

UNIT 4 DISTRIBUTION OF CROPS IN NIGERIA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The distribution of crop species in the various ecozones of Nigeria relates most significantly to the seasonality of rainfall, and the duration and regimes of the wet season. In areas where cropping is mainly by rain-fed agriculture, these have great implications on the crop type, cropping pattern, cropping sequence and the scale of crop production. Thus, the long-season root and perennial tree crops, which are highly demanding on soil moisture, dominate in the wetter south, contrasting the short-season grain crops of the drier north. The situation is also significantly true in areas of irrigated agriculture, since floodplains and rivers supplying water to irrigation systems need to be replenished by rain water. Soil types and vegetation characteristics are also important factors in crop distribution across ecozones in Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to explain:

- the patterns of distribution of various crop groups in Nigeria, and
- the factors governing the extensive cultivation of crops in specific parts/regions.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Distribution of Root Crops

The main root crops of Nigeria are yams, cassava, cocoyam, and to a lesser extent, sweet potato which is a minor crop. Root crops occupy a significant position in agricultural production in the country. However, the amount of land allocated to the cultivation of the three leading root crops is less significant. Thus, when compared with other crops such as cereals root crops, especially yams and cassava have high relative value per unit of land used in their cultivation. The eastern states constitute the most important root crop-producing area of the country, and have more extensive areas allocated to the crops than any other part of the country. Three main areas of these states account for over 75% of land cultivated to root crops, namely an extensive coastal plain covering the southern parts of Cross River State and the eastern parts of Rivers State except where fishing is dominant in the forest zone; less extensive area covering parts of Ogoja, Ikom, Obubra and Abakaliki areas in the grassland savanna; and a relatively limited area covering the western parts of Onitsha, Orlu and owerri divisions in the forest zone. The well-known root crop-producing areas of the Oyo, Ondo, Benue and Plateau States fall considerably behind the eastern states, accounting for 25-49% of land cultivated to the crops in both the forest and savanna-producing areas. The amount of time and energy available for root crop cultivation are limited by export crops. Root crops are produced in the far north but production is really marginal in areas north of Rivers Niger and Benue.

3.2 Distribution of Cereals and Pulses

In Nigeria, cereals and pulses (guinea-corn, millet, maize, cowpeas, rice) account for a large proportion of the land used for agricultural cultivation of the major crops.

3.2.1 Guinea-Corn

This crop is the most extensively cultivated, and most of the production occurs in northern Nigeria where it is suited to most soil types. The four

major species of sorghum produced in Nigeria are the Guinea, Kaura, Farafara and Chad. Guinea-corn is also the most versatile of the cereals, being produced in all ecological zones except the Sahel savanna. It is most important in the southern and northern Guinea savanna and subhumid Sudan savanna. Further north, sorghum does better on the heavier soils in depressions and floodplains as the rains decrease. It is a very minor crop in the derived savanna and forest zones. The most important growers of guinea-corn in Nigeria are Kaduna, Borno, Sokoto and Kano States. In Zaria, most land is cultivated to guinea-corn interplanted with millet, and less to sole guinea-corn.

3.2.2 Millet

Most parts of northern Nigeria where millet production is practised on 30% or more land coincide approximately with the areas where the crop ranks first in agricultural use. These areas are Borno, Bauchi and Sokoto States. There is some overlap of guinea-corn and millet-producing areas in parts of Sokoto, Kano and Katsina. A higher proportion of the most important producing areas are located in the Sahel savanna zone, where moisture conditions are marginal for crop production. However, it is grown as far south as Lat. 10°N in parts of Borgu Province of Kwara State and Lat. 8°N in parts of Benue State.

3.2.3 Maize

This is the most important cereal crop in the agriculture of the southern parts of Nigeria. Also, the south-western parts are outstanding in maize production contrary to the south-eastern parts, where production is less important. The Niger Delta area is relatively unimportant for maize production. Although it occurs in all ecological zones except the Sahel savanna zone, the crop is of only marginal importance in many parts of the northern region. There are three core areas where 30% or more of cultivated land is allocated to maize production in Nigeria. The most extensive of these areas is the Yoruba savanna, covering large parts of Oyo State and Egbado division and a limited area south-west of Ilorin. Less intense maize cultivation extends into Osun and Ibadan Divisions to the east. The other two areas are found within the forest zone in the heart of the cocoa zone in Ife-Ijesa Divisions and the parts located near the Obubra-Ikom cocoa-producing areas. Other areas of maize production are Edo State, Nasarawa, Lafia and Wukari Divisions of Benue and Plateau States. Generally, there is a systematic decline in maize production towards the north, where sporadic production of the crop occurs.

3.2.4 Rice

Rice has been cultivated in parts of northern Nigeria since the 16th century. The cultivation of rice is undertaken in four main types of environments in Nigeria, namely rain-fed uplands, especially in southern Nigeria; tidal freshwater mangrove swamps, naturally-flooded areas such as the fadamas of northern Nigeria, and irrigated lands. These ecologies are found in many parts of the country; thus, rice is produced in virtually all ecological zones.

3.2.5 Cowpeas

These are widely cultivated and eaten in Nigeria. Its production in northern Nigeria is very closely associated with sorghum and millet. The most important producing areas of cowpeas are located in the Sudan savanna zone (Borno, Bauchi, Kano and Sokoto States), with 508-1016 mm of rain per year, due to its requirements of light rainfall, good loamy soils and drought-resistant nature. The only important cowpea-producing areas located in the Guinea savanna zone are northern parts of Niger State, northern Oyo State and southern Ilorin Division of Kwara State. Its cultivation under the less ideal conditions in the latter two areas is attributed to special consumption preferences for the crop in Oyo Yoruba. Thus, about 50% of the cowpea crop produced in the wetter Ilorin areas is sold to the more southern western states

3.3 Distribution of Tree Crops

The main ecologically significant tree crops grown in Nigeria are cocoa, oil palm, rubber (important export crops) and kola (mainly produced for internal trade). The areas of coffee and cashew production are diffuse. Cocoa, oil palm, rubber and kola are all grown in the forest zone, but with the production of specific crop species in different sections. Thus, cocoa and kola are produced in the western part of the forest zone, rubber in the central parts, and oil palm in denser stands in the eastern states in spite of its more widespread cultivation across the zone than the other tree crops.

3.3.1 Cocoa

It is produced in two main moisture belts, namely in western Nigeria where annual rainfall is 1143-1524 mm, and in the south-east, where annual rainfall is 1905-3048 mm. Ogun, Oyo and Ondo States account for over 95% of Nigerian cocoa production. Cocoa production in the eastern states is increasing tremendously, but the amount of land allocated to the crop is very small. There is also limited production of cocoa in the Bendel and Kwara States.

3.3.2 Kolanuts

Cola acuminata (Gbanja) is the kola of commerce, large quantities of which are transported to the northern states, where it is widely consumed. The western states are the leading producers of *C. nitida* kolanuts in Nigeria, accounting for over 80% of the country's production. The main areas of kolanut production in western Nigeria are located in parts of Abeokuta, Ijebu and Ibadan provinces. The dominant areas of production are in the forest zone, while the less important areas are widely scattered in the cocoa zone.

3.3.3 Rubber

Edo State is the main rubber-producing area of Nigeria, with more than 80% of the production coming from the peasant holders. However, the greater part of the output in other parts of the country is obtained from private or government plantations. 3.3.4 Oil palm- The oil palm is considered to be an indigenous crop of West Africa, where the sources and banks of water courses, moist valleys, especially in the forest/savanna transition zone, banks of lakes and swamps, and low-lying islands in humid tropical environments serve as the natural habitats of the plant. Oil palm groves are found mainly in areas of secondary forest throughout southern Nigeria and in parts of the derived savanna. There are three main types of oil palm groves in man-made habitats in the country, namely secondary rain forest with oil palms; palm bush; and dense palm grove or farmland with palms. Also, there are planted village groves and peasant plantations. The oil palms in the secondary rain forest are found mainly in western Nigeria and Edo State. Oil palm bush is also found in parts of Asaba and Warri Divisions of Edo State and Kabba and Igala Divisions of Kwara State.

3.4 Distribution of Oil Seeds

The most important oil seeds produced in Nigeria both for export and internal use are groundnuts, beniseed and soybeans. They are cultivated mainly in northern Nigeria and outside the forest environment.

3.4.1 Groundnuts

Groundnuts are produced predominantly in northern Nigeria, where its spread and cultivation date back to the 1800's. Most of the important groundnut-producing areas are located in the drier parts of the Sudan savanna zone, especially in areas with less than 1016 mm annual rainfall. These areas are characterized by modest moisture requirements of the crop and extensive light sandy soils. The Kano region, which started the cultivation of the crop, is still the largest producer. However,

the important groundnut-producing areas extend into the Borno and Sokoto States, other states, namely Bauchi, Adamawa, Taraba, Katsina and Gombe. The production of the crop is much less intensive in Sokoto and Niger States. Only very limited groundnut output is noted in areas south of Lat. 11°N, mainly in Bauchi, Gombe and Adamawa States.

3.4.2 Beniseed

A high proportion of the beniseed output of Nigeria is produced in four main areas, namely the Tiv Division; Doma District, both in Benue State; Igbira Division of Kwara State; and the Kwali area of Niger State. Most of the producing areas are located in the Guinea savanna zone, where annual rainfall is 1016-1397 mm.

3.4.3 Soybeans

Although an exotic crop, soybean production trends are very similar to those of beniseed. The main producing areas are also found in Tiv Division, which extends into adjacent Niger and Kabba Provinces. Soybean production also extends northwards into southern Zaria and even southern Katsina Provinces.

3.5 Industrial Crops

The main industrial crops of Nigeria are cotton, tobacco, sugar-cane and kenaf.

3.5.1 Cotton

Cotton has been grown in Nigeria for many centuries before the advent of the Europeans. It was traditionally associated with the spinning and weaving industries, the main centres of which were located at Kano in the north and Iseyin in the south-west. The three main regions of cotton production in Nigeria are the northern (most extensive production), eastern (moderate production) and southern (minor production) zones. The northern zone covers the whole of Zaria Province and the southern parts of Kano and Katsina Provinces. The eastern zone covers considerable areas of south-eastern Bauchi, adjoining districts of Adamawa and south-western Borno State. A small extension is also found in the Lowland and Pankshin Divisions of Plateau State. The main concentration of production is around Gombe and Kumo, both of which have cotton ginneries. The main areas of cotton production in the southern zone are the Borgu Division in north-west Kwara State and the Ankpa area in the Idoma Division of Kogi State. Other areas are parts of Bida Division and the area between Nasarawa and Keffi in Nasarawa State.

3.5.2 Tobacco

The cultivation of this crop in Nigeria has been known for ages. Air-cured tobacco is produced both in western (Ogbomoso) and northern (Zaria, *fadamas* of Shinkafe, Gusau, Birnin Kebbi, Kano, Hadeija, Sokoto) Nigeria. In western Nigeria, the crop is grown in several scattered smallholdings ranging from 0.4 to 2.0 ha in size. Flue-cured tobacco is mainly produced in north-western Oyo State, extending from Saki in the north to Iseyin and Igbo-Ora in the south, where the annual rainfall of 1016-1270 mm is adequate for production. Other desirable factors are the availability of light soils for growing the crop and abundant dry wood for firing during the curing process.

3.5.3 Sugar-Cane

Small quantities are traditionally produced by Nigerian farmers on the floodplains of rivers. Limited quantities of crude brown sugar were produced at Kano, Katsina and Zaria before the refining of sugar started in the early 1960s. This led to the commercial production at Bacita near Jebba, on the southern bank of the Niger floodplain in 1957. This also marks the origin of the Nigerian Sugar Company and other sugar-cane estates in various parts of the floodplains of both the Niger and Benue rivers.

3.5.4 Kenaf

This crop has been grown for centuries by farmers in several parts of Nigeria. Kenaf was found to be a good substitute for jute under Nigerian conditions and this led to the commercial production of unretted kenaf fibre at Jema'a (northern Nigeria) in the early 1960s. Other areas of kenaf production include the floodplains of the Niger and Benue rivers, and parts of Oyo State.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learned about

- i. the important crops grown in different parts of Nigeria,
- ii. the spatial distribution of the production of crop types and groups and the factors influencing this, and
- iii. the areas of intensive cultivation of specific crops.

5.0 SUMMARY

Crop types and groups of crops differ widely in spatial distribution across ecozones of Nigeria, especially due to seasonal rainfall patterns and soil type.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Identify fully, the most important areas of root crop production in eastern Nigeria.
- 2) Why is guinea-corn regarded as the most versatile cereal crop in Nigeria?
- 3) Why is the Sahel savanna reported to be the highest millet-producing zone?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Agboola, S.A. (1979). *An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria*. Oxford University Press Ltd.: U.K.