Pitting the State of Food Security against Some Millennium Development Goals in a Few Countries of the Developing World

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to explore the state of food security by pitting the state with the progress made towards attainment of the MDGs in a few countries of the developing world. Findings indicate that though many countries have developed various projects towards the attainment of food security friendly MDGs, immense food crisis stubbornly persist. This food insecurity or food crisis has been exacerbated by various factors such as feminization of food production, unfavourable weather conditions and phenomenal population growth. This paper recommends that food security programmes in developing countries need to address food insecurity by making these programmes sustainable and increase their agricultural production. A paradigm shift that will see democratization of leadership and economic structures will hopefully facilitate or expedite the amelioration of food production and therefore the fulfilment of food security friendly MDGs.

INTRODUCTION

Indubitably, food insecurity is and remains a recurrent glaring challenge affecting many countries of the world, with developing ones bearing the brunt edge of the phenomenon. The international community is of the view that managing food security is vital as it is one of the measures to address goal number one of the Millennium Development Goals that envisage addressing poverty and extreme hunger among the people of different countries (FAO 2012). Although immense literature has defined the concept food security, these researchers have found it plausible to define the concept food insecurity. This is because they find food insecurity as the challenge that needs to be addressed timeously. To this end, food insecurity refers to the social, economic and emotional problems that stem from the lack of food to meet body's physiological and nutritional needs (Lee and Frongilo 2001). Phillips (2009) states that the concerns about food insecurity may also include issues of population growth, control, morbidity as well as the distribution of resources, consumption of the resources, production of food, environmental management, climate change, economic and social development, land ownership, human rights and healthcare access.

However, to succinctly evaluate the state of food security and MDGs calls for an analysis of the progress made by every country towards the set standards. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which range from halving extreme poverty to stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education by the set target date of 2015 form the blueprint goals and targets that were agreed upon in year 2000 by a greater part of the global community (MDG Report 2013). Phillips (2009) also states that though these MDGs are a splendid phenomenon, but still many countries remain far from reaching the desired targets and much progress that had been made has been eroded by the global food prices and economic crises. Importantly, working stock at the MDG target to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger is extremely important in the developing states where food security has become increasingly problematic (Love et al. 2006). However, in this paper, it has been noted that several MDGs have a link with food security, or food insecurity thereof. Therefore, these researchers consider it pertinent to address MDGs number one, three and five.

Problem Statement

Widespread concerns of hunger and malnutrition in the developing countries have left the international community perturbed if many nations will ever reach the set target of MDGs by

the year 2015. In the developing world, with Africa leading the pack, substantial progress towards many goals, targets and indicators of the MDGs is beyond doubt. At the same time, serious challenges remain especially in translating economic growth into decent job opportunities, improving service delivery and minimizing income, gender and spatial inequalities. These challenges relegate the poor to a state of food poverty, and the measures to mitigate food insecurity are still cosmetic and lacking sustainability beyond the set target of 2015. However, these factors have prompted the researchers to robustly consider looking into food security and the prevalent gaps that are halting the progress towards the attainment of the MDGs. Also, this paper will act as an advocacy platform to advocate for policy reinstatement and further come up with possible recommendations to address food insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper, through a literature review methodology evaluates the deterrent factors that unrelentlessly continue to impede the progress towards food security and the attainment of the MDGs. The paper has borrowed heavily from journals reporting on food security, government and United Nations publications and other eclectic literature sources. This paper is an assessment or reflection towards the progress made towards the attainment of MDGs as the stock taking button nears to show red.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Factors Impeding the Attainment of Food Security and the MDGs Target

Food Crisis

Incontrovertibly, many countries, especially from the African continent have intermittently and frequently suffered food crisis. Policy wise, governments have an obligation to address food crises to bolster and secure the lives of its citizens. This is why the issue of food production, management and control remains some of the important global agenda especially under the auspices of the United Nations. The developing countries have a duty to address this glaring problem of food insecurity despite the huge impacts on its population growth and capacities thereof. According to MDG Report (2013), Africa is the second fastest growing region and poverty had declined in a faster rate since 2005 than the 1990-2005, period but still this rate is not fast enough to reach the 2015 target. Food insecurity is escalating and this is caused by the low supply that does not tally with the high demand part. To this end, Misselhorn et al. (2012) are of the view that increased food production remains a cornerstone strategy in the efforts to alleviate global food insecurity. Although global food production has been kept ahead of the demand, presently approximately one billion people do not have enough to eat and a further billion lack proper and adequate nutrition (Misselhorn et al. 2012).

In the year 2012, for example, statistics revealed that African countries especially in the Southern Eastern, Central and Western regions had the world's second highest Global Hunger Index and most of these regions where identified as having alarming levels of hunger (MDG 2013). According to Love et al. (2006), Africa's population is expected to reach 1.2 billion by the year 2020, but what is more worrying is the fact that an estimation of 25 percent will be undernourished and living in dry lands of sub-Saharan Africa. To make matters worse, the sub-Saharan region has been affected by declines in food production and thereby negatively affecting the progress towards the attainment of MDGs by the set target of 2015.

Undesirable, food insecurity is grave in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. This is due to severe droughts for a protracted period of time. This food crisis has also affected the Horn of Africa region. According to World Food Programme (WFP) (WFP 2011), severe droughts have threatened the livelihoods of more than 13.3 million people within the region. This threat has in turn resulted into many people from Somalia migrating to Ethiopia and Kenya in desperation as they search for food and other resources for survival (Woldetsadick 2012).

The 2011 Horn of Africa food crisis was caused by varying factors that are different from the previous food shortages caused by limited rain fall. The World Food Programme (WFP) and other humanitarian strategies have come to a conclusion that the food crisis was caused by population growth that does not tally with the resources available during the long period of

drought. In other worlds, the supply is low yet the demand is rising and thereby leading to starvation, hunger, and sometimes death (Woldetsadick 2012). These researchers view the situation of the horn of Africa as an important one. They believe that humanitarian aid is not a solution, but a long term solutions to mitigate the effect needs to be sought.

Feminization of Food Production

As the Millennium Development Goals stock taking draws nearer, it is an incontrovertible fact that poverty and food insecurity embrace a state of gender bias. Millennium Development Goal Report (2013) notes that gender-based inequalities still persist in public and private areas. There is huge recognition that women play a central role in food security and therefore feminization of poverty and food security greatly affects capacities to produce (Phillips 2009). Observably, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men in various structures of life, whether in government, private sector, NGOs, business, and in leadership. These researchers view this scenario as perpetuation of patriarchy. This case is evidently depicted in the Horn of Africa region where still the worst affected people by the food crisis are women. In partiarchal deriven societies in particular, the responsibility to fend for the family has been placed on the shoulders of women. This presents a sad state of affairs that needs to be reversed if countries are to achieve Millennium Development Goal number three that envisage seeing women achieve equality and equity with men. Woldetsadick (2012) argues that the MDGs cannot advance meaningfully in the horn of Africa where women continue to face structural and social discrimination when compared to their male counterparts. Women, due to patriarchal practices continue to bear the brunt edge of economic deprivations. To add insult to injury, many men have abandoned their responsibilities of being bread winners and relegated it to women. These are scenario that can explain the phenomenon of feminization of women. This largely explains why efforts to bolster food security in patriarchal driven societies continue to move at snail's pace or a lagged-out-process. This also explains why the pace towards attaining MDG number three has also not been making significant scores.

Unfavourable Weather Conditions

Undeniably, climate change has been depicted as the world's casual factor to food insecurity. This is mainly affecting the communities that are glued to agriculture. To this end, Misselhorn et al. (2012) postulate that not only does climate change affects food security, but also human activities that determine food production, supply and management. These researchers are of the view that climate change has contributed to an increase in food prices and has dislocated the people who used to be farmers from their indigenous economic pursuits like agriculture. Climate change has especially negatively affected smallholder farmers. This has grave consequences in that these farmers have been forced to change their consumption pattern to fit the rich people's calendar since they have advanced technological techniques to produce food. This situation has even led to de-agrarianisation in many places (International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) 2005).

Clara and Du Toit (2007:5), state that 'de-agrarianisation has reached alarming levels in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, with rural households intensely dependent on social grants for survival.' This has had the impact of agricultural activities changing goals posts with the result that people's food systems have declined due to the state support in the form of grants and also the unfavourable weather conditions. Only a small portion of people are still making a living from farming and this has crippled communities in their bid to solve issues of poverty and food insecurity (Clara and Du Toit 2007). In a way, the state welfare system have in a huge way de-motivated the people to carry out farming, but instead turning out to depend on the grants for survival. This is scaring if South Africa is to address the state of poverty of its population. Infact, statistics indicates that over 50 percent of the South African population lies below the poverty datum line (National Treasury 2007). Recent information from the Statistics South Africa has revealed that about 30 percent of the South African population solely rely on grants for their livelihoods. This is economic suicidal and an indication that the government of the day is failing to mobilize and sensitize its population to attain economic Independence (Gutura 2011). With the South African economy continuing to slide downwards, this state of de-

pendence on the grants has to change, otherwise it is not sustainable. Majority of these smallholder farmers are unable to rely on their farming to feed their families because of the narrow production base that they are subjected to. These farmers are now deficit producers who have become the net consumers of purchased commodities. This has caused the black majority to be subjected to white people's food production calendar. These researchers term this situation as 'food apartheid' because of the dominion power that the whites are still having and the sky rocketing prices that favour them as producers. In as much as the whites are a minority group, they are in full control of the production system. This in a way leaves most South Africans vulnerable to food insecurity because they are now purchasing food stuff not because they want to, but they are forced by the harsh environmental conditions they face (IFPRI 2005).

These researchers hold the opinion that South African food security status is misleading and varies from one context to another. This is because a larger population is suffering from food poverty. These researchers also view the country of South Africa, despite it being called a rainbow nation because of co existence of different races with different socio-economic statuses, as one with a *rainbow food security*. While the minority white community is immensely food secure and driver of the South African's food market and therefore occupying their own socio-economic rainbow status, conversely we have the majority black population which is very food insecure and therefore occupying their own food insecurity niche. In a way, the food security in South Africa is much skewed. This justifies viewing the state of food security in South Africa displaying a food security rainbow (De Klerk 2004).

Phenomenal Population Growth vis-à-vis Food Production in the Horn of Africa

Although the MDG goal 5 on the attainment of health care services in the Horn of Africa is on course, there have been some gaps that have played a significant contributory factor to food insecurity. Population growth poses immense challenge. Population growth has been increased by poverty, limited access to health care services such as the availability of contraceptives and high levels of illiteracy especially among wom-

en (UNDP 2010). Therefore, there appears an inextricable relationship between poverty and increased population growth (MDG 2013). The argument goes that because of lack of recreational facilities such as televisions and money to go for outings, poor people solely rely on sex overtures as the only source of recreation. No wonder in many countries of the developed world where people are economically stable and can afford requisite recreational facilities, they have a lower population growth index. This sharply contrasts with poor or poorer countries whose population growth is usually higher. A comparison of countries such as Sweden and any one of the poorer African countries' population growth rates can incontrovertibly prove an inextricable relationship between poverty and higher population growth (Woldetsadick 2012).

Zimbabwe: A Shift From a Net Exporter to a Net Importer

Observation of the economic position of Zimbabwe since the beginning of the 21st century shows phenomenal changes that have embraced especially the economic and social landscapes of the country (UNDP 2010). Bad political climate has been blamed for the phenomenon. This has seen the country that was once the Southern African region's food basket and an exporter degenerate to a net importer of food (Francis and Aksoy 2008). These researchers postulate that this trend from being a net exporter to a net importer has serious implications associated with food security; and of course the lives of the Zimbabweans. This also poses serious challenges towards the fulfilment and attainment of MDGs by the year 2015 (UNDP 2010). It is to this end that the ZIMVAC Report (2010) had estimated that 1.3 million Zimbabweans were to be food insecure during the period of February and March of 2011. However, these researchers contend that it is the decline in agriculture which has had a knock-on-effect on the country's economy, especially threatening industrialisation (ZIMVAC Report 2010).

According to the ZIMVAC Report (2010), the crisis period from the year 2000 affected Zimbabwe's strong inter-sectoral linkages between manufacturing and agriculture. By 2008, the capacity utilisation in industry had declined to 10 percent resulting in a high unemployment rate and a critical lack of basic commodities within

the nation. To date, Zimbabwe is still faced with a situation of high unemployment, underemployment and subsequently low productivity. These researchers, one a Zimbabwean national considers it pertinent to link Zimbabweans economic woes to its political stance, usually devoid of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech and association, as well as being militant to those holding contrary and different views. As long as the political hegemony of the ruling party is in power, probably problems such as food security may take a snail's pace to be tackled (UNDP 2010).

The International Community Pushing the Implementation of MDGs in Tandem with Other Latent Political Agenda

To say the least, MDGs remain invaluable and significant benchmarks that continue to direct the growth and development of most countries of the globe. Although MDGs are a noble and a desirable phenomenon to many countries, different players have interpreted political environment associated with the MDGS as a de-incentive towards the attainment of the set goals. However, proponents against westernization feel that MDGs besides harbouring positive agenda also carry latent mischievous motives. In some countries like Myanmar, for example, the pursuit of Millennium Development Goals such as poverty alleviation harbours some other sinister motives of achieving political change (Ware 2011). This, therefore, has made the government of Myanmar to repel and accept the assistance package with immense suspicion. Since the government is the main player to domesticate, and push for the MDG's success, this may not be achieved, or its progress may move at a lagged-out-process. This means that significant progress may not have been made when the MDG hour of reckoning tickles (Ware 2011).

In Africa, food insecurity has become a recurrent problem that needs serious interventions to tackle the challenge. The MDG Report (2013) views that food insecurity in many countries such as Zimbabwe, is a result of multifaceted factors such as bad political climate, weak private sector and civil society involvement. Observably, Zimbabwean food insecurity suffers from being feminized. In the same vein, it is still more women than men who experience higher prevalence rate of poverty, with female-headed households bearing the brunt edge of it. This may explain the situation of feminization of poverty in Zimbabwe (Musekiwa 2013; Kang'ethe 2013). No country is known better than Zimbabwe for having its food security interfered by bad political climate. The phenomenal changes have for instance led to informalisation of employment sectors like food processing and textile industry. These sectors were mainly dominated by women but they collapsed (Zimbabwe Status Report 2010). For example, during the year 2006 and 2009, the percentage of food insecure urban households increased from 24 percent to 33 percent (ZVAC 2009). According to ZVAC (2009:18), it is indicated that, "...the proportion of people consuming adequate dietary diversity declined from 87 percent to 59 percent. Food purchase (70%) and own production (15%) were the major sources of food for urban households."

Sustainability of the Progress Made Towards the Achievement of MDGs

One of the glaring concerns in many developing countries is how to make the progress that has been made in terms of alleviating poverty and food insecurity sustainable. Loopholes towards food security progress and its sustainability have been noted as the policy makers strive to achieve them without taking into considerations the quality, equality and sustainability of the progress so far made. This act of negligence on the part of the policy makers could in a way further stimulate chronic food shortages or poverty (MDG Report 2013). According to MDG report (2013), the urgency must be tempered by the vital nature of sustaining the progress on Millennium Developmental Goals beyond 2015. Noted is the fact that some of the developmental challenges which slow progress in some instances will still persist even beyond the bench mark target of 2015. Misselhorn (2005) postulates that food crises together with persistent food shortages lead to compromised human well-being, hunger and malnutrition, and thereby causing serious challenges to the government and the non-governmental institutions offering help to the needy.

Regrettably and for a long time, humanitarian support or aid is one of the measures that most countries have looked or offered to the people, but the sustainability of such measures

is debatable. Berry et al. (2004) state that humanitarian interventions are more effective at meeting immediate needs, but having a low impact on solving long term measures. They should serve the role of being remedial and should stop immediately a crisis is over. Unfortunately in many cases of humanitarian assistance in many poor countries, the situation has created dependence syndrome (Gutura 2011). In the case of South Africa, the government has perfected social assistance in the form of various types of grants to the resource poor. However, this grant system has received much criticism for being inadequate and not a durable or sustainable solution to address poverty or food insecurity in the long run. These researchers take this forum to warn governments advancing social assistance such as South Africa to be precautious to make sure that those who are assisted are also exposed to further avenues of training, job preparedness so that they may not be subject of dependence syndrome (Kang'ethe 2014). To say the least, social assistance or welfare service in South Africa has become a fiscal burden to the government budget (Tanga 2007). According to Tanga (2007), it has been revealed that none of the grants is sufficient to maintain the recipient of the grant, let alone the whole family. Thus, this leaves the sustainability of such welfare assistance an unsustainable one and lacking any developmental component. It is not a viable avenue of addressing food security.

Theoretical Framework

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)

This paper utilizes the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) as a frame of reference. To succinctly understand the concept of sustainable livelihoods, it is imperative to first define the term livelihoods. A livelihood comprises of the capabilities, assets and activities to facilitate a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base (Solesbury 2003). Solesbury (2003) notes that the emergence of the sustainable livelihoods paradigm represented classic paradigm shift in the development glossary which has conceptually drawn on changing views on poverty, recognized the diversity of aspirations, the importance of assets in communities, and the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures and processes in various donor and development agencies.

This Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is a tool often used by development agencies for planning and assessing development interventions. It focuses on how people strategically use the resources available to them to forge livelihoods, and how development interventions affect the available resources and the way people interact with them (Solesbury 2003). The sustainable livelihoods approach, therefore, considers vulnerability as the main factor that shapes how people make their living.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the attainment of the MDGs remains a major concern as the target date draws closer. To say the least, gaps impeding the achievement of these MDGS have succinctly been revealed, and they include unfavourable weather conditions, food crises, feminization of food production and bad political climate. Critically, bad political climate has played a significant role in slowing down the progress made in the attainment of the MDGs and their sustainability thereof. However, the situation of food security in many nations remains a paramount goal to be addressed if several or all of the MDGs have to be met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustainability

These researchers recommend that there is a need for the policy makers to rethink about the sustainability of policies they set. Optimistically, three main facets must be satisfied for food security to be met throughout the globe. These facets include food availability (supply), food affordability (pricing) and food accessibility (demand). These researchers, however, suggest that for these three facets to be met, first, each country has to be able to identify its needs and set up community development projects in accordance with achievable and sustainable measures to solve the issues of food insecurity and at the same time meet the MDG targets. Also, there is a need to borrow a leaf from those countries that were food insecure but have now bridged the gap.

Increase in Food Production

As a way to address the glaring problem of food security in developing countries, there is need to increase agricultural productivity and product quality so as to ensure that what these countries produce is competitive in both domestic and the international markets. In a Country like Zimbabwe, there is a need to create a conducive environment to facilitate effectuation of sustainable development and improvements in both the economic and politics of their countries.

Development Should be Prioritized and Respect Hierarchy of Needs

These researchers believe that there is a need to assess the environment first before setting up plans like the MDGs. This is evident in the country where there are wars. These researchers believe that such states need peace first before any other developmental oriented goal can then be accomplished.

Optimistically, there is need for the international community to consider two broad requirements for the MDGs to be achieved: (1) countries to be helped to be MDG friendly (2) commitments from the developing countries to policy reform and better governance. These researchers support this assertion and also postulate that there will be need for the developing countries to receive aid to run projects that are sustainable. These researchers continue to postulate that this would be possible when monitoring and accountability is enforced. These researchers oppose humanitarian aid like the South African grant but suggest that such measures should be given to a selected few or when accessed the grant beneficiaries should be involved in projects that will generate more income for them in the long run.

Ameliorate Political Environment

In virtually all the countries of the developing world such as Zimbabwe with a bad political environment that negatively impact their policy formulation, implementation and operationalization, a paradigm shift is necessary to make the countries economic structures liberal and country friendly. This political goodwill and adjustment is critical and topical. This could be the only way to turn around the economies that can ensure a perennial food security, reduction of extreme hunger and poverty.

LIMITATIONS

The paper only focuses more on food security and MDG number one, three and five, and not the others. These three MDGs are linked to one another and also to food security.

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