

FOOD SECURITY FIRST: THE ROLE OF WOMEN THROUGH EMPOWEREMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD, GENERAL SECURITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the roles which women could play if they are effectively empowered towards resolving the problem of food security that will guarantee an enduring and sustainable general security and economic development in Nigeria. The paper examines the issues such as; the issue of food security situation in Nigeria, general security challenges in recent times in Nigeria, as well as the economic implication of general security challenges on food security in Nigeria. The methodological approach adopted in writing this paper is content analysis. The paper found that livelihood initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting food security could be achieved through women's empowerment in agricultural production, small scale businesses and any other forms of employment. This will consequently lead to food security, prevent dependency, reduce vulnerability to social vices, enhance self reliance and development of specific skills leading to improvement of the general well being of the people, culminating in sustainable economic development. The paper therefore recommends among other things, that there is need for proper

understanding of the inter-connectedness of women and household food security in targeting and designing intervention mechanisms that would lead to improvement in a variety of well being and outcomes for the entire family, community and society at large.

Keywords: Food security, sustainable food, economic development .

Section One

Introduction

May 29th 1999 is seen by many as Nigeria's second independence due to the birth of democracy and the overthrow of the military junta. This auspicious day was expected to usher in an era of opulence via general security, based on equity, transparency, accountability, tolerance, justice, belongingness, involvement and participation in the affairs of the nation by all. Indeed, hopes were high for the radical transformation of the economy in the area of food for all, effective health care and educational systems, heavy infrastructure development, total reversal of the poverty scourge, corruption, indiscipline, and moral decadence that characterized the years of military rule (Uya, 2005:1). Twelve years down the lane, overwhelming evidence has revealed the stark reality that we are still on a very long journey to our democratic destination, as acute hunger, stark poverty of the masses in the midst of stupendous opulence of the few primitive acquirers, ethno-religious and political bigotry of the highest order, with terrorist attacks via bomb blasts everywhere being the order of the day, a feature hitherto alien to Nigeria. Thus, general anarchy has been unleashed on the land, occasioned by the increasing pauperization and total elimination of the Nigerian middle class, hence everything has fallen apart and the centre cannot therefore hold the fabric that once united and held the plural Nigerian society.

The above problems were heightened due to the fact that the Nigerian women have suffered long term marginalization in the affairs of the nation, despite their fundamental role in the area of ensuring peaceful co-existence for sustainable economic development via maintenance of the family by ensuring food security at the household level and the general society (Okoli and Umeh, 2001). Thus, women as producers of food are central towards achieving food security through empowerment. In the light of the foregoing, this paper intends to examine the roles which women could play if they are effectively empowered towards resolving the problem of food security that will provide an enduring and sustainable general security for economic development

in Nigeria. The paper is therefore structured into six (6) sections including this brief introduction as section one (1). Section two (2) examines the issue of food security situation in Nigeria, while section three (3) looks at the general security challenges in Nigeria in recent times. Section four (4) highlights the economic implications of the general security challenges on food security in Nigeria, while section five (5) examines the roles that women could play towards resolving the food security challenges through empowerment for sustainable general security and economic development. The final section concludes the paper with recommendations.

Section Two

Nigeria's Food Security Situation in Recent Times

In the last three decades, the concept of food security has emerged to reflect the changes in policy thoughts among nations of the world. However, the concept was first muted in 1974 at a World Food Conference where it was defined in “terms of food supply, assuring the availability and price stability of basic food stuffs at the national and international levels”; “availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic food stuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (FAO, 1983; World bank, 1986 and Shuaibu, 2011). However, “ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need” as well as “secure access by all people at all times to enough food for a healthy, active life” became the main focus of FAO (1983) and World Bank (1986). In Nigeria in recent times, food security situation has become the single most critical area of concern due to its stagnation, while growth in food demand has kept pace with population explosion (Abdullahi, 2010:45). It is rather an irony of fate that Nigeria is endowed with abundant resources (human and natural), including vast fertile land for farming, i.e. about 23% (21 million hectares) arable land, while only 0.9 million hectares (1%) is under permanent cultivation (ibid). It is useful to quickly observe that the country was self- sufficient in food production before the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in the late 1950s. A fortune that should have been used to galvanize the agricultural sector was instead used to destroy the sector, thereby making Nigeria to divert from agriculture as a source of external revenue into a mono-cultured economy dependent on crude oil. As a result of this, the country witnessed a rapid decline in agriculture, both in the share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absolute terms. For instance, the contribution of agriculture to GDP was 55.5% in 1968, 19.22% in 1978 and by the 1980s, the sector was contributing only 18%. The situation currently is best imagined as Nigeria has now

become a net importer of foodstuffs. According to Adesina (2012), Nigeria spends 1.3 trillion naira on wheat and sugar importation alone, while 356 billion naira is spent on rice importation yearly. This simply indicates that an average of one billion naira is spent daily on rice import in Nigeria.

Indeed, the implication of this on the nation's general security is best imagined. Thus, as observed by Abdullahi (2010), "massive food importation leads to the drainage of the nation's scarce foreign reserves, frequent show-down between the federal government and workers for wage increases to meet up with the rising cost of basic necessities of life, and decline in local capacity due to competition from foreign food stuffs as we have in the case of rice today. Thus, over the years, Nigeria's food security has been bedevilled by both general and specific problems in the agricultural sector. Abdullahi (2010: 49-50) observes that the general agricultural problems include inadequate supplies of agricultural inputs, land ownership systems, rural-urban migration, lack of farm credit agricultural financial institutions, etc, while the specific problems include zero incentives to cash crop production, lack of rural credit for rural farmers, poor storage system and poor marketing and pricing regime, etc.

While it is useful to observe that various regimes over the years have tried to find solutions to the problem of food security through various agricultural policies and programmes such as farm settlements, land use decree, River Basin Development Programmes, etc (Anyanwu et al, 1997), but all yielded minimal success due to lack of political will in addition to the fact that the technology used was not in tune with the factor-endowment of Nigeria. Also, most often, such policies always lead to social unrest due to its trickle-down strategy both in the plan formulation and implementation. The Bakalori Dam project of the former Sokoto state during the Shagari regime of the 1980s was a great example of this scenario.

What all these translates to is that the vast majority of the Nigerian masses are not only hungry, but very angry, hence the current waves of conflicts leading to an atmosphere of rancour and insecurity of lives and properties. Thus, how can Nigeria attain economic development that is sustainable with the masses becoming refugees in their country due to ethno-religious and political insecurity? To observe that Nigeria has the potential of becoming one of the largest economies and a major player in the global economic arena by the year 2020 and beyond may not be an over exaggeration by virtue of her rich resource endowment. However, given the current wave of national security challenges, occasioned by previous neglect of effectively and efficiently tapping and utilization of the nation's resources for the common good of all citizens, Nigeria runs the risk

of not actualizing that dream. For instance, according to statistics, more than 50% of the Nigerian citizens are underfed compared to 35% in Ghana, while her positions among the most failed States in the last few years stood as follows: In 2005, it was (54th), 2006 (22nd), 2007 (17th), 2008 (18th), 2009 (15th) and 2010 (13th), hence assuming its worst stagnant development status out of 177 countries that were ranked in this millennium (World Bank ,2000; Adebayo, 2011 and Abdullahi, 2011).

A cursory look on the streets of almost all the urban and rural areas in the country shows evidence of malnutrition (Oladele, 2005), while the inadequacy of food and prevalence of malnutrition among children are not in terms of national food aggregate availability, but in terms of household availability and affordability (ibid), which the FAO/WHO (1992:v) Document defines as the capacity of households “to secure either from its own production or through purchases----(or) adequate food for meeting the dietary needs of its members”. The resultant effect of this food security crisis is the manifestation in the level of general insecurity as a result of conflicts in all regions of the country in recent times. The next sub-section throws more light on this issue, i.e. the general security challenges in Nigeria in recent times.

Section Three

The Current General Security Challenges in Nigeria

Globally, the desire for economic prosperity and development is usually a unifying factor among human race. However, this unity is often threatened by disagreements, confusions and contradictions over policy options likely to actualize the desired economic development objectives. In recent times, these contradictions, confusions and disagreements have played out themselves in virtually all regions of Nigeria. Consequently, “grievances, accumulated anger, and repressed frustration arising from several years of perceived injustice (marginalization from national issues of people from certain segment of the country), have poisoned inter-ethnic and religious relations, resulting into communal conflicts on an unprecedented level across every nook and crannies of the nation. Indeed, Nigeria has had a chequered history of ethnic, political and religious crisis. For instance, the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970 was orchestrated by ethnic rivalry due to the fear of domination by one or the other of the major ethnic groups. This resulted into the inability of the nation failing to sustain two democratic governance, thereby making the nation to experience many years of military dictatorship (Maduagwu, 2005:10).

As observed by Arifowose (2003:48-56), violence has become a tool in the hands of an advantaged groups for the perpetuation of their advantage over the other (less) advantaged group, with the initial aim of protesting unacceptable behaviour....with time, however, it has metamorphosed into intractable violence in which either group seeks to (exterminate) the other permanently. This is the scenario today in Nigeria. Aside from the civil war, high scale of conflict has widened in both substance and geographical spread. According to Jega (2002:36), “a mere argument (disagreement) between two people of different ethnic (or religious belief) in the market place is enough to trigger another round of crisis”. Thus, people who have been living peacefully for years now experience these conflicts. Infact, list according to Omojuwa (2005:172) “is as varied as the multicultural endowment of Nigeria, e.g. Tiv/Jukun; Tiv/Azara; Hausa/Kataf; Yoruba/Hausa; Epira/Bassa; Ife/Modakeke; Auguleri/Umuleri; Ijaw/Itsekiri; Itsekiri/Urhobo; Ijaw/Ilaje; Hausa/Bachana; Fulani/Mambilla”, etc. The February 2000 Kaduna Shari’ah crisis was reported to have claimed a conservative estimate of 1,295 lives (NIPSS, 2003:16). The various clannish/political violence that has been the order of the day among the Epira-Tao community of Kogi since the 1990s has continued un-abated till date, taking different dimensions with each passing day, just like the Plateau crisis dating back to the 1990s due to dysfunctional communal conflicts which later reached explosive dimension between the Hausa/Fulani Muslims and the Plateau Christian residents, leading to a colossal loss of lives and properties, with the state recording about 23 communal attacks between 7th September, 2001 to May, 2004. In 2004 alone, the conflict claimed an estimated 53, 789 lives, among which are 17,459 children, 17,397 women and 18,931 men, while over 200,000 thousand people were displaced and sent to refugee camps (Goshit, 2005:189). This situation led to the declaration of a state of emergency in Plateau State by the Obasanjo regime in 2004. Till date, Plateau is still engulfed in serious conflict hence insecurity of lives and properties.

The Niger Delta issue became a different keg of wine in its own style of violence, with the militants kidnapping and killing both local and foreign oil personnels, a situation vividly captured by Efemini (2005:51) that “in the Niger delta, the lack of respect for human rights has resulted in torture and arbitrary killings and massacre of civilians by security forces of the Nigerian State”. For instance, the Umuechem massacre, the Ogoni genocide, the Kaiama killings and the attacks on Uzere, Ekeremor-Zion, Ubeji and other several villages by soldiers and anti-riot (Mobile) Policemen (PEFS:2004). To Efemini (2005:52), “the fear of a bleak future, occasioned

by a dictatorial State not committed to genuine socio-economic transformation led the people of the Niger Delta to acts which can be described as political agitations and provoked acts of violence”.

However, the most devastating act of violence in nascent Nigeria is the Boko Haram that emerged in Borno, a hitherto very peaceful State. Here, bomb blast has become a past time, with strategic government buildings and security organizations being the main targets. The Police Headquarters and the United Nations building in Abuja, etc, are cases in point, with the most recent being the Christmas day (25th December, 2011) bombing at a Church in Madalla, Suleja, Niger State that claimed about 30 lives, with many injured and the 20th January, 2012 bombing of Police buildings (about four places) in Kano which claimed the lives of about 185 people, with a lot of injured masses. According to Kuka:

“Clearly, these are very troubled times for our country. But they are also very promising times because amidst this confusing debris of hate, anger and frustration we have had some very interesting dimensions. Nigeria is changing because Nigerians are taking back their country from the grip of marauders, as Christians and Muslims together in solidarity are protesting against bad governance and corruption beyond the falsehood of religion. Once freed from the grip of these dark forces, religion will be able to play its role as a force for harmony, truth and the common good”.

The spate of bombing and general insecurity made the Federal government to declare a state of emergency in 15 LGAs of four states, in December, 2012, i.e. Niger state (Suleja); Ebonyi state where Eza-Ezilo community were attacked by neighboring community over land dispute with about sixty people dead and properties worth millions of Naira destroyed; Plateau state and.....(see newspaper). It is easy to agree with Lord-Mallam (2006:109) that there is a complex interaction of internal security threats and external power factors...and that leadership weakness, instability and severe resource constraints tend to focus the attention of ruling elites on questions of regime survival and on the pursuit of short term relief measures. As Karl Marx (1932) observes, conflict arises inevitably out of life and death struggle of socio-economic classes and social change will occur only as a result of rational planning, debate and decision making. Thus, clash between classes would either lead to a societal transformation or at times national insecurity.

The new trend of general insecurity in Nigeria, though very alien cannot be divorced from the burgeoning number of the citizens living in abject poverty and hunger, while many could

even be described as “living dead”. With no job, no decent food, state of hopelessness, the devil easily engages otherwise vibrant youths in devilish activities like armed robbery, prostitution, thuggery, etc. The end result is that the primitive acquirers too cannot sleep in peace or enjoy the luxury of their loots, while the toiling, struggling and suffering masses are caught in the crisis of survival by all means. Thus which ever way, we are all common losers in the pauperization and dehumanization of the masses through economic theories that talk about micro and macro effects of national policies which ironically negates and neglects the common sense economic theory that good democracy must first start with the “stomach” (Daily Sun, 2006). Endemic hunger and starvation no doubt is a basic fact that undermines human security and security is a fundamental condition for the normal functioning of man and society. Absence of security means less attention to issues that could foster sustainable economic development. Arising from the above, the question that comes to mind is what economic implications do these violent conflicts portend for food security in Nigeria? The next sub-section throws more light on this.

Section Four

The Economic Implications of the General Security (Conflicts) Challenges on Food Security in Nigeria

According to ROAPE (1986), war and famine are related. This is in view of the fact that military expenditure on war diverts resources away from agricultural production and imports when it becomes necessary to feed the (war-stricken and displaced victims) citizens (Goshit, 2005:189). This observation correctly reflects Nigeria’s current general security (conflict) challenges. Conflicts which can be defined as a “clash, struggle, confrontation or controversy.....is an inevitable evil in any society or family, which if not resolved amicably could lead to war” (Adeyemo, 2003; Goshit, 2005). In the same measure, conflict which could be political, armed or violent as a fact of life may not be totally abnormal or evil as it could be a precursor for positive change. However, it arises when there is divergence in interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in a defined social and physical environment – a fact of a plural society like Nigeria (Otite and Albert, 2001).

Thus, Nigeria’s current general insecurity has been compromised by avoidable conflicts that have become a common issue in recent times. This infact has become more worrisome especially when the impoverished segments of the Nigerian masses are finding it increasingly hard

to avoid starving to death. Resources that could have been diverted to improving the agricultural sector have been consumed in the rehabilitation of displaced and injured citizens. It will not be an over exaggeration to observe that the current wave of general insecurity was fuelled by food insecurity as a result of acute poverty, a condition that has made the people highly susceptible and vulnerable to any conflict situation....after all, “a hungry man is an angry man” as the popular saying reveals.

Indeed, food insecurity as a result of acute poverty has continued unabated since the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the mid 1980s. This was further worsened by the withdrawal of subsidies on agricultural inputs, petroleum products as well as other welfare programmes (social services like quality education) (Goshit, 2005:193). This situation has continued to exert enormous hardship on the masses. The rebirth of democracy in 1999 has not helped matters as prices of foodstuffs continued to sky-rocket. All these as far as observers are concerned is due to “government’s economic mismanagement, corruption, lack of (effective economic) development (agenda), failure to pay worker’s and pensioner’s salaries as at when due, etc” (Goshit, 2005:196).

For instance, due to SAP, the peasant farmers became worse-off as a result of high rise in the prices of farm inputs like fertilizers and tractor hiring services which was beyond the reach of the local ordinary farmers that constitute the bulk of the farming population. This situation did not only lead to drastic fall in the level of food production, but also the prices of available foodstuffs jumped up. The resultant effect of this is that today, malnutrition and kwashiorkor has continued to plague the poor and the children (ibid), with 40% of children under five years suffering from the scourge which claims the lives of 100,000 children annually (ibid). It is useful to note that the conflict that has engulfed all the regions of Nigeria has worsened the menace of food insecurity and acute poverty generally.

That there are overwhelming large number of the Nigerian masses who are food insecure is an understatement (NBS, 2003; NDHS, 2003; Akinyele, 2009). This scenario has been corroborated by FEWSN (2007). In a study in Lagos and Ibadan by Sanusi et al (2006), it was revealed that in Lagos, 37.2%, 22.8% and 12.0% and in Ibadan, 45.7%, 25.9% and 4.7% were food insecure with no hunger, moderate hunger and severe hunger respectively. Food insecurity was worse in Northern Nigeria as government decision to release grains to the public in 2008 is a further confirmation of this pathetic food situation (Shuaibu, 2011). Infact the HDR (2004) reveals

that 70.2% of Nigerians survive on less than one US Dollar per day. According to FAO (2009), the number of hungry people in Nigeria is about 53 million, i.e. about 30% of the country's total population, with 52% living under the poverty line. Also, IFPRI (2009) reveals that Nigeria's progress in reducing hunger remains very slow.

Taking the specific case of Plateau State conflicts for instance, people could not go to the farm during the crisis, while thousands of heaps of yams were set on fire. In addition, maize farms were destroyed, while farm produce stored in barns were burnt. Most farmers who escaped could not go back to harvest their crops, leading to total loss of all their farm products (Sunday Standard, 2001:17; Goshit, 2005:196). The resultant effects of all these is acute food scarcity, leading to stealing, child labour and all other social vices. Thus from 2001 to date, the prices of foodstuffs have continued to rise, a situation exacerbated by the government's deregulation policy, the most recent being the January 1st 2012 removal of fuel subsidy, a situation that also led to further breach of security and general unrest. Food insecurity and acute poverty have no doubt become serious factors responsible for ethno-religious conflicts. A situation that the political class have capitalized on to unleash mayhem on the society using the hungry youths that constitutes the bulk of the jobless masses. Indeed, there is a paradoxical relationship between food insecurity and conflicts due to high level of economic disruption and destruction. While the economic crisis continues to bite harder, peace and security has eluded the nation. These are indeed matters of great concern. The question is what role(s) can the Nigerian women play through their empowerment to resolve the problem of food insecurity, hence bring about general state of peace, security and economic development? This is discussed in the next sub-section.

Section Five

The Role of Women through Empowerment for Resolving the Problem of Sustainable Food, General Security and Economic Development in Nigeria

In discussing the role of women in resolving the problems of food and general security challenges, it is useful to revisit Sen (1996) concept of "entitlement" to food whereby he observes that hunger, food security and famine are consequences of poverty due to lack of entitlements. To him, entitlements are variables that indicate an individual's power within the economic and political system and access to resources, i.e. overall command over things and relevant rights and obligations. The postulation of "entitlement" approach is that who gets to eat and who doesn't eat

are ultimately questions of power, particularly economic power. Thus, people's ability to participate in the market economy is contingent on equitable distribution of power, (hence food).

However, it is an irony of fate to observe that while the current world's food production is enough for all (Insight-IDS, 2012), recent FAO estimates reveals otherwise, as about 925 million people go to bed daily on empty stomach. Coupled with this is the additional global spike in the prices of food, leading to increase in the level of undernourishment by 7%, thus driving about 100 million people into impoverishment (ibid). With an estimated 9.3 billion world population by 2050, it is expected that everyone of this population will need about 70% increases in cereals supplies alone (ibid). This indeed is a serious scenario that calls for urgent gender equity and justice and the realization that women and men have equal rights as humans, thus women's rights as human rights – as well as ending hunger are interdependent objectives. Consequently, solving the problem of food insecurity now and in the future requires a critical evaluation of the current global development paradigm that has sanctioned inequitable distribution of power in all ramifications.

Gender analysis has revealed the crucial roles that women play in agricultural production. It is no longer news that women are key (major) players in the farming sector (producers, processors, cooks, servers of food, etc). Conservatively, it is estimated that female farmers cultivate more than 50% of all food grown in many parts of the world, especially in the less developed countries (Mehudu, 1999; World Bank, 2001 and 2007; Dauda, 2009; UNHRC, 2010 cited in Insights-IDS, 2012). Ironically, these fundamental roles of women have not only been obscured and unrewarded, also due to asymmetries in land ownership, access and control of livelihood assets (like land, water, energy, credit, education and labour), it has negatively affected women's production (Shuaibu, 2011), a situation that has resulted in women making sub-optimal decisions with respect to crop production choices.

Also, in the area of food utilization, women's role in this regard is very critical for food security, which underscores their importance in food production. Their responsibility in food preparation is essential for dietary diversity of their households, especially in the area of selecting complement stable foods like fruits, vegetables, animal source food, etc. This reveals their critical roles in food security both within the household and the society at large. In the history of mankind, women have always had the major responsibility for the family's nutrition, hence any effort at

preventing hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity as well as health enhancement will to a great extent depend on women's activities and their empowerment in all ramifications.

Thus in Nigeria, empowering women for sustainable economic development is a crucial key towards solving the problem of food and general security challenges. This is in view of the fact that fighting hunger entails a two-prong approach (De Haen, 2001):

- *Direct and immediate access to food for those who need it most (food sovereignty), i.e. both women and men must have equal access to resources, including land (Insights-IDS, 2012:2).*
- *Agricultural and rural development.*

Women's empowerment in both prongs is crucial. In Africa, studies have revealed that women do not only produce 75% of the food, but they also play essential role in the survival of the entire population, because they combine both work in the fields and at home to provide for the basic needs of the family (Pontifical Council Cor Unum, 1996; Plattner, 1995; UN, 1998; De Haen, 2001; Shuaibu, 2011 and Insights-IDS, 2012).

In the area of agriculture and rural development, women's empowerment will enable them to play a key role through laws, legislations, policies and programmes that mainstream gender in the area of access to credit, agricultural extension education, etc. According to Sprengler (2001), women have remained an untapped resource, because if they obtain the same access to education, experience and farm inputs currently available to male farmers, they can increase their yields between 20% - 30% (Quisumbing, 1996 and Insights – IDS, 2012:2). Women often actively endeavour to protect their households, adopting several actions, strategies and mechanisms in the face of shocks and stresses that affect the livelihood of the family like food security (Beraki, 2009; Neogy, 2012:4). These coping strategies encompass a wide range of economic, social, political and behavioural responses to declining food security, e.g. off-farm employment, past savings, family networks for sharing, etc, which are positive coping strategies, while negative coping strategies may include severe reduction in food consumption, selling (personal valuables) and productive assets, expenditure reduction on basic services like health and education (it is the girl child that is withdrawn from school – the sacrificial lamb in periods of scarcity) and abnormal migration (Corbett, 1988; Taal, 1989; Shuaibu, 2011). In the same measure, Nigerian women have often resorted to such coping strategy in the face of food shortage like allowing the children to eat first, buying food on credit or eating once a day, or picking left over foods at social functions. Some

households resort to eating less expensive food, borrowing food or money to buy food, backyard crop and livestock farming and skipping meals within a day (Idrisa et al, 2008; Orewa and Iyangbe, 2010).

Arising from the above therefore, if women are empowered, the general household production, consumption and income as well as women's social status would be enhanced (Keller, 2010; Farnworth, 2012:6; Quisumbing and Kumar, 2012:7). Thus women's empowerment through agricultural intervention has been observed to be the most sustainable antidote in resolving the problems of food security and economic development in Nigeria (Bloem et al, 2001). Livelihood strategies include capabilities and assets (material and social resources) as well as activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Livelihood is sustainable if it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain and enhance its capabilities both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. Consequently, livelihood initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting food security could be achieved through women's empowerment in agricultural production, small scale businesses and any other forms of employment. Attaining this state of affairs will lead to food security, prevent dependency, reduce vulnerability to social vices, enhance self-reliance and development of specific skills with positive impact on the general well-being of the masses, hence future opportunities and prosperity for all, culminating in economic development that is sustainable.

Section Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is useful to conclude this paper by noting that in the life of any society or nation, it is only rational that during critical moments, strategic and difficult decisions must be undertaken which ultimately may influence the survival of the nation and the quality of life of the citizens. Given the current food and general security challenges confronting Nigeria, the nation is faced with that critical moment when it has become vital to embrace lasting change by moving away from rhetoric's to reality. On this note, we proffer the following recommendations:

Firstly, understanding the inter-connectedness of women and household food security is a useful step for targeting and designing intervention mechanisms in the areas of the determinant of coping strategies. This is in view of the fact that women are the main caretakers of the household members. Thus, acknowledging the fact that women empowerment through effective programme

intervention would lead to improvement in a variety of well-being and outcomes for the entire family, the community and the society at large.

Secondly, women's participation in economic development programmes is supposed to lead to the achievements of a process of active and equitable participation of women in the formulation and implementation of development policies, strategic programmes and activities. In this regard, the determination of the level of involvement of women in developmental programmes as a basis for sustainable food security initiatives and general security for economic development cannot be overemphasized.

Thirdly, food security at all levels- individuals, households, communities and the nation is achieved when there is genuine political will by the leaders towards ensuring that at all times, all people have both physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their daily needs and food preferences for an active, healthy and productive life for general economic development.

Fourthly, it is useful to observe that the major cause of the current lawlessness in Nigeria is as a result of poverty and hopelessness, orchestrated by greed and corruption of the highest order, occasioned by ignorant and selfish leadership which have/has perverted the noble value of Nigeria's unity, thus ushering in the distortion of the process of addressing the economic and political imbalance that should lead to love, understanding and one-peaceful co-existence in the affairs of the nation. Therefore, on the issue of the current general security challenges, it is imperative to point out that resorting to violence to address perceived economic injustice is not only uncivilized, but barbaric and archaic. It is useful to observe that when one interest seeks to expand and dominate the other interests, then competing interests must have a determined end. In this respect, the current security problems calls for concerted efforts on all because nation building is a collective responsibility, therefore, all hands must be on deck towards the process of national renewal for sustainable general security and economic development. Aggrieved Nigerians should be given the chance to express their grievances through dialogue and consultations, while the rulers should not alienate the people through intimidation.

Fifthly, there is no doubt that there exist lack of social contract between the government and the people, thereby leading to breakdown of socialization. In addition, the cultural, moral, legal, economic and political constitutional accumulation of evils over the years has made the Nigerian people to loose confidence in their leaders. In the light of this, the government should

create an atmosphere for adequate cooperation and confidence building through massively developing the decayed infrastructure to reduce youth unemployment, long-run strategy through capacity building programmes that is adequately pro-women, with up-to-date technology to complement human efforts, bearing in mind that security is the life-blood of any society, and without women as active participants there will be no sustainable general security that will transform the nation in her quest for economic development. Therefore, the socio-economic transformation agenda of the nation should be adequately and holistically addressed through total reconstruction of the mind-set via gender mainstreaming policies and programmes.

Sixthly, our founding fathers had a vision for a united Nigeria despite the multi- religious, ethnic and cultural groups. Therefore, finding strength in our diversity at this critical moment is crucial. Over the years, Nigerians have lived and interrelated peacefully, a condition sanctioned by all religions. At this critical moment, indigenization and inter-ethnic integration should be the core value for our national cohesion through constitutional review that will enforce automatic indigenship of any state by virtue of being a Nigerian. In this regard, our leaders and the masses should embrace the principle of dialogue and develop national conscience for national cohesion and economic development. The people and the government should create a symbiotic situation to bring about harmony. Thus co-opting women in taking critical decisions in this respect becomes fundamental because of their motherly roles in nation building.

Seventhly, it is also important to stress that government should always embark on policies with human face, by first and foremost put on ground palliative measures to cushion the effects of any policy that may result to initial hardship on the masses before the implementation of such policy. The recent case of the Federal Government versus Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) show-off between 9th–13th January, 2012; is a case in point over fuel subsidy removal. Apparently, the masses were taken by surprise and many saw it as the highest form of insensitivity on the part of the government, given the fact that many people were still consumed in the shock of Christmas bomb blast at Madalla in Niger state and the Ebony community overnight massacre around the same time (Kukah, 2012). While deregulation of the downstream petroleum sector may be a necessary step to take towards ensuring an enduring economy that will lead to sustainable economic development, the time was not only miscalculated, but very wrong. What resulted from the announcement of fuel subsidy removal from a pump price

of N65.00 per litre to N141.00 per litre is a clarion call that the government should not always take the masses for granted.

Finally, security is the responsibility of all. In this regard, implementing simple security tips is necessary and all should act as security watch, especially the women who are always at alert, especially at home over the activities of the members of the household. In the same measure, there should be democratic policing system instead of the current community policing with no ideological base. This no doubt will erase the current lack of trust between the people and the security agents which has created a lacuna in the economic development process of the nation. Thus, with adequate cooperation and confidence in the government by the people and the government too exerting the political will to protect the people's wellbeing, the current food and general security challenges can be surmounted, hence creating a conducive environment for economic development that is sustainable. For this to be effective, gender mainstreaming becomes an imperative. In this respect, there is need to create opportunities for critical analysis of gender norms that has created a sense of alienation, deprivation, marginalization and social injustice over the years. Women empowerment should be seen in positive terms rather than as threat masculinity. Thus joint decisions over both food and general security matters through adoption of women's empowerment perspective can be transformative, hence enabling peaceful co-existence for sustainable economic development. In order words, more funds should be voted for justice, equity and women's empowerment as against the current huge sums being allocated as security votes, as equity, justice and fairness by the leaders will create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility.

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