

Impact of Food Crisis on Nigeria's Quest For food Sufficiency And Security in The Economy

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Abstract

Plants and animals alike need nourishment for their bodies in order to grow, reproduce, recreate and regenerate. In times of crisis, whether due to natural phenomena or man-made disruptions, plants and, especially, animals face lengthy periods of danger, difficulty or uncertainty which leads to food shortages, food unavailability and ultimately food crisis. Accordingly, the scarcity or unavailability of food and other supplements makes living difficult and poses serious threats to human life, the economy and economic activities of the nation. Thus, in times of difficulties, most households, communities and individuals need food security to bolster their chances of livelihood and survival. Many households in Nigeria currently face unequal access to food as a result of poverty, terrorism, unemployment, corruption, communal crises and national policies that do not promote equal access to food for all, environmental degradation, barriers to trade, insufficient agricultural development, population growth, low levels of education, social and gender inequality, poor health status, cultural insensitivity and natural disasters. Government's policies on the production of food since independence have not translated into any meaningful increases; instead, the production of food keeps dwindling. This further causes uncertainty and plunges individuals and communities into more hardship. A situation where the population's demand for food out-weighs the quantity of food available leads to food scarcity, and if this situational scarcity lingers over time, food crisis occurs. This study examines the impact of food crisis and Nigeria's quest for food sufficiency as it relates to the economy and the population with a view to achieving food sufficiency. The study recommends that to curb the situation of food crisis in the economy, all hands must be on the deck, and government should commit resources to full and holistic implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Programme for Food Security, and also address the concerns of small-scale farmers in the implementation of the National Programme for Food Security

Key Words: Food insufficiency, Scarcity, Economy, Food Crises, Security, Poverty

Introduction

With the exception of clothing and shelter as the basic necessities of life, food remains the most vital due to its centrality to human existence (Ikeokwu, 2018). It is a known fact that ruthless expedition for food has shaped human history, provoking wars, driving migration and underpinning the growth of nations. The recent escalation of food prices calls for sober reflection, owing to the fact that the world is facing a worsening food crisis period unseen in the last 20 years, with the potential of leading to a catastrophe. Life is becoming unceasingly difficult and miserable for many Nigerians because of the escalating prices of food items. A school of thought argues that Nigeria's population grows at a faster rate while food production is declining. Another school of thought blames the present high cost of living on hoarding, which is economic sabotage perpetrated by the middlemen to create artificial scarcity, and the same school of thought insists that farmers should dispense with the services of middlemen and deal directly with the consumers as a solution. Another view is that Nigerians' quest for food would be a thing of the past if the Federal Government lifts the ban on the importation of some foodstuffs to supplement the locally produced ones.

In spite of the divergent opinions of the various groups, the fact remains that food crisis looms large in Nigeria and if this unfortunate situation is allowed to continue unchecked, the problems associated with inadequate food production and distribution may assume a more difficult dimension sooner than later. The key word in most households today is hunger. The prices of goods and services have increased astronomically (Ayodele, 2019). The prices of all food items have risen so highly that only the exceptionally rich can afford them, yet there are still steady fluctuations in the value of the naira against other foreign currencies, which would make the import option untenable.

Many farmers in Nigeria today find it extremely difficult to evacuate their farm produce to needy parts of the country because of high transportation fares, bad roads and unregulated prices of petroleum products. In addition, farm inputs, including fertilizers, are not made available to the genuine farmers at the right time. A situation whereby fertilizers are produced and distributed to farmers and agricultural institutions when their crops are either over-grown or ready for harvesting suggests ignorance of the importance of the inputs in boosting crop yields.

Ayodele (2019) and Paul (2015) blamed the food crisis in the

country on inadequate supply occasioned by the massive flooding that occurred during the 2023 farming season in most parts of the country. The floods were said to have ravaged thousands of hectares of farms, especially in the Northern parts of the country, leading to poor harvests. There were also insinuations that the late release of fertilizer might have contributed to the poor harvests. Some said it was due to the drought, which had affected the Northern States, while others attributed the situation to the food crisis in some countries of the world. It is also believed that the massive purchase of excess grains by some state governments to keep as buffer stock might have compounded the problem. The price hikes have also been attributed to hoarding by grain-merchants, the activities of middlemen and agents of breweries and manufacturers of poultry feed. The prices of grains including maize, millet, sorghum, beans and rice, which are the major staple food items, had more than doubled in some cases. Before the hike, according to Onuchukwu (2023), a 100 kg bag of maize, millet and sorghum, among others, had sold for forty five thousand naira (N45,000) but sky-rocketed to about two hundred thousand naira (N200,000). The same scenario played out in most of the markets surveyed, nationwide, with only minor price variations. This also affected other food items like yam, palm oil, vegetable, onions and tomatoes.

Before independence, the various nationality groups that currently make up Nigeria were largely agricultural people. They were food self-sufficient and produced a variety of commodities that were exported overseas. According to Okechukwu (2010), under colonial rule, Nigeria remained an agricultural country, exporting raw materials to Britain and importing from Britain finished goods. When crude oil prices around the world reached a record-high of \$130 per barrel with fears that it would eventually hit \$200 per barrel mark, nearly everyone got set on their marks in a race to be the first to provide an answer to the inflationary crude oil trend (Oghene, 2018).

Nigeria always produced diverse kinds of foods in such a manner that if you took rice off the tables of most Nigerians, amala, tuwo, starch and garri would be reliable substitutes. Our food diversity is greatly complemented by relatively good weather that makes it impossible for Nigerians to go hungry. Nevertheless, we must tell ourselves the truth sometimes and insist that a place like Benue State, known as 'food basket of the nation', does not have that name simply because it feeds the nation or because the farmers have a unique farming technique. It is because Nigeria is an endowed land, a land blessed by God, and nearly every plant that is plantable could grow and do well on Nigeria's soil.

Nevertheless, many questions have arisen about a people with this kind of blessedness and bountifulness but who still produce food at subsistence level. We must ask ourselves why we not yet the food basket of Africa. Why do we experience high cost of the food items that we can produce locally? Why must there be scarcity anytime we hear that Nigeria exports cassava to China? Why the price of rice is still out of reach to the larger population of the country?

The Genesis of the Food Crisis in Nigeria

Food prices have skyrocketed internationally and a lot of factors seem to be fuelling this scenario. In order to have enough to feed their population in the face of falling productivity, rice exporters like Vietnam, Thailand, India and Egypt recently halted export of rice. Studies have shown that world rice inventories are at a mere 72 million metric tons, which is just about 17 per cent of what the world consumes annually, leading to an unstable market and vulnerability to supply disruptions. According to Ikpeze (2019), some farmers pointed at poor harvest; others have blamed the conversion of corn and other produce that should have been consumed into ethanol and the transfer of manpower, land and other inputs from food cultivation to infrastructure.

It is not hard to link Nigeria's food crises to inappropriate government agricultural policies that stifle the country's great agricultural potential. Over the years, nothing has been done to address low crop yields. To the contrary, government has seemingly gone out of its way to hamper production with policies that are often flawed from conception and ad hoc in nature (Ayodele, 2019). According to the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria, as cited in Ashaka (2018), Nigeria fell 800,000 metric tons short of a ten-million-ton production target for 2023 due to inconsistent government policies, terrorism and negligence of the agricultural sector. The current local production stands at a meagre 525,000 metric tons - requiring \$267 million in imports because most locally-produced rice is of low quality and its market potential is limited even within the Nigerian markets.

According to Mohammed (2019), Nigeria ranks 110th out of 127 countries on the Global Hunger Index indicating a serious level of hunger and food insecurity. Specifically, about 75 per cent Nigerians are food insecure, meaning that majority lack access to the amount and variety of food for a healthy and productive life. Invariably, malnutrition rules the land where about 40 per cent of children under age five are stunted. Some nine per cent are wasted and 25 per cent are underweight (Ikeokwu, 2018). These are clearly results of

the poor performance of the agricultural sector.

Findings have also shown that fertilizer application is still very dismal on our farms. Presently, Nigeria requires about 8.7 million metric tons of fertilizer per annum but only one third of this is used on the farms. The average global rate of application of NPK is 93 kilogram per hectare but Nigeria's rate is 13 kilogram per hectare (Kolavalli, 2019). No wonder the nation continues to record heavy post-harvest losses calculated at 50 per cent for fruits and vegetables and 30 per cent for root crops and tubers.

Despite the nation's huge human and natural resources in the forms of arable land, crop variety, human population and other endowments, hunger is still prevalent. The situation has been officially acknowledged by the Federal Government, which has mapped out a series of short- medium- and long-term measures to contain the situation as contained in the National Programme for Food Security. Thus, there is a disconnection between policies and users, to the extent that beneficiaries were not sufficiently involved in the articulation of government's response to the situation and there are discrepancies and inconsistencies in the implementation of policies on food security (Onaid, 2019).

The World Bank has since stated that the cost of bridging the current hunger gap is approximately \$500million. World Bank President, Mr Ajay Banga, lamented at the recent annual meeting of the multilateral institution in Washington that the poor in many developing countries spend up to 75 per cent of their income on food, a situation which puts them in tricky conditions. Official reports confirm that government faces several challenges due to the population growth and consumption volume increase where the problem is not only about the increase of the price of bread, but extends to other issues which will require improvement of the food security level in Nigeria. Some of these challenges are:

1. The weakness of food crops efficiency and productivity, limited availability of agricultural and veterinary services and the weak attention paid to the development of the capacities of rural women.
2. The scarcity of capabilities and the absence of sincere forms of encouraging the cultivation of food crops.
3. Limited opportunities for financing and lending to agricultural

producers, fishermen, rural development projects by commercial banks and productive assets.

4. Difficulty in the limitation of soil erosion and desertification.
5. The weakness of capabilities to develop rural areas and to improve the living conditions of the population in rural areas.
6. The absence of policies that limit the hardship farmers face in the hands of the Police when transporting their produce to other parts of the country.
7. Insecurity faced by farmers as a result of herdsmen attacks and terrorism.
8. Low level of coverage for health care services, maternal and child health, particularly in rural areas and the limited support for nutrition programmes, school health and the basic services to family health.

Food insecurity may also result in severe social, psychological and behavioural consequences. Food-insecure individuals may manifest feelings of alienation, powerlessness, stress, and anxiety. They may experience reduced productivity, reduced work and school performance and reduced income earnings. Household dynamics may become disrupted because of a preoccupation with obtaining food, which may lead to anger, pessimism and irritability. Adverse consequences of food insecure children include: higher levels of aggressive or destructive behaviour, hyperactivity, anxiety, difficulty with social interactions, increased passivity, poor school performance, increased school absenteeism and a greater need for mental health care services (Bellamy, 2019).

Nigeria's Food Situation in Post-Independence

Nigeria has a land area of 98.3 million hectares, 74 million hectares are good for farming but less than half is being explored. The population involved in farming is 60 - 70%. Agriculture's contribution to GDP is also 41.5%. Crops, livestock and fish have potentials for providing food and nutrition (Lambert, 2018). From independence in 1960, the country took up the direction and planning of economic growth and development, the officials took the path of rapid, large-scale industrialization at the expense of the agricultural sector, as well as light manufacturing. They directed the bulk of investment capital

towards the promotion of what Western advisers captioned "industrial take off." This decision to abandon the known agriculture for the unknown rapid large-scale industrialization was a fundamental error. The capital and the skill needed for rapid, large-scale industrialization were not sufficiently available. Nigeria's neglect of the agricultural sector aggravated problematic food shortages. Nigeria had raised enough food to meet domestic needs during its colonial period and in the decade following independence. However, it experienced food shortages in the 1970s and 1980s, which necessitated the importation of food from foreign countries. Among the imports were palm oil, of which Nigeria had been the world's largest producer and exporter, and rice which was considered less nutritious than Nigeria's brown rice (Alade, 2016).

Once Africa's largest poultry producer, Nigeria lost that status because of inefficient corn production. Furthermore, it is no longer a major exporter of cocoa, peanuts and rubber; thus, several forces compounded the problems of the agricultural sector. The migration of labour from the rural areas to the urban centres reduced the traditional agricultural labour force. Ecological constraints such as poor soil, erosion, drought and the absence of agricultural research added to the problem. Other constraints on agricultural production include the use of antiquated technology due to a lack of capital, the low status given to agriculture in the education of the youth, inefficient marketing, inadequate transportation, poor road infrastructure, lack of refrigeration, trade restrictions, under-investment due to unavailability of credit facilities, low prices and unstable pricing policies which resulted in farmers literally subsidizing urban dwellers and other sectors of the economy. In addition to these handicaps, import constraints limit the availability of many agricultural and food-processing plants. In general, land tenure discourages long-term investment in technology and modern production techniques (Lambert, 2018).

The Global Food Crisis and the Challenge to Nigeria

Nwaokugha Ikeokwu, in his article captioned "The Global food crisis and the challenge to Nigeria" published in the *Nigerian Tribune* of Tuesday 27th May, 2018, said that the discussion of this vital issue has taken a centre stage among world leaders thereby increasing concern about the world's ability to feed its 6.5 billion people, to avert worldwide unrest and political instability as reported in Egypt, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gaza, among others. As a result of this, the collaboration of international organizations and individual countries became the only option to remedy the situation in order to make food affordable to all.

The food security assessment in 2015 proved that over 750 million people were food insecure in 70 lower countries globally (Ashaka, 2018). Both Asia and the commonwealth of independent states experienced a 30 per cent drop in the number of hungry people. The numbers for Latin American and Caribbean have varied slightly over time, but there has been a trend across the region as a whole. Despite the strong growth in food production, sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the number of hungry people has risen in the last decade. Analysts are of the view that high food prices will cause an increase in food insecurity and wide spread food crisis in many developing countries such as Nigeria. Poor people in developing countries spend 50-80 per cent of their incomes on food and poor rural households tend to be net consumers of food. Any increases in food prices reduce food consumption and increase hunger.

The prices of rice, corn and wheat have all skyrocketed and this has posed a big threat to developing countries. This has been attributed to a number of factors, including climate change, population growth, increase demand for biofuels, failure to improve crop yield, high oil and input prices, leading to increase input and loss for producer and traders. Speculation on commodity market and structural problems like under investment in agriculture and infrastructure had dominance in the supply chain of food and agricultural policies could also push prices. Even though there is no correspondence between the ever growing population and agriculture produce in Nigeria, agriculture remains a crucial sector in the Nigerian economy. Majority of the rural population depends on agro-related activities for livelihood.

The appraisal of the past shows that successive administrations had initiated programmes ensuring that food is available, accessible and adequate for the teeming population. Unfortunately, the sustenance of this laudable idea to fulfil their mandate has remained a mere dream. Some of these programmes are: Farm Settlement School and National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), launched in 1972 by General Yakubu Gowon; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) introduced by the Murtala/Obasanjo administration; River Basin and Rural Development Authority (RBRDA) established in 1976; Green Revolution and the World Bank-Funded Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) launched by the administration of Shehu Shagari in 1980; and Babangida's Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).

Despite the above efforts, Agriculture has been constrained by numerous challenges like Rural/Urban migration, wavering policy formulation and implementation, insufficient infrastructural support; poor distribution

system due to emphasis on oil economy; pricing system, over-dependence on rainfall farming, poor capacity utilization, low investor confidence, environmental degradation; poor access to funds, poor socio-economic status of farms and insufficient technological transfer system, corruption and poor commitment to implementation of agricultural policies. According to Yusuf (2019), for Nigeria to be transformed to one of the leading 20 economies of the world by 2050, an agricultural revolution should be the catalyst to its industrialization. Besides, the target of the MDG of reducing hunger and poverty and sustainable development can only be attained through increased attention to Agriculture, food security and sustainable water resource development.

Government's Efforts towards Containing the Food Crisis

The appraisal of the past shows that successive administrations had initiated programmes towards ensuring that food is available, accessible and adequate for the teeming population. Agricultural researchers are unanimous that Nigeria neglected policies for food production during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. The government concentrated on industrialization, especially on import substitution industries and export crops which were seen as its capital source and managed collectively in the marketing board, whereas no action was taken for food crops. The degree to which Nigeria had been confident in her natural resources including agricultural resources, just after her independence can be exemplified in the first line of the first National Development Plan to 1962-68 (Federal Ministry of Economic Development Plan 1963). This Development Plan aimed to exploit abundant resources for improvement of the living standards of the people, set GDP growth target to 5% per annum with agriculture, industries, and put the highest priority on middle and higher education. However, the share of investment to the primary sector was only 13.6% whereas the shares of industries, electricity and the transportation system added up to 50%. Hence, this development plan focused mainly on infrastructure provisions.

In 1973, the Nigerian government effected the emergency import of over 100,000 tons of wheat but this was more a measure to stop rises in food prices in urban areas than to supplement domestic grain shortages (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1992). This was because root crops were in heavy shortages and grain crops yielded relatively better than root crops that year. Regardless of which crop failed, however, the kinds of crops imported in the emergency were limited

to internationally traded crops such as wheat and rice and continued from 1976 to 1977 when a large amount of rice was imported.

Unfortunately, the sustenance of these laudable ideas to fulfil their mandates has remained a dream. Some of these programmes are: Farm Settlement Scheme and National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), launched in 1972 by Gen. Yakubu Gowon, between 1960 and 1975, agricultural policy was laissez-faire, while stagnation in food production became clear. In the second period, the government commenced policies to encourage food production to counter the serious food shortages (Shimada, 1999) as cited in (Olatunji, 2019).

Operation Feed the Nation was introduced by the Murtala/ Obasanjo administration; River Basin and Rural Development Authority established in 1976; Green Revolution and the World Bank funded Agricultural Development Project (ADP) launched by the administration of Shehu Shagari in 1980; and Babangida's Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), (USAID, 2018). The Federal Government in an effort to create an enabling environment for the private sector participation, deregulated the economy in 1986 and introduced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) owing to high import component of agricultural input production, cost rose and prices of stable food were found to have increased to a greater degree than the pre-SAP periods.

Other factors observed to have contributed to the shortage in food supply and high prices are inefficient storage facilities, poor transportation and inappropriate processing technology. A joint report from the impact of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on Nigerian Agriculture and Rural Life' analysed the effects through various changes in the policy fields of trades, markets, foreign exchange, subsidiary, finance, welfare, and wage. The S.A.P. affected not only the production of export crops but also that of food crops, directly and indirectly. The direct effects were rise in prices of imported foods and consequent relative lowering of domestic food prices, while the prices of imported agricultural inputs, combined with subsidies, made them absolutely unaffordable for the peasants. As for the indirect effects, they indicated the hardship of urban life due to increased unemployment and under-employment amidst rising food prices. Thus, the living standard of the rural area was more improved in comparison to that of urban areas.

The role of processors in achieving food security cannot be over-

emphasized, especially in ensuring the availability and affordability of food. To help mitigate the food crisis in Nigeria and attain national food security, the present government has promised to float a N200-billion bond in the Nigerian capital market, for on-lending to commercial farmers. The bond is expected to be used to fund farm set-up on the basis of soft loans, construct large dams, associated irrigation facilities and fiscal incentives, such as tax credit schemes on agricultural inputs (Ballamy, 2019). The planned government equity will include well-structured modern factories and processing plants with grading systems and standards, quality controls, quarantine services, power security and water. The agro-industrial parks would be situated as near the production areas as possible to reduce the logistical constraints distance might pose. Despite these efforts, agriculture has been constrained by numerous challenges like rural-urban migration, wavering policy formulation and implementation, insufficient infrastructure support, poor input distribution system, emphasis on oil economy, pricing system, over dependence on rain-fed farming, poor capacity utilization, low investor's confidence, environmental degradation, terrorism by Fulani herdsmen, poor access to funds, poor socio-economic status of farms and insufficient technological transfer system, corruption and poor commitment to implementation of agricultural policies.

Reinventing Agriculture towards Nigeria's Quest for Food Sufficiency

Prior to the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria's Niger Delta in 1956, agriculture occupied a central place in the Nigerian economy. There was a healthy economic competition among the then four regions of the country as each exploited its comparative advantage by focusing on the cultivation and production of specific set of cash crops. Thus, Nigeria was reasonably self-sufficient in food production and carved a respectable niche for herself as a major exporter of a bouquet of cash crops ranging from groundnuts, palm oil, cocoa, rubber, cotton, among others, including hide and skin (Okotie, 2018). The dominance of agriculture in the Nigerian economy then could be seen from its contributions. Not only was agriculture able to cater for the 95 per cent of the food needs of Nigerians, it contributed 74.1 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employed over 70 per cent of her population (Paul, 2015). Additionally, at that point, export of agricultural produce accounted for 80 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings and 50 per cent of government revenue (Okotie, 2018). However, the oil boom of the 1970s changed everything as the country became over-dependent on oil for its foreign exchange earnings. Since the mid-1970s, oil began to account approximately 95 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings (Ikpeze,

2019).

The oil boom led to an unprecedented inflow of foreign exchange that the then Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, was delirious with wealth and felt that Nigeria's problem was not money but how to spend it. It was estimated that between 1973 and 1981, Nigeria earned over N60 billion (about US\$90 billion) from oil and adopted a spendthrift attitude. The agricultural sector was neglected as a result of the oil boom. The neglect propelled some farmers into abandoning their farms to participate in the sharing of the windfall produced by the oil boom. According to Oghene (2018), the oil boom led to a severe disruption in the agricultural sector, which manifested in a large exodus of labour to the cities and this brought a decline in agricultural productivity.

Additionally, lack of government interest also resulted in poor policy intervention, such that farmers relied on obsolete crop varieties and over-aged trees to keep afloat. In other words, Nigeria did not flow with the tide of global best practices in the agricultural sector. According to Okotie (2018), Nigeria ceased to be a major exporter of those cash crops for which it was previously known, such as cocoa, groundnut, rubber and palm products, and agriculture in the country's export profile dropped drastically. This was so because of the declining productivity in these cash crops. Another consequence was that Nigeria became a net importer of food despite the various national development plans it implemented and, despite the specialized agriculture-oriented policies, agriculture is still at the subsistence level without modern implements that would maximize productivity.

Since the 1970s, successive governments have been emphasizing their desire to diversify the economy and reinstate the agricultural sector as a major driver of the Nigerian economy but nothing much has changed as the sector is still backward despite its potentials. Thus, in spite of the various agricultural development programmes launched by successive governments since the 1960s till date, as we had seen earlier, no significant milestone has yet been recorded in the agricultural sector. Oil still dominates the Nigerian economy as the major foreign exchange earner for the country.

As part of the global effort to leverage on agriculture towards the actualization of SDGs 1 and 2, the global community has been emphasizing on the indispensability of agriculture. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) believes that the agricultural sector is the engine of economic growth in Africa. Thus, African leaders, under the auspices of the African Union (AU)

and NEPAD, evolved a continental strategy in Maputo in 2003 called the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) to revitalize and leverage on the agricultural sector to drive development on the continent (Ayodele, 2019).

The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) is a continental platform designed for collaboration among African countries to promote modern and sustainable agriculture that would enhance productivity and competitiveness, thereby guaranteeing food security and providing decent incomes to farmers and other agricultural workers. The key target of the CAADP is to achieve 6 per cent growth in productivity with the expectation that African states would devote at least 10 per cent of their annual national budgets to agriculture. According to NEPAD (2017), the CAADP is anchored on five mutually reinforcing pillars to rescue and reposition African agriculture. These pillars are:

- i) Extending the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems;
- ii) Improving rural infrastructure and trade-related capacities for improved market access;
- iii) Increasing food supply and reducing hunger rates;
- iv) Investment in agricultural research, including dissemination and adoption of technology, and
- v) Pursuit of sustainable development of livestock, fisheries and forestry resources (Kolavalli, et al, 2019).

In line with the CAADP and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agenda, the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) is in tandem with CAADP and its thrust centres on the promotion of modern and sustainable agriculture in order to satisfy the food requirements of the population, contribute to socio-economic development, reduce poverty in the sub-region and deal with inequalities among countries. Nigeria has keyed into the ECOWAP/CAADP agenda to revamp its agricultural sector as part of their overall objectives to diversify its mono-cultural economy to achieving food security.

Nigeria's two most recent policy thrusts are the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) that was launched in 2011 and the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) which was flagged off in 2016. The many years of neglect of agriculture by successive governments created complex contradictions in that sector. The

foremost of these contradictions are the twin-problems of inadequacy of food production resulting in the inability to meet domestic food requirements, and the poor quality of crops due to poor knowledge of modern agronomy practices.

The most contemporary agricultural policies of Nigeria recognized the deficits and the great potentials in agriculture in terms of boosting employment opportunities, ensuring food security, providing better and quality life and alleviating poverty. The Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) was a departure from the previous intervention policy instruments that conceptualized and implemented the restructure of the agricultural sector (Lambert, 2018). The point of departure was the conceptualization of agriculture as a business and not a development project where the government would invest without clear-cut expectations. Thus, within the framework of Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), the primary role of the government was to create an enabling environment for private-sector leadership in providing all necessary inputs and services. In addition to building on the successes of Agricultural Transformation Agenda, the core mission of Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) is to create an agribusiness economy with focus on meeting domestic food security goals of the country and delivering sustained prosperity to workers and investors in the agricultural sector. Thus, the policy thrusts of Agricultural Promotion Policy revolve around four key themes, namely, food security, import substitution, job creation, and economic diversification.

The aim of Nigeria's agricultural policy is to boost agricultural production such that the country would be food-secure and cease to depend on food importation as prelude to achieving food security, but the government took advantage of the country's natural endowments and favourable environment at the expense of food production and agro-allied industrial activities. Agricultural activities are still stuck at the level of subsistence with majority of farmers doing small scale farming. The peasant structure of the agricultural sector is still dominated by traditional agricultural methods with scanty opportunity for modern agronomy. Several governmental initiatives were implemented to strengthen the agricultural sector focusing on modernizing the sector to ensure increased productivity that would pave way for global competitiveness (Ayodele, 2019).

Food Security and Future Challenges

It is a fact that the need for food is utmost in the hierarchy of need (Oyefara, 2021). Achievement of food security is a total victory over poverty in any given nation. Food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social

and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Mohammed, 2020). Millions of people worldwide suffer from hunger and under-nutrition. A major factor contributing to this problem is food insecurity and the causes of food insecurity include: poverty, corruption, national policies that do not promote equal access to food for all, environmental degradation, barriers to trade, insufficient agricultural development, terrorism, population growth, low levels of education, social and gender inequality, poor health status, cultural insensitivity and natural disasters (Ashaka, 2018).

The federal government has launched an investigation into the food crisis but with inadequate result due to corruption and insecurity. The issue of food insecurity has been on the international agenda for decades but prices remain on the increase especially in Nigeria as a result of fuel hike, speculative hoarding by traders and high industrial demand for grains. Food security has continued deteriorating in Nigeria due to uneven distribution of food, climate change resulting in late rainfall, droughts and excessive and widespread crop failure. The low access to fertilizers and quality seeds results in further reductions in yields. Ineffective road systems and high cost of transportation have made it difficult to transport crops to markets. The combined impact of the water shortages and high prices of food contributed to high cost and standard of living.

Conclusion

Nigeria's quest for food sufficiency and security involves tackling challenges like low productivity and infrastructure, insecurity in farming communities, food import dependence, need for sustainable practices, government initiatives, technological advancement, improved seed use, partnership, research and development, training programs, addressing climate change and national food security programs. With President Bola Tinubu's goal of achieving Nigeria's agricultural productivity and reducing dependency on food imports, states have been tasked with identifying specific areas for food production and devising strategies for their development.

Recommendations

The Federal and State Governments should commit resources to the full and holistic implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Programme for Food Sufficiency and Security by:

1. Prioritizing sustainable agriculture, empowering women, investing in infrastructure and promoting innovative solutions.
2. Promoting awareness and involvement of the private sector, including NGOs, into farming networks in the monitoring and evaluation of government's implementation programmes.
3. Scaling up present credit facilities to meet the needs of rural and small scale farmers.
4. Investing research and development through a programme to revitalize the national agricultural research system.
5. Making agriculture and food production attractive to young people to address unemployment.
6. Channelling International financial resources towards providing and upgrading infrastructures and materials that will bring down the prices of food.

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