

Combating Hunger: Nigeria's Pathway to a Resilient and Food-Secure Future

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Abstract

With approximately 25 million people facing food insecurity, the nation must address challenges like poor governance, climate change, trade restrictions, and internal conflicts. Collaborations between researchers, governments, industries, and communities are crucial to accelerate food production and distribution. Public-private partnerships and sustainable agricultural practices can enhance resilience and boost food availability. Good governance and visionary policies are essential to formulate evidence-based initiatives, attract investments, and create lasting change. By uniting efforts, Nigeria can overcome obstacles and empower its people to achieve a prosperous, food-secure future. The nation can unlock a brighter tomorrow for every Nigerian through resilience, collaboration, and innovation.

***Keywords:** Hunger, Nigeria, Resilience, Food security, Collaboration*

1.0. Introduction

SDG 2 aims to eradicate hunger, provide safe and nutritious food, and eliminate all types of malnutrition to ensure everyone can access sufficient food (United Nations, 2023). It addresses various dimensions of hunger and food security, including eradicating hunger and ensuring food security for all, especially vulnerable populations. Nigeria faces significant challenges in achieving this goal, as approximately 25 million Nigerians are at risk of food insecurity (WFP, 2022). The country also grapples with the dual burden of undernutrition and rising rates of overweight and obesity, leading to diet-related non-communicable diseases (Global Nutrition Report, 2023).

This alarming situation severely threatens the well-being and development of millions of Nigerians, especially the vulnerable and marginalized communities. Achieving Zero Hunger in Nigeria demands a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. It requires addressing not only the issue of food availability but also ensuring equitable access to nutritious food for all citizens. To end the country's food insecurity cycle, it is vital to tackle the underlying causes of hunger, such as poverty, inequality, and restricted access to education and healthcare.

To combat these challenges, Nigeria must prioritize investment in sustainable agricultural practices, improve rural infrastructure, and support small-scale farmers to enhance food production and distribution. Implementing effective social protection programs will also be crucial in providing a safety net for vulnerable populations and meeting their food and nutrition needs.

Furthermore, promoting awareness and education about healthy and sustainable food choices is vital to improving nutritional outcomes and reducing malnutrition-related health issues in Nigeria. Collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners will be pivotal in driving transformative actions and building resilient food systems that can withstand shocks and provide food security for all Nigerians.

Nigeria possesses a remarkable chance to achieve significant strides in eradicating hunger, enhancing nutrition, and ensuring food security for its citizens by aligning efforts with SDG 2. The collective commitment and actions towards achieving Zero Hunger will foster a healthier and more prosperous society and contribute to overall sustainable development in the nation.

2.0. Zero Hunger in Nigeria

Nigeria, as Africa's powerhouse and with the largest economy and population on the continent, confronts a significant challenge in attaining the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of Zero Hunger. Despite commendable progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Nigeria has yet to unlock its boundless human development potential fully. A shadow of critical food insecurity and malnutrition looms large, particularly among its most vulnerable populations.

A convergence of factors, such as organized violence, recurrent climate shocks, and the broader impact of climate change, has resulted in Nigeria being among the world's top five nations burdened with food crises, along with Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (United Nations News, 2022). An alarming estimate suggests that approximately 19.5 million Nigerians will require immediate assistance in 2022, underscoring the urgency of intervention (FSIN, 2021; Health Digest, 2022). Moreover, certain conflict-affected regions are on the brink of plunging into catastrophic levels of food insecurity.

Despite being blessed with abundant natural resources and untapped human capital, the stark reality in Nigeria is that nearly one in three households cannot afford a nutritious diet (World Food Programme, 2023). Shockingly, over 100 million people report experiencing at least moderate food insecurity, exposing the depth of the crisis. As Nigeria struggles to recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic, the severity and magnitude of regionalized food crises have been further compounded by the global food supply crisis (FSIN, 2021). The road to resilience and prosperity has been met with additional hurdles.

A holistic approach encompassing emergency response, anticipatory action, and sustainable food security measures is imperative to counter these pressing challenges. The World Food Programme (WFP) has set its sights on bolstering its humanitarian operations in Nigeria's northeastern and northwestern regions and extending aid to Cameroonian refugees residing in border states (WFP, 2019). With its dual mandate, operating at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the WFP seeks to save lives, stimulate early recovery, and drive sustainable solutions prioritizing nutrition, gender equality, climate change adaptation, and protection concerns.

Realizing the SDG of Zero Hunger demands prioritizing targeted interventions, addressing immediate food security needs and laying the groundwork for long-term sustainable development. By harnessing Nigeria's immense potential and executing strategies that seamlessly integrate emergency response with development initiatives, the country can make meaningful strides in eradicating hunger, enhancing livelihoods, and crafting a resilient and food-secure future for its cherished citizens.

3.0. Doubling Productivity for Sustainable Food Security

To promote food security and sustainable agricultural development, Nigeria needs to double its agricultural productivity across different sectors, encompassing crop cultivation, livestock rearing, fisheries, forestry, and apiculture. The Agriculture Summit Africa (ASA), held in collaboration with leading companies, including Sterling Bank Plc, emphasized the significance of "Engineering a Trillion Dollar Agricultural Economy" to address Nigeria's dependence on food and manufacturing imports (Thisdaylive, 2023). It outlined crucial strategies to bolster agricultural productivity and food security.

Import substitution and local sourcing of inputs were highlighted as crucial steps to reduce Nigeria's reliance on imported agricultural products. Nigeria can boost agricultural productivity and reduce its food import bill by promoting locally produced goods. Standardization of agricultural practices and products is essential to meet local and international demands, ensuring quality and competitiveness in the global market. To achieve sustainable agricultural growth, there is a need to emphasize the need for increased exports while safeguarding local companies. Promoting sustainable exportation will expand Nigeria's presence in the global market, creating opportunities for agricultural producers and enhancing food security (Thisdaylive, 2023).

Securing adequate funding throughout the agricultural value chain is essential. Long-term financing options are recommended to support farmers and agribusinesses, enabling them to invest in modern technologies, inputs, and infrastructure. Risk-sharing structures should be introduced to mitigate the uncertainties associated with agricultural activities, encouraging private sector participation and investments. Additionally, understanding the long gestation

periods in the agriculture sector is crucial for sustainable growth. Policymakers and stakeholders must recognize that agricultural development may require time and patience, and consistent support is needed to realize the sector's full potential. It is essential to disseminate knowledge and harmonize policies in promoting agricultural productivity. Investing in research and technological interventions will enhance farmers' knowledge and equip them with innovative practices to improve yields and efficiency (Thisdaylive, 2023).

The Agriculture Summit Africa provided valuable insights and recommendations to address food security and enhance Nigeria's agricultural productivity. By promoting import substitution, local sourcing of inputs, standardization, and ensuring long-term financing and risk-sharing structures, Nigeria can take significant strides towards doubling its agricultural productivity and achieving sustainable food security for its population (Thisdaylive, 2023).

4.0. Improving Nutrition in Nigeria

Underweight, overweight, and obesity are defined based on body mass index (BMI) measurements. Underweight is characterized by a BMI of less than 18.5 kg/m² (BMI<18.5), indicating an insufficient weight relative to height. On the other hand, overweight, including obesity, is identified as having a BMI equal to or greater than 25 kg/m² (BMI≥25). Obesity, a more severe condition, is classified as having a BMI equal to or greater than 30 kg/m² (BMI≥30). These BMI categories serve as crucial indicators to assess and address nutritional status and associated health risks in populations (WHO, 2023).

Addressing malnutrition, undernutrition, obesity, and dietary intake in Nigeria is paramount to improving the health and well-being of its population. The country faces a complex nutritional landscape, with challenges in various aspects of nutrition. Efforts to tackle these issues require a multi-faceted approach involving government policies, healthcare interventions, public awareness campaigns, and collaborations with various stakeholders.

Nigeria grapples with high rates of malnutrition and undernutrition, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women. Insufficient access to nutritious food, limited healthcare services, and poor sanitation contribute to these problems. To address malnutrition and undernutrition, the government should prioritize interventions that improve food security, enhance maternal and child health, and ensure access to essential nutrients. Initiatives like promoting exclusive breastfeeding, micronutrient supplementation, and community-based nutrition programs can significantly impact malnutrition rates (UNICEF, 2019; WHO, 2022).

In contrast to undernutrition, Nigeria also faces a rising obesity epidemic, particularly in urban areas. Changes in dietary habits, increased consumption of processed foods, and sedentary lifestyles contribute to the growing obesity rates. Addressing obesity requires comprehensive strategies, including public awareness campaigns on healthy eating habits, physical activity promotion, and food industry regulations to reduce the availability of unhealthy food options. Encouraging the consumption of locally grown and nutritious foods can play a vital role in combatting obesity (WHO, 2022).

Addressing underweight in Nigeria is crucial to improving its population's health and well-being. Improving its population's health and well-being, especially among children and pregnant women. Underweight individuals are at higher risk of health complications and reduced quality of life. Strategies should focus on enhancing access to nutritious food, promoting maternal and child health, and implementing community-based nutrition programs. Targeted interventions and public awareness campaigns can help combat underweight and improve overall nutritional status in the country.

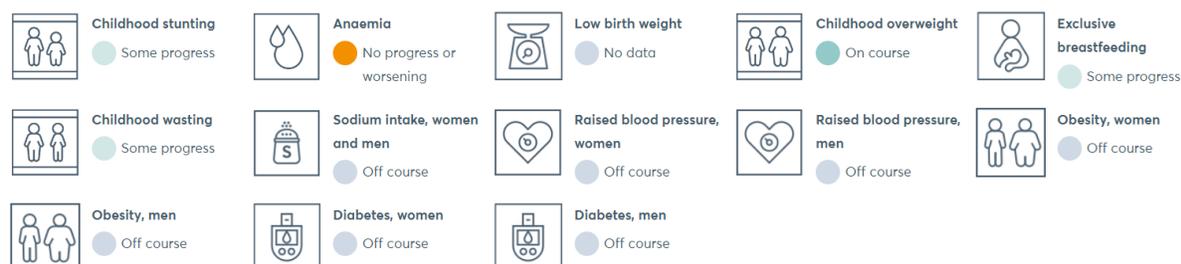
Promoting a diverse and balanced dietary intake ensures adequate nutrition for all Nigerians. Investing in nutritional education programs to raise awareness about the significance of consuming a diverse range of foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and proteins, is crucial for the government. Emphasizing traditional and locally available foods can also help improve dietary intake while supporting local agriculture and food production (UNICEF, 2020a; UNICEF, 2020b). Enhancing healthcare infrastructure and services is critical for tackling malnutrition and related health issues. Improved access to healthcare facilities, especially in rural areas, can facilitate early detection and management of malnutrition and nutrition-related conditions. Healthcare professionals should have the knowledge and skills to address nutrition-related challenges effectively.

A robust data collection and monitoring system is essential for understanding the prevalence of malnutrition, undernutrition, underweight and obesity in Nigeria. Regular assessments and surveys can help identify vulnerable populations and areas requiring targeted interventions. Data-driven decision-making is crucial for developing evidence-based policies and programs to

address nutrition challenges effectively. Addressing these issues requires collaborative efforts among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sectors, and international partners. Partnerships can leverage expertise, resources, and best practices to implement effective and sustainable nutrition interventions (UNICEF, 2019)

Tackling malnutrition, undernutrition, underweight, obesity, and dietary intake in Nigeria demands a comprehensive and integrated approach. Prioritizing nutrition as a national health agenda, investing in healthcare infrastructure, promoting healthy eating habits, and fostering collaborations can significantly improve the country's nutrition outcomes and overall well-being. Achieving a lasting impact and ensuring a healthier future for Nigerians requires the collective effort of all stakeholders.

Figure 1: Nigeria's Progress towards the global nutrition targets (Source: Global Nutrition Report, 2022).



Notes: Progress towards achieving the maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) and diet-related non-communicable disease (NCD) global nutrition targets is assessed based on three categories: 'on course,' 'some progress,' or 'no progress or worsening.' The MIYCN targets encompass reducing anaemia among women of reproductive age (15–49 years), decreasing low birthweight in infants, promoting exclusive breastfeeding among infants under six months, and addressing childhood stunting, wasting, and overweight. NCD targets include adult obesity and diabetes, raised blood pressure, and sodium intake. Specific targets have been set, such as reducing childhood stunting by 40%, achieving a 50% reduction in anaemia among women, and attaining at least a 30% increase in exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months. Additionally, targets for childhood overweight, wasting, salt/sodium intake, raised blood pressure, obesity and diabetes are also established to ensure progress and improvement in nutrition and health outcomes (Global Nutrition Report, 2022).

5.0. Genetic Diversity and Technology

Promoting genetic diversity and technology in Nigeria is vital for achieving the goal of zero hunger and ensuring food security for its population. Genetic diversity in crops and livestock is crucial for enhancing resilience to environmental changes, pests, and diseases, ultimately leading to increased agricultural productivity (FAO, 2019). By conserving and utilizing diverse plant and animal genetic resources, Nigeria can develop more resilient and productive agricultural systems contributing to food security.

Additionally, integrating technology into agriculture can significantly boost productivity and efficiency. Modern agricultural technologies, such as precision farming, crop monitoring systems, and smart irrigation techniques, can enhance resource efficiency and boost crop yields significantly (Branca et al., 2019). Moreover, digital platforms and mobile applications can give farmers access to market information, weather forecasts, and agronomic advice, empowering them to make informed decisions and increase their income.

Investments in research and development, infrastructure, and farmer education are essential to promote genetic diversity and technology in Nigeria's agricultural sector. Collaborative efforts among the government, private sector, and research institutions can pave the way for sustainable agricultural practices and contribute to the country's pursuit of zero hunger.

6.0. Overcoming Challenges and Trade Restrictions

Achieving zero hunger in Nigeria is complex, with various challenges and trade restrictions hindering progress. One of the significant challenges is food insecurity, which affects millions of Nigerians. According to the Global Hunger Index, Nigeria has a "serious" level of hunger, with 22% of its population undernourished (Global Hunger Index, 2023). Factors such as climate change, inefficient agricultural practices, and limited access to resources exacerbate food insecurity, making it difficult to ensure adequate and nutritious food for all.

Additionally, trade restrictions play a role in impeding efforts to achieve zero hunger. Import tariffs and non-tariff barriers can limit the accessibility of food items, impacting food availability and affordability for vulnerable populations. Trade restrictions can also affect the country's ability to import essential agricultural inputs, equipment, and technologies, hampering efforts to boost agricultural productivity (World Bank, 2022).

Furthermore, internal conflicts and instability in some regions of Nigeria pose significant challenges to food security and nutrition. Displacement of communities, destruction of farmlands, and disruption of food supply chains due to conflicts exacerbate the already existing food insecurity challenges (UNICEF, 2022). It requires coordinated efforts from the government, international organizations, and local communities to address the root causes of conflicts and create an enabling environment for agricultural development and food distribution.

Addressing these challenges and trade restrictions requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing policy reforms, investment in sustainable agricultural practices, improvement of infrastructure, and social safety nets to support vulnerable populations. Additionally, promoting trade liberalization and regional cooperation can facilitate the flow of food products across borders, ensuring food security and nutrition for all Nigerians (ADBG, 2021).

7.0. Public-Private Partnerships

Partnerships and collaborations are vital in achieving zero hunger in Nigeria as they bring together diverse stakeholders to address food security challenges collectively. The need for such collaborations is highlighted by the increasing food insecurity triggered by climate change, market disruptions, and declining productivity (Garmendia et al., 2021). These challenges require renewed collaboration among researchers, governments, industries, and interest groups to accelerate food production and distribution.

Public-private partnerships (P3s) are one effective approach to tackle these challenges. P3s involve joint efforts between the public and private sectors, sharing costs and risks to drive innovation and enhance food security (Garmendia et al., 2021). Such partnerships facilitate the adoption of advanced agricultural technologies, efficient resource management, and sustainable farming practices, which are critical in increasing agricultural productivity and ensuring food availability.

Furthermore, collaborations enable knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, allowing for the dissemination of best practices and innovative approaches across the food value chain. By working together, stakeholders can implement comprehensive and sustainable solutions to combat hunger and malnutrition, improving food security and nutrition for all Nigerians.

8.0. Building a Foundation for Zero Hunger

Good policies and governance are of utmost importance in achieving zero hunger in Nigeria, as they provide the framework and foundation for effective food security initiatives. The country's food insecurity challenges, including governance crises, undercapitalization, dysfunctional institutions, and poor infrastructure, highlight the need for robust governance systems (Isitor and Eze, 2015). Good governance entails promoting democracy, accountability, and transparency, essential in formulating and implementing effective policies to manage resources for sustainable national development and economic prosperity.

To address the looming food crisis, stakeholders must work together in developing comprehensive and sustainable food security policies that focus on enhancing food availability, accessibility, and adequacy. Collaboration between the government and the private sector is critical to achieving food security, poverty alleviation, and overall prosperity for the population (Isitor and Eze, 2015). By engaging all relevant actors, including policymakers, civil society organizations, and industry players, Nigeria can design and implement evidence-based policies that promote agricultural productivity, support smallholder farmers, and improve distribution systems to ensure food reaches those in need.

Furthermore, sound policies and governance play a crucial role in attracting domestic and foreign investments to the agricultural sector. Adequate investment can lead to the development of modern and sustainable agricultural practices, innovative technologies, and improved infrastructure, ultimately boosting food production and reducing food insecurity in the country.

9.0. CONCLUSION

In pursuing a resilient and food-secure future, Nigeria stands at a critical juncture where collective will and determination can pave the way for a transformative journey. "Combating Hunger: Nigeria's Pathway to a Resilient and Food-Secure Future" embodies a vision and a call to action for a nation rich in potential and promise. The challenges of food insecurity, malnutrition, and trade restrictions may seem daunting, but they present an opportunity for Nigeria to rise above and create lasting change.

As we embark on this transformative journey, partnerships and collaborations will be the cornerstone of success. We can harness our collective strength to overcome even the most formidable obstacles by uniting researchers, policymakers, private industries, and communities. Public-private partnerships will drive innovation, bringing forth cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices to boost agricultural productivity and ensure food availability for all. At the heart of this endeavour lies good governance and visionary policies. A nation that upholds democracy, accountability, and transparency in its government will lay the foundation for comprehensive and inclusive food security initiatives. By embracing evidence-based policies and

investing in sustainable agricultural practices, Nigeria will nurture its immense potential and empower its people to achieve lasting prosperity.

The journey towards zero hunger demands unwavering commitment, and we must remember that each step we take today will profoundly impact the generations to come. Through the resilience and determination of every citizen, we will create a future where no one goes to bed hungry, where the potential of our land is realized, and where the seeds of prosperity flourish. As we forge ahead, let us draw inspiration from the unity of purpose and the strength of our diversity. Let us rally together, guided by the shared belief that a food-secure Nigeria is not only achievable but essential for the well-being and prosperity of every Nigerian. Our pathway to a resilient and food-secure future is within reach, and with courage, collaboration, and innovation, we will unlock a brighter tomorrow for our beloved nation.

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