

NIGERIA'S QUEST FOR FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria wants to feed its citizens adequately hence it embarks on the promotion of food security for the country through the instrumentality of policies, projects and various initiatives during the past four decades. Unfortunately the objective has not been realized. This paper focuses on Nigeria's quest for food security on the thesis that without wholesome environment, good governance and almost zero tolerance of corruption in the nation, food security for the nation may remain a mirage. The paper also maintains that unsustainable use of abundant natural resources poses serious threat to food security in Nigeria.

Keywords: food security, poverty, development

INTRODUCTION

It was once assumed even in Nigeria that natural resources from where materials for human development are derived were limitless and many nation states lived accordingly; they exploited natural resources recklessly and degraded the environment. However, the reality of climate change that is putting the entire ecosystem in jeopardy, and the awareness that natural resources are finite have changed the hitherto assumption of living without recourse to environmental sensitivity. This seemingly paradigm shift has a far reaching implication for the national development of all countries since their progress is anchored among others on food security. For instance, as Lucas has rightly stated in the modern world, no nation can truly be great if it cannot feed her populace and no meaningful progress can be made in other sectors of life if there is scarcity of food for the people...No system – whether capitalism, socialism or other political ideologies that mushroomed in Africa and other parts of the world, can sustain the loyalty of underfed and impoverished people (Lucas, 2007: 3).

Furthermore, food has become power and necessary for the security of any state and the well-being of its citizenry but without wholesome environment, food security may not be realizable. From this view point, a symbiotic relationship cannot but be established that the international community is vital for global food security and security of the world cannot be guaranteed without food security in a wholesome environment. Unsustainable use of abundant natural resources poses serious threat to wholesome environment pursuance of food production through farming and industrial processing but the search for food security does not necessarily threaten environmental endowments (Oyeshola, 2008: 21). The first part of this paper starts with the basis for quest for food security. This is followed by the program and policies for the quest for food security. The critique of the initiatives and sustainable agriculture paradigm shift are discussed before the conclusion of the paper.

BASIS FOR QUEST FOR FOOD SECURITY

In the global context, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the 1948 proclaimed that 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well being of himself, his family, including the elimination of hunger'. Furthermore, Article II of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reaffirms the right to a standard of living for the household, while also recognizing the fundamental right to be free from hunger. In a bid to reaffirm the 1948 Declarations, the United Nations in the year 2000, during the Millennium General Assembly agreed in principle that the nations of the world must pursue and attain some minimum standards, that will not only make life more meaningful for the inhabitants of the earth but would also make the earth a sustainable planet for continued human existence. These agreements were later codified into what is now called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). In all, eight goals were identified, and the target date for the realization of these goals was set at 2015. Some indicators were also set to monitor progress report country by country.

The first goal on the list is the eradication of poverty and extreme hunger. In African states, poverty is the major cause of food insecurity. Lucas (2007: 3) succinctly captures the rationale behind the first of the MDGs in these penetrating words when he stated that

In the modern world, no nation can be truly be great if it cannot feed her populace and no meaningful progress can be made in other sectors of life if there is scarcity of food for the people (Akinyele, 1993: 1).

Akinyele, in stressing the primacy of food security in human life, he said that, the need to have a secured access to food has been affirmed and re-echoed also in religious writings. According to him

...when Jesus Christ was teaching the disciples how to pray, the first request he asked them to make after giving glory to God Almighty was for God to give them their daily bread (Akinyele, 1993: 2).

In the industrialized countries, 'food first' seems to be their national slogan. They are food secured in terms of its availability, accessibility and sustainability. But in most developing countries like Nigeria the opposite is the case. To live a healthy and productive life, however, the right to food must include a reliable supply of food. This concept is known as food security. The food insecurity individual or household does not consume a sufficient quality and quantity of food to survive or, if there is sufficient food, the individual does not have the good health to use it properly. Food insecurity is measured by low consumption and high malnutrition and mortality rates.

Food insecurity is a major worldwide problem. It is estimated that 800 million people in the world are food insecure and the majority of whom live in South Asia and Africa with smaller percentages in Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe (World Bank, 1986; World Food Summit). There have been some improvements universally in food security over the past 30 years. For example, in south and west Asia, the food insecure population shrunk by half during the 1971-2000 period. But in sub-Saharan Africa, the food insecure population doubled during the same period (Falcon, 2005: 113-127).

Other statistics provide further evidence of the problem. Approximately, 160 million children under the age of five are malnutrition. Micro-nutrient deficiencies remain widespread, with two billion people suffering from iron-deficient anemia, two billion people at risk of iodine deficiency disorders and 250 million children affected by vitamin A deficiency (International Food Policy Institute, 2001). Although food production in the developing countries is projected to increase by 45% between 1997 and 2020, that won't be enough to keep pace with the expected population growth. Currently, 1.2 billion people

(30%) of the world' population have only a dollar a day or less per person to meet their basic needs (International Food Policy Institute, 2001).

Poverty does not allow the poor to have a disposal income that is critical to existence and subsistence. Where poverty prevails, there is hunger. The poor farmers for example have no money to buy food for his family, not to mention of seed and other farm input for planting to increase yields. The farm (land) is generally over-gazed and over farmed leading to abuse of the soil and degradation. Consistent farming of the land, leads to environment degradation and on the long-run it becomes impossible to sustain itself both economically and environmentally. For the farmers, their subsistence is further reduced, their poverty exacerbated and their hunger persists. Furthermore, food, water, housing and education cannot be accessed. In the same way, the struggle of individuals or groups for food and sustainability can further exacerbate an already problematical environmental situation of deforestation and desertification. The environment is particularly affected in situations when large numbers of humans take to flight as a result of war or drought. This can be seen, for example in the program supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and SIDA for the reintegration of the people who once fled from Guatemala. The returning refugees are being educated to farm and being involved in forestry in an environmentally friendly way in resettlement areas which are always located on high sensitive land.

The drive for industrialization and development without proven policies and sustainable strategies rapes the poor and degrades the land. Each time the environment is exploited in a non-sustainable way violation of human rights and hunger are results. A clear example is the extraction of oil in the Niger Delta where the people whose land is being tapped for oil for billions of dollars, rarely have running water, electricity or basic health care. Their land and water are polluted and this makes life hard and almost unlivable.

There are four core concepts implicit in the notion of food security. These are
Sufficiency of food, defined mainly as the calories needed for an active healthy life.

- (a) Access to food, defined by entitlement to produce, purchase or exchange food or receive it as a gift.
- (b) Security, defined by the balance between vulnerability and access.
- (c) Time, where food insecurity can be chronic, transitory or cyclical. (Akinyele, 1993: 3-40).

Having said that, Akinyele, went further and conceptualized food security in the following words

Food security will be achieved when the poor and vulnerable, particularly women and children and other marginalized groups have easy access to the food they want, and are thus guaranteed the daily bread which they need to live a healthy and productive life (Akinyele, 1993: 6).

Furthermore food security could be conceptualized from both demand and supply analytical stand points. If food security is defined as regular access to food by individual, households and nations, then access to food has two fundamental components. These are physical and economic access. Physical access relates to the unhindered supply of food, that is, availability of food for those who want it at a particular place and time while economic access to food touches on the demand side of food security. Ability to buy food by individuals, households and nations, is dependent on the economic status of these entities. A poor or destitute will be food insecure, once he lacks the financial ability to purchase food.

From the above overview, it can be seen that food security is based on the tripod of food namely availability (supply), affordability (demand) and sustainability of the access to food. The implication of these three factors is that food security is not a state, but a process. A food secured nation or household could become food insecure if food supply is interrupted even when there is financial ability to buy food. This possibility must have influenced Akinyele who identifies three manifestations of food insecurity as chronic, transitory and cyclical (Akinyele, 1993: 4).

Differential economic status, to a large extent determines how people of the same country would experience food security. While the rich would be food secured, because of their higher earning power, the poor or the vulnerable group would be food insecure, (poverty engendered – food insecurity), because they do not have the ability to purchase food. In Nigeria food security is essentially determined by purchasing power, that is, the ability of the individual and household to purchase their preferred food items at the time they want them. From the foregoing, food security may be defined as the ability by an individual to decide everyday what to eat, when to eat and where to eat. The ability to decide on these three variables implies that such a person is not extremely poor. Those who subscribe to the ‘supply

side' school on food security believe that a country will be food secured if it produces more food or makes food available for its people. However, this argument has been proved wrong by the fact that Saudi Arabia, that is not a food producing country is food secured. The reason is that Saudi Arabia is a rich nation, its subjects are rich enough to determine what they want to eat, at their own time and at their choice place. It is because of the vulnerability of the poor are vulnerable to the fluctuations in the supply and prices of food. It is this realization that consequently inspired the international community to develop different diplomatic instruments in form of conventions, agreements and protocols aimed at ensuring that the poor are protected from the shackles of hunger (Akinyele, 1993: 4).

From the above food security is mandatory for any country (and Nigeria is not excluded) if it must discharge its fundamental responsibility towards its citizens. Food security is human rights issue and fundamental to the development of any nation. Therefore quest for food security is a mandatory responsibility of any country. This is one of the main reasons why Nigeria embarks on many of its agricultural initiatives and developmental policies in order to reverse the situation of food insecurity.

PROGRAMS AND POLICY INITIATIVES IN QUEST FOR FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

In the past, various efforts and methods have been employed in order to address the problematic of food insecurity in the country. Here, it suffers to mention some of the major initiatives. However, space will be giving to the major policy in respect of agriculture by way of quoting the policy. This is called for because it is within this policy framework that a comprehensive assessment of and recommendation can be made.

Some of the programs/projects, policies, institutions introduced to revamp agricultural production and bring food to the tables of Nigerians over the past four decades include

1. Farm Settlement Schemes in the Former Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria (1956)
2. The National Accelerated Food Production Programs (1973)
3. The Procurement and Distribution of Fertilizer Project (1973)
4. The Agricultural Development Project (ADP) (1973)
5. Integrated Rural Development Authority (1975)
6. Subsidies on Fertilizers, Seeds, Agro-chemicals and Tractor Hire Services (1976)

7. National Seed Services (1976)
8. Operation Feed the Nation (1976-1979)
9. Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (1976)
10. River Basin Authorities (1977)
11. The Rural Banking Program (1977)
12. The Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (1978)
13. Opticom Program by the Governments of Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Lagos and Bendel States (1979)
14. Green Revolution by the Shagari Administration (1980-1983)
15. The Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Scheme (1987)
16. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) (1986)
17. Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (1986)
18. Peoples Bank (1989) chaired by the legendary Tai Solarin of blessed memory
19. The National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA) (1991).
20. National Policy on Science and Technology: Sectorial utilization.

Under agriculture, the policy statement is stated as: “The nation shall utilize science and technology for intensive agriculture for the purpose of achieving food security and providing adequate raw materials for sustainable industrialization”. The objectives for the realization of the policy statement include

Increasing crop production through the development of more efficient farming methods, high yielding crop varieties, appropriate farm inputs, suitable irrigation methods, appropriate farm implementations and sustainable use of land resources.

- (a) Diversification of food sources by introducing new sources of food, adopting new dietary habits and developing new uses of existing food items.
- (b) Ensuring availability and adequacy of food throughout the year through the systematic upgrading of traditional technologies to improve their capacity and efficiency for food storage and processing and utilization and adaptation of imported technology for food storage and processing
- (c) Increasing production and productivity of livestock through the development of improved and adapted breeds for increased quantity and quality of meat, milk and carcass, vaccines and drugs for controlling animal diseases, and livestock feeds from local raw materials.

- (d) Increasing fish production by initiating programs for the accurate determination of the breeding and migration patterns of fish and the productivity potential in the continental shelf region as well as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the nation, developing improved and suitable infrastructure for fishing including fishing boats and gears and developing improved fish-farming methods with respect to fingerling multiplication, suitable fish feeds and low-cost pond construction.
- (e) Ensuring availability of livestock and fish products through the development of improved preservation, processing, storage and packaging practices
- (f) Promoting and supporting research and application of new technologies such as biotechnology that hold potential for increasing agricultural productivity and improving the market and nutritional quality of agricultural product.
- (g) Promoting the use of agricultural mechanization for facilitating agricultural production.
- (h) Enacting and enforcing bio safety regulations for genetically manipulated organisms and materials.
- (i) Increasing the potential of the nation's forest products for a variety of industrial and domestic uses through the development of capabilities for agro-forestry research and extension, improved woody forest species, purposeful a forestation programmes in all ecological regions, effective enforcement mechanisms for forest conservation and effective regulations against bush-fires.
- (j) Increasing wildlife population for maintaining ecological balance, human consumption, game and recreation.
- (k) Improving the technology for processing, preserving, storing and utilizing forest products.
- (l) Encouraging the wider use of agricultural and forest products as inputs in other industries.
- (m) Developing efficient agricultural extension services.
- (n) Developing local capacity for the producti0n of agro-chemicals.

Under Environment, the objectives include to

- (a) protect the environment from harmful effects of human and other activities.
- (b) Facilitate the preservation of the environment

In addition, the country has established the Ministry of Environment

21. The Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda. This consists of power and energy, food security, wealth creation, transport sector, land reform, security and education.

By 2003 and in spite of the establishment of the Ministry of Environment and many agricultural policy and initiatives as outlined above, Nigeria was yet to be food secure. It was this realization that presented a challenge in a new way to Nigeria that it started to believe that getting Nigerians from the poverty trap is the surest way of promoting food security. Accordingly, it began to promote the philosophy of food security as the best means of ensuring sustainable development. It therefore established National Planning Commission in 2004 which published The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and addressed the issue of poverty as

Poverty is dynamic and has many dimensions. People may move in and out of poverty as a result of natural disasters or health problems, lack access to credit, or the lack of natural resources. Poor people are more likely to live in rural areas, be less educated, and have larger families than the rest of the population National Planning Commission, Nigeria, 2004: xiv).

NEEDS document, traces the source of poverty in Nigeria into three major causes. These are

- Lack of basic services, such as clean water, education and health care. (electricity included the authors)
 - Lack of assets, such as land, tools credit, and supportive networks of friends and family.
 - Lack of income, including food, shelter, clothing, and empowerment (political power, confidence, dignity).

NEEDS set as its goals

1. Wealth creation
2. Employment generation
3. Poverty reduction
4. Value reorientation.

In spite of all efforts Nigeria is yet to be food secure. This is not unconnected with the following observation under the subsection that follows.

A CRITIQUE OF THE INITIATIVES

Over the years the government of Nigeria has concentrated mainly on “supply side” (making food available in abundance) of food security while neglecting the ‘demand side’ (empowering people to purchase food no matter the price). Even the supply side policies of food security have not been properly implemented. Lucas (2007) trenchantly argued that the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria could be attributed essentially to the governmental policy failure. Akinyele also concurred with this position. Lucas in order to drive home his point listed 19 various governmental programs/projects/institutions, which were set up to ensure food security (improved supply) in the country ranging from Farm settlement scheme in the former western and eastern regions of Nigeria (1956) through Operation Feed the Nation (1976 – 1979) to The National Agriculture Land Development Agency (NALDA) (1991).

These laudable program, projects and institutions did not fully realize goals for which they were established because of the multi-lateral political factors and issues. One of these was political instability occasioned by incessant military incursion into politics. However, it may be asserted that the crux of the matter is that the nation has wherewithal to be food-secured at least from supply component, but the political will to propel the dream of food security into reality is what is lacking. Akinyele corroborated this as he stated

Ironically, resources abound in Nigeria to provide the needed food but appropriate policies do not exist to harness these resources to feed hungry Nigerians. Attempts at resolving the hunger question have been beset by conflicting approaches with the result that access to food by the hungry has not diminished (Akinyele, 1993: 67).

Nigerian leaders both past and present have failed to improve the nation’s agriculture because of the pedestrian and often ill-conceived policies on agriculture. Idachada, a renowned agricultural economist stated that there are many different government policies on agriculture but the nation needs to back up its good intention in agricultural policy process with good implementation commitments. He went on

further to conclude that the efforts of all policy analysts and policymakers who keep vigil night and day to achieve food security for all Nigerians would be futile. Besides, like other African countries, Nigeria has failed not only to produce enough food for its people, but the food items produced are of low nutritive value.

The low capacity utilization of resources must be increased and to protect the environment, which in the end justifies a real National Development. The food security increases utilization cannot be divorce from the protection of the environment. The core of the initiative to secure food security lies primarily in sustainable production of commodities and products. Sustainable development paradigm is multi-dimensional. It involves sustainable agriculture production, protection of the community's natural resources base, improve health and nutritional practices for mothers and children, and capacity building of health organization among others. Quick fix solution to food insecurity is not a solution. What must exist is a meticulous plan programmed for over a short-run and long-run to properly address the issue. The international donor community could reduce or avoid investment in productivity-increasing research on foods grown and consumed by the well to do to the food consumed by the poor families.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: NECESSITY FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Sustainable Agriculture means producing food in a way that can work indefinitely without endangering health or the natural "life support systems" upon which human beings depend. Ironically and too often today, decisions are driven by short-term thinking and profits, rather than a vision of the agriculture system that will best meet, at least, the needs of the present generation in the long-term. In the industrialized countries, it is common to see many expansive mechanized agricultural farms doused with chemicals; herbicides and insecticides to control the weeds and insect pests that tend to run rampant when just one or two crops dominate large areas, and oil-based synthetic fertilizers that substitute for healthy soils teeming with beneficial organisms.

This contemporary and often encouraged farming system produces pesticides, fertilizers and manure that seep into the groundwater and run-off into local streams and rivers. In the late summer, there is always a huge fossil-fuel burning combines crawling up and down the fields but many birds or butterflies, or for that matter, many people in the fields may not be seen. And while the highway is bustling with trucks, you will not see many people even in the towns you drive through! Often most of the food products on

store shelves in this fertile farming region come from somewhere else. For instance, in the northern half of the of Iowa in the U.S., there is very little ‘food’ growing there, as virtually all of the corn and soybeans that dominate the landscape are fed to livestock and poultry, incorporated into highly processed food products or diverted from the food supply to make bio-fuels (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2009).

This western type of agriculture cannot promote a sustainable agriculture of the future, that is, produce food indefinitely without damaging land, air and water. Farms of all types and sizes of sustainable agriculture would produce a variety of foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables as well as grains and livestock. The soil would regain its richness since farmers would no longer poison it to control insects. Sophisticated modern crop rotation and the use of beneficial insects would control pest populations. Crops and livestock would have been bred to fit into the new smart pasture operations. Rural well water would be safer to drink while rivers and streams would again run clean enough for people to swim and for fish, birds and other wildlife to flourish.

Sustainable agriculture would survive because it views a farm as a kind of ecosystem, that is, an ‘agro ecosystem’ made up of elements like soil, plants, insects and animals. These elements can be enriched and adjusted to solve problems and maximize yields. The integrated approach is both practical and scientific. It relies on modern knowledge about the interactions within natural systems as well as cutting-edge technologies, to achieve its results. It is a powerful approach that can produce high yields and profits for farmers while protecting human health, animal health and the environment. Songhai farming project in Port Novo in Benin Republic is a demonstration of this new agricultural shift paradigm orientation.

To create a flourishing sustainable agricultural system that meets needs of people of today and those of future generations, there is the need for innovative government policies that are grounded in both the science and economics of agriculture. Similarly, there is need for research to further explore the interaction of all natural systems supporting farming and to produce appropriate new technologies, extension services to update farmers about new developments in science and technology as well as more constructive subsidy programs than current ones in places where this is the case. Where there is no subsidy program, there is need to establish one. The subsidy will help industrialized farmers in the West

and 'big' farmers in Nigeria in particular through the transition to sustainable agriculture (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2009).

A sustainable agriculture will not be achieved without a strong scientific base, but the base will be different from the one on which conventional agriculture rests. It is not like the one that is even recommended by many food security recommendations in the U.N Millennium project (2005) which noted that nothing is more important in support of food than sustained economic growth that includes the poor. In this regard The World Bank supports whole heartedly programs that support certain types of rural investments, including roads and irrigation. Similarly the Bank supports agricultural communities particularly with environmental sensitivity to their situation by way of both productivity-increase technology and better resources management empowerment. Another broad area in which the Bank intervenes is by providing support for agricultural Research and Development (R & D).

In the United States, for instance, it is suggested that research on orphan crops (Naylor, et al, 2004: 15-44) should be supported because orphan crops are typically produced and consumed by poor households. They have high nutritional value, and are adapted to harsh environments. More work should be supported in funding genetically modified orphan crops to benefit the poor and not the industry. In Nigerian context, should genetic engineered food be encouraged? At the research level, this may be fine but a lot has to be done before the products of this new research be introduced in to the market. Despite the establishment of NAFDAC, Nigeria lacks monitoring and enforcement infrastructure to cope with such an advanced venture knowing the potential risk implications of genetic engineered food products not only to human health but also to the environment.

Real sustainable agriculture requires basic and applied research that is rooted deeply in ecology rather than molecular biology where crop rotations, soil amendments and biological control agents working in a particular cropping system or part of the country. Farmers need a much larger set of crop and livestock options. New crops could be introduced not only for food uses, like new grains and edible oils but also for non-food uses, like paper and energy crops. New uses of crops should be aimed at new kinds of integrated farm systems. In order to wage a successful war against hunger and to put more food on the tables of all Nigerians, the following two suggestions and recommendations are pertinent.

Provision of Adequate Subsidies for Agricultural Inputs

There is no country in the world where agriculture is successful and the people well fed, without subsidized agriculture. Government should restore subsidies on agricultural inputs such as fertilizers where subsidies had been removed. The Federal Government of Nigeria should view the provision of subsidies in agriculture as part of social services to the people because provision of food is more or less a social welfare. The often repeated argument that subsidies go to wrong people instead of the farmers they are intended for is not sufficient reason to remove subsidies. The governments should use its enormous legislative and executive powers to curb abuses associated with agricultural subsidies.

Increased Funding for Research Institutes and Faculties of Agriculture

The present funding of agricultural research in the country is very low. Although Nigeria has the largest number of agricultural research institutes in Africa their efficiency is seriously hampered because of insufficient funding. The present situation where most of the subventions are used to pay staff salaries with little left for research is unhealthy for agricultural development in the country. The government should fund adequately, the faculties of agriculture in Nigeria universities instead of establishing more specialized universities of agriculture.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's economic recovery has been slow and tardy. It has dropped from being listed as a middle income country to one of the poorest countries in the world, even in Africa. It cannot arrogate to itself the self acclaim 'giant of Africa' when South Africa is with three times Nigeria's GDP with only a third of its population (*The Nation*, 2009: 64). Nigeria's non-oil exports are negligible. It does not even have the infrastructure to sustain a determined industrial policy for the promotion of manufactured goods and other non-oil exports. In the same vain it may be observed that foreign investment in the industrial sector appears to be falling as well, as many foreign investors are divesting from the industrial sector despite Nigeria's large internal market of over 140 million. The cost of doing business in Nigeria is simply too high. The pervasive corruption is a disincentive to both local and foreign investment. The returns are too uncertain. Similarly the energy situation in the country has not shown any significant improvement despite the huge financial investment in the sector during the immediate past (Oyeshola, 2008 :) and present administrations. The financial burden of public administration remains heavy and public corruption remains unabated. The President's economic management team is too large and unwieldy. In

the light of the above observation, it may be affirmed that there will never be food security in Nigeria and sustainable development until the government establishes a non-partisan government of all the talents available in the nation. Also public expenditure and policy must focus on the need to create enabling environment of security, environmental wholeness to economic recovery and growth.

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