

# ART AND SCIENCE OF POLITICS

Essays in Honour of  
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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### FOOD SECURITY AND NATIONALISM IN NIGERIA

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#### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria by any measurement is an agricultural country. By 1950 it was estimated that about ninety per cent of Nigerians rely on agriculture for their livelihood (Ukeje, 1978:19). Since then great strides have been made in dealing with problems of hunger and malnutrition through effective agricultural policies and programmes. What then is food security? By World Bank definition, it is the access by the population of a country to have enough food for an active and healthy life at all times of the year (World Bank, 1988). What this meant is that there should be availability of food in the right quantity and quality at all times even during emergencies. It also implies self-sufficiency in food production, consumption, preservation and proper exchange. However, the United Nations Sub-committee on nutrition expressed food security as a condition of making food available both in quality and quantity to individuals, households, community and the World Community at large (Jolh 1997:83). Esu (2000:350) explains that a food system offering security should possess the following characteristics:

- (a) Capacity to produce and store sufficient food to meet basic food needs for all groups;
- (b) Maximum autonomy and self-determination (without implying autarky, that is national economic self-sufficiency and independence, reducing vulnerability to international market fluctuations and political pressures;
- (c) Reliability, such that seasonal, cyclical and other variations in access to food are minimal;
- (d) Sustainability such that the ecological system is protected and improved over time;
- (e) Equity in distributional and dependable access to adequate food for all social groups.

Every nation in this connection seeks to achieve food security.

Nigeria is the most populous black nation on earth. Her major problem is the inability to provide adequate food at the affordable prices to the nation's teeming population. It is contended that while the population and the aggregate personal incomes have witnessed substantial and upward increases since 1970, domestic food production has lagged behind (Igieber, 1987). Domestic food prices have been rising daily. This rise in the prices of domestic food may be due to inadequate production and market supplies, as well as poor distribution across social groups. It



It is a known fact that the potential factor of social and political instability in many countries of the world (developed or developing) has been food shortages. A case in point had been the shortage of bread in Algeria in 1986 that sparked wide-scale riot in that country. The current Malawian President Bakili Muluzi failed to get the two-thirds majority he needed from the parliament to change constitution for a third term running because of accusations of severe food shortages. In addition, he also failed because the aid donors refused to assist because of concerns over official corruption (Banda, 2002). Banda went on to say that hundreds of people in Malawi died from starvation earlier in 2002. The crisis was heightened by the government's decision to sell off most of its grain reserves in 2001. In countries such as ours, food insecurity mainly affects the poor who spend more than half of their incomes to feed themselves. To stem social instability, Nigerian government has been making efforts to import food and supplement the domestic production.

### **PATTERNS OF NIGERIA'S FOOD IMPORTATION SINCE 1970**

Since independence, Nigeria has been 'struggling' through its policies and programmes to make food available to all its citizens. But this goal has not been achieved. Hence, further measures have been taken in this direction through importation of food from industrialized nations. Much resources have been committed to food import especially since late 1970s.

By 1973 oil had overtaken agriculture as a major earner for the country and Nigeria's export started to be counted in billions of Naira. The immediate result was a boom in imports which included food. So began the debilitating import syndrome which afflicted the country from the 1970s till date.

In 1973 Nigeria import on fishery stood at N7.05 million, and by 1979, over N144 million was spent on importing 445, 147 tonnes of fish. In 1978 Nigeria spent N1,004.2million to import food. In 1981, food import gulped N2,198.3 million. It should be noted that there was food crisis because with the advent of oil agriculture was abandoned. It made the production of food crops a wasted effort (Igiebor). Food import was equally being made possible because of sharp practices of many Nigerians. By 1970s the amount of money spent on importation was huge compared to what is being obtained today.

During Yakubu Gowon's era especially after the Civil War food was classified as an essential commodity. Men and women queued up in urban centers to buy food, particularly rice. Hoarding became the order of the day. Thus hoarding became such a serious problem that the Gowon regime found it necessary to set up a price control board. This was to make sure that every individual and household has enough.

### **MEASURES AIMED AT FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria has agrarian economy, though since 1970 agriculture has failed and the people's stomachs and industries partially mortgaged to foreign sources of food and raw materials. Nigeria has a fine climate suitable for varieties of crops and livestock. What holds the little agricultural percentage which makes food available is the smallholder producer. Smallholder producer it is agreed account for nearly 90 per cent of the total domestic food supply.

Indeed, the successive military and civilian administrations in Nigeria have been seen to be advocating policies and programmes aimed at improving the food supply and security to the populace. Government policies and programmes put in place to ensure food security in Nigeria over the years are: The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Land use Decree, the Green Revolution, National Accelerated Industrial Crops Production Programmed (NAFPP) Food Crops Production Transfer Stations, the River Basin Development Authorities and various irrigation schemes, the Agricultural Development Project (ADPS), National Horticultural Development Programmed, Plantain/Banana Development Programmed, National Plan for Rice, the National Fadama Development Programme (NFDP), National Agricultural Technology Support Project (NATSP), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DEFRI) (Aja Akpuru and Emeribe : 2000:146 149; Olorunfemi and Adesina, 1998:60-64; Igiebor, 1987). Despite these policy programmes the food insecurity *palavar* is still persisting.

### **FOOD INSECURE GROUP**

The food insecure group is divided into two. The first group is found in the rural area while the second is found habiting the urban. The rural falls under the few landless people, the unemployed classified as lazy and the disabled, female headed households. The urban insecure group is found among the unemployed of all classes, unskilled wage labourers, the disabled of all classes.

### **THE STATE OF FOOD AVAILABILITY IN NIGERIA**

It will be wrong to completely talk of food insecurity in Nigeria especially since 1980s. In the years between 1987 and 1996 there was a general increase in the supply of food, though some areas were in advantage while others were vice versa. The increase in the amount of food was as a result of the trend of production for major food crops at the time. There was a linkage between production and amount of food. The linkage is as a result of increase in crop output owing to the steady increase in land area being cultivated. On the other hand food was imported to supplement local production as the available statistics have shown below (Esu).



**ESTIMATED OUTPUT OF MAJOR AGRICULTURAL  
COMMODITIES 1991- 1995 (X 1000 MT)**

	CROP	YIELD				
		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1.	Maize	5810	5840	6290	6902	7048
2.	Rice	3226	3260	3065	2427	2920
3.	Sorghum	5367	5909	6051	6197	6494
4.	Millet	4109	4501	4602	4757	4952
5.	Wheat	455	515	32.6	35.2	43.8
6.	Cowpea	1352	1411	1576	1545	1644
7.	Cassava	26004	29181	30128	31005	31404
8.	Yam	16956	19781	21632	23153	23264
9.	Irish Potato	66	73	80	90	95
10.	Groundnut	1361	1297	1416	1453	1579
11.	Soyabean	145	154	163	173	192
12.	Benniseed	46	49	52	56	60
13.	Sugarcane	888	896	905	833	636
14.	Coffee	320	388	353	382	392
15.	Tobacco	20	19	20	21	22
16.	Cotton Seed	309	348	192	218	308
17.	Palm Oil	760	792	825	837	860
18.	Palm Kernel	1203	1321	491	503	534
19.	Cocoa	263	292	306	325	328
20.	Rubber	215	220	225	230	255

NB: MT = Metric Tonnes

Source: Civil Society and the consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria (Uya, 2000)

### MEASURES ADOPTED BY GOVERNMENT FOR FOOD STABILITY

It is sometimes difficult to have food stability every year, this is because total food supplies often fall short of total output due to post harvest losses, variously estimated at 15 - 25 per cent (Uya, 355, *Ibid*). Being sensitive to this fact, and to ensure increased supplies of food to its teeming population, the Federal Government introduced some measures to cushion the effect such yearly losses may have on the people.

Indeed, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Post-Harvest Technology Division, the strategic Grains Reserve Scheme in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Standardised Storage Strategic Grains Reserve Scheme in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; and the Standardised Storage Programmes at three levels. That translated required that 5

percent of the national grains output be stored annually in the National Strategic Grains Reserve Silos to meet the Country's needs during emergencies such as drought, disasters, famine, war should it arise and other calamities; 10 per cent of total grains output in every state be stored as buffer stocks to stabilize prices and markets over time and space, and that the remaining 85 percent be handled by private investors (Uya: 2000:356).

However, like other lofty policies and programmed Nigerian Government has been putting in place which on paper fine, on implementation zero caught up with the measures of making food available to all. The ability of Government in maintaining food stocks, supplies such that the food is made accessible to the general public had never been realized.

### FOOD SUPPLY ACCESSIBILITY AND PROBLEMS

It is important to note that food supply and accessibility is a condition in which the population has access to food supplies irrespective of where they reside in Nigeria. That food supplies involve both physical and financial accessibility. The financial accessibility is the ability of the consumable public to afford the quantity and quality of food at the prices in the market.

The 1950 - 51 sample census of agriculture showed that only ten per cent of the total land area of Nigeria was under cultivation, 13.8 per cent was under fallow, 7.5 per cent under forest reserve, and 67.5 per cent was uncultivated bush and waste (Ukeje, 1978:22) Today, about 18 million hectares are cultivated annually, mainly in mixed crops. Less than 1 per cent of this is irrigated though it is agreed that the unexploited irrigation potential is estimated at over 3 million hectares (Uya, *Ibid*:357).

However, in Nigeria, most food crops are produced in the rural areas. What is found in the market is to a large extent the product of subsistence. And Nigerian environment has the picture of difficulty in bringing out these products from the areas of plenty (rural areas) to areas of need (the urban) because of poor accessibility necessitated by poor roads and transportation. Hence, the concern is that in spite of a lot of food in the rural areas of Nigeria begging for consumption, many Nigerians lack adequate reach to available foods at various times and locations.

With the ban on importation of food, it is hoped that local production would be stimulated, farmers economic position would be improved and food supply and consumption enhanced.

### PROBLEMS OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

Of recent, there is increase in food production for the expanding population. But the fact remains that government support for farmers within the three tiers of government is undesirable. The percentage allocation for increase in food production is more on paper. Hence, the country had turned to borrowing and dependence on aid.



The level of food consumption depends on the level of food production. Many small scale farmers lack direct access to credit from banks. This adversely affects the level of food production and in turn affects the level of consumption plunging many into a begging culture.

### **FOOD PRICES**

One would expect instability of food prices in a country such as ours where infrastructure facilities such as roads are in a bad state of disrepair and in some are not available at all. In such areas food becomes surplus and wasted while in other areas people are in a state of want. Such conditions give rise to food insecurity.

Per capita income is often cited as a major cause of instability in food consumption. When people are unable to produce their own food, what and how much they eat depends primarily on their income. If it is that increased income raises the effective demand for food, it is equally true that reduced or inadequate income lowers effective demand. The food problem is the result of poverty and therefore of an inability to purchase the food necessary to meet the basic household nutritional requirements (Diakosavvas, 1989).

Many people are unemployed and would want to take to farming either for household consumption or for commercial index, but are confronted with land scarcity. Land scarcity especially in the semi urban areas has become worrisome because the willing farmers do not have enough land to expand thus limiting the level of food production and subsequent problems to many households.

Other factors are poor processing and storage of surplus production, low technology application, poor post-harvest handling etc.

### **NATIONALISM AND FOOD SECURITY**

Esu (2000) posits that food shortages before the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 were hardly heard off. And he continued to say that the percentage of food imports into the country was lower before 1967 than 1970s and beyond. Statistically, he put that food constituted 10.1 per cent of total imports in 1966 as against 12.6 per cent and 17.0 per cent in 1978 and 1985 respectively. Supplies of staple foods such as rice, yam, sorghum, cassava, maize etc were adequate and at affordable prices. It could be argued that at independence welfare policies were not politicized and every Nigerian was his brothers keeper. However, with the coming of crude oil in commercial quantities, food production suffered a severe setback. Shift of interest came in, consequently, food production and supply were observed to be not attended to though the population kept growing.

Conversely, it is agreed that there is impressive gains in global and national food supplies over the past 30 years and were achieved because of effective investments in agricultural research. Though food security has improved globally, progress has been uneven. Studies have shown that significant proportions of the population in sub-saharan African in which Nigeria is part are still food insecure

(Jolh). Charting a course on research and development, it is regrettably though that neither the government nor commercial enterprises set high premium on research and development. Nigeria is yet to comply with either the United Nations recommendations that developing countries allocate at least two per cent of their Gross Domestic Product, GDP on Research and Development (R & D) or the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) and the Lagos Plan of Action of one percent to science and Development.

National food security clearly does not solve the problem of household food security. It is access to food or the household's ability to obtain food that is important to ensuring food security. Nigerian Government policies should centre on policies that increase the access of vulnerable individuals to food either through increased food prices will enhance a good leveling food security.

Indeed, strategies that increase the income of the poor are the most sustainable means of improving individual and nations food security. It is known that it may take quite large increases in income to bridge the food security gap for low-income individuals. In the short to medium term, interventions targeted at low income individuals maybe needed to buffer vulnerable individuals and communities against hunger and indeed malnutrition.

This may lead us to food aid as a measure to cushion the effect of inadequate supply of food either in time of emergency, famine etc. Studies have indicated that food aid can be used as a political weapon especially on developing nations such as ours. For example the United States cut off food aid as part of the political weapon to bring down the government of Allende in Chile. The USA also terminated grain sales to the defunct USSR following the sending of troops to Afghanistan by the USSR (Esu, 2000). Nigeria used the food problem in the defunct Biafra to force her to surrender. Food insecurity can also be used to undermine a nations democracy either internally or externally induced. While there is no current evidence of a hyper food crisis as such, nevertheless, the number of malnourished people has probably increased and the position of certain communities and particular regions has deteriorated seriously.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Food has been used as a weapon of suppression and domination since ancient times, and will ever continue to be so. Thus the developed nations have used it before and would want to continue especially with African Nations.

For us to attain food security and maintain our nationalism the following measure need be taken.

1. The government should be more pragmatic in agriculture policies that would enhance food production.

2. Government should give highest priority to agricultural production and procession. There should be direct assistance to farmers in form of extension services in areas when there is non; improved seeds and supply of fertilizers, credit and loan facilities, tractors and other implements etc.
3. Certain programmes of government failed largely because of corruption, bad conception and maladministration. Those found to be corrupt should be made to face the full weight of the law.
4. Lack of storage facilities: Farmers, in the season of plenty are still being confronted with the problem of transportation and storage. Storage facilities should be reactivated and in areas where there were none, enough facilities should be provided.
5. Efforts of government should be geared towards Research and Development especially on the local food crop. When the citizenry are well fed they will be able to contribute their quota to the development of Nigeria and the nascent democracy will have a sense of mission, but a hungry Nigerian is insecure and this dampens the image of the country through engagement in vices.

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