

## **ACHIEVING COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA THROUGH FOOD SECURITY**

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### **Abstract**

*The quest for sustainability has for the past decade been an issue of topical concern globally. This is evidenced on the emphasis on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which superseded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To ensure sustainability particularly in the area of food security, every country tries to inculcate sustainable habits for protection of the future generations in all her development policies, plans and activities. Consequently, community sustainability is sought to achieve national sustainability premised on the fact that every nation state is made up of communities, a place where people want to live and work in present and in the future. Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. To ensure high quality of life for both the present and future generation, available resources ought to be maximized so as to maintain healthy physical and social environment. Active participation of members with professional skills in both public and private sectors are also required for actualization of a sustainable community. A critical analysis of the elements identified by Institute of Sustainable development reveals that community sustainability and by extension national sustainability would remain a mirage in the absence of food security.*

**Keywords:** Achievement, Community, Sustainability and food security

### **Introduction**

Sustainable food security implies accessibility to enough food by all people at all time for an active healthy life at

present plus the ability to provide enough for future generations. Issues on food security were brought to limelight in 1974 during the world food conference when it dawned on the governments that nations

all over the world needed to strategize on how best to improve agricultural production so as to match the per capita needs of the population. Ban Ki Moon, the UN Secretary-General at a World food summit in Rome in 2009, warned that six million children die of hunger every year; 17,000 die of starvation every day and by the year 2050, the world will need to feed two million more mouths (Honfoga & Van den Boon, 2013).. This has rekindled the idea of achieving sustainable food security in all countries of the world including Nigeria. Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources, but despite its significant natural resources, the majority of the citizens are living below the poverty line. For instance, according to World Development Indicators (2015) an estimated 60% of Nigerians live on less than US\$1.25 per day. Nigeria was also ranked 91<sup>st</sup> out of a total of 104 countries on the 2015 Global Hunger Index and 153<sup>rd</sup> out of a total of 187 countries on the 2012 UNDP Human Development Index. Malnutrition and hunger which is linked to poverty have been ravaging most developing countries and affecting their productive capacity. Classifying Nigeria as one of the poorest countries testifies to our failure to achieve our development policy as well as national food security. It once more awakened the government to the realities on ground, that is, the need to

achieve the first sustainable development goal of no hunger before the year 2030.

World Bank (2012) estimates the population of Nigerians to be above 160 million people, the largest in Africa, almost accounting for 47% of West Africa's total population. As the population increases, the country's demand for food increases, while the ability to produce food diminishes because pressures from the growing population in the form of desertification, climate change and erosion are also impacting on the already diminishing resources and further threatening food production. The main objective of this paper is to evaluate the food security situation and the challenges of achieving sustainable food security in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the paper identifies pressing issues hampering food availability, stability, accessibility, and utilization in Nigeria and proffers short, medium, and long-term solutions to address the problems. The five components of food security, availability of food, access to food, utilization of food, stability, malnutrition.

### **What is Food Security**

According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2017), in a definition established at the World Food Summit (WFS) in Rome in 1996, food security is

achieved when everyone has physical, social and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security involves access and availability of food stuff, stability of supplies and the quality of the diet (Honfoga & Van den Boon, 2013). According to FAO (2017) International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP), Nigeria have an energy intake of 1730 Kcal and an average protein supply of 64g capita per day far below the 2500–3400Kcal minimum recommended daily intake per day. This shows that Nigeria is facing the challenge of an unbalanced diet leading to various deficiency symptoms. Also among the 109 countries assessed by Global Food Security Index (GFSI) in 2015, Nigeria was 91<sup>st</sup> with 37.1 score based on indices of affordability, availability, quality and safety.

One of the goals of Nigeria's agricultural development policy is to ensure that there is enough food reserve at household, state and federal government levels to forestall any threat to the level of food security. Since domestic agricultural production has failed to meet up with the increasing demand for food, the government had to spend on importation to feed her teeming

population. For instance, food import increased from 19.9% in 2000 to 30.6% and 22.7% in 2011 and 2012 respectively while food export is barely 5.3% of merchandise (World Development Indicator (2015). The second sustainable development goal of zero hunger incorporates the need to achieve food security and improved nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture, ending rural hunger, empowering small scale farmers especially women, ensuring healthy lifestyle by 2030. The Nigerian government is working assiduously to achieve these goals.

### **Meaning of Sustainable Food Security**

Sustainable food security has been defined in various ways by different scholars. According to WHO (2015) and FAO (2017) food security is access to the food needed by all people to enable them to live a healthy life at all times. A country is said to be food secure when there is access to food of acceptable quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times for the majority of the population (Reutlinger, 2015 & Idachaba, 2014). This means that food must be available to the people so as to meet the basic nutritional standard needed by the body. But it should be noted that availability of food does not mean accessibility to food. Availability depends on production, consumer prices,

information flows and the market dynamics. The World Bank (2012) defined sustainable food security as an access to enough food for an active, healthy life at present as well as the ability to provide enough in the future. Abdullahi (2018) defined sustainable food security as when people have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive healthy life at present as well as in the future.

This definition outlines some indices for measuring the extent or degree of food security to be achieved by any country and the indices are adequate national food supply, nutritional content, accessibility, affordability and environmental protection. Absence of food security is food insecurity; food insecurity on the other hand represents lack of access to enough food and can either be chronic or temporary. Adeoti (2019) opine that chronic food insecurity arises from lack of resources to acquire and produce food thereby leading to persistent inadequate diet. Food and Agricultural Organization (2017) refers to food insecurity as the consequences of inadequate consumption of nutritious food bearing in mind that the physiological use of food is within the domain of nutrition and health. When individuals cannot provide enough food for their families, it leads to hunger and

poor health. Poor health reduces one's ability to work and live a productive healthy life. Poor human development destabilizes a country's potential for economic development for generations to come (Otaha, 2013).

### **Determinants of Food Security**

According to FAO, (2017), the core determinants of food security are availability, accessibility, utilization and stability.

**Food Availability:** Availability of food plays a conspicuous role in food security. Having enough food in a nation is necessary but not adequate to ensure that people have satisfactory access to food. Over the years, population has increased faster than the supply of food thus resulting in food unavailability per person.

**Economic access and physical access:** Economic access depends on one's income, the price of food and the purchasing power of the people. Physical access depends on the availability and quality of infrastructure needed for the production and distribution of food. Lack of economic access to food is as a result of the increase in the rate of poverty.

**Food Utilization:** Food utilization is measured by two outcomes indicators which reflect the impact of inadequate food intake and utilization. The first

outcome is measured by under-five years of age nutrition level while second measurement is quality of food, health and hygiene. According to FAO measuring the nutritional status of under-five years of age is an effective approximation for the entire population. The indicators for the measurement of under-five years of age are wasting (too thin for height); underweight (too thin for age) and stunting (too short for age). Most times, progress in terms of having access to food is not always accompanied by progress in the utilization of the food. A more direct indicator of food utilization is underweight because it shows improvement more promptly than stunting and wasting whose improvement can take a longer time to be noticeable. Since 1990, the prevalence rates of under-five stunting and underweight have declined in some developing countries, while some countries still report a prevalence rate of 30% or more and WHO (2019) categorized it as high.

**Stability:** Stability has to do with exposure to short-term risks which have a way of endangering long-term progress. Key indicators for exposure to risk include climate shocks such as droughts, erosion and volatility in the prices of inputs for food production. The world price shocks lead to domestic price instability which is

a threat to domestic food producers as they stand the chance of losing invested capital. Nigerian farmers are mainly smallholders farming mainly for subsistence, this makes it difficult for them to cope with changes in the prices of inputs, and it also lowers their ability to adopt new technologies thereby resulting in reduced overall production.

Changing weather patterns as a result of climate change have played a part in reducing food supply, for instance flood in the southern parts of the country and drought in the northern parts leads to substantial losses in production and income. The interplay of all these variables determines whether an individual, household, state or nation is food secured or not. This is because sustainable food security at the household level does not guarantee sustainable food security at the state or national level.

### **Challenges to food security**

Achieving food security is central to a reduction in starvation and hunger as well as attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Food security has been conceptualized in different but complementary ways. The World Bank defined it as a condition where everyone has access to sufficient food to live a healthy and productive life. The Africa Bureau of the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID) (2015) defined it as a situation when everyone has physical, social, and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs, produce, and stay healthy. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2017), food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. From the above perspectives, food security entails a production of diverse, safe, and nutritious food that can sustain the consumption demand of the population. It also requires that availability of food is backed by consumers’ purchasing ability to acquire desired food varieties that promote their well-being and wellness. Meeting this goal in the face of myriad development challenges confronting Nigeria remains a daunting exercise

In Nigeria, there is high level of food insecurity for the past four decades as a result of neglect in food production when oil has become the major export product and because of the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies such as devaluation of naira, trade liberalization. In Nigeria, about 13.7 million people, across 16 states, are food insecure National Bureau of

Statistics (2020). Several factors have driven this. These include civil conflicts, large-scale displacement, rising food prices, climate change, natural resource degradation, poverty and population growth. In addition to the increasing demand for animal products in the context of globalization of food systems, these challenges include, but are not limited to, consequences for individual country and regional concerns about food security, such as the impact of geopolitical strife on food production and distribution. Some of the challenges are:

#### **i. Reduced Food Production**

Nigeria is facing a lingering food crisis. Between 2008 and 2013, production of staple cereal foods (maize, millet, rice, sorghum, wheat, and other cereals) declined by 11.8% from about 28.8 million tons to about 25.4 million tons. Also, spice (pimento and other spices) and tomato production shrank by 1.7% and 14.1%, respectively over the same period. An observed decline in food production vis-à-vis a projected 2.7% annual population growth in the country poses a serious food security challenge.

#### **ii. Internal Conflict.**

Chief among the contributing factors to the persisting food crisis in Nigeria is the



Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, unknown gunmen, and cow rustlings. Since the attacks escalated in 2009, hundreds of civilians have been killed with thousands of households in North Eastern Nigeria displaced and their farmlands and livelihoods completely destroyed. The nefarious activities of the insurgents contributed greatly to waning food production recorded since 2008. Given that cereal, spice, and vegetable crops are widely grown in the North, the destructive nature of the insurgency, aside from hampering farming activities in the region, also resulted in serious security challenges in transporting goods across conflict-prone states in the North to southern states. This places enormous constraints on the availability of essential staple foods especially in southern states.

The general decline in food supply partly reflects in the upward food price trajectory witnessed from January 2010 till date. Higher food prices without a corresponding increase in income would greatly impinge on food accessibility. This suggests that the existence of food insecurity is not peculiar to the northern states of Nigeria, but it is also present in the southern states. The loss of agricultural production due to Boko Haram and other incidences of insecurity is estimated at US\$3.5 billion; the total economic impact

of the insurgency has been put at US\$9 billion (World Development Indicators, 2015),

Compounding the food insecurity situation are the yet-to-be-resolved incessant clashes between herdsmen and farmers. The long-standing herdsmen–farmers face-off has generated civil unrest of varying dimensions and magnitude resulting in deaths and causing disruptions in agricultural activities. In most cases, the conflict is a loss–loss situation for both cattle herders and peasant farmers. The indiscriminate grazing of farmlands has cost farmers a great loss in farm produce, a protest by farmers especially the youth on the resulting damage, usually brings about hostile conflict leading to further loss of lives on both sides with evidence of high cases of cattle rustling. The crisis has destabilized food and meat production with a negative implication on food security in Nigeria.

### **iii. Underdeveloped Market for Produce.**

The underdeveloped nature of markets for agricultural produce in Nigeria is another factor posing threats to the food security situation in Nigeria. Food market infrastructure (e.g., good road network, storage facilities, marketing boards) are not readily available or rather underdeveloped in Nigeria. Existing

markets in the country are too fragmentary and disintegrated from the farm. Most farmlands have no functional road networks that would make for easy transportation of farm produce from farm to the market. Consequently, most produce decays in transit before getting in the market. Facilities to store and preserve raw agricultural produce before shipping to the market are grossly inadequate. About 30 to 40% of food produced in Nigeria is wasted because of poor preservation capacity. This loss is estimated at about US\$8.9 billion annually. Postharvest losses have received great attention among agricultural research institutes and multilateral institutions in recent times.

#### **iv. Access to Finance**

Unattractive agricultural financing mechanisms limit enterprising initiatives along the agricultural value chains. Ensuring safe, available, and affordable food products requires a roadmap that actively promotes agricultural value chain development. This entails the development of initiatives that enhance the spring-up of agro-based industries in the areas of processing, packaging, storage, and marketing of agricultural produce. Current financing arrangements for the agricultural sector in Nigeria are mostly left in the hands of the financial institutions that always view agricultural ventures as

unattractive and would rather extend credit to high-risk, high-reward ventures on a short-term basis. A recent report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2016) indicated that the agricultural sector received only 3% of total bank credit allocation in the third quarter of 2017. This sectoral credit allocation to agriculture seems not far-fetched given the high lending rates of banks to the sector (which currently averages 18%).

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) “Anchor Borrowers Programme” which took effect in 2016, seeks to lend to small holders farmers at lower interest rates (as low as 9%). However, the scheme has not been effectively managed given the high number of cases of default by farmers. It is important to note that current agricultural interventions are ostensibly limited to agricultural production (crops, fisheries, and livestock) to the neglect of the value chain—a strong lever of food security. Hence, Metu, Kalu and Ezenekwe (2015) identified other challenges of sustainable food security in Nigeria as;

- i. **Poverty:** It is the major problem of food accessibility, availability and utilization. Poverty leads to insufficient income needed to meet household basic needs.
- ii. **Government policy:** Nigeria depended so much on agricultural productivity



for its revenue until the exploration of oil in the 1970s. The oil boom led to the negligence of the non-oil sectors especially the agricultural sector which used to be the major source of revenue for the country. The attention given to agriculture reduced drastically, farming reduced drastically, farmers' needs were not attended to and the worst of all was that research and development in the sector slowed down causing a stagnation in food production.

iii. **Agricultural practices:** The type of farming system prevalent in Nigeria is the traditional subsistence farming. This system is characterized by use of simple farm tools, small farm holdings, restricted access to credit facilities and low agricultural inputs, inadequate storage facilities, insecure markets for post-harvest products and exploitation of farmers by the middlemen.

iv. **Population increase:** The demand for food exceeds the supply of food because the rate of growth of population is higher than the growth in agricultural productivity. Also the large population continues to relocate to the urban areas in search of white collar jobs which do not exist. This youth rural-urban drift makes it

difficult for the country to be food secured.

v. **Environmental issues:** Flood, drought, desertification are environmental issues affecting availability of food in Nigeria. Climate change affects food supply through loss of farmland, fluctuating food prices, increases in food borne illnesses and other food utilization issues. The recent environmental degradation through deforestation and flooding has wide negative implications for food production. For instance, in 2012 the country witnessed unprecedented rainfall as a result of extreme weather. The rainfall resulted in severe flooding causing loss of agricultural crops, livestock and human lives and;

vi. **Corruption:** Corruption in Nigeria has been on the increase leading to money budgeted for public utilities being siphoned for private use. This leads to decay in infrastructure, especially rural infrastructure where the majority of the farmers live and operate from. For instance, we have seen situations where money meant for importation of fertilizers is siphoned.

### **Ways Forward**

i. The challenges related to violent conflict necessitate profound

approaches. The government should scale up existing collaboration with neighboring countries (especially Niger, Chad, and Cameroon) towards countering the Boko Haram menace and other seemingly growing cross-border armed conflicts in West Africa. Also, large-scale orientation and education of herdsmen on the need to respect property rights should be institutionalized (Kah, 2017).

- ii. Internal security and intelligence need to be adequately strengthened for early detection of crime and prevention of violent conflict. Also, there is a need to establish grazing reserves for the herdsmen and to strongly discourage cattle encroachment on farmland.
- iii. Modern innovative techniques of cattle rearing should be explored and embraced.
- iv. To enhance the market for agricultural produce, there is a need to invest massively in road distribution networks that connect farms to the market and to the cities. More can be achieved through innovative public-private partnership on infrastructure financing especially in the rural areas.
- v. Restoration and empowerment of the defunct marketing boards in Nigeria. Having an independent board with a mandate to buy and absorb agricultural

produce from farmers during bumper harvests and preserve them to sell during postharvest periods can help minimize losses.

- vi. Appropriate public-private collaboration that enhances value chain development. Making agriculture profitable remains key towards attracting funds to the sector, fostering innovations that encourage wide-scale mechanization, and enhancing value chains towards food and nutrition security in Nigeria.

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