

Food (In)Security, Agricultural Transformation and Livelihood in Nigeria

By

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1. Introduction

Food insecurity is a severe problem in Nigeria. It ranks 98th out of 107 countries on the 2020 Global Hunger Index. In Nigeria, over 9 million people face food insecurity, and the United Nations (UN) Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) recently warned that unless appropriate policies are implemented, or resilience-focused and humanitarian actions are taken, millions of Nigerians are likely to suffer while some of them are already being threatened by famine.

Meanwhile, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) is to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition by promoting sustainable agriculture by the year 2030. It is also projected that the world population would increase to at least 9 billion in 2050, while Nigeria's population is projected to rise to over 400 million people by 2050. This will double the demand for food. Therefore, agricultural production should be increased alongside the growing population that aids in the productive capacity of the agricultural sector. This will help feed the global population and reduce poverty in rural communities, where the bulk of the poorest people in the world live and depend mainly on agriculture for livelihoods.

2. Food Security Question

Significant causes of Food Insecurity in Nigeria, include, *inter alia*, the following:

Conflict: One of the most common causes of food insecurity is Conflict; it affects both agricultural and food production. Boko Haram's insurgency, Banditry, Niger Delta conflict and fights between Fulani-herders and farmers over resources are all conflicts in Nigeria. Attacks by Boko Haram in the northern part (blessed with rich resources) of the country ensued in a drastic reduction in food production, loss of livelihoods, large-scale displacement of people, and increased food prices in Nigeria. The Boko Haram crisis resulted in the displacement of millions of people in north-eastern part of Nigeria alone and exacerbated food shortages for Nigerians.

The [Niger Delta] conflict, which began as a result of disputes between international oil firms and some minority ethnic groups, has also wreaked havoc on the country's food security. The artisanal small-scale fish growers in the Niger-Delta region produce around half of the fish consumed in Nigeria. Oil spills and overfishing have exacerbated the problem, impeding access to fish, which accounts for around 40% of all animal protein consumed in Nigeria.

Bandits keep kidnapping people from their homes and farms. Just recently, bandits evaded homes in Kaduna and kidnapped both young and old. This is because the bandits are ready to kidnap anything or person that fetches them money. Farmers have not been able to go to their farms; Crops are decaying. There have been cases of hikes in the prices of food which is the reason for food insecurity. In Nigeria, for instance, according to Akov (2017), “rivalry over land use is the cause of Farmers-herdsmen conflicts and many communal skirmishes that are endemic in the country, resulting in significant loss of livelihoods, properties, and lives across the country's landscape”.

Natural Events and Socioeconomic Shocks

Natural disasters like erosion, drought, desertification, flooding and socioeconomic shocks like food insecurity have all resulted in poor agricultural practices, land and environmental degradation, and a drop in crop production. About 90% of Nigeria's food is being produced by small-scale farmers with less than two hectares of land under cultivation (Edufa, Osabuohien & Osabohien, 2021). Unless they use sustainable agricultural practices that safeguard land, soil, water, or precision farming techniques that make them more robust to natural calamities, small scale farmers would be unable to feed their families or meet public demand.

3. Dwindled Priority of Agriculture and Upsurge of Food Insecurity

The agricultural sector in the 1960s was Nigeria's primary source of job creation, income, and foreign exchange earnings. This was owing to well-targeted regional activities which were based on commodities comparative advantage. However, these potentials have mostly gone unexplored, resulting in the agricultural sector's dwindling performance both domestically and internationally in recent years. Nigeria was the world's biggest peanut exporter in 1961, with a 42% market share. As the largest West African cotton exporter, Nigeria also exported 1.4% of the world's cotton, 18% cocoa, and 27% palm oil (Oyebola, Osabuohien & Obasaju, 2019; Obiora, 2014).

Unfortunately, the government prioritised crude oil over agriculture and relied on food importation to feed its inhabitants after discovering crude-oil in the late 1960s and the significant financial rewards that came with it. This glory, however, faded with time. As a result, as of 2008, Nigeria's groundnut export dominance had been eclipsed by Argentina, China, and the United States of America (USA). In palm oil, Malaysia and Indonesia have taken over; in cocoa, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana have surpassed Mali and Burkina Faso; and in cotton, Mali and Burkina Faso have surpassed Mali and Burkina Faso. Farmers were connected to markets through strong marketing groups, which also assisted with better planting materials and fertiliser.

As a result, Nigeria became one of the world's major food importers, which spend over \$10 billion yearly on wheat, rice, sugar, and fish imports (Obiora, 2014). Petroleum became the pivot around which the nation's economy revolved, and any shock in that sector today has adverse consequences for the entire economy. Nigeria's food security may be jeopardised by exporters' recent willingness to impose export bans. Apart from the domestic food availability predicted from Nigerian

agriculture, rising unemployment, particularly among the youths, would be remedied if the country's agriculture was promoted. This is because agriculture is the predominant occupation in the country's North Central region.

4. Agricultural Transformation and Rural Livelihood

Nigeria has 34 million hectares of arable land, with 6.5 million hectares dedicated to permanent crops and 30.3 million hectares devoted to meadows and pastures. Agriculture contributes more than 20% of Nigeria's GDP (Edufe, Osabuohien & Osabohien, 2021). Palm oil, cocoa beans, pineapple, and sorghum are just a few of the agricultural products that the country excels at. It is the world's second-largest sorghum producer, after the United States and ranks the world's fifth-largest producer of palm oil and cocoa beans. Nigeria is also a major exporter of nuts around the globe. It is the world's second-largest exporter of cashew nuts in terms of value (Osabuohien et al, 2020; Osabuohien et al, 2019; Obiora, 2014). Oil, fruits, nuts, and seeds, for example, are among the top 10 export categories.

Many Nigerians rely on agriculture for their living, although oil money only reaches a small portion of the population. Agricultural activities are carried out by a greater number of persons in rural areas than in urban areas. Despite its favourable agricultural terrain, Nigeria is having difficulty translating its advantages into economic transformation. The issue is complicated. For one thing, arable land for large-scale farming is difficult to acquire, and even when it is, legal ownership rights are insufficient. According to the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET), agricultural transformation is a process that increases farm productivity, commercialises farming, and strengthens the link between farming and other economic sectors. Agricultural transformation is about more than just food production; it's also about economic prosperity (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development-FMARD, 2011).

The transformation strategy aspires to establish a hunger-free Nigeria through an agricultural sector that drives economic development, accelerates food security, provides jobs, and turns Nigeria into a global food market leader, increasing wealth for many farmers. Hence, the traditional approach to agriculture must be modified to achieve this goal. In some countries, the agricultural transformation has shown to possess a considerable influence on poverty alleviation. For example, China, Vietnam, Brazil, and Thailand have witnessed rapid agricultural expansion in the past three decades, with yearly growth rates of 2.6%, 2.0%, 1.8%, and 1.4%, respectively (FMARD, 2011).

Between 1995 and 2005, China and Vietnam lifted 440 and 24 million people out of poverty. Similarly, in the same period, Thailand and Brazil also lifted 8 and 14 million people out of poverty, respectively. Vietnam and China, for example, also pulled 40% of their populations out of poverty because of strong agricultural investment and growth. Examples of countries that have achieved agricultural transformation include Malawi and Kenya. Malawi achieved food self-sufficiency in

just a year by focusing on agricultural transformation, which was a watershed moment for the country suffering from low maize yields for nearly a decade, from 1994 to 2004. However, Malawi had its worst harvest in 2004. Agricultural reform by the private sector was a reality in Kenya. Kenya climbed to the top of the global horticulture market in less than nine years, thanks to private-sector marketing institutions. Kenya experienced annual growth of 16% in horticulture value and 7% in floriculture exports between 2000 and 2008. Horticulture, a single sub-sector of agriculture in Kenya, created eight million employments within the same period.

5. Conclusion

With a view to improving agricultural production and ensuring food security, there is the need for: Value chain coordination to reduce post-harvest losses and improve infrastructural development; private sector leadership should promote key value chain participants by taking responsibility for articulating and implementing agriculture's growth plan. The sector managed by private sectors should be well maintained, with government intervention limited to regulation and certification. In addition, fiscal policies that are beneficial by lowering taxes on inputs, equipment, and other items should be paid, and also lower duties should be charged. Farmers should also have access to market information systems to plan appropriately and avoid risks and uncertainties.

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