

Policyweekly

Broken Links:

Assessing the Drivers of Food Insecurity in Nigeria



Policy Recommendations

- 1 The government should prioritise investment in agriculture as a fundamental pillar of addressing Nigeria's entrenched food insecurity.
- 2 There is a need to empower women to make informed choices about their fertility, which can help stabilise population growth and contribute to long-term food security and sustainable development.
- 3 The government needs prudent economic policies and concerted efforts to address the underlying causes of inflation, which are vital in stabilising prices and ensuring food affordability for all citizens.
- 4 The Nigerian government needs to increase the presence of security forces in farming communities to deter criminal activities.
- 5 The humanitarian community must remain committed to scaling up efforts, enhancing coordination and collaboration, and mobilising resources to respond effectively to evolving humanitarian crises in the country.

Introduction

Food insecurity is a significant global challenge, impacting numerous countries. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), an estimated 783 million people suffer from hunger, constituting 9.2 per cent of the global population. This represents an alarming increase of 122 million people between 2019 and 2022. Furthermore, approximately 37 million individuals face acute food insecurity. Projections indicate that by 2030, nearly 600 million individuals could be chronically undernourished. Particularly affected regions include Africa and Asia, where 20% and 8.5% of the population grapple with undernourishment.

In Nigeria, the scale of [food insecurity has surged dramatically](#), rising by 133 per cent in three years. According to the FAO [report](#), the number of Nigerians facing food insecurity escalated from 63.8 million between 2014 and 2016 to 148.7 million between 2020 and 2022, a trend likely to worsen. Despite substantial investments by the Nigerian

government and interventions from international donor agencies aimed at bolstering food production, the situation remains dire. In response to escalating concerns, in July 2023, the Nigerian government [declared food insecurity a national emergency](#) and ordered the immediate release of fertilisers and grains to farmers and households to mitigate the adverse effects of fuel subsidy removal. Furthermore, the government announced plans to enhance security measures to safeguard farmers from armed attacks and kidnappings. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist, and food insecurity looms large over the nation. Hence, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly delves into the multifaceted issues exacerbating food insecurity in Nigeria, aiming to shed light on the situation's complexities and explore potential pathways towards sustainable solutions.

Hunger Haunting Nigerians

In contrast to some nations contending with singular issues such as drought or conflict, Nigeria faces a complex interplay of factors exacerbating one another's detrimental effects. The country is highly [vulnerable to the impacts of climate change](#), evidenced by occurrences such as droughts, desertification, erosion, and floods. These occurrences threaten the availability and quality of essential resources, including land, water, and biodiversity. Flooding has become a recurring nightmare for countless Nigerians, particularly in the central and northern regions. Beyond the rising water levels, flooding triggers a cascade of devastating consequences for affected communities. In 2022, Nigeria witnessed its worst floods in a decade, impacting 3.2 million people across 34 of its 36 states. Over 600 fatalities were recorded, and about 1.4 million people were displaced. With over 569,000 hectares of farmland submerged, crops and livelihoods were destroyed. Moreover, the aftermath of flooding gives rise to outbreaks of waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid. This puts immense strain on fragile healthcare systems and jeopardises the lives of children and vulnerable populations.

Beyond the unpredictable influence of weather patterns, Nigerians continue to face poverty and economic challenges. This goes beyond mere financial constraints but restricted access to essential resources such as fertilisers, improved seeds, and proper storage facilities. The situation is further compounded by unequal land distribution, where a few individuals own vast expanses while others grapple with cultivating a small plot. This stark contrast impedes agricultural productivity and denies millions of people access to nutritious food. Even with a good harvest, transporting them to the market is challenging. [Post-harvest losses, estimated at 50%](#), represent a significant missed opportunity for millions of people to access food. Nigeria's rural infrastructure, characterised by bad roads and bridges, acts as a bottleneck for food distribution. The consequence is that the produce rots in transit, compounding the

challenges farmers face. These factors perpetuate a cycle of food insecurity in rural Nigeria.

Nigeria's population, projected to reach 400 million by 2050, is growing at a rate outpacing food production. This rapid growth puts immense pressure on available resources, straining the existing agricultural system's capacity to meet everyone's nutritional needs. Arable land, a finite resource, cannot expand to accommodate the growing population. Consequently, this puts pressure on existing farmland, leading to unsustainable practices like deforestation and soil degradation. As more people migrate to cities, the workforce available for rural agriculture shrinks. This creates a labour shortage and further hinders production at a time when increased output is crucial.

Inflation and escalating food prices exert pressure on household finances and exacerbate food insecurity. Reduced food supply has contributed to the high food inflation rate, which reached [33.93% in December 2023, the second-highest in over 20 years](#). Food inflation significantly impacts the overall inflation rate, which stood at 28.92% in December 2023. The situation is exacerbated by the ongoing war in Ukraine, the depreciation of the naira, high transportation costs, insecurity in food-producing regions, and post-harvest losses. The consequences of rising food prices are stark. For millions of Nigerians, particularly those living in poverty, accessing basic food is increasingly challenging. Highlights of the 2022 Multi-dimensional Poverty Index survey reveal that 63% of persons living in Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. Families are being forced to cut back on food consumption, heightening the risk of malnutrition and related health complications. Moreover, the threat to basic needs like food exacerbates social tensions, leading to heightened community instability. As individuals and families grapple with the harsh realities of food insecurity, the potential for unrest and discord within communities grows, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address the root causes of poverty and hunger.

Beyond climate conditions and poverty, Nigeria's battle for food security faces a formidable foe: insecurity. The escalating insecurity in the country is significantly exacerbating food insecurity. With pervasive threats from insurgent groups, banditry, communal clashes, and other forms of violence, many regions face severe disruptions in agricultural activities, food production, and distribution channels. Farmers, who are the backbone of the nation's food supply, are facing numerous challenges, including attacks on farmlands, kidnapping, livestock theft, imposition of levies by bandits and displacement from their homes. These challenges disrupt farming activities and contribute to declining food production and availability.

States such as Niger, Kaduna, Taraba, Adamawa, and Plateau, which are among the top producers of grain in the country, have been grappling with recurring insecurity which reverberates across the country. Mangu Local Government Area, for instance, holds immense significance as it hosts the state's largest and most commercial maize market.

Communities in the area, in the last month (January 1- 31, 2014), have been attacked four times by armed gangs and over 38 casualties have been recorded. The Mangu maize market serves as a vital hub for maize trading and exports to other states across Nigeria. The cost of maize directly influences the prices of poultry, spaghetti, and other carbohydrate products. The closure of over 50% of poultry farms in 2023 has been attributed to the increased production costs resulting from the rise in maize prices, a critical ingredient in poultry feed production.

Moreover, insecurity also affects transportation networks and market access, hindering food movement from surplus to deficit areas. Attacks and general insecurity along transportation routes impede the timely delivery of food supplies to markets, exacerbating food shortages and driving up prices. In conflict-affected regions, food markets are often disrupted, limiting access to food for vulnerable populations. The consequences of worsening insecurity are dire. Fear and the threat of violence force entire communities to flee their homes, seeking refuge in makeshift camps or unfamiliar villages, disrupting their traditional farming practices and access to land. Disrupted farming activities, destruction of crops and livestock, and displacement of farmers lead to a significant decline in food production, causing shortages and driving up prices. Violence and conflict erode communities' resilience, making them even more susceptible to food insecurity due to climate shocks, such as droughts or floods.

Nigeria's battle against food insecurity is not just a domestic concern; it casts a long shadow on the nation's pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2): Zero Hunger. While many countries are progressing towards this laudable objective, Nigeria finds itself locked in an impasse, with millions of people challenged by hunger daily. [About 26.5 million Nigerians are projected to be highly food insecure in 2024](#), approximately a 29.7 per cent surge from the 18.6 million people vulnerable to food insecurity from October to December 2023. This is not just a handful of individuals; it's equivalent to the entire population of Australia. Among the most vulnerable are Nigeria's children, particularly those in their formative years. Approximately 9 million children are at risk of suffering from acute malnutrition. The impact of chronic malnutrition reverberates throughout their lives, stunting growth and impairing cognitive development. Malnutrition rates among Nigerian children remain alarmingly high, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to safeguard their well-being and secure their futures.

Harvesting Solutions

1. Addressing Nigeria's entrenched food insecurity requires more than short-term fixes; it demands a concerted, multi-dimensional approach that tackles the underlying structural issues driving hunger and deprivation. The government should prioritise investment in agriculture as a fundamental pillar of this strategy. Investing in modern storage facilities and transportation networks is crucial for reducing post-harvest losses and creating an efficient and resilient food supply chain. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and supporting small-scale farmers to help meet the growing demand for food without depleting natural resources is also essential.
2. Perhaps the most critical element is family planning, education and access to reproductive health services. Empowering women to make informed choices about their fertility can help stabilise population growth, which is essential for long-term food security and sustainable development. Furthermore, encouraging alternative income-generating activities can reduce dependence on agriculture and make communities more resilient to shocks. By diversifying livelihood options, communities can better withstand external pressures and disruptions to agricultural productivity.
3. Addressing inflation and rising food prices is not a quick fix; it requires a long-term commitment from the government. Prudent economic policies by the government and addressing the underlying causes of inflation are crucial steps in stabilising prices and ensuring food affordability for all citizens. Expanding social safety nets, such as food assistance programmes, cash transfers, and other forms of support to vulnerable populations, can provide temporary relief to those most affected by rising prices. These safety nets alleviate immediate food insecurity and promote resilience among vulnerable communities, enabling them to withstand economic shocks and recover more quickly from crises.
4. Increase the presence of security forces by the government in farming communities to deter criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping, and attacks on farmers. Deploying security personnel to vulnerable areas can help restore confidence among farmers and ensure their safety while working in the fields. It is also important to strengthen intelligence-gathering and early warning mechanisms to identify and pre-empt security threats before they escalate. Tackling the root causes of insecurity, including poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, is paramount. Implementing targeted development programs and poverty alleviation

initiatives can be crucial in addressing underlying grievances that fuel insecurity in farming communities.

5. Collaboration between the government and the humanitarian community is crucial in delivering essential services such as food, nutrition, health, water, sanitation, and protection to the most vulnerable populations, particularly those living in conflict-affected areas. In 2022, the United Nations and its partners successfully reached more than 5.1 million people in Nigeria with humanitarian assistance, with 3.4 million individuals benefiting from food security interventions. However, as the challenges continue to grow, the humanitarian community must maintain an unwavering commitment to scaling up efforts, enhancing coordination and collaboration, and mobilising resources to respond to evolving humanitarian crises in the country effectively. The increasing complexity of emergencies, coupled with the ongoing impacts of conflicts and other crises, necessitates a sustained and collective response to the pressing needs of affected populations.

Conclusion

The multifaceted drivers of food insecurity in Nigeria underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and targeted interventions to address this pressing issue. The path to food security remains complex, demanding a shift from piecemeal solutions to a holistic, multi-pronged approach. Nigeria can unlock its agricultural potential by addressing the intertwined issues of climate change, economic disparities, infrastructure limitations, and population growth. Ultimately, achieving SDG 2 in Nigeria demands a collective effort, collaboration, and unwavering commitment to securing food for all.

Author:

Ndidi Anyanwu is a Policy and Research Consultant at Nextier.

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