

## Food Security in Nigeria and South Africa: Policies and Challenges

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**KEYWORDS** Affordable Food. Access to Food. Nutrition Insecurity. Policies and Strategies

**ABSTRACT** This paper highlights food security situation and reflects on the challenges of food security in two sub-Saharan African countries: Nigeria and South Africa. Over the years, Nigeria and South Africa have made several attempts to address the issue of increased affordable food production in both quantity and quality. Some of these attempts have cumulated into several programmes and projects aimed at boosting agricultural production. Commendable as some of these policies and programs are, it would appear that the goal of food security might not be achieved with these initiatives alone in the respective countries. A number of challenges appear to limit effective implementation of these strategies. Therefore, in order to exploit the benefit of food security policies in the two countries, there may be need to share experiences between Nigeria and South Africa with the overall purpose of reducing food insecurity.

### INTRODUCTION

Plummeting food insecurity continues to be a major public policy challenge in developing countries. Achievement of food security in any country is typically an insurance against hunger and malnutrition, both of which hinder economic development (Davies 2009). This is why all developed and some developing countries make considerable efforts to increase their food production capacity. Approximately one billion people worldwide are undernourished, many more suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, and the absolute numbers tend to increase further, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO 2008). The World Food Conference defined food security simply as: “availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food-stuffs” (United Nations 1975). The World Bank proposed a definition of food security which remains current today, broadening the emphasis from food availability to include access to food, and narrowing the focus from the global and national to households and individuals: “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (World Bank 1986).

According to IFSS (2002), this definition has different but inter-related components: food availability, the effective or continuous supply of food at both national and household level which affected by input and output market condition, as well as production capabilities of the agricultural sector; food access or effective demand, the ability of nations and household to acquire sufficient food on sustainable basis and addresses issues of purchasing power and consumption behaviour; reliability of food, the utilisation and consumption of safe and nutritious food and food distribution, refers to equitable provision of food to points of demand at the right time and place. This spatial/time aspect of food security relates to the fact that a country might be food secure at the national level, but still have local pockets of food insecurity, at various periods of the agricultural cycle (IFSS 2002). The opposite of food security is food insecurity (Devereux et al. 2008). This refers to lack of access to an adequate diet which can be either temporary (transitory food insecurity) or continuous (chronic food insecurity). Food insecurity continues to be a key development problem across the globe, undermining people’s health, productivity, and often their very survival (Smith and Subandoro 2007).

Since the attainment of food security in any country is usually an insurance against hunger and malnutrition, both of which slow down economic development (Davies 2009), all

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developed and developing countries must provide policies and strategies to increase their food production capacity. Generally, a country is food-secure when a majority of its population have access to food in sufficient quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times (Reutlinger 1985; Idachaba 2004). It has been documented since the 1980s, that the achievement of food security requires paying attention to supply-side, which can be secured through agricultural production, commercial imports or food aid and on the demand-side food has to be safe, nutritious, and appropriate to meet food preferences (Devereux et al. 2008).

Besides being the leading economies in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria and South Africa together account for over 20 percent of sub-Saharan Africa population. Over the years, Nigeria and South Africa have made several attempts to address the issue of increased food production in both quantity and quality. Some of these attempts have cumulated into several programmes and projects aimed at boosting agricultural production. The central objective of these programmes was to increase food production thereby solving the problem of food insecurity and poverty. Despite successive strategies and programmes implemented by both countries, food and nutrition insecurity are still rampant in these two countries. Food security policies and strategies appears to yield dividends in some cases, however, absence of official bilateral exchange of strengths and weaknesses of each country's food security strategies seems to limit the potentials of policies in ensuring food security in both countries.

In Nigeria, for instance, successive governments came up with different programmes and policies such as (1) Operation Feed the Nation, mass mobilization and mass awareness programme on food production; (2) the River Basin Development Authority aimed at harnessing the potential of existing water bodies through irrigation services, fishery development and control of flood, water pollution and erosion; (3) Agricultural Development Project aimed at enhancing the technical and economic efficiencies of small-scale farmers (4) Green Revolution aimed at accelerating the achievement of the general agricultural sub-sector objectives; (5) the National Special Food Security Programme was aimed at offering a practical vehicle for piloting and eventually extending the

application of innovative low cost approaches both technical and institutional to improving the productivity and sustainability of agricultural system with the ultimate objective of contributing to better livelihoods for poor farmers on a sustainable basis and (6) the National Fadama Development Project (Fadama I, II, and III) aimed at addressing some of the factors that militate against the full realization of the potential benefit of agricultural production activities. According to Blench and Ingawa (2003), the Fadama projects were aimed at increasing the incomes of Fadama users who depend directly or indirectly on Fadama resources through empowering communities to take charge of their own development schedule.

On the other hand, South Africa embarked on Farmer Support Programmes (FSP) aimed at stimulating rural development, land reform aimed at facilitating access to land for previously disadvantaged groups, deregulation of the agricultural sector, (especially the maize sector), establishment of National Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS).

Laudable as these policies and programs were in both countries, it would appear that the goal of food security might not have been achieved with these initiatives alone. There may be the need for sharing of food policy experiences between these countries with the view to maximising strengths and minimising weaknesses. It is against this backdrop that this paper highlights some of the policies and challenges of food security in both Nigeria and South Africa.

### **FOOD SECURITY STATUS**

Despite agricultural policies and strategies in both Nigeria and South Africa, food insecurity remains a fundamental challenge in both Nigeria (Hall 2002) and South Africa (Machethe 2004).

In Nigeria for instance, although agriculture remains a key component of the Nigerian economy, contributing about 41% of GDP and employing about 70% of the active population, it receives less than 10% of the annual budgetary allocations. As a result, the agricultural sector has significantly underperformed given its vast potential. Consequently, Nigerian agriculture has failed to supply sufficient food in quantity and quality to feed the constantly growing population. Therefore, the level of food insecurity in Nigeria has continued to increase steadily since

the 1980s. Food insecurity rose from about 18% in 1986 to about 41% in 2004 (Sanusi et al. 2006), with an estimated population of 150 million, this implies that over 61 million Nigerians are food insecure, that is are either hungry, under nourished, or starving. This is not surprising given that about 52% of the population live under the poverty line

Notwithstanding the fact that the goal of food self-sufficiency has been achieved largely in South Africa in terms of surplus being produced in most of the agricultural commodities, large inequities, and inefficient food distribution networks and high levels of malnutrition are experienced (van Zyl and Kirsten 1992) especially among the majority rural poor communities. According to Machethe (2004), there are an estimated 14 million households vulnerable to food insecurity in South Africa, implying that about 31% of an estimated population of 45 million are food insecure. McLachlan and Kuzwayo (1997) reported that women and children bear the long-term consequences of food insecurity because of the negative impact on their learning capacity and productivity in adult life. Thus, even though South Africa may well have sufficient food available at the national level, access is a problem for many South Africans.

### **FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES**

Achieving food security in its totality continues to be a challenge as both countries face a wide spectrum of food security problems. First and foremost, the primary cause of food insecurity in developing countries is the inability of people to gain access to food due to poverty. Nigeria and South Africa face household food insecurity problems: the major causes being widespread poverty and unemployment. Compounding the problem of poverty is the global rise in food prices. Food price volatility has exerted considerable pressure on global (South Africa and Nigeria included) food security. The average increase in food prices contributed significantly to increase in food security. Until increases in food production are followed by steady supply all year round, increase in productivity will be made meaningless by rise in prices. Another related issue to high food prices is high cost of inputs which limit yield and production levels as a result of high cost of production.

Specifically, some of the challenges of food security in Nigeria according to FMAWR (2008), can be attributed to factors such as; (1) More than 90 percent of agricultural output is accounted for by households with less than 2 hectares under cropping, (2) Supply of agricultural inputs has also been generally sub-optimal, for instance Nigerian fertilizer consumption is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa at 7kg/hectare, (3) Farmers have limited access to credit, and less than 10 percent of irrigable land is under irrigation and (4) On the processing front, Nigeria loses significant value of between 15-40 percent of products from its inability to process most of its agricultural production. Other challenges are rapid population increases and lack of correct estimate of food deficits or surpluses which tends to further undermine Nigeria's food security situation. A correct estimate of food deficits or surpluses in a country depends mainly on the accuracy of base line information on food requirements and food supply (Davies 2009). Compounding the crisis is the apparent inconsistency in government's policy formulation and implementation strategies.

In contrast, the main challenges undermining South Africa's ability to achieve food security is the fact that South African agriculture is made up of a dualistic or bi-modal production structure consisting mainly of few commercial farmers producing for local and export markets while subsistence farmers predominantly produce for household consumption only (Backeberg and Sanewe 2010). Furthermore, poor land distribution, inadequate and unstable household food production, lack of purchasing power, weak support networks and disaster management systems, poor nutritional status and inadequate safety nets (IFSS 2002) have contributed to the food security situation in South Africa.

Besides the specific challenges faced by these countries, common challenges are; barriers to market access (especially for smallholder farmers), effects of globalization, disease and infection (HIV/AIDS) and poor policies. These challenges have far reaching consequences for weak households, in addition to a range of other household level challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although food production has increased in both countries over the years, it appears that

increasing food production through policies of food self-sufficiency, may not automatically guarantee that people have enough to eat. According to van Zyl and Kirsten (1992), to be self-sufficient in food is only one minor element of a food security strategy. Therefore, this situation requires a re-examination of the policy of self-sufficiency because the concept of food security goes beyond the simple idea of a country's inability to feed its population.

Whilst strategies aimed at mechanized, irrigation farming and promotion of large processing outlets have helped to ensure improved agricultural production in South Africa, the distribution and empowerment of agricultural resources in the hands of the majority of rural poor has been very poor, leading to high population of food insecure in the mist of plenty. Conversely, in Nigeria, over dependence on rain-fed, peasant agriculture, lack of industrialization, lack of effective irrigation, lack of efficient post harvest handling during storage, transportation and so on have compounded the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria.

Enhancing access to productive resources such as land, technology and credit to the poor (including women) in both countries would pave way for food security. Studies (Okuneye 2002; and Rosen and Shapouri 2008) have shown that high food prices have implication for food security because food price is also a function of food availability. Therefore, ensuring food availability via storage mechanism could stem the increase in food insecurity. Instituting an effective system of food reserves in both countries can address hunger and stabilize food prices for both farmers and consumers thereby suppressing hunger and reversing the trend of food insecurity. Since food insecurity in Nigeria and South Africa is directly related to poverty, it is necessary to not only alleviate poverty but also generate wealth for the target population.

While Nigeria is a major importer of major food staples, South Africa an exporter of major food staples because of commercialization of agricultural production. As a result, South Africa is unlikely to appear in the 'high risk' category in any international rating of food security. In order to maximize the benefits of food security policies in the two countries, there may be need to share experiences between Nigeria and South Africa with the overall goal of minimizing food insecurity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Author is very grateful to the Education Trust Fund (ETF), Abuja, Nigeria, for financial support and University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria for granting study leave.

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