
PROSPECTS OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF HOME GARDENS TO FOOD SECURITY IN OUR HOUSEHOLDS

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the prospects of the contribution of home gardens to food security in our households. It highlights the features of food security in our households to include – accessibility to food, stability of supplies over time, availability of enough food and utilization of food viz-a-viz ingestion of enough and qualitative food. These features can be achieved by the following prospects of home gardens: economic development of household, diversity of food in home gardens, stability of food supply over time, and ecological role of home garden. If there is food security in our household through the establishment of home garden in both urban and rural settlements, inferentially there will be food security in our nation.

Key words: Home gardens, food security, households, economic development, food supply.

INTRODUCTION

Amonum et al. (2009) reports that tropical home gardens consists of an assemblage of plants which may include trees, shrubs, vines and herbaceous plants growing in or adjacent to a homestead or home compound. Okafor and Fernandes (1989) quoted by Amonum *et al.* (2009) reported that in this system, multipurpose trees and shrubs in a multistory association with agricultural crops are raised with livestock in homestead. In agroforestry it implies the intimate

association of multipurpose trees and shrubs with annuals and perennial crops and invariably livestock within the compound of individuals with the whole crop-tree-animal-unit being managed by family labour (Anon, 2009).

World Bank (1986) quoted by Babatunde and Oyetoye (2000) define food security as access by all people to food of adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all time. The World Food

Summit in 1996, described food security to exist when people have physical and economic access at all times to food sufficient in quantity and quality needed for their daily activities (World Bank, 1996). The challenges of food security can be at national, regional, local or household levels. At national level for example, a nation is food secured when the majority of the population have access to food of adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times. A region within a country is food secured when the majority of the population in that geo-political region has access to food of adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times (Babatunde and Oyatoye, 2000).

Food security is jointly determined by availability of food and accessibility to food of which availability is a function of production of which home garden is primarily for food production of quantity and majorly quality.

This paper is concerned with food security in our household of which access or availability of food to all members of the family must be either through their own farm operation or by purchasing the food from the market. Availability through their

own farm operation can be from either growing food crops in fields and gardens, (Huges and Phippe, 1989).

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY AND HOME GARDENS

Food production is the primary role of most home gardens. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of the Nigerian economy. This is because it contributes more than 30% of the total annual GDP, employs about 70% of the labour force, accounts for over 70% of non-oil export and perhaps most important, provides over 80% of the food needs of the country, (Adegboye, 2004).

The first decade of Nigerian Independence (1960-1970) opened the way to food shortages as a result of declining agricultural production and increasing population growth. The increase in population at rate considerably higher than the rate of increase in food production has continued to widen the gap between domestic food supply and domestic demand. This disparity has led to rising food prices (85-125% increases in many Nigerian cities) and declining foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. The interaction of these factors has led to food insecurity and the idea of self-

sufficiently is becoming more and more difficult to achieve due to declining agricultural production and inefficient food marketing system (Babatunde and Oyatuye 2000). Thus to achieve food self-sufficiency or security in our household the food must be produced in the right quantity and at the appropriate quality. In quantity staple foods are produced in the field, while for quality vegetables, fruits etc which contain vitamins and minerals are produced in home gardens for a diet to be balanced.

PROSPECTS OF HOME GARDENS

Food security at household level which exists when all members of the family have access to food of adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times, has the following features identified by Tollens (1998) as quoted by Umar et al (2008).

1. Accessibility to food
2. Stability of supplies overtime, to guarantee availability at any given time.
3. Availability of enough food for achieving healthy life.
4. Utilization of food viz a viz ingestion of enough and qualitative food for maintenance of good health.

These features of food security highlighted above can be achieved from the following prospects of home gardens discussed below.

HOME DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSEHOLD

Home gardens according to Huges and Philippe (1989) have an economic role to play in the food security of household as they yield food products and by-products, products used in medicine, in home, in clothing, in arts and crafts. Produce can be consumed, or sold to ensure an income.

Home gardens are often part of the kitchen, an extension of the housewife realm where she finds staple foods and ingredients for cooking and for sale (Huges and Philippe, 1989). This meets the third feature of food security.

FOOD DIVERSITY IN HOME GARDENS

The home gardens are places where one should be able to find a little of everything; fruits, vegetables, condiments, medicinal herbs, dyes, wood for fires or buildings, poles, fibres, flowers, incense, calabashes etc (Huges and Philippe, 1989). They also stressed that diversity of plants in the gardens leads to diversity of family diet.

Small animals such as rabbits, poultry and bees can be associated with the garden for animal protein intake and vitamins. This prospect meets the fourth feature of food security (utilization of food viz a viz ingestion of enough and qualitative food for maintenance of good health).

STABILITY OF SUPPLY OVER TIME

Another aspect of food production in home gardens is the almost continuous production that occurs throughout the year. Also due to the proximity of gardens to home, it ensures that there is access to food at all times. Huges and Philippe (1989) reports that there is always some produce waiting to be picked, pulled, or cut, no matter the time of the year, whether it be seeds, nuts, bananas, leaves, fruits, staple foods, medicinal herbs, calabashes or wood. Whenever the woman of the house feels the need, she can harvest some produce for family consumption or for sale. This prospect of home gardens meets the first feature of food security (Accessibility to food) and the second feature of food security (Stability of supply over time to guarantee availability at any given time).

ECOLOGICAL ROLE OF HOME GARDENS

Home gardens according to Huges and Philippe (1989) have an ecological role to

play as plants especially perennials, influence the living and physical environments. They produce vegetal manure in the form of humus, they help to control erosion. They create shade, they intercept wind, they promote rainwater infiltration. Huges and Philippe (1989) also reports that by planting and managing trees, the climatic conditions in the garden are modified. The cultivated trees are ecologically useful, because they change or conserve the environment of other plants. A few months are added to the horticultural season and this is quite an achievement in regions where rainfed crops can only be grown for 4 to 5 months each year. This ecological sustainability and conservation of plants in the garden meets the second feature of food security in our household as it ensures (stability of supplies over time, to guarantee availability at any given time).

CONCLUSION

Presently over 40% of Nigeria's population is food insecure (Idachaba, 2000) quoted by (Adegboye, 2004). He also reports that the food problem was not peculiar to Nigeria. It attracted a global attention as more than 800 million people throughout the developing countries and some 40 millions in developed words do not have enough

food to meet their basic needs and millions more experience hunger, malnutrition, growth retardation and sometimes death due to starvation. From the above statistics urgent measures are necessary from all quarters to increase food production. Home gardens are good avenues for ensuring food security in the households. If food is secured in all households, it means food is secured in all locality, it means food is secured in all regions, it means food is secured in all nations, it also means food is secured in the world. So, it is necessary to start addressing the problems of food insecurity from the household by establishing home gardens in households both in rural and rural areas.

Town planners should ensure that spaces are provided for home gardens in homes in the urban areas as this will not only ensure food security in household but will also help in maintaining the ecological balance of that micro environment.

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