

Chapter 58

Violence, Politics, and Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Fidelis Allen

University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how violence and politics affect food security in Nigeria against the backdrop of existential oil, cult, herdsmen versus farmers conflict and Boko Haram insurgency. It examines the contribution of politics and violence in the rising rate of food insecurity in parts of Nigeria. When villagers run away from the violence of cult groups, herdsmen and farmers clashes, and the terror of Boko Haram, the impact on availability and affordability of food requires more accountability. So is the link between oil violence and food insecurity, considering how the industry, through pollution, has considerably reduced cultivable land and fishing in the Niger Delta. Relying on secondary and primary data, the chapter argues that a complex mesh of illegal political relationships and considerations in frequent cases of non-state and criminal armed violence is fast reducing men and women labor in peasant agriculture, such that availability and affordability of food have become threatened.

INTRODUCTION

Food Security Information Network report (FSIN, 2019) on the global food security situation, identified 113 million people currently in acute food insecurity. Two-third of this number reside in eight countries, including Nigeria. Conflict and natural disasters were mentioned as two main factors responsible for this. In the same vein, the Food and Agriculture Organization insisted in a 2017 report, stated that the greatest number of the world's undernourished people were in regions affected by conflict (FAO 2017). Rural communities are more prone and affected by these conflicts, and therefore tend to face the greatest challenge of access to food during and after conflicts. This context is crucial, considering the oil and cult debacle in the Niger Delta, herdsmen versus farmers clashes in parts of the country, and Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast. The resource-based nature of these conflicts and politics around them delineate specific trajectories.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5352-0.ch058

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The global food security discourse became intense after the foundation laid by FAO in 1996. That year, over 190 representatives of countries assembled in Rome for a summit. The meeting ended with the Rome Declaration on Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action. They pledged reduction in the number of people living in hunger, especially in developing countries, by at least half, by 2015. One interesting aspect of the summit and the declaration was the pledge of commitments, including creating social, political and economic atmosphere conducive for achieving sustainable food security, where men and women are active participants. This declaration has frequently been cited as a basis for a shared pursuit of food security, at the individual, household, regional, and international fronts.

Decades since that declaration, Africa is the only continent where the food security situation has not become better. What accounts for this? The question of violent conflict and nature of politics, in a country that has continued to pay lip service to agriculture since oil and gas became her main foreign exchange and national income earner remains crucial in the discourse of food security in the case of Nigeria. Yet this has not been sufficiently explored. How are oil conflicts, farmers and herdsman clashes and Boko Haram insurgency contributing to food insecurity in Nigeria? The chapter addresses this question, with content analysis derived data sets from mainstream discourses of politics, conflict and food security.

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity has been conceptualized in terms of citizens' inability to access adequate food and nutrition (Satter, 2007 Purokayo & Umaru, 2012). Discussions of the definition of food security easily point to the Food and Agriculture Organization which contends that:

Food security exists 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. The four pillars of food security are availability, the stability of supply, access and utilization (FAO, 2004:4).

There is a binary view to it, necessitated by the difficulty in discussing the subject of security without, at once, referring to insecurity. The idea is, notions of security tend always to carry a background sense of insecurity. Food security relates to the nature of food systems—production, distribution and exchange-- that enable access and quality (Ferree, 1973). Indicators such as affordability, preference, allocation, and utilization are critical (Ferree, 1973; Gregory, Ingram, & Brklacich, 2005). Availability and sufficiency are essential elements of any food secure people. As such, food stock, market and price are embedded in the conceptualization of the dimensions of food security.

Countries or communities that depend mostly on external supplies or importation of the bulk of the food they need, face a risk of food insecurity (Paarlberg, 1999; Suweis 2015). The sense also is that food security is a highly normative concept, that requires a review of the reality in relation to the expected. Food insecurity, therefore, helps to make this easily comprehensible. This also means that the binary view, from a quantitative and qualitative angle, enables the understanding of the political and policy atmosphere of food security or insecurity (Hospes, Van Dick & Van den, 2010).

In an age of climate change and its destructive potentials, the problem of food shortage has, in part been linked to natural disasters, such as regular flood and other forms of extreme weather conditions (Gregory, Ingram, & Brklacich, 2005; Hitzhusen & Jeanty, 2006; Melgar-Quiñonez, et al., 2006; Haen & Hemrich, 2007; Barnett & Adger, 2007; Birkland, 2009; Evans, 2010; Osuolale, Ogunrinade, &

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