

IMPEDIMENTS AGAINST THE REALIZATION OF FOOD SECURITY POLICY IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Achieving food security by the year 2020 is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) objectives, which have made Nigeria, as a nation and Imo state in particular, to have food policy. However, this policy's failure leads to wastages of government funds and efforts which make this research expedient. This study examines the socio-economic variables responsible for the non-realization of the government's goal in Imo State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was presented to 280 respondents in the three-food producing zones of Imo state. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics namely; frequency distribution of Yes and No using percentages and such variables like corruption of officials, dependence on food imports, giving more social infrastructure to urban than rural areas, shortage of incentives for private sector participants, unequal social objective and unstable political environment, etc. The samples were also taken according to the three zones in Imo and on Local Government Area basis; one community represented a Local Government. Of all the variables, corruption has been identified as the main cause of food security policy failure in Imo vis-à-vis Nigeria. Appropriate recommendations were also made.

Key Words: Food security, Impediment, Food policy, Food production.

Introduction

A basic necessity for human capital development and efficiency is food. If a country cannot guarantee food supply to her citizens, she stands the risk of losing her sovereignty technically. This is because food supply is used as political tool and as an instrument for winning wars both internally/locally and externally/internationally. The susceptibility of African nations to food crises has attracted the minds of economic thinkers of our time to improve the state of food supply to the people via policy formulations. Food security policy failures or impediments are those factors that may lead to the non-realization of food policy objectives.

Despite its abundant human and material resources, the neglect of agriculture by Nigeria has made her to depend on finished goods from Europe and other developed countries at exorbitant prices. According to Ayo (1988:89), between 1946 and 1956, economic activities in Nigeria had almost entirely been commercial whereas the role

envisaged for the colonies was that of producers of raw materials and consumers of finished products. Agriculture dominated economic activities from 1950s to 1960s, and even the early 1970s. The sector contributed an average of 60% of GDP between 1960 and 1967. Between 1969 and 1972, its contribution averaged 45%. The oil boom of 1973/74 brought a new dimension into the economic activities of the country.

The sharp increases in oil revenue in 1973/74 and again in 1979/80 had a pervasive effect on the Nigerian economy and the neglect of agriculture vis-à-vis the surfacing of food crises. Hence, Obasanjo (2001) recommended that this variable (i.e. food security) should attract people oriented policies and commitment on part of national resources to ensure meaningful life for all Nigerians.

The demand for food out-stripped the growth in supply of food due to the growth in world population which doubled between 25 and 30 years. The growth in food demand will be more than doubled in the near future while the cultivable land gets depleted in size and fertility due to population pressure over time. This becomes a warning signal to food crises. This is frightening indeed.

As a theory is a set of related principles providing insight into the operation of some phenomena, a policy therefore sets the goals and identifies the instruments and strategies for the attainment of such goals that theory considers attainable (Ani, 1996). So the economist/agricultural economist holds theory and policy as important guiding tools for successfully dealing with the ever-dynamic food situation in our country, Nigeria.

Despite this, the efforts of the food policy makers can be thwarted or impaired by some factors or variables. Therefore, only effective translation of food policies into sustainable food supply can dismiss or allay the fears expressed in the 'Limited To Grow Theory and Dooms-Day Theory' (Achoja, 2007). Hence, causes of food policy failure in Nigeria in general and Imo state in particular deserve this study.

Some research questions are guides to this investigation:

- Is corruption of public officials responsible for food security policy problems in the state?
- Is the high rate of dependence of Nigerians on food import responsible for the non-realization of food security policy in the country?
- Is the government's dichotomy between the urban and rural farmers an impediment on food security objective realization?

The problem of this study bothers on the understated. Imo State government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, has been spending a lot of money in the agricultural sector. The objective has been to increase food production in the state. Through its annual budget, the state government has invested much so as to reduce the poverty rate, and increase self-employment efforts and standard of living of the citizens. However, the under mentioned problems have been militating against these objectives:

- a) It is observed that some officials, mainly agricultural superintendents, extension officers, accountants, and politicians siphon money or allocations and materials meant for the rural farmers.
- b) Politicians parade themselves as farmers and collect loans and incentives meant for farmers.
- c) In some zones, the farmers are fighting themselves in the name of boundary adjustments and intra-ethnic problems. The land tenure problem is a major factor in this regard.
- d) The rural farmers are being discriminated against their urban counterparts in infrastructural amenities and prices of commodities, etc. (Ideh, 2007).

The objectives of this study are therefore:

1. To identify and analyze the major factors that impede food security policy in Nigeria, particularly in Imo state.
2. To determine or ascertain the extent to which the identified variables hinder/inhibit the efficient translation of food policy to sustainable food supply in Imo state, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of food policy

A policy can be defined as a course of action selected from among alternatives to guide present and future decisions. Jenkins (1987) defined policy as a set of inter-related decisions concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation. With this therefore, food security policy represents the intentions and plans of action, goals and ambitions of government for the food sector which are reflected in programs and projects.

The fundamental vision and mission of the government for the citizenry are the cardinal objectives of food policy. In effect, the ultimate goal of food policy is human welfare, while the poorest of the poor are the targets. Targeting here means the process of ensuring that the benefits of food policy intervention are directed to the intended vulnerable groups, organizations, individuals, communities or geographical areas.

The evaluation of food policy may be conducted to detect the effect and impact or the success or failure on the target. In this study, we are interested in why policies fail to translate, sooner or later, into definite quality and quantity of food necessity, for life improvement among the target population.

Concept of food security

The access to adequate and safe domestically produced food in both quantity and quality to meet the nutritional requirement of the people throughout the year at affordable prices is called FOOD SECURITY. It could be permanent or transitory. It is permanent when food is available to all people at all times (World Bank, 1986), while food insecurity is when sustainable agriculture fails, hence food security fails.

According to South Centre (1997), there are five principles of food security. These are: food sufficiency, equity, sustainability, autonomy and reliability.

- ❖ **Food sufficiency** National food sufficiency is attained when the food system of a nation possesses the capacity to produce, import, store or otherwise acquire sufficient food to meet the needs of all its citizens at all times.
- ❖ **Equity** This deals with the distributional issues. The South Centre (1979) remarked that every social group and individual in the economy should have access to adequate food at all times. Equitable access to food should be a fundamental guiding criterion of food policy. Market-based food distribution arrangements should provide enough incentives and guarantee fair prices that do not harm the pockets of the poor consumers.
- ❖ **Sustainability** This is one principle that implies that current food production and consumption patterns should not in anyway jeopardize food production and consumption in the future.
- ❖ **Autonomy** The principle of autonomy or self reliance emphasizes that nation-states should not be subject to the dictates of other nations and multi-national corporations in determining the policies and rules affecting their food systems. Over reliance on food imports, especially of basic staple food can be harmful to the long term strategic survival of a country.
- ❖ **Reliability** This implies that the food system continues to supply adequate food even during periods of seasonal and cyclical variation in climatic and socio-economic conditions. Such system is resilient enough to withstand the impact of external shocks like natural disaster, climatic changes, policy reversals and socially induced changes in the production and consumption environments.

Research Method

The study area is Imo State of Nigeria and primary data were collected from 280 respondents, sampled from the three agricultural zones of Okigwe, Orlu, and Owerri. Based on the number of Local Governments, Orlu with 12 LGAs had 50 percent, Owerri with 9 LGAs was given 35 percent, while Okigwe with 6 LGAs had 15 percent. A community represented one Local Government. The following communities / towns were therefore chosen as representatives for Orlu zone: Nempi, Awo-Omamma, Awo-Idemili, Amaifeke, Osina, Dikenafai, Umuaka, Isu, Umudi, Atta, Abba and Agbaja. Owerri zone had its representatives as óUmuokanne, Izombe, Avu, Egbu, Amawom, Ogwa, Amaimo, Umumbiri, Obizi / Uvuru. In the same vein, Okigwe zone was represented by Umunumo, Umuezegwu, Ikenanzizi, Okwe, and Anara. Hence, the zones and Local Governments were represented in the sample survey based on the three questions asked above. Also, the respondents were chosen from 10 fields of human endeavor as well as the twenty-seven local government areas as shown in Table 1.0 below:

Table 1.0: Distribution of Respondents

S/NO	RESPONDENTS	NO OF RESPONDENTS
1	Farmers	60
2	Traders	15
3	Bankers	10
4	Government officials	30
5	Politicians	22
6	Policy makers	18
7	Teachers	21
8	Transporters	25
9	Community leaders	34
10	Opinion leaders	45
	Total	280

SOURCES: SURVEY DATA, 2007.

The above respondents were considered useful in the study because they are the major stakeholders in the food security policy and programs in Nigeria. The instrument used to elicit primary data from the respondents was structured questionnaire. As well, data collected were analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics like frequency distribution and percentages.

The identified impediments towards food security policy/program in Imo State are presented based on the distribution of respondents' responses as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Distribution of Respondent's Response

S/NO	CAUSES OF FOOD SECURITY POLICY FAILURE	FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATION			PERCENTAGE		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
1	Corruption of Public Officials	250	30	280	89	11	100
2	Dependence On Food Imports And Aid	200	80	280	71	29	100
3	Distribution Of Social Amenities To Urban Dwellers By Government	220	60	280	79	21	100
4	Inadequate Incentives For Private Sector Participation In Food Production	240	40	280	86	14	100
5	Unstable/Unpredictable Political Environment	180	100	280	64	36	100
6	Unequal Social Environment	150	130	280	54	46	100

SOURCES: FIELD SURVEY (2007) N/B Multiple responses were recorded in this survey.

The Factors That Impede Effective Implementation of Food Security Policy in Imo State, Nigeria

The identified impediments on food security policy in Imo state vis-à-vis Nigeria in the study area are discussed below:

- 1) **Corruption of Public Officials** The study revealed that 89% of respondents agreed that corruption of public officials was a major factor that inhibits the implementation and realization of food security policy in the state in particular and Nigeria in general. In other words, food production resources are allocated to corrupt individuals within the bureaucratic system who are involved in food production projects that are not implemented. Influential persons in the society usurp the benefits like fertilizers, cash and seedlings of food programs. The reason is that the benefit of public sector spending trickles down to unintended beneficiaries, hence the objectives of the relevant food policy are never realized. As a result of the leakages, it leads to economic wastages. This finding agrees with the theory of targeting according to Orji (2002) which anchors on the assumption that left alone, the unaided economic system and bureaucracy may not deliver the scheduled benefits to the intended groups.
- 2) **Dependence on Food Imports and Aid** This study also revealed that 71% respondents opined that the country's high dependence on food imports and foreign aid are one of the impediments towards the realization of food security. Also, over dependence on food import undoubtedly violates the policy of self sufficiency in food production which discourages domestic food production initiatives as confirmed by 200 respondents on Table 2. The negative influences of the high dependence on imports are collapse of some local food cottage industries like poultry, reduction of local consumer's patronage, etc.
- 3) **Distribution of Social Amenities to Urban Than Rural Dwellers by Government** The analysis of survey data showed that 79% respondents affirmed that government's preference of urban sector (urban dwellers) to rural sector (rural dwellers) in the distribution of social amenities is a hindrance towards the success of food security. In the past, the government of Nigeria has given more attention to urban centers in the allocation of social amenities, but the grassroots or rural dwellers are the major producers of food and the urban centers are the consumers. The bottleneck of movement between the two sectors becomes an impediment to food security policy. In effect, the distance between urban and rural centers has important influence on food prices. As transportation cost increases with increased distance, the prices farmers pay for their material inputs increase and the price they receive for their marketed foodstuff tends to fall (Oji 2002). With increasing remoteness, the terms of trade deteriorate. The incentive to produce by the farmers or producers will reduce dependence on the bulkiness and perishability of food stuff and market spread. Finally, elements of poor social amenities like lack of storage facilities or silos, electricity, bad road network, etc are examples of impediments to food security.

- (4) Inadequate Incentives for Private Sector Participation in Food Production** Lack of incentives for private sector participation is one of the impediments against food security policy in Nigeria as attested to by 86% respondents in this study. There should be a distinction between agricultural services that are technically public and private. Food security policy or agenda of the government should not be a replica of food production activities which private individuals are already fulfilling. In most cases, the reverse is the case. The government involves itself in food production activities that gulp a reasonable sum of public fund, but their products never find their way into the food system. It is the government that formulates and implements food security policy without reference to the private sector participation. This practice yields negative result in the end. According to Achoja (2002), the important thing for government to do is not to engage in food production matters through the agricultural ministries (which private farmers are already doing or willing to do and can even do better), but to embark on activities such as production of high yielding varieties of seeds, seedlings, etc and the distribution of seeds, seedlings, mini sets at subsidized rates to the private sector. The private sector needs only government support, encouragement and quality control.
- (5) Unstable/Unpredictable Political Environment** Unstable political environment is one of the impediments militating against the realization of food security policy in Nigeria. Continuous changes in the political system tend to introduce distortion into food security policies and projects. The existence of a particular political leader brings to an end or collapse of on-going food security projects. Also, unpredictable political climate may make investors loose confidence in making investment in the food sub sector. During crises of food production, programs are destroyed leading to huge loses which leads to the food security policy in Nigeria, as confirmed by 64% of the respondents.
- (6) Unequal Social Environment** The survey data revealed that 54% respondents opined that unequal social environment is the bane of food security policy in Nigeria. Farming is not regarded as an attractive occupation in Nigeria. Most young and old men and women go to the towns to look for white collar jobs. Most of the farms are being provided by old people who cannot farm effectively. This brings about low productivity. (Anyanwuocha 2006:84). The magnitude of inequality of income and power between men and women and between leaders are evident in agricultural credit scheme. For instance, women who are farmers and who farm more than 60% of food production are often side-tracked under such policies/programs. In most cases, such credits never flow into food production system. This brings about failures in Nigeria.

Conclusion

There is no gain saying the fact that the causes of food security policy non-realization in Imo State, nay Nigeria are myriad. These are mainly socio-economic factors like the corruption of agricultural officials; urban-rural dichotomy, much dependence on food imports and unstable political environment, etc. Amongst all these, corruption or

mismanagement is the bane of this policy in Nigeria. The solutions to food security policy cannot be divorced from remedies required is a strong political will to action; as many recommendations have been proffered in this study.

Recommendations

The first policy recommendation is that emphasis should be laid on popular participation in food policy formulation so as to reduce food security policy failures. The government should not discriminate between rural and urban areas in citing infrastructure or amenities. It should ensure balanced infrastructure development in both rural and urban centers to encourage food production and efficient delivery. As well, rural areas should be developed to attract young farmers.

Both the federal and state governments should provide agricultural incentives as well as soft loans, subsidies and other inputs to the farmers especially in rural areas. There should be enforceable stringent measures on corrupt practices as well as built in monitoring and control mechanisms on food security policies. Government should deal directly with grass root farmers rather than the existing tripartite arrangement in local, state and federal establishments. In other words, there should be equitable distribution of productive resources among every stake-holder in the food production system.

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