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Constraints to Food Security in Nigeria and Implications

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Abstract

The study investigated the constraints to food security and the effects on Nigerians. The population comprised of Agricultural Science teachers, lecturers, students, farm managers, Home Economists, Nutritionists, literate farmers from four states in Nigeria. From these a sample of 320 was randomly selected. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The data was analyzed by computing the percentages, mean, standard deviation and variance of the responses. Findings indicated that some of the constraints to food security are poverty and low income level. Few people are engaged in farming and high post harvest losses. Some effects of food insecurity are malnutrition, poor health status, high mortality rate and low life span. It was recommended among others that Nigeria should adopt the successful food security measures used by advanced countries.

Introduction

Food is an important resource to human development and survival. As such food is expected to be available for human existence. Nigeria's population is growing rapidly. This has made food supply to be insufficient to feed the populace. This indicates food insecurity. Idachaba (2004) stated that food insecurity exists when the majority of the people in a nation do not have access to food that is adequate in quality and quantity consistent with descent existence at all times.

Food security is very important to the development of a nation. Food security

occurs where the quantity/quality of food is sufficient and available to the citizens of a country. Food or its lack has strong effects on human destiny and subsequently on the nation. A nation is food secure when the majority of the population has access to food of adequate quality and quantity, consistent at all times (Nwabah 2005). A report by Edo ADP (2002) highlighted the present situation. It reported that less than 5% of Nigerians are food secure, 65% are semi-food secure. Over 30% of Nigerians are facing the problem of food insecurity.

The problem of food insecurity has serious adverse effects on a nation. Food insecurity is the inability of the citizens to have regular access to enough food to meet up the daily nutritional requirements for a healthy and productive life (Uko – Aviomoh 2005). She stated that endemic poverty and very low per capita income level are the root causes of food insecurity in Nigeria. She remarked that raising the per capita income level and reducing poverty levels will reduce food insecurity in Nigeria.

Some factors account for the presence of food insecurity in Nigeria. There is the problem of low food production in Nigeria to meet the needs of the growing population. Robinson (1995) noted that with the rural to urban shift and few people to work on farm led to insufficient food production. This food shortage leads to higher prices.

In Nigeria, many food items e.g. rice are being imported instead of boosting rice production locally. Embarking on importation of food instead of producing them will be a drag on the nation's economy (Olaloku et al 1997).

Heavy losses occur during and after harvest. Sanni (1999) recorded various types of crop losses due to poor post harvest handling of food. The food losses include weight loss, loss in quantity and acceptability of foodstuffs. The causes of these losses are attributed to chemical changes that occur in food, attacks by micro-organisms; exposure of food items to high temperature and high relative humidity; unhygienic way of handling foodstuffs; attacks by insects/rodents, wrong methods of harvesting, poor methods of storage, processing, poor handling of food items during distribution to consumers. The above mentioned losses bring about huge loss of food. As a result, there is shortage of food which poses a threat to food security. The heavy loss of food represents high economic loss to farmers.

Uko-Aviomah gave some reasons why food insecurity must be avoided. These are based on the effects of food insecurity which are as follows (i)

Malnutrition, (ii) Deterioration in health of the citizens, occurrence of high blood pressure, and nutritional deficiency diseases (iii) Increase in social vices such as begging, ritual sacrifices, prostitution, armed robbery, child labour, juvenile delinquency, hunger, unemployment etc (iv) Production of mean citizens that lack self esteem and low integrity (v) High infant mortality rate (vi) low life span (vii) Increase in divorce rate. In addition Nwabah (2005) explained that lack of food has strong effects on human destiny and also on the nation. Bald (1999), stated that lack of food security will slow down a nation's development and will also seriously disrupt farm input, provision of infrastructural facilities and employing new techniques.

The campaign for food security has been on for quite sometime now. In spite of some effort being made by both government and individuals, food insecurity still persists. Certain factors could be responsible for this persistent problem. Such factors need to be identified and appropriately addressed to terminate the dreaded problem of food insecurity. This study investigated such factors.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate into the factors that cause food insecurity in Nigeria and the effects

Objectives of the study – The objective of the study are as follows –

1. To identify the constraints to food security in Nigeria.
2. To identify the effects of food insecurity in Nigeria

Methodology

Design of the study: The study was a research survey meant to investigate the causes of food insecurity and the effects in Nigeria.

Population: The study population comprised of literate farmers, agricultural science teachers, lecturers, students, farm managers, Home Economists, Nutritionists from Delta, Edo, Ogun and Oshun States.

Sample/Sampling Procedure – The sample for the study comprised of 320 people who were randomly selected. Ninety (90) people were selected from Delta State, 90 from Edo State, 70 from Oshun State and 70 from Ogun State.

Instrument: Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. This was made up of the factors that lead to food insecurity and the effects.

Method of Data Collection: The copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and research assistants. After completion, the copies of the questionnaire which were well filled were used for the study.

Method of Data Analysis: The responses were arranged in frequency distribution tables. The percentages, mean, standard deviation of the responses were calculated.

Results

Findings indicated that 134 (44.2%) of the people are interested in farming. Sixty-one (20.1%) of the people are literate farmers. Others 242 (79.9%) are not involved in farming.

Table I shows that all the items 1 – 13 have their mean above 2.50. This indicates that all the items were perceived to be the constraints to food security in Nigeria.

Table II indicated that all the items 1 – 8 have mean above 2.50. This shows that the respondents regarded all the items as the effects of food insecurity in Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

The findings of the study indicated that low income and poverty were viewed as causes of food insecurity in Nigeria. Uko-Aviomoh (2005) pointed this out. Insufficient money and poverty could reduce one's access to food especially food of high quality. Those who do not have sufficient money will likely buy mainly carbohydrate foods. The continuous overdependence on the consumption of carbohydrate foods has serious health implications e.g. the tendency to be obese could occur.

Another cause of food insecurity is the fact that few people are involved in food production to sufficiently feed the growing population of Nigeria. There is the problem of rural to urban shift. Many people move to cities in search of lucrative jobs. Few people that are left to work on farms led to insufficient food production. This usually results in high prices of food items. Consequently only a few are able to access high quality food.

Only a few people are involved in food production. They will not be able to produce enough food to feed the ever growing population of Nigeria. This results to food insecurity.

Poor crop yield is a major constraint to food security. When crop yield is

low, it could be due to over cultivation of the land. Low crop yield poses serious problems to farmers. The use of implements such as cutlasses and hoes only allow for the cultivation of few hectares of land. As a result, majority of farmers in rural areas in Nigeria engage in subsistent farming. If mechanized farming methods are introduced to them and made available, large scale production of food will become a reality. Consequently food insecurity will be highly minimized.

Other problems identified from the study are use of poor storage facilities, use of poor storage methods and poor processing methods. As a result, post harvest food losses are high. High post harvest losses is one of the major channels of food wastage leading to food insecurity. Ignorance of people on how to maintain food security is a common problem. Another problem is poor Nutrition Education. The solution to the problem is by giving appropriate nutrition education to the public especially farmers.

Food insecurity in Nigeria has adverse effects on the people. Some of such effects are malnutrition, and poor health status. Uko-Aviomoh (2005) referred to these problems as reasons why food insecurity must be avoided. Malnutrition could easily predispose people to ill health due to poor resistance in the body system. Other problems of food insecurity are high death rate and low life span. These problems were also outlined by Uko-Aviomoh as also the rationale for avoidance of food insecurity. The major reasons for this problem are hunger. This leads to malnutrition and death. Nwaban (2005) explained that lack of food has strong effects on human destiny.

Other effects of food insecurity as identified from the study are the development of people with low self esteem and integrity. The problem of food insecurity has long standing effect on people. Insufficient food supply could make people to scramble for food especially during parties. This could result in low self esteem and integrity. There could always be that sense of inferiority complex as time goes on.

Increase in crime rate, e.g. armed robbery is common where there is food insecurity. Some people could resort to stealing in order to meet their needs. Some others end up becoming beggars. Under such conditions, food insecurity will on the long run have negative effects on the nation. Bald (1999) stated that lack of food security will slow down a nation's development and disrupt national development programme.

Implications of the Study

Food is highly essential to human growth and development. Insufficient quality food (food insecurity) will bring about malnutrition. Those who will be adversely affected are the vulnerable group infants, children and adolescents, invalids, convalescents, pregnant and lactating mothers. Morbidity and mortality rate will be on rapid increase. This will bring about a drastic reduction in the nations work force and consequently a rapid decline/retrogression in national development.

Recommendations

1. High yielding crops should be made available to farmers
2. The government should own farms and employ trained farmers to work them. This could boost the morale of the farmers to put in their best and hence high food production.
3. The government should stop the importation of food items that are produced in Nigeria e.g. rice and boost local production.
4. The government should buy foodstuffs directly from farmers. These should be preserved, processed, stored and sold to consumers during planting season which is usually the peak of food scarcity.
5. The government should raise the per capital income of workers.
6. There should be poverty alleviation measures put in place
7. More people should be encouraged to engage in food production to make food available and cheap for consumers.
8. Food security techniques used successfully by developed countries should be introduced into Nigeria and utilized.

Table I: Constraints to food security in Nigeria.

S/N	Constraints	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Std dev.	variance
1	Poverty	120	70	41	72	2.79	1.20	1.44
2	Low income	128	101	62		3.23	0.78	0.60
3	Insufficient attention to food production	111	114	44		3.25	0.72	0.32
4	A shift from rural to urban area	68	126	11		3.65	0.55	0.30
5	Use of crude implements for farming contribute to low food production	205	81	11		3.65	0.55	0.30
6	Poor yield of crops	122	109	16	16	3.28	0.83	0.69
7	High post harvest food losses	122	102	67	11	3.19	0.78	0.62
8	Use of poor storage facilities	127	121	40	12	3.21	0.82	0.67
9	Inadequate processing of food	20	226	14		3.02	0.32	0.14
10	Poor storage methods	129	119	8		3.47	0.56	0.31
11	Few people are involved in food production	119	112	37		3.29	0.69	0.48
12	Ignorance	117	129			3.88	0.50	0.25
13	Poor nutrition education	128	102	58		3.56	0.50	0.25

Table II: The effects of food insecurity in Nigeria.

	Effects	Strongly agree	Agree	Dis-agree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Std dev.	variance
1	Malnutrition	103	192	5		3.33	0.50	0.25
2	Deterioration in health of the people e.g. the presence of nutritional deficiency diseases.	130	103	62		3.41	0.49	0.25
3	Increase in crime rate e.g. armed robbery, fighting, begging	144	132	22		3.40	0.63	0.39
4	Development of people with low self esteem/integrity	108	125	11	11	3.29	0.74	0.85
5	High death rate of infants	166	127			3.86	0.35	0.12
6	Low life span	105	106	65	21	2.99	0.93	0.87
7	High morbidity rate	118	100	61	10	3.13	0.86	0.74
8	High cost of food	122	108	16	16	3.28	0.83	0.59

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