

Policyweekly

Government and World Food Programme (WFP) Engagement with Rising Hunger Index in Nigeria



Policy Recommendations

- 1** The government should see its cash transfers not as the solution to the problem but as temporary cushioning measures while it embarks on more practical actions that squarely connect food production with internal security in the country.
- 2** The government must address the problems of farmer-herder violence and restore the peace of rural environments to encourage farmers to return to their food production activities.
- 3** There is a need for greater commitment to climate action and focused preparedness for managing climate-induced ecological occurrences like flooding, desertification, and drying up of natural water sources.
- 4** Greater inclusivity is needed to embrace broader sections of vulnerable citizens and greater transparency in managing cash transfers.
- 5** The government should focus on supporting food production by subsidising farm input, which should be distributed transparently.
- 6** There is a need for geographical expansion and inclusivity in the good works of the WFP and other institutions committed to achieving SDG2.
- 7** WFP and sister institutions can also support food production by partnering with the government to provide improved farm input.

Introduction

In the next six years, 2030, the world will evaluate the achievement of the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG) made by the UN in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. [The second of these 17 Goals is the attainment of zero hunger](#), which envisages achieving the crucial parts of the eight targets of goal 2. The targets of SDG 2 include universal access to safe and nutritious food, ending all forms of malnutrition, doubling the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, sustainable food production and resilient agricultural practices, and maintaining genetic diversity in food production. The other three targets are investment in infrastructure, agricultural research, technology and gene banks; prevention of agricultural restrictions, market distortions and export subsidies; ensuring stable food and commodity markets and timely access to information. Despite the lofty hopes of SDG 2, current records reveal that [733 million](#) people go hungry daily. Hunger rates in Africa are incredibly high, as 1 out of 5 people go hungry every day. At least 40 of the 50 countries at the bottom of the [Global Hunger Index](#) are in Africa. Nigeria declined from 109 in 2023 to 110 out of 127 in 2024 in the Global Hunger Index, with scores of [28.8 in 2024 and 28.3 in 2023](#). These scores indicate the hardship and hunger citizens have experienced across the country in the past few years, especially the last year, because of several policy shifts.

The push factors of hunger are conflicts, pervasive insecurity occasioned by terrorist insurgency in the North East, banditry and ethnic rivalry in the North West and farmer-herder conflict in North Central and southern Nigeria. The terrorist insurgency has lasted over a decade with massive population displacement, which disconnects peasant farmers from their agricultural livelihood sources and practices of artisanal skills for survival. The problem of conflicts may even worsen in the near future as a group earlier known as harmless herders or [Lakurawa](#) has turned into a deadly terrorist group in the North West region of Nigeria. The unfolding conflicts and policy changes, especially around the cost of petroleum, have led to a phenomenal rise in the price of staple foods and increased the number of poor and food-insecure people in Nigeria.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), having [31.8 million](#) acutely food insecure people places Nigeria at the top of the global chart for this phenomenon. [4.8 million and 6.2 million](#) persons are experiencing food insecurity in the Northeast and the Northwest, respectively. The number of children facing malnutrition in this area is also rapidly rising. Overall, the government's efforts appear to be swamped by its policy direction, while the intervention of WFP focuses on conflict-affected regions of the North East and North West. Indeed, North East and North West present emergencies because the victims are mainly in IDP camps, but their combined figures of food insecure persons represent 34.6 per cent of the entire numbers nationally; the other 65.4 per cent is not properly reckoned in analysis. At the moment, WFP is merely able to reach 1.1 million people with a concentration in the terror conflict zones of northern Nigeria. There is no clear information about intervention in North Central Nigeria, which hosts more than [600,000 IDPs](#). Also, statistics on people who are hungry in the South are neither properly established statistically nor given adequate attention. The truth, however, is that many people across Nigeria are hungry. To be sure, WFP can only augment the role of Nigeria's government, but there is a need for a more inclusive framework for intervention against hunger. Thus, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly reflects on the need for more inclusive hunger intervention in national coverage and strategy by the state and WFP.

Engagements with Increasing Hunger

The recent spike in commodity prices in the country, including food prices due to government policy on petrol, increased the cost of transportation and significantly contributed to inflation. The government has attempted various interventions to cushion this impact of its policy. The first intervention was the

payment of [35,000 NGN](#) to federal public servants to cushion their hardship. Another government intervention was the payment of [25,000 NGN](#) to 991 261 households. While these interventions were not directly called hunger interventions, they were invariably part of the concerns the cash transfers were expected to address. In addition, there was a more direct policy for selling 50kg bags of rice at [40,000 NGN](#), which is fifty per cent of the market price. While the cash transfers to federal public servants are commendable, they leave out state-level public servants and, of course, the more significant rural poor. The population of federal public servants is only [720,000](#), constituting an insignificant 0.003 per cent of the country's population. Also, the modality for payment of the 25,000 NGN transfers needs to be more transparent. How beneficiaries were chosen across the 36 states purported to be covered is unknown.

Regarding the 720 trucks of rice provided for sale at 40,000 NGN (half the market value), the quantity is far too little to affect the extent of hunger. Besides, the [discounted sale](#) was halted barely a week after commencement and without explanation. Also, the distribution points could have been better publicised to avoid any experience of diversion by powerful interests. Thus, it is difficult to establish the extent to which the discounted rice was available to the poor.

A look at WFP's [strategic plan for 2023-2027](#) suggests continuity in its current strategy, which is driven largely by the SDGs related to its mandate. However, one crucial factor that needs to be observed is that there ought to be openings for intervention beyond its geographical concentration at the moment. Rural families in north-central and southern Nigeria and the urban poor are important demographics that bear attention regarding the ravages of hunger. For instance, WFP is currently [aiding land restoration](#) in some countries of the Sahel, like Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali. A similar programme can be initiated in Nigeria around flooding, considering [food losses](#) due to heavy flooding.

While government strategy suggests a reckoning with severe hunger in Nigeria, its commitment to seriously addressing issues that connect insecurity, economic policies, and hunger does not inspire confidence. The link between internal security and food production stands out among the challenges that should be seriously considered. Cash transfers and other ad-hoc measures will not solve the problem of hunger. To that end, there is a need to resolve conditions that undermine food production, such as terrorism and agrarian violence between farmers and herders, as well as manage ecological and other climate-change-induced challenges.

Recommendations

1. The government should see its cash transfers not as the solution to the problem but as temporary cushioning measures. At the same time, it embarks on more practical actions that squarely connect food production with internal security in the country. Primarily, it should fight determinedly against terrorist insurgency, which affects food production, in order to return farmers to their sources of livelihood.
2. Similar to number 1 above, the government must address the problems of farmer-herder violence and restore the peace of rural environments to encourage farmers to return to their food production activities.
3. There is a need for greater commitment to climate action and focused preparedness for managing climate-induced ecological occurrences like flooding, desertification, and drying up of natural water sources.
4. Greater inclusivity to embrace broader sections of vulnerable citizens and greater transparency in the management of cash transfers are needed.
5. The government should also focus on supporting food production by subsidising farm input, which should be distributed transparently.
6. The WFP and other institutions committed to achieving SDG 2, which intends to achieve zero hunger by 2030, should expand their good works by being more geographically inclusive in Nigeria, both in their cash transfers and

interventions in food distribution. Every part of Nigeria has areas that could be supported through school feeding and dietary interventions for vulnerable people.

7. WFP and sister institutions can also support food production by partnering with the government to provide improved farm input. While they engage in this activity among returned displaced persons in the North East, encouraging food production in relatively more peaceful parts of the country will help enhance food supplies to compensate for stalled production in conflict-infested areas.

Conclusion

Nigeria's hunger crisis is worsening, and more people are becoming vulnerable. It is chiefly occasioned by conditions that undermine local food production, especially conflicts which have for some time forced many people out of land and confined them to IDP camps. Other causes include agrarian violence and ecological challenges like flooding, drought and desertification. These causal factors are reinforced by government policy that drastically raised the cost of transportation, thereby increasing the price of commodities and inflation. Government intervention in the form of minimal cash transfers and short-lived sales of subsidised rice have had little effect. As a source of active support, the United Nations World Food Programme has been supporting Nigeria but focuses almost entirely on one of the country's conflict zones. To achieve more significant outcomes in engaging the high hunger index in Nigeria, the state and WFP need to consider some changes in strategy and coverage for greater inclusion and better outcomes.

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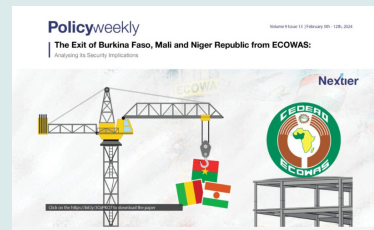
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