to rural dwellers, thereby reducing the rural – urban drift syndrome.



7. **A Safe Haven for Retirement:** With a viable agribusiness in place, a retiree from government wage employment looks towards a sustained quality lifestyle ahead.

### **Conclusion**

Reliance on government wage alone will lead to frustration as salaries are most of the time delayed and if paid, slashed. A fixed income chasing goods and services that are on the rise every day will not in anyway bring a better quality life. To cope with the harsh economic realities is to explore the possibilities of developing other sources of income, one of which is the combination of government wage employment with agribusiness. It is permitted by law, and have been demonstrated by two state governments, that is, Benue and Imo.

### **Recommendations**

To encourage the combination of government wage employment with agribusiness, the following are recommended:

- (1) Government should give orientation to her employees on the possibility of such combination and the benefits attached thereafter;
- (2) Government should create awareness on this salient but silent venture called agribusiness;
- (3) Government employees should be made to know their rights and privileges as contained in code of conduct guiding all her employees;
- (4) Government employees should be motivated with certain incentives like free training on any aspect of agribusiness and possibly start-up capital;
- (5) More funds should be injected and made accessible at single digit interest rate for aspiring and prospective employees that wish to embark on agribusiness;
- (6) The necessary infrastructure like good and assessable roads, constant and regular power supply, etc. should be provided and;
- (7) Our farms, forests, etc should be made as safe as possible. All necessary machineries should be put in place to ensure the safety of lives, properties and produce of such agribusiness venture.



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