

COMMENTARY

Socio-economic impact of food insecurity on vulnerable population in Nigeria

Oyinbolaji Akinwande Ajetunmobi *
University of Lagos and ReelFruit


Submitted March 3, 2024 / Revised May 26, 2024 / Accepted May 27, 2024 /
Published online September 11, 2024

Citation: Ajetunmobi, O. A. (2024). Socio-economic impact of food insecurity on vulnerable population in Nigeria [Commentary]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 13(4), 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2024.134.010>

Copyright © 2024 by the Author. Published by the Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. Open access under CC BY license.

Introduction

Food insecurity is a significant problem in Nigeria, particularly for those living in poverty; vulnerable populations such as children, women, and the elderly are particularly at risk. This commentary explores the multifaceted issue of food insecurity in Nigeria, drawing from both global and local peculiarities in the socio-economic dimensions, and looks at the impact on vulnerable populations and the government's response. Understanding of and ideas regarding food security have undergone numerous transformations over the past three decades, which are reflected in many official policy perspectives (Clay, 2002; Heidhues et al., 2004).

* Oyinbolaji Akinwande Ajetunmobi, Faculty of Social Science, University of Lagos; 101017, Akoka, Nigeria; and ReelFruit; 101245 Lagos, Nigeria; +2347068294982;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6631-6778>; ajetunmobi@unilag.edu.ng

The concept of *food security* emerged in the mid-1970s, with the World Food Conference in 1974 defining it in terms of the stability and availability of food commodities at both the national and international levels (FAO, 1996, 2006; FAO & DED, 2006). The notion of food security is influenced by four key factors: food availability, affordability, utilization, and sustainability (Titus & Adetokunbo, 2007).

Global food prices have had significant consequences on the global market and food security, particularly affecting low-income, food import-dependent countries and their populations (Ruta, 2022; WFP, 2022). These price increases were further exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to inflationary pressures on already high food prices (Ruta, 2022; WFP, 2022). The country's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)¹ in 2022 was 0.257 (Kasuwa, 2024), indicat-

¹ The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a tool that assesses poverty by evaluating household deprivation across three key dimensions: monetary poverty, education, and access to basic infrastructure services. This index provides a more comprehensive understanding of poverty beyond income alone (World Bank Group, 2024). Developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), the MPI includes living on less than US\$2.15 per day, the international poverty line based on 2017 purchasing power parity (PPP), as one of its measures of monetary poverty (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2018).

ing that individuals in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 63% of Nigeria's population (133 million people) live in multidimensional poverty. Multidimensional poverty is more prevalent in rural areas, affecting 72% of the population, compared to 42% in urban areas (Abubakar, 2022). Additionally, approximately 2.1% of the Nigerian population (4 million people) live in households where a child aged 15–17 is the first generation to have completed primary school (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Furthermore, food security is now understood as a complex, multidimensional concept encompassing four key dimensions (Figure 1).

Achieving food security involves addressing numerous factors, including poverty, inequality, climate change, conflict, and inadequate access to education, healthcare, and social services. Conversely, food insecurity is a significant problem in Nigeria, particularly for those living in poverty. Vulnerable populations such as children, women,

and the elderly are particularly at risk. According to a household survey conducted from September 2018 to October 2019 by Thomas and Turk (2023), meeting the recommended caloric intake of 2251 calories per day for food security costs approximately 82,000 nairas per person per year. The survey revealed that around 40% of the Nigerian population experiences food insecurity. These findings are consistent with a study by Mekonnen et al. (2021), which also estimated that approximately 28% of the population experiences food insecurity. Both studies based their estimates on the expenses associated with following a diet aligned with local food preferences and fulfilling dietary guidelines.

Consequences of Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Understanding key concepts related to food insecurity is essential for grasping its socio-economic impacts. Food insecurity significantly affects individuals, households, and communities, exacerbating vulnerabilities, disrupting economic stability, and undermining social cohesion.

Figure 1. Dimensions of Food Security: Availability, Access, Utilization, and Stability

Each dimension is essential to ensure that individuals have consistent and adequate access to nutritious food, which is vital for maintaining health and well-being. These dimensions are interconnected, and addressing all of them is crucial for achieving effective food security.

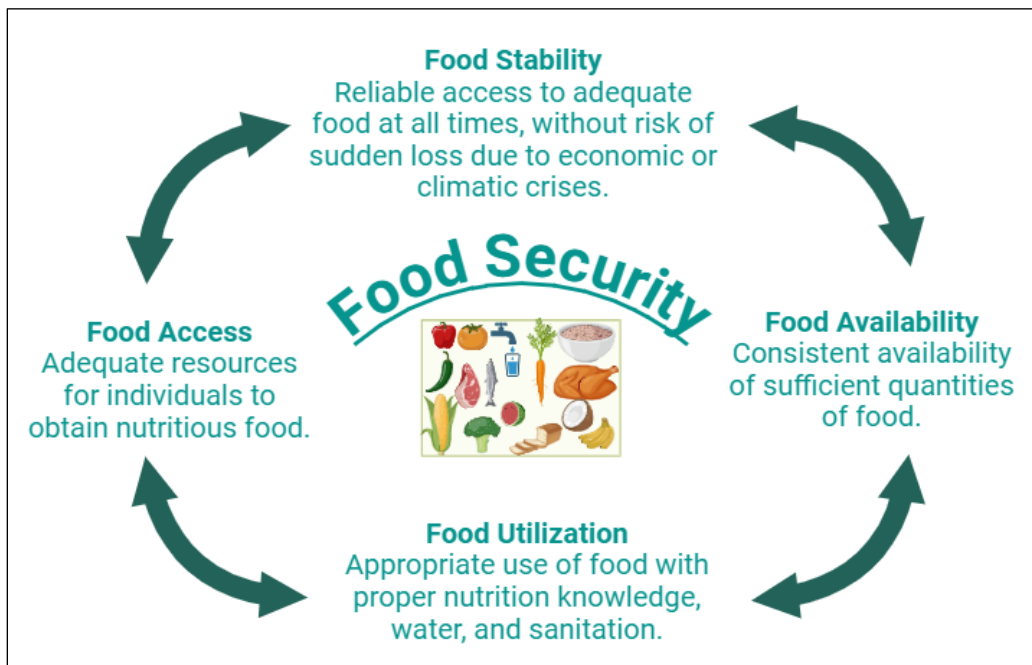


Figure created with BioRender.com.

- **Adverse Health Outcomes:** Food insecurity is closely linked to a range of adverse health outcomes, including malnutrition, stunted growth, anemia, and cognitive impairments (FAO & DED, 2006). Individuals experiencing food insecurity are at a higher risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Malnutrition significantly contributes to the observed burden of diseases, increasing the mortality rate for children under 5 years old, obesity, and susceptibility to infections (IFPRI, 2016). Furthermore, poor nutrition affects economic development by reducing the productivity of the workforce (Harris, 2011). Children are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of food insecurity, which can lead to inadequate nutrient intake, cognitive deficits, and behavioural and psychosocial problems. These issues can hinder a child's academic achievement and future success, which signals the need for early interventions to ensure adequate nutrition and support for this population (Cook et al., 2004).
- **Increased Poverty:** Food insecurity and poverty are deeply intertwined, with each exacerbating the other. Resource-constrained or poverty-linked food insecurity arises from insufficient financial resources to purchase food, affecting even families with incomes above the poverty threshold (Cook et al., 2004; Olayiwola et al., 2017). Food insecurity reduces household income and increases expenses related to healthcare and basic needs, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and making it difficult for households to escape deprivation (FAO & DED, 2006).
- **Political and Policy Instability:** Food insecurity can also contribute to political instability and conflict, as food shortages exacerbate existing tensions and lead to social unrest. Policy decisions both at the macroeconomic level and within the agricultural sector are crucial in shaping food

security outcomes. Effective policies must address the direct and indirect impacts of food availability, accessibility, and utilization while fostering a stable socio-political environment (Adebayo, 2010).

- **Impaired Productivity:** In Nigeria, for example, the percentage of food-insecure households rose from 18% in 1986 to over 40% in 2005, indicating a worsening situation that demands urgent attention (Ajani et al., 2006). This significant increase in food insecurity correlates with a loss of productivity, as hunger and malnutrition impair individuals' ability to work effectively, particularly in sectors like agriculture and manual labor, which are crucial to the country's economy. By addressing food insecurity, Nigeria has the potential to improve workforce health, thereby enhancing economic productivity and growth (FAO & DED, 2006).

Addressing food insecurity, especially in Nigeria, requires an all-inclusive approach, where solutions must tackle both human-made problems, such as ethnic and religious conflicts; inadequate policy frameworks; and natural disasters that impact food production. Key strategies are displayed in Figure 2.

Policy Implications and Government Response

Addressing food insecurity in Nigeria requires a multifaceted policy approach that tackles both immediate and underlying causes. Enhancing agricultural productivity through investments in technology and rural infrastructure is crucial. This includes promoting precision farming and biotechnology, and improving roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems. Economic access can be bolstered through targeted income support programs like direct cash transfers and subsidies for vulnerable populations. Creating employment opportunities and providing vocational training can help alleviate poverty, thus reducing food insecurity. Strengthening social safety nets by expanding food assistance programs and promoting health and

Figure 2. Key Strategies for Addressing Food Insecurity

Long-term strategies focus on strengthening political will through supportive economic policies and equitable food distribution. Medium-term strategies emphasize investment in infrastructure to mitigate environmental risks and protect agricultural output. Short-term strategies highlight the importance of promoting research and development to enhance agricultural productivity and reduce post-harvest losses.

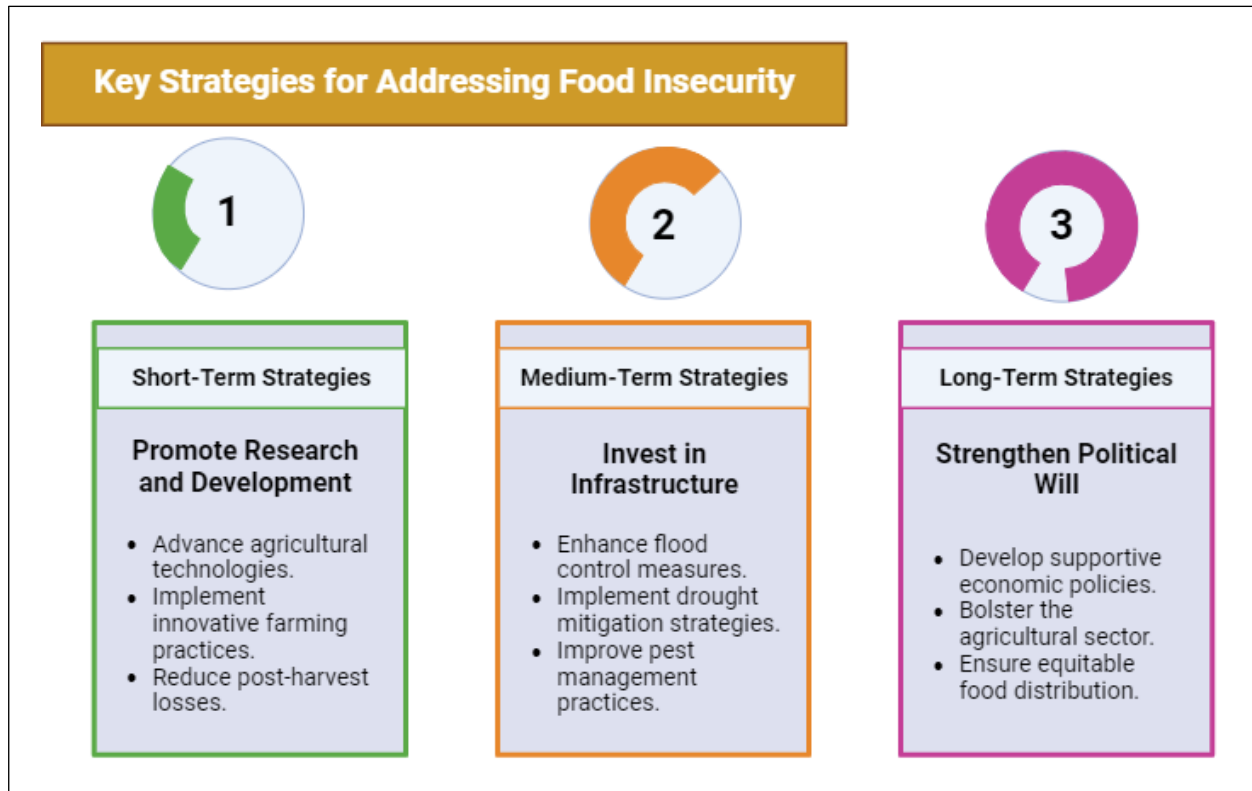


Figure created with BioRender.com.

nutrition education can offer immediate relief and long-term benefits. Effective policy coordination, involving multiple sectors and stakeholders, is essential for a cohesive and sustainable approach to food security.

The Nigerian government has implemented several initiatives to combat food insecurity, but the effectiveness of these efforts has been varied. Programs like the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) and the Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) focus on boosting agricultural productivity and supporting smallholder farmers. Emergency interventions, often in collaboration with international organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), provide immediate relief during crises. Policy reforms, including the National Food Security Council and the National Social

Investment Program (NSIP), aim to streamline efforts and ensure a coordinated response. Adopting forward-looking strategies, such as climate-resilient agricultural practices, sustainable farming, and robust data collection systems, will be crucial.

Recommendations

To combat food insecurity in Nigeria effectively, a tailored strategy that integrates immediate relief measures with long-term sustainable solutions is essential. Here are my four recommendations to address the multifaceted nature of food insecurity:

1. Enhance agricultural productivity and rural infrastructure by adopting modern farming techniques, high-yield and drought-resistant crops, and sustainable practices; providing


affordable credit and inputs; investing in agricultural research and development; and improving roads, storage facilities, irrigation, electrification, and water supply systems.

2. Expand social safety nets with direct cash transfers, food assistance, and nutrition programs; implement school feeding initiatives; support climate-resilient agriculture through agroforestry, conservation practices, sustainable water management, and early warning systems.
3. Promote economic diversification and enhance education by investing in manufacturing, services, and technology; creating non-farm jobs; improving nutrition awareness through community programs; and integrating nutrition education into school curricula.
4. Strengthen policy coordination, governance, and public-private partnerships; establish a central coordinating body for oversight; engage the private sector to enhance agricultural value chains and innovation;

and invest in robust data collection and monitoring systems for informed decision-making.

Conclusion

Addressing food insecurity in Nigeria demands a comprehensive strategy that acknowledges the intricate interplay among socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. With ramifications extending to health, poverty, political stability, and economic productivity, effective solutions must target immediate relief needs while addressing the underlying systemic issues. While the Nigerian government has initiated some measures, sustained efforts are imperative for enduring solutions. Efforts should focus on bolstering agricultural productivity, expanding social safety nets, promoting economic diversification, and enhancing policy coordination. From investing in rural infrastructure to fostering climate-resilient agriculture and improving education, a concerted effort involving government, civil society, and the private sector is essential. By prioritizing food security as a national imperative and implementing the recommended measures, Nigeria can progress toward a more resilient and equitable food system, ensuring the well-being of its entire populace.



References

- Abubakar, I. R. (2022). Multidimensional poverty among Nigerian households: Sustainable development implications. *Social Indicators Research*, 164, 993–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-02963-0>
- Adebayo, A. A. (2010). Food security status in Nigeria: Pre and post economic deregulation review. *International Journal of Economic Development Research and Investment*, 1(1), 135–150. <https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/food-security-status-in-nigeria.pdf>
- Ajani, S. R., Adebukola, C. B., & Oyindamola, Y. B. (2006). Measuring household food insecurity in selected local government areas of Lagos and Ibadan, Nigeria. *Pakistan Journal of Nutrition*, 5(1), 62–67. <https://doi.org/10.3923/pjn.2006.62.67>
- Clay, E. (2003). Food security: Concepts and measurement. In Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), (Ed.), *Trade reforms and food security: Conceptualizing the linkages* (Chap. 2). FAO. <https://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>
- Cook, J. T., Frank, D. A., Meyers, A. F., Berkowitz, C., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Cutts, D. B., Zaldivar, N., Skalicky, A., Levenson, S., Heeren, T., & Nord, M. (2004). Food insecurity is associated with adverse health outcomes among human infants and toddlers. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 134(6), 1432–1438. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/134.6.1432>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]. (1996). *Report of the World Food Summit (WFS 96/REP Part One)*. <https://www.fao.org/3/w3548e/w3548e00.htm>
- FAO. (2006). *The state of food and agriculture 2006: Food aid for food security?* <https://www.fao.org/4/a0800e/a0800e00.htm>

- FAO & Development Economics Division (ESA) [DED]. (2006, June 30). *Policy brief: Food security - Issue 2, June 2006* [Press release]. Retrieved from the ReliefWeb website:
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-brief-food-security-issue-2-june-2006>
- Harris, J. (2011). *Agriculture, nutrition and health essentials for non-specialist development professionals*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Retrieved from the Food Security and Nutrition Network website:
<https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/agriculture-nutrition-and-health-essentials-non-specialist-development-professionals>
- Heidhues, F., Atsain, A., Nyangito, H. Padilla, M., Ghersi, G. & Le Vallée, J.-C. (2004). *Development strategies and food and nutrition security in Africa: An assessment* (2020 Discussion Paper No. 38). International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). <https://doi.org/10.22004/AG.ECON.42270>
- International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI]. (2016). *Global nutrition report 2016: From promise to impact: Ending malnutrition by 2030*. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896295841>
- Kasuwa, P. F. (2024). Nigeria: Hungry nation in a land of plenty. *Przegląd Prawno-Ekonomiczny*, 3, 9–31.
<https://doi.org/10.31743/ppe.17613>
- Mekonnen, D. A., Trijsburg, L., Achterbosch, T., Brouwer, I. D., Kennedy, G., Linderhof, V., Ruben, R., & Talsma, E. F. (2021). Food consumption patterns, nutrient adequacy, and the food systems in Nigeria. *Agricultural and Food Economics*, 9, Article 16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-021-00188-2>
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2022, November 17). *Nigeria launches its most extensive national measure of multidimensional poverty* [Press release]. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78>
- Olayiwola, S. A., Tashikalma, A. K., & Giroh, D. Y. (2017). Analysis of food security status and coping strategies among rural households in Oluyole Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. *FUW Trends in Science and Technology Journal*, 2(1), 28-32. <https://www.ftstjournal.com/Digital%20Library/article6vol21.php>
- Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. (2018). *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2018: The most detailed picture to date of the world's poorest people* (Publication no. GMPI 9). University of Oxford.
<https://ophi.org.uk/Publications/GMPI-2018>
- Ruta, M. (Ed.). (2022). *The impact of the war in Ukraine on global trade and investment*. World Bank.
<https://hdl.handle.net/10986/37359>
- Thomas, A., & Turk, R. (2023). *Food insecurity in Nigeria: Food supply matters: Nigeria* (SIP/2023/018). International Monetary Fund. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400236921.018>
- Titus, B., & Adetokunbo, G. (2007). An analysis of food security situation among Nigerian urban households: Evidence from Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Central European Agriculture*, 8(3), 397–406. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/19609>
- World Bank Group. (2024, April). *Multidimensional Poverty Measure*.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure>
- World Food Programme. (2022). *Global report on food crises 2022*.
<https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2022>