

African Research Review

An International *Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*

Vol. 7 (4), Serial No. 31, September, 2013:26-35

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.7i4.2>

Food Insecurity in Nigeria: Way Forward

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Abstract

Food security is indispensable prerequisite for the survival of mankind and his economic activities including food production. Food is different from other commodities because of its inevitability for survival and existence. In Nigeria, there is high level of food insecurity for the past four decades as a result of neglect in food production when oil has become the major export product and the because of the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies such as devaluation of naira, trade liberalization and withdrawal of government from economic activities, ethnic and religious conflicts; disasters, such as flooding and drought have also contributed to food insecurity in Nigeria. Food is different from other commodities because everybody needs it for survival, and it is an indispensable factor in nation's quest for economic growth and development. Unfortunately, most of the food need in Nigeria is produced by peasant farmers who lack capital, skills, energy and other viable ingredients to produce on large quantity that will meet the

requirement of the growing population. Thus food insecurity in Nigeria is a recurrent and double digit problem. The paper however proffers workable solution to these problems.

Introduction

The first essential component of social and economic justice is adequate food production. Even if a nation cannot send cosmonauts to the moon, it should be able to feed her population, only then can it occupy place of pride in the community of nations. Nigeria is a country richly blessed with abundant natural and human resources that if properly harnessed can feed its people and export the surpluses to other countries, yet it is experiencing persistent food crisis both in terms of quantity and quality. Cases of malnutrition and under nutrition are growing by the day. The food intake requirements of majority of Nigerians have fallen far below the international standard.

Past effort at improving food supply through agricultural production has not yielded successful results. The programmes that were introduced only helped to alienate the peasant farmers who are the major producers of food in Nigeria. Some of the companies that had something to do with food production include:

1. The national Grains Production Company.
2. National Root Crops Production Companies.
3. North-east, Western and National Livestock Production Companies.
4. The Nigerian National Shrimp Company.
5. The Nigerian National Fish Company.

These companies were set up by the federal Government in 1989 to participate in direct production of food. The major crops target includes maize, rice, millet, wheat, sorghum and cassava. One should mention in passing the establishment of 11 (eleven) River Basin Development Authorities, they were set up to develop river basins for meaningful agricultural production to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food production. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Green

Revolution were other short-lived national campaign launched to give agriculture a good image and to encourage land owners to take to farming not only as an occupation but also as a way of life. These programmes were more in favour of capital intensive and large scale commercial farmers who corruptly enriched themselves at the expense of poor peasant farmers.

Concept of food security

Food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation (FAO 2001). Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Idachaba, 2006). Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes a minimum of

1. The ready availability of nutritional adequate and safe foods and
2. An assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, that is without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies (USDA 2008).

In the World Bank Policy Study (2006) food security is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active healthy life. To the Economic commission for Africa (2009) food security involves not only food availability through storage, and trade but also more importantly food access through domestic or home production. It is the contentions of the (FAO, 2010) that for a country to have sustainable food security, food supplies must keep pace with increase population and urbanization. As such, according to FAO, addressing agriculture and population growth is vital to achieving food security. Other organizations and people (Peter Singer 2008) have come to this same conclusion in agriculture and population control. USAID, (2011)

proposes several key steps to increasing agricultural productivity which is in turn key to increasing rural income and reducing food insecurity. They include:

1. Boost agricultural science and technology. Current agricultural yields are insufficient to feed the growing populations. Eventually productivity derives economic growth.
2. Securing property rights and access to finance.
3. Enhancing human capital through education and improved health.
4. Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and democracy and good governance based on principles of accountability and transparency in public institutions and the rule of law are basic to reducing vulnerable members of society.

The United Nation Millennium Development Goals are of the initiatives aimed at achieving food security in the World. In its list of goals, the first Millennium Development Goals state that the UN is to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty or to half it by 2015 and that agricultural productivity is the key player if this is to be achieved.

Of the eight MDG, eradicating extreme hunger and poverty depends on agricultural productivity entirely. The MDG I call for halving hunger and poverty by 2015 in relation to 1990 as the base period.

Improvement in food security strategies by individuals and households allows more time and resources to be directed towards improving economic situations, through investments in better means of production, further education, and other quality of life measures which can improve the communities. Macroeconomic factors should also be taken into account, such as the emergence of neo-liberal capitalist policies imposed through the Washington consensus which include structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), austerity measures and emphasis on expanding export-oriented trade at the expense of small scale producers and rural development. Policy making by the

World Bank, the International Monetary Organization and others that encouraged and pressurized African countries in general and Nigeria in particular into dropping government subsidies for fertilizer, improved seed and other input as a requirement to get aid from them. This is really the act of economic sabotage and hypocrisy on the part of these neo-liberal institutions who are promoting government intervention in their economies and at the same time advising other countries especially Africa countries and particularly Nigeria to withdraw government subsidies in all basic provisions including agricultural production. Owing to the adoption of these neo-liberal policies, Nigeria is now the net importer of food today despite the abundant natural and human resources God has given to us. While we are blaming the neo-liberal institutions for imposing neo-liberal policies on Nigeria the greatest blame go to Nigeria leaders for accepting policies that are inimical to their own economic policies because of greed and corruption.

Causes of food insecurity in Nigeria

Food insecurity exists when people are undernourished as a result of the physical unavailability of food, their lack of social or economic access to adequate food. Food insecure people are those whose food intake falls below their minimum energy requirements as well as those who exhibit physical symptoms caused by energy and nutrient deficiencies resulting from an inadequate or unbalanced diet or from the body's inability to use food effectively because of infection or disease.

According to FAO (2010) food insecurity refers to the consequences of inadequate consumption of nutritious food, considering the physiological use of food by the body as being within the domain of nutrition and health. Malnourishment also leads to poor health; hence individuals fail to provide for their families. If left unaddressed, hunger sets in motion an array of outcomes that perpetuate malnutrition, reduce ability of adults to work and to give birth to healthy children and erode children's ability to learn and lead

productive healthy and happy lives. This truncation of human development undermines a country's potential for economic development for generations to come.

Famine and hunger are both rooted in food insecurity. Food insecurity can be categorized as either chronic or transitory, chronic food insecurity translates into high degree of vulnerability to famine and hunger, ensuring food security presupposes the elimination of that vulnerability. Chronic insecurity is similar to undernourishment and is related to poverty existing mainly in poor countries. No problems can be solved unless its causes are known: therefore, knowing the causes of food insecurity will help us to locate the solutions.

Discussing the causes of food insecurity in Nigeria is a very difficult task; this is because most Nigerians develop apathy towards locally produced food and prefer imported food which they consider as superior to domestically produced ones.

The emergence of oil sector and the substantial revenue accruing from the sector shifted emphasis from agriculture to the extent that even domestic food production is not given the desired requirement. The government felt that it was better to import food than to embark on local production, especially when oil money has changed the tastes of most Nigeria in favour of foreign imported goods. The above reasons notwithstanding, the causes of food insecurity in Nigeria can be discussed under the following:

1. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a major cause of hunger and poverty. Food security can be a major concern for people who are incapable of or denied access to participation in labour - formal, informal or agricultural. In 2009, the UN estimated that 60 percent of the world's chronically hungry people are women and girls, 98% of which live in developing nations, when women have income, substantial evidence indicates that the income is more likely to be spent on food and children's needs. Women are generally responsible for food selection

and preparation and for the care and feeding of children. Women play many roles in land use, production, distribution, processing, marketing accessing, trading and food availability. They often work as unpaid and self-employed workers on and off farm employees, entrepreneurs, traders, providers of services and caretakers of children and elderly, women farmers represent more than a quarter of the world population, comprising on average 43 percent of the agricultural workforces, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. However, women have less access than men to agricultural assets, inputs and service. Analysts suggest that if women have the same access to productive resources as men, women would have boost yield by 20 – 30 percent, raising the overall agricultural output in developing countries by two and half to four percent. This gain in production could lessen the number of hungry people in the world.

Reducing gender inequality and recognizing the contribution of women to agriculture is critical to achieving global food security, there is consistent and compelling evidence that when the status of women is improved, agricultural productivity increases, poverty is reduced and nutrition improves.

2. Policy inconsistencies and corruption

Frequent policy changes and poor performance of agencies assigned to implement food and agriculture policies have serious setback on food production and distribution. Each time a new government comes to power, the previous agricultural policies and programmes are abandoned and new ones are put in place, and not that the new ones are better than the old ones. It is in a bid to create opportunities for graft. This creates no room for stability and progress in food production. Similarly, the dismal performance of some of the past programs like Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Lower River Basin Development Authorities as well as agencies like National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA) and the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure

(DFRRI) have contributed to low agricultural and food productivity in Nigeria.

3. Poverty and hunger

Poverty and hunger prevent people from working hard to increase productivity. Food and agricultural productivity is both capital and labour intensive. Unfortunately, it is the poor peasant farmers that produce the bulk of food needs in Nigeria, due to their level of poverty, they find it very difficult to learn, work and care for themselves and their family members, let alone getting the necessary inputs and energy to produce for others. Apart from the inconsistency in policies most of these policies are neo-liberal which work against the interest of the domestic economy such as the devaluation of naira which made the importation of farm inputs very difficult and out of the reach of peasant farmers.

4. Conflicts

The ethnic or religious conflicts have devastating effects on the economic activities especially food production in the areas that they take place. Conflicts here do not necessarily mean physical fighting of wars. It means a disarticulated country or society that is experiencing structural violence without official declaration of war such as pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of ordinary people by those in power, oppression of women and children and monopolization of resources and power by some sections of the society. It will be wrong to say there is peace in such a country like Nigeria where Boko Haram and other sects are threatening the unity of the country. Consequently, it is quite possible not to have peace even when there is no war (Oke Ibeanu, 2009).

5. Natural disasters

Frequent climate changes leading to shortage of rainfall and persist drought in Northern part of the country and excessive rainfall and

flood in southern and middle belt regions of the country contributed immensely to low food production in Nigeria.

6. Low level of technology, low agricultural financing and rural-urban migration pose serious threat to food production in Nigeria.

Solution to food insecurity in Nigeria

It is widely accepted that Nigeria is not a poor country except that it has been poorly managed by those entrusted with its development. It is also widely accepted that Nigeria is rich enough to feed herself and the rest of Africa, the major hindrance to this are:

1. The ethnic and religious conflicts which claimed many lives and the destruction of food crops with able men and women staying in refugee camps for two or three years.
2. Those who rule Nigeria do not believe in Nigeria because of that they lack political will and patriotic zeal to deal with the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria; hence they adopt all forms of neo-liberal economic policies recommended by the World Bank and IMF for personal profits.

These are the man made problems, so that if properly addressed sanity will return and people's confidence in food production will be restored. The other solution to food insecurity lies with paying attention to the natural disasters such as flood, drought and pest control.

Fortunately, we are going to have new generation of leaders who will have faith in Nigeria and strongly believe that Nigeria must take responsibility for its own destiny, that Nigeria will uplift herself only by her own efforts in partnership with those who wish her well – Otaha 2013.

Conclusion

Eradicating hunger and poverty requires an understanding of the ways in which these two injustices interconnected. Hunger and the

malnourishment that accompanies it, prevent poor people from escaping poverty because it diminishes their ability to learn, work, and care for themselves and their family members. Food is not like other commodities, it is an indispensable and an important factor in nation's quest for economic growth and development. Being an inevitable commodity all efforts must be geared toward ensuring its adequate supply for sustainable economic development and human survival. In Nigeria, most of the food need is produced by peasant farmers who are scattered all over the rural areas and not multinational companies who produce on large scale for export and profit. For the dream of food security to realized agricultural policies must target these peasants' farmers and their rural environments.

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