

Averting the Looming Food Crisis: A Clarion Call to Immediate and Near-Term Policy Actions

Gabriel S. Umoh*

Abstract

This paper reviews food crisis and its causes in Nigeria. It takes the position that food crisis has been simmering in Nigeria for the past couple of years and identifies policy instability, poor policy implementation and declining household purchasing power, among others as the major causes of food crisis. It recommends strong policy support and implementation, automatic indexation of wages and pensions and other measures to curb food crisis in the country.

I. Introduction

Food crisis occurs when rates of hunger and malnutrition rise sharply at local, national or global levels. Food crisis is often triggered by a shock to either supply or demand for food and often involves sudden spike in food prices (Timmer, 2010). Due to its effects on global and national economic development, food crisis has received some attention at the global, regional, and national levels. The United Nations, for instance, has established such agencies as Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), etc. to support countries develop their agriculture towards achieving food security and avert food crisis. Despite this, food insecurity still persists in many countries.

Nigeria is recognised to be well endowed with resources for sufficient food production. These include over 34 million hectares of arable land, favorable climatic conditions, large farming population (over 70.0 percent of Nigerians engage in agriculture), and numerous water bodies for irrigation agriculture, among others. Despite its rich endowments, the country has suffered chronic food crisis spanning many decades as well as government/administrations.

Successive administrations (both military and civilian) have attempted to address the twin problems of food crisis and food insecurity through a plethora of policies, programmes, schemes and projects. Some of these were directed at increasing food production to meet local demand (e.g. National Accelerated Food Production Programmes, 1972; Root and Tuber Expansion programme, 2000; National Food Security Programme, 2008, among others.). Yet, the country has

** Prof. Gabriel S. Umoh is a staff of the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Uyo. The usual disclaimer applies.*

continued to suffer chronic food insecurity spanning many decades as well as government/administrations. The problem has remained persistent and almost intractable in nature (Olayemi, 1997).

Indeed, records show that exception of the immediate post-independence era, the country has been neither food self-sufficient nor food secure; rather, it has been experiencing deteriorating food crises situation. In 2020, the country was ranked the 10th hungriest nation in the world (Table 1) (CONCERN WorldwideUS 2020). Similarly, Nigeria came a distant 100th on the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) during the same period (Table 2) (The Economic Group, 2021). The GFSI assesses the performance of countries based on food affordability, availability, quality and safety, and natural resources and resilience. The index is a dynamic quantitative and qualitative benchmarking model constructed from 59 unique indicators that measure the drivers of food security across both developing and developed countries. Nigeria performed below average in all five performance indicators, the lowest score being recorded on "affordability" (32.0 per cent) followed by natural resources and resilience (39.3 per cent). This situation was exacerbated by violence, conflict, and climate change.

From the various data and reports, it is apparent that food crisis in Nigeria is not "looming" or about to happen, it exists already. It happened a long time ago and has remained so till the present time. Therefore, this paper sets out to discuss drivers of food crisis in Nigeria and to suggest immediate and near- terms policy actions to mitigate food crisis in the country.

Table 1: Ten Hungriest Countries

Ranking	Country	Major Causes
1	Chad	Climate Change,
2	Timor-Leste	Low Agricultural productivity, diseases due to poor infrastructure for WASH, cyclones
3	Madagascar	Political instability, extreme weather pattern, crisis
4	Haiti	Natural disasters (earthquake, hurricane) political instability
5	Mozambique	-
6	Liberia	Previous civil war
7	Sierra Leone	COVID-19, Ebola epidemic
8	Lesotho	Climate Change, drought, inflation, crop failure
9	Afghanistan	Drought, conflict, climate change
10	Nigeria	Violence, conflict, climate change

Source: CONCERN WorldwideUS (2020).

Table 2: Performance of Countries based on their 2020 Food Security Score

Global Ranking	Country	Overall Score	Affordability	Availability	Quality & Safety	Natural Resources & Resilience
1	Finland	85.3	90.6	82.0	93.8	73.2
2	Ireland	83.8	92.2	75.7	94.0	73.2
3	Netherlands	79.9	90.7	74.5	88.7	61.5
4	Austria	79.4	89.5	70.8	94.3	61.8
5	Czech Republic	78.6	86.3	70.4	87.1	70.9
6	United Kingdom	78.5	89.7	70.0	92.8	59.4
7	Sweden	78.1	89.2	65.0	92.3	67.4
8	Israel	78.0	89.5	75.3	93.9	46.3
9	Japan	77.7	90.4	73.0	83.4	58.6
10	Switzerland	77.7	87.9	68.4	89.6	64.2
100	Nigeria	40.1	32.9	46.8	41.5	39.3

Source: The Economic Group (2021).

Following the introduction, section 2 presents previous policies targeted at mitigating food crisis in Nigeria, while section 3 highlights the causes of food crisis in the country. Section 4 contains recommendations for mitigating food crisis while section 5 concludes the paper.

II. Previous Policies Aimed at Mitigating Food Crisis and Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria has used several policies, programmes and schemes to attempt to address the problem of food crisis and food insecurity. These come in the form of multi-sectorial policies and programmes. Chief among the sectorial policies are agricultural and food and nutrition policies. Historically, it is well documented that before the decade of the 1960s, with little support from government, Nigerian agriculture was able to grow at a sufficient rate to provide adequate food for an increasing population, raw materials for a budding industrial sector, increasing public revenue and foreign exchange for government and employment opportunities for an expanding labour force. Self-sufficiency in food production did not pose any problem worthy of public attention at that time. However, problem started to emerge as from the first decade of the country's independence (1960 – 69). These indications were clear from increasing food supply shortfalls, rising food prices and declining foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. Notwithstanding the situation, not much rational concern was shown because the problems were thought to be the temporary effects of a series of crises which eventually culminated in the civil war (1967 – 70).

The second decade of Nigeria's independence (1970 – 79) witnessed a rapid deterioration in the country's agricultural situation aggravated by labour shortages. As a consequence, there were widening food supply-demand gaps, rising food import bills, and rapid declines in government revenue from agriculture, in particular foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. The situation was compounded by the residual effects of the civil war, severe droughts in some parts of the country, and government fiscal and monetary policies. Above all, an "oil boom" which created serious distortions in the economy and accelerated the rate of migration of labour from agriculture further aggravated the situation.

To tackle these problems, government initiated several agricultural policies, programmes and projects. In 1971, government came up with the Agricultural Research Policy with the objective of harmonising and coordinating agricultural research extension linkages. The policy was expected to ultimately, enhance agricultural production and national food sufficiency. To check inflation and protect low earner earners, government promulgated the Price Control Act in 1977. The Act gave government powers through its Price Control Board to fix price of certain commodities. A total of 44.0 per cent of these commodities were food items namely; flour, milk, salt, and sugar. Although this Act has not been repealed, the country has moved to more market-based economy where people are free to determine prices of goods and services except petroleum products.

Similarly, in 1988, there was the New Agricultural Policy with the objective of quickening growth in the agricultural sector through Accelerated Development Area Programme, Livestock Development Project and Rural Agro-Industrial Scheme. The latest of these agricultural sector-wide policies is the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) of 2016. This policy has as its overarching objective "eliminating various constraints which affect agricultural productivity in Nigeria". The policy was expected to run from 2016 to 2020 (Table 3) and two of the APP priorities directly focused on food crisis issue:

Priority No. 3

Food as Human right

"Focusing the policy instruments for agricultural development on social responsibility of government with respect to food security, social security and equity in the Nigerian Society; and compelling the government to recognise, protect and fulfill the irreducible minimum degree of freedom of the people from hunger and malnutrition".

Priority No. 10
Nutrition sensitive agriculture

“Focusing policy instruments on addressing the issues of stunting, wasting, underweight and other manifestations of hunger and malnutrition with particular reference to the vulnerable groups, which include children under 5, nursing mothers and persons with chronic illness and disabilities”.

Besides agriculture sector-wide policies, there are sub-sectorial policies, which also aim at addressing food problem in the country. Two of these are listed in Table 3 viz: National Seed Policy (2014) and National Food and Nutrition Policy. The objectives of the National Seed Policy was to support and fast-track varietal development, registration and release of new crop varieties as well as the rapid multiplication of released varieties; improve the quality of seeds sold to farmers for higher yield and better income; encourage private sector participation in seed operations; etc. This also led to the establishment of the National Seed Council. Seeds are crucial inputs in crops production. Therefore, a National Seed Policy for Nigeria would be considered a well-intentioned policy. But, its only improvements in crops production and food availability that can really justify the enactment of this policy in 2014.

Another Nigeria's sub-sector specific policy relevant to our discussion on food crisis is the National Food and Nutrition Policy. The Policy document was to provide the framework for addressing the problems of food and nutrition insecurity in Nigeria, from the individual, household, community and up to the national level. The goal of the policy was to attain optimal nutritional status for all Nigerians, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents, women, elderly, and groups with special nutritional needs by 2025. The first objective of the policy speaks most directly to food crisis thus: “To improve food security at the national, community and household levels”.

Table 4: Selected Policies to Mitigate Food Crisis in Nigeria

Policy	Objective(s)
Agricultural Research Policy, 1971	Harmonising & coordinating agricultural research & extension linkages
Price Control Act, 1977	To prevent exploitation of consumers by producers; control inflation; help low-income earner; and control the profit of companies
New Agricultural Policy, 1988	Quickening growth in the agricultural sector through Accelerated Development Area Programme, Livestock Development Project & Rural Agro-Industrial Scheme
National Seed Policy, 2014	To support and fast track varietal development, registration and release of new crop varieties as well as the rapid multiplication of released varieties; improve the quality of seeds sold to farmers for higher yield and better income; encourage private sector participation in seed operations; etc
Agriculture Promotion Policy, 2016	Eliminating various constraints which affect agricultural productivity in Nigeria
National Policy on Food and Nutrition, 2016	To attain optimal nutritional status for all Nigerians by 2025

Source: Author's Compilation.

III. Causes of Food Crisis in Nigeria

Despite the various policies implemented, several factors have been identified in the literature as responsible for food crisis across the globe. However, in this paper factors responsible for food crisis in Nigeria are discussed under three headings, namely; (i) factors affecting food production, (ii) factors affecting consumers' food demand and, (iii) factors relating to policy.

Factors Affecting Food Production:

Several issues currently affect food production in Nigeria leading to the present wave of food crisis. We discuss only four of these factors below.

Insecurity. With the exception of the civil war years, Nigeria seems to have witnessed increased spate of insecurity in the past couple of years more than ever before. The insecurity is in the form of banditry (especially in sections of the North), herders-farmers conflicts, and sea piracy in coastal communities of South-South and political violence in the East. No section or region of the country is spared in this unfortunate development. Banditry (defined as a conflict caused by bandits, gunmen, robbers, and kidnappers) has overtaken political issues as the most critical cause of lethal conflicts in Nigeria. On daily basis, there are reports of escalating attacks on unarmed citizens and government security agents in states like Kaduna, Benue, Katsina, Imo and Osun states are the leading cause of violent conflicts in Nigeria.

The challenge of insecurity does not disrupt crop production only. It also extends to fishing sub-sector. Recent study (Ataire, 2021) reports of incessant attack of fishers by sea pirates in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State. Fishers lose their catch and fishing equipment to sea pirates on regular basis. Fishers make regular financial payment to the sea pirates to stem their molestation. Those who cannot pay are forced to stay away from their businesses. The resultant effect of piracy has been reduction in the quantity of fish and other aquatic products to consumers. Another dimension of insecurity leading to food insecurity is attack of traders by armed men along the roads. Where farmers or fishers manage to attend to their farms or go out to fish and produce food commodities, it is too risky to transport them to sections of the country in short supply due to banditry. All these contribute to food scarcity and rising food crisis in the country.

High cost of farm inputs. As with many other items in the Nigerian local markets, the prices of farm inputs have increased considerably over the past years. Most new varieties of seeds cannot be preserved for future planting as were local seeds. But they are the ones recommended and distributed to farmers by agricultural development agencies. So, instead of farmers having own seed for next season cultivation, they must buy seeds every planting season. This tends to increase the cost of production sometimes beyond the reach of the small farmers. Where farmers can buy these seeds, they naturally transfer the additional cost to consumers, thus setting in motion the spiral of price hikes leading to food crisis.

Poor infrastructure. Poor condition of roads in many parts of the country is a hindrance to food distribution. This, coupled with high cost of transportation due to increase cost of premium motor spirit (PMS) and diesel fuel, have made most foodstuffs beyond the reach of a lot of households especially the poor and the vulnerable. In addition, farmers in many parts of Nigeria do not have access to storage facilities for their produce. A lot of wastes occur, particularly of perishable commodities like fruits and vegetables, during the peak production season. This also contributes to food crisis in the country.

Weather-related events/climate change. Distinct weather-related incidents have caused disruption in food crop production. Some of these incidents are in part associated with climate change. Recent annual flooding of coastal communities has long-lasting adverse effect on wetlands agriculture and have impacted food availability in many parts of the country, and thus, contributed to the rise of food insecurity and food crisis. Temperature change has led to increasing desertification in the north, erratic and changing rainfall across the country, and increased flood risk in coastal regions along the major river systems. These changes make food production, distribution, and utilisation more vulnerable (Morgan & Fanzo, 2020).

Factors Affecting Consumers' Food Demand.

While no availability or lack of food commodities directly leads to food crisis, is also important the consumers' ability to demand the commodities when available. The interplay of production (supply) and demand of factors determine the extent of food crisis in a country. Some of these demand factors are discussed below.

Rising food prices. The prices of almost all food commodities have increased dramatically on local markets in Nigeria. This is happening without concomitant rise in wages. Between January 2020 and January 2021, the consumer price index has increased by 16.5 per cent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics data. This indicates that inflation has been constantly increasing. Inflation, it is well known, erode the ability of households, particularly, the poor and vulnerable households to attain food security.

Change in Food culture and Preference for Foreign Products. The past two decades have produced a dynamic shift in world diets for low and lower middle-income countries (Morgan & Fanz, 2020), including Nigeria. The head of the International Food Policy Research Institute stated in 2008 that the gradual change in diet among newly prosperous populations is the most important factor underpinning the rise in global food prices. Where food utilisation has increased, it has largely been in processed "value added" foods, sold in developing and developed nations.

Policy Related Factors

Policy Instability. Garba (2000) and Umoh (2013; 2017) have reported discontinuities in agricultural policies in Nigeria. The government itself acknowledges this fact in its opening statements in the Agricultural Promotion Policy: "Nigeria suffers from policy instability driven by high rate of turnover of programmes and personnel, which in turn has made the application of policy instruments unstable. The outcome is an uneven development pathway for agriculture; lack of policy accountability, transparency and due process of law, relating to willful violation of the constitution and subsidiary legislations governing the agriculture sector" (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, 2016). Policy instability/discontinuities adversely affect achievement of policy objectives and specific targets. This is also the case of policies targeted at food security in the country.

The Increase in the Pump price of fuel (premium motor spirit). Fuel (premium motor spirit) prices have been increased not less than two times in seven years (2015-2021). These increases directly translate to higher transportation cost. This is transmitted along the chain of businesses including agriculture. Thus, the increase in oil prices also affect the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural commodities, and hence food prices.

Rising Food Prices & Declining Household Purchasing Power. One of the factors causing food crisis in Nigeria is declining household purchasing power. With increasing unemployment, stagnant wages and rising inflation, consumer driven goods such as food are expected to experience a drop-in demand. This in turn affects the production of such goods. The 2019 fourth quarter Consumer Expectation Survey report released by the Central Bank of Nigeria predicted that purchasing power would drop by 2020. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) - a measure of inflation rate in the country, calculated for the period January 2020 to January 2021 shows rising CPI for the period. In January 2021, CPI in Nigeria stood at 361.2 while in January 2020 it was 310.2 (Table 5). This, shows that CPI increased by 16.5 per cent, indicating that inflation has been constantly increasing in the last months. Given that CPI is a measure that examines the changes in the purchasing power of a currency, the declining household purchasing power contributes to food crisis at both the household and national levels.

Table 5: Monthly Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Nigeria (Jan. 2020-Jan. 2021)

Month/Period	CPI
January, 2021	361.2
December, 2020	355.9
November, 2020	350.3
October, 2020	344.9
September, 2020	339.5
August, 2020	334.6
July, 2020	330.1
June, 2020	326.1
May, 2020	322.2
April, 2020	318.4
March, 2020	315.2
February, 2020	312.6
January, 2020	310.2

Source: National Bureau of Statistics.

VI. Averting the Looming Food Crisis in Nigeria: Recommendations

Nigeria has implemented some of the suggested actions such as Cash Transfer and policy to enhance access to inputs (e-wallet fertilizer purchase under Agricultural Transformation Agenda). However, it is yet to be seen how effective these policies and interventions have been in tackling the ravaging food crisis in Nigeria. This calls for a critical examination of the implementation of these policies. This paper identified some factors responsible for the current crisis, and should be addressed to prevent the country from plunging into famine. In this section, the "twin approach" to dealing with the urgent issue of food crisis is recommended.

The Twin-Track Approach

The twin-track approach requires specific and urgent attention to both short- and longer-term interventions to address food security and malnutrition. Both the short-term and long-term interventions should be implemented simultaneously and in a coordinated manner to successfully fight hunger. This is presented this under the sub-headings: Immediate term, and near-term policies.

Immediate Term Policies:

In the immediate term, attention should be paid to the immediate needs of those who are unable to meet their food and nutrition requirements. These are the poor, those living below the poverty line. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics reported that in 2020, 40.0 per cent or 83 million Nigerians lived in poverty. These numbers are expected to jump to 90 million or 45.0 per cent in 2021. To this end, the following specific policy actions are recommended:

- a. Establish Nigerian Fund for Food Security (NFFS): NFFS should be established and funded to ensure that the country attain food security in all its facets;
- b. Declare Food a Public Health Issue: Emergency food assistance and nutrition interventions should receive the level of attention as disaster management and other emergencies;
- c. Implement a policy of automatic indexation of wages and pensions: This is the automatic adjustment of wages and pension amounts based on fluctuations in the prices of consumer goods. This is to prevent households losing purchasing power due to inflation. This is an economic tool for dealing inflation to avoid endangering household's ability to afford essentials;
- d. Review existing Cash Transfers and other social protection instruments to address the peculiarities of the localities; and
- e. Improve Farmers' access to production inputs: Make agricultural production inputs more accessible. For example, the e-wallet fertilizer purchase model could be revisited.

Near-Term Interventions:

This should be geared towards building resilience and addressing the root causes of hunger. The key requirements are to:

- I. Improve agricultural productivity and enhance livelihoods;
- II. Develop and conserve natural resources, ensure access to productive resources;
- III. Expand rural infrastructure including capacity for food safety, plant, and animal health, and broaden market access;
- IV. Strengthen capacity for knowledge generation and dissemination;

- V. Policy Formulation and Implementation Policy Analysis in section 3 shows that Nigeria has had a plethora of policies aimed at making food available to the populace. The policies and food security seem to be moving in opposite direction. It is my opinion that the failure of policies may as well lie in the implementation phase of policy chain. Therefore, it is recommended that a policy be enacted to make no implementation or below-level implementation of agricultural policies, programmes and schemes a punishable offence in Nigeria. In addition, prescription of faulty policy should also be a punishable offence. The government cannot justifiably shy away from this responsibility. In 2009, an Italian court convicted seven scientists and experts of manslaughter for failing to adequately warn citizens before an earthquake struck L'Aquila in central Italy in 2009, killing more than 300 people. Each of the defendants was a member of the country's Grand Commission on High Risks. The event in Italy supports the assertion by Ekpo (2004) that: "*A mistake by a trained Medical Doctor may kill a few patients. A "bad economic theory and policy may destroy an entire economy and by implication kill millions of people"*". Nigeria has seen many policy failures. Along the entire policy making-implementation chain, someone should be held responsible for these failures;
- VI. Make the Universities Food Production Hubs. Globally, there is a paradigm shift in the way universities operate. Emphasis is tilting towards the Triple helix Innovation Model. It is the concept of the Triple Helix of university-industry-government relationships. The model can help the universities be more relevant and assist more in the fight against food crisis. As at 2020, there were 43 Federal universities in Nigeria. Most of these universities have run agricultural programmes. The Federal government who is the proprietor of these institutions should make a policy making them food production hubs. Each university is required to have 100 hectares of land to obtain approval to operate. Each of these universities and any federal university could be enabled by law to devote 10.0 per cent (10,000 hectares) of their land area solely to food production. This can add tremendously to food output and reduce the scores of Nigerians suffering from food crisis in their surrounding communities and nationally on the aggregate; and
- VII. Establish Climate Hubs. One of the domains for assessing food security is natural resources and resilience. Nigeria's GSFI score in the performance factor relating to her exposure to the impacts of a changing climate, its susceptibility to natural resource risks; and how the country is adapting to these risks, all of which impact the incidence of food insecurity in the country it can be inferred that a lot is required in this direction. Current efforts by government at addressing the challenge of climate change and its impacts, can be enhanced established "Climate Hub" in each State of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory to conduct researches

relevant to their localities and translate climate jargons into real-world advice for farmers and the locals on how best to survive more erratic and hotter climate. In many parts of the country, the locals do not have a good understanding of climate change and thus do not take adaptation seriously (Umoh, et al., 2013).

V. Conclusion

The government admits that “experience from these policies, programmes and projects have, however, convinced Nigerians that there is no alternative to well-designed and articulate agricultural policies as instruments for promoting agricultural growth and development” (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, 2016). Government and all those concerned with solving the problem of food crisis should be honest enough to try novel approaches. Doing the same thing same way and expecting different result is not likely to take the country out of the current food crisis. This should begin with honest formulation of policies that take the peculiarities of our localities into consideration, honest implementation of these policies and sanctioning of those who contribute to policy failure at any level. Policies should be allowed to run their full course with only honest adjustment of strategies if need be but staying focused on policies’ aims and objectives. In this way, the desire to achieve national food security can be achieved.

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