



THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBALISATION AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA (1999 – 2019)

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest challenges of any nation is that of feeding her citizens. Different analytical perspectives had been used to examine the food problem while the root cause has been situated in many sources and claims. In the Nigerian context, in spite of the country's enormous human and natural resources, and the formulation and implementation of a number of high-quality policies aimed at improving the food situation of the country, hunger is still widespread. This paper explores the shift in policy focus by government from subsistence agriculture, as a way of life, to commercial agriculture as a business within the context of globalization. The paper shows that the Nigerian food situation had not fare better in the face of globalization. Ethno-sectional considerations have continued to intrude into the process of allocation in the food and agricultural sector and the implementation of food policies in Nigeria, with grave consequences on sustainable food security. To properly globalize the Nigerian agricultural system towards improving the nation's food situation and enhancing food security, there is the need to harmonize agricultural policies with other agencies active in promoting food production in the country, in line with the socio-cultural milieu and the food preferences of the people.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Political Economy, Food Security, Socio-Cultural Milieu, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Food self-sufficiency and food security are two key indicators of a nation's success in achieving the goal of "food for all" (Ering, 2011). Ensuring food security, which is the fundamental right of individuals to access the food they need, is a particularly pressing issue in low-income, food-deficit countries. In response to this challenge, different approaches have been proposed. Some policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders advocate for the use of advanced technologies like genetic engineering to secure future food supplies, while others support more localized, low-tech alternatives centered around smaller-scale food systems.

Genetically modified (GM) foods have gained traction in regions where they are available. While some individuals and communities have embraced and are consuming GM foods, others have voiced strong opposition, arguing that there is insufficient evidence to prove their safety for human consumption and long-term health (Foodafrica, 2004). Despite assurances from international organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the safety of GM foods, environmental activists in many parts of the world continue to warn about potential risks associated with their use and consumption.



In the context of globalization and the ongoing shift toward a market-driven economy, the agricultural landscape in which resource-poor, developing countries and their subsistence farmers operate is evolving rapidly. Traditional knowledge and skills that served earlier generations are no longer sufficient (Commonwealth of Learning, 2003). Globalization offers subsistence farmers the opportunity to enhance their expertise and adopt new agricultural technologies, enabling them to better tackle the challenges of maintaining and improving agricultural productivity.

According to the World Development Indicators (2004), one-third of the world's food insecurity cases occur in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Nigeria is among the countries facing this challenge. Food insecurity has remained a widespread issue across Africa in the early 21st century, driven by factors such as rising food prices and ineffective domestic policies aimed at ensuring food security in several African nations.

CONCEPTUALISING GLOBALISATION AND FOOD SECURITY

Globalization refers to the integration of national economies through trade, financial exchanges, and investment, which leads domestic economies to be influenced by the policies and practices of other nations. This process fosters the expansion of economic activities that extend beyond the political borders of nations and regions (Ajakaiye & Akinbinu, 2000). It is characterized by the increased cross-border movement of goods and services through trade, and of people through migration. Globalization is largely driven by economic actors—businesses, financial institutions, and individuals—seeking profit, often motivated by competition, as capital and resources shift to areas with the highest returns (Ajakaiye & Akinbinu, 2000). According to a distinguished member of the global elite, the president of ABB, an electronic and electrical transnational:

I would define globalization as the freedom for my group to invest where and as long as it wishes, to produce what it wishes, by buying and selling wherever it wishes, and all the while putting up with a little labour laws and social convention constraints as possible (Gelinas, 2003:21).

Globalization has garnered significant interest from scholars across various disciplines, resulting in an extensive body of literature on the topic. In contrast, the issue of food security became particularly prominent in the 1970s and has since drawn considerable attention. Maxwell and Frankenberger (1992) identified as many as 30 definitions of food security. Initially, the concept was predominantly viewed from the perspective of food supply alone. However, this outlook began to evolve in 1979 when the World Food Programme (WFP) redefined food security as the "assurance of supplies and a balanced supply-demand situation of staple foods in the international market." The same WFP report emphasized that food security for developing countries would be achieved primarily by increasing their food production.

Despite global food availability, food security does not automatically extend to every nation, particularly those in the developing world. Many low-income populations cannot access available food in the international market due to limited economic resources and foreign currency shortages needed to make such purchases (Ayalew, 2001). According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (2006), food security is defined as a state in which all individuals, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for a healthy and active life.

Expanding on this definition, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (1999) highlights that food security also includes ensuring both physical and economic access to balanced diets and safe drinking water for all people at all times. This means that beyond food availability, the affordability and body's ability to absorb nutrients are critical aspects of food security. As Idachaba (2004) points out, true food security is only achieved when the



majority of a nation's population has consistent access to food in adequate quantity and quality to support a decent standard of living at all times. .

It is insufficient to view food security solely through qualitative and quantitative lenses. The importance of food hygiene and safety must also be emphasized to safeguard public health. For example, food may be available, but if the source or the processing methods are unhygienic, or if harmful chemicals are used in production or preservation, it can pose significant health risks (Ojo & Adebayo, 2012, p. 203). Therefore, a country should be considered food-secure not only when it has an adequate supply to meet the population's needs for a decent standard of living but also when the food consumed is safe and does not endanger citizens' health (Davies, 2009).

Over time, the concept of food security has evolved from focusing on self-sufficiency to addressing vulnerability and risk in access to food and nutrition (IFPRI, 2004). Due to the complexity of the issue, more than 200 different definitions have appeared in scholarly literature (FAO, 2003). At the 1974 World Food Summit, food security was defined as the "availability at all times of sufficient world food supplies to sustain a steady increase in consumption and counterbalance fluctuations in production and prices." This definition has since been updated to include food safety, nutritional adequacy, and cultural preferences. The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as "physical and economic access by all people at all times to sufficient, nutritionally adequate, and safe food of their choice for an active and healthy life." The core elements of food security are, therefore, availability, accessibility, affordability, and proper utilization of food.

The pace and intensity of changes in food systems vary across regions and countries, even though all are moving along a similar trajectory as globalization connects the world. Country-specific examples are crucial in understanding the factors influencing these transformations and their impact on the nutritional status of populations. In nations such as Colombia, South Africa, Tanzania, and India, economic reforms and market liberalization have opened their markets to international trade. Population growth, climate change, and globalization all play critical roles in shaping food security (George, 2002).

Globalization enables countries to benefit from increased capital flows, technological advancements, and more affordable imports and exports. However, some scholars argue that the importation of food products can negatively impact a nation's food security. There is ongoing debate about the effects of globalization on sustainable food security, with some contending that growing economic connections worldwide will be advantageous to all (Dioume, 2015).

A country's economic policies serve as a key measure of how globalization affects its integration into the global economy. The impact of globalization on a nation largely depends on its commitment to economic development within the international arena. Food security can enhance a nation's global standing and security through trade liberalization (George, 2002). Free markets, which play a pivotal role in promoting globalization, involve the systematic reduction or elimination of trade tariffs and non-tariff barriers. These include lowering duties, removing quotas, and minimizing other trade restrictions. The benefits of free markets include promoting comparative advantage, reducing prices, and increasing the availability of goods.

However, the influx of cheap food imports into developing countries has undermined domestic agriculture by reducing demand for locally produced goods. As a result, many farmers and workers in agro-allied industries have lost their jobs, with few alternative sources of income unless they switch to other profitable ventures. Even when low-cost food is plentiful, access remains limited for many. Rising transportation costs, driven by increased fuel prices, further exacerbate the situation, as higher transport expenses inflate the cost of getting farm produce to markets. The Nigerian government's price support program has



contributed to rising food prices by releasing surplus grains from the nation's strategic reserves (Okuneye, 2001). These factors have constrained both access to and availability of food, deepening food insecurity.

Additionally, fluctuations in foreign exchange rates have driven up the cost of imported agricultural inputs, further straining the agricultural sector. Cassava, a key food staple in Nigeria, has also been impacted. Cassava-based foods like garri (cassava granules) and lafun (cassava flour) are increasingly scarce, rendering them less accessible to the population (Adebola & Folorunso, 2014).

ATTEMPTS AT ADDRESSING THE WORLD FOOD PROBLEM

At the 1974 World Food Conference, delegates expressed optimism that food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition could be eliminated within a decade. However, nearly two decades later, the International Conference on Nutrition provided clear evidence that this goal remained unmet in many regions (Women Aid International, 2005). This failure persisted despite advancements in agricultural technology and innovative food production methods.

A significant portion of the population in developing countries resides in rural areas, where agriculture is their primary means of livelihood. Unfortunately, many governments in these regions have neglected rural development, prioritizing urbanization and industrialization instead. When agriculture has received attention, it has often focused on cash crops for export rather than staple foods for local consumption.

In recent years, global hunger has taken on a new dimension, with food riots erupting in over 30 countries in 2008 as millions protested for affordable food (Mousseau, 2009). Currently, over 1 billion people are chronically undernourished, lacking the necessary food to maintain healthy, productive lives (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2009). In some developing nations, food production has not kept pace with population growth, raising serious concerns for the future. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, agricultural output is projected to struggle in meeting the needs of a population expected to grow from 550 million in 1995 to 1.2 billion by 2025 unless significant efforts are made to boost staple crop production and yields (Women Aid International, 2005).

Most Africans rely on farming for their livelihoods, yet government policies in many African countries have historically undermined farmers' interests, contributing to food shortages and widespread hunger (Bates, 1981). Compounding the issue is the lack of capacity in sub-Saharan African nations to formulate and implement food policies that meet the needs of their citizens, reduce reliance on external actors, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. The concept of food sovereignty remains largely unfamiliar to many African leaders.

Despite this, there is a growing recognition that African governments have not fulfilled their commitments to allocate at least 10 percent of their annual budgets to agricultural development, as outlined in the 2003 Maputo Declaration. In response, regional organizations have launched campaigns to promote alternative policy frameworks aimed at strengthening agriculture and food production across the continent.

To address the impacts of food insecurity on their populations, some leaders have taken seemingly proactive measures aimed at ensuring that their people have access to sufficient food for healthy and productive lives. One notable initiative is the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) and the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP). Under the ECOWAP-CAADP framework, each country is expected to develop and sign agreements with ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) on strategies to alleviate poverty and hunger, followed by the formulation of National Agriculture Investment Plans (NAIPs). However, food security does not hold a prominent place in the policy agendas of many participating African nations, and there is a lack of coordination between the NAIP initiatives.



and earlier programs such as the National Food Crisis Response Programmes (NFCRP) (Ajayeoba, 2010).

While policy experts and food security analysts continue to debate the issue, a range of differing opinions and proposals have emerged. Neo-Malthusians remain concerned about the risks posed by unchecked population growth to food security, whereas Cornucopians are more optimistic, believing that current methods of food production and distribution can adequately meet future demands, making global food security an attainable goal (wmich.edu/n2senic/population.doc). Amid these contrasting viewpoints, the role of global economic system managers appears intentional. For decades, international trade has kept food prices artificially low, thereby reducing the income of farmers in developing countries. This has led to a situation where many of the least developed nations are heavily reliant on global markets for their food supply, leaving the poor increasingly unable to afford even the most basic sustenance for themselves and their families. The result has been a recent sharp rise in global food prices, with significant social and economic consequences (Mousseau, 2009).

In the case of Nigeria, despite its abundant human and natural resources—such as arable land, diverse crops, and a large population—hunger remains widespread. Idachaba (2009) noted that Nigeria is blessed with extensive agro-ecological resources and biodiversity, yet paradoxically, it remains one of the largest food importers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Clover (2003) argues that hunger is primarily a political issue, requiring political solutions. This idea is supported by Diaz-Bonilla (2001), who asserts that hunger and poverty can be eradicated if those with the means muster the political will to take action. Unfortunately, African nations have often been subject to inconsistent policy frameworks, where leaders make empty promises regarding people-centered agricultural policies. As a result, with each new administration, progress stagnates, and efforts must begin anew (Idachaba, 2009).

Despite the preceding points, the fundamental truth remains that access to an adequate food supply is the most essential human need and right. Ensuring that people have enough to eat is not only a moral obligation for governments, but also aligns with their economic and political interests. The key components of any effective food production system—food availability, accessibility, and affordability—are critical to achieving food security. Without proper nutrition, individuals cannot work, children cannot learn, and societal development becomes an unattainable goal. Therefore, food security is vital for the survival of individuals, households, communities, nations, and humanity as a whole. It is also a cornerstone of national development, as it supports growth in other sectors of the economy (Ofuje, 2014).

In light of this, some of the major causes of hunger and food insecurity in Nigeria—and by extension, Africa—include the failure of leaders to implement and maintain a consistent agricultural policy that is periodically reviewed by experts and stakeholders. There has been a lack of long-term policy continuity across successive governments, undermining efforts to achieve the country's food security goals. Additionally, rural-to-urban migration has significantly reduced the agricultural labor force in rural areas, where most of the food is produced, further decreasing food output and exacerbating hunger.

Another contributing factor to food insecurity is the government's inadequate funding and promotion of mechanized farming. While agriculture is now recognized globally as a vital business enterprise, many countries have moved beyond subsistence farming, which primarily feeds only the farmer's family, to modern agricultural practices that generate employment, provide a significant source of income, and contribute to foreign exchange. However, in Nigeria, the shift to modern, mechanized farming has been slow, further hindering efforts to combat hunger and food insecurity.



TOWARDS A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GLOBAL AND NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY

Rational choice theory offers a framework for evaluating decision-making processes by analyzing empirical data to comprehend choices and validate the reasoning behind inferences and conclusions. Rooted in neoclassical economics, this theory is integral to modern political science and has been adopted by scholars in fields such as sociology and economics.

The core premise of rational choice theory is that individuals make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of various options. It assumes that people are goal-oriented and act with intentionality, aiming to achieve specific objectives. In the context of food security in Nigeria, rational choice theory helps elucidate the politico-economic dynamics influenced by globalization. Key actors in this study include Nigerian citizens, institutions addressing food issues, the government, expatriate farmers, operators of the World Bank-funded National Fadama Development Project (NFDP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The challenge in governance related to food security is less about increasing the provision of global public goods and more about motivating sovereign governments to ensure the delivery of essential public goods at the national level (Paarlberg, 2002). This means that key stakeholders must evaluate available options, preferences, and alternatives to make optimal policy decisions that will advance the country's food security goals. Rational choice theory thus provides a useful framework for analyzing and assessing Nigeria's agricultural policies, focusing on the motivations, incentives, behaviors, and decisions of major stakeholders. Actors in both economic and political realms make rational choices regarding policies through political action, lobbying, and other forms of influence (Timmer, 2004:11).

Additionally, while rational choice models of agricultural protection have been insightful, they are not always entirely satisfactory (Timmer, 2004:11). Anderson and Hayami (1989) explain the surge in agricultural protection in Asia by examining the evolving role of agriculture in structural transformation and the costs associated with free-riding in political coalitions. Their work builds on Krueger's (1974) and Olsen's (1965) theories of rent-seeking and collective action. Lindert (1991) expanded on these concepts, leading to the development of positive political economy (Timmer, 2004:11).

In a world that is increasingly interconnected, effective policies aimed at improving food security must leverage the advantages of global integration while fostering a stable political climate conducive to socio-economic development. Food security is crucial as it reflects the stability of agriculture and the progress towards achieving self-sufficiency and self-reliance in food production.

However, Nigerian authorities have been criticized for their inadequate response to the challenges of food insecurity. Despite numerous policies and agricultural programs designed to boost the sector and address food shortages, these efforts have often fallen short. The goal has been to restore agriculture's role in the national economy to its pre-oil boom significance, enhancing its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Consequently, successive governments have developed a multitude of similar food and agricultural policies, yet these initiatives have not effectively tackled the problem.

THE NIGERIAN SITUATION IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL FACTORS

This paper argues that many governmental policy interventions in food and agriculture have merely drained national resources rather than improving food security. Food insecurity has persisted in Nigeria and other developing countries due to ineffective policies, particularly in



agriculture, trade, and related sectors. These inadequate policies have exacerbated food insecurity and hunger.

The Second National Development Plan (1970-1974) aimed to address the severe food shortages caused by the Nigerian Civil War, which led to widespread starvation. However, Shimada (1999) criticized this effort, suggesting that the government only superficially addressed agricultural issues while cutting the budget for agriculture and food security to 7.7%, compared to 23.1% allocated to the transport sector. Murio (1989) also pointed out that the Nigerian government opted to rely on importing food products rather than enhancing national agricultural production capacity.

Since gaining independence in 1960, the Nigerian government has implemented food policies without adequate consultation with ordinary citizens or farmers' associations, the key stakeholders in this sector. The execution of these agricultural and food security policies has faced significant obstacles, reflecting the influence of political and economic interests on the food policy process in Nigeria. Many policies, acts, and initiatives have failed to address stakeholder concerns because they have been shaped by the perspectives of external actors or donor agencies, often overlooking local food preferences and needs.

A notable example of the political economy of globalization and food security in Nigeria is the involvement of white Zimbabwean farmers in agricultural production through the Shonga Farms Project. This initiative, established in 2004 under the Kwara State government led by Dr. Olubukola Saraki, was a public-private partnership between the Kwara State government and British farmers formerly based in Zimbabwe. Although intended as a strategy for achieving food security, the project represents a significant moment in Nigeria's policy attempts to address food security.

Shonga Farms Holding Limited (SFH) was established as a Special Purpose Vehicle to promote a public-private partnership for a commercial farming initiative launched by the Kwara State Government under Governor Dr. Bukola Saraki. SFH was specifically created to fund the farm's operations. The project was conceived by Governor Saraki, who, in 2004, invited a group of displaced Zimbabwean farmers to explore Kwara's potential for commercial agriculture development. The initiative has drawn significant local and national attention due to the substantial public investment involved in what is essentially a private enterprise (Mustapha, 2011).

This focus on commercial farming aligns with Nigeria's current national policy, which aims to transition from food imports to promoting domestic agricultural production. However, the Shonga Farms project appears to serve more as a commercial venture benefiting the Kwara State government rather than a policy-driven effort to enhance food availability for the state's residents. A total of 2.5 billion naira was invested in the project, but its benefits seem to favor the government more than the general populace. Despite the considerable public funding, food prices have remained high, and there has been no notable improvement in food availability or affordability in Kwara State. Notably, Shonga Farms now provides raw materials to various industries across Nigeria. For example, Friesland Campina Wamco, known for the Peak Milk brand, sources 20 percent of its raw milk from Shonga Farms. Additionally, maize from Shonga Farms is supplied to milling industries in Lagos and other regions, while cassava is distributed to Ihiala in Anambra State.

Official reports have asserted that the operation of the farm in Kwara State has created employment opportunities for over 5,000 local youths and has significantly boosted the economic transformation of Shonga township since the involvement of expatriate farmers. However, these claims are not substantiated by evidence, as the farm's products are conspicuously absent from local markets in Kwara State and beyond in Nigeria. This discrepancy came to light when Kwara State sought an additional 2 billion naira loan from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), which was met with strong resistance from the state's residents, as reported by Punch (2017). Instead, there was a push for the CBN to provide loans directly to Kwara State farmers to support local empowerment. Similar instances of



expatriate involvement in Nigerian agriculture often reflect a narrative similar to that of the Shonga Farms project.

CONCLUSION

Globalizing Nigeria's food system has brought both benefits and challenges, as evidenced by the Shonga Farms project in Kwara State. Nigeria has struggled to effectively manage the impacts of globalization on its food and agricultural sectors. There is a notable disconnect between global food policy trends and Nigeria's food policy processes and production activities. This disconnection has not been advantageous for the Nigerian populace, as many policy decisions and their implementations are often out of touch with the socio-cultural context and the food preferences of the local population.

The involvement of expatriate white farmers in Nigeria's food system, intended to be a "rescue mission" by global factors, has led to some improvements in food production. However, this contribution to food security has been limited and slow. Despite the global replication of production technologies, the Nigerian food system has not seen significant benefits from globalization.



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