

FOOD SECURITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The quality of the food people eat is a reflection of their lives. The primary achievement of a man in African setting is his ability to provide quality food for his family. One of the endemic problems facing developing nations of the world today is that of food insufficiency and poverty. No nation can be said to be great if it depends on other nations to satisfy her food needs. This paper highlights food security as an indicator for national development in Nigeria. The paper also identifies the reasons for food insufficiency in Nigeria and expected role of agriculture in enhancing food security, the role of food security in national development and why food insecurity must be avoided. Recommendations were made on the need to avoid food insecurity which will help in minimizing the effects of food insecurity to healthy life and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Food insecurity has been the concern of the most nations of the world today especially the developing nations. Fadeyiye (2005) buttresses this point, when he pointed out that most developing nations of the world today are at the mercy of the developed nation because they are unable to feed their citizens. Examples of such nations include Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, Chad, Liberia, Zambia, Sudan and many other African nation that have suffer gross food shortages. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recently released its 2002 Human Development Report (HDR) in which it ranked Nigeria 148 out of the 173 countries surveyed for its annual Human Development Index (HDI). The implication of this is that Nigeria belongs to the unenviable league of the 36 countries that fall within the low development category where the

standard of living has been on a steady decline over the years (Vanguard, August 21st, 2002;39).

Recent estimates put the number of hungry people in Nigeria at over 53 million, which is about 30 percent of the country's total population of roughly 150 million; and 52 percent live under the poverty line. These are matters of grave concern largely because Nigeria was self sufficient in food production and was indeed a net exporter of food to other regions of the continent in the 1950s and 1960s, things changed dramatically for the worse following the global economic crisis that hit developing countries beginning from the late 1970's onward. The discovery of crude oil and rising revenue from the country's petroleum sector encouraged official neglect of the agricultural sector and turned Nigeria into a net importer of food. By 2009 for example the federal ministry of agriculture estimated that Nigeria was spending over \$3 billion annually on food imports (Agaba, 2003).

No wonder , then the Yar'adua administration has brought to focus the issue of food security as one of the components of the seven points agenda in the effort to reassert Nigeria's status as the giant of Africa. It is worthy of note that all of the items on the seven point agenda, food security appears the easiest to attain , with just little coordinated efforts to utilize abundant human and natural resources to reposition Nigeria on the map of the world. Most of what needs to be a leading food producer and exporter are within her reach.

Worse still Nigeria, going by the report fared worse than such low income earning

African countries as Madagascar, Togo, Sudan, Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, and Gabon. What this translates to is that standard of living is relatively better in this poverty ravaged countries than in oil rich Nigeria, (Vanguard August 21st, 2002:39). However, incredible as the UNDP report may seem in respect to Nigeria, only but few Nigerians will today have any difficulty accepting Nigeria's dismal position on the index. The reason for this is that the sharp rise in prices of goods in the market in recent time has been a major cause of strident complaint by Nigerian who can no longer afford the product he has always taken for granted because their prices are going out of reach.

Since agriculture plays a critical role in enhancing food security according to Anacta (2003), the federal government of Nigeria has formulated several agricultural policies and programmes aimed at enhancing agricultural production of food for self-sufficiency in the country. Such programme include: - The World Bank assisted river basin development project, National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Operation Feed The Nation (OFN) Green Revolution Programme (GRP), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), Directorate Of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). Most of the agricultural policies and programmes mentioned above, according to Anacta (2003), were planned based on top-to-down approach instead of down-to-top approach, in other words, the rural farmers were not made the focus of the programme in terms of how to boost agricultural production. The rural farmers need adequate enlightenment on the use of agricultural inputs and technology in order to boost agricultural production.

One of the ways in which to assure food security to millions of people in developing nation like Nigeria is through adequate education of the rural farmers on modern means of agricultural production, agricultural education,

therefore, is expected to provide the veritable tools or needed skills and basic scientific knowledge and technology that can enhance adequate food production and self-sufficiency. The farmer is incompetent to content with the challenges of the erratic climatic change. Whether with too little or too much rains, the Nigeria farmer is still a loser, because he has no stabilizing factor to cope with two extremes. The farmer still largely depends on traditional implement, operated with bare hands. The Nigeria farm is still a model of incompatible marriage between new ideas such as improved crop varieties and crude age-long working tools of bare-foot old farmer. With so many agricultural universities, faculties and research institutes, Nigeria hardly needs more paper work or theories to attain a comfortable level of food security.

Conceptual Clarification

The international conference on nutrition (ICN) held in Rome in 1992 defined food security as 'access by all people at all time to the food needed for a healthy life'. According to United Nations Food And Agricultural Organization (UN F.A.O). (1997) 'agriculture, food and nutrition for African' cited in Ibanga and Maduagwu (2002; 18), for a country to attain food security, she must, (1) ensure adequacy of food supplies in terms of quantity, quality and variety of food. (2) Optimize stability in the flow of supplies (3) secure sustainable access to available supplies by all who need them. FAO/WHO, 1992 stated that food security has three important dimensions: adequate availability of food supplies, assured access to sufficient food for all individuals; and its proper utilization to provide a proper and balanced diet.

Food security according to World Bank (1986), means access by all people at all time to enough food for an active healthy life. Harrigan, Loader and Thirtle (1992) and

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Ononamadu (2002) amplified the above definition when they opined that food security is said to exist when a country's production, marketing and trade system are able to provide adequate food for the entire people at all times, even in the time of adverse domestic production and international market condition. In whichever way we look at the terms, it implies the ability on the part of a country to meet the food needs of her people for an active and healthy life within the framework of her national development aspiration (Idachaba 1980). Thus, according to Suleiman (2003), food security measure must take into account not only the ability to provide an adequate food supply, but also the need to ensure that all the households in all the regions of the country have the means to purchase enough food throughout the year.

Development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when she is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. National development can be described as the overall development or a collective socioeconomic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government (Naomi, O. 1995).

Reasons for Poverty and Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria, according to Oladeabo (2004) is a rich nation in terms of human and material resources, yet majority of its people do not enjoy adequate condition of living because of poverty in Nigeria according to World Bank report (1999) of The Assessment of poverty in the country indicated that poverty is more pronounced in the rural area characterized by agriculturally based traditional sector. Nigeria economy is, therefore characterized by a large rural, mostly agricultural based, traditional sector which comprise about

2/3 of the poor and by a smaller urban capital intensive sector, which has benefited most from exploitation of the country's resources and from the provision of service that successive governments have provided.

Most of the food produced in Nigeria come from the agriculturally based traditional sector made up of high illiterate and peasant agricultural producers using crude and rudimentary technology which result in subsistence production. Those farmers are basically illiterate, poor and poorly motivated, with lots of them operating more or less at the subsistence level. High illiteracy limits their access to the scientific, technical, economic and market information necessary for improve performance in a competitive world. Their abject poverty hampers the farmers' investment capacity and subjects them to pitiable conditions of existence. Efforts of research, according to Agaba (2003), hardly get to this group of producers and as such they are in the continuous cycle of poverty due to low production and low income. Those who are poor lack the access to market their goods and they are unable to vary or enrich their diets.

According to Ohitoto (2001), by 1960, Nigeria was self-sufficient in food production but in the early 70's Nigeria started experiencing food insecurity due to neglect of agriculture as a result of the oil boom. The emergence of oil in commercial quantities in Nigeria in the early 70's displaced agriculture as the chief earner of foreign exchange as well as nation income. This explains why Nwulia (1986) observed that prior to 1980; agricultural commodities in Nigeria accounted for over 80% of the country's foreign exchange earnings. But dropped to only 75% in 1983. In contrast, oil revenue, was historically a minimal source of foreign exchange and accounted for about 63% of the revenue by 1985.

Some other reasons for Nigeria's food insecurity and continuous dependence on

foreign source of food include poor policy formulation and execution, decline in agricultural production, impact of pests/diseases, impact of drought, absence of widespread impact of technological change, impact of government policies, inadequate funding of agricultural projects, lack of reliable credit facilities for farmers, impact of global warming, pervasive poverty among the rural farmers, effect of land tenure system, impact of social conflicts, effect of rural urban migration, impact of gender discrimination, impact of petroleum economy, effect of rising cost of living, impact of population growth, poor knowledge of farmers particularly small-scale farmers, and failure to take advantage of improve varieties of crops and breeds of livestock. In addition, inadequate extension services, shoddy and unpatriotic management practices, indiscipline and irrationality in resource allocation; and above all, the absence of effective dynamic engineering are well directed in the area of agricultural production are some other factors given for food insecurity in Nigeria. Mark S. in "The Gadfly" agrees with Adedeji who indentified limited use of new technology.

Why Food Insecurity must be Avoided

Food insecurity is the inability of the citizens to have regular access to enough food to meet up the daily nutritional requirements for a healthy and productive life. The effect of food insecurity include

- i. Malnutrition
- ii. Deterioration in health of the citizens and low immune system
- iii. Increase in social vices such as begging, prostitution, armed robbery, child labor, unemployment, hunger, juvenile delinquency, kidnapping.
- iv. Development of low self esteem and low integrity.
- v. High infant mortality

The social and economic effects of food insecurity on individuals are wide-ranging. For example, children that are malnourished with iodine deficiency have a reduced learning capacity and poor attendance at school. In adults, Intellectual Development Disorder (IDD) leads to poor income-earning capacity due to mental and physical impairment, as well as decreased productivity, which has a negative effect on both family and national economy.

Nigeria is still classified as food insecure nation (Edo, ADP 2002) because of the following reasons:

- i. Poverty
- ii. Low income earnings
- iii. High incidence of malnutrition and other deficiency diseases
- iv. High death rate
- v. Low life expectancy
- vi. High crime rate

Implication of the Definition of Food Insecurity

Nigerians need economic access not mere physical availability in the market place. They need to see food, touch food then take physical possession through economic access. Endemic poverty and very low per capita income levels are the root causes of food insecurity in Nigeria. Raising per capita income levels and reducing poverty levels will reduce food insecurity in Nigeria. For food security to exist, the majority must the meet minimum nutritional standard.

The Role of Food Security in National Development

The important role of food security in keeping the regional and global stability and prosperity is well recognized. Nutrition status is a measure of the health condition of an individual as affected primarily by the intake of food and utilization of nutrients. According to

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the World Health Organization (WHO), health is only the absence of disease but a state of complete mental and physical wellbeing in relation to productivity and performance of an individual. The state of hunger and malnutrition within a country is related to its level of development (OMN, 1998). The relationship between nutrition and resource development was best described by the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) held in Rome, which, in its world Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, stated that nutritional well-being of all people is a pre-condition for the development of societies and is a key objective of progress in human development. A well-nourished, healthy workforce is a pre-condition for sustainable development. At the same time, the nutritional well-being of a population is a reflection of the performance of its social and economic sector: and to a large extent, an indicator of the efficiency of national resource development.

Achieving food security in Nigeria is pivot to success of the Yar' adua's administration because this will foster the other six of the 7-point agenda, it is said that a hungry man is an angry man. An angry man is a danger to his neighborhood and, in fact, a displeasure to himself. Therefore, a nation with a fragile food security will have a fragile internal security, as it will breed nothing but a population of people with bottled anger, awaiting explosion. Beside the nutritional value and industrial potentialities, food is an international identity, as world-class exported food tends to become a cultural ambassador for a country and its people. On the long run, success in food security as part of the 7-point agenda will affect other efforts to make Nigeria one of the 20 most industrialized nations in the world by the year 2020.

As a matter of fact the major challenges and solutions to food security in Nigeria may be attributed to the followings:

1. Inadequate investment in agriculture. Annual agriculture growth rate should be sustained at not less than 9.5 percent.
2. Support for small holder farmers. Since over 80 percent of farmers are small holder farmers, and over 75 percent of women in rural Nigeria are engaged in agriculture, then these must be the major beneficiaries of government financial and other forms of material assistance.
3. Policy incoherence and inconsistencies. The National Agency for Small Scale Agriculture Development (NASSAD) should endeavor to develop and harmonize its agricultural policies with other agencies active in promoting food production in the country.

Conclusions

Food has been an important weapon in national development. Provision of enough food to all households in Nigeria through physical and economic access will improve the lives of its citizens. This can help minimize poverty and crimes, which no doubt will bring political social and economic sustainable development in Nigeria.

Food security is a veritable tool for enhancing sustainable national development. The importance of food security in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized because according to International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) (1992) a well nourished individual workforce is a pre-condition for sustainable national development. They further stated that the nutritional well-being of a population is a reflection of the performance of its social and economic sector and, to a large extent, an indicator of the efficiency of national development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the study.

1. Families in Nigeria should be empowered economically to minimize poverty.
2. At national level the government needs to ensure that food security policy are well implemented.
3. Government should actively support agricultural production by making available adequate loan, fertilizers and technical assistance to enable subsistence farmers in rural communities produce better quality and high yielding foods.
4. To ensure that the available foods are well utilized nutrition education program should be organized for the masses.

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