
FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Food is one of man's necessities and its scarcity leads to hunger, starvation, poverty, malnutrition and susceptibility to diseases. Abundance of food ensures good health, improved standard of living, steady supply of raw materials to agro-based industries and foreign exchange. Nigeria's initial interest in agriculture died down following the discovery of oil and subsequent oil boom. Failure to concentrate on and invest in agriculture has brought its hardship on Nigeria and Nigerians. To reverse the trend, the researcher suggests measures like increased funding, increased interest in research and development (R&D), abundant supply of affordable fertilizers, mechanized farming and increased storage/preservation capacities. The contributions of Social Studies Education to food security are also highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Food is very essential to man and Abraham Maslow, the great industrial psychologist, has identified it as one of the key needs of man, the others being air, water and shelter (Woolfork, 1993). Food has always been a source of worry to man and this is understandable. Without it or enough of it, man will starve, experience deficiency in body nutrients and short fall in dietary requirement. The concern for food is high to the extent that one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is focused on it. It seeks to eradicate poverty and hunger and the target is to halve the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day and also halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger between 1990 and 2015.

In an assessment of Nigeria's performance on the MDGs, Professors J. A. Odebiyi and Sesan Ayodele asserted that the most pressing challenge facing Nigeria is that of the eradication of poverty and hunger; that if poverty and hunger could be eradicated through appropriate policy measures, all the other challenges would ease out; (Odebiyi & Ayodele, 2008). Nigeria is not alone in the hunger problem as most of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is caught up in its web. The world over, over 850 million people are affected by hunger and Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 44% of the total number of hungry people and BGL Financial Monitor says the region's hungry people will hit 460 million by 2016 and this is frightening (BGL, 2008).

Poverty and hunger have always been with Nigeria as she has really not been able to feed all her citizens well unlike the developed countries that are able to do so and have some excess for export. The situation is worsening because of increasing food prices and the reluctance of developed countries in encouraging the exportation of their food surpluses. This manifests in the cost of feeding as the world's poorest spend 60% -100% of their incomes on food whereas the developed countries spend about 10% or even less (BGL, 2008). Urgent steps need to be taken to ensure food security, peace and development. This paper therefore aims at the following:

- a) Discuss the situation of food in Nigeria before the oil boom;
- b) Examine the situation of food in Nigeria since then;
- c) Discuss steps Nigeria has taken so far to stem the tide of food insecurity;
- d) Suggest the way forward; and
- e) Discuss the role of Social Studies Education in the drive for food security.

THE PRE-OIL BOOM ERA

Ordinarily, Nigeria ought not to be worried to a frenzied state over food issues if things had been done right all along. At the beginning, that is from independence in 1960, when oil was not an exportable commodity, Nigeria pursued agriculture with some vigour. According to Ajaero (2009), during the period, Nigeria was the second largest producer of palm kernel and largest producer and exporter of palm oil. Nigeria was also a leading exporter of cotton, groundnut, rubber, hide and skin as agricultural sector contributed more than 60 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the sixties. We had "the groundnut pyramids in the North, the cocoa mountains in the West, the oil palm kernel heaps in the East and the rubber plantations in the Midwest (Ajaero, 2009)."

Though the farmers tilled the soil with crude implements and no mechanized farming of any sort, they produced 70 percent of Nigeria's export and 95 percent of its food needs. These were the days of the marketing boards and the surplus earnings from agricultural products were used for infrastructural development.

THE EMERGENCE OF OIL BOOM

The emergence of the oil boom era also meant steady neglect and decline of the agricultural sector. In 1971, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP fell to 48.23 and by 1977 it further dipped to 21 percent while oil represented 90 percent of foreign earnings and about 85 percent of total exports. The more oil was exported, the more petro-dollar came into the country and interest in agriculture started declining. The youths headed for the cities in search of jobs and the good things associated with them, while the old ones were left in the rural areas to till the soil. Before long, what was coming from the farms could not feed the ever-increasing population of Nigeria. Hunger became a reality in a country that could boast of over 68 million hectares of arable land, clement and favourable weather and a sizable population of youths. Nigeria that used to export food started importing and gradually lost its position as the world's largest producer of palm oil, palm kernel and cassava.

Successive governments realizing the harm Nigeria did or was doing to herself tried to encourage food production by introducing such programmes as:

- Operation Feed the Nation (1976)
- The Green Revolution (1979)
- Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (1986 - 1993)
- Better Life Programme (1985)
- Family Support Programme (1994)

They were captivating names but yielded little in terms of food for the people. Nigerians having seen and tested petro-dollar turned their back on agriculture. This is why one agrees

with *BGL Financial Monitor* which asserted that "food insecurity is a man-made problem". In its 37th edition where the above assertion was made, it gave a number of reasons why food insecurity is man-made. First, Africa and South Asia countries, for a long time, did not invest sufficiently in rural economies. For instance, Africa countries are yet to meet the 2003 Maputo Declaration which enjoined them to spend at least 10% of the national budgets on agriculture. The failure to invest substantially in agriculture partly manifests in low fertilizer consumption. Poor soil fertility is common in Africa and high fertilizer consumption can and does improve the situation.

In Sub-Saharan Africa fertilizer consumption is about 8 kilogram per hectare of land as against the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) recommendation of 200 kilogram per hectare. The result is poor yield leading to food insecurity. Second, it is claimed that more than half of the world's grain production is fed to animals. It is argued that 7 kilogram of grain is required to produce 1 kilogram of beef and so meat production, in a way, slows down the realization of global food security. Similarly, as argued by Sampson (2008) much of the grains that would have gone for human consumption is used up as refined fuel (ethanol) thus aggravating the demand for and, consequently, the cost of grains. Third, violent clashes and war lead to extreme food insecurity and North Korea and Zimbabwe are cited as examples.

Apart from these general problems, agriculture in Nigeria faces some peculiar ones, according to Ekpu (2009). They include policy somersaults; agriculture still being regarded as a vocation for the illiterate; the devastating impact of corruption in the agricultural sector; the conservative stance of the agricultural credit scheme of the banks; the women, who are the bulk of farmers, are hardly consulted on policies; climate change and poor remuneration for agricultural products.

THE WAY FORWARD IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian government is not unmindful of the threat of food insecurity. The threat is real and this has been seen from the soaring prices of wheat, flour and rice which are staple food in Nigeria. In neighbouring countries of Togo, Cote d' Ivoire, Gabon and Senegal, rise in the price of wheat has led to food riots. Government has put some strategies in place to cope with food security challenges before they result in riots. In the interim, government has ordered the release of food stock, from the National Food Reserve, to public at a subsidized rate. It released 6,500 metric tons from its strategic grain reserve which include corn, millet and sorghum. It is also encouraging more food storage as effort are geared towards completing the 25 ongoing silos project and construction of 60 specialized warehouses (*Financial Vanguard*, May 5, 2008, p. A2). Nigeria is also thinking of establishing a special ₦200 billion intervention fund to cope with the threatening food crisis.

These are laudable steps but they are not penetrating enough. Bolder steps are needed such that compares with the zeal demonstrated by Brazil. President Lula Da Silva of Brazil initiated the Zero Hunger Programme aimed at providing food security to the 46 million inhabitants that receive less than US\$1 per day to survive (*BGL Financial Monitor*, 39th edition, 2009).

First and foremost, Nigeria must invest more funds in agriculture just as financial institutions and corporate investors should be encouraged to do same. Africa governments, including Nigeria, are yet to allocate 10% of their national budgets to agriculture as agreed upon by the 2003 Maputo Declaration. This is very important because agriculture is the backbone of world economies. In Nigeria, injecting more capital into agriculture will enhance food security, fasten the creation of self-reliance, ensure adequate supply of raw materials for industries, increase the export of non-oil commodities, improvement in the standard of living of the masses, and encourage the growth of a physical fit and mentally alert population (*BGL Financial Monitor*, 37th edition, 2008). Unfortunately, Nigeria continues to neglect agriculture as she does to other crucial sectors like education and energy. For instance, as indicated in the above edition of the *BGL Financial Monitor*, Nigeria sectorial utilization, in percentages of foreign exchange are industrial sector 39%, finished goods 31%, invisible 22%; transport 6%; agriculture sector 2% and personal effects 0%. Agriculture ought to be as high as the industrial sector if not higher.

Secondly, Nigeria should be committed to research and development (R&D) which has become the most enduring and effective means of boosting sustainable economic development (Bako, 2005). According to Okecha (2008), Nigerian leaders do not seem to appreciate that the buoyant economies of the developed and fast developing countries are knowledge-driven and that knowledge has become the most important factor for economic development. Japan, one of the world's major economies, has no crude oil or gas but relies more on brainpower. Her economy is knowledge based and invests robustly of R&D as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Expenditure on R&D in selected Countries

Source: Okecha (2008) p. 89.

S/N.	Countries	Expenditure on R&D as % of GDP
1.	Nigeria	0.3%
2.	Korea	2.0%
3.	Japan	3.0%
4.	West Germany	3.0%
5.	USA	2-3.0%

The huge expenditure on R&D by the developed countries explains their enhanced and enviable level of industrialization and self-reliance. African countries prefer spending on cultural festivals, sports, and the military and devoting peanuts to R&D and that explains their poverty level. One has explained above why it is beneficial to spend on agriculture; however, investing in R&D will do Nigeria a lot of good. There should be funding of research in areas like soil, crops, pest control, preservation, agro-based industries, utilization, and etcetera. The entrenchment of science in African countries is imperative if they plan and hope to progress scientifically and technologically.

Thirdly, Nigeria should go for mechanized farming, domestication of fertilizer production and improved storage and preservation. This three-in-one package is very important. Nigeria needs to mechanise its farming to enhance production that can feed the populace and agro-based industries, take advantage of scientific methods and devices and ensure rapid development. One complaint of the Newswatch Colloquium on Food Crisis is that fertilizers hardly get to the intended end users as they are hijacked by government officials, middlemen and politicians. This is largely caused by the scarcity of the commodity. We must demystify everything about fertilizers by producing it locally so much that every farmer can visit a nearby store and purchase the fertilizer he or she wants. The National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria (NAFCON), Onne, River State of Nigeria, can be expanded while similar ones replicated elsewhere in Nigeria to ensure steady supply of fertilizer to Nigeria farmers. Nigeria also needs to be more aggressive in her food reservation, preservation and storage programmes.

There are a few food storage silos and new ones are springing up. Presently, the country's 300,000 tonnes food storage reserve is nothing compared to the 2.8 million tonnes reserve expectation of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Much has to be done to move from the present 300,000 to the expected 2.8 million. Nigeria, according to Chigbo (2009), wastes about 70 percent of her perishable food annually and 30 percent of durable food after harvest. With good food preservation and storage, these huge losses can be avoided thereby making food more abundant for the people and avoiding food crisis.

THE PLACE OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

Social Studies has some roles to play in warding off food crisis in Nigeria. The social studies teacher as a social engineer must draw the attention of students, and through them, their parents to the looming food crisis and hunger. Awareness must be created and all stakeholders sensitized to contribute their quota towards averting the impending food crisis.

Secondly, all (including civil servants, students and the self employed) must be encouraged to have farms or gardens. There must be a paradigm shift from "talking" to "working". At the colloquium on food crisis, the Imo State Commissioner for Agriculture (Longers Anyanwu) called for the re-introduction of schools farms as a means of ensuring more food and this is necessary.

Thirdly, the social studies teacher, as a moulder of character, must seize any available opportunity especially when teaching topics like nationalism, peace, security, internal and international trade to emphasize the place of agriculture in our economy. He must emphasize that apart from providing food for the populace, it ensures smooth flow of raw materials, earns foreign exchange and the like. He must preach the love for agriculture. Finally, the social studies teacher, as a social facilitator, must emphasize and encourage honesty, concern for others and patriotism in general. He must present as detestable the corruption of government officials and others whose activities make life unbearable for others. Professor Francis Idachaba, two-time Vice-Chancellor and a strong voice in the campaign for improved agricultural sector, believes that greed and corruption are two evils that have stunted growth and development in the sector. Consequently, the social studies teacher must assist in waging war against the two evils, so that subsequent policies can achieve their desired results.

CONCLUSION

It has been asserted that food is a key need of man and that without it hunger, malnutrition and low resistance to diseases become inevitable. According to the United Nations Secretary -General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, "food is not just a commodity, and agriculture is not just a business. Both are central to survival". It is the truth. Nigeria's initial interest in agriculture waned with the oil boom and the resultant effect is prevailing hunger and poverty. She has to retrace her steps and invest robustly in agriculture, if she is to evade the looming food crisis and associated calamities. Nigeria must be interested in R&D, make fertilizers available in affordable quantity, engage in mechanized farming and ensure higher storage/preservation capacity. In the march towards food security, the social studies teacher has his role to play as well. He must assist in creating awareness about food crisis, encourage participation in food production, and preach against greed and corruption that ruin most agricultural policies and preach love of agriculture. All Nigerians must see food as crucial and work towards its abundance to ensure good health since a healthy nation is wealthy nation.

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