

Assessing Government Programmes and Policies on Food Security in Nigeria: 1970-2015

Nwachukwu, Chituru Udo M. A., Adeleke Odunayo D., Nwachukwu. Joel N.
(PhD)

Dept. of History and International Studies Babcock University, Ilishan, -Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
Dept. of History and International Studies Babcock University, Ilishan, -Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
Pol. Science & Pub. Admin. Babcock University, Ilishan, -Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: Nwachukwu. Joel N.

ABSTRACT: *This study explored the nexus between Government Policies and failure to fast-track Nigeria's agricultural development and tackle the problem of food insecurity through efficient delivery of food via government agricultural policies since 1970-2015. Over the years, the Nigerian Governments, national and international conventions have come up with rules and proclamations on how to eradicate hunger, how food would be made available for everyone in the recent decades, but these rules have not been able to place the country in the list of food secured nations of the world. The resultant effect is that food security continues to elude the Nigerian nation. This study, which is analytically qualitative used secondary sources of data. In its findings, the study found that since 1970, the various Nigerian Governments have made various efforts through agricultural agencies in running agricultural programmes geared towards making food available for her citizens, all to no avail. Hence, improved agricultural practices and food security have been a mirage chase by the national state irrespective of the government efforts. The way forward is to change the ways and patterns of administering these government policies to the people that are directly affected so as to get the right result; the fertilizers provided by the government and agricultural bank loans should get to the grass roots where the real farmers reside instead of the city farmers that hold the various party tickets who hijack these efforts in the urban centers.*

KEY WORDS: *Policies and Food Security.*

Date of Submission: 01-10-2019

Date of acceptance: 16-10-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been tagged a land of agriculture and peace ever before the colonial period. Hence the Nigerian Flag; Green-White-Green tells every visitor of the lush green fields that can be seen all over the nook and cranny of the country. The Nigerian soil grows almost all kinds of crops from the temperate crops, to savannah and the rain forest crops.

By the 1940s and 1950s, decades before oil was discovered, each region competed with each other to produce those agricultural produce found in their areas in large quantities; the north produced groundnuts, south western people produced cocoa and the South-Easterners produced palm oil and kernel for local consumption and for export. The other minority ethnic groups also produced those things found in their environments. The Nigerian economy depended heavily on agricultural produce for her revenue. By the late 50s, 1957 to be specific when crude oil was discovered in large quantities at Oloibiri in the then Rivers State, things started to fall apart in the area of agriculture. As oil prices went up, Nigerians lost their hold and interest on agriculture. This marked the beginning of decline into the abyss as a polity. The consequential effects of these decline fell on the nation's economy which felt the brunt of the rising cost of food items, especially the rise in prices of staple foods. Adeagbo, (2012) adopts that Nigeria became heavily dependent on importation of food. The rural areas became even more vulnerable to malnutrition, erratic supply of food items, unaffordable food costs, low quality foods and sometimes complete lack of food.

Beginning from the 1970s, the various successive governments directed efforts at restoring agriculture to its former status before the oil boom, which became increased concern for and commitment to making sure that food is made available to every Nigerian citizen. These efforts did not work out well for the purposes they were made. Hence, food security in Nigeria, like other nations in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa had remained a mirage chase. The focus of this study is to investigate these government programmes from 1970 till 2015 to find out why they failed, their resultant effects on the Nigerian people and economy and proffer remedy measures for the future.

Conceptual Clarification

The term food security was first defined in the mid-1974 at the World Food Conference. At this conference, food security was defined in terms of supply of food, that is assuring the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level". From this World Food Conference in 1974, the concept of food security has evolved into what is now generally agreed the standard definition which was adopted during the World Food Summit in 1996. The World Food Summit, 1996, agreed that food security "exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

A country is said to be food secured when the larger part of her population have access to food in adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent living at all times (Reutlinger, 1985:7; Idachaba, 2004:2). This implies that food must be available to the citizens to the extent that must meet some acceptable level of nutritional standards in terms of calorie, protein and minerals which the body needs and people having the means to acquire it with reasonable continuity and consistency in supply (Davidson, 2009:4). In other words, food security is referred to the financial power that every citizen has to quality food at all times for a healthy living (Reutlinger, 1985).

Ebo (1997:28) adopts that the security of a nation is ultimately seen in the security of the citizens which makes the presence of food essential in national security because lack of food projects a potential source of threat to the security of the nation. Ebo further emphasized that a hungry man is an angry man and in an atmosphere of social and economic alienation, a hungry man is likely to listen to the rumbling of his empty stomach than to the gospel of government publicists. A strong economy and a healthy population are assets to any country. Thus food security is seen as the first security any nation must have since a country which cannot adequately feed his citizenry leaves them at the mercy of donor agencies which can manipulate them (Mbachu&Eze, 2009:399).

Food insecurity on the other hand is the lack of access to quality food in the right quantity at all times. Food insecurity should not only be considered in the quantity and quality of food but should be seen from the perspective of the hygienic and safety of the food in order to protect the lives of the citizens. For instance, food may be available but the source of production and preservation may be unhygienic, or the food may be heavily laden with chemical substances which may cause health hazard. Davidson, (2009) opined that, a country is considered food-secured when food is available in the right quantity needed by the population consistent with decent living and also when consumption of the food does not pose health hazard to the citizens.

Food security does not only mean an adequate aggregate supply of food, but also means that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food" it does not just require enough food to go round. It requires that people have ready access to food (UNDP, 1994:24)

According to Nwaniki(2007) Food security can be seen from three perspectives: food availability, food access and food adequacy. Food availability is seen when food supply is sufficiently provided in their right quantity, quality and in their various forms. The right to sufficient food is enshrined in the United Nations International Human Rights law on Food in 1948 which established that everyone has a right to adequate food and a fundamental right to be free from hunger. These rights, though assumed to be universal, are not yet globally enjoyed, which implies that there are still millions of people who still suffer from severe hunger and malnutrition around the globe. To these people, food security is non-existent (Eide, 1999). In terms of adequacy, food security should be the absence of threats of hunger or malnutrition. It should entail safety from basic physiological needs. The lack of adequacy would result in chronic hunger or starvation and malnutrition. It is in this context that Clover(2003b:5) avered that Africa, which reversed from a key exporter of agricultural commodities into being a net importer, has the highest percentage of under nourished people and has shown less progress in reducing the prevalence of under nourishment in the last thirty years. It is against this backdrop that the study is divided into the following; government programmes from 1970 to 2015, reasons for their failures, the effects on the country and then recommendations.

Government Efforts and Programmes in Revamping Agriculture

Due to the falling food conditions in Africa south of the Sahara and Nigeria in particular in the late 1950s when oil took the center stage of the economy, the various Nigerian governments and leaders came up with policies to curtail food insecurity through efforts in restoring agriculture to its former status before the oil boom. These efforts in the national economy in terms of its higher contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), could be regarded as evidence of increased concern for and commitment to food security.

Beginning from the 1970s, the period immediately after the Biafran war under the leadership of Yakubu Gowon. The Gowon's military government embarked on an extra massive rice importation to the point that the ports did not have the facility to handle the huge importation of what came to be called rice amada. The ports were choked by rice to the point that a decongestion committee was set up (Ekpu, 2009:12) but this mass

importation of rice, without any organized efforts on how it could be stored for the far future could not tackle the long term problem of food security.

In 1976, the General Olusegun Obasanjo's administration also began his Operation Feed the Nation programme (OFN). An agricultural revolution instituted to allow everybody to plant something anywhere, even in a flower pot to produce food no matter how small. In order to protect farmers against a drastic fall in prices of food crops minimum prices and increase in output, the government announced guaranteed minimum prices per metric ton for the 1976 agricultural season. But it was soon found that the prices fixed were more than those obtained in the markets. As a development strategy, the impact of the OFN was not as profound as its initiators may want us to believe. The programme only succeeded in creating the awareness of food shortage without any commensurate effort in fighting against the problem. Everyone irrespective of their trade and profession took to farming but this did not last for a long time. Increased food importation, the land use decree, inadequate human and material resources, faulty campaign strategy and faulty administrative system led to the death of OFN. However, this programme did not produce the bumper harvest that was expected and by extension did not lead Nigeria to become a food secured Nation (Ekpu, 2009:12).

The Alhaji Shehu Shagari's Green Revolution efforts made in 1979 was not different from the Operation Feed the Nation Programme of Obasanjo in every ramifications. Thus the programme could not make any appreciable impact, coupled with corruption in the government. This also could not achieve much in all fronts. The Babangida's Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1985 was a very much welcomed development that was to bring about massive food production and rural transformation, but the programme, which appeared good on paper failed to deliver in actual practice because of massive corruption which eventually frustrated it.

By 1999, the civilian government of President Obasanjo gave greater attention to food production by putting in place a number of food security initiatives as they were then called. For instance,

- The Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS). Through this programme, the government sought assistance from Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in disseminating information on proven and accessible technologies to one hundred and nine (109) farming communities across the country to enhance food production and substantial increase in income levels of farmers.
- The Roots and Tubers Expansion Programme also was an agricultural initiative supported by the international fund for Agricultural development on improved processing technology and expansion technique for cassava products.
- Fadama Development Projects was to ensure all season farming through large scale irrigation system or naturally flooded areas (fadama).
- Community based agricultural schemes which came under different names such as farm settlements; School to land or back to land programmes were made to take farming to the rural communities by providing them with material and financial support.
- Provision of infrastructure by constructing access roads that linked the rural areas through grading the old ones, supplying energy through electrification, distribution of farm inputs like seedling and fertilizers, selling and leasing tractors and harvesters to farmers to encourage mechanized farming (Vanguard, oct.27, 2004). Then came the various Policy instruments and directions by which government banned importation of some agricultural products (NEEDS documents, 2001:88). Others worthy of mention in this category include the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFP), which was created in order to induce the masses of farmers to boost food production "within the shortest possible time", in 1973. The programme was based on the green revolution concepts and experiences of Mexico, India, Philippines and Pakistan. Its main aim was to accelerate the production of six major food crops namely rice, millet, sorghum, maize, wheat and cassava which were to be achieved by using field tested traditional ones. (Anyanwu, 1997). Despite the fact that a substantial number of farmers have gained from the programme, it is bedeviled by inadequate finance, inadequate commitment by some states inadequate publicity and poor infrastructure facilities.
- **The Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB)** was founded in April, 1973, to aid growth in the quantity and quality of credit given to all aspects of agricultural production including poultry farming, fisheries, forestry and timber production, horticulture etc. It also aims at improving storage facilities for agricultural products and the promotion of the marketing of agricultural products. Despite this apparent impressive performance, quantity of loans granted to small-holder has proved grossly inadequate.

(c) **The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs).** The development of river basins was conceived in 1963 with involvement in the Lake Chad Basin and River Niger Commissions for countries bordering the Lake and the Niger River Anyanwu (1997) and Are (1985) cited Okoli and Onah (2002). The River Basin Development Authorities were expected to cater for the development of the land and water resources potentials of Nigeria for agricultural purposes and general rural development. Activities of the RBDAs have been hampered due to inadequate planning data. Shortage of funds, shortage of spare parts and lubricants, difficulties

in securing land for development especially in the south and the shortage of qualified and experience technical, professional and managerial manpower.

(e) Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), the Rural Banking scheme and the Commodity Boards were all geared towards improving food production through credit schemes and marketing of marketing of their respective commodities. But all these schemes failed to achieve the expected goals set by the various governments at the end of the day because of delays experienced by farmers in having their application processed by the banks and some issues alleged to have arisen from the Land Use Act. The nation continued to suffer serious food insecurity in the midst of these efforts (Ijere, 2001).

In the present dispensation, under the Buhari led administration, there is the Agriculture Promotion Policy document for 2016-2020 (APP) tagged "The Green Alternative". This is as a result of consultations from all stake holders from all works of life to resolve to build a next generation agribusiness economy in Nigeria. It is the vision of the of the Buhari administration for agriculture to work with key stake holders to build an agribusiness economy capable of delivering sustained prosperity by meeting domestic food security goals, generating exports, and supporting sustainable income and job growth.

As the Sun puts it the allocation to agriculture as a percentage of the overall annual budget to all sectors in the 2019 proposal dropped to 1.56% from 1.25% in 2016, to 1.82% in 2017 and to 2.23% in 2018, at this time when the government is professing to its intensions to diversify the economy away from crude oil and into critical sectors like agriculture. This only suggest that agriculture has dropped in the pecking order of priority sectors of the government for the 2019 budget year.

All the above agricultural policies/government efforts or programmes could not launch the country into a food secured nation because of the wide gap between the budget and these programmes. Most of the times, these programmes fail because they concentrate their attention on the urban farmers who had no contact with agricultural practices mostly if they are party members or are forgotten as soon as they were put in place by the government of the day, and little or nothing is given during the budgeting period. Again, the various governments keep on coming up with a new programme, disconnecting the previous programmes as soon as they come into office. This makes the whole aims and objectives to be disjointed and dumped. What progress can anyone make of a new programme in four years may be the question.

From the fore going analysis, it is not a gain saying that the Nigerian governments at various times have made concerted efforts to bring about food security in Nigeria, all to no avail. Food insecurity still stares the nation in the face. Hunger and under nourishment have fallen since 2000, but progress in many areas have stagnated or even reversed in recent times. At the regional level, these stagnation manifest itself in stalled progress on certain indicators; the prevalence of under nourishment in Africa south of the Sahara has increased marginally. Of the countries with moderate, serious, alarming or extremely alarming hunger levels, 16 have seen no improvement (Global Hunger Index, 2018).

In the Global Hunger Index (GHI) of 2018, Nigeria scored 31.1%. From 2000 to 2018, Nigeria is among the countries with serious Global Hunger Index. One would say that if all the government programmes worked as planned on paper, Nigeria would not be grouped among the world's hungry nations. The nation have found herself where she was not meant to be because of incessant failures of government policies and its misapplications.

The Major threats to food Security in Nigeria

That are no nations without hungry people is a true saying, but that there are nations who are not supposed to fall among the group of hungry nation is also true. Nigeria lost it all when she left agriculture to depend on oil since 1959, and this has rubbed the nation of her rich agricultural produce. In the present, with the drop in oil price and the huge neglect of agricultural produce, the nation suffers food insecurity in every sphere. Thus, the threats are as follows:

- Oil spillage, caused by oil worker and vandal around the Niger Delta and all over the country has left a permanent damage on the soil of Nigeria. These polluted soils do not allow agricultural practices any more. Even around the delta, the fauna and flora have been depleted leading to scarcity of food.
- Desertification in the north as well has left hundreds of kilometers of landmass to the desert encroachment, more especially as a result of draught and the indiscriminate felling of trees, contributing to food scarcity.
- Flooding around the Niger, Benue basins and the delta areas have their effects on food. Lots of tons are lost on yearly basis.
- The numerous others include terrorist activities like Boko Haram in the north that has driven away most of the farmers from their lands, Herds men in the Middle Belt, these have left a big blow on agriculture and food production in Nigeria.

Reasons for the failure of Government Efforts

- Inadequate funding of the Agricultural sector-the agricultural sector is one of the most neglected sectors in Nigeria because of the ideas that farmers are illiterates or backward people. Over the years, the sector has not received up to 10% of allocation in Federal budget which is the minimum requirement according to Maputo declaration of sufficient food production. The highest the sector has received is 7% in 2008 budget (News Watch, May 5, 2008:27). By 2007, the budgetary provision for agriculture was 3%. Hence the greatest challenge to achieving food security in Nigeria, no doubt has been inadequate funding. To make up for the short fall is massive importation of food items ranging from rice, sugar, wheat, and tomatoes, so instead of the government financing the sector, it took to the easy way of importation.
- Corruption and Corrupt Practices: Corruption in Nigeria has become a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian nation. It can be found in every sphere of our economy. Most of these programmes ended up most of the time on the round table where they were discussed while the money allotted also ended up in someone else's pocket, but the general masses would have been deceived with all their successes with the television jingles. Corruption and corrupt practices muddled up the river basins, dams, silos and fertilizers. Contracts have over the years been conducted and concluded on the very paper that signed them off.
- Policy Summersault-Frequent changes of policies on agriculture allows onesuccessive government to replace the existing policy with another. On each occasion, every new government comes up with a new programme for his own administration, which would not have taken off by the time he is leaving the office.
- Unhealthy assumptions-Agriculture is regarded as the vocation for the illiterate in the rural areas who have nothing better to do. The big farmers, politicians, retired generals and businessmen engage largely in crops or animals cultivation that are not common staples like pineapple plantation, ostrich and other exotic farms that add nothing to our quest for food security. Yet the government concentrate on the urban centres to implement the agricultural policies. What a contradiction.
- The impact of agricultural credits with the Banks is not felt because of lack of awareness. When they are felt, the loans are peanuts that can achieve nothing. Sometimes, these credits also get into the wrong hands of those who have nothing to do with farming, neglecting the real farmers.
- Farmers do not get the reward for all their labour. Nigerians are the largest producers of cassava and yams, but the impact on their income is minimal and this tend to discourage them.
- The fertilizer politics- the people who the subsidized fertilizer from the government are not the farmers but those with party cards who are allowed the number of bags as they may need to be resold to the real farmers at higher price.
- The Nigerian Farmers are not well remunerated for their produce. The impact of their income discourage them.

Effects of Food insecurity in Nigeria

- In Nigeria, malnutrition has resulted in death of many of her citizens. Achieving a sustainable economic development in Nigeria and Africa at large will continue to be a mirage without well-nourished and healthy citizens.
- Failure to ensure food security has unavoidably resulted in many social problems including civil unrest and riots in many major cities of the Nigeria.
- People lose their consciences as a result of hunger. The citizens now are easily bought or sold for a plate of porridge during elections because they want to feed their stomach.
- Electioneering malpractices are all due to poverty and hunger among the Nigerian citizens.
- It leads to killing for little amounts of money to earn a living.

II. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion therefore, the study has looked at food security and the various government efforts from 1970 to 2015 and found that Nigeria is among the food insecured nations of the world today because of her neglect of agriculture; the fall and misappropriation of oil funds; the numerous government policies that were wrongly implemented and misapplied. That most of the policies ended up at the tables where they were planned or in the hands of corrupt and greedy politicians who are representing their own families instead of the Nigerian masses. The government policies when they were applied concentrated on the wrong people who were never involved in agriculture but rather diverted funds to politicians and party card holders.

The study therefore recommend that Nigerians should be encouraged to go back to agriculture in a better way; the governments should encourage the rural farmers by supply them tractors, construct rural roads to enable them transport their produce to the markets; and make agriculture a compulsory subject in Primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

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Nwachukwu, Joel N." *Assessing Government Programmes and Policies on Food Security in Nigeria: 1970-2015*" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 08, no. 10, 2019, pp. 45-50