

# THE CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, PROSPECTS, AND STRATEGIES

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## Abstract

Food security has become a contemporary development issue in view of the role it plays in transforming people's livelihood, promoting good health and mitigating endemic poverty. In Nigeria, the state of food security has attained a worrisome dimension, particularly when weighed against the rapid increases in the country's population; thus, making Nigeria a food-deficit country with rapidly escalating food import bills. Various factors have been identified for the nation's position of relative food insecurity. These include poor economic policies, under-capitalization, dysfunctional institutions and poor infrastructural facilities, amongst others. Arising from these findings, therefore, this paper opines that if this looming food crisis is to be averted, then stakeholders at all levels should, as a matter of priority, embark on the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive and sustainable food security policy aimed at fostering access to food for all citizens. To realize this, the government should work in collaboration with the private sector with the former providing the enabling environment for the latter to expand and assume the role of economic prime mover.

## Introduction

Food security has become a contemporary development issue in view of the role it plays in transforming people's livelihood, promoting good health and mitigating endemic poverty. Until the 1960s, agriculture had been able to cope with global demands in both industrialized and developing countries. However, with accelerated population growth in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the consequent demographic impacts on these regions, an emergent food gap becomes a worrisome issue in many developing countries concerned.

The inability of food production to match explosive population growth, particularly in Asia in the 1960s, created a widespread fear of imminent famine in the region, with disastrous consequences around the world (Rosegrant et al., 2001).

In order to avert a looming food crisis, development practitioners, policy makers and researchers in Asia and around the world initiated a "green revolution" programme, featuring the adoption of high-yielding cereal varieties, irrigation agriculture and fertilizer use.

The green revolution introduced novel technologies, which transformed food productivity in Asia and other developing regions, erasing the fear of widespread hunger in Asia. Technological innovations in agriculture, especially in the past few decades, are keys to the reinforcement of food security, as the number of people suffering from food deprivation has declined by 40 million during the first half of the 1990s, (United Nations, 2001).

Despite the improvement in global agricultural productivity, which has mitigated food deprivation around the world, food availability has remained largely uneven, with severe shortfalls in parts of the developing world. Indeed, about 800 million people in developing countries suffer from chronic food deprivation, in addition to 24 million people in developed countries and transitional economies, making food security a global challenge to policy makers around the world (FAO, 2000).

Table 1 shows recent and projected trends in global under-nourishment, as an indicator of the growing severity of food insecurity.

**Table 1: Projected Trends in Global Under-Nourishment**

	1996-98	2015
Percentage of Population	2030	Millions of

Sub-Saharan Africa	34	22	186	184		
Near East/North Africa	10	8	36	38		
Latin America & the Caribbean	11	7	55	45		
China and India	16	7	348	195		
Other Asian	19	10	5	166	114	7
Developing Countries	8	10	6	791	576	4

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2000a).

What becomes evident from Table 1 is that the issue of food insecurity, although projected to reduce in the near future, will likely persist for some time.

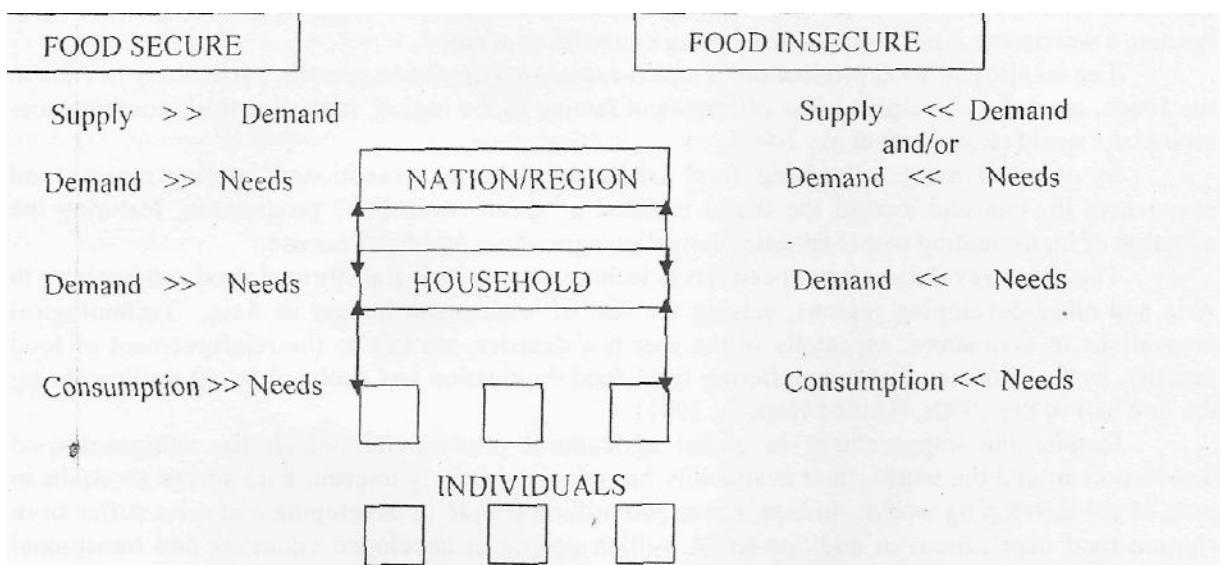
In the light of the foregoing development, an attempt is made in this paper to shed some light on contemporary issues of food security. Specifically, it discusses global and national trends in food security, as well as challenges, which undermine effective food security. Accordingly, this paper is divided into four sections. Following this introductory section, section two discusses the concept of food security while section three examines the Nigerian food security challenges. Section four concludes the paper with relevant recommendations aimed at fostering food security as an effective instrument for economic growth and national development.

### Food Security: A Conceptual Framework

Food security, which has become a buzzword in recent times, often conveys different meanings to various people. The World Bank report on poverty and hunger defines food security as "access b> all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life" (World Bank, 1996:12).'

The committee on world food security defines food security as the physical and economic access to adequate food for all household members, without undue risk of losing such access. This definition, which introduces the concept of vulnerability, also implies that food security may be viewed from different levels. Apart from the levels of individuals, food security can be viewed from households, national or regional levels as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Different levels of Food Security**



Source: Thomson and Metz, 1997:4.

Figure F illustrates the different levels of food security, and shows the phenomenon as a multi-dimensional issue. At the level of the individual, one is considered to be food secured when his food consumption is greater than need, as defined by physiological requirement. At this level, consumption is determined by the claim an individual has on household food resources, which may in turn be affected by his earnings and assets or by his position in (he household (Thomson and Metz, 1997). Food security at the household level is probably the most important in view of the fact that the household is the basic economic unit,

which determines the consumption levels of most individuals.

Since income to the household, as well as resource allocation is often made at this level, consumption is divided amongst household members in line with relative needs.

At the regional/national level, food security refers to the aggregate situation in all households of a particular region or nation. food security assumes a complex dimension at the national level. For example, a country may face food insecurity even though there may be sufficient food for everyone if it is divided in a "fair" way, a situation that is seldom the case. Also, a nation may be food secure at the national level, but witnesses food deprivation in some households. In yet another scenario, a nation may produce sufficient food, but sections of the population may face food deprivation if they lack enough resources to access sufficient food.

Time is an important factor in determining the nature of food security challenges. It is important to distinguish between chronic food insecurity and transitory food insecurity. When individuals or groups of people suffer from food insecurity all the time, they are said to be suffering from chronic food insecurity. Transitory food insecurity, on the other hand, occurs when households face a temporary decline in access to food.

Transitory food insecurity can be further divided into temporary food insecurity and cyclical or seasonal food insecurity. Temporary food insecurity occurs when sudden and unpredictable shocks such as drought or pests attack affects a household's entitlements.

Seasonal food insecurity occurs when there is a regular pattern of inadequate access to food, often linked to agricultural seasons (World Bank. 1986).

Food security is particularly important in view of its key role in national development. A well-fed populace has a potential for high work productivity, which also increases earnings and the income of the populace. On the other hand, ill-fed people are often sick and become vulnerable to diseases and low productivity, which lead them to a vicious circle of poverty.

### The Emergence of Food insecurity in Nigeria

Food insecurity has assumed a worrisome dimension in Nigeria, particularly in the past three decades. Chronic food insecurity has become the norm in poor Nigerian households, a situation that is blamed on the country's rapid annual population growth rate estimated at 2.8%, (United Nations, 2001a).

However, other issues are equally accountable for Nigeria's emergent food insecurity. Decades of bad policies, particularly in the agricultural sector, have taken a huge toll on the economy, with serious consequences on national development. Worst among the bad policies affecting the agricultural sector is government's insensitivity to the needs of the rural areas. Prominent among these is lack of infrastructural development and incentives e.g. loan for farmers. This invariably results in rural-urban migration. Also, the agricultural sector has witnessed a pattern of undercapitalization over a period of three decades, accounting for the sector's poor performance and thus fueling food insecurity in Nigeria.

### Current Trends and Developments

Although Nigeria's food insecurity problem is a long-standing issue, many analysts see it as a self-inflicted scourge. At the nation's independence in 1960s, Nigeria's agriculture was dynamic and buoyant, accounting for more than one-half of the nation's GDP and for more than three-quarters of its export earnings. However, the advent of crude oil in the late 1960s, is blamed for the neglect and subsequent decline of the agricultural sector, a position from which the nation is yet to recover (United Nations, 2001 a). The contribution of agriculture to GDP during 1976-80, for example, declined to 21.8% (from 50.2% during 1960-70 period). Although the sector's contribution to GDP increased to 39.6%, in the 1981-85 period and 41.2% in the 1986-90 period, this was far from its dominant position in the 1960s, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Average Growth Rate of Agricultural Output in Nigeria, 1970-99**

Types of Agricultural Activity.

Period	Aggregate	Crops	Staples	Others	Livestock	Fish	Forestry
1970-75	-2.9	-3.6	-4.4	2.1	-0.1	4.6	2.9
1976-80	-2.3	-3.7	-6.7	4.1	-0.3	3.9	3.9
1981-85	-2.6	2.5	3.9	-0.3	7.0	15.0	-1.0
1986-90	10.0	12.0	13.0	7.0	9.0	5.0	3.0
1991-98	4.5	5.9	6.5	2.9	1.7	4.2	1.6

Source: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) (2003).

Table 2 illustrates the performance of the nation's agricultural sector between 1970 and 1998. It portrays an average annual growth of about -2.6%, for the sector between 1970 and 1985, with subsequent periods generally witnessing positive growth reaching a peak of 10.0% in the 1986-90 period. It, however, declined to about 4.5%, during the 1991-98 period. The improved performance of the agricultural sector in the 1980s and early 1990s was attributed to the positive impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which the nation embraced as part of a comprehensive programme of economic restructuring and liberalization (Donovan, 1996; Uniamikogbo and Ewanehi, 1998). However, the nation's food security position has declined considerably since the 1990s, due to

various constraints undermining farmers' productive efforts.

### **Constraints Undermining Food Security in Nigeria**

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the state of food security in Nigeria has been undermined by a combination of different factors, most prominent of which are the following.

Firstly, there has been the formulation and implementation of bad economic policies over the years. Policy makers in Nigeria have placed undue emphasis on the development of urban infrastructure at the expense of rural areas, particularly since the advent of crude oil in the nation's economy. The flow of resources away from rural areas to urban centres has exacerbated impoverished conditions in the former, with serious consequences for both rural and urban areas. The rural-urban population drift is a manifestation of the negative conditions prevalent in the nation's rural areas.

Secondly, the agricultural sector in Nigeria has witnessed lack/or dearth of appropriate technology over the years. Novel innovations and technologies that have enhanced agricultural productivity elsewhere are particularly absent in the nation's agricultural sector. Farmers are often unable to purchase hybrid seeds and seedlings, fertilizers and agro-chemicals, which are critical to improved farm output and productivity.

Furthermore, the sector has been characterized by the existence of dysfunctional institutions over the years. Essentially, effective institutions play vital roles in making available crucial resources to the agricultural sector. These include research institutions. Unfortunately, Nigeria's eighteen National Agricultural Systems (NARS) are in a worrisome state. Lacking in financial and material resources, NARS have been undermined and are unable to generate appropriate technologies in an effective manner necessary to boost agricultural productivity in Nigeria. Also, agricultural extension systems have been similarly handicapped as a result of inadequate resources allocated to them. Consequently, farmers have not been able to receive necessary extension services to support farm output and increase their income. Other institutional structures and programmes, including the River Basins and Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), which showed initial promises when they began operations, but have either collapsed or become moribund with serious consequences for the nation's food security and poverty reduction efforts.

Another constraint has been the dearth of investment capital in the sector. In the past three decades, Nigeria's agricultural sector has suffered from under-investment both from the public and private sectors of the economy. In Nigeria, virtually all of the nation's agricultural output is recorded by low-income, small scale farmers, whose access to investment capital is severely curtailed. The inability of farmers to access funds to assist farm production is a binding constraint in the nation's quest for food security. The formal banking sector is averse to agricultural lending in view of the high level of risks associated with the sector.

The foregoing dismal posture is further compounded by the diverse constraints on land use in Nigeria. Although the nation is endowed with a vast supply of arable land, and favourable weather conditions, suitable land for cultivation is increasingly threatened, particularly in recent times. A combination of natural and anthropogenic factors continue to undermine accessibility of arable land in Nigeria. Natural forces include desertification in the

North and soil erosion in the South. Human-induced (land) degradation includes bush burning, deforestation, shifting cultivation and unsustainable urbanization.

These negative trends, over the years, have impacted adversely on agricultural output and food security. And indications are that, unless the trend is reversed promptly, irreversible damages may be inflicted on the nation's stock of land resources.

### **Summary and Policy Options**

Food security has assumed an important position in the development agenda for developing countries. In recent times, agriculture has come under pressure to fill the gap created by inadequate food production in developing countries. The emergent food crisis, particularly in Asia during the 1960s, provided an impetus for the generation of innovative techniques and novel technologies to boost food production in the region. The development stemmed the tide of food insecurity in Asia and fostered development in the region. However, sub-Saharan Africa was by-passed by the benefits of the "green revolution", which enhanced farm productivity in Asia.

\* In the Nigerian context, the state of food security has assumed a precarious dimension, as the nation moved from a position of relative food self-sufficiency in the 1960s to one of extreme dependence on food imports in recent times. Various factors have been blamed for the nation's position of relative food insecurity. These include bad economic policies, under-capitalisation in the agricultural sector, dysfunctional institutions and the dearth of social and physical infrastructure in the rural areas. And, unless this trend is reversed through a comprehensive and sustained food security policy by all stakeholders, the nation's development prospects will be curtailed.

The nation's food security policy, in order to succeed, should adequately address, *inter alia*, those constraints that have been identified above.

First, the problem of poor infrastructure in the nation can be tackled through increased investments in rural roads constructions, with a view to reducing transportation costs, and improve access to inputs and marketing of outputs. This should be complemented by similar investments in communications, electrification, healthcare and schools.

Second, the prevailing dearth of appropriate technology can be improved upon by strengthening capacity to generate location-specific technology adaptable to the agro-ecosystems that are prevalent in the country, as well as creating the enabling environment for researcher/extension/farmer linkages through information dissemination.

Third, for a purposeful agricultural production, there is the need for the government to institute rural finance policy which is supportive of alternative rural financial institutions, including informal institutions, financial intermediation (as opposed *to*, purely credit) approach, saving mobilization including rural financial institutions, especially where it has been restricted.

Fourth, in view of the unsustainable rate of population increase throughout Nigeria, there is the need to stem the tide of accelerated population growth. The nation must embark upon an action plan, which guarantees easy access to family planning services. The programme should also place a special focus on rural areas, where the majority of the poor who have been deprived access to family planning services live.

The realization of the foregoing goals of agricultural development in Nigeria and, by extension, adequate access to food for all requires the collaborative efforts of the private sector of the economy. In this regard, the government should provide the enabling environment through the creation of investment incentives and formulation of policies, which would help to enhance the purchasing power of the poor to attract businesses to rural areas.

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