

Food Insecurity and the Challenges of Rural Development in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract: *This work focuses on food insecurity and rural development in Nigeria: the way forward. The study is crucial given the present challenges with rural development and their effects on food security in Nigeria. Data for the study were only obtained through secondary sources; hence a thematic approach was adopted. The study made some recommendations while determining that the government of Nigeria's efforts to ensure food security and encourage rapid rural development has not been very successful due to various underlying limitations.*

Keywords: Food Insecurity, Rural Development, Poverty, sustainable development.

Introduction

Agriculture and rural development are vital to the economic transformation of any nation; both are two inseparable concepts that determine the survival of mankind. Food security is indeed a very critical and principal component in the development of rural areas. It's essential to note that more than half of the population of developing countries, and by extension, Nigeria, lives in rural areas and, as such, depends largely on the poorly developed traditional agricultural system for their livelihoods. It should go without saying that in modern Nigeria, the rural population accounts for an average of over 60% of the overall population, and 90% of the rural labor force is either directly or indirectly involved in agricultural growth. Though despite the immense benefits of agriculture to the social and economic development of the country, it receives less than 10 percent of the annual budgetary allocation. This situation has forced Nigeria to heavily depend on food from foreign countries, both within Africa and outside Africa.

Currently, the globe is grappling with a major problem: food security and rural development. This problem has also attracted the attention of government and non-government organizations, as well as international organizations looking for ways to cushion the negative effects of the situation. Odugbemi and Aina (2014) maintained that food insecurity has persisted in Nigeria due to inefficient government policies, especially with respect to agriculture, trade, and economics. However, despite the fact that these policies and programmes were adopted to alleviate, or rather eradicate, this ugly situation, they have historically been perceived to fail with the regime that implemented them, particularly in rural areas.

Onuoha (2014) was of the opinion that the current food security challenges in Nigeria are due to faulty and shaky agricultural policy objectives that are often designed to favor the elites instead of the rural farmers who are directly involved in agricultural activities. He maintained that the farmers, who are excluded from the planning, are forced to go back to the same farming methods that have not yielded a sufficient food supply.

The primary motive of this study is to examine why, despite a variety of agricultural programmes implemented by present and previous governments, Nigeria has not been able to extricate itself from the current prevalent food crisis. Okuneye (2009) argued that the following agricultural programmes by previous governments, such as Operation Feed the Nation, the Lower River Basin Development Authorities, the Green Revolution, the Directorate for Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), the National Agricultural and Land Development Authority (NALDA), et cetera, failed woefully because of poor implementation strategies, greed, and corruption on the part of their implementation agencies, and this has contributed to Nigeria's poor agricultural and food production.

Definition of Key Concepts

Rural Development

Okeke (2018) defined rural development as the process aimed at developing the rural poor, their economy and institutions from a state of stagnation and low productivity equilibrium into a dynamic process leading to higher level of living a better life. Thus, understanding the need for the economic development of the local inhabitants, is to understand the need for human security which emphasizes the provision of food, water security, economic and political security for the general population. Development involves not only the economic growth of a country but also the conditions in which the people in the country have adequate food, jobs, reduced income inequality and a good measure of self reliance. Undoubtedly, rural development should be focused on the problems of food insecurity, poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Okuneye (2021) defines rural development as a broad concept that involves the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the rural population through the provision of basic infrastructure and services, access to credit, and the promotion of

economic activities. It also emphasizes the want to increase a complete rural improvement coverage that addresses the wishes of the agricultural people. Umar (2017) provides an overview of rural development in Nigeria and argues that rural development has been a major challenge in the country. It examines the various factors contributing to the underdevelopment of rural areas, such as weak institutional structures, inadequate access to resources, and lack of access to basic infrastructure and services. The paper also highlights the role of the government in promoting rural development in Nigeria, and suggests some policy recommendations for improving the living conditions of the rural population.

On his part, Uzo (2013) defines rural development as a process of improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural people by providing them with basic services and infrastructure, access to credit, and the promotion of economic activities. It also emphasizes the need for increased investment in rural areas, as well as the need to develop a comprehensive rural development policy that addresses the needs of the rural people. Rural development is an integrated process of creating economic, social and physical infrastructures in rural areas to promote economic activities and enhance the living standards of rural dwellers. It also discusses the various components of rural development, including rural infrastructure, agricultural production, education, health, access to credit and other services, and rural-urban linkages (Okeke, 2018).

Akinyele (2002) defined rural development as “the process through which the socio-economic and physical environment of rural areas is improved, with the aim of reducing poverty, improving food security and other forms of economic and social welfare”. It also states that rural development encompasses “the process of improving access to basic needs such as health care, education, water, sanitation, infrastructure and other services, as well as creating employment opportunities and promoting sustainable use of natural resources.” Olaosebikan (2013) sees rural development as “the process of improving the living conditions of people in rural areas and providing them with access to basic services and resources, including education, health care, sanitation, and infrastructure.” It also states that rural development is important for Nigeria’s economic and social development, as it contributes to poverty reduction, improved food security and better livelihoods. Onuoha (2014) defined rural development in Nigeria as “the process of improving the physical, economic, social and environmental conditions of people in rural areas.” It further states that the development of rural areas is essential for the nation’s economic and social development, particularly in terms of poverty reduction and improved food security. The article also identifies some of the challenges faced by rural development in Nigeria, such as limited access to basic services and infrastructure, limited access to credit and poor agricultural practices.

Rural development is a process of creating enabling environment for the people living in rural areas to increase their access to resources, improve their livelihoods, and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. It is a process of empowering rural communities to identify and address their needs and aspirations through the use of appropriate technology and institutional mechanisms (United Nations, 2020).

Food Insecurity

According to Odugbemi and Aina (2014), the inability of people and households to obtain sufficient and nourishing food to suit their dietary needs and food choices for an active and healthy life is known as food insecurity. The authors further explain that food insecurity is caused by poverty, unemployment, low income, and inadequate food production. They also point out that food insecurity is a major problem in Nigeria, particularly among rural and urban poor households. According to a study by Adewole, Ogunjobi, and Omotayo (2017), food insecurity is defined as the state of having inadequate or insecure access to food due to a lack of financial resources or other constraints. It is a situation in which a household is unable to obtain enough food to meet the basic requirements of its members. This lack of access to food can be caused by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of access to food outlets.

According to the World Bank, food insecurity is the absence of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life on a physical and financial level (World Bank, 2020). This definition emphasizes the importance of access to adequate, nutritious food in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, it highlights the need for individuals, households and communities to have access to affordable food in order to maintain a secure and healthy diet. United Nations argued that food insecurity is a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development as well as a healthy, active lifestyle (United Nations, 2019). This definition portrayed the importance of access to safe, nutritious food and the need to ensure that all people have access to enough food to maintain a healthy life. In addition, the United Nations notes that food insecurity can take many forms and that it can be caused by a wide range of factors, including poverty, conflict, climate change, and natural disasters.

Food insecurity is defined by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as the inability of people or families to procure or eat enough nourishment to satisfy their nutritional requirements for an active and wholesome life. This definition is based on the concept of food accessibility, which refers to the availability of, access to, and utilization of food supplies, services, and resources; Food insecurity can also be measured in terms of the quality and quantity of food consumed as well as the extent to which individuals and households are able to meet their dietary needs (FAO, 2019).

Theoretical Foundation

The theory used in this study is based on the concept of sustainable development. According to the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations, sustainable development is defined as growth that satisfies current needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs (United Nation, 2020).

Addressing existing demands without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is emphasized by the sustainable development theory. It is based on an integrated knowledge of how people and their environment interact, which takes into consideration the environmental, economic, and social sides of development. The goal of sustainable development is to advance social justice while achieving a balance between environmental preservation and economic growth.

In order to ensure that economic development is equitable and sustainable, the theory places a strong emphasis on the value of long-term planning and resource management. It is founded on the intergenerational equality principle, which acknowledges that actions need not undermine the environment or threaten societal economic, social, or cultural institutions in order for subsequent generations to have access to natural resources and development opportunities.

The theory is relevant to this research because it stresses the importance of finding a balance between social equity, environmental protection, and economic growth. It is essential to ensure that initiatives are put in place that not only help reduce poverty and food insecurity but also take into account the initiatives' environmental and social implications if food insecurity and rural development in Nigeria are to be addressed. For example, programs that promote sustainable agricultural practices like agroforestry, crop rotation, and integrated pest management can boost agricultural productivity while preserving the environment. In addition to reducing poverty and food insecurity, this kind of initiative might also open up job opportunities in rural areas. The sustainable development paradigm also highlights the significance of spending money on infrastructure to increase access to necessities like education, clean water, and health care. By making necessary services more accessible, this could assist to raise the quality of life in rural areas.

Empirical Review

Adeniji (2020) examined rural development and food insecurity in Nigeria. He emphasized that because of Nigeria's population explosion, climate change, and limited access to resources, food insecurity is a significant issue for rural areas there. This essay investigates how food insecurity affects rural development in Nigeria. The study used a qualitative methodology to investigate the root causes of food insecurity and its consequences for rural development. The findings demonstrate that food insecurity has a substantial impact on rural development in Nigeria. It has led to an increase in poverty, malnutrition, health issues, illiteracy, and poor household income. Poor access to resources like land and water is a significant issue affecting remote communities throughout Nigeria. According to the study, the Nigerian government should take into account policies and strategies to address the issue of food insecurity, such as expanding access to resources and enhancing agricultural methods. There is also a need for more research to determine the best ways to address food insecurity in Nigeria's rural areas.

In a study on Food Insecurity and Rural Development in Nigeria undertaken by Kawo (2020). Rural inhabitants of Nigeria, especially those in the north, struggle greatly with food insecurity. In this essay, we focus on rural communities as we investigate the causes and effects of food insecurity in Nigeria. The study makes the case that a range of issues, including as poverty, environmental damage, insufficient or erratic access to food, and unsustainable agricultural techniques, are to blame for food insecurity. The study also emphasizes the significance of rural development activities in reducing food insecurity, including the improvement of agricultural infrastructure, bettering access to markets, and expanding access to financial services. In order to minimize food insecurity in Nigeria, the study makes suggestions for next research and policy activities.

In 2020, Ogunsola conducted study on Nigeria's rural development and food insecurity. The researchers mentioned above examined the relationship between rural development in Nigeria and food insecurity. Food insecurity is a major issue in Nigeria, where an estimated 54.4 million people are unable to meet their basic food demands. The rural development of the country has been impacted because a substantial portion of the population lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture for a living. The study examines the causes of food insecurity in Nigeria and its implications for rural development. It also examines government interventions and programs aimed at reducing food insecurity and advancing rural development in the country. The results of the study show that more research is required to assess the success of government initiatives and establish policies and programs that enhance food and nutrition security and rural development in the country.

Adebayo (2020) studied Nigeria's rural development and food insecurity. In rural areas, where food insecurity has grown to be a serious issue, he claims that more than 70% of Nigeria's population resides. Numerous factors, such as poverty, environmental damage, restricted resource availability, population growth, and insufficient infrastructure, have been linked to this. This essay discusses the reasons behind food insecurity in rural Nigeria as well as possible solutions. Rural development initiatives are seen to need to be incorporated into more comprehensive national policies and programs in order to lessen food insecurity in Nigeria. It is further claimed that a comprehensive approach to resolving the issue must include activities to raise agricultural output, develop infrastructure, improve access to resources and services, and encourage sustainable practices.

Food Insecurity and rural development crises in Nigeria

Nigeria's food value chain has been impacted by the food insecurity issue that has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic catastrophe. More importantly, the pandemic's consequences have upset the nation's already precarious value chain, impairing people's capacity to grow, process, and transport food. The livelihoods of the vulnerable rural residents are negatively impacted by this reduction in agricultural productivity. (USAID, 2021). In Nigeria, there is a serious issue with food insecurity. According to World Food Programme (2020), one in four Nigerians is thought to be food insecure, which means they do not always have access to enough nourishing food. This has been connected to instability, bad infrastructure, unemployment, poverty, and climate change.

An estimated 35.3 million Nigerians do not have access to enough food to survive. This indicates that about 15.3% of people experience food insecurity. This is a serious problem, especially considering the size of the population in Nigeria (FAO, 2021). Food insecurity in Nigeria is a result of a lack of basic infrastructure and services like roads, healthcare, electricity, and water. It is challenging for farmers to access markets and for people to access food due to inadequate infrastructure and services. Furthermore, Nigeria's food production has been impacted by climate change, which has resulted in lower crop yields and a rise in food insecurity (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

In Nigeria, food insecurity is largely a result of poverty. Many individuals struggle to purchase enough and wholesome food because 62 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line. Economic disparity exacerbates this poverty by denying those in the lowest economic classes access to sufficient food (World Food Programme, 2020). Additionally, the nation has gone through a series of internal crises, perhaps most famously the Boko Haram insurgency, which has had a terrible effect on food security. Food insecurity has been exacerbated by this conflict's displacement effects, infrastructural damage, and loss of livelihoods.

A significant factor affecting Nigeria's food security is environmental degradation. Food production has become more challenging as a result of nutrient depletion and soil erosion brought on by over-cultivation and deforestation. Food security has also been severely weakened by declining fish stocks as a result of overfishing and the degradation of wetlands. Nigeria's food security has been influenced by the changing climate as well. It is becoming increasingly challenging for farmers to produce food as a result of rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns. Furthermore, the issue is getting worsened by extreme weather conditions like floods and droughts (FAO, 2021).

Food insecurity is primarily a result of high food prices. As a result of the naira's depreciation, rising demand, and problems in the supply chain, food prices in Nigeria have surged recently. As a result of the drought, pests, and high fuel prices, the price of grains, Nigeria's basic diet, has also increased. Food insecurity results from the fact that many Nigerians are unable to afford food. Food insecurity in Nigeria is also significantly influenced by the economic downturn. The decline in oil prices and the naira's devaluation in recent years have caused the nation's economy to enter a recession. This has led to a rise in food insecurity because of the high unemployment rate, declining wages, and rising poverty.

Small-scale farmers make up the majority of the population, and for many of them, subsistence farming is their only source of income. Low yields and limited food supply are the result of poor access to fertile land and a dearth of modern agricultural methods. Additionally, due to climate change, extreme weather occurrences like floods and droughts are happening more frequently, which has made the problem of inadequate food supply worse. The Nigerian government has launched several programmes to combat food insecurity, such as the National Food Security Programme, which attempts to lessen poverty and food insecurity by giving cash transfers and other incentives to small-scale farmers. In order to remedy the issue, there is still more work to be done.

The way forward/ Recommendations

There are several measures that can be used in Nigeria to combat food insecurity. Increased federal funding for agriculture and rural development, better access to markets and financing, building resilience to climate change, improved monitoring and evaluation of governmental programs, mechanized farming, and other initiatives that empower rural women farmers are just a few of these.

1. Investments in research and development, better seed types, access to irrigation equipment and other agricultural inputs, as well as enhanced access to agricultural extension services and agricultural education, can all help to increase agricultural production. Enhanced loan availability may also assist farmers in increasing output and gaining access to markets with higher prices.
2. Farmers who have access to markets, capital, and insurance may be better able to control their exposure to risks from weather, pests, and other outside influences. Reducing post-harvest losses and enhancing access to and affordability of food may be achieved by enhancing markets' accessibility through better infrastructure and transportation. Farmers may also be better able to control production and marketing risks with more access to financing and insurance.
3. Nigeria's agricultural systems are susceptible to the effects of climate change, such as drought, floods, and other extreme weather conditions. It is important to apply policies like better land and water management, enhanced access to climate data, and improved access to climate-resilient agricultural technologies in order to promote resilience to climate change.
4. Also, expanding the 2003 Maputo Declaration's recommended federal allocation for agricultural and rural development from 3% or less of the national budget to at least 10%. The Nigerian government can also put in place an institutional structure involving all relevant parties to assist subsidies, loan finance, and insurance for small-scale and rural farmers.

5. Enhancing government programmes, monitoring and assessment. When allocating funding to areas where they are most needed, such as rural development, mechanized farming, women farmer empowerment, and expanded credit for smallholder farmers, the government should take data-driven techniques into consideration.
6. In Nigeria, increasing automated farming will boost agricultural productivity and lower food insecurity.
7. The government ought to fund programmes that enable rural women farmers, such as leasing land to them in places where cultural norms forbid it or encouraging women's access to credit.
8. Adoption of a comprehensive security strategy made just for the agriculture industry and the people who work in it. To turn conflict perpetrators into civic and economically productive citizens, the government will benefit from implementing effective conflict preventive measures like mediation, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration as well as community violence reduction programs. These methods will guarantee improved food access, an environment for long-term national peace, and higher agricultural economic production.

Conclusion

Nigeria faces serious problems that must be addressed, including food shortages and rural development. The government must be proactive in guaranteeing food security by funding agricultural infrastructure, promoting the advancement of agricultural technologies, and establishing social safety nets for disadvantaged groups. When people feel physically and psychologically uncomfortable, a nation cannot thrive and increase production. In addressing security issues, the government must be honest with itself. It is crucial to remember that any agricultural or economic strategies intended to revive the sector must be properly developed, taking into account the needs of those living in rural regions. Without a doubt, Nigeria's government's efforts to guarantee food security and promote rapid rural development have not been very successful. However, it is strongly encouraged to strengthen agricultural activity in all respects. For Nigeria's national growth, the problems of unemployment, particularly in rural regions, and corruption in all its forms need to be appropriately handled.

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