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Food Management Policy: Indispensability of Food Security for a Virile Nationhood

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Abstract

Food security is an issue that should concern any realistic and honest Nigerian. Great fears have been expressed on the fate of our Agriculture in rural areas and its consequences on productivity, poverty alleviation and health of the people. This paper examines the concept of food security and healthy living. It highlighted the situation of food production in Nigeria, bottlenecks to food security in Nigeria and its effects on the nation. The paper advocates the use of extension service in the rural areas, encouraging women full participation in food production, provision of modern storage facilities in rural areas, linking rural farmers to viable farm credit facilities among others as measures that would promote food security in Nigeria.

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Introduction

Before independence and roughly a decade after independence, Nigeria was predominantly known as an agricultural country producing subsistence food crops for consumption, which contributed about sixty-seven percent (67%) of the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) (Nkom, 1990). From 1970 and the years beyond, Nigeria has been steadily experiencing short fall in food production. Abalu (1991) ascertained that in 1980 almost 14 million Nigerians or 17 percent of the population, were said to be food insecure, that is people were either unable to consume enough food to allow for a healthy and active working life or obtain enough energy from their diet to prevent serious health risks or stunted growth. Akosile (2003) comments that Nigeria with its vast fertile land, abundant manpower and huge 'allocations' to agricultural sector could not successfully meet the domestic food need of the country.

Gbenjo (2006), observed that beautiful programmes were written, conferences and seminar/workshops were held to discuss ways and means of attaining the lofty dreams of the write ups but still Nigeria remained a net importer of basic food items; and he lamented that if no serious action is taken, food production would remain a mirage.

Bearing in mind the overriding importance of adequate food supply over other societal needs, the present democratic government has made food security one of its front-burner issues, more so as there are wide cries of rising food prices as well as warnings on impending food scarcity all over the world (Adisa, 2008; Whiteman, 2008). At this juncture, it becomes very pertinent to dissect the food security phenomena as it borders on Nigeria, considering her vast agricultural potentials and to weigh the implications of insensitivity to food security. It is imperative for the federal, state and local government councils in the country and individuals to work towards food security.

Conceptual explanations

According to Shaibu, Adedipe and Aliyu (1997), food security is the access by all people at all times to the food needed for a healthy living. Access in his circumstance considers both quality and quantity bearing in mind issues of production, supply, demand and safety of food items that are consistent with dietary regulations. Food security as seen by Nkom (1990) is regarded as ensuring all year-round availability of food and stabilization of food

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consumption across different regions, groups within the country irrespective of periodic fluctuations in food production as well as other exigencies or emergencies which may temporarily affect food supply. Doppler and Kormawa (2003), maintained that food security exists when all people at all times have access to safe nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 1995) food security is access by all people at all times to the food required for a healthy life.

Food security transcends mere availability of food stuff to feed the entire people. It is also not synonymous with increased production of food items. Rather, it is the ability of a nation to produce enough food and maintain adequate reserves from which it can feed its present and future generations at affordable price (Alamieyeseigha, 2004).

Henry Fayol management theory

His theory grew out of the need to find guidelines for managing complex organizations. He was the earliest manager who systematically examined his own personal experience and tried to draw from it a theory of management. He sought to discover principles of management which determine the "soundness and good working order" of a firm. According to Henry Fayol, management was not a personal talent, but a skill that can be developed through education and training. A number of principles have been developed to aid managers in performing their functions. According to him, any number of principles might exist, but he describes only those which he most frequently applied in his own experience. Fayol elaborated on a number of general principles which if followed would improve the practice of general management and guide the thinking of managers in resolving concrete problems. His fourteen principles are summarized as follows:

Division of work, Authority and responsibility, Discipline, Unity of Command, Unity of Director, Subordination of individual to generate interest, Remuneration, centralization, the scalar chain, Order, Equity, Stability, Initiative and Esprit Decorps.

In Fayol's view, the five functions of management – to plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate and to control are the means for viewing the managerial process, and the principles are the guide for implementing the process.

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Situation of food production in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a population of over 140 million. The greatest number of this population inhabited in the rural areas, but could not produce sufficient food to feed the teeming population. Since enough food crops could not be produced to meet the growing population, Nigeria has resorted to importing essential commodities. Thus, Nigeria has been reduced into a net importer of several agricultural goods, including milk, wheat, poultry, frozen chicken, rice, sugar, cotton, groundnut, palm oil and rubber for which she was a leading world exporter before the advent of petroleum between 1960 and 1970.

One of the reasons for food crisis in Nigeria is the negligence and marginalization of peasant farmers residing in the rural areas. The undermining of the rural dwellers reinforced rural poverty in Nigeria, which has not only fuelled rural-urban migration but also undermined the ability of the peasants to produce enough for themselves and the country's non agricultural population. Thus, Alamieyeseigha (2004), observes that national security is threatened when there is no adequate food security, and that food serves as a bulwark against famine and mass hunger in situation like rapid population growth, economic downturn, political upheavals as well as different kinds of natural disasters.

Bottlenecks to food security in Nigeria

A number of factors continue to militate against the attainment of food security in Nigeria. Some of the factors include the following:

(i) High rate of migration from rural areas to urban centre

This basically has led to the decline of food production in the rural areas. Thus, oil boom era and improve in communication, according to Njoku (2003) encouraged rural-urban drift with the consequent neglect of agriculture, which was a vital sector of the economy.

(ii) Rapid Rate of Population Growth

Population growth has been at an alarming rate, while food production is not at pace with the increasing number of people in Nigeria. Although controlling population growth rate is important for achieving food security, a low production growth rate does not guarantee food security nor does a high

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growth rate create food in security. A state may have a low population growth but higher percentage of the populace may be undernourished.

This implies that food security problem may be caused by poverty or by rapid loss of arable land as cities expand. In fact in a low population states, lack of food security can be caused by extreme poverty, largely as result of dictatorship which may neglect development in agriculture, schools, healthcare and transportation. Population growth negatively affects food security only when other food related variables are affected. For instance a country may not have enough water, arable land to support more people, or agricultural technique may not produce enough food for a growing population.

(iii) Lack of irrigation facilities and natural problem

One of the reasons food is not produced in sufficient quantity in rural areas is due to absence of irrigation facilities and natural problems such as global warming which has negatively affected farm lands.

There is need to provide irrigation facilities in rural areas and also enlighten individuals on the need to stop some of their actions that contribute to global warming which militate against food production in Nigeria.

(iv) Absence of Good Road Network

The absence of good road network for evacuating food crops from the rural areas to the urban centres has been one of the obstacles of food security in Nigeria. According to Sule (2006), some of the feeder roads constructed during General Babangida's administration for easy transportation of food crops from the interior to the urban markets lacked maintenance, are today, impassable especially during the rainy season. This situation has served as a deterrent to food security in Nigeria.

(v) Lack of Modern Storage facilities in Rural Areas

The plight of farmers is precarious on how to preserve the harvested food crops. The locally made ban in which they used as storage facility could not preserve their grains for a very long time. These farmers are always forced to sell their farm crops earlier than expected at a subsidized cost because of non-availability of modern storage facilities.

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(vi) Unfavourable Government Policies and Policy Inconsistency

It is a thing of worry to note that most of government programmes and policies in agriculture have not yielded the much desired results, as the nation still remained seriously food insecure with all its accompanied effects seen everywhere. Ogunfiditimi (1988) asserts that "some of the government strategies to improve agricultural production were either geared towards a wrong priority, bad timing, and deficiency in operational strategies or failure to get to the grassroots level in order to make the desired impact." Idachaba (2000) opines that failures of these programmes could be as a result of some unintended beneficiaries who hijack such programmes due to improper administration, supervision and monitoring at every stage of such programme.

(vii) Improper Distribution of Fertilizer to Farmers:

One of the major bottlenecks of food security is that of fertilizer production and distribution to the farmers. For a very long time, the procurement of fertilizer has been the major problem the Nigerian farmers face in food production. In the year 2006, the farmers lamented for high cost of fertilizer and people cried out that food crisis was imminent. The increased production of fertilizer from the company did not get to the real farmers at the subsidized rates. The reason for this is that the role of the middlemen, who purchase the goods either divert or hoard them and therefore could not reach the farmers at subsidized rates, instead would buy at high cost if made available to purchase.

The effects of food insecurity in Nigeria

Food insecurity, especially unavailability and un-affordability, undoubtedly has serious effects on national security and stability. Such effects as severally noted by Iwuagu, (2008), Alamieyeseigha, (2004) and Whiteman (2008) include:

(a) Mass poverty and starvation

(b) Diminished work performance

(c) Depletion of human capital arising from poor nutrition, low immunity to diseases which ultimately leads to untimely death.

(d) High import bills leading to balance of payment deficits.

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(e) Mass protest/riots and political instability.

The above scenario gives support to a view that "national security is threatened when there is no food security" (Alamieyeseigha 2004).

Other implications of food insecurity specifically applicable to Nigeria include:

(a) Child trafficking, as many parents now sell their children to enable them to survive.

(b) Youth restiveness and hostage taking of women and children.

(c) Food insecurity could lead to lower cognitive ability and low school performance in children.

Government management policy that could ensure food security in Nigeria:

(i) Provision of Inputs to farmers:

The farmers are ill-equipped and they till the soil with crude and primitive tools in the scorching sun and operate on small scale holdings. Provision of inputs such as improved seedlings, fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides to farmers will greatly increase yield. Mechanization will increase labour and the farmer will be placed in an earning position and healthier harvest.

(ii) The Volume of Fertilizer going to every state and local government should be monitored:

The issue of fertilizer administration in terms of the endemic cases of diversion to middle men who hoard it and sell it at exorbitant prices should no longer be handled with levity. The volume of fertilizer going to every state and local governments should be regularly published on the local and national newspapers and other electronic media in the languages of the people. A census of full time farmers should be taken throughout the country to ascertain their felt needs while committees should be set up to monitor the implementation of agricultural programmes at the grassroots and to give regular feedback to the central planning bodies or agencies.

(iii) Supervised Agricultural Credit Scheme

Farmers should not only be given credit schemes, credit should be supervised to know how it has been used. Indeed, it is better to supply farm inputs and

machinery to farmers than to give them raw cash. This will ensure that credit facility is not wrongly applied.

(iv) Provision of Irrigation and Drainage Scheme for cultivation of Crops:

One of the major reasons why food is not produced in sufficient quantity is that farmers follow what the environment dictates or determines. There is farm work only during the rainy season. When irrigation and drainage facilities are provided for farmers, there will be all the year production of food crops which will lead to cheap and plentiful supply of food.

(v) Encouraging Women Full Participation in Food Production

There should be urgent need to appreciate the crucial role of rural women in food production. This day in Nigeria, there is an increasing migration of the male gender to other endeavours for greener pastures, and thus more rural women are becoming farm labourers, processors and distributors. To appreciate this new role, rural women should be made to have easy access to credit scheme, farm lands and improved seedlings.

(vi) The use of Agricultural extension services in the Rural Areas:

There is need to mobilize the rural farmers towards intensive and extensive food production through the use of modern techniques, for example, the use of tractor. This objective can be achieved through public enlightenment and the use of agricultural extension services. To improve skills and commitments of the peasant farmer in food production, Friday and Coiz (2005) maintained that farmers needed basic education about improved practices to minimize waste and to better utilize available resources at their disposal.

(vii) Provision of modern storage facilities in rural areas:

Government should provide modern storage facilities in rural areas, where excess produce will be stored by government during harvesting and sold to the masses during the period of scarcity.

Conclusion

To actually achieve self-sufficiency on food at the national level, the rural households should not be undermined but be initiated into their full capacity in food production so as to be self-reliant in their food needs. The

achievement of food security should not only be done by the government alone, but for its success, individuals, private organizations, groups and co-operative societies should also contribute.

Until our food policy measures go beyond mere launching of agricultural programmes and really touch the soil by provoking the farmers unto fruitful actions, if not, all is not yet well. National peace and security remains threatened so long as food security is endangered. Given our untapped agricultural potentials, the challenge of the current food crisis ought not to last. All it takes to feed ourselves and the world is total commitment to a will.

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