



TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

With over 200 million people in Nigeria, feeding and meeting their nutritional needs is not only challenging for the nation but crucial and critical for the quality and quantity of human resource available for sustainable food security. If Nigeria is to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger and Goal 3 of Good Health and well Being; the issue of food security thus becomes inevitable because food crisis (food insecurity) has become a persistently volatile problem in the country recently with Nigeria skyrocketing food importation. Like many other developing countries, Nigeria has experienced a shortage of food supplies due to economic instability, severe drought, flood and persistent conflicts etc. To feed the future population of Nigeria which the United Nations has projected to reach 398 million in 2050, there is a need to examine the food security apparatus of the nation which will no doubt impact on the nation's sustainable development. Thus, this paper x-rays the place of food security: Issues and challenges. The paper recommends among others the need for improvement in technology, ensured security of lives and property of farmers and appropriate policy and political will by the government so as to enhance increased domestic production and reduced importation of food.

Keywords: Food, Food Security, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

It is incontrovertible fact that food, after air and water is a basic necessity for human existence. Nobody can subsist for long without adequate and nourishing food intake. Hence, its production in sustainable quality and quantity is taken to be a major preoccupation of the human race. Its inadequacy poses serious public policy problem. Nigeria is far from being completely food secured. Ban Ki Moon, the then UN Secretary- General

at a World food summit in Rome in 2009, warned that six million children die of hunger every year; 17,000 die of starvation every day and by 2050 the world will need to feed two million more mouths. This has rekindled the idea of achieving sustainable food security in all countries of the world including Nigerian. At the global level, somewhere in the world, a child dies of hunger every five seconds, although the planet has more than enough food for all. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, laid out these sobering statistics as he kicked-off a three-day summit on world food security in Rome. Ban Ki Moon added that in 2050, the world will need to feed two million more mouths – 9.1 billion in all (Nigerian Compass, November, 18, 2009:6).

Dahlberg (1998:24-28), identified four global threats that has significant implications for the food security of cities. First, there are three different types of incipient population explosions: human, livestock and cars. The threats of increasing human numbers and urbanization are clear. Less often considered is the explosion since World War II of livestock numbers – today some 38 percent of the world's grain crop is fed to livestock. Second, there is global warming – an issue beset by uncertainty and confusion. While a few regions may benefit from global warming, the latest projections suggest African agriculture is the most vulnerable, while many agricultural areas in the temperate zones will suffer from more frequent storms, droughts, and floods as well as temperature extremes. Third, the loss of biodiversity is perhaps the greatest long-term threat to global sustainability. The fourth one is the threat of poverty and globalization of injustice. Whatever one understands the sources of this to be, the weak, and the poor (including poor cities and states) are becoming more vulnerable than ever to powerful economic forces and structures (Ojo & Adebayo, 2012).

According to Metu, Okeyika & Maduka (2016), Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources, but despite its significant natural resources, majority of the citizens are living below the poverty line. For instance according to WDI, (2015), an estimated 60% of Nigerians live on less than US\$1.25 per day. Nigeria was also ranked 91st out of a total of



104 counties on the 2015 Global Hunger Index and 153rd out of a total of 187 countries on the 2012 UNDP Human Development Index. Malnutrition and hunger which is linked to poverty have been ravaging most developing countries and affecting their productive capacity. Classifying Nigeria as one of the poorest countries testifies to our failure to achieve our development policy as well as national food security. It once more awakened the government to the realities on ground, that is, the need to achieve the first sustainable development goal of no hunger before the year 2030. World Bank (2012) estimates the population of Nigerian to above 160 million people, the largest in Africa almost accounting for 47% of West Africa's total population. As the population increases, the country's demand for food increases, while the ability to produce food diminishes because pressures from the growing population in form of desertification, climate change and erosion are also impacting on the already diminishing resources and further threatening food production.

Like many other developing countries, Nigeria has experienced a shortage of food supplies due to economic instability, severe drought, flood and persistent conflicts etc. To feed the future population of Nigeria which the United Nations has projected to reach 398 million in 2050, there is a need to examine the food security apparatus of the nation which will no doubt impact on the nation's sustainable development which forms the basis of this paper. Thus, this paper examines the state of food security and the challenges of achieving sustainable food security in Nigeria.

Conceptual Issues

Food security

Any attempt to conceptualize food security should necessarily begin with the concept of security. Security as a concept in its traditional conception means absence of physical threats (Saliu, 1997:12). It was perhaps for this reason that security, in this sense, was essentially predicated on military rationalisations. However, one of the core non-strategic components of security is food security (Saliu & Omotola, 2006). Food security connotes the availability of and access to adequate nourishment (Ebo,

1997;29). Food Security is a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life (Mwaniki, 2005:1 citing IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2002). According to WHO (1995) and FAO, et al. (2013) food security is access to the food needed by all people to enable them live a healthy life at all times. A country is said to be food secured when there is access to food of acceptable quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times for the majority of the population (Reutlinger, 1985; Idachaba, 2004). This means that food must be available to the people so as to meet the basic nutritional standard needed by the body. But it should be noted that availability of food does not mean accessibility to food. Availability depends on production, consumer prices, information flows and the market dynamics.

World Bank (1986) defined sustainable food security as an access to enough food for an active, healthy life at present as well as ability to provide enough in the future. Abudullahi (2008) defined sustainable food security as when people have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive healthy life at present as well as in the future. This definition outlines some indices for measuring the extent or degree of food security to be achieved by any country and the indices are adequate national food supply, nutritional content, accessibility, affordability and environmental protection.

According to FAO, et al. (2013), the core determinants of food security are availability, accessibility, utilization and stability.

Food Availability: – Availability of food plays a conspicuous role in food security. Having enough food in a nation is necessary but not adequate to ensure that people have satisfactory access to food. Over the years, population has increased faster than the supply of food thus resulting in food unavailability per person.

Food Accessibility: – The ability to have access to food depends on two major conditions: – Economic access and physical access. Economic access depends on one's income, the price of food and the purchasing



power of the people. Physical access depends on the availability and quality of infrastructure needed for the production and distribution of food. Lack of economic access to food is as a result of the increase in the rate of poverty.

Food Utilization: - Food utilization is measured by two outcomes indicators which reflect the impact of inadequate food intake and utilization. The first outcome is measured by under-five years of age nutrition level while second measurement is quality of food, health and hygiene. According to FAO measuring the nutritional status of under-five years of age is an effective approximation for the entire population. The indicators for the measurement of under-five years of age are wasting (too thin for height); underweight (too thin for age) and stunting (too short for age).

Most times, progress in terms of having accessing to food is not always accompanied by progress in the utilization of the food. A more direct indicator of food utilization is underweight because it shows improvement more promptly than stunting and wasting whose improvement can take a longer time to be noticeable. Since 1990, the prevalence rates of under-five stunting and underweight have declined in some developing countries, while some countries still report a prevalence rate of 30% or more and WHO categorizes this as being high (WHOUNICEF, 2011).

Stability: - Stability has to do with exposure to short-term risks which have a way of endangering long-term progress. Key indicators for exposure to risk include climate shocks such as droughts, erosion and volatility in the prices of inputs for food production. The world price shocks leads to domestic price instability which is a threat to domestic food producers as they stand the chance of losing invested capital. Nigerian farmers are mainly smallholders farming mainly for subsistence, this makes it difficult for them to cope with changes in the prices of inputs, and it also lowers their ability to adopt new technologies thereby resulting in reduced overall production. Changing weather patterns as a result of climate change have played a part in reducing food supply, for

instance flood in the southern parts of the country and drought in the northern parts leads to substantial losses in production and income.

The interplay of all these variables determines whether an individual, household, state or nation is food secured or not. This is because sustainable food security at the household level does not guarantee sustainable food security at the state or national level.

However, whenever this is threatened in any way, it becomes a major source of threat to security at all levels – individual, national and international (Onimode, 2000:171). This kind of situation can be appropriately referred to as food insecurity. Food insecurity is therefore, tantamount to a condition of food poverty, defined as “a condition of lacking the resources to acquire a nutritionally adequate diet. No doubt, food deprivation represents a basic dimension of poverty. Food security, like any other dimension of security, operates at various levels. These include: the individual, household, community, national, regional and international levels. It is therefore, not impossible to see a situation whereby variations exist in the level of food security within a group and/or between/ among groups. Whenever there is a disruption at any level, it has the potential of threatening other levels due to the interdependence of the entire system. Thus, whenever, the reverse becomes the case, a state of food insecurity ensues, and poses serious threats not only to the pursuit of the core values and objectives of the individual, but also to the entire networks of state and society (Saliu & Omotola, 2006:160). Thus, when individuals cannot provide enough food for their families, it leads to hunger and poor health. Poor health reduces one’s ability to work and live a productive healthy life. Poor human development destabilizes a country’s potential for sustainable economic development for generations to come.

In September 2000, at the Millennium Summit, the world leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, which committed the nations of the world to a new global partnership, aimed at reducing extreme poverty and other time-bound targets, with a stated deadline of 2015. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) therefore have been the world’s only time-bound and quantifiable targets for addressing extreme



poverty in its many dimensions: income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and social exclusion, while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. This eight goal initiative was planned to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, while aiming to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. Based on these goals, the world has galvanized previously unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged (Oleribe & Tylor-Robinson, 2016).

Nigeria, like most other nations of the world, signed this treaty and promised to work towards the realization of this goal. To achieve this, a number of steps were taken, including the release of central government funds. Offices were created and individuals appointed to key positions to work towards the MDG targets. Nigeria, like many sub-Saharan African countries, did not meet the MDG targets which are fundamental to the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These universal goals and targets, codenamed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to achieve sustainable development for humanity and a well safeguarded planet earth by the year 2030, replaced the millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which global pursuit ends this September, 2015 after 15 years. With 17 goals and 169 targets under the new agenda which have already sparked debates by governments and policy makers on which goals and targets are going to make the most difference to individual countries and to the world, the 17 SDGs, which will come into effect on 1 January, 2016, are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

It is crystal clear from the foregoing that if Nigeria is to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger and Goal 3 of Good Health and well Being; the issue of food security thus becomes inevitable because food crisis (food insecurity) has become a persistently volatile problem in the country recently with Nigeria skyrocketing food importation.

The State of Food Insecurity in Nigeria: Overview

According to Saliu & Omotola (2006), given Nigeria's resource base, especially in relation to agriculture, the country should ordinarily have no business with food crisis. Nigeria's agricultural potentials manifest in



the forms of natural, geographical and sociological factors. For instance, Nigeria has a total land area of 923,768sq. km. out of this, 68 million hectares constitute estimated arable land; 37 million hectares of natural forests and rangelands, with large diversity of livestock and wildlife. It also has 120,000sq. km. of large rivers and lakes; as well as coastal and marine resources to the tune of 960 kilometres of shore-line. These exist in variable and suitable climate for agriculture. The quality of these resources is so high that one should not envisage any form of food poverty.

In the 40s and early 50s, Nigeria did not have to contend with the problem of food insecurity. The system was able to feed her citizens and at the same time export the surplus food items. Every regions of the country specialized in the production of one or two major crops, whether food or cash crops, and together the country was relatively self-sufficient in food production. Nigeria had the groundnut pyramids in the North, the cocoa maintains in the west, oil palm and kernel heaps in the East and the rubber plantation in the mid-west (see, Tell, August 3, 2009:2). But when oil was discovered in 1956 and exportation of it started in 1958, things started changing gradually, and later furiously. It was like declaring holiday for hoes and machetes. As oil prices went up, interest in agriculture waned which marked the beginning of decline into the abyss as a polity. The consequential effect of the decline like some countries of the world, the nation's economy is feeling the brunt of the rising cost of food items, especially the rise in the prices of staple foods. Significantly, the price of rice has increased by over 100 per cent since 2006 (Ojo & Adebayo, 2012).

Salihu & Omotola (2006), further asserts that today, Nigeria presents a vast theatre of food crisis. This crisis manifests in diverse forms and character. One is in terms of the quantity and quality of food intake. Second, is the volume of food production; and third, has to do with the prices of food, population growth and the earning power of the people. For security of food to be assured and sustained, the quantity and quality of food intake must be up to standard. The volume of food production must be high, at least to be consistent with the rate of population growth.

Besides, the prices of food items must be kept moderate, to be in parity with the earning powers of the people, if it cannot be kept lower. Again, it is equally important that self-sufficiency in food production be maintained to reduce importation of food. Although, there has been an increase in the level of agricultural output over the years, there are still significant increases in import bills of the country.

For instance, the price of rice has increased by over 100 per cent since 2006. It is instructive to note that Nigeria requires 2.5 million metric tons of rice annually while local rice production is less than half a million metric tons per year (Tell, May 5, 2008:23). With these figures as released by Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Nigeria is short of two million tons of rice, which it has to source from other countries. It is estimated that Nigeria spent a whopping \$2 billion dollars importing about six million tons of wheat, \$750 million on rice \$700 million on sugar and \$500 million on milk and other dairy products (Tell, May 5, 2008:23). As things stand now, Nigeria is likely to spend even more. With the global rise in food prices, the United Nations Food Security Information Note, (FOSIN), of November 2007 showed that "market tensions manifest, in part, through price increases would be most acutely felt by vulnerable households, where difficulties in accessing cereals would lead to localized food security problems (see Tell, May 5, 2008:23). We must however, commend the effort of the present government of Muhammadu Buhari in boosting local rice production through various CBN intervention programmes which has seen the level of rice importation drop drastically.

Ogbe (2004:80) posits that the import bills on food has been on the increase since 1999 when it was at \$5.8 billion. In the year 2000, the bill rose to \$7.6 billion. By 2001, the total import was put at \$11.3 billion, but declined to \$7.0 billion in 2002. Between January and June 2003, it was already \$5.5 billion. On fish importation alone, Nigeria reportedly spends over N50 billion annually (Dada, 2005: 56). Various food commodities are imported into the country on an annual basis. Nigeria's imports against disappointing rising global food prices, soaring inflation, food



insecurity, high level of poverty and hunger among millions of poor farmers and rural dwellers, in the main, should be discouraged. According to FMARD (2011) in 2010 alone, Nigeria spent ₦635 billion on importation of wheat, ₦356 billion on rice, which is tantamount to spending about ₦1.0 billion per day, ₦217 billion on sugar and ₦97 billion on fish in spite of all the endowed marine resources, rivers, lakes and creeks of the nation.

Corroborating the above, Ogbe (2016) further lamented that Nigeria spends N7.2 billion annually for the importation of toothpick, \$600 million in importing fish a year and milk and milk products to the tune of \$1 billion dollars per annum. Ogbe said, "We depended on Thailand, India and Vietnam to feed us with rice, we depend on other countries to feed us with tomato paste; we depend on others even for tooth picks at the cost of 18 million dollars per annum. We depend on Brazil for sugar; and we also depend even now on other countries for pepper and so on. We import 5 million eggs per a day from South Africa. We bring sliced potatoes from South Africa. We spend \$600 million in importing fish a year. There's no reason why we can't grow our fish here". A basic question that readily comes to mind according to Saliu & Omotola (2006), is; how did Nigeria suddenly descend into this severe crisis of food, given her vast agricultural resource base?

Sustainable Food Security in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

The challenges to sustainable food security in Nigeria today include the fact that the existing agricultural systems are unable to provide food to the average Nigerian at affordable prices; coupled with the delay of agricultural infrastructures to sustain healthy agriculture. At present, farmers still cultivate fragmented small holdings with traditional implements, storage and transport costs are high; there is high rate of rural-urban migration with a telling impact on rural population where farming thrives most. To feed the future population, which the UN has projected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050, the agriculture sector needs significant long-term public spending and private investment so that we can improve the technologies to grow food. Some of the areas in which

advancements in technology is crucial include irrigation, and prevention of food loss and waste. The current spate of short-term and low investment in agricultural research and development (R&D) has a glaring implication – which is stagnant production and low productivity. Public and private sector agricultural R&D can lead to development of new crop and livestock production technologies, significantly increasing the quantity and quality of agricultural output per unit of labour, land and other resources in low-income countries like Nigeria.

There are also other political and socioeconomic issues leading to food insecurity in Nigeria enunciated by Metu, Okeyika & Maduka (2016) and others below:

- A. Government Policy: Nigeria depended so much on agricultural productivity for its revenue until the exploration of oil in 1970s. The oil boom led to the negligence of the non-oil sectors especially the agricultural sector which used to be the major source of revenue for the country. The attention given to agriculture reduced drastically, farming reduced drastically, farmer's needs were not attended to and the worst of all was that research and development in the sector slowed down causing a stagnation in food production. Government policies with regard to agricultural production were rapid with plans hastily put together and little or no participation from those who are engaged in agricultural productivity. Moreover, policy change that championed increased incentive for local farmers for improved local food productions were neglected. Urban and community farming and even home gardening were no longer encouraged as land agents made it too difficult for people to obtain land for building as well as for agricultural productivity.
- B. Agricultural Practices: The type of farming system prevalent in Nigeria is the traditional subsistent farming. This system is characterized by use of simple farm tools, small farm holdings, restricted access to credit facilities and low agricultural inputs, inadequate storage facilities, insecure markets for post-harvest products and exploitation of farmers by the middlemen. In terms of technology, Nigeria is still lagging behind when compared to other nations in Europe and Asia. Due to



poverty and illiteracy, farmers do not have access to modern communication system with which they can access information regarding new technologies. Also there are few extension officers to transfer new technology to the farmers. Funding for agricultural research is still low in Nigeria. Also heavy importation of food crops affects productivity of local farmers because the small farmers cannot compete with the imported crops.

- C. Population Increase: The demand for food exceeds the supply of food because the rate of growth of population is higher than the growth in agricultural productivity. Also the large population continues to relocate to the urban areas in search of white collar jobs which do not exist. This youth rural-urban drift makes it difficult for the country to be food secured.
- D. Environmental Issues: Flood, drought, desertification are environmental issues affecting availability of food in Nigeria. Climate change affects food supply through loss of farmland, fluctuating food prices, increases in food borne illnesses and other food utilization issues (GCF, 2016). The recent environmental degradation through deforestation and flooding has wide negative implication for food production. For instance, in 2012 the country witnessed an unprecedented rainfall as a result of extreme weather. The rainfall resulted in severe flooding causing loss of agricultural crops, live stocks and human lives. According to Metu, Kalu and Ezenekwe (2015), the estimated loss of the country's GDP was worth N2.6 trillion. In the same period, share of agriculture value added to total GDP declined from 23.89% in 2010 to 22.05% in 2012 (WDI, 2014). Other environmental factors that may affect food security includes soil degradation, soil pollution and deforestation. Also air and water pollution from industrialization threaten both human and natural resources to an extent that food securities capabilities are damaged and the recent herder's/ farmers crisis across the country.
- E. Corruption: Corruption in Nigeria has been on the increase leading to money budgeted for public utilities being siphoned for private use. This leads to decay in infrastructure especially rural infrastructure where majority of the farmers live and operate from. For instance, we

have seen situations where money meant for importation of fertilizers are siphoned. Moreover, the pervasive trend of poverty in the country also underscores the crisis of food insecurity in Nigeria. That about 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line is no longer news. For this reason, they are highly incapacitated to afford the quantity and quality of nutritionally sufficient diet. More importantly, the discovery of oil in large quantities and its subsequent elevation to the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, to the neglect of other sectors particularly agriculture, is another decisive factor underpinning food insecurity. Although, whenever there is a disruption in the oil market at any level of the system, Nigeria makes more money. However, these proceeds have not been effectively managed to boost other sectors of the economy. The worst hit in this regard is the agricultural sector, with very telling impact on food production and prices. Hence, the increasing rate of food insecurity (Saliu & Omotola, 2006).

- F. Unabated Farmers/Herders Crisis, Banditry and Insecurity: The herdsman/farmers conflict in Nigeria in the past few years portends a very great danger and a serious security threat to peace, unity, and socio-economic development of the country (Idakwoji, Ojomah, Usman & Orokpo, 2018) and food security in Nigeria. With the recent dimension of insecurity across the nation and banditry no doubt presages a great threat to food security in Nigeria as farmers hardly go to farm because of fear of bandits, kidnapping and killings by herders.

CONCLUSION

It is no doubt that attaining food security for the nation is an enormous task that requires serious political will. Thus, efforts should be on all fronts to simultaneously address this critical national deficit because food importation poses both emergency and significant threats to any nation. Hence, the major objective Nigerian state must pursue in this nascent democratic era is food security. A country that cannot formulate and effectively implement agricultural and food policies may find it difficult to use the citizens as catalyst for sustainable development.



With the world just 8 years away from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030, it behoves on the nation to succinctly put up mechanism towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals 2 of Zero Hunger and Goal 3 of Good Health and well Being via food security. The issue of food security thus becomes inevitable because food crisis (food insecurity) has become a persistently volatile problem in the country recently with Nigeria skyrocketing food importation with its telling effect on our foreign exchange.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends among others the followings;

- The need for improvement in technology and its application to farming and agriculture in general.
- The government is to ensure the security of lives and property of farmers so as to enhance agricultural output.
- A review of appropriate agricultural policies that will further boost agricultural and food production in the country.
- There should be a political will by the government so as to enhance increased domestic production and reduced importation of food.

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