

## **POLITICS OF FOOD SECURITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** Food security in Nigeria has become a precarious political and social issue, interwoven with socioeconomic inequalities and political decisions. The politics of food security in Nigeria directly impacts social change, influencing everything from rural livelihoods to national stability. This paper explores the complicated relationship between food security and social change, focusing on how political influences shape food accessibility, distribution, and consumption patterns. With over 70% of the population living in food insecurity, the role of political instability, government policies, and economic challenges cannot be overlooked. Additionally, malnutrition remains prevalent, particularly in vulnerable groups such as children and internally displaced persons (IDPs), exacerbated by inefficient governance and inadequate agricultural policies. The paper examines how political elites use food security as a tool for political leverage, resulting in a fragmented approach to addressing the underlying causes of hunger. The paper applies theoretical lenses such as Political Economy and Social Change Theory to explore these dynamics in detail. Using a historical and contemporary analysis of Nigerian agriculture, government policy, and international relations, this paper discusses the need for sustainable policies that bridge the gap between food production, distribution, and consumption, alongside the role of government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies in mitigating this crisis. The study concludes that unless food security is treated as a national priority, social inequalities and poverty will continue to rise, preventing the achievement of social change in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Food Security, Political Economy, Social Change, Agricultural Policy, Nigeria

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria, despite its agricultural potential, grapples with persistent food insecurity, a crisis that threatens the livelihoods of millions. This complex issue is deeply intertwined with the nation's political dynamics, as government policies, governance structures, and resource allocation significantly impact food availability and access. Political instability, corruption, and socioeconomic inequalities have exacerbated the problem, leading to widespread malnutrition and hunger (Oladipo & Oyinloye 2022). The politics of food security is not just about food production; it is intertwined with power dynamics, economic policies, and social structures that either exacerbate or alleviate food shortages. Understanding how these factors influence each other is essential to addressing Nigeria's ongoing food crisis.

Food insecurity in Nigeria is a paradox. Despite the country's vast agricultural potential, it continues to suffer from chronic food shortages. As of 2023, over 25 million Nigerians are at risk of food insecurity, a figure that reflects both the failure of agricultural policies and the broader political and economic instability in the country (UNICEF, 2023). These shortages

are not simply the result of natural disasters or poor agricultural practices but are deeply rooted in political mismanagement, corruption, and inequality. As many scholars argue, food security is as much about politics as it is about agriculture (Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 1998). In Nigeria, political decisions about land use, resource distribution, and agricultural funding directly impact food availability and accessibility, disproportionately affecting rural communities and the urban poor (Olaiya, 2020).

The political economy of Nigeria's food security is deeply knotted with its post-colonial history. After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria embarked on various agricultural policies aimed at self-sufficiency. However, these efforts were often derailed by political instability, corruption, and poor governance. For instance, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) introduced in the 1980s, under the guidance of international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), prioritized market liberalization over food subsidies, pushing millions of Nigerians into deeper poverty (Olukoshi, 1993). SAP's emphasis on cash crop exports, rather than local food production, meant that the country became increasingly reliant on food imports, further entrenching its vulnerability to global market fluctuations.

Food insecurity is not just a matter of insufficient food production; it is a result of how resources are distributed and controlled. Political elites often control access to fertile land, subsidies, and agricultural inputs, sidelining small-scale farmers who make up the majority of Nigeria's agricultural workforce (Amanza et al., 2021; Ayinde et al., 2022). These power dynamics are worsened by corruption; funds meant for rural development and agricultural enhancement are most times often siphoned off by powerful political actors. As a result, policies intended to address food insecurity rarely reach those who need them most.

Moreover, the political nature of food security in Nigeria extends to its role in shaping social change. The agricultural sector employs over 70% of Nigeria's population, and fluctuations in food availability have a profound impact on social organization and economic mobility (FAO, 2022). For instance, food shortages in rural areas often lead to mass migrations to urban centers, where opportunities for employment are scarce, exacerbating poverty and social unrest. The Boko Haram insurgency, which has ravaged northeastern Nigeria for over a decade, is often linked to the region's chronic food insecurity, as unemployed and disenfranchised youth are drawn into militant groups that promise food and income (Onuoha, 2022).

Political instability also contributes to food insecurity by disrupting agricultural production and distribution networks. Conflicts over land, especially in the Middle Belt region, have led to violent clashes between herders and farmers, further reducing food production in key agricultural zones (Okeke & Nnamani, 2023). Government responses to these crises have been insufficient, often characterized by weak enforcement of land rights and a lack of investment in conflict resolution. These conflicts not only affect food production but also deepen ethnic and religious divides, fueling further social instability.

Food security, or the lack thereof, is a key driver of social change in Nigeria. In rural areas, food scarcity pushes families to migrate in search of better opportunities, either within the country or internationally. This has led to the rapid urbanization of cities like Lagos and Abuja, which struggle to provide adequate services for their growing populations. The social fabric of rural communities is also transformed, as younger generations abandon farming in favor of more stable, albeit low-paying, work in urban centers. This shift has long-term

implications for Nigeria's agricultural sector, as the country becomes increasingly dependent on food imports to meet the needs of its growing population (Ayiti, & Adedokun, 2023).

On a global scale, Nigeria's food security crisis also has political ramifications. The country's reliance on food imports leaves it vulnerable to fluctuations in global food prices (Ojo, 2023), making it harder for local populations to access affordable food. This, in turn, places pressure on the Nigerian government to engage in international negotiations and seek food aid, which often comes with political strings attached. For example, food aid from Western nations is frequently tied to neoliberal economic reforms that prioritize market liberalization over social welfare, further entrenching inequalities within Nigeria's food system.

More worrisome is that Nigeria's food security legislative framework remains inadequate, particularly in regulating and managing international development aid. Despite numerous interventions from international bodies and donor agencies, there is a significant lack of coordination and harmonization between these external efforts and Nigeria's domestic food security needs. This legislative gap allows development aid to be deployed without adequate oversight, leading to fragmented interventions that often fail to address the root causes of food insecurity. For instance, funds meant for agricultural enhancement and nutritional programs are sometimes misallocated or mismanaged due to the absence of strict regulatory guidelines.

Additionally, this lack of regulation means that development partners may introduce projects that do not fully align with Nigeria's unique regional and agricultural challenges. Without a cohesive legal framework to standardize and direct these interventions, Nigeria faces a disjointed approach to food security that fails to deliver sustainable results. Moreover, the frequent turnover in government policies and leadership further exacerbates this issue, as incoming administrations often discard or neglect previously initiated programs, leading to a lack of continuity in food security efforts. As a result, initiatives that could potentially alleviate food insecurity become redundant or underfunded, leaving millions of Nigerians vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition (Faniran, 2024).

The absence of a well-defined legislative framework also hinders the country's ability to respond effectively to crises such as natural disasters, conflict-induced displacement, or fluctuations in global food markets. A robust food security law would ensure that donations and aid are directed towards comprehensive, long-term strategies that prioritize self-sufficiency, rather than short-term fixes that fail to address systemic issues like corruption, infrastructural deficits, and regional inequalities (Faniran, 2024).. The need for a centralized authority or legislative body to oversee these processes is critical for streamlining the flow of aid and ensuring that interventions are equitable and sustainable.

Therefore, the politics of food security in Nigeria is a multidimensional issue that incorporates everything from local power struggles to international relations. It is clear that achieving food security requires not only addressing agricultural production but also tackling the political inequalities and governance failures that perpetuate food scarcity. Social change in Nigeria is intrinsically linked to food security, as shifts in agricultural policies, migration patterns, and urbanization shape the country's future. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the political dimensions of food security, which is essential for creating policies that promote both food access and equitable social transformation.

## Conceptual Clarification

In understanding the relationship between politics, politics of food security, and social change in Nigeria, it is essential to clarify the key concepts at the heart of this discussion. These concepts—food security, politics of food security, and social change—are deeply interrelated and must be comprehended within both local and global contexts. Without clear definitions, it becomes challenging to analyze how these dynamics shape Nigeria's society and economy.

## Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022) defines food security as a condition where "all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Food security is not just about food availability but also access, utilization, and stability over time.

In the Nigerian context, food security is heavily influenced by factors such as political instability, economic disparities, environmental challenges, and infrastructural deficiencies. For instance, the ongoing insurgencies in the northeast and farmer-herder conflicts in central Nigeria have severely disrupted food production and distribution (Onuoha, 2022). Even in regions where food is available, access to it can be restricted by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and inflated prices due to market volatility. According to a UNICEF report, only 18% of Nigerian children between the ages of 6 to 23 months are fed the minimum acceptable diet, while 45% of deaths among under-five children are linked to malnutrition (UNICEF, 2023). These alarming statistics underscore the critical need for a deeper understanding of food security in Nigeria and how political factors contribute to its current state.

Food security is generally divided into four dimensions:

1. **Availability:** Refers to the supply of food through production, distribution, and exchange.
2. **Access:** Involves the ability to obtain sufficient resources (both economic and physical) to acquire appropriate food for a nutritious diet.
3. **Utilization:** Centers on the appropriate use of food based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as access to adequate water and sanitation.
4. **Stability:** Refers to the ability to obtain food over time, without significant fluctuations due to economic, environmental, or political factors.

Each of these dimensions is relevant to Nigeria, where periodic food shortages are common due to poor agricultural practices, climate change, and fluctuating food prices.

## POLITICS OF FOOD SECURITY

The politics of food security refers to the political processes and power dynamics that shape how food is produced, distributed, and accessed within a society. Food security is not just an agricultural issue; it is a deeply political one. Governments, international organizations, corporations, and local communities all play critical roles in determining who gets access to food and how resources are allocated.

In Nigeria, the politics of food security is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internally, political elites often control agricultural policies and funding, creating inequalities in how resources are distributed. Corruption in government agricultural programs frequently diverts funds intended for smallholder farmers, leaving them without the necessary inputs to increase food production (Ayinde et al., 2022). Moreover, land ownership is often concentrated in the hands of political elites, with small-scale farmers having limited access to fertile land, further aggravating food insecurity (Amanza et al., 2021).

Externally, Nigeria's reliance on imported food makes it vulnerable to global market fluctuations and political pressures from foreign governments and international organizations. For example, trade policies imposed by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other bodies often favor export-oriented agriculture over subsistence farming, pushing Nigeria to prioritize cash crops at the expense of food crops (Olukoshi, 1993). This dynamic not only perpetuates food insecurity but also reinforces dependency on foreign food supplies.

### **Social Change**

Social change refers to the transformation of cultural, social, and economic structures over time. In the context of Nigeria, food security—or the lack thereof—acts as a catalyst for significant social changes, influencing migration patterns, employment structures, and social relations. For example, food scarcity in rural areas has led to mass migrations to urban centers in search of better opportunities. This has resulted in rapid urbanization, with cities like Lagos experiencing an influx of rural migrants seeking employment outside of agriculture (Iruonagbe, 2009).

Additionally, food insecurity exacerbates existing social inequalities. Marginalized groups, such as women, children, and rural farmers, are disproportionately affected by food shortages and malnutrition. In many cases, women are responsible for managing household food resources, and when food becomes scarce, they bear the brunt of ensuring that their families have enough to eat. This dynamic often leads to changes in gender roles and family structures, as women take on additional responsibilities or seek employment outside the home to supplement their family's food supply (FAO, 2022).

Moreover, food insecurity can lead to social unrest. In Nigeria, food scarcity has been linked to various forms of social instability, including protests, violent conflicts, and the rise of insurgent groups. The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria, for example, has been partly fueled by the region's chronic food insecurity, which has left large portions of the population impoverished and disenfranchised (Onuoha, 2022).

Thus, the politics of food security is not only about controlling resources but also about shaping social structures. As food security crises intensify, they drive changes in how Nigerian society is organized, from migration and urbanization to shifts in gender roles and family dynamics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The relationship between politics, food security, and social change in Nigeria can be best understood through the application of two key theories: the Political Economy Theory and the Dependency Theory. These theories provide a foundation for analyzing how political

decisions, power dynamics, and external dependencies influence food security and drive social change in the country. Each theory highlights different aspects of how political systems and global relations impact Nigeria's food security challenges.

### **1. Political Economy Theory**

Political Economy Theory emphasizes the relationship between political systems and economic structures, suggesting that political decisions directly influence economic outcomes, including food security (Resnick, 2024). In Nigeria, the political economy of food security is deeply intertwined with governance, corruption, and resource allocation (Amanza et al., 2021). This theory argues that political elites often control food resources, using them as a tool for political leverage, which in turn affects the broader economic system and food access for the population.

In the Nigerian context, political control over agricultural policies, food subsidies, and import regulations significantly affects food availability and accessibility. Despite being rich in natural resources and having favourable conditions for agriculture, Nigeria suffers from widespread food insecurity due to poor governance and policy implementation. For instance, various government initiatives, such as the National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (NMPFAN), have sought to address malnutrition and food insecurity. However, these initiatives are often undermined by corruption, mismanagement, and poor political will, leaving millions in poverty and food deprivation.

Moreover, the political economy approach also highlights the unequal power relations between different regions in Nigeria. For example, northern Nigeria, which is predominantly agricultural, has been severely impacted by both political neglect and the Boko Haram insurgency. The instability in this region has resulted in reduced agricultural output, displacement of millions, and a significant decline in food security. This regional disparity underscores how political decisions—such as inadequate security interventions and weak agricultural policies—create an uneven distribution of food resources, contributing to food insecurity and social unrest.

Additionally, Nigeria's food security is often tied to broader political agendas, with food aid programs being used as political tools. During elections, promises of food aid or agricultural support are frequently made but rarely delivered, reflecting the clientelist nature of Nigerian politics. The political economy theory thus helps explain how political motivations hinder the establishment of long-term, sustainable food systems and perpetuate inequality.

### **2. Dependency Theory**

Dependency Theory, developed in the 1960s, argues that developing countries are dependent on more developed nations for resources, technology, and economic opportunities, which perpetuates a cycle of underdevelopment (Emeh 2013). This theory is particularly relevant in analyzing Nigeria's food security challenges, as the country remains reliant on food imports and foreign aid to meet its population's needs, despite its agricultural potential.

Nigeria's reliance on imported food commodities such as rice, wheat, and dairy products makes it vulnerable to global price fluctuations and foreign policy decisions. This dependency on international markets reduces the country's food sovereignty, leaving it at the

mercy of external factors beyond its control. For instance, disruptions in global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted Nigeria's vulnerability, as food prices soared due to import restrictions.

Dependency Theory also sheds light on the influence of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, whose structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to the decline of Nigeria's agricultural sector. These programs, which mandated reduced government spending and the liberalization of trade, weakened Nigeria's domestic food production by cutting agricultural subsidies and encouraging food imports. As a result, Nigeria's agricultural capacity deteriorated, leading to increased food insecurity and a reliance on external sources for sustenance.

Moreover, international aid programs, while intended to alleviate hunger, often reinforce Nigeria's dependence on foreign assistance. Humanitarian aid provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in conflict zones like the northeast is necessary for immediate relief, but it also highlights the long-term failure of domestic agricultural and political systems to provide food security. Without substantial investment in local agriculture and food production infrastructure, Nigeria will continue to depend on international aid to address its food security needs.

Dependency Theory further explains the limited technological advancement in Nigeria's agricultural sector. Many farmers still rely on traditional farming methods due to the lack of access to modern technology, infrastructure, and education. This technological gap prevents the country from fully harnessing its agricultural potential, reinforcing its dependence on imported food to meet domestic demand.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Two Theories**

Both the Political Economy Theory and Dependency Theory offer valuable insights into Nigeria's food security crisis. While Political Economy Theory focuses on internal political dynamics, such as governance failures, corruption, and regional disparities, Dependency Theory emphasizes Nigeria's external dependencies, such as reliance on food imports and international aid. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between politics, food security, and social change in Nigeria.

From the Political Economy perspective, improving food security in Nigeria would require addressing corruption, implementing effective agricultural policies, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources. On the other hand, Dependency Theory suggests that Nigeria needs to reduce its reliance on foreign aid and imports by investing in domestic food production and infrastructure. Both approaches highlight the importance of political will and governance reforms in achieving sustainable food security.

In conclusion, the Political Economy and Dependency theories offer essential tools for understanding how food security in Nigeria is shaped by both internal political factors and external dependencies. The intersection of these factors creates a vicious cycle of food insecurity, which in turn drives social change by exacerbating poverty, inequality, and social unrest. Addressing Nigeria's food security challenges requires not only political reforms and

better governance but also a strategic shift towards self-reliance in agriculture. The successful implementation of food security policies will ultimately depend on breaking the cycle of dependency and ensuring that political decisions prioritize the needs of the population over short-term political gains.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper relies on a comprehensive review of existing literature, policy documents, and statistical data to explore the dynamics of food security and social change in Nigeria. Data was gathered from multiple sources, including government reports, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies such as UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and Nigeria's National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (NMPFAN). These sources provide critical insights into Nigeria's food security challenges, political frameworks, and social changes that result from food insecurity.

In addition to secondary data, policy analyses were conducted to examine the implementation and impact of Nigerian government programs aimed at improving food security, such as the National School Feeding Program and agricultural subsidies. Theoretical models such as Political Economy Theory and Dependency Theory were applied to interpret the relationships between political decisions, food distribution, and social outcomes.

No primary data collection was undertaken due to the theoretical nature of the study. However, relevant statistics on malnutrition, food insecurity, and poverty from agencies like UNICEF and Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics were utilized to reinforce the discussion on the intersection of politics, food security, and social change. This methodology allows for a thorough investigation of the systemic issues that influence food security in Nigeria, providing a robust foundation for theoretical analysis.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

To comprehend the current food security situation in Nigeria, it is essential to explore the historical context that has shaped its agricultural and political landscape. This section outlines key events and policies that have influenced food production, distribution, and access over time, demonstrating how the interplay between politics, governance, and economic structures has impacted the country's ability to achieve food security.

### **Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods**

In pre-colonial Nigeria, food production was largely decentralized, with diverse agricultural practices tailored to the ecological conditions of various regions (Ijere, 1974). The northern regions specialized in grains like millet and sorghum, while the southern regions were known for root crops such as yam and cassava. Communities practiced subsistence farming, with surplus produce used for local trade. The relatively stable food production systems at the time contributed to a balance between population needs and available resources.

However, with the advent of colonial rule in the late 19th century, Nigeria's agricultural landscape began to change significantly. The British colonial government prioritized the extraction of raw materials for export to fuel its industries. Cash crops like cocoa, groundnuts, palm oil, and cotton were promoted at the expense of food crops, altering the



traditional food production system (Azunna, 2018). This focus on export-oriented agriculture weakened local food production and laid the foundation for future food insecurity.

Colonial agricultural policies also introduced systems of land ownership that disrupted indigenous practices. The introduction of land tenure systems gave elites, often aligned with colonial authorities, control over vast tracts of fertile land, marginalizing smallholder farmers (Maxwell & Wiebe, 1999). This legacy of unequal land distribution persists in Nigeria today, contributing to contemporary food insecurity.

### **Post-Independence Agricultural Policies**

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the new government faced the challenge of transforming the agricultural sector to ensure food security for its growing population. The First National Development Plan (1962-1968) aimed to increase agricultural productivity, but the program was largely unsuccessful due to a lack of investment, political instability, and insufficient coordination between regional governments (Ugwuanyi, 2014). The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) further compounded the food crisis. During the war, agricultural production declined sharply as farmlands were destroyed, labour was diverted to the conflict, and food imports were disrupted. The war created widespread food shortages and famine, particularly in the eastern regions. In response, the Nigerian government introduced several post-war reconstruction initiatives aimed at revitalizing the agricultural sector, but these efforts were hampered by poor governance and corruption (Clevenger, 1975).

### **Green Revolution and Structural Adjustment Program**

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Nigerian government launched the Green Revolution Program in an attempt to modernize agriculture and achieve self-sufficiency in food production. Inspired by similar programs in Asia and Latin America, the Green Revolution focused on increasing the use of high-yielding seed varieties, chemical fertilizers, and mechanized farming techniques. However, the program failed to produce the expected results due to a lack of infrastructure, inadequate extension services, and poor access to credit for smallholder farmers ((Ambali & Georgantzís, 2021)).

Concurrently, Nigeria's economic problems worsened, leading to the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986. SAP, implemented under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, prioritized market liberalization, privatization, and the reduction of government subsidies, including those for agriculture (Olukoshi, 1993). While SAP aimed to improve economic efficiency, it led to significant cuts in agricultural support, leaving small-scale farmers without access to affordable inputs and extension services.

The shift from government-subsidized food production to reliance on market forces exacerbated food insecurity in Nigeria. The emphasis on cash crops for export, coupled with reduced support for food crop farmers, left the country increasingly dependent on imported food. This made Nigeria vulnerable to global food price fluctuations and external economic shocks, such as the 2007-2008 global food crisis.

## Contemporary Challenges

Today, Nigeria continues to struggle with food security due to a combination of political, economic, and environmental factors. The country's population has grown rapidly, reaching over 200 million people in 2023, placing immense pressure on its food systems (World Bank, 2023). Despite its vast agricultural potential, Nigeria remains one of the largest food importers in Africa, spending billions of dollars annually on imports such as rice, wheat, and fish (Ayinde et al., 2022).

One of the major obstacles to achieving food security in Nigeria is poor governance. Corruption and mismanagement in government agricultural programs have led to inefficiencies and the misallocation of resources. For example, funds meant for rural development or agricultural inputs are often diverted or poorly utilized, leaving farmers without the support they need to increase productivity (Olukoshi, 1993). In addition, political instability and conflicts, particularly in the northern regions, have severely disrupted food production. The Boko Haram insurgency and the ongoing farmer-herder conflicts have displaced millions of people and reduced access to farmland, exacerbating food shortages in affected areas (Onuoha, 2022).

Climate change also poses a significant threat to Nigeria's food security. The increasing frequency of droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events has devastated agricultural production, particularly in the northern regions where desertification is advancing (FAO, 2022). Smallholder farmers, who lack access to irrigation and climate-resilient farming techniques, are especially vulnerable to these environmental challenges.

The historical evolution of food security in Nigeria illustrates how political decisions, economic policies, and external influences have shaped the country's ability to feed its population. From the colonial era's focus on cash crops to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, food security has been consistently undermined by political and economic forces. Today, Nigeria continues to face significant challenges in achieving food security, with political instability, corruption, and environmental degradation posing major obstacles. Understanding this historical context is essential for developing policies that address the root causes of food insecurity and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

## POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON FOOD SECURITY

The political landscape of any nation is a critical determinant of its food security. In Nigeria, political decisions, governance structures, and power dynamics profoundly influence how food is produced, distributed, and accessed by the population. The intersection of politics and food security manifests in policies related to agriculture, land ownership, economic reforms, and international relations. This section explores how political factors have either facilitated or hindered food security in Nigeria, focusing on governance, policy formulation, corruption, and the impact of conflicts.

### Governance and Agricultural Policy Failures

Agricultural policies are a key element of national food security strategies, and their success depends on effective governance. In Nigeria, governance failures have significantly contributed to food insecurity. Since independence in 1960, various governments have

introduced agricultural policies aimed at achieving food self-sufficiency, yet many of these initiatives have been poorly implemented due to corruption, mismanagement, and political instability.

One major example is the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) program, launched in 1976 under the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. OFN aimed to increase agricultural productivity by encouraging citizens to engage in farming. While the program raised awareness about agriculture, it failed to address structural issues such as access to land, capital, and agricultural inputs for smallholder farmers. Furthermore, political elites benefited disproportionately from the program, as they were able to acquire large tracts of land, leaving small-scale farmers marginalized (Olukoshi, 1993).

Subsequent agricultural policies, such as the Green Revolution Program of the late 1970s and early 1980s, also faced similar governance issues. While the Green Revolution aimed to modernize Nigerian agriculture through the introduction of high-yielding seed varieties and mechanization, it largely benefited wealthy farmers and agribusinesses, while smallholders—who constitute the bulk of Nigeria's farming population—lacked the resources to adopt these new technologies (Ayinde et al., 2022). This unequal distribution of benefits further entrenched food insecurity among rural populations.

Poor governance is also evident in the failure to invest adequately in rural infrastructure. One of the critical missing links in Nigeria's food security framework is the lack of robust legislative oversight. This oversight, a fundamental responsibility of the legislature, has been deficient for decades. Neither the Development Partners nor the Executive branch is at fault for this gap; in fact, both entities may find the current status quo preferable as it deflects accountability for implementation failures. Without effective legislative scrutiny, food security programs lack the necessary checks to ensure proper execution and impact.

Roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities are critical to boosting agricultural productivity and ensuring that food can reach markets. In Nigeria, however, rural infrastructure is often neglected due to political inefficiencies and corruption. For instance, many rural roads remain in poor condition, making it difficult for farmers to transport their produce to markets, which results in significant post-harvest losses. The absence of effective governance at the local and national levels means that even well-intended agricultural policies often fail to translate into improved food security.

### **Corruption and Mismanagement**

Corruption is a pervasive issue in Nigeria's political system, profoundly impacting the country's food security. Government funds allocated for agricultural development are frequently siphoned off by political elites, leaving little for actual investments in food production or support for farmers (Ojiya, Ameh, & Ashifa, 2020). Corruption also distorts the implementation of agricultural policies, as those with political connections gain access to resources such as fertilizers, seeds, and land, while marginalized communities are left out (Olabiyi, 2022).

A notable example of corruption affecting food security is the National Fertilizer Subsidy Program, which was intended to provide affordable fertilizers to smallholder farmers. Corruption and self-interest among legislators also pose significant challenges to effective

oversight of food security programs. Legislative inaction, often driven by pecuniary incentives, has allowed mismanagement to persist, undermining efforts to address the nation's food security crisis. This reluctance to engage in thorough oversight contributes to the perpetuation of inefficiencies across governmental and development partner initiatives. However, corrupt officials and middlemen frequently diverted subsidized fertilizers to the black market, where they were sold at inflated prices, making them unaffordable for the farmers who needed them most (Fajobi, Raheem, & Olajide, 2023). As a result, agricultural productivity remained low, contributing to food shortages and higher food prices (Nugroho et al., 2022).

### **Economic Policies and Food Insecurity**

Economic policies in Nigeria have significantly influenced food security outcomes. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), introduced in the mid-1980s by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, aimed to liberalize Nigeria's economy and reduce government intervention. While SAP reduced inflation and stabilized the currency, it adversely affected the agricultural sector and food security (Thomas & Turk, 2023).

A key component of SAP was the reduction of agricultural subsidies, which had previously supported small-scale farmers with affordable inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and credit. The removal of these subsidies hindered farmers' ability to maintain or increase food production, leading to lower crop yields and higher food prices (Thomas & Turk, 2023). Additionally, SAP prioritized cash crop production for export over food crops, diverting resources from domestic food production and increasing dependency on food imports (Thomas & Turk, 2023).

The liberalization of Nigeria's agricultural sector under SAP also exposed the country to global market fluctuations. For instance, the global food price crisis of 2007-2008, driven by rising oil prices and increased demand for biofuels, led to sharp increases in the cost of staple foods such as rice and wheat. As Nigeria had become reliant on imported food due to SAP, the country was particularly vulnerable to these price shocks, exacerbating food insecurity (Thomas & Turk, 2023).

### **POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND FOOD SECURITY**

Political instability and conflicts in Nigeria have severely disrupted food production and access, particularly in violence-affected regions. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast exemplifies how political conflict undermines food security. This insurgency has displaced millions, destroyed farmlands, and disrupted agricultural activities, leading to widespread food shortages (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023). Farmers often cannot access their fields due to violence threats, and markets are frequently targeted, hindering food distribution (Badewa & Dinbabo, 2022).

Additionally, ongoing farmer-herder conflicts in central Nigeria exacerbate food insecurity. These conflicts, driven by competition over land and resources, have resulted in the destruction of crops, livestock, and infrastructure (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023). The government's inability to effectively resolve these conflicts has contributed to continued food shortages in affected regions (Badewa & Dinbabo, 2022).

Political conflicts also divert government resources away from agriculture towards military spending. In response to Boko Haram, increased defense spending has limited funds for agricultural development and rural infrastructure, further worsening food security for vulnerable populations (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023).

### **Role of International Politics**

Nigeria's food security is influenced by both domestic and international politics. The country's dependence on food imports, such as rice, wheat, and fish, makes it vulnerable to global trade policies. Trade agreements with major food-exporting countries and organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) significantly impact food prices and availability in Nigeria (IMF, 2023). While trade liberalization can reduce food prices by lowering tariffs, it may also harm local farmers who struggle to compete with cheaper imports (NESG, 2024).

International food aid, particularly in conflict-affected regions, also plays a role. Organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) provide emergency assistance, but this aid is often tied to political agreements that may not align with Nigeria's long-term interests (UN, 2021). Additionally, reliance on food aid can create dependency and discourage local production (IMF, 2023).

Addressing these political factors is crucial for improving food security in Nigeria. Effective governance, anti-corruption measures, and supportive economic policies are essential to ensure all citizens have access to sufficient and nutritious food (NESG, 2024).

### **Food Security as a Driver of Social Change**

Food security is a fundamental human right, and its absence profoundly impacts society. In Nigeria, the struggle for food security drives migration, urbanization, changes in employment, and shifts in family dynamics. These shifts act as powerful agents of social change, transforming both rural and urban life. This essay examines how food insecurity reshapes Nigerian society, focusing on migration, labour dynamics, rural communities, gender roles, and social unrest.

### **Migration and Urbanization**

Food insecurity in Nigeria has led to a significant rise in rural-to-urban migration. Historically an agrarian society, Nigeria has seen many rural residents leave their farms due to declining agricultural productivity, particularly in the north, where droughts and conflict have exacerbated food shortages. Over 50% of Nigeria's population now lives in cities, with much of this movement driven by food scarcity (World Bank, 2023). However, this rural exodus has strained urban infrastructure. Cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Kano face severe overcrowding, with slums growing rapidly. More than half of Nigeria's urban population lives in informal settlements, where access to clean water and sanitation is limited (UN-Habitat, 2023). Migrants often find that cities are not havens of food security; urban living brings higher food prices and persistent hunger.

### **Changing Labour Dynamics**

The decline of agricultural livelihoods due to food insecurity has altered labour patterns. Once the backbone of the rural economy, agriculture is in decline, forcing many to abandon farming in search of new opportunities in cities. As young people leave farming behind, rural areas are left with aging populations, threatening the future of agriculture. In cities, migrants increasingly join the informal economy, where over 60% of Nigeria's workforce is employed. However, jobs in this sector are typically low-paying and offer little security, perpetuating poverty and food insecurity (International Labour Organization, 2023). As agriculture wanes, this shift toward urban informal work reshapes the country's labour landscape, but not necessarily for the better.

### **Transformation of Rural Communities**

Food insecurity has transformed Nigeria's rural communities. The exodus of younger workers to cities has diminished the agricultural workforce, resulting in reduced food production. Traditional farming practices and knowledge, vital to sustaining rural life, are also being lost. This migration alters family dynamics in rural areas, where older generations are left to manage farms and households. Many depend on remittances sent by relatives in urban areas, but these financial contributions are rarely enough to alleviate the deeper issues of rural poverty and food shortages. As more young people leave, rural depopulation worsens, making it even harder to maintain agricultural productivity (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023).

### **Shifts in Gender Roles**

Food insecurity has driven significant changes in gender roles, particularly in rural Nigeria. Women, who are traditionally responsible for household food production, now take on additional economic duties, such as engaging in petty trade or informal work, to support their families. This shift challenges traditional gender roles, with women assuming more decision-making power and economic responsibility. In urban areas, many women find work in low-paying sectors like domestic labour and food vending. Despite their growing economic role, women face considerable barriers, including limited access to land and credit, which exacerbates their vulnerability to food insecurity (UN Women, 2023).

### **Social Unrest and Instability**

Food insecurity has not only reshaped migration and labour dynamics but also fueled social unrest. When food becomes scarce or expensive, tensions rise. Protests erupted during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when food prices soared, highlighting the link between food security and social stability (UNICEF, 2023). Persistent food insecurity can lead to increased crime rates and political instability, further complicating efforts to achieve sustainable development.

## **SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF FOOD SECURITY ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

Food security, or the lack thereof, profoundly affects vulnerable populations in Nigeria, particularly rural farmers, women, children, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These

groups face systemic challenges that exacerbate poverty, malnutrition, gender inequality, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

### **Impact on Rural Farmers**

Rural farmers are the backbone of Nigeria's agriculture, yet they are among the most food-insecure groups. Over 70% of Nigeria's rural population depends on agriculture for their livelihood, but factors like poor infrastructure, lack of access to credit and inputs, environmental degradation, and political instability limit their productivity (Ajetunmobi, 2024). One of the key challenges is limited market access. Poor transportation infrastructure makes it difficult for farmers to sell their produce at profitable urban markets. Consequently, they are forced to sell locally at lower prices, reducing their income and worsening food insecurity (Ajetunmobi, 2024). Inadequate storage facilities also lead to significant post-harvest losses, further eroding their earnings (FAO, 2022).

Access to essential agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers is also problematic. Government subsidy programs meant to provide these inputs are often riddled with corruption and inefficiency, leaving farmers without resources to improve yields (World Bank, 2023). Moreover, environmental issues like desertification and erratic weather patterns due to climate change, especially in northern Nigeria, disrupt farming seasons, worsening the food crisis (Nwafor et al., 2021).

### **Impact on Women**

Women play a crucial role in food production and management but face unique barriers that heighten their vulnerability to food insecurity. Many are responsible for growing and preparing food, especially in rural areas, yet they are disadvantaged due to limited access to land, credit, education, and agricultural inputs (FAO, 2022). In many parts of Nigeria, patriarchal land tenure systems prevent women from owning land, leaving them dependent on male relatives. This lack of ownership limits their access to credit and decision-making power in agriculture (Ajetunmobi, 2024). Without land as collateral, women struggle to secure loans for purchasing inputs or expanding their operations (World Bank, 2023).

Moreover, women often lack access to education and agricultural extension services compared to men, preventing them from adopting modern farming techniques that could improve their productivity. This knowledge gap further disadvantages women farmers in terms of income and market access. Malnutrition also disproportionately affects women, as they often prioritize feeding their children and families over themselves, leading to higher rates of malnutrition, particularly among pregnant and breastfeeding women (FAO, 2022).

### **Impact on Children**

Children are highly vulnerable to the impacts of food insecurity in Nigeria, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. Malnutrition, stunting, and wasting are common, with 17 million Nigerian children undernourished, many of whom suffer from stunting (UNICEF, 2023). Stunting, which results from chronic malnutrition, has severe long-term effects on cognitive development and overall health, limiting children's potential to escape poverty (UNICEF, 2023).

Food insecurity also affects children's access to education. In rural areas, many children are pulled out of school to help their families with farming or income-generating activities. Malnutrition further hinders their ability to perform well in school, perpetuating cycles of poverty and food insecurity (UNICEF, 2023).

### **Impact on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

IDPs, particularly those displaced by conflict in the northeast, are among the most food-insecure populations in Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced millions, forcing many IDPs into overcrowded camps with limited access to food, water, and healthcare. These conditions exacerbate their vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition (WFP, 2022).

### **International Relations and Food Aid**

Nigeria's food security is influenced by both internal factors and international interactions. Global market forces, international organizations, foreign aid, and trade agreements play crucial roles. This section examines how international relations shape Nigeria's food security, focusing on global trade, food aid, and the implications of foreign assistance.

## **GLOBAL MARKET FORCES AND NIGERIA'S DEPENDENCE ON FOOD IMPORTS**

Despite its agricultural potential, Nigeria relies heavily on food imports to meet its population's needs. Key staples like rice, wheat, and fish are imported, making Nigeria vulnerable to global food price fluctuations. This reliance exposes the country to external shocks such as market volatility, trade disruptions, and inflation (Akinyele, 2009; Olomola, 2015).

The 2007-2008 global food crisis exemplifies how international market forces can disrupt Nigeria's food security. During this period, global food prices soared due to rising oil prices, biofuel demand, and extreme weather events, leading to increased prices of imported staples in Nigeria (FAO, 2009). This crisis exacerbated food insecurity and sparked protests as citizens struggled to afford basic food items (Akinyele, 2009).

Trade agreements, such as those with the World Trade Organization (WTO), also impact Nigeria's food security. While these agreements reduce tariffs on imports, they can undermine local food production by making it difficult for Nigerian farmers to compete with cheaper imported goods (Olomola, 2015). This dynamic threatens Nigeria's food sovereignty and increases dependence on external sources (Akinyele, 2009).

### **The Role of International Food Aid**

International food aid significantly addresses Nigeria's food security challenges, especially in conflict-affected regions like the northeast, where the Boko Haram insurgency has displaced millions. Organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provide emergency food assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable populations (UNICEF, 2023; WFP, 2022).



In the northeast, food aid is crucial for meeting the immediate needs of IDPs who have lost their livelihoods due to conflict. Many of these individuals were formerly farmers now unable to access their land or produce food. Food aid helps prevent famine and reduces malnutrition among displaced populations. For example, the WFP distributes food rations and nutritional supplements to IDPs, particularly women and children, who are most vulnerable to malnutrition (WFP, 2022).

However, international food aid can also have political and economic implications. Sometimes, food aid is tied to foreign policy objectives or trade agreements, creating a complex web of political interests. Conditions attached to food aid may require Nigeria to implement economic reforms, such as trade liberalization, which can conflict with domestic interests or long-term development goals (IMF, 2023).

### **Bilateral Relations and Food Security**

Nigeria's bilateral relations significantly impact its food security. Key trade partners like India, Thailand, and the United States supply essential staples such as rice and wheat (IMF, 2023). These relationships ensure a steady food supply but also pose risks. For instance, Nigeria's 2019 border closure with Benin and Niger to curb smuggling led to increased food prices and shortages (UNICEF, 2023).

Regional trade agreements, such as ECOWAS and AfCFTA, aim to reduce tariffs and promote intra-African trade, potentially boosting Nigeria's agricultural exports (USAID, 2024). However, these agreements can also expose local farmers to increased competition, challenging domestic food production (IMF, 2023).

### **International Organizations and Development Partners**

International organizations play a crucial role in supporting Nigeria's food security through development assistance. Organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) provide technical assistance, funding, and capacity-building programs to strengthen Nigeria's agricultural sector (FAO, 2022; World Bank, 2023). For instance, the FAO promotes sustainable agricultural practices, focusing on climate-smart agriculture, improved irrigation, and access to quality seeds and fertilizers (FAO, 2022). These development Partners formalize their involvement in Nigeria's development initiatives through a compact with the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning. This compact ensures that all programs are aligned with the Government of Nigeria's priorities. While the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning coordinates the government's side, the UNDP oversees the coordination of Development Partners on development aid, ensuring streamlined and targeted efforts to address the nation's pressing challenges, including food security. These initiatives address environmental degradation and climate change, which threaten food security.

Similarly, the World Bank supports projects to improve rural infrastructure, access to credit, and agricultural technology. The FADAMA program empowers smallholder farmers with extension services, inputs, and market information, enhancing agricultural productivity and reducing food insecurity (World Bank, 2023). Several other development partners provide development funds targeted at improving food security but these funds are disproportionately directed towards northern states in Nigeria with only a few selected states from eastern and

southern Nigeria. Development partners like Nutrition International (NI) play an important but supplementary role in tackling food security issues, particularly in addressing malnutrition through targeted interventions. Their efforts focus on improving nutritional outcomes, especially among vulnerable populations such as women and children in conflict-affected areas. This practice could further drive or heighten vulnerabilities leading to conflict. It could further create regional disparities, which would leave other parts of the country underfunded. However, the sustainability of these programs is a challenge, as they often depend on continued donor funding. Development projects must be tailored to Nigeria's specific needs, considering diverse environmental, social, and political factors to ensure long-term success (IMF, 2023).

### **Conclusion**

The politics of food security and social change in Nigeria is a complex interplay of local, national, and international forces. At the heart of Nigeria's food insecurity lie systemic issues such as poor governance, corruption, environmental degradation, and political instability, all of which significantly influence the country's agricultural productivity and access to food. Moreover, international relations, global market dynamics, and the dependence on food imports and aid further complicate Nigeria's efforts to achieve food sovereignty.

This paper has demonstrated that the politics of food security in Nigeria is a key driver of social change, influencing migration, labour dynamics, gender roles, and the socioeconomic vulnerability of marginalized populations. Addressing food insecurity is critical not only for alleviating hunger but also for fostering equitable social transformation in the country.

Nigeria's food security challenges are further exacerbated by external factors such as trade policies, market volatility, and international food aid, which create both opportunities and risks for the country's agricultural sector. Sustainable solutions to Nigeria's food crisis require a multifaceted approach that addresses the political, economic, and social roots of the problem. This includes empowering local farmers, improving governance, promoting gender equality, and reducing dependency on food imports.

Achieving long-term food security in Nigeria will require collaborative efforts from the government, international organizations, and civil society. By focusing on sustainable agricultural practices, equitable policy reforms, and resilience-building strategies, Nigeria can overcome its food security challenges and pave the way for inclusive social change and development.

### **Recommendations**

To tackle Nigeria's food security crisis and promote sustainable social change, a set of focused, impactful actions are necessary.

First, supporting smallholder farmers must become a national priority. By offering targeted subsidies and affordable agricultural inputs, the government can enhance productivity. Investments in rural infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, will further ensure farmers access markets and reduce post-harvest losses. Secure land tenure reforms, particularly for women, are essential to fostering long-term agricultural growth.

Second, the development of climate-resilient infrastructure is critical. By expanding irrigation systems, the reliance on rain-fed farming can be minimized. In parallel, adopting drought-resistant crops and efficient water management practices will enable year-round agricultural productivity, ensuring resilience against environmental challenges.

Third, the Federal Government, through the FIRS, should collaborate with state governments to eliminate duplicate taxes on foodstuff transportation across states. Instances where traders buy foodstuffs from a state and in the course of transporting the goods to their state of business pay several duplicate taxes while passing through other states would not help the current administration efforts at price control and inflation management. This policy would stabilize food prices and encourage intra-country trade.

Fourth, empowering women in agriculture can transform Nigeria's food security landscape. Women must have equal access to land, credit, and training. By expanding women's access to modern agricultural technology and decision-making platforms, their productivity can be greatly enhanced, which will directly contribute to improved household food security.

Fifth, reducing Nigeria's dependency on food imports is crucial. The country must diversify its agricultural output to reduce reliance on imported staples like rice and wheat. Introducing protective trade policies and offering incentives will promote local food production. Encouraging the consumption of locally grown food will strengthen national food security and stabilize the economy.

Next, improving governance is key to sustainable progress. Anti-corruption measures in agricultural programs are vital, ensuring transparency and accountability. Strong oversight in the distribution of agricultural resources will prevent mismanagement, ensuring that those most in need receive the necessary support. To enhance the effectiveness of food security programs, the recently inaugurated legislative network on food security within the National Assembly should be fully supported. This network can serve as a critical platform for fostering stronger oversight, ensuring that both federal and state legislators prioritize the enforcement of food security policies and programs.

Lastly, it is crucial that Nigerian legislators, both at the Federal and state levels, take up their oversight responsibilities on food security matters more seriously. Strengthened legislative oversight is a proven pathway to ensuring that initiatives by development partners and government agencies are not only well-implemented but also sustained over time.

These recommendations, if implemented effectively, will foster robust food production, empower vulnerable populations, and fortify the country against climate and market vulnerabilities.

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