

Averting the Looming Food Crisis: A Clarion Call to Immediate and Near-term Policy Action

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I. Introduction

Food is defined by Britannica, a web-based encyclopedia, as any substance consisting of protein, carbohydrate, fat, and other nutrients used in the body of an organism to sustain growth and vital processes, and to furnish energy.⁸ In a similar definition, Wikipedia described food as any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for an organism; adding that food is usually of plant, animal or fungal origin, and contains essential nutrients.

The above definitions explain why food is viewed as an essential need of life. However, the production of food has been declining in recent times for some reasons, including the adverse impacts of climate change. In this dialogue, we argue that the world may be heading for a terrible food crisis in a short while if this trend is not averted. Thus, the paper focuses on some of these issues and provides recommendations to avert the looming food crisis.

II. Arising Issues Leading to Food Scarcity in Nigeria

1. Population explosion

Nigeria, according to an online poll, is projected to have grown to a population of 268 million. The high population growth in Nigeria has overstretched all sectors of the economy, leading to high cost of living. Fan and Besong (2010) identified the factors responsible for the population explosion in Nigeria to include high birth rate, low death rate, and immigration.

Rural-urban migration has also been a major challenge to food production in Nigeria. According to a World Bank data sheet, there has been a steady decrease in the number of rural dwellers, leaving only 48.0 per cent of Nigeria's population

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⁸ Accessed on 3rd September, 2021 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/food>.

living in the agrarian communities as at 2020.⁹ This implies that the rural labour force for agriculture in the rural area is fast reducing, even as the country's population is increasing. In other words, whereas the country is experiencing population increase, the workforce required to produce the quantity of food needed to feed the population is declining. This is a growing concern requiring a conscious policy to tackle.

2. Climate change

Though a global phenomenon, climate change is an important factor that is actively negating food availability for the growing population of Nigeria. The inconsistency coming with weather element prediction is increasing at an alarming rate. The climatic distribution usually adopted to fix crops to zones is currently being threatened. Farmers now experience unexpected drought and sometimes flooding. This has, in no small measure, affected the productivity of farmers.

3. Security concerns

The spate of crises between pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria has been exacerbated due to climate change. As we are fast experiencing changes in rainfall patterns, migration of animals is increasing from the North to the South in search of pasture. This sort of migration often causes series of conflicts over land resources; thus, leading to security concerns arising from increased tension amongst the sedentary crop farmers and nomadic herders. The implication of these crises is a further reduction in the size of farming population, which in turn leads to a gross reduction in the quantity of produce per year. This is a growing concern, and it is also a factor contributing to the looming food crisis, if not checked.

4. Reduction in the number of food processing centres

Because of several factors around the ease of doing business in Nigeria, some processing companies are folding up or downsizing, leading to reduced demand for farm produce. This sometimes leads to massive post-harvest losses and discourage more people from going into agricultural production. Most processing centres operating in Nigeria face business challenges that render them uncompetitive, compared with their counterparts in advanced countries.

⁹ Accessed from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL?locations=NG>

5. Inadequate storage facilities

There is insufficient storage facilities in Nigeria, as quite a number of the existing ones are becoming moribund. Those available are either not properly maintained, old fashioned, or not upgraded.

III. Immediate Action Plans to Curb Looming Crisis

Having discussed some of the factors contributing to food insecurity, this section highlights some short- and long-term remedial measures for preventing possible food crisis in Nigeria.

III.1 Short term remediating policies

1. Encourage fully mechanised farms

The practice of subsistence agriculture is basically out of fashion as it is no longer relevant in this century. An important factor contributing to low mechanised farming is the declining contribution of development partners to smallholder farmers. This calls for more sustainable means of agricultural financing in the country. Policies should also be designed around fully mechanised farming, especially when a minimum of 250 hectares is cultivated for various crops in clusters. This will afford the use of mechanised and precision implements on the field. The use of small capacity tractors should also be totally discouraged, except for minor operations on the farm. It is important that the use of highly efficient tractors and implement is consistently encouraged.

A fully mechanised farm requires less persons on the farm as most of the operations are automated. This is the way forward if we intend to produce enough food to feed the growing population and mitigate the possibility of food crisis.

2. Encourage the establishment of cluster farms

Isolated farms are commonly faced with the perennial problems of theft and picketing, higher cost of production, and farm invasion. On the other hand, clustered farms/farming zones enhance shared economy, which helps to reduce the cost of production. It also helps to reduce incidences of theft and invasion of farms by criminal elements. The CBN, in collaboration with other relevant agencies of government, should promote the establishment of farm settlements. It is also important that such farm clusters are provided with farm implements and infrastructure to encourage seamless production of crops in the different geo-political zones of Nigeria.

3. Establishment of processing centres

Policies should be tailored towards the establishment of food processing centres in the farm clusters. This will help to reduce the costs associated with food processing. In the case of cassava, for instance, its useful part is just about 30.0 per cent maximum. The other components are water and fibre, which are removed at processing stage. If we have farm gate processing centres around the farm location, the cost of transporting the tuber from the farm to the factory will be substantially reduced, if not eliminated. The savings from such cost reduction can then be used to move more semi-processed/finished product to the factory/market. This will reduce the overall cost of production and encourage increased production of food, both for domestic consumption and exports.

III.2 Long Term Policies

1. Encourage/strengthen Local Governments/private investors

The Local Government Authorities (LGAs) should be encouraged to establish food processing centres within their jurisdictions. Such centres should be those that are required for the processing of crops in which the LGAs have comparative advantage. Each local government should identify their strength as far as food production is concerned and establish storage/processing/value addition centres that will allow for immediate mop-up of harvested produce, thereby curbing post-harvest losses to the barest minimum.

2. Establish mop-up centre/commodity board in each production locality

This approach has been used previously in the farm settlements, where farmers from different locations move their produce to a central point where they can be bought, stored, or preserved. The farmers are happy to get their produce exchanged for money without much ado about looking for customers and the commodities are also aggregated and sold in bulk either for export or as input for industries.

IV. Conclusion

It is possible to avert the looming food crisis in Nigeria. In this dialogue, we highlighted some of the factors contributing to food insecurity; and proposed some short- and long-term measures for enhancing food production and processing. It is important that policies should be developed around these identified remedial measures to prevent possible food crisis in the country.

References

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