

Food Situation in Nigeria's Developing Economy: Concepts, Challenges and Policy Options

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Abstract

The paper reviews Nigeria food situation and examines the problems and prospects of food production in the country. The objectives of the paper were to: access the food supply and demand scenario in Nigeria, ascertain the historical antecedents of food situation in Nigeria, determine the constraints to achieving self-sufficiency in food production in Nigeria and analyse the prospects of food production in Nigeria. Suggestions are made on how to improve food supply, prominent among which are improved production practices for food crops and the development of appropriate infrastructural support systems. Nigeria is currently facing a food crisis, with the population-especially the poor-having limited access to adequate quantity and quality of food. Food security reflects stability of the food supply and availability of and access to food. These, in turn, influence the quality of food consumed and have implications for the health of consumers. The following recommendations were proffered: Peasant farmers should be encouraged to engage in Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) based on integration of livestock production into cropping systems, modern farm technologies should be made available and accessible and effective training of farmers on the use of innovations in agriculture should be made a priority by the government.

Keywords: Food accessibility; Food availability; Food production; Food security; Nigeria

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Introduction

Despite pretensions to the contrary, Nigeria is far from being completely food secure. According to Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (2013) food security is defined as: food that is available at all times, to which all persons have means of access, nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety, and is acceptable within the given culture. Availability, access and affordability are all elements of food security complex issues that encompass a wide range of interrelated economic, social and political factors – internal and external which challenge Nigeria's ability to address food security (Nkang, Udom and Abang, 2006). Any system where food demand is not sufficiently marched by supply is no doubt one with looming food crisis. Ettah and Ukwuaba (2017) noted reasons that may be deduced

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for increasing food crises in Nigeria to include the following: the threats of increasing human numbers and urbanization, Boko Haram and herdsmen/farmers conflict that have severely limited normal agricultural activities, made Nigeria's agriculture vulnerability to global warming, causing more frequent storms, droughts and floods as well as temperature extremes; which results to the loss of biodiversity and lack of jobs, or hyper – inflation that causes reduced purchasing power. All these may be eliminated or reduced with sound management of the national economy.

Blessed as it is, with abundant agro-ecological resources and diversity, paradoxically, Nigeria has become one of the largest food importers in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the food-deficit countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Abang and Agom, 2004). Although the country is arguably better in terms of production than the others and has also not suffered any major catastrophe that could precipitate scourges of famine, mass hunger and therefore food crisis (Etim and Ukoha, 2010). The authors further noted that this does not in any way prevent public policy makers from being conscious of avoiding the debilitating impact of food shortages. Hunger occurs when, there is food crises and is a situation in which there is an inadequate quantity of available food; and malnutrition which is indicative of intake of unbalanced diets, have been ravaging most Nigerians severely menacing poor families leaving debilitating effects in the productive capacity of the citizens, impacting negatively on their overall economic activities (Akande, 2006). The twin problem of hunger and malnutrition is closely linked with poverty. Many households unable to access assistance are facing emergency or worse outcomes. Displaced households and female-headed households are amongst the most food insecure households in the country.

Nigeria needs to come up with food policy which for now it lacks. Fasoriyo and Taiwo (2012) stated that what public policy makers pursue is merely an agricultural policy that still suffers enormously from a wide gap between intent and actual practices. It is in view of the foregoing that attainment of food security is imperative in the country. This is why all developed and developing countries should make considerable efforts to increase their food production capacity. Much still needs to be done in the country if the crisis in the sector will not escalate more so, in a supposedly democratic dispensation which expectedly should promote the value of welfarism.

This paper has two major foci. First, it is to evaluate Nigeria's food situation and second it is to explore food security especially in a democratic dispensation. Specifically, the objectives of the paper are:

1. Access the food supply and demand scenario in Nigeria
2. Ascertain the historical antecedents of food situation in Nigeria
3. Determine the constraints to achieving self-sufficiency in food production in Nigeria
4. Analyse the prospects of food production in Nigeria.

Food Supply and Demand

Over the last decade, Nigeria's domestic food production has consistently lagged behind national food demand. The increasing pattern of the annual shortfalls is a dangerous pointer to the fact that the nation may be on the threshold of food insecurity (Ettah and Ukwuaba, 2017). For instance, demand for rice was currently at seven million tonnes but the local production was at about 3.5 million tonnes, there is a deficit of about four million tonnes. Factors that may cause a shift to the right i.e. first diagram (increase in supply) or to the left i.e. second diagram (decrease in supply) of the supply curve of food items are as mentioned on the diagram below

A shift to the right of the demand curve as shown above indicates an increase in demand and conversely, the one that occurs to the left shows a decrease in demand. ceterus paribus changes in demand of food stuff may be dependent on changes in tastes and preferences, changes in expectations, changes in the prices of related goods (substitutes and complements), Population size and composition.

Within the Nigeria there are regional differences in food supply which can be explained by the area of land available to the regions. Harris (1996) stated that the North has 79.1 percent of the cultivable land in Nigeria and accounts for the largest share of domestic food production. Next is the West which has 12.4 percent of the available land and comes second in national food production. The East accounts for only 8.5 percent of the available land and therefore contributes the least in terms of national food production. There are regular "internal

transfers” of food from the North to the South in order to meet some of the shortages in food demand in the South. Generally, many Nigerians are not meeting up with their nutritional requirements. For instance Fasoriyo and Taiwo (2012) noted that the average intake of 9gms of protein per day as against the recommended rate of 65gm is grossly inadequate. It is not a surprise that the vulnerable ones are either dying or suffering diverse illnesses that affect their efficiency at work. Behind the problem of mal and under-nutrition lies poverty. The agricultural sector has been providing the main source of food and nutrition to the nation whose average population growth of 2.71 percent between 1990 and 2000 is well above the growth of domestic food production which averaged 1.7 percent for the same period (FAO, 2013).

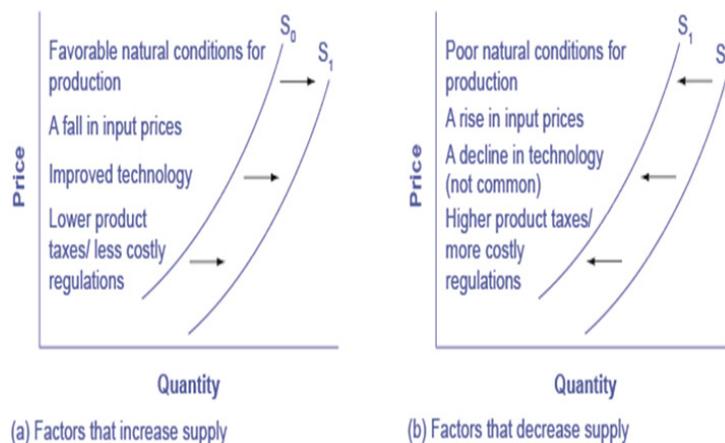


Figure 1: Supply Curves.

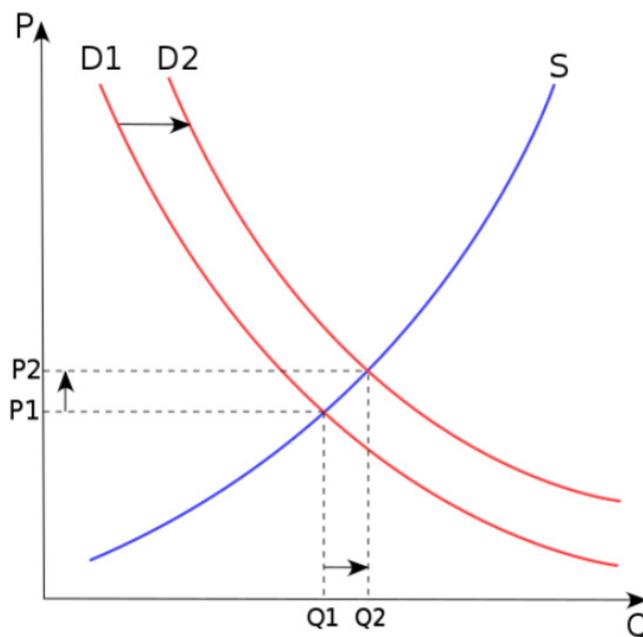


Figure 2: Demand Curve.

Historical Antecedents of Food Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria’s achievements in agriculture and by extension food in the 1970s later witnessed a decline by virtue of the discovery of oil. Apparently, the oil-boom encouraged rural-urban drift with attendant adverse effect on food production of the nation (Balogun, 2001). Nigeria had by this time relegated agriculture to the background and started expending colossal sums of the oil revenue on food

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importation. The nation later witnessed a sharp decline in oil revenue due to the oil glut of the 1970s, a development that compelled her to introduce austerity measures with a view to revitalizing agricultural and rural development (FAO, 2013). Whether or not the austerity measures yielded the desired fruits remains a subject of considerable debate. Over the years, Nigeria's food problems have prompted the initiation of various government-sponsored agricultural development programmes. The National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP) was one of such initiatives. In the year 1973, NAFPP was launched following the end of the Nigerian civil war and the need to end the food crisis that engulfed the nation at that time. According to Fasoriyo and Taiwo (2012), the program was designed with the basic aim of increasing food production in the country, through: education of farmers on methods of increasing their productivity in the area of food crop production and the organization of workshops, seminars and conferences for farmers to enhance their education for greater agricultural productivity. Operation feed the nation (OFN) was another program initiated by another regime. Okolo posited that the policy goal of it was to increase food production on the premise that availability of cheap food would lead to a higher nutritional level which in its turn would affect national growth tremendously. These and many more programs did not see the light of the day compounding the food quagmire of the country.

Constraints to Achieving Self-Sufficiency in Food Production in Nigeria

In spite of all the agricultural and rural development efforts enumerated above, the realization of their goals has consistently been plagued by a plethora of constraints. For instance, Ettah and Ukwuaba (2017) noted that the failure of the nation to fully reap the benefits of the integrated rural development approach adopted by successive governments has been obvious. Experts have blamed this failure on the inability of the nation to simultaneously implement all the components of the integrated (multi-sectoral) approach to rural development that was adopted by Nigeria. The authors further stated that experience has shown that the various sub-sectors of the Nigerian integrated rural development projects example, health, education and agricultural projects were implemented separately, and often times without completing a given project before embarking on another. Another constraint to agricultural and rural development in Nigeria is that of discontinuance of existing programs by in-coming governments. This has evidently led to insignificant progress in the nation's quest for sustainable agricultural and rural development (Akande, 2006).

Endemic corruption among government officials and project contractors as well as over-dependence on international donor agencies have also been identified as serious constraint to agricultural and rural development programs in Nigeria. Carr (2014) over-dependence on donor agencies has made the nation reluctant at fashioning out home-grown agricultural and rural development programs that would adequately address her peculiarities as an independent country. Other serious constraints according to Okolo (2004) include; poor extension agent- to- farmer ratio, inadequate motivation and training for the few extension staff as well as inadequate supply of farm inputs and agricultural information to the rural people.

Prospects of Food Production in Nigeria

Agricultural Intensification

Despite promising future for the agricultural sector in Nigeria, sustainability of the sector has continued to pose a major issue confronting the sector's development over time. Abang and Agom (2004) posited that one of the new strategies by the rural people in Nigeria in meeting the increasing demand for food and attaining sustainable livelihood is agricultural intensification. This relates to the use of the land resources on a continuous basis using good agronomic practices and with an increase in the gross output in fixed proportions due to inputs expanding proportionate increase in input use (Okike, Jabbar, Manyong, Smith, Akinwumi, and Ehui, 2001). It can also occur by a shift towards more valuable outputs and by a technical progress that raises land productivity. Okike, *et al.* (2001) noted that agricultural intensification increases value of output per hectare which can occur through changes in cultivation method, increase in labour inputs, changes in technologies, increased use of natural and artificial fertilizer, improved seed, animal traction, mechanisation, multicropping, irrigation and soil conservation methods. However, it may have the negative effect in terms of environmental and economic sustainability and soil fertility maintenance.

Balogun (2001) identified soil fertility maintenance as posing the greatest challenge to the sustainability of the agricultural sector in many of the densely populated areas in Nigeria. With the need to intensify agricultural crop production to meet the food supply of the increasing population in the region, there is a need to address the problem of rapid decline in soil productivity due to continuous cultivation as many of the land areas in the region are susceptible to soil degradation (Akande, 2006).

Modern Agricultural Enclaves

The main problem faced by Nigeria's urban dwellers is a shortage of food supplies which results in excess importation. To solve this problem, the Nigerian government should invest on a large-scale subsidized production units. These units include state farms, commercialized private farms or some capital-intensive projects which use imported industrial machinery. The main aim of the approach is that implementing it will result in a "trickle-down effect" of wealth from massive industrial projects to poor labour via employment (Balogun, 2001). The negative aspect of this approach is that it results in structural unemployment as it discourages entrepreneurship or self-employment.

Fertilizer use

Fertilizer use has been shown to increase food production, though its supply and use are still inadequate. Effort should be made to ensure timely supply and to promote greater use of the product.

Agricultural mechanization

This component emphasizes the use of farm power machinery, especially the smaller horsepower. It is expected that they will make considerable impact in establishing more land for cultivation. Under this measure, tractors are introduced and deployed to the agricultural zones to increase production. Apart from tractors, efforts should also be made to facilitate the purchase of work bull, and animal drawn implements by farmers especially in the Northern part of the country (Harris, 1996).

Smallholder services and input and output markets

Improvements in technology will continue to lead to lower productivity gains, if services, input and output markets are not significantly improved. Rural finance is also insufficiently developed.

Farmers' organizations have made a lot of progress, but are still not able to provide much of the needed capacity. If the smallholder services, rural finance, and markets were improved, however, a number of problems will be closer to a solution: farm profit and investments will increase, nutrition depletion will be reduced, and food insecurity associated with poor markets will be minimal (Nkang, Udom and Abang, 2006).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The inability of Nigerian agriculturists to provide food in sufficient quantity and quality to feed the increasing population has resulted in food shortages, undernourishment, malnutrition, starvation, hunger and ill-health. Increasing farmers' productivity and income could be a way out of this quagmire and will require the development of appropriate technology through research and the transfer of research output through efficient extension systems. A number of factors have been reported to cause food crises in Nigeria. These include poor infrastructural facilities, inadequate farm input, lack of working capital, inappropriate equipment, labor intensive traditional/manual processes, shortage of manpower/skill development, and postharvest losses.

Promoting productivity among small-scale farmers is therefore essential for food security in Nigeria. Specifically, the review centered on: accessing the food supply and demand scenario in Nigeria, ascertaining the historical antecedents of food situation in Nigeria, determining the constraints to achieving self-sufficiency in food production in Nigeria and analysing the prospects of food production in Nigeria. The following recommendations were proffered: Peasant farmers should be encouraged to engage in Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) based on integration of livestock production into cropping systems, modern farm technologies should be made available and accessible and effective training of farmers on the use of innovations in agriculture should be made a priority by the government.

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