

Food Insecurity in Nigerian Society “The Result of Social-Political Conflict”

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Abstract

The attainment of national security by a country depends on its ability to guarantee total sustenance for its populace. Food security is a core element of both internal and external security. However, attainment of food security will be a mirage where socio-political conflict is the order of the day. This study observes that food security in Nigeria is an element of the agricultural system and its insecurity is a threat to other forms of security. It observes concept of food security and socio-political cum economic factors militating against food security. Thus, the study concludes on the way forwards to attainment of food security which is the bed rock of internal security.

INTRODUCTION

Social-political conflict is steadily becoming a universal problem. Except in some few countries where they adhere strictly to their constitutional policies in order to better the lots of their populace. The upsurge of social-political conflict in Nigeria is troubling and the damage is doing to Nigerian society is astronomical. The worst is yet to happen, if the evil consequences of this menace is not curtail.

In Nigeria, we have land mass more than enough to do farm work. We are blessed with good climate, we are blessed with good soil, and we are blessed with human capacity, we have more than enough potential to attain food sufficiency in this country. The truth remains, a peaceful environment is an incentive to social-political development. Where this is lacking, insecurities in all its ramification is inevitable.

FOOD SECURITY

Security expert defines security as: “The total sum of actions and measures, including legislatives and operational procedures, adopted to ensure peace and stability and the general well-being of a nation and its citizen”. (Benson, 2004). In line with the above definition, food security is defined thus: The ability of a country to secure enough food, an adequate dietary intake of all household members at all time in order to live an active and healthy life. The opposite of security could be insecurity. Food insecurity could be viewed as inability of a country to secure enough food, adequate dietary intake of all household members in order to live an active and healthy life.

Agriculture and food security exist when “all people at all times have access to safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (FAO, 2003).

The concept is around 3 pillars namely food availability, food accessibility and nutrition factors (World Bank 2001).

Food access means reducing poverty and increasing the purchasing powers of the people. Nutritional factors have to do with good nutritional income, which is nutritional security. Upton (1987) argues that although government may facilitate, stimulate and promote the growth of agricultural food production, success must ultimately depend on the multitude of farm household. More than 70 percent of Nigeria population lives in rural areas and majority are independent small holder farmers. Therefore in order to achieve sustainable agriculture and pedal out food insecurity in Nigeria there is the need to put into consideration the farmer’s perception and socio-political problems confronting them in their domains.

CONCEPT OF FOOD SECURITY

It is remarkable to note that security is both complex and multidimensional. The national security in Nigeria consists of both internal and external security of the nation’s resources, lives and properties. Internal Security is one of the factors that threatened national development in Nigeria. Internal Security, according to Thomas (1990) is the absence of those tendencies which could undermine internal cohesion as well as corporate existence of the nation and its ability to maintain its vital institutions for the promotion of its values and socio-political and economic objectives as well as meet the legitimate aspiration of the people. While we are focusing on both external and internal security, food security should not be undermined. For a hungry man is an angry man. If the man that will coordinate the resources for socio-economic development is not well fed, the resultant effect will be negative on both external and internal security in national development.

THREATS MILITATING AGAINST NATIONAL SECURITY WHICH INVARIABLY ARE AFFECTING FOOD SECURITY IS RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE;

Few incidences of Religious Disturbances in Nigeria according to Vincent (2001) are as follows:

- Kano State in 1980 between 18th to 22nd December.
- Maiduguri - Borno State on 29th October 1982.
- Jimeta – Yola Adamawa State on 29th February, 1984.
- Ilorin religious disturbance in March 1986
- Kaduna religious disturbance on February 2000 and July 2001
- University of Ibadan on 5th May, 1986.
- Political motivated Boko Haran Sect 2011-till date.

The implication of this religions unrest is that many innocent farmers living in these communities turn down by religious war relocate for safety at the expense of their farm and other properties. This acts is leading to economic insecurity. Zabadi (2009) define economic instability as a system where commercial companies, government agencies, local authorities and international organizations cannot effectively function or contribute to the economic development of a nation due to lack of stable security in such a nation. It then mean that no economic activities can take place where there is no peace. In such a situation there would be suffering from hunger and food starvation.

REASONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY

In addition to religious intolerant pestering food insecurity in Nigeria, following are reasons responsible for food insecurity in Nigeria:

- Civil war and conflicts
- Globalization of markets
- Increasing population in Africa
- Deteriorating terms of trade and debt burden of less developed countries.
- **Spread and Impact of War and Conflict:-** The incidence of hungers and food insecurity is the order of the day where war and conflict abound. Food insecurity is a fertile breeding ground for a community, nations or country where there is war and conflict. It creates refuges and displaced persons, besides it keep the land out of cultivation. Gates Gleclitsch and Hegre (Gates et al 2004) posted that to achieve a more secured world peace must be attained globally at the regional and domestic levels. It is worth knowing that civil peace requires more than the absence of war. It describes a condition of enduring social, economic, and political stability, such that the thought of taking up wars against one's government becomes inconceivable. When this is done, favourable atmosphere for all sectors of economy, (Agriculture inclusive) to develop have been created and food sufficiency is guarantee.
- **Deteriorating Terms of Trade and Debt Burden:-** This aspect is more of economic effect than political reason for food insecurity. Most developing countries are languishing under heavy burden of debt from I.M.F. standard set for the economic recovery of most of these developing counties by I.M.F. failed. The consequence of this is that significant proportion of export earning is needed for servicing the debt which is not available for food importation or the means needed to increase local food production.
- **Increased Globalization of Markets:-** The increase globalization of market is also a contributory factor of food insecurity combined with this is increased urbanization. The latter has led to a shift of farm work force to the cities having aged people behind on subsistence farming which cannot guarantee food security for the teeming population.
- **Increased Population in Nigeria:-** Population pressure may not directly increase the demand for food but it also indirectly reduce the supply of food through environmental degradation. Besides, land meant for agricultural purposes become fragmented into industrial sights and other domestic uses such as recreations centres.

SECURING FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA, THE WAY FORWARD:

The right to food is the right of every person to have regular access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food for healthy life.

For Nigeria to effectuate this Right, the following conditions must be met:

- Stable social and political environment, which promote both local and foreign investment in agricultural sector.
- Emergency standby food reserved to deal with localized or nation wide emergencies arising from national man-made disaster.

- Efficient food storage, processing, preservations, transportation and distribution system;
- Equitable distribution of food to all members of the household without discrimination on ground of age, gender and other cultural or religions consideration.

Besides the conditions stated above, other important dimensions and ramifications for Nigeria to achieve a sustainable food security include:

- Human resources capacity for domestic food production
- Technology ability and capacity to achieve high output per unit area and be able to cope with the challenges associated with post harvest wastage/spoilage, processing and storage.
- Infrastructure to ensure efficient transportation, marketing and distribution of food through the entire nation.
- Mobilization of farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development through cooperative organization, local institutions and communities.
- Government should ensure an effective agricultural extension services.
- Research and development including biotechnology should be given attention. The dissemination of products/requests of research to the grass root should be promptly.

CONCLUSION

Food security brings internal stability and also enables a country to earn foreign exchange in international trade and greatly influence its foreign policy. Government must therefore double the efforts towards boosting agriculture to take advantage of our fertile land to produce more food for our growing population and to achieve self sufficiency in food security. It has been suggested (Bello, 2009) that the farmers should be motivated further especially by creating non-farm income opportunities to poor households. This will enhance development.

Food and nutrition security can help prevent conflict which is an essential ingredient for sustainable growth and national development.

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