

# Curbing the Menace of Food Insecurity in Nigeria's Democratic Setting

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## ABSTRACT

*Food insecurity has become a cankerworm that has eaten to the marrow of Nigeria as a nation and has got an attendant effect on good democratic rule and the survival of the nation. This review took a look at a way of curbing the menace of food insecurity in Nigeria's democratic system. The study identified some of the causes of food insecurity in Nigeria to include civil wars and conflict, debt burden and deteriorating terms of trade, increase Globalization of market, population explosion in Africa, underdeveloped Agricultural Sector, Disease and infection, Handicapping Policies and poor Governance. Considering the above, the study submitted that since hunger may lead one to involve in various social vices and even sell one's conscience, good governance, gender sensitive development, nutritional intervention, capacity building facilitation of market access, building of implementable strategies among others and agricultural support programmes from government are recommended. These will enhance productivity, nip the menace of food insecurity in bud and make democracy survive for consolidation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Food insecurity, democracy, democratic consolidation*

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of food insecurity is not a new issue in the world economy, but its effects on the Less Developed Countries of the world among which Nigeria is, has become enormous. Jose Graziano da Silva, the Head of the Food and agricultural Organisation, an organ of the United Nations, noted with dismay that food prices will remain elevated and will be highly volatile in the next ten years (Tell, 2012:24). This effect has made it an inevitable issue of discourse for economists of this generation. Nigerian economy, being a democratic one, is being threatened with food insecurity. Democracy has been tethered to national communities and sovereign states in ways that lend popular government its efficacy and legitimacy. Rooted in the social contract and producing forms of sovereignty and rule-making that are popular, democracy has permitted people around the world to govern themselves if not directly, then through representatives. Ever since the American Declaration of independence, the formula for achieving liberty and security has been sovereign independence. The Nigerian government has faced a number of challenges which have considerably undermined its capacity to serve as agent of democratic consolidation. Such challenges include those of achieving technical competence, coping with public expectation and changes behaving ethnically and maintaining constitutional order. The Nigerian economy has long been in recess due to a number of factors Nigeria has been over dependent on oil sector since its discoveries in the 1970s rendering the contribution of Agricultural sector

low on the scale of the national Gross Domestic Product and Foreign exchange Earnings. Upon this Nigeria became heavy importer and consumer of food. According to Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, Nigeria's food import bill between 2007 and 2010 was N98 trillion. The amount was broken down thus: rice importation carried N365 billion; sugar importation, N217 billion; fish importation, N97 billion; wheat, N635 billion, in spite of the natural and the agricultural endowments of the country (Tell, 2012:24). It is evident that most of our political leaders mismanaged the countries resources which brings about inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the democratic governance of the country. A clear pattern of living among the country's citizen is evident from the political leaders' misappropriation of funds, extreme hardships and disproportionate suffering is brought to ordinary citizens especially the most disadvantaged sectors of the society by a situation they have no hand in creating while those who are responsible for situations leading to these crises enjoy impunity; such are the other group living the so called better life. Criminal activities such as militancy, smuggling, robbery vandalization of pipelines and abduction emanate from the oppressed or the poor masses who find it difficult to eat even a square meal in a day. The study is set out to find among other things the following:

- i. The incidence of food insecurity in Nigeria.
- ii. The cause of the current food insecurity in Less Develop Countries
- iii. The impact of food insecurity on survival of democracy in Nigeria
- iv. What government and political stake holders can do to achieve food security in Africa and ensure the stability of democracy in Nigeria

Running down the memory lane, food security issues can be linked to two major theories: the Malthusian Population theory and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of Need theory of human Motivation. According to Reverend Thomas Malthus (1798) there exist a great dichotomy in the rate of growth of population and food production. He argued that while population increased in geometric progression (that is to say, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128...) food production increased in Arithmetic progression (that is, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14...), he therefore contend that in due course, there would be acute shortage in food supply which will bring about fall in the standard of living. He later advocate for preventive checks such as "moral restraints" (abstinence from marriage, family planning) and limit the number of progeny, to reduce high population growth rate.

Malthus (1798) has not been proved wrong concerning this issue in Nigeria and other African countries which is having the challenges of food security in the present time and the quest to satisfy man's primary need of food consumption. Maslow in his theory of human needs, is able to prove that man respond to incentives especially that of primary need. He classified human needs into five as "hierarchy of needs" with psychological needs (primary needs) coming first, followed by safety needs, belonging needs, self esteem and self actualization. The primary needs with food as a component which needs to be satisfied before every other needs on which politicians capitalize in Africa to buy electorates' conscience. Therefore, for primary needs to be met, agriculture must be given serious attention. As nationalist political economy would assume, "it is true that industry can have

certain advantages over agriculture and that the introduction of industrial technology into a society has spillover effects that tend to modernize all the aspects of the economy as it upgrades the quality of the labor force and increases the profitability of the capital. Yet one must remember that few societies have developed without a prior agricultural revolution and a high level of agricultural productivity. In fact, certain of the most prosperous economies of the world, for example Denmark, the American farm belt, and Western Canada, are based on efficient agriculture. In all these societies, moreover, the state has promoted agricultural development (Gilpin, 1987). Food security, according to Anderson (2009), entails the provision of food to ensure adequate supply of it for all people to live active and healthy lives. Oriola (2009), on his own, views food security as entailing production of food that will go round every citizen both in quantity and quality while Obodomu (2006) described food security as the availability or adequacy of food supplies in terms of quantity and variety of food. It implies secure sustainable access to available supplies by all who need them. Akinola (2009) opined it as self-sufficiency in food production in such a way that adequate diet is available to all. Igbani (2009) therefore sees food insecurity as the inability of people to have access to safe and nutritious food necessary for the maintenance of healthy and active life. Hence food insecurity can be referred to as the inability of a country to secure enough food and adequate dietary intake of all household members and at all times in order to live an active and healthy life.

Therefore, in the light of the above views, food security is defined in this work as a situation whereby food is available in both quantity and quality with varieties at a secure sustainable proportion at affordable prices to the nation. Variety and price are important because they say variety is the spice of life and that capacity to purchase are economic factors that determine demand. These two issues remain significant in food security matters in the less developed countries of the world. Adefabi and Aderoju (2011) identify two major types of food insecurity namely, transitory and chronic insecurity. Transitory food insecurity is said to occur when a household assess to sufficient food declines temporarily as a result of instability in food production income as well as prices of food. Chronic insecurity, on the other hand is referred to as continuous inadequate diet by the population of a given country which arises as a result of lack of income or lack of resources.

Both income and price influence the consumption of food not necessarily or directly the consumption of nutrients derived from food. When people spend more on food, they may or may not obtain better nutrition. Some of their additional expenditures go for a larger quantity of food but much of it especially, above minimal income levels go for higher quality. Quality is defined subjectively by the consumer following his or her tastes. Food regarded as higher in quality need not be more nutritious than less favoured competitors and they may even be nutritionally inferior. Every nutritionist can tell horror stories about the deterioration in nutritional standards as development proceeds: Carbonated beverages replace natural drinks, commercial infant foods replace mother's breast milk and various junk foods are being increasingly consumed by children and adults. Statistics make it clear however that these cases run against the general pattern of improved nutrition in relation to increasing income. The consumption of food, like that of other goods and services can be

thought of as determined by three elements: income, relative price and tastes. The household spend an increasing amount but a decreasing proportion of income on food as their income rises, very poor households devote more than half of their income on food and have relatively high income elasticity of demand for food. Price also has considerable influence through income effects and substitution effects. A change in the price of basic foodstuff-rice, wheat, or corn, depending on the country-can have a significant effect on the purchasing power of a poor household. Substitution effects can be significant as well even if people strongly prefer a particular food, large price differences could cause them to shift to cheaper substitutes for the more-expensive foods that they prefer. This is especially true for the poor. In general, people with higher income have at least a somewhat higher caloric intakes and a more varied diet, which is superior in terms of nutrients other than calories. Food beliefs and tastes can impede nutritional improvement. Every culture has beliefs about the health effects of various foods that are not supported by modern nutritional science. Traditional feeding taboos for infants and nursing mothers are particularly injurious in many developing countries. In most human environment, one can point to nutritional potentials that remain under exploited for reasons of taste and habit.

For example, soya beans products provide a much cheaper source of protein than animal products, yet, they are eaten in quantity only in Asian countries where they are standard protein sources. Nutritionists can counter the economists' assertion that income is the main influence on nutritional status by demonstrating that every poor household could eat more nutritiously, if they had the necessary information and chose to do so. Hence income, prices and tastes, are significant contributors to the determination of nutritional status. The distribution of food within a family is another important aspect of individual nutritional status. When there is not enough food to go round, children and other adults tend to find their rations disproportionately reduced. It is understandable that, in dire circumstances families channel scarce food to the working adults on whose continued health and strength of the survival of all family members ultimately depends. This makes it hard to devise programs to improve the nutritional status of the more vulnerable family members, such as infants and nursing mothers since they get more food at clinic, the family may compensate by giving them less at home. In the end the net increase in the family's food supply may go to the breadwinner, rather than the intended recipients. Taking adequate diet guarantees better health. Health is an important goal in its own right. Health increases human potentialities of all kinds and rightly health is regarded as a basic human need.

Like education, health services improve the quality of human resources both now and in future. Better health for workers can provide direct and immediate benefits by increasing the workers' strength, stamina and ability to concentrate while on the job. Better child health and nutrition promote future productivity growth directly by helping children develop into stronger healthier adults. In addition, they contribute indirectly by improving children's ability to acquire productive skills and attitudes through schooling. It has been showing that healthy, well-fed children have higher attendance rates and are able to concentrate better while they are in school. Moreover children who enjoyed better health and nutrition in their pre-school years achieve more after they enter school. Although

expenditure on health promises several different kinds of private and social benefits, returns to the investment in health unfortunately are even harder to quantify and verify empirically than returns to investment in education. This is because there is no simple measure, analogous to years of schooling, for the amount invested in the health of a particular individual. The economic effects of better health are also hard to measure. Various researches previously carried out to measure the effect of better health on labour productivity have yielded varying results but almost all revealed expected positive effects on productivity while few indicated smaller impact they expected. In addition, it has been proved that increasing the consumption of good quality food can save the money spent on curative health care.

Democracy is a very wide concept on which scholars have tried but to no avail, in reaching consensus about its definition. However, some selected definitions have bearing to the subject of discussion of this write-up. According to Diamond *et al* (1988) democracy connotes a system of government that meets three essential conditions viz: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies at least through regular and fair election, such that no major group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties like freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure integrity of political competition and participation.

Enemuo (1999) asserts that there are five elements without which no community can call itself democratic, such elements include equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law and liberty of the individual, however all the aforementioned represent the ideals of democracy which can be imbibed and solidified by a resolute people within a relatively long period of time, hence the view expressed by Ake (cited in Ayodele, 2004) that the desirability of democracy lies in the concept itself but that at least none of the major problems of Africa (Nigeria) can be solved without it becomes apt. Mimiko (1999), in his own, submits that democracy imbibe seven elements which needs to be maintained. They are challenge to non-democratic sources of power, regime change through the electoral process, mass participation in democratic process resilience, ability of the democratic system to cope with stress defined as economic recession, ability to manage horizontal and vertical separation of power and the bureaucratic autonomy from the party in power. From the foregoing, therefore democracy can be said to be the government of the people for the people by the people's representative. The election of a true democratic leader requires respect for human life, poverty free environment (food security), coupled with the identified elements.

### ***Causes of food insecurity in Nigeria***

Food insecurity has been observed to be rampant in less developed countries with Nigeria as no exception Audu-Bida (2010) reiterated that about seven states of Nigeria are currently at the risk of food insecurity and nutrition crises. He said:

*Ensuring food security is currently one of the greatest challenges facing the world community because food prices continue to soar in many countries. These challenges are most critical in low-income and food deficit African countries of which Nigeria is one...*

The above is an assertion that food insecurity looms in the country. Oshodi (2009 cited in Oladiti, 2011) describes food crisis in Nigeria thus:

*The last few decades or so witnessed a series of development leading to the challenges of food insecurity in the country. These include the persistence of hunger in many parts of the country being juxtapose with good surpluses and stocks in some other parts the rising food prices resulting in wide spread of food insecurity, media report of starvation deaths and finally hunger and malnutrition... due to wide spread poverty and poor implementation of government agricultural programmes...*

As a corollary to the above, the food situation in Nigeria is evident in the country's rank of 18th on the 2011 Global hunger index (Global hunger Index comprised of the proportion of undernourished as a percentage of the population) and her 156th rank out of 187 countries on Human Development Index Estimate for 2011. All the above make it glaring that food crisis is prevalent in Nigeria. The following among others have been identified as the causes.

**Civil wars and conflict:** The spread and impact of war and conflict disrupts food production, creates refugees and displaced person and keep land out of cultivation Rwanda, Somalia and Afghanistan are the most striking cases today.

**Debt burden and deteriorating terms of trade:** With huge debt burden, the country needed a significant proportion of export earnings hence the need for covers supply at the expense of home use.

**Increase Globalized Market:** This combined with increased urbanization has led to shift from food crops to cash crops production on the best land.

**Increased population in Africa:** As postulated by Rev. Thomas Malthus (earlier discussed) is already the case in developing countries population pressure also reduces the supply of food indirectly through environmental degradation and driving of food production increasingly into marginal areas.

**Underdeveloped Agricultural sector:** Agricultural sector in developing countries is mostly characterized by over reliance on primary agriculture, low soil fertility, minimal use of external farm inputs, environmental degradation, significant food crop loss (both to pre- and post-harvest) etc. the impact of oil boom on the agricultural sector has equally affected the sector as the mainstay of Nigeria economy which invariably reduce the sectors contribution to food production and culminate to food insecurity.

**Disease and infection:** Disease and infection continue to plague the African continent. Diseases such as Malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS not only reduce the man-hours available to agriculture and household food acquisition but also increase the burden of household in acquiring food.

**Handicapping policies:** Poor policies have greatly affected the food security in Africa. The problem arises when the focus on policies, structures and institutions is put above that of the people themselves.

**Natural phenomenon:** This is yet another factor responsible for food insecurity in the world. It manifests in the form of climate change with its attendant impact as loss of biodiversity in the ecosystem, and other physical access.

***Inefficient small farmers:*** Farming activities are being done mainly by the farmers who don't have access to necessary wherewithal for optimal production of food in Nigeria. The World Bank's statistics show that about 90% of Nigeria's agricultural output comes from inefficient small farmers who have little or no access to fertilizers, irrigation or other modern inputs. Consequently, such farmers are only able or even struggle to produce enough food to sustain their immediate families. No wonder the UN' Children's Fund, UNICEF, said 65% of the country's population, approximately 91 million people, is what humanitarian organisations call "food insecure" (Tell, 2012:24). As a result of the various causes of food insecurity highlighted above, poverty persist in Nigeria and various politicians capitalize on this to buy the conscience of the voters by giving them peanuts to advocate for their votes. Through this, voters end up choosing bad leaders and eventually poor governance emerges on the political scale. The elected leaders, on getting to power, see it as a venture on which they expect return, hence corruption, embezzlement, non-performance, ineptitude etc. are the order of the day.

#### ***Stemming the menace of food insecurity in a democratic world***

From the foregoing, it is pertinent that for continuous existence and sustenance of democratic rule in Nigeria as a nation, the menace of food insecurity rocking the nation needs to be tackled. It is pertinent at this juncture to make reference to the blueprint proposed by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria on the way to move Nigeria forward, in which explicating the significance of the agricultural sector to Nigeria's development. The Association identified ten areas of uplifting the Manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy. However, out of the ten, six were directly related to agriculture, apart from the food producing capacity of agriculture.

They are (i) food, beverages and tobacco (ii) chemical and pharmaceuticals (iii) domestic and industrial plastic, rubber and foam (v) basic metal, iron and steel and fabricated metal products, (v) pulp, paper and paper products, printing and publishing, (vi) electrical and electronics, (vii) textile, wearing apparel, carpet, leather/leather footwear, (viii) wood and wood products including furniture, (ix) Non-Metallic mineral products (x` ) Motor vehicle and miscellaneous assembly. The implication of this is that agriculture remains the most important corner stone for the development of the Nigerian manufacturing sector development. It is also important in peace building in Nigeria as the youths who engage in various nefarious activities can be converted to agricultural use as the current situation means non-use or under-utilization of youths. When we import, particularly food, we give our jobs to the citizens of the supplying nations. As Eni (2012) observes, "when you import goods into the country, you are providing employment opportunities to those countries from where you are importing" and you are invariably promoting good governance and reducing political instability as evil hand is the devil's workshop. Food insecurity in Africa is directly correlated with poverty, hence for continuous existence and sustenance of democratic rule in Nigeria, it is therefore necessary to embark on poverty alleviating programme to create wealth for the target population in achieving food security. The solution also lies in increasing food availability, food access and food adequacy for all coupled with the above the following suggestions and recommendations are made as the way out. Rural

development: Agriculture should not be seen as job for the peasants in as much as its effects impact on both the poor and the rich. Government needs to empower farmers, especially in the rural villages so they profitably embark on agriculture. All necessary facilities that can aid rural farmers to be lover of that environment should be provided: electricity, good roads, health facilities and other amenities that contribute to human capital development as a way of curbing rural-urban drift.

**Nutritional interventions:** Malnutrition has devastating effects on any population. It increases mortality and morbidity rates diminishes the cognitive abilities of children and lowers their educational attainment, reduces labour productivity and the quality of life is affected. Increased production both in quantity, quality and variety would make those foods affordable to the poor and increase their protein, vitamin and mineral intake.

**Facilitating Market Access:** Farmers produce with the aim of selling to gain. Thus agriculture activities must not be seen as a way of life, but as a business form which its investors must profit. Markets need to be open up for people to benefit both producers and consumers which can also increase gains from the world trade, the proceeds of which can be used for economic development.

**Capacity Building:** Nigeria should focus on education, research and development access to capital and infrastructure development. Free primary education, should be facilitated throughout the country to the level of transfer of knowledge and provide off farm employment, thus acting as a safety net.

**Gender Sensitive Development:** Discrimination against women must be eliminated and the value of their role promoted for them to be fully effective in contributing to food and nutrition security. However, care should be taken not to aggregate the male gender while the noble task of empowering women is pursued. If both gender had more equal schooling, incomes, etc. the economy would grow faster and true democracy prosper.

**Good governance:** Nigerian must ensure that credible people who are honest dedicated, responsible, dynamic, accountable and incorruptible are elected into political offices. This will ensure the sustenance of true democracy.

**Creating off-farm Opportunities:** Off farm opportunities such as college industries, production of small scale processing machinery, provision of credit combat processing facilities and market facilities need to be provided. This will curb rural to urban migration and possibly influence some urban to rural migration thus paving way for efficient farming and food security.

**Building on Coping Strategies:** There is need for developing countries like Nigeria to build on strategies that have worked for them in order to alleviate food insecurity and poverty. Credit needs be given to poor countries for the survival of their socio-cultural framework. Economic power should also be made available to everyone as well as government supporting agriculture and reposition the economy to engender the needed diversification, particularly in Nigeria from oil dependence to agricultural sector taking the lead as it was experienced during the first Republic before the military intervention of January 15, 1966.



## CONCLUSION

Akinola (2009) also confirmed the saying that "hungry dog is an angry dog" is true for all human society since hunger may lead one to be involved in various social vices. Hence, food insecurity is the basis of other insecurities and can dictate the nonconformist behaviour of man as it has severally been noted that economic deprivation is a factor of social crisis in the world. Many touts, popularly called area boys have turned themselves to be instruments of disruption and destruction for fraudulent politicians because of their quest for means of survival selling their life values, particularly supreme price, for money in order to make ends meet. If the suggestions of this write up are therefore adhered to, it is believed that Nigeria will experience sustainable democracy that will yield itself to good governance and Nigeria as a Nation will have a solid footing.

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