

## Global Food Crisis and its Implications in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The increasing world population is putting pressure on the productive lands, resulting to decline in yield and hence food to feed the ever teeming world population, thus causing food crisis globally. The food crisis has resulted in problems leading to riots in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Burma, Egypt, Morocco Ethiopia, France, Spain, Brazil, Venezuela, Kenya and most recently, Madagascar. These problems could have far reaching effect on the fertility i.e. reproductive capacity of the population. Therefore, Food crisis has become a global issue since it occurs in virtually all parts of the world. Some constraints to food production in the world include land policies, poverty, rural-urban migration, bad governance, disease (especially the AIDS scourge). Execution of Research findings from Research institutes, deliberate government policies to alleviate poverty and disease are some of the ways of tackling the crisis. [Journal of American Science 2010;6(5):77-79]. (ISSN: 1545-1003).

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### Introduction

Global food crisis is not a new phenomenon. It has been there since the creation of the world, but certainly the current food crisis being experienced in many parts of the world is a big embarrassment to the national governments. Since the Second World War ended in 1945, many Countries have placed emphasis on massive food production to feed the ever-increasing national populations and provide raw materials for industry with positive results. However in some Countries especially in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America where there are heavy demographic figures, the situation is different. These countries experienced and would continue to experience food deficit as a result of uncontrolled birth rates (which continue to rise), poor agricultural development and “Bad” governance.

The total world population is put at 6.78 billion people of who half is in the Asian continent. South America and Africa constitute a sizeable proportion of the world’s demography. Unfortunately, these regions are prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, desertification and man-made conflicts (wars). With the world population increasing at 3.5% annually and food production at between 1.5% and 2.0%, it becomes difficult to feed the ever-increasing hungry mouths in the world. This scenario aggravated by the current global climatic change (Global warming) which has devastated many countries in the world by destroying farm lands, infrastructures and even human population (in hundreds and thousands) is the main reason for the current global food crisis. The politico-economic crisis in many parts of the world (especially in the

third- world countries due to instability) has disrupted the supply of oil to the world market and created influx of refugees which further contributed immensely to the current global food crisis.

The results of these problems cited above include some food related riots in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Burma, Egypt, Morocco, Ethiopia, France, Spain, Brazil, Venezuela, Kenya and recently Madagascar. The cost of living in many countries is rising while standard of living is declining. Millions of people world-wide are suffering from hunger and hunger related diseases like Kwashiorkor and Marasmus; squalor, deprivation and are grossly malnourished. This could have a far reaching effect in the fertility (or reproductive capacity) of the population – may be natural birth control measure. The adage ‘a hungry man is an angry man’ is apt to describe the dilemma the world is facing if urgent steps are not taken to mitigate the suffering of the vulnerable segment of the world active populations.

### The Nigerian Perspectives, Constraints, Prospects and Challenges

Nigeria belongs to the community of nations of the world. Whatever is happening at the world scene trickles down into the country. The current global food crisis is also affecting the populace. Cost of living is soaring daily and many families cannot afford one square meal daily let alone three square meals. There is hunger and anger in the land. Net pay of the working class can no longer carry them through-out the month. Even the “rich also cry” as they are not comfortable with the trend where many hungry mouths are looking up to them for succour on a daily basis. With an estimated population of 140

million people (NPC, 2007) growing at the rate of 3.65% per year, it means that by the year 2020, the nation's population will be about 201,320,000 million (an addition of about 61.32 million people in 12 years). If the current food production growth trend of 1.35% annually is not increased to tally with or surpass the population growth rate, then the country is in for a turbulent future.

### **Constraints to food production in Nigeria**

The constraints to increasing food production in Nigeria include land use policy (where the Federal Government claims ownership of all land); farm fragmentation (where farmers cultivate small parcels of land located here and there); use of archaic farm tools (due to poverty and illiteracy); poor farming techniques; rural-urban migration of the active segment of the population in search of 'white-collar jobs'; 'bad' governance (due to crooked, obnoxious and uncoordinated policies or lack of it) by the government in power and hydra-headed monster called corruption and ineptitude. Also, farm land encroachment due to expansion of urban centres; siting of heavy industries; construction of roads, dams and game reserves have all contributed to diminishing arable land available for massive and sustained food production.

The findings of Research conducted in Universities and Research Institutes (albeit poorly funded Research) across the country cannot reach the end users (resource-poor farmers) and primary processors. Banks willingly lend money to traders but are reluctant granting loans to farmers because of the high risk involved. Can anyone explain to Nigerians why every year, the supply of fertilizers to farmers has become a recurrent decimal in the polity? This commodity is neither been imported early enough nor local sources developed and maintained (sustained) so that farmers can have access to the product as at when needed (evidence of planlessness). Even when fertilizers eventually arrive, alas belatedly, it becomes a service tool to politicians, middlemen and cannot get to the real farmers.

Another major constraint (and perhaps most important) is the AIDS pandemic which is fast decimating the active working population of the society with its resultant effect on the loss of manpower (labour force) in all sectors (education, agriculture, etc). Since the first reported case of HIV infection in Nigeria, there has been a systematic effort (by past governments) to respond to the potential epidemic, in view of the large population of the country. There has also been a steady decline in sero-prevalence over the years, from 1.8% in 1991, peaking at 5.8% in 2001, 5.0% in 2003 and lowering to 4.4% in 2005. However in 2008, the national HIV

prevalence rate in Nigeria was 4.6%. Sero-prevalence surveys in Nigeria have always shown that the population with the most HIV infection is in the 15-29 years age range. Infection rates among the population segment below 15 years have also grown very rapidly in the last decade (UNICEF, 2009).

This increase may be attributed to the global economic recession which has seen previous donor-nations looking inwards to their own economic down-turn, thereby shifting their attention from the hitherto massive funding on HIV/AIDS control Programmes. If Nigeria, is to avert an ugly food crisis situation (now or in the near future), this is the time all heads must adorn our thinking caps to call a spade a spade.

### **Prospects and Challenges**

Fortunately, Mother Nature has been so kind to the country by giving us benevolent weather, fertile soil and large expanses of arable land. The country is also endowed with abundant manpower and other resources which can be harnessed and ploughed into food production and processing. This raises the question of food security. Recently, the Federal Government established the 'National Programme for Food Security', a deliberate policy to assuage and free the people from hunger, malnutrition and deprivation through actions that would guarantee consistent and adequate food supply at affordable prices. These actions include ecological security (protecting the nations forests from desertification, erosion degradation); technological security (encouraging commercial food production and processing of produce/commodities into durable and nutrient stable products); building of strategic grains reserves across the country and maintaining a buffer stock to ensure price stability, nutrition education (where special lessons or messages are designed to target the "home-makers" on how to prepare high quality nutritious food for the family and "street feeders").

Surveys carried out by FAO (1985) have shown that postharvest losses due to poor storage vary from 30 to 50% in Nigeria. These surveys have also shown that the widely used traditional sun-drying techniques are the most appropriate and economical means of preservation of most of these commodities for low-income consumers. The adoption of modern but small scale solar drying technologies can be a means towards increased food preservation whereby not only excess produce are dried but a deliberate protection of our agricultural produce in good condition to save for the off-season. The establishment of collection centres which would undertake the processing of fresh produce as well as

packaging, storage and marketing should also be encouraged.

The construction of dams to provide potable drinking water and for irrigation would no-doubt encourage dry season farming but they must be maintained for effectiveness. Research Institutes and Universities (as agents of change) should be well funded and their findings made available to the resource-poor farmers and processors for increased yield per hectare and conversion of raw materials into finished products that are durable and nutrient fortified. Banks should be encouraged to assist agro-allied business through soft-loans guaranteed by the government.

The vision of NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) which focuses on key strategies like wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value reorientation must be thoroughly exploited. Among other things, offering farmers improved irrigation, machinery, and crop varieties will help boost agricultural productivity and tackle poverty head on, since 70% of Nigeria's rural people work in farms. Since half of Nigeria's population are children (NPC, 2004), recognizing the importance of improvement of their education would become a viable bridge to a prosperous future where we are self sufficient all round. The plan to improve the system of health care delivery with emphasis on HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and reproductive health-related illnesses will assuage this major social and health problem which is threatening the country's productivity and economy.

### Conclusion

Global food crisis is an aberration. It smacks of lack of fore-sight by the various national rulers (albeit leaders). Both the developed and developing countries must pledge to work together to solve the food crisis through measures that have been outlined above including good governance; zero tolerance on corruption; organizing and encouraging other stakeholders towards increased food production to avert imminent "Armageddon". Execution of the 'Kuru' Declaration of 2001 which is to build a truly great African democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized, with equal opportunity for all, and responsibility from all, to become the catalyst of (African) Renaissance, and making adequate all-embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally will help us achieve our goal of averting a global food crisis.

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