



Food and Nutrition Security in Nigeria: Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era and National Insecurity Challenges

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Abstract

The agricultural sector holds the key to Nigeria's drive for sustainable economic progress and diversification, but it is bedeviled by a plethora of challenges. These range from adverse weather conditions associated with climate changes, herder-farmer clashes, terrorism, and insurgency in the north-east, cattle rustling and banditry in the north-west to low levels of mechanization, poor research and development activities, huge post-harvest losses due to lack of storage facilities and marketing infrastructure. Thus, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the hope for attaining food and nutrition security in Nigeria is being dashed as it has engendered rising food prices and exposed the weaknesses in the food systems. This study involved a review of various literatures, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies on the impacts and to form the basis for the conclusion and recommendations. The paper is of the view that in order to reduce the impact on the agricultural sector by the distortions caused by COVID-19 and attendant restrictions, the government at all levels should consider offering more palliatives to farmers in the form of improved seedlings, inputs and basic farm implements at highly subsidized prices and greater access to affordable farm extension services. The overall objective is to reduce Nigeria's dependence on importation of food commodities, address underlying economic vulnerabilities and ensure management of the food, pandemic and other related crises affecting food and nutrition security as the main path to tackling national insecurity challenges in the long term.

Keywords: Food and nutrition security, COVID-19 pandemic, security challenges

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that has spread rapidly and extensively around the world since late 2019 has had profound implications for food security and nutrition. The unfolding crisis has affected food systems and threatened people's access to food via multiple dynamics (HLPE, 2017). However, the virus

and measures adopted to contain its spread have had profound implications for food security and security challenges in Nigeria as well as in other developing and fragile countries where the pandemic has eroded incomes, disrupted markets and supply chains,

resulting in shortages of food and price increases of a kind.

The global economic slowdown triggered by the pandemic, as well as the spread of the disease itself, has exacerbated existing societal inequities in most countries (Ashford *et al.*, 2020). These inequities are affecting the rights and access to basic needs such as food, water, and health care, and access to jobs and livelihoods, all of which have implications for food security and nutrition. Food insecurity already disproportionately affects those people experiencing poverty and who face societal discrimination, and it is these very people who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and who have less access to health care services (Klassen and Murphy, 2020).

The elaboration of this term COVID-19 has led the security concept of "protection and emancipation of individuals" and drawing attention to the multitude of emerging threats across the entire spectrum of human activities to highlight the interconnections between security, development and human rights so as to promote a new commitment to integrated and coordinated efforts for peace between nations (United Nation Trust Fund for Human Security, 2009).

This perspective, therefore, opens to new forms of insecurity which originate no longer exclusively from forms of physical violence but also from conditions of poverty, the inability of the population to access food or water resources, and the global context of the ongoing pandemic, including the sudden onset of a virus which is spreading worldwide at an increasing rate, endangering those standards of development that allow individual actors to remain stable and relatively peaceful (Churrua, 2017).

In this context of security, community security refers to 'protection against the breakdown of communities through loss of traditional relationships and values and from sectarian and ethnic violence (Caballero-Anthony, 2015). Analysts warn of further instability in the world's poorest countries that are already suffering from hunger, disease, lack of opportunity, climate change and conflict (Tarek, 2021).

This severe effects of the pandemic on all economic activities and resulting reductions in income and rising unemployment rates are expected to affect access to food and food demand also, beyond the immediate disruption of value chains (Torero, 2020). These effects may lead to downward pressure on agricultural prices and, in the medium term, adjustments in the quantity and structure of

agricultural production. It is on this note that the paper examines the food and nutrition security situation in Nigeria within the context of challenges of the post COVID-19 pandemic era and national insecurity.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Food Security: Food security is defined as a condition in which all the people, at all times, have physical and economical access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food, meeting their nutritional requirements and their food preferences for an active and a balanced life (FAO, 2008). However, despite fundamental efforts and accomplishments in the battle against poverty in recent decades, many countries in Africa have been suffering from economic recession and many Africans are profoundly affected by the dramatic fallout of livelihoods and income.

COVID-19 Pandemic: COVID-19 is a novel infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus strain SARS-CoV-2. It is an ongoing global pandemic first discovered in Wuhan, China, in late 2019. The emergence of COVID-19 has affected the global economy by directly affecting production in key countries that are sole manufacturers of raw materials, intermediate products and consumer goods thereby creating supply chain and market disruption, and by its financial impact on firms, security threats, and the financial markets.

Security Challenges: Security is the peace of mind which flows from the opinion everyone forms about his 'safety'. In the conventional sense of the term, security challenges are part of a competitive world as every society is faced with different problems ranging from health, technology, resources, education or security. However, the most pronounced challenge that has been bedeviling Nigeria is insecurity. This is one of the most important and collective challenges of any nation or economy because no development can be attained in the absence of peace. Thus, the presence of insecurity will lead to dismal level of peace which is the most essential public good but the most elusive in Nigeria.

Literature Review

COVID-19 has impacted global food security due to the lockdown and movement restrictions across

many countries of the world. In a bid to combating the impending global hunger, the need to attain food security has become extremely important. Prior to COVID-19, Nigeria's agricultural sector was affected by several challenges ranging from drought and flooding occasioned by climate change, and widespread instabilities including the Boko Haram crisis and insurgency in the north-east zone, cattle rustling in the north and farmer-herder clashes across most of the southern and Middle Belt states.

Alvi and Gupta (2020) argued that the effect of COVID-19 on food security and education will be more severe for girls and children who are already from disadvantaged ethnic groups while Udmale *et al.* (2020) suggested that 15 African countries, 4 Asian countries, 10 Latin American countries and 6 countries from Oceania among other developing countries were at a greater risk of transitory food insecurity. Although it is not unexpected given the physical and social restrictions that were put in place to curb the spread of the virus, this disparity across socio-economic quintile threatens to greatly exacerbate the existing level of inequality. Out of all these clichés, the lockdown became more visible because of the associated security, governance and socio-economic impacts in particular. While people panicked for their safety based on health anxiety, survival became a major slogan as people had reasons to worry about the possibility of living a normal life without disruption of livelihoods (Wolfson and Leung, 2020).

During the lockdown, there were reports of criminality in some parts of the country. The recruitment of unemployed youths by criminal syndicates due to their availability for anti-social criminal activities, explains why such social group dominates the incidents of instability in the Nigerian society (Ukoji and Okolie-Osemene, 2016). The foregoing shows that there is hardly any breakdown of law and order.

The fact that COVID-19 later became a neighbourhood issue showed that disturbances recorded within the districts neighbourhood in some cities exposed the weakness of the security sector around containing security threats through early warning signals especially before and during crimes. In fact, some neighborhoods were left alone to either provide security for themselves or endure the pains of armed banditry which became an urban nuisance during the lockdown.

A study using a system dynamics model suggested that a severe pandemic with 25% reduction in labour availability can create widespread food shortages even in developed nations (Huff *et al.*, 2015).

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, any prediction or recommendation as to its further course will be inevitably tentative and approximate. Its scale and, more important, its duration can only be guessed at. The uncertainties include how deep the crisis will be in the sectors hardest hit by the lockdown, by how much unemployment will rise and whether governments will continue to claim a bigger role in the economy. How these and other issues will play out globally or in any nation is not yet clear. Because what is clear is that failures in protecting food security and threat of life will seriously affect the economy, politics, and the public sphere. Efforts to improve good governance will need to be made against a background of increased pessimism, xenophobia, irrationalism, disinformation, a crisis of confidence at all levels of government, and a crippled economy.

Based on literatures reviewed, COVID-19 pandemic has negative effects on the socio-economic status of households. The low socio-economic status is highly related to household dietary intake and nutritional status. The movement restrictions engendered by COVID-19 affect all stages of the food supply chain from production through distribution, processing, storage and consumption (Poudel *et al.*, 2020; Siche 2020; Torero 2020; Nicola *et al.*, 2020).

In view of the above, the lessons learned in post COVID-19 crisis will be very important for African countries to rethink their strategies and policies for sustainable economic growth, as COVID-19 may have significant impacts on all sectors of our economy.

Issues and Trends of Food Security in Post Covid-19 and Security Challenges in Nigeria

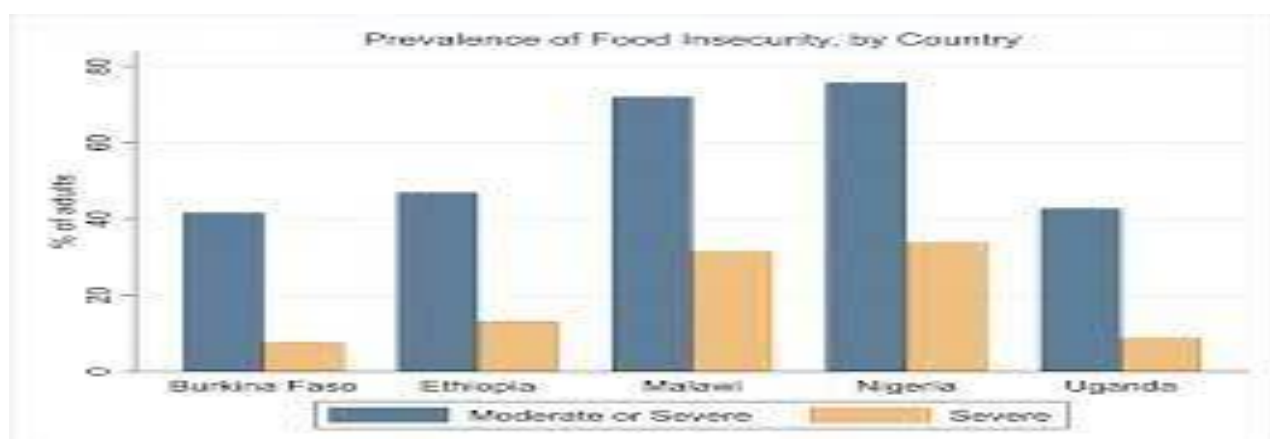
Global pandemics can be seen to threaten internal state stability directly and indirectly, with consequences that initially impact on families and communities, but can rapidly spread to a scale that challenges state legitimacy. Thus, the relationship between security governance and lockdown enforcements is the measure put in place to check the activities and compliance of people through the deployment of security operatives and task forces along the roads and streets (Peterson, 2002). According to FAO (2020), the implications include

hunger, sex-for-food, violence against women and girl children and negative coping habits, amongst others. These implications are a threat to humanity and global peaceful co-existence as the lockdown has inflicted devastating household hardships (food shortage, low disposable income, rape, sex-for-food and skipping of food, amongst others) in Nigeria (Hamza 2020; Laetitia 2020; Laura 2020; NCDC 2020; UNHCR 2020; United Nations 2020; WHO 2020). For instance, with the total lockdown of communities, producers of agricultural food (farmers) and sellers (traders) find it very difficult to supply and trade in food. Consequently, this sends the price of food very high for households, who at the same time have been locked out of their daily economic activities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, many countries moved to shut down informal food markets, which governments saw as spaces for potential disease transmission, reflecting a 'formality' bias in public health and food policy (Battersby, 2020). Informal markets are extremely important as sources of food and livelihoods in developing countries (Young and Crush, 2019). In South Africa, for instance, formal food retail outlets which sell processed and packaged foods were allowed to remain open while informal and open-air food markets, which typically sell more fresh fruits and vegetables, were shut down (even though open air markets are safer in terms of person-to-person transmission (Moseley and Battersby, 2020). This

move was especially detrimental to poor people who are more reliant on such markets for food because they can buy produce and foodstuffs in smaller quantities. After lobbying from academics and civil society, these markets were eventually allowed to reopen.

This explains the rationale behind quarrels, abuses and domestic conflicts or violence between husband and wife in some households. The community is also not free of violence, triggered by households' food insecurity during the COVID-19 lockdown. In Nigeria, unlike other affected countries, the lockdown has not only subjected the already vulnerable households to hunger, but also created more tensions, violence, and unfortunate killings of Nigerians by either hoodlum who are hungry and resort to attacking neighbouring households for food. Besides, security agencies, which are expected to act professionally and humanely in the handling of violators of the lockdowns order, because of the current hardship posed by the pandemic are engaged in shooting, leading to loss of lives. However, the delivery of humanitarian assistance for COVID-19 also risks fueling underlying conflicts within communities as well as new conflict dynamics. These tensions are pervasive across States in the country and undermine the ability of humanitarian actors to fulfill their missions and uphold their commitment to the principles of Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity. Below is the line graph showing food security in the face of COVID-19 prevalence



Source: worldbank.org/opendata/food-security-face-covid-19-evidence-africa

Addressing the COVID and security challenges requires Nigerians to work together across sectors and borders both to mitigate the immediate impacts

and to reshape food systems, so they support healthy diets for all and do more to make food

production and consumption aligned to sustainable development.

Conclusion

From what has been said so far, the paper is of the view that COVID-19 pandemic is a health and human crisis threatening to food security of millions of people around the world. Also, the virus has reversed several development gains and much uncertainty surrounds pathways of recovery from the pandemic's wide-ranging effects. The paper is equally of the stand that pandemic gives us back a more insecure world, struggling with an invisible enemy from which we still do not know how to defend ourselves and which strikes with more force in fragile realities and is tried by poverty and conflict.

Recommendations

1. Government should ease the lockdowns and restrictions in movement so that people can partake in economic activities through which to put food on the table for their families.
2. There should be support in the form of an improved budgetary allocation to agricultural sector to assist in research, extension services, food production and nutrition adequacy; this will promote food security in the post-COVID-19 period.

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3. The present government should work hand-in-hand with various peace stakeholders, through people's participation on matters affecting them.
4. Palliative measures should be provided by government and other non-governmental organizations so has to provide foods and other essential materials for the displaced people or areas more affected by lockdowns.
5. Government should always be fair in their dealing with the populace to gain more trust and be able to provide policies that will be generally accepted by the populace.
6. The leadership in Nigeria must ensure good governance, respect for rule of law and equality before the law. Poverty, injustice and discrimination are some of the causes of conflict in Nigeria. Civil Society Organizations and philanthropists are better organized under a peaceful, just and equitable atmosphere. Threat to security is a threat to the workings and functioning of civil society organizations.
7. Governments at all levels need to develop and work together around food security and farming arrangements. This will lead to the option of diminishing the dangers of food ban and consequently guarantee access to food by the populace.
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