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FACTORS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Developing countries, especially of Africa have been facing the problem of feeding their population, and so, depended, on food imports with its attendant high prices. This has placed these countries in a precarious position in terms of sustaining development. Therefore, the recent cries over increased prices of food items and speculations of imminent hunger have become worrisome. Food security is an indispensable virtue that cannot be compromised at any level of development, as it ranks next to none in the hierarchy of development indicators. These developments informed the need to examine the true food security position in Africa with special reference to Nigeria. The implications of food insecurity as well as an overview of food policy measures overtime are also examined. The recommendations, among others, on food security challenges, are that, investment in agricultural research be given priority in national budgets; diversification of food production systems and regional trade be encouraged; bad governance discouraged, dependence on few crops be discouraged, farm credit administration mechanism be properly revived to ensure that real farmers have access to soft credits advanced by government.

Key Words: Food security, Poverty, Developing countries, Agriculture, Hunger

INTRODUCTION

For more than four decades developing countries of the world especially African countries, have been facing food crisis. This situation has prompted them to resort to importation and receiving food aid from the developed countries such as the USA, Canada, amongst other countries. Depending on importation of food from developed economies does not allow the economies of these developing countries to grow. There are various reasons put forward for occurrence of food crisis in these states. These include drought, desertification, civil wars, use of crude implements, and in some cases, irresponsible governments that pay little attention to agriculture.

What is Food Security?

Food security is the condition of a people to guarantee the nutritional need of her populace for an active, vibrant and sustainable living condition within a definable time scope. Food security entails vigorous planning effort for the coordination of capital, land and entrepreneurial capacity of the people to satisfy the demand function for a food needed by a growing population. Food security comes with a deliberate planning and management of predictable factors of production and inputs against vagaries of climatic factors that increase the risk associated with food production, its processing, distribution and consumption function (Dina, 2010). By World Bank definition, it is the access by the population of a country to 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 production and proper exchange. However, the United Nations sub-committee on nutrition describes 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). Food insecurity would mean food shortage in a crisis period.

Food is very important for both individual and societal needs. It is the index of measuring Sovereignty, because any nation that is worth her sovereignty but cannot feed her population is a failure. Two years ago, the entire world was faced with major food crisis that threatened food security the world over. In the face of that global food crisis, the United Nations Secretary General Ben Ki-moon, urged nations to seize the "historic opportunity to revitalize agriculture" as a way of tackling the food crisis (Jimkamshi, 2008). However, this is to show that the issue of food insecurity is worrisome not only in Nigeria but the world over.

Indeed, most of the world food importers come from Africa mainly Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Eritrea, Mali and Burkina Faso. Others are South East Asia such as Philippines and Latin American Countries. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) the developing countries food imports are expected to reach \$50 billion by 2030 from the current \$17 billion (Felix, 2008). The objective of this paper is to showcase the fact that food can still be produced in the developing countries such as Nigeria, to feed their teeming population if adequate attention is given to agriculture. That there is nothing wrong with Nigeria's agricultural environment. With import of food, Nigeria is depleting her scarce resources that would have been used for other developmental projects. That while Nigeria is importing she is assisting in the growth and development of those export countries while she is trapped and impoverished.

Food, Food Security and Challenges

Food is the basic necessity of life. No living organism can survive for too long without food. In this connection, searching for and obtaining food is an important business for every nation in the world, whether developing or developed (Avidime & Egwemi, 2008). By implication, every nation must produce or obtain adequate food for her citizens. There are challenges to provision of food.

The first challenge is to provide enough food to meet the demands of every man in the expanding population, without destroying the natural resources needed to sustain food production. Another challenge is to ensure that all the people have access to food sufficiency so as to live active, healthy lives, since it is not just enough to produce food but also to guarantee that everyone who needs it has access to it. In a situation where a certain percentage of the population cannot have money to buy enough food or land to grow food, and if natural or man-made disasters such as drought or war prevents one from getting food, then people are at the risk of starvation. In advanced economies, poverty often prevents people from obtaining food. In developing countries, the circumstances that cause food scarcity include poverty, low crop yields, unproductive economic policies of government, desertification, dependence on rain fed production of one crop, soil erosion, flood and war conditions.

Nigeria's Food Situation

In the 1940s and early 1950s, Nigeria did not have any problem feeding her population. Food items were within the reach of individuals and the surplus food items were exported. Every region, and sometimes communities, specialized in the production of one food crop or another. These people used very crude implements or tools but yet there was food for the growing population. With the coming of oil in the 1970s, food became a problem. Farming was abandoned, thus necessitating the Federal government to import food to feed her population. The year 1970 marked the beginning of large scale importation of food by Nigeria, and since then the trend has continued unabated. Though it is still on record that about 75 percent of Nigerians are still in farms producing food, again food is not sufficient (Igbebor, 1987).

According to statistics produced by Oxfam, a non-governmental organization in 2007, Nigeria spends an average of \$3 billion yearly on the importation of foods. The report noted that "in stark contrast to the 1960s when agriculture provided the main source of employment, income and foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria, the advent of commercial oil exploration in the mid 1970s heralded an era of decay and decline for agricultural output (Anuforo, 2009).

Despite this massive food import, many Nigerians are still hungry. The United States Agency for International Development USAID, observed that about 138.6 million of Nigeria's 140 million people live below poverty level. This is to show the ugly situation Nigerian people are passing through. The implication is that food may be available but many people do not have access to it because of poverty. The issue of poverty in the Nigerian nation may be caused by poor governance over the years.

FACTORS AFFECTING LOW AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT

Vocation for illiterates

Agriculture is still being regarded as a vocation for the illiterates in the rural areas who have no alternative for a living. The big time farmers, businessmen, politicians engage largely in crops or livestock production that are not common staples. They grow pineapple plantations, keep exotic animals and birds but add nothing to food section (Ekpu, 2009). However, the most tragic aspect of Nigeria agriculture in the past 49 years is the very low rate of modernization in terms of power, application of new and better techniques and utilization of research breakthroughs, especially in the area of development of vastly improved seedlings. Agriculture is still highly dependent on the human muscle as its primary source of power and the result is the generally low productivity per man hour on the farms. By implication, the yield has become inadequate thus exacerbating food insecurity situation and encouraging food imports (Igbebor, 1987).

Research Institutes

There are more than 20 agricultural research institutes in Nigeria at present. All of them are funded by the government which hardly provides enough resources or pay attention to their research findings. The results of their efforts are locked away in cabinets because of lack of effective mechanism to make them accessible to farmers on whose behalf the researchers were carried out. All these boil down to inadequate food production especially the making of food unaffordable especially in local communities (Igbebor, 1987).

Women are the farmers

In the rural areas of this country, women form the bulk of small scale farmers, producing much of the food for urban consumption, but hardly are they consulted on policy or gender issues that affect agriculture, land ownership and or usage. Besides, farmers are not well remunerated for their products. Nigeria produces the largest quantities of cassava, yam and cocoyam in the world, but the impact on their income is nothing to show. Again, large quantities of these food items produced usually rot away because of lack of storage facilities. It is considered that it would have been the responsibility of government at whatever level to buy off these food items at favourable rates from the farmers and store same for the rainy day just to encourage the farmers (Ekpu, 2009).

Low Fertilizer Supply

In another perspective, fertilizer is an important ingredient for improved crop yield but Nigeria plays politics with it. The people who get fertilizer allocations hardly have farms, they only have party cards. Ekpu (2009) reported that in 1993/94 cropping season, government provided one million metric tonnes of fertilizer. By 1997, subsidy on fertilizer was removed and fertilizer consumption dropped to 200,000 metric tonnes, the lowest ever, thus worsening the food situation. What is expected is that subsidy on fertilizer and indeed agriculture should be taken by government seriously. In the advanced economies such as the USA and Canada, agriculture is highly subsidized by government. This explains the reasons for food surpluses in those economies.

Low Budgeting Provisions

In 2008, the Federal government allocated N89.95 billion for agriculture and water resources. It is assumed that not much of that money was released, hence the controversy about budgets that were approved but hardly implemented. Such a situation cannot support food increase in any economy. Idachaba (1987) summarized the situation thus,

"Successive governments have engaged in the past time of glorifying agriculture on the pages of newspapers and news conferences but have failed to back up such loud exhortations with annual budgets that are adequate and stable from year to year. That past governments preferred the construction of five-star hotels and township Stadia to making adequate allocations to infrastructure for agriculture development (Igbebor, 1987)."

Shifting cultivation:

Shifting cultivation had been a practice in communities not only in Nigeria but in the developing economies of Africa and Latin America. It is no longer common in Nigeria based on the population explosion over the last five decades. However, mixed cropping is ecologically efficient under the non-mechanised traditional system, because the interplanted crops interact with each other to modify the micro-climate, provide nutrients to the soil and act as a form of insurance against crop failure (Soeze, 2009).

Soil erosion

Closely following is the issue of soil erosion and flood. Reduction in soil fertility is a challenge because the agricultural ecosystem is seriously damaged and the whims of climate and its impact on agriculture become profound. It causes the reduction in yield leading to scarcity or reduction in quality and quantity especially the staples.

Rain fed

Most farmers depend on rain for their farming project. This is really ineffective in that some years rain come late or in very small amounts and the farmers become worst off. In this connection there is bound to be shortage of food commodities in the market, increasing food insecurity.

Conflicts

Conflicts often times are responsible for food insecurity in developing economies. Conflicts may escalate to civil wars or communal disturbances, which under this condition would not allow for planning and engagement in farming. What is seen is that funds that would have been ploughed back into agriculture might be used to purchase arms. There would be this general insecurity to lives and farming would not be encouraged.

Low investment

The most effective way of combating hunger and poverty is by increasing investments in the agricultural sector to improve productivity, diversify food systems, and intensify food processing and regional trade for wealth generation. Nigeria may not reinvent the wheel but technologies and know-how exist, they just need to be put in practice.

Poor infrastructural facilities

Local farmers produced the bulk of the food consumed in the country. In spite of this, infrastructural facilities in these rural environments are in the state of decay; and in most instances are not there at all. Farmers transport their produce to markets with tears and pay high taxes in addition. Other factors responsible for food insecurity include stagnation of agriculture. Stagnation here implies that the expected role of agriculture within the economy is not being achieved. The slow pace is caused by total neglect of the rural farmers that actually produce food, lack of infrastructure, poor supply of required inputs, inadequate funding, stultifying bureaucracies, both at the Federal and State levels among others (Igierbor, 1987).

Consequences of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, more especially unavailability and unaffordability, usually have serious ripple effects on national security and stability. Such ripple effects, as severally noted (FAO, 1998; Alamieyeseigha, 2004; and Whiteman, 2008) include mass poverty and starvation, diminished work performance, depletion of human capital arising from poor nutrition, low immunity to diseases which ultimately leads to untimely deaths, high import bills by the government leading to balance of payment deficits, mass protests or riots and political instability as was witnessed in Haiti, Egypt, Philippines, Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Other implications of food insecurity as applicable to Nigeria include, child trafficking as many parents sell some of their children to enable them survive and feed the remaining ones; youths restiveness and hostage taking of men, women and children.

MEASURES TAKEN BY NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION FOR FOOD SECURITY SINCE 1980S

Over the years, Nigeria came up with a lot of fine and well articulated policies and programmes aimed at tackling the decline in agricultural production for food security. Some of these include:

National Accelerated Food Production Programme of the 1970

This was initiated and set up in the 1970s with the objective of teaching farmers modern farming techniques, broadening the country's agricultural base and accelerating production to meet the country's food needs and increase exports. The targets were not met because of structural issues or problems.

Licensing and indigenization programme of 1972

Nigerians were to take over from foreigners in some sectors of our economy. Indigenization programme failed because lack of financial resources to acquire the alien business affected by the decree. There was also inadequate trained and experienced manpower to manage the indigenized businesses as efficiently as displaced aliens. The emergence of a few Nigerian capitalists and business tycoons could not propel the agricultural sector and indeed Nigerian economy to achieve the objectives of the programme. There was equally the problem of valuation of the businesses on shares of the company to be bought (Edame, 2001).

Operation Feed the Nation of (OFN) 1976

In the early 1970s owing to oil boom, many Nigerians lost interest in farming and government resorted to importation because of food scarcity. In the mid 1970s there was rising food import bills in Nigeria owing to sliding agricultural production creating food problems to the people. The government became concerned that if the tide was not checked the country would plunge itself into problems that might affect other sectors of the economy. Thus the OFN programme was meant to reverse the continuing slide in agricultural production and revive people's interest in farming. Every Nigerian was urged to put any available space under cultivation and make farming his vocation. The operation feed the nation programme did not function because of the advent of oil boom. Nigeria now was relying on food imports rather than producing food locally. Food import was cheaper than the local production, hence the programme failed (Igierbor, 1987).

River Basin Development Strategy 1976

The river basin was set up to make it possible for farmers to produce food and cash crops all the year round instead of seasonally before then. Meaning that production of food and cash crops should not depend on seasonal rain. It was envisaged that the basin authorities would put at least 274,000 hectares of land under year-round irrigation throughout the country. The programme was primarily to promote systematic development of all facets of agriculture in their areas of operation. The impact has been very minimal.

Land Use Decree of 1978

The law was designed to make accessibility to land for agricultural purposes easy for genuine large scale private investors. This also failed because it compounded the problem of land acquisition even for large-scale farming.

Green Revolution and Austerity measures of 1980

Green revolution was one of the means of achieving the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) ruling government major objective of providing food cheaply for all Nigerians by 1985. This too failed, because it was a political heist engineered by the ruling government (NPN) to rake in millions of naira from the public till to provide the financial means of attaining its political ends and satisfy the voracious appetites of its leaders for riches. It achieved nothing, and was not different from operation feed the nation programme.

It was a programme to prepare arable land for cultivation by peasant farmers. It failed because it lacked structural foundations, hence it succeeded only in opening rural roads and digging of boreholes (Ode, 1994).

It is worrisome to note that all these measures never yielded the desired economic effect due to the lip-service paid by government towards their implementation. Besides, corruption partly undermined the effective implementation of the policies. As observed by policy analyst, the failure of those programmes was because;

The strategy for food production is biased towards solving the urban food crisis; is capital intensive, and focuses on transferring investment into the hands of elite farmers and not mobilizing the creative powers of the millions of small rural farmers (Akan, 2008; Avidime, 2008).

Odey (2009) reported that: "already nearly one third of the world's cropland had become unproductive and abandoned in the past 40 years, which almost three quarters of rangelands show various symptoms of desertification". Specifically in Nigeria, the problem of desertification is threatening the livelihoods of over 43 million people (Adeosun, 2009). In the process adequate yield would lead to food security. Now, because of bad governance most countries have not invested adequately in agriculture and infrastructural facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian State needs to stimulate the economy, by making education affordable and compulsory to all young Nigerians, provide basic health facilities free to all; put in place a sustainable poverty alleviation programme and build cottage and agro-allied industries. These it is hoped would assist to put smiles on the faces of poor Nigerians. Employment has a positive linkage effect in stimulating the economy and providing food for the masses.

Government and private organizations should organize enlightenment campaigns among the communities that are worst hit and vulnerable to desertification for them to adopt practices that would not impact negatively on the environment. For instance the campaign should feature and encourage the planting of trees, reduction in deforestation, discourage bush burning and over grazing and adopt irrigation farming where necessary. The best practices would assist to increase yield and conserve the soil for farming purposes. Areas prone to soil erosion needs be closely monitored, and government should come to the aid of these communities by putting remedial measures so that the affected communities do not suffer adversely or migrate as it is typical of some villages in Eastern Nigeria (Soeze, 2009).

Consultancy services should be extended to farmers on farm management and higher productivity. Results of research works from Agricultural Research Institutes and other Institutions of higher learning should be made available to farmers and be properly interpreted. Agricultural research is important in fighting food insecurity and poverty through accessibility and utilization of grounded facts. Research can provide those facts and relevant technologies (Popoola, 2009; Soeze, 2009). Hence, individual farmers should adopt modern irrigation techniques to make sure water is available at all times (Babatunde, 2009).

The government at various levels should evolve strategies to meet the needs of the farmers, especially in farm input and micro-finance. This, it is expected would improve the system and make food available especially to the urban dwellers (Dauda, 2008). Straighter (2008) warned that unless African countries including Nigeria reviewed their agricultural policies, the youths at the front burner, then the continent might be courting the problem of food insecurity. Second, government must ensure that stakeholders in the sector improve on storage facilities, research development and provision of modern implements. There should be a mechanism that would motivate the youths into taking to farming as a career.

THE WAY FORWARD

The business of food production and food security is a sine qua non in developing humanity. There should be a conscious effort on the part of government to set aside the United Nations recommended 2 % of GDP on Research and Development. This to a large extent would relate much to the expansion of food production. Government should identify the real farmers within the economy and assist them have access to soft loans.

Priority should be given to improvement of the health of the people:

- Each senatorial district in Nigeria should have at least two well-equipped hospitals, health centre each at least in every political ward in this country. Health is wealth.
- Most farmers are uneducated folk in our rural areas. These group of farmers should be encouraged to attend formal school. In this way ignorance and traditional beliefs would give way to accepting the new farming methods and applications. For instance low yield in most instances come as a result of poor soil. Many farmers hold the believe that fertilizers are negative to preservation of food crops as food crops usually rot faster and sometimes lack taste when eaten. Education would clear all these beliefs.
- Industrialization: Industrialization functions effectively here if silos are built near food producing areas so that during harvest the surplus food crops be stored for future use.
- Infrastructures: There is need for government at all levels to construct new roads, rehabilitate and maintain the existing ones to link food producing areas with markets. These roads should be used in all seasons. Currently most roads that link food producing areas are seasonal, hence most food crops usually rot away because the consumers have no access to them. It becomes counter productive and tends to discourage farmers.
- Government at all levels too as a matter of necessity should assist in the tackling desertification and erosion menace.

Private individuals and government should as a matter of priority check the menace of desertification in the Savana region and erosion in the forest zones. This twin-hydra phenomena has reduced the available space meant for agriculture to bare and unproductive land. If these conditions are improved Nigeria, and indeed developing economies, would guarantee food security for the people and surplus for export.

CONCLUSION

It is true that most of the countries in the developing economies are endowed with natural resources that can make them self-sufficient in food production for their citizens and surplus for export. Since Nigeria has proved incapable of feeding herself and guaranteeing food security for her teeming population, the country should take immediate steps to reverse the situation. When the Nigerian size and enormous natural resources cannot translate to food security for her citizens, it becomes a challenge to her sovereignty as a nation state and makes her fragile among comity of nations. Government therefore should evolve policies that would assist in the production of enough food for her citizens. Over the years Nigerian government has consistently rolled out agricultural policies but only to abandon them partly implemented. A genuine effort at revamping agricultural production through research, employment of youths, provision of soft loan to farmers, putting in place adequate infrastructural facilities, good leadership and provision of sustainable poverty alleviation programmes can lead to food security.

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