

THE PEOPLE – FOOD PREDICAMENT IN AFRICA: THE QUEST FOR FOOD SECURITY

Akpomuvie, Orhioghene Benedict Ph.D

Delta State University
Sociology Department
Abraka, Delta State
Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper is geared towards addressing the critical challenges of food insecurity and hunger which are widespread in Africa and the dire need to revert the trend by tackling the issues of essential fundamental components of food security availability, access and utilization which differ in urban and rural contexts. Besides examining the determinants of food security, the paper also analyzed the international and regional legal framework related to the right to food and the imperatives of good governance in the whole process of ensuring food security in Africa. The paper which relied overwhelmingly on secondary sources of data, revealed that the rate of increase in undernourishment in Africa vastly exceeds that of other developing regions, that food insecurity in Africa directly correlated with poverty and achieving food security is imperative; but how to do so is an elusive and complex problem. The paper therefore, recommended that the solution to food insecurity lies in increasing food availability, access and adequacy for all and a slowing of population growth rates through sustained policy formulation and implementation; occasioned by visionary leadership. In addition, it is pertinent not only to alleviate poverty but also create wealth for the target population and hinged on mutual honest intentions from multi-stakeholders to ensure that structures are put in place.

Introduction

Food systems are cultural mechanisms for meeting basic human nutritional needs. According to Bodley (2001), every food system must confront two general problems if it is to continue to perform satisfactorily: (1) it must avoid long-term depletion of the natural resource base and (2) must equitably distribute essential nutrients to people. The existence of widespread malnutrition in the modern world indicates that many food systems are not performing adequately and concerned observers have not always agreed on either the causes or the best treatment of the problem. Yet it also seems clear, as British Economist Thomas R. Malthus observed, that population always has the potential of increasing more rapidly than production. It also seems likely that chronic malnutrition is rooted in the structural aspects of society, particularly inequalities in wealth and power in cultures that make food a commercial commodity. Nadakarukaren (1986) also contended that during the prosperous years following World War II, the specter of famine which had haunted so much of human history, appeared to be a relic of the past banished forever by the agricultural gains made possible by the introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, hybrid crop varieties, expanded – irrigation systems and farm mechanization.

From 1950 until 1971, the world's farmers were successful in producing increased quantities of food more rapidly than the world's parents were producing babies. The global grain harvest Nadakarukaren (1986) observed doubled during those years from 631 million tons in 1950 to 1.2 billion tons in 1971. In spite of the population explosion which was well underway by that time, per capita availability of food also increased steadily during that 21 year period resulting in impressive nutritional gains in many Third World countries. This favourable over –all trend was somewhat deceptive, however, for global food production averages were largely reflective of the massive increase in North America crop yields during that period and masked the gloomier statistics which showed that in many of the poorer nations, per capita increase in food production had halted by the late 1950s due to high rates of population growth. In some parts of Africa, food production per person actually declined between 1955 and 1970 (see Nadakarukaren, 1986).

Early in the 1970s, a combination of factors brought an abrupt halt to the steady increase in per capita food supply which the world's people had come to take for granted. Several years of bad weather (floods in many areas, droughts and others) sharply reduced harvests in several of the world's major grain growing areas while continued high rates of population growth meant an ever- increasing number of mouths to be fed. Huge purchases of American wheat by the Soviet Union in 1972; the largest food import deal in history, initiated the upward surge in food prices which has continued to the present.

Food price stability which had characterized the preceding two decades suddenly vanished as the world price of grain double within a period of months. Suddenly, the prospect of massive famine in many parts of the world particularly Africa, began to look like a distinct possibility and the warnings of Thomas Malthus took on new credibility. In a sense, the Malthusian dilemma; the need to balance the power of population with the power of food production is the most basic adaptive problem that any culture must successfully solve if it is to survive for any length of time. As succinctly noted by Bodley (2001), anthropologists have devoted a large share of their research efforts to examining subsistence systems in various cultures and archaeologists have focused much of their research on the evolution of food-producing systems. The major findings in both fields have contributed to a better understanding of today's food systems.

Bodley (2001) also noted that in many respects, cultural evolution has been based on efforts to avoid hunger by maintaining a secure subsistence base while minimizing the pain of regulating population. Diminishing returns are experienced in the intensification of food production systems. This is the Malthusian dilemma and in a general sense, Malthus was right. Domestic scale cultures can often be reasonably viewed in this term but in a world dominated by commercial interests and characterized by great inequality, it would be a mistake to assume that natural limits such as overpopulation and inadequate production are the primary causes of hunger. It now seems obvious that hunger is also caused by powerlessness, landlessness and poverty and can be reduced by changes in social and economic policies designed to provide people with the resources to feed themselves. Hunger was not a characteristic of domestic-scale cultures because they made the equitable satisfaction of the most basic human needs their primary objective. It is against this background, that the paper takes a critical look at the Quest for Food Security in Africa:

2. EXTENT AND CAUSES OF HUNGER

Determining the number of hungry people in the world today is a rather tricky business. Certainly there is a quantum difference between the teenager coming home from school complaining "When's dinner Mom? I'm starving!" and an Ethiopian child with stick-like limbs and protruding abdomen dying of acute malnutrition. In an attempt to establish some basis for comparison, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has devised a concept called the Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR). The BMR is defined as the minimum amount of energy required for activity. On this basis, the FAO considers anyone receiving less than 1.2 BMR food intakes daily, to be undernourished. Using this rather conservative figure (some authorities feel the cut-off point should be raised to 1.5 BMR). The FAO estimates that today, approximately 450 million people-one-tenth of humanity are undernourished. Nadakavukaren (1986) however, stressed that hunger of course, is not equally shared among nations or even within nations.

He noted that the vast majority of the world's hungry people inhabit the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, parts of Southwest Asia, Africa South of the Sahara and the Andean region of South America - all regions where rates of population growth continue to be high. Nevertheless, pockets of hunger can be found even within many affluent societies- in the U.S, malnutrition is distressingly common among the poor, the elderly, migrant farm workers and American Indians. The hunger issue most frequently impinges on the public consciousness during periods of severe famine, generally caused by prolonged droughts, floods or wartime upheavals. During recent years, media coverage of starving children and anguished parents in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the Sahel have kept us grimly aware of human suffering during times of calamities elsewhere in the world. Such periodic episodes of famine, tragic though they are, do not represent the world's major hunger problem at present, however. Rather, the chronic, undramatic, day-after-day under nutrition of those who know that good harvest or poor, their bellies will never be full, constitutes today's most serious food supply dilemma.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have estimated that almost 200 million Africans were undernourished at the dawn of the millennium, compared with 133 million 20 years earlier (FAO, 2000:20). The rate of undernourishment in Africa vastly exceeds that of other developing regions. Yet West Africa has gone against the trend in the rest of Africa with its numbers and the prevalence of undernourishment falling dramatically over the period; and this is reason for optimism that the trend can be reversed in other parts of Africa (FAO, 2002). Countries that stand out are Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria but were the only Sub-Saharan African countries that had consistent declines in both the numbers and the prevalence of undernourished people over the past 20 years. Food and Agriculture Organization (2002) further asserted that about 33 percent of people in sub-Saharan African are undernourished, compared to about 6 percent in North Africa and 15 percent in Asia.

More than 60 percent of the undernourished are in East Africa with more than half of the population in Congo Democratic Republic and Mozambique affected while Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania show prevalence rates between 40 -50 percent. Nigeria's prevalence rate is low but its large population means that the country accounts for 22 percent of the food insecurity in West and Central Africa. Achieving food security in Africa is complex. Clearly, increased food availability is a necessary component but not a sufficient one. Over the past 20 years per capita crop and livestock production in Sub-Saharan Africa, declined by about 0.2 percent per year (FAO, 2000:45). In the last 10 years, there has been a reversal to an annual per capital increase of 0.3 percent. Hence, while recent production trends per capita have been encouraging, projected aggregate demand growth of 2.8 percent per year to 2015 is likely to exceed projected production growth of 2.6 percent per year over the same period. This will represent a challenge for Africa and implies major food imports in the absence of significant productivity growth.

In the same vein, FAO (2000:19-22) uses food balance sheets at national level to assess the extent of undernourishment, as measured by the proportion of the population falling below an Adjusted Average Requirement of 2,600 -2, 950 Kilocalories per person per day, depending on the country and its population structures (age, sex, body weight). Its analysis shows that the incidence of undernourishment in Sub-Saharan Africa has stayed around one-third of the population from the 1970s to the 1990s. In 1995-97, this represented 180 million people. The FAO predicts a significant decline to 15 percent towards 2030 but this will still number 165 million (40 percent of all undernourished people in the developing world). Less than 10 percent of the population of the Near East/North Africa is undernourished and this prevalence rate has stayed the same for the past two decades. It currently represents 33 million people and is projected to grow to 38 million by 2015.

Pinstrup – Andersen et al (1999) also averred that projections to 2020 from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) indicate that as a consequence of poor growth in incomes, poverty is expected to remain pervasive in Sub-Saharan Africa. Food availability should increase marginally but remain at the unacceptably low average of 2,276 calories per day (compared to 2,633 for South Asia; 3008 for Latin America and the Caribbean and 2,902 for the world). The situation in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to cause concern with per capita food consumption reaching only marginally acceptable levels. The FAO predicts that of the 17 countries below the recommended 2,200 kilocalories per person per day in 2015, 12 will be in Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2000). The existence of nearly half a billion undernourished people seems paradoxical when one considers the World Bank's Report that if the global grain harvest were equally distributed; each person would receive 3000 calories and 65 grams of protein per day-more than enough for good health. The authors of the Global 2000 Report according to Nadakavukaren (1986) concluded that resources exist to meet the food demands of the projected world population at the turn of the century.

If this is so, why are so many people today suffering from inadequate diets? The current situation is caused largely by two factors: uneven distribution of food and poverty. Although global averages suggest that there should be enough food for everyone, as was stated earlier, many of the areas where hunger is endemic are regions where there is a widening gap between food production and population growth; only imports from food surplus areas prevent the problem from worsening further. The most basic problem, however, is poverty. Even in chronically food-short countries, the rich eat quite well. By contrast, even in the wealthiest nations where markets bulge with a veritable cornucopia of foods, people who lack money to purchase groceries go hungry. In Third World countries, almost 40 percent of the people are too poor to afford a minimally adequate diet. For these hungry people, an increase in world food production will mean little unless corresponding social and economic changes increase their purchasing power.

Poverty's role as a determinant of hunger was clearly evident during the 1967 drought in Bihar, a state in eastern India threatened with severe famine due to near total crop failure. Food aid rushed into the area by the U.S and other donors was credited with averting large –scale loss of life and interviews with villagers after the crisis, revealed that many of them ate better during this period of national disaster than at any other time in their lives. This was largely because, the donated wheat was distributed to the needy free of charge and all received a share. During normal times, the poorer segments of society lacked money to buy sufficient food in the market place and so went hungry, (Nadakavukaren, 1986) further observed. Ironically, some of the improvements in agricultural technology much heralded in recent years (for example, "The Green Revolution") have actually worsened the nutritional status of landless labourers who found themselves displaced by machines, hence without an income to purchase food.

The inflation of food prices which began with the Russian grain purchase of 1972 and has continued steadily in the years, has probably been instrumental than any other single factor in reversing the nutritional gains witnessed during the 1950s and 1960s. The sharp increase in energy costs (for example, gasoline to power farm machinery, natural gas for making nitrogen fertilizer and for drying grain), has heightened demand for live-stock feed in the developed countries, continued rapid increase in population size in the less developed nations-all assure a continued escalation in food prices during the years ahead. Unless the world economic conditions improve, with a more equitable distribution of resources and income, unless there are improvements in productivity and a slowing of population growth rates, it is unlikely that world poverty, which is the principal cause of hunger, can be substantially ameliorated.

3. THE CONCEPT OF FOOD SECURITY

Available statistics indicate that there were about 848 million hungry and undernourished people during the period from 2003 to 2005 (FAO, 2008c). The hungry and undernourished population in developing countries increased from 824 million in 1990 to 1992 to 832 million in 2003 to 2005. Although this was a relatively small increase, the long-term trend is very worrying as high food prices increased the number of hungry and undernourished people by about 75 million in 2007 and 40 million in 2008 when it reached 963 million. This poses a serious threat to the prospects of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of halving the proportion of hungry people worldwide by 2015.

What makes this food crisis unique is the fact that it is the first time in history that the impact of food shortage is spreading from the developing to the developed world. Since the incidence of the food crisis, more than 73 million people in 78 countries worldwide that depend on food aid from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2008b) have had their rations reduced. According to the UN predictions, there is the likelihood that food prices will continue their relentless rise especially in developing countries and will lead to social unrest and political instability. For instance, high food prices has prompted a number of protests around the world including protest over grain prices in Senegal, Mauritania, Egypt and Cote D'Ivoire; resulting in violent clashes and deaths. It is evident that if enough is not done about the rising food prices, more people around the globe particularly Africa, will be unable to afford the food they need to stay alive and without help, they will become desperate and more food riots will flare up. In addition, governments will become unstable and millions could die from the riots, hunger and malnutrition. This situation according to Akudugu (2010) requires more urgent attention in that the global demand for food as observed by the World Food Programme (2008c), will double by 2030. This is partly because the world's population is expected to grow by three billion by 2050 which is only one of the many interlocking causes of increasing demands for food and food products.

The 1996 World Food Summit in Rome defined food security as a state when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2001:4). Recognizing the urgency of the situation, world leaders adopted the Rome Declaration on World Food Security; the challenges of climate change and bio-energy on 5th June 2008 and pledged to recognize food security as a priority national development policy. World Health Organization informed the conference that adequate food intake is a fundamental determinant of health throughout the life course and highlighted the health implications of the current situation. The 2008 Group of Eight (G8) Multi-Industrialized Countries Summit also considered the recent rise in food prices which could jeopardize all nutrition programmes and adopted interventions to address the risks and consequences of malnutrition among vulnerable groups.

Food security, therefore, implies the provision of safe, nutritious and quantitatively and qualitatively adequate food as well as access to it by all people. Food security has three dimensions (UNEP 2002: 288).

- availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production imports;
- access by households and individuals to appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; and
- Optimal uptake of nourishment, thanks to a sustaining diet, clean water and adequate sanitation together with health care.

3.1 ACCESS TO FOOD

It is important to emphasize that *more food production does not necessarily mean more food for those who need it*. Most experts would agree that the largest part of the production increase has to come from yield increases.

Current levels of agricultural productivity and production say little about potential levels, because they are simply a response to present levels of demand and price / market conditions. It is however important to note that *food production is not the same as food availability* (production minus exports plus imports), and that *aggregate availability and the ability to acquire food (food entitlements) are very different things*. Whilst food production undoubtedly influences food entitlements, the connections are complex and there are also other matters involved. People's *access to food* depends both on the purchasing power of their income, and on their *non-market entitlements*, such as rights to land for subsistence farming and foraging purposes. Households seeking to preserve *food security levels* may resort to a number of *coping strategies* to gain *access to food*. These include: maintaining normal income generating patterns; adaptation by means of innovative use of available resources or some divestment of liquid assets; divestment of productive assets, such as stock or land; and out-migration and destitution. Clearly, food insecurity is basically a problem of poverty, affecting those social groups with the weakest or most fragile food entitlements, both in terms of access to social networks and safety nets or productive assets (capital, land, agricultural inputs). Malnutrition can thus be a threat to urban and rural dwellers at different times and for different reasons. Urban-rural links are often created in the pursuit of food security, and hence urban dwellers will maintain rural contacts, or even land, to provide food security in case their purchasing power is disrupted, whilst rural dwellers will maintain urban contacts, in part to ensure against the loss of local food entitlements.

3.2 ADEQUACY OF FOOD SUPPLY

Agricultural output in Africa has been lagging behind population growth since the 1960s. Between 1965 and 1990, agricultural production grew at an annual rate of 1.7 percent, while there was annual population growth average of 2.8 percent. Food imports including food aid in the African region have increased substantially to offset the deficiencies and in early 1994 represented about 10 percent of the food consumed. At the current growth rates, the food gap is projected to increase to more than nine times the present gap by 2020 (Agyare-Kwabi, 2003).

3.3 ACCEPTABILITY OF FOOD

As a result of its agro-ecology, trade history and position, most African countries have diverse diets in terms of staple foods. This is a great advantage in terms of food security because many consumers will substitute among the five broad categories of staple – cassava, yams and tubers, plantain, millet, maize and rice – according to national and also ethnic taste preferences and changing relative prices. Women have distinctive roles to play in determining the acceptability of food basically because of their traditional roles as wives and mother who cook for their families. Transforming food from its raw state into processed or cooked food has long been the preserve of women. Women can get whole households to accept one menu over the other ensuring that family members accept one available food over the other.

3.4 DETERMINANTS OF FOOD SECURITY

These factors are directly and indirectly interrelated. Available food must be accessible to all members of the populace. What is available must also be adequate and the populace must be willing to eat, that is, what is available must be accepted as a preferred food.

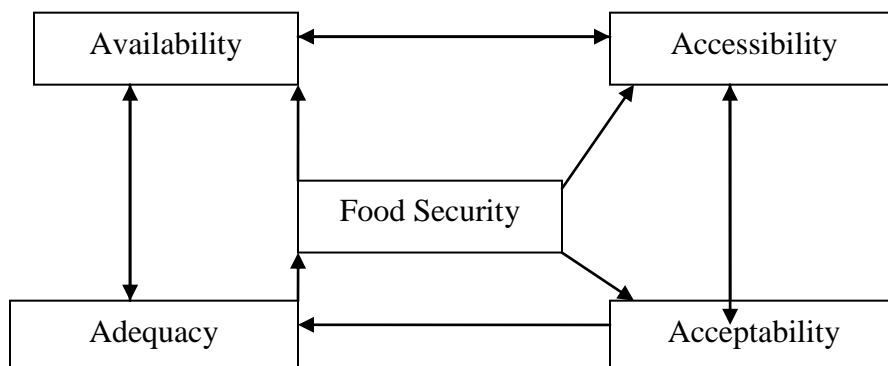


Figure 1: The Intricate Determinants of Food Security

Practically, a food glut in the rural communities may not necessarily be reflected on the market due to problems relating to accessibility-road and transportation networks, more market distributors are not willing to move into the hinterland to cart food to the urban centers.

3.5 MONITORING FOOD SECURITY

The main indicator for monitoring food security in the world is per caput food consumption, measured at the national level by the average dietary energy supply (DES) in Calories on the basis of national food balance sheets (FBS) and population data (FAO 1996a :vii). However, there are no internationally comparable comprehensive data for tracking the evolution of access to food for individuals or population groups within countries. Under nutrition in a given country is determined by its DES in relation to a minimum threshold defined as corresponding to the average DES that represents a minimum level or energy requirements for individuals, allowing for only light activity. This level ranges from 1,720 to 1,960 Calories / day / person, depending on the country. For countries where the average DES is close to the threshold, the majority of individuals are undernourished while experience shows that for countries with DES about a level of say, 2,700 Calories, the proportion of undernourished individuals becomes small, except under conditions of extreme inequalities.

4. THE RIGHT TO FOOD UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

Article 25 of the UDHR and article 11 of the ICESCR enshrine the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including food. Article 11 of the ICESCR also recognizes the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and obliges the States parties to adopt concrete measures and programmes to achieve this goal. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESR) of the United Nations, the expert body in charge of monitoring compliance with the ICESCR, presented in its General Comment (GC) 12 of 1999 on the Right to Adequate Food, a detailed and authoritative interpretation of the international law provisions contained in the Convention. The Comment highlights, in paragraphs 1 and 2 on article 11 of the ICESCR, the following normative content: “The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, either alone or with others, has continuous physical and economic access to adequate food or to the means to its acquisition.” The essential content of the right to food is the following: “The availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances and acceptable within a given culture; and the accessibility to such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights” (GC 12, 8).

“Availability refers to the possibilities for feeding oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources, or for well- functioning distribution, processing and market systems that can move food from its site of production to where it is needed in accordance with demand” (GC, 12, 12). The accessibility of food encompasses both economic and physical accessibility: economic accessibility implies that the costs associated with the acquisition of food for a given diet should be at a level such that the satisfaction of other basic needs is not threatened. Socially vulnerable groups, such as landless persons and other particularly impoverished segments of the population, may need attention through special programmes. Physical accessibility means that adequate food should be accessible to all, including physically vulnerable individual, people living in high risk areas or other particularly disadvantaged groups, such as many indigenous groups whose access to their ancestral lands may be threatened (cf. GC 12, 13).

GC 12 summarizes in paragraphs 14-20 the States obligations and possible violations of the human right to food. Regarding the nature of the obligations, the Comment stipulates the following: “The nature of the legal obligations of States parties is set out in article 2 of the Convention and has been dealt with in the Committee’s General Comment No. 3 (1990). The principle obligation is to take steps to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to adequate food. This imposes an obligation to move as expeditiously as possible towards that goal. Every State, is obliged to ensure for everyone under its jurisdiction, access to the minimum essential food which is sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe and to ensure their freedom from hunger” (GC 12, par, 14). The right to adequate food, like any other human right, imposes three types of obligations on States parties: the obligations to respect, to protect and to fulfill. In turn, the obligations to fulfill incorporate both an obligation to facilitate and an obligation to provide. The obligation to respect existing access to adequate food requires States parties not to take any measures that result in preventing such access. The obligation to protect requires measures by the States to ensure that third parties (companies or individuals) do not deprive persons of their access to adequate food.

The obligation to fulfill (facilitate) means that the State must pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security. Finally, whenever an individual or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, States have the obligation to fulfill (provide) that right directly. This obligation also applies for persons who are victims of natural or other disasters (cf. GC 12, par 15).

Being aware of the differing contexts and situations, the CESCR highlights the need for each State party to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that everyone is free from hunger and can enjoy the right to adequate food. This will require the adoption of a national strategy to ensure the right to food that formulates policies and corresponding benchmarks and that also identifies the resources available to meet the objectives. (cf. GC 12, 21). According to paragraph 26 of GC 12, this strategy should include guarantees of full and equal access to economic resources, particularly for women, including the right to inheritance and the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technology; measures to respect and protect self-employment and work which provide remuneration ensuring a decent living for wage earners and their families and maintaining registries on rights to land (including forests).

The Covenant's States parties should also take steps to respect the enjoyment of the right to food in other countries, refraining from implementing measures that endanger access to food in other countries (paragraphs 36 and 37). It is worth highlighting that duty-holders under the right to food are not only States parties to the ICESCR but also international financial institutions. In this regard, paragraph 41 of General Comment 12 stipulates the following: "The international financial institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, should pay greater attention to the protection of the right to food in their lending policies and credit agreements and in international measures to deal with the debt crisis." Access to land is a key element of the right to food General Comment 12 underlines that access to food depends on access to income or an access to productive resources, such as land. According to the Comment, special attention should be paid to especially vulnerable groups such as the landless people. The Comment asks for guarantees to full and equal access to economic resources, particularly for women, including the right to inheritance, and the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technology. Due to the close relationship between the right to food and access to land, particularly in rural areas, where a large number of people suffer from hunger, the States parties to the ICESCR are obliged to respect, protect and fulfill access to land.

The obligation to fulfill, in particular, implies the implementation of an agrarian reform programme that enables landless persons and peasant farmers to have access to land, water, seeds, livestock and other productive resources. In order to achieve this objective, States parties should formulate agrarian reform policies and the corresponding measures for their implementation, in addition to using their resources to the maximum, as stipulated in article 2 of the ICESCR. As a State party to the ICESCR, African countries are obliged to regularly present reports on the realization of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. For example, Kenya presented the last report to the ICESCR in 2006 and examined in 2008. In its Concluding Observations the CESCR recognizes a number of advances and positive developments but expresses its concerns about the adverse effects of continued corruption on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights as well as the high disparities in levels of enjoyment of economic, social and cultural right, including access to land and noted that these disparities have led to inter-ethnic tension and contributed to the post-election violence of 2008. Further, the Committee is concerned about the fact that according to article 82(4) of the constitution, certain customary law practices, including those related to marriage and inheritance are exempted from the constitutional guarantees against discrimination.

It is also concerned about the low levels of employment in the formal sector and lack of regulation of the informal sector. The provisions of the ICESCR on the right to food should be read in conjunction with those laid out in Article 2 of the ICESCR that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, as well as with the provisions of other international conventions and treaties. With regard to the right to food, the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are crucial, especially those stipulated in Article 5 on modifying prejudicial customary practices, Article 14 on the rights of rural women and Article 16 (h) on women's equal right to own property. In 2004, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) approved the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food (FAO, 2004).

To achieve this objective, States are urged to adopt the measures needed to improve the functioning of and access to the agricultural and food markets that benefit particularly disadvantaged groups (Guideline 4), access to resources and assets by vulnerable populations (guideline 8), work opportunities (Guideline 8A), security of land tenure, especially with respect to women, the poor and disadvantaged segments of society (Guideline 8B), protection of ecological sustainability and the carrying capacity of ecosystems (Guideline 8E).

5. REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

At the African level the right to food can be found in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), its Protocol on the Rights of Women and in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Although the ACHPR does not include specific reference to the right to food it was derived in *SERAC vs Nigeria* by the African Commission on Human Rights, which is mandated with the interpretation of the ACHPR from the right to life (Articles 4), the right to dignity (Article 5) and the right to health (Article 16). Further, Article 60 stipulates that all States Parties should implement the right enshrined in international human rights treaties they have ratified such as the ICESCR. States Parties to the ACHPR and the ICESCR such as Nigeria thus have an obligation to implement the right to food.

Moreover the Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa stipulates in Article 15 (Rights to Food Security) the states obligations to provide women with access to clean drinking water, sources of domestic fuel, land, and the means of producing nutritious food; and the obligation to establish adequate systems of supply and storage to ensure food security. The African Chapter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, to which Nigeria is a Party, specifically recognizes the right to food under the right to health. According to Article 14, States parties must “ensure the provision of adequate food and safe drinking water”. According to Article 20(2) they must also take all appropriate measures to assist parents or other persons responsible for the child and where needed, should provide material assistance and support, specifically in relation to nutrition.

6. CRITICAL FOOD SECURITY FACTORS IN AFRICA

With regard to food security, the African continent faces special challenges. Figures for 1997-99 show that about 200 million people (28 percent of Africa’s population) are chronically hungry compared to 173 million in 1990-92. While the proportion of the population living in hunger is dropping slightly, the absolute numbers are rising. Most of the economic opportunities accessible at both the household and the national levels will have to come from agriculture, since agriculture directly affects the lives of between 70 and 80 percent of Africa’s people. Clearly, agricultural development must be at the center of sustainable development in Africa in order to bring down the incidence of hunger and poverty by a substantial amount. Given the special needs of Africa, especially SSA, a minimum amount of US \$ 4.6 billion per year will be required for financing anti-hunger programmes (FAO, 2002:11). It is proposed that these additional resources be allocated to Sub-Saharan Africa as follows: US \$ 2.4 billion in concessional assistance to agriculture and rural development, another US\$ 1.6 billion for public domestic sources. It is expected that an additional inflow of US 0.6 billion per year in non-concessional loans will be available. The stated resource requirements for the Anti-Hunger Programmes in Africa are the minimum amounts required to promote hunger reduction through agricultural development.

Population growth is probably the single most vital global factor influencing food security. Africa remains the world’s fastest growing region at an estimated 2.4 percent per annum. According to the UNEP (2002:312), the region will attain an estimated population of 1,406 million by the year 2030. What is more, structural characteristics of the world’s population are changing in ways that affect food security. In addition, rapid urbanization is also a main driving force which is causing stresses in many African economies. With an average growth rate of 3.71 percent, Africa is the fastest urbanizing region of the world. In 2000, the urbanization level was at 37.9 percent and it is projected to reach 54.5 percent by 2030. Urban population is expected to grow from 297 million in 2000 to 766 million in 2030; the next 30 years, the number of people living in cities in developing countries will quadruple from 1 billion to 4 billion individuals. This imposing shift towards a more urban world calls for a different set of institutions, markets and infrastructure and food policies.

Access to markets is another hurdle that small holders have to overcome. The problem is many-fold; poor infrastructure and barriers in penetrating the market caused by their limited resource base, lack of information, inadequate support institutions and poor policies in place among others. Poor infrastructure literally limits the markets to which farmers can profitably take their produce by increasing the cost of transportation and hence also acts as a barrier to market penetration.

Other barriers include market standards, limited information, requirements for large initial capital investments, limited product differentiation and handicapping policies.

According to projections by Runge and Colleagues (2003), trend investment in rural roads, irrigation, clean water, education and agricultural research also would have to increase by about 80 percent to achieve these outcomes. Such rates of increase may sound too optimistic but they are not unprecedented because, they occurred in Asia during the Green Revolution. The essential point being made, is that the decline in the real price of food – facilitated by crop yield growth from increased investments in agricultural research, infrastructure and environmental protection – drives increased access to food with consequent reductions in under- nutrition; especially child malnutrition.

More than 85 percent of the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa reside in rural areas (Randolph et al, 2001). While as Wolgin (2001); UNICEF (2003) noted, the prevalence rates of child malnutrition in rural areas are generally equal to or up to double those in urban areas. In North Africa, the situation seems different. There, only 48 percent of the poor are in the rural areas. However, the prevalence rates of child malnutrition in rural areas are more than double those in urban areas. Action to eliminate food insecurity and malnutrition in Africa therefore, must focus on the rural areas for a long time to come even though the rates of urbanization in Africa are rapidly increasing. The large majority of food-insecure rural Africans depend directly or indirectly on agriculture.

Disease and infection continue to plague the African continent. Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV /AIDS not only reduce the man- hours available to agriculture and household food acquisition but also increase the burden of household in acquiring food. In Sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is the leading cause of adult mortality and morbidity. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), estimates that by 2000, the epidemic will claim the lives of 20 percent or more of the population working in agriculture in many Southern African countries. More than two thirds of the total population of the 25 most affected countries resides in rural areas, thereby affecting agricultural production as well as farm and domestic labour supplies. Lack of resources also makes it more difficult for HIV –affected households to supplement their diet through the purchase of more nutritious and varied foods. The effect of malnutrition on food security is further exacerbated by the fact that individuals affected by diseases and infections, have greater nutritional requirements.

On technology and food processing, before colonization, African economies were able to survive large –scale environmental degradation for a number of reasons. First, the population was small and the demands on the economy were small. More importantly, the technology was appropriate and adequate because the African people had learned over centuries to adapt systems of extraction of natural resources to be commensurate with the dictates of the environment (UNEP, 2002: 316). Things have since changed. Modern economic practices have introduced increased demand on human and natural resources, that technology has proved inadequate. For instance, attempts to improve agriculture have resulted in the importation of strange varieties of food crops and the introduction of chemicals and additives to soils, plants and vegetation.

For a large part of the 20th century, Africa's role in the development of science and technology was marginalized. To a large extent, the colonial powers inhibited the development of indigenous technology in Africa and destabilized some of the existing processes of technical growth. Indigenous manufacturing capability was deliberately undermined in order to facilitate European experts and captive markets were created. In addition, colonial powers deprived Africa of its historical credit in contributing to advancement in science and medicine. Furthermore, Africa has not been only a user of technologies developed in the west but has also been a dumping ground for obsolete technologies abandoned in the west.

In a cross – country analysis, the FAO (2002) estimates that more equal access to land and increased tenure security result in more rapid growth in GDP and reduced prevalence of undernourishment. Tenure security can be achieved by respecting decentralized customary tenure and does not require centralized top-down land tenure and titling reforms. Land tenure security also provides the safety required for productivity- enhancing and long –run technology investments to be made.

Another effective instrument for poverty reduction and ensuring food security is the installation of a Famine Early Warning System (FEWS). The 1985 famine in Ethiopia galvanized African countries to established FEWS, with funding from support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The main objective of FEWS is to lower the incidence of drought induced famine by providing timely and accurate information to decision makers regarding potential famine conditions.

USAID has established FEWS Network (FEWS NET), which is an information system designed to identify problems in the food supply system which can potentially lead to famine, flood or other food insecure conditions in SSA. A similar second though sub-regional food security early warning programme was established for Southern Africa between 1996 and 1998 with the support of FAO technical assistance. It comprises the following: the Regional Early Warning System (REWS), the Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU); the Regional Remote Sensing Unit (RRSU); and the National Early Warning System (NEWS) (UNEP, 2002).

Poor policies have greatly affected food security in Africa. The problem arises when the focus on policies, structures and institutions is put above that of the people themselves. When policies are not inclusive in their design, they tend to handicap the exempted lot by providing barriers. One such ways in which this might take place is uneven development within countries where certain regions are preferentially developed for political reasons at the expense of other. Policies that promote monopolistic competition for the large –scale industries, hurt the cottage and small industry. When we fail to provide safety nets for vulnerable groups, we doom them to destruction.

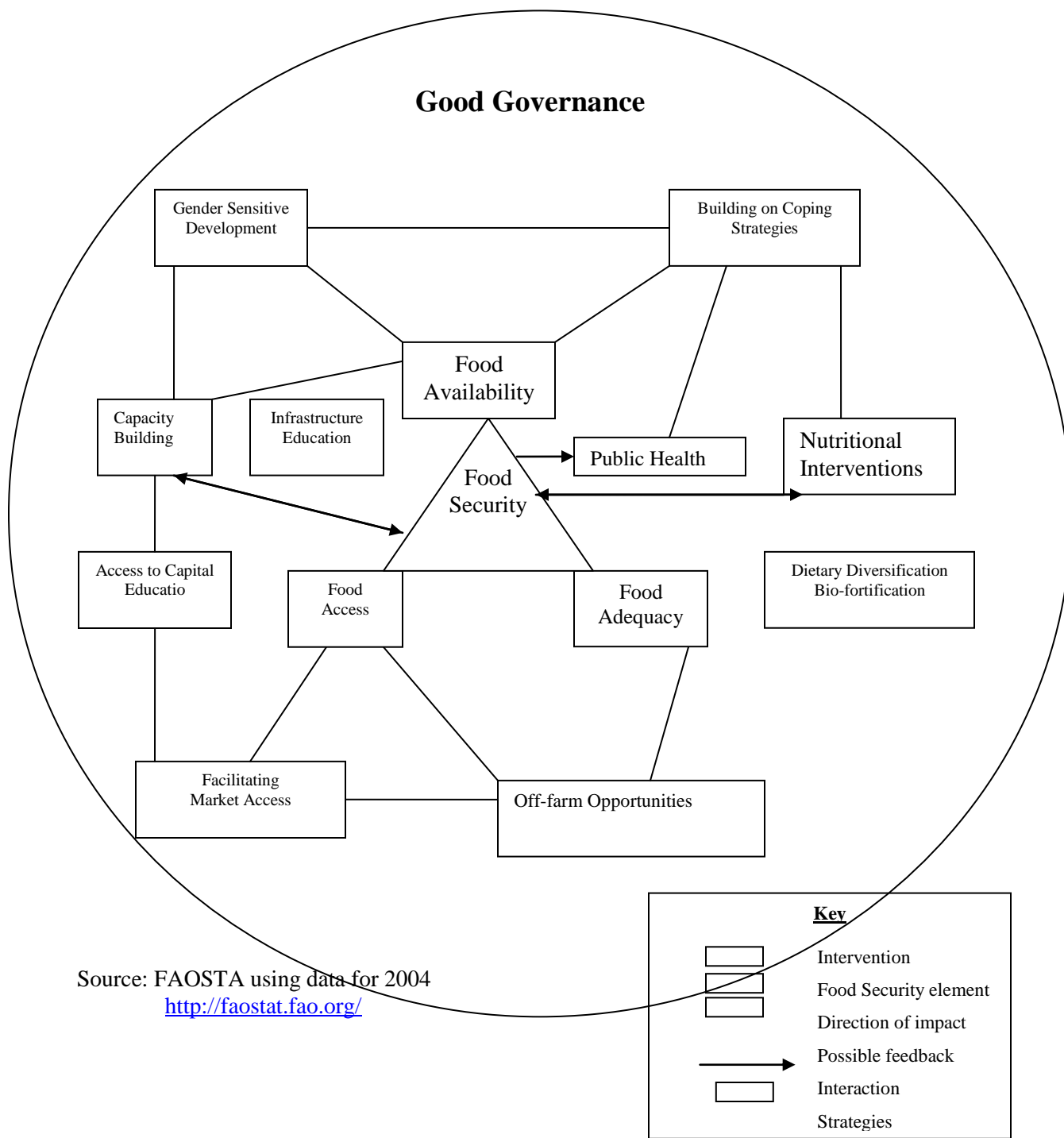
7. TOWARDS FOOD SECURITY INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICA.

How then can Africa achieve food security?. The solution lies in increasing food availability, food access and food adequacy for all. Because food security in Africa is directly correlated with poverty; it is necessary not only to alleviate poverty but also create wealth for the target population. The key lies in mutual honest intention from multi-stakeholders to ensure that structures are put in place. The following strategies well implemented, would hold good prospects for substantially promoting food security in Africa.

- Nutritional interventions;
- Facilitating Market access;
- Capacity Building;
- Building on coping strategies;
- Creating off-farm opportunities and
- Good governance.

Figure 1, below illustrates how these strategies interlink to ensure food security.

Figure 2: Primary Conceptual Framework on the Mechanism of Proposed Food Security Interventions in Achieving Food Security in Africa



Source: FAOSTA using data for 2004
<http://faostat.fao.org/>

8. CONCLUSION

Africa faces a number of critical challenges. According to Klaus Topfer (UNEP 2002: xv), the environment continue to deteriorate: social and economic inequality is increasing and globalization is sweeping across the world, largely leaving Africa behind. Rapid changes in the global economy, on consumption pattern, population and demographics are having a negative impact on the environment. In spite of the introduction of economic reforms in many Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, economic growth continues to be sluggish impacting heavily on the welfare of the people especially the rural population. In addition, major environmental disasters in the continent such as recurrent drought and floods have serious devastating socio-economic and ecological impacts.

Poor land policies and management practices, which lead to land degradation and deforestation, contribute to increase flood disasters in some risk areas. The outcome of these developments, are significant decline in agricultural production, poverty and most especially food insecurity. While some continents of the world have made significant progress towards poverty alleviation, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to lag behind. Projections show that there will be an increase in this tendency unless preventive measures as advocated in this paper are taken. The immediate need in the current food crisis is to prevent hunger and ensure that populations have access to safe food. The involvement of the health sector in addressing the challenges associated with food access, adequacy, quality and safety would provide multi-sectorial solution for the current global food crisis. Cooperation and collaboration with other sectors facilitates actions in addressing non-health issues. Renewed attention to food and nutrition will prompt action to strengthen the design and implementation of food and nutrition policies. The factors which influence food security differ across urban and rural environments. Urban planners and policy makers should recognize these differences when designing programmes to meet the needs of the urban poor. Lessons from successful agricultural and nutrition related policies and programme in other regions can be useful in highlighting best practices.

9. REFERENCES

- Africa Development Bank Group (2008), Kenya's Hunger Crisis. The Result of Right to Food Violations: Report of a Joint International Mission by RAPDA and FIAN International. The African Food Crisis Response (AFCR).
- Agyare-Kwabi, P. (2003), Women and Food Security in West Africa, a paper presented at a seminar on Women, Integrated Farming Systems and Food Security in West Africa, held in Accra from 25-28, November.
- Akudugu, M. A (2010), Implications of the World Food Crisis on Trends of Local Food Prices in the Upper East Region of Ghana. A Poster Presented at the Joint 3rd African Association of Agricultural Economists Association of South Africa (AEASA) Conference.
- Bodley, J. H (2001), Anthropology and Contemporary Human Problems. London; Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Boon, E.K. (?). Africa Food Security in Africa; Challenges and Prospects. Regional Sustainable Development Review.
- FAO (1996a), Food Production: The Critical Role of Water in World Food Summit, Volume 1, Technical Background Documents 6-11, Rome; Italy.
- FAO (2000), Agriculture: Towards 2015/30. Technical Interim Report. Rome; Economic and Social Department.
- FAO (2002), Food Security: When people must live with hunger and fear starvation, The State of food insecurity in the World.
- FAO (2006), The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- FAO (2007), The State of Food and Agriculture; FAO Agriculture Series, No. 38-240. Rome; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- FAO (2008), Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture Crop Prospects and Food Situation. <http://www.fao.org/giews/>.
- FAO (2008b), Soaring Food Prices: Facts, Prospective, Impacts and Actions Required. High level Conference on world Food Security: The Challenges of Climate change and Bio-energy, HLC/08/INF/, Rome.
- FAO (2008c), The State of Food Insecurity in the World, Rome.
- FAO, (1996), Report of the World Food Summit, Rome 13-17, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- Golay, C. and Ozden, M. (2005), The Right to Food: A Fundamental Human Right Affirmed by the United Nations and recognized in Regional Treaties and Numerous National Constitutions, Human Rights Programme of the Europe-Third World Centre (CETIM).
- IFPRI (2002), Reaching Sustainable Food Security for all by 2020; Getting the Priorities and Responsibilities Right. Washington, D.C; International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Nadakarukaren, A (1986), Man and Environment; A Health Perspective. Illinois; Waveland Press, Inc.
- Pinstrup-Andersen, P, Pandya-Lorch, R and Rose grant, M.W (1999), World Food Prospects: Critical Issues for the early twenty-first century 2020 Vision Food Policy Report, Washington, D.C; International Food Policy Research Institute.
- UNEP (2002), Africa Environment Outlook: Past Present and Future Perspectives: UNEP Nairobi.
- UNICEF (2003) UNICEF Statistics.
- United Nations (2002), Report of the Special UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food for the UN General Assembly, A/57/356.
- USAID (2009), Global Food Insecurity and Price Increase. Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Human Assistance (DCHA) Office of U.S Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).
- Wolgin, J.M (2001), A Strategy for cutting hunger in Africa. Commissioned paper by Technical Committee of Partnership to Cut Hunger in Africa.
- Wmaniki, A (2004), Achieving Food Security in Africa; Challenges and Issues. [http:// faostat.fao.org/](http://faostat.fao.org/).