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## **Eclipse of the Sun: The Political Economy of Food Dependency in Nigeria**

**Okosun, Abhie Victor (Ph.D, FCAI, FWASCN)**

Department of General Studies

College of Education, Ekiadolor Benin City

E-mail: [vicbismack@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:vicbismack@yahoo.co.uk)

Tel: +2348094929950

**Akongbowa, A. Bramwell**

Professor of Public Administration

Federal University, Wukari

Taraba State, Nigeria

Tel: +2348039445333

**&**

**Aihie-Ezomo, Joy,**

Department of General Studies

College of Education, Ekiadolor, Benin City

Edo State, Nigeria

E-mail: [joyaiheezomo#@hotmail.com](mailto:joyaiheezomo#@hotmail.com)

Tel: +2348055608194

### Abstract

The main rhythm of this paper is on eclipse of the sun: the political economy of food dependency in Nigeria. The title of the paper is germane because of the unsavory situation of food dependency that is prevailing in the country. The aftermath of the latter sentence has led the nation to depend on the importation of all classes of food from western nations etc. This has cast a shadow of indices of underdevelopment on the nation economy. This unpalatable situation has brought opprobrium to the nation. She has spent over three hundred trillions dollars on food importation, in order to feed her teeming population. This is an anathema to the yearning and aspiration of her citizenry that Nigeria should be self-sufficient in food. The main factor that is adduced for the economic dislocation of food dependency in the country is traceable to the diabolical economic policy of her erstwhile colonial master and her neocolonialist collaborators etc. Consequently, the paper defines the concept of political economy, food dependency. The paper is explicated with the aid of dependency theory. The authors take a holistic discourse of food dependency in Nigeria. Epitomizing, the paper opines that current economic realities of food dependency in the country is an albatross to Nigeria developmental aspiration.

### Introduction

The issue of food dependency in third world nations of sub-Saharan Africa, such as Nigeria has occupied front burner in intellectual discourse among scholars, academics etc. The aftermath is that it has gained wider currency among Nigerians in various fora, conferences etc (Okosun and Urhoghide, 2013). Since the 1970's, when the federal government of Nigeria found out that the nation was enmeshed in food crisis resulting from the continued pillage of Nigerian agriculture to meet world market demand, the discovery of oil, the neglect of the peasant farmers and other factors like the rural to urban migration (Takura, 1985). The central government has put in place various policy and programmes such as the National Accelerated Food Production, (1973), Operation Feed the Nation (1976), and the establishment of interventionist agency (the eleven River Basin Development Authorities etc).

The aforementioned programmes in the last paragraph initiated and executed by the central government was to address the food crisis plaguing the nation. They were targeted at making the country food sufficient. However, it is sad to note, that all her effort failed to yield the necessary fruits of meeting the optimal food requirements of Nigerians. According to Anyiwe (2008), "the teeming population of Nigeria depend to a large extent on food production by the nation agricultural sector. A nation that cannot feed itself stands the risk of loosing its sovereignty and some concerned Nigerians have continued to work towards the goal of self sufficiency in food.

An overview of the political landscape of Nigeria will bring to limelight that despite the trillions of naira the nations have sunk in the execution of various policy

and programmes. The nation is still marooned in the importation of various classes of food to feed her population (Ekpo, 1956). Thus, Nigeria is food dependent on advanced nations. Given the above scenario, the paper reviews the core issues of food dependency in the nation economy. The paper is divided into sections beginning with an introduction. The first section deals with the conceptual clarification of political economy and food dependency. The paper is explicated with the aid of dependency theory. The third section takes a holistic discourse on the political economy of food dependency in Nigeria. The third section also includes policy prescriptions aimed at redressing the ugly trend of food dependency in the country.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Political Economy**

The definition of the concept political economy has been addressed by various scholars. There are different definitions of the concept. This is due to the perspective which the scholars view the concept. According to Ake (1981), "there are problems connected with the concept of political economy". Part of the problem is associated with the fact that there is no single definition of the concept. Secondly, different scholars view the concept from the Marxist, capitalist or neo-Malthusian perspectives. This latter reason accounted for the variegated definition of the concept. According to Wikipedia Free, Encyclopedia (2010), the term political economy was the original term used for the studying of production and trade and their relations with the distribution of wealth.

A synthesis of the above definition will bring to limelight that political economy as a discipline is supra in character. This is due to the fact that the discipline draws heavily from political science, economics, sociology etc. It is from these disciplines that political economy gravitates. Right from the days of Adam Smith, a foremost economist who popularized the discipline through his famous book "the wealth of the nation". Other definitions of the discipline have evolved. The Dictionary of Unfamiliar Worlds by Diagram Group (2008) sees political economy as "the branch of science that deals with the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services and their management".

A macroscopic view of the above definition will reveal that from the dictionary perspective, political economy is the discipline that examines issues within a given nation or states which has both political and economic dimensions. These dimensions include the primary, secondary and tertiary production of goods and services, as well as how these goods and services that are produced by individuals, corporate companies, and government are consumed. It also includes how these goods and services are managed for the upliftment of the standard of living of the entire citizenry of a nation. It exposes the way and manner a country economy operates, taking into cognizance its strength and weakness (Idada, 2008).

## Dependence

The concept dependency has been addressed by different scholars. There are a plethora of literature of the concept. Various scholars have postulated different definition of the concept. The reason can be found in the fact that there are problems associated with the concept (Ake, 1983). Part of the problem is due to the different perspectives which scholars view the concept. The perspectives could be Marxian, capitalist, neo classical, structuralist etc (Takura, 1985). Again, a potent problem that is associated with the definition of dependence is that scholars tend to define dependency within the context of underdevelopment. The two concept are treated as interwoven, and the inability to separate the two concepts (Brien, 1979). According to Ake (1983), the term dependence refers to “an economy which is dependent to the extent that its position and relations to other economics in the international system and the articulation of its international structure makes it incapable of autocentric development”. A macroscopic view of the definition will bring to focus that Ake is quite clairvoyant to the issue at hand. He sees dependency as the hallmark of Less Developed Countries (LDL) in sub-Sahara Africa. This is because the economics of these nations is vulnerable to the economic dictated of the advanced western nations. There are inherent distortions, and disarticulation in Africa countries’ economies. This is as a result of the historical antecedent of colonialism which held sway in Africa. (Ake, 1981).

According to Dos Santos (1970), dependency is a “situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another country to which the former is subject”. He elaborated further that a dependent relationship between this or more economics is one when the core of the wealthy states or advance dominant nation can expand, enriching themselves at the expense of the poor states or peripheral nations (Wikipedia 2001). Flowing from the two definitions above i.e. the one of Claude Ake (1983) and that of Dos Santos. It will be evident that both definitions refers to the less developed nations as the center point of dependency. These nations are peripheral states dependening on the western nations. Their economics can either expand or contract depending on the economic situation or realities in the dominant nations of the world.

## Theoretical Framework

The dependency theory is crucial in analyzing the economics of Sub-Saharan African nations e.g. Nigeria. Dependency is a kind of unequal relationship between two or more countries. Various scholars have contributed immensely to the dependency theory. Some of the scholars include Paul Baran (1957), Samir Amin (1973), Gunder Frank (1976), Dos Santos (1970). According to Baran (1957), the analysis of underdevelopment and dependency falls within the purview of political economy. He opined that economic questions lies within the ambit of social, political and ideological

sphere. Baran stressed that advanced and developed nations through their colonial policy of diabolical liquidating mechanism was responsible for the gross underdevelopment and dependency of the Less Development Countries (LDC).

The policy put in place by Nigeria erstwhile colonial matter (Britain) ensured that the factors of production, land, labour, capital and entrepreneur in the peripheral nation (Nigeria) were harnessed to ensure that the natives produce surplus goods. This in the form of cash crops. The cash crops are cocoa, in the western region, groundnut in the northern part of Nigeria, while in the eastern region, palm oil was highly encouraged. The colonial bureaucrats were specifically instructed not to encourage the production and growth of local foodstuffs that will sustain the teeming population of Nigeria. This can be corroborated by the statement of Governor Clifford cited by Smith (1972).

I am strongly opposed to any encouragement been given to... projects for the creation of European owned and managed plantation, or even supplement agricultural industries which are already in existence or which are capable of being developed by peasants in Nigeria.

The colonial government forbade any government support in improved tools, fertility or improved agricultural seedlings. The cash crops produced by the citizens of Nigeria were sold at lower prices by Nigerians to the British transnational companies such as United African Company (UAC) etc. The goods were later sold at exorbitant prices, after being exported to Britain. Transnational companies (UAC) ensured that a large chunk of the profit were repatriated home, only a small fraction of the surplus was invested in Nigeria. The colonial infrastructures such as railways, roads put in place by the British was to ensure the evacuation of the cash crops to the coast.

Idachaba (1991) in his article “food problem in Nigeria” opined that as the local peasants in Nigeria were entangled in the production of cash crops either as labourers or as local farmers, in order to be able to pay their taxes and have money (with the introduction of currency). The peasant farmers neglected the growth and production of local foodstuffs as yam, cassava, millet, guinea corn etc.

Frank (1957) contend that “the underdevelopment and dependency of the less developed countries can be explained within the context of historical development of the capitalist system”. He elaborated that the twin evils of underdevelopment and capitalism helped to explain the backwardness of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This can be seen in the fact, that because their colonial economics were tied to the apronstring of advance nations. The integration of Nigeria to the international market opened her frontier for exploitation. This can be explained in the following manners, due to the fact that the vast majority of Nigerians inhabitants were entangled in the production of cash crops, food crops for their survival was relegated to the

background. A conscious policy of Britain was to ensure that Nigeria depended on Britain for food items.

In 1960, when Nigeria attained independence, she found herself enmeshed in the importation of various kinds of food to feeding her growing population. Despite the fact that between 1950, 1960 and 1996, the average percentage of Nigeria labour force engaged in agriculture was 84%, 78% and 64%. The nation was marooned in food importation to feed its citizen, what a paradox? See Table I

**Table I:** Percentage Population Engaged in Agriculture

Year	Average Labour Force in Agriculture as % of Total Populating
1950	84
1960	78
1970	62
1980	54
1985	67
1990	43
1996	64

**Source:** Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2005) and Earlier Years Statistical Bulletin, Nov/Dec

**Table 2:** Food Production/Food Import Indicator in Nigeria; 1960-2005.

Year	FOOD PRODUCTION INDICATORS					FOOD IMPORT INDICATORS			
	Food Output (Staples) Million Tonnes	Food Production Index (Staples) 1984-100	Food Production (Staples) Per Capita	Food production GDP Ratio (%)	Agricultural Contribution to GDP	Food Imports Current Prices (₦M)	Food Imports Per Capita (₦)	Food Import as % of Total Imports (%)	Food Import GDP Ratio (%)
1960	27	150.1	05.9	1.20	63	48	1.0	11.1	2.14
1961	30	168.4	0.63	1.27	62	45	0.9	10.2	1.91
1962	30	168.4	0.63	1.16	62	47	0.94	11.6	1.81
1963	34	188.5	0.61	1.24	61	44	0.79	10.5	1.60
1964	34	186.7	0.59	1.17	58	41	0.72	8.1	1.42
1965	34	186.7	0.57	1.09	54	46	0.78	8.4	1.48
1966	29	162.9	0.49	0.86	55	52	0.87	10.0	1.54
1967	29	162.9	0.48	1.05	56	43	0.70	9.5	1.56
1968	26	146.4	0.42	0.98	53	29	0.46	7.3	1.09
1969	30	164.3	0.46	0.85	49	42	0.65	8.4	1.18
1970	31	171.6	0.47	0.59	49	57.7	0.87	7.6	1.11
1971	26	146.7	0.38	0.39	46	88.3	1.30	8.2	1.34
1972	19	101.1	0.27	2.26	43	95.8	1.37	9.6	1.33
1973	22	122.3	0.36	0.20	30	126.3	1.77	10.3	1.15
1974	26	144.5	0.36	0.14	26	154.8	2.12	8.9	0.85
1975	22	122.4	0.29	0.10	27	298.8	3.98	8.0	1.43
1976	19	105.0	0.25	0.07	25	441.7	5.76	8.5	1.66
1977	19	99.3	0.23	0.06	25	780.7	9.97	11.0	2.48
1978	18	88	0.20	0.46	25	1027.6	12.79	12.5	29.78

1979	15	84.2	0.18	0.04	22	1254.3	15.4	16.7	2.99
1980	15	85.9	0.18	0.03	22	1437.5	17.5	15.8	2.89
1981	16	87.4	0.19	0.03	27	1819.6	21.9	14.2	3.61
1982	16	91.4	0.19	0.03	31	1642.3	19.6	15.2	3.17
1983	14	89	0.16	0.02	33	1761.1	20.8	19.7	3.13
1984	29	100	0.34	0.05	38	1349.7	15.8	18.8	2.16
1985	32	103.3	0.37	0.05	37	1199.0	13.9	16.9	1.69
1986	33	110	0.38	0.05	39	801.9	9.24	13.4	1.12
1987	37	125.6	0.42	0.03	37	1873.8	21.5	10.5	1.73
1988	47	159.1	0.54	0.03	41	1891.6	21.6	8.8	1.33
1989	53	178.6	0.60	0.02	31	2108.9	23.9	6.8	0.96
1990	56	189.4	0.63	0.02	33	3474.5	39.5	7.6	1.28
1991	68	228.7	0.76	0.02	30	3045.7	34.4	3.5	0.96
1992	75	264.2	0.82	0.01	27	12840.2	141.1	8.8	2.39
1993	79	266.3	0.84	0.01	34	13952.4	149.1	8.4	2.03
1994	82	276.8	0.85	0.009	38	13837.0	143.8	8.5	1.53
1995	84	285.2	0.85	0.004	32	88349.9	893.3	11.7	4.57
1996	88	298.1	0.86	0.003	36	75392.0	740.6	13.4	2.79
1997	91	307.3	0.86	0.003	36	100728.3	957.5	11.9	3.59
1998	93	316.1	0.86	0.003	35	102165.1	941.6	11.9	3.75
1999	97	322.4	0.87	0.003	36	103489.8	926.5	12.1	3.12
2000	103	337.3	0.81	0.002	36	113630.5	897.5	11.9	2.40
2001	88	349.0	0.79	0.002	34	160209.1	1228.6	11.7	2.98
2002	92	363.6	0.80	0.002	35	138993.5	1034.9	9.5	2.23

**Source:** Central Bank of Nigeria (1995) Economic and Financial Review, Vol 33, Nov/March.

In analyzing the data, it can be observe that at independence, Nigeria food output staples in million tonnes was 27, food production index staples 150.1, while food production GDP ratio was 1.20. The agriculture contribution to Nigeria GDP was 63. Conversely, the food import indicators, i.e. food import current price was 48, while the food import as percentage of total import was 11.1%. The total percentage import ratio was 2.14. This figure rose astronomically 1978 to 18 for food import, 88 for food production index, while 0.20 was for food production staples, 0.46 was for food production, on the other hand 25 was for agricultural contribution to GDP. The food import indicator was 1027, while food import current prices was 12.79.

### Issues on Food Dependence in Nigeria

According to Olatunbosun (1971) “the British grand design was to ensure that the vast majority of Nigeria were engaged in the colonial economy of food dependency. While the export crop continued to contribute substantially to the revenue of the metropolitan country, the economic life and earning of the community producers were declining. It indeed nosedived. While the citizenship were grossed in the cultivation of cash crops, they neglected in all ramifications the production of staple food such as guinea corn, millet sorghum maize etc. (Takura, 1985).

The shortfall in the production of staple food led the federal government to engage in the massive importation of all classes of food, in order to arrest the unsavoury situation of food crises plaguing the nation. Takura (1985) opined that Nigeria engaged in the policy of food substitution of four essential food items such as wheat, rice, milk and sugar. This wave of food importation led to a two pronged form of dependency, while Nigeria imported food from advanced nations, she neglect hers at the same time, she spent huge sum of foreign exchange to pay for the items. A classic example is wheat; a cereal crop produced in the United State of America is in high demand in Nigeria today, because of the rise of cases of diabetic patients in our hospitals. At the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, wheat import stood at 20,000, current wheat import stood at 1 million tonnes (Takura, 1985).

In the arena of the importation of fertilizers for agriculture, the country largely depend on the importation of fertilizers. Despite the fact that the nation have a large deposit of minerals (Takura, 1985), most Nigerian business men do not want to invest in the production of fertilizers because it is capital intensive.

The federal government establishment of eleven five Basins Development authorities to boost integrated rural development in Nigeria is embroiled in dependency saga. This is because in construction and maintained of dyke and dams to control flooding and irrigation of crops such as the Shiroro Dam, most of the turbines, spare parts and technology are import driven, they are not produced in the country. This has led to the federal government spending trillion of naira on importation of machines (Okosun, 2009), what is indeed painful, is the aspect of the iron and steel industry at Ajoakuta that would have leap Nigeria into the technological age was allow to decay because of corruption (Obasanjo, 2008).

Similarly, the financial institutions such as the Nigerian agricultural bank etc. have also subverted food sufficiency in Nigeria. This can be seen in the fact that the managers of those banks collude with the wealthy businessmen to hijack the federal government agricultural loan scheme. The peasant farmers are often denied loans for planting of crops because they do not have collateral security (Okosun, 2009) when they are giving loans, the amount is too small engaged to commercial agriculture.

A corollary to the above mention fact is the issue of Nigeria depending on western nation for beverages such as milk and sugar etc. Milk, a major source of protein is imported into Nigeria on a large scale (Takura, 1985). Nigerian has spent billions of naira on the importation of this commodity. Various brands of milk are abound in the market such as three crown, peak milk, loya etc. Nigeria buys these products. The federal government has not been able to achieve milk substitution because of the fact that the dairy industry in the country is very small and highly dependent on Danish and Swedish imports (Takura 1985).

Another classical example of food depending is sugar. Before the advent of colonialism and its attendant imperialism in Nigeria. Nigerian were not used to consumption of sugar. From all intent and purpose, sugar was popularized by the British government and its imperialist companies, such as the United Africa Company etc. The local production of sugar in Nigeria has not been able to meet the demand of its citizens, sugar importation continue to rise. Thus Nigeria depends on foreign nation to meet its sugar requirement.

With regard to rice, Nigeria towers high in its importation. She import rice from Indonesia, Thailand etc. Government officials collude with foreign business men to subvert federal government agricultural policy and programmes on the cultivation of rice. The local production of rice was not encouraged by states and the federal government. It is only recently in 2013 that ex-president Goodluck Jonathan tried to intensify the cultivation of rice in Nigeria, but this programme was bedevilled by corruption (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015). Be it as it may, the agreement between the states governors and the federal government on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, October 2015 to end the rice importation of welcome by 2017 (FGN, 2015) is salutary. However, this remains elusive until conscious effort is put in place to realize this dream.

Finally, the state government cum federal government by its own deliberate agricultural policy have contributed to food dependence in Nigeria. The various tier of government effort to popularize the use of the participatory approach, in the design, execution and evaluation of food sufficiency programme such as the cultivation of rice, maize, cassava is at low ebb. The government usage of the top bottom approach is indeed counterproductive. For this singular reason, the local farmers strongly depreciate their non-involvement in the planning process (Igben, 2001). This no doubt have affected in no small measure the production of staple food crops in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This paper in all its ramification has dwell on the issue of political economy of food dependence in Nigeria. This is timely, due to the unsavoury situation, where Nigeria the so called “Giant of Africa” has to depend on western nations to feed her teeming population. This is an albatross to the nation developmental aspiration. For Nigeria to rears its head, in the gathering of comity of nations, conscious and radical policy must be put in place to redress the anomaly of food dependence benighting the nation.

### **Policy Prescription/Recommendations**

- 1) The federal and state governments must purse vigorously integrated rural development, as a leeway of redressing the disarticulation with regard to food dependence in Nigeria. This approach has been effectively utilized in South Korea, Indonesia etc.

- 2) The various tiers of government should encourage the use of local content in its food sufficiency drive. This will motivate local and indigenous craftsmen, industrialists to produce farm tools (Takura, 1985).
- 3) The use of the participation/approach must be aggressively pursued. This has the merit of galvanizing the local peasant farmers residing in the nook and crannies of Nigeria to increase their production capacity in staple food such as rice, cassava etc.
- 4) The federal government must as a matter of urgency increase agriculture budget, with regard to the production of staple foods. The current budget is not enough to pursue a radical transformation of the agricultural sector, with a view of meeting food sufficiency in Nigeria.
- 5) Corruption, a major albatross that is bedeviling agricultural development in the country must be ribbed in the bud. There must be probity and accountability in the agricultural sector.

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