

The Challenges of Agriculture, Poverty, and Hunger Are Harbinger of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract—Northern Nigeria's agricultural sector, traditionally the basis of regional and national food security, has suffered catastrophic declines due to a complex of natural and human factors, where agricultural challenges, deepening poverty, and worsening hunger have become powerful drivers of insecurity. This interwoven crisis has threatened the stability of Nigeria, with far-reaching consequences for regional security and development. Once considered Nigeria's food bowl, the northern region now is dealing with a confluence of issues such as climate change, floods, drought, bushfire, banditry, kidnapping, land disputes, and communal violence over some fishing ponds that have disrupted food systems and livelihoods. The situation has created a vicious cycle where agricultural collapse fuels poverty and hunger, which in turn exacerbate social tensions and drive recruitment into armed groups. This research paper examines the relevance of agriculture in food security and how the challenges confronting the sector have led to food insecurity, poverty, hunger, and above all, Nigeria's insecurity.

Keywords— Agriculture, Hunger, Insecurity, and Poverty.

I. INTRODUCTION

In general terms, Agriculture includes crop and livestock production, aquaculture, and forestry for food and non-food production. It is the practice of growing crops and raising animals for food, meat, and milk in order to combat hunger and poverty and also to ensure security. Prior to some challenges associated with climate change and the advent of the global system of modern communication, agriculture was playing a vital role in combating hunger and preventing insecurity as a whole.¹

The role of agriculture in the social and economic development of any society can never be overstressed. It is the bedrock of any development. Adam Smith stated that the economic wellbeing and growth of any society depend on agriculture. He said, "Agriculture is of all other arts the most beneficial to society; whatever tends to retard its improvement is extremely prejudicial to the public interest. The produce of agriculture is much greater than that of land and other manufacture."² This statement signifies the important role agriculture has been playing in any society right from the pre-colonial period through the colonial and up to the present time. It has been the bedrock of any development and the foundation of prosperity ever since in history. The agricultural sector has a number of sub-sectors, which include wet season farming, dry season farming (irrigation farming), livestock production, and fishing.³ All the sub-sectors have been practiced in northern Nigeria since the pre-colonial period to date. The people of this area and the country as a whole

depended on agriculture for survival. In this study some of the natural and man-made problems shrouded in it.

II. CHALLENGES OF AGRICULTURE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

First and foremost, the agriculture sector is a strong rural base with agriculture and rural development as the bedrock for agriculture development and ultimately rural development in northern Nigeria. The thing is that, without rural development and security, all effort to improve the traditional smallholder farmers and cattle rearers would be in vain.

The first food crisis happened during the Nigeria civil war period (1967-1970) as a result of the neglect of agriculture and the compelling need to minimize imports to conserve foreign exchange earnings.⁴ Thus, the contribution of the agriculture sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell drastically and reached as low as 218 between 1971 and 1975. Agriculture exports declined drastically from 279.9 million in 1966-1970 to 260.3 million in 1971-1975. Moreover, export earnings from the sector dropped in relative terms to about 1.6 per cent in 1981.⁵ They made agriculture unattractive and encouraged rural-urban migration. This was the beginning of food crisis and food insecurity in Nigeria.

In a clear term, food insecurity is an indication of a security threat in the country. This is because the consciousness of food insecurity is hunger and poverty. This situation was further compounded by the neglect of the agricultural sector because of crude oil in Nigeria's economy as well as the oil wind fall, especially in 1974.⁶ To address the problems of food insecurity in the agricultural sector, various governments intervened through the establishment of large scale agricultural and irrigation projects as well as agricultural revival strategies focused on different activities in the sectors. An example of these agricultural revival strategies were Operation Feed the Nation, Operation Green Revolution and Back to Land of Certainty.

All the above strategies were aimed at boosting food production and food self-sufficiency by encouraging increased food production by farmers, thus improving life in rural areas by minimizing rural-urban migration and insecurity. In other words, the strategies were designed with the aims of generation employment, enhancing agricultural expense and income, and reducing the tide of rural-urban migration to reduce poverty and other related crimes.⁷ The reviving strategies in this sector were expected to supply the food requirements of the growing population, raw materials for industries, improve the welfare of both the rural and urban populace, provide a market for the industrial sector, generate

foreign exchange for the country, and store up labour for the industrial sector.⁸ Various governments embarked upon various rural development strategies to combat hunger, poverty and insecurity in the country, The various rural development strategies have been formulated to achieve poverty reduction, food security, and accelerated economic growth. This accelerated agricultural production was envisaged for the seven major crops, which include rice, millet, maize, yams, sorghum wheat, and cassava. Government intervention took the form of direct and indirect macro-economic strategies. In line with the strategies, *M.L. Abdulkadir, et al.* Say:

These strategies include World Bank Assisted Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), Upper Benue River Basin Development Authorities and Lower Benue River Basin River Basin Development Authorities, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Marketing/Commodity Boards, and the Agricultural Credit Guarantee scheme.⁹

All these agricultural strategies and schemes were meant to raise productivity and farmer's incomes in rural areas by providing them with improved seed varieties, fertilizers, pesticides, credit facilities, and infrastructure like roads, water supply, and health care, as well as extensive services and institutional support. All these are geared towards combating hunger, poverty, and insecurity. They were partly financed by federal and state governments and the World Bank. The number of World Bank Assisted Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) increased from two in 1974 to three in 1975, five in 1980, nine in 1982, ten in 1983-1985, nineteen in 1986-1987, twenty-one in 1988-1989, and twenty-two in 1990.¹⁰ The River Basin Development Authorities established in 1977, with the sole objective of developing Nigeria by controlling floods and erosion, providing large-scale mechanized clearing and farming of land for farmers, ensuring large scale multiplication of improved seed varieties, and constructing and maintaining dams, dykes, wells, boreholes, and irrigation systems for the demands of the agricultural sector.¹¹ The most important action taken by the government to ensure food security via security of the nation was the Green Revolution. Any century that is self-sufficient and self-reliance in terms of agricultural products has maximum security for its citizens. The Green Revolution (GR) was launched in May, 1980 with the main objectives of making Nigeria self-sufficient in food production. This Revo-intensifying agricultural production was taken so that the century would tend itself, produce a surplus for export and provide a solid raw materials base for the industry. The provision of farm equipment, improved seedlings, and active use of extensive workers, and the distribution of agricultural inputs to farmers at subsidized prices were important aspects of the Green Revolution Programme considered essential to the rapid transformation of the agricultural sector to combat insecurity. More so in order to achieve the ends of the revolution, certain institutions were set up, namely, the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative

Bank, the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, the National Accelerated Fish Production Programme, Commercial Agriculture Development Programme. Youth and woman Empowerment Programme.¹² All these effects of agricultural strategies and policies by the various government of Nigeria provide solutions to food insecurity in the country, This in view of the fact that, throughout the 1980s, 1990s and up to 2000, there was food insecurity, and the country has relative peace and security. However, with the advent of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM), insecurity resurfaces, particularly in northern Nigeria.

III. CHALLENGES OF GSM TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION-IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY

The advent of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) has adversely affected agricultural activities in some of Northern Nigeria. The GSM, the technology behind 2G cellular networks, is a standard for 2G digital cellular networks that are used by mobile devices such as cell phones. GSM is a family of standards to describe the protocols for second-generation digital cellular, such as mobile phones and mobile broadband modems. GSM is also a trademark of the GSM Association. GSM was finally implemented in Finland in December 1991. It became the global standard for mobile cellular communication, with over 2 billion GSM subscribers globally in 2000, acting as its standard.

A few years after the Nigerian civil war, there was a food crisis in the country. Nevertheless, various governments and regimes launched some strategies and policies with the assessment of the World Bank to curb food insecurity. The policies of the Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation, and Back to Land are central provisions to cater the food crisis in the country. However, with the advance of GSM, food insecurity resurfaces again with some catastrophic consciousness, like the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping.

Food production in Northern Nigeria was negatively impacted by the actions of Boko Haram bandits and kidnapping. a. M.S. Abdulkadir says

The Boko Haram insurgency has created and continued to create great havoc in most of the Northeast. The Vanguard newspaper quoted Gene Butai as having stimulated the economic impact of Boko Haram activities in the Northeast at Atabu. According to him, the insecurity in the northeast paralysed economic activities in the region and hinders any form of economic investment. With farm lands and other produce destroyed, over 400,000 houses burnt down, and millions rendered homeless, security and peace were undermined, thereby contributing negatively to economic growth and development in the area. Boko Haram kept expanding into new areas and taking advantage of Nigeria's poverty and other security challenges to fully embrace extremist ideologies.¹³

Moreover, herdsmen and farmers conflicts also threatened food security in the country. The herdsmen's and farmers

conflict over the control and utilisation of available resources has contributed to the escalation of insecurity in many parts of the north. The various serious conflicts that have occurred between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have led to the loss of lives and valuable properties and the destruction of a vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands, thereby posing a serious threat to food security. Disagreements over the use of land and water, as well as grazing routes, have been exacerbated by climate change and the spread of the Sahara Desert. It's a result of herds relocating further south looking for pasture.¹⁴

Banditry and kidnapping are also economic challenges to agricultural production in northern Nigeria, causing insecurity and food crises in the country. Banditry and kidnapping have become lucrative businesses in Nigeria. One of the scariest threats for families, individuals, organisations, and even the government has been the frequent kidnapping of schoolchildren from their classrooms and boarding houses and hostels, as well as along highways and rail routes. In village settlements, towns, and cities, most of the kidnapped victims were only released after a substantial amount of money was paid by their individuals, families, associates, and even the government. The worst part of the whole saga is the government negotiating with these criminal elements. Some of the kidnapers, commonly referred to as bandits, raid villages, kidnap victims, and burn down houses and even homesteads.¹⁵

In a bid to connect challenges of agriculture (food insecurity and poverty) with banditry and kidnapping, M.S. Abdul Kadir says:

Attacks by “bandits” and “kidnappers” have forced thousands of people to flee their homes and farms and seek refuge or shelter in other parts of the country. By every indication Nigeria’s kidnapping industry is thriving and expanding into previously safe areas seemingly beyond the control of the country’s personnel. Kidnapping and banditry have serious threats and damage to trade, farming safety, and education, as well as the country’s farming communities. The overall implication for sustainable development is that farming economic and social activities have deteriorated over the years.¹⁶

The implication of banditry and kidnapping adversely affected agricultural production, which swiftly led us to poverty, hunger, and insecurity.

Poverty, Hunger, and Insecurity

The scourge of poverty is a global phenomenon, but it is more prevalent in developing economies or countries, where Nigeria belongs. Nigeria has experienced an increasing incidence of poverty over the decades, particularly since 1999, when the country entered an uninterrupted civilian democratic disposition and also the advent of GSM. According to the 2016 report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on 25 March 2017, Nigeria retained its 2015 poverty status with a computation of 0.527, which was two points above the 2014 computation of 0.525. Nigeria was therefore ranked 152 among the 188 UN member states in the

Human Development Index (HDI).¹⁷ More Nigerians were multi-dimensionally poor than a decade before 2017; in 2018, around 869 million Nigerians were living in extreme poverty, making Nigeria have the highest level of extreme poverty globally. In 2019, a few days before the general election in February, 91 million Nigerians were living in extreme poverty; this means about half or more of Nigeria's population lived on less than a dollar (360) a day.¹⁸

In a more comprehensive definition, the term “poverty: connotes deprivation and the denial of certain basic needs like food, water, health, education, security, peace, and order; thus, due to insecurity, people would be deprived of all these needs. It is worthy to note that one of the fundamental negative sides of insecurity is poverty due to disruption of socio-economic activities and, at times, destruction of farming activities as well as rural facilities.¹⁹ Therefore, poverty, like insecurity or conflict, is deprivation of all attributes of human development. There have been varying degrees of deprivation of human needs, and this has led to the varying perceptions of poverty in Nigeria. These perceptions are very pertinent in considering poverty vis-à-vis human development in the 21st century. Some Nigerians, as reported in the UNDP Human Development Report of 1996, expressed their perception of poverty as follows:

A person is said to be in poverty when they are objectively unable to use their environment to advance their economic, social, political, or other well-being. It could be due to lack of opportunity for education, which is basic to human development.²⁰

More recently, the poverty situation is a security challenge; poverty According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank (WB), it is “the inability to attain a minimum standard of living.”²¹ Abdullah and Gbegi asserted that the World Bank report has given two indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of the concept, and they also introduce the use of such other indices as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrolment ratio, and number of persons per physician.²² These scholars further addressed the issues of poverty within the framework of basic needs, specifically these needs, and settled minimum levels for them within the Nigerian context.²³ However, Ogunwunike and Odupogun, on their own, defined poverty as a household's inability to provide sufficient income to satisfy needs for food, shelter, education, clothing, and transportation.²⁴ Ezekiel Ayibo Ameh states that

Poverty has also been conceptualised in both the “relative and absolute” terms. According to U. Kalu, the relative conceptualisation of poverty is largely income-based; thus, relative poverty defines income or resources in relation to the average. Poverty is defined relative to the standard of living in society at a specific time. With the lack of adequate resources to support body and soul, absolute poverty may be thought of.²⁵

Certainly, it denotes socio-economic conditions of deprivations or lack of the basic necessities of life, in particular of things that are imperative but are absent and

render life indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, and to be without them certainly denotes poverty. At a global level, nobody will be in serious doubt that most industrialised countries are rich, while the less developed countries like Nigeria and other African countries are generally poor, with minor exceptions on both sides.²⁶ For example, according to World Bank reports in 1981, about 600 million adults in less developed countries were illiterate and poor, while up to 400 million people were recorded to have very low life expectancy, and about 780 million lived on very low incomes. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that poor people mostly live in rural villages rather than urban countries.²⁷

Inferring from above, all scholars and urbanisation, both in Nigeria and abroad, centre on the concept of poverty, one thing which is “lack”—lack of essential things of life, for example, lack of food, lack of security (or insecurity), and lack of education. This study simply views “poverty” as the lack of things needed to make life comfortable, healthy, peaceful, and lengthy.

IV. HUNGER: ITS NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FACTORS

Hunger is a reality of history, pervasive and well established. “Yet” people starve quickly, and the world sincerely appears in the history book.²⁸ What is more, “hunger persists in a world of plenty...and plenty and society both characterised the past.²⁹ The current perspective on hunger differs from that on famine.³⁰ Both phenomena are characterised by food shortages but can better be understood or differentiated if viewed in a continuum by placing hunger and famine at two extreme points. On one hand, famine is a critical shortage of foodstuffs leading from hunger to starvation, epidemics, and low/high mortality rates. According to the United Nations Research Institute on Social Development (UNRISD 1977), famine has three stages; the first is the gestation stage, when a number of factors converge to deteriorate food supply. The next stage is characterized by limited access to food, which is so necessary for survival that it poses a threat to it. The period of recovery from the pangs of food shortage. Apeldorn says famine occurs when a substantial proportion of the population in a sizeable area experiences semi-starvation. Watts defines famine as “a societal crisis induced by the dissolution of the accustomed availability of access to staple food on a scale sufficient to cause starvation among a significant number of individuals.³¹ It should be noted that famine is a biological and socio-economic as well as environmental problem. Its impact is more serious than that of mere scarcity or periodic hunger, involving a sharp rise in mortality and a serene rise in food prices.

Hunger means undernourishment or reduction of calories or proteins or a shortfall of nourishment qualities such as vitamins and minerals in human diets.³² While famine, as we have already emphasised, may lead to starvation and death, hunger is the “better of two evils” since its impact is less total; however, hunger (malnutrition) causes a reduction in the consensus of physician growth and development.³³ It should be borne in mind that hunger and famine are two different

phenomena. The first (hunger) is caused by artificial or human factors, whereas the latter (that is, famines) is caused by some natural factors. On the whole, hunger is caused by human factors like inflation, herding, kidnapping, armed banditry, et cetera, whereas famines are caused by some natural factor like drought, flood, climate change, et cetera. And both cause insecurity; strictly speaking, agricultural challenges cause insecurity, resulting in preventing hunger.

V. SECURITY INSECURITY

The term “security” is derived from the Latin word “secure,” which means to make something (property) or people (live) safe, secure, or peaceful. Security means to protect and keep away from apprehension of or exposure to danger. In other words, to keep away from the danger of hunger, the hunger of poverty, the danger of kidnapping or banditry, et cetera. According to Ali, the term security means the prevention of unlawful possession or to protect a person, people, place, or property from attack by dangerous elements. Security is a major responsibility of the state.³⁴

Balmi, Ahmed, and Yusuf examined security from three fundamental analyses, namely, first, traditional threat and use of regular police. Secondly, military protection of the country's territorial integrity, and thirdly, non-military when concerned with the environment and the people of the area.³⁵ Human security as used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) involved the protection of the basic freedoms from threats, freedoms from what and fear of poverty and hunger, as well as freedom from violence (wars, banditry, and kidnapping) and also fear of violence.³⁶

Granted, security is the antithesis of insecurity; insecurity thus connotes different meanings, such as the absence of safety, security, danger, hazard, lack of protection, and safety. In other words, the absence of security causes some natural and artificial dangers like floods, climate change, drought, poverty, hunger, banditry, kidnapping, et cetera. Thus, insecurity in this context of the study refers to a gross breach of peace and security, increased anxiety and fear, the prevalence of violence and threats to lives and properties, obstructions to human freedom, et cetera.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined some factors responsible for persistent insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Some of these factors are naturally phenomenal, whereas others are artificial or man-made. Both natural and artificial factors adversely affected agricultural output. It should be noted that it is some of these factors that adversely affected agricultural production that are referred to as agricultural challenges. Examples of these agricultural challenges are climate change, kidnapping, and armed banditry. Cumulatively, these challenges cause insecurity in the north. The northern part of this country is the food basket of the nation. Yet in spite of the vast land and rainfall, we still have insecurity that causes hunger, poverty, and malnutrition.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

Since they all agreed that some of these agricultural challenges are man-made and these challenges resulted in hunger, poverty, and insecurity in the nation, then strict measures should be taken to enforce security. All the security personnel should be well-trained, and arms and ammunition should be given to them with regular payment of salaries and allowances, and their lives should be insured.

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