

Socioeconomic Uncertainties and Food Crisis in Nigeria: Current Obstacles and Future Opportunities

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Abstract

Nigeria's socioeconomic uncertainties have exacerbated food insecurity, leading to increased hunger and malnutrition, especially in vulnerable regions such as the Northern rural communities. The worsening economic conditions, marked by inflation, unemployment, insecurity, and inconsistent government policies, have intensified the country's food crisis. Recent protests, including #EndBadGovernance, stressed public frustration over the government's failure to address these challenges effectively. This study employs qualitative content analysis and trend examination (2019–2024), using documentary evidence to assess the key socioeconomic factors influencing food security and the role of government policies. The Political Economy Theory serves as the theoretical lens, emphasizing the interplay of economic policies, governance structures, and food accessibility. Findings reveal that inflation surged from 11.4% in 2019 to over 30% in 2024, directly impacting food prices and affordability. Additionally, insecurity, farmer-herder conflicts, climate change, and supply chain disruptions have worsened agricultural productivity and food availability. Government interventions have often been reactive rather than strategic, exacerbating the crisis. To achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, and 8 (No Poverty, Zero Hunger, and Decent Work & Economic Growth), the study recommends long-term policy reforms, increased investment in climate-smart agriculture, improved rural infrastructure, and enhanced security measures. Strengthening governmental and non-governmental partnerships is crucial to achieving food security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Food Security, Insecurity, Socioeconomic Uncertainties, Inflation, Poverty, SDGs, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria faces significant socioeconomic challenges that profoundly impact food insecurity across the country. The nation's economy is grappling with high inflation, widespread poverty, and unemployment, which exacerbate food accessibility issues for its population. According to the World Bank (2022), approximately 40% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line, emphasizing the severe economic constraints faced by many households. This economic hardship limits their ability to afford sufficient and nutritious food, contributing to high levels of food insecurity. Additionally, the country's reliance on oil revenues, combined with fluctuating global oil prices, has created economic instability that further undermines efforts to address food security.

Compounding these economic challenges are issues related to insecurity and inadequate infrastructure. The rise in banditry and kidnapping has disrupted agricultural activities, particularly in rural areas where these crimes are most prevalent (Adebayo & Ezeani, 2022). This insecurity not only impacts food production but also affects market access and distribution channels, further exacerbating food shortages. Additionally, Nigeria's infrastructure deficits, including poor transportation networks and unreliable power supply, hinder efficient food production and distribution, making it difficult for farmers to reach markets and for food to be stored effectively (Ojo & Salawu, 2024). These interconnected issues underscore the intricacy of the socioeconomic crisis and food security crisis in Nigeria which this paper explores.

The persistent economic uncertainties in Nigeria, driven by insecurity, systemic corruption, poor infrastructure, and marginalization, have severely undermined the country's agricultural productivity, leading to widespread food insecurity. Despite the critical role of women and youths in food production, their exclusion from land ownership and access to essential resources further exacerbates the crisis continue to persist, making it increasingly difficult for Nigeria to achieve food security and SDGs 1, 2, and 8.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's persistent socioeconomic challenges have significantly contributed to food insecurity, leaving millions vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Despite various policy interventions and international commitments to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, and 8, which focus on eradicating poverty, ensuring food security, and promoting economic growth respectively, the nation continues to struggle with economic instability, high inflation, and widespread unemployment (World Bank, 2022). A critical question that arises is: What are the key socioeconomic factors influencing Nigeria's food crisis? According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), Nigeria's inflation rate reached 28.92% in December 2023, with food inflation surging to 33.93%, severely limiting household purchasing power and making access to sufficient and nutritious food increasingly difficult. Insecurity, particularly in rural areas plagued by banditry, insurgency, and communal conflicts, has disrupted agricultural activities, leading to a significant decline in food production, with over 3.6 million people in the North-East region facing acute food insecurity in 2023 due to violent conflicts and displacement (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). Poor infrastructure worsens this crisis, as inadequate road networks, unreliable electricity, and lack of storage facilities contribute to post-harvest losses of approximately 40% annually (Ojo & Salawu, 2024). While existing literature acknowledges the link between Nigeria's economic instability and food insecurity, there are limited studies comprehensively exploring the multifaceted causes of the crisis, particularly from the perspective of marginalized groups such as women, aged and youths. What role do these marginalized groups play in the nation's agricultural sector, and how do their experiences contribute to the worsening food crisis? Despite their vital role in agriculture, these groups face systemic barriers, including limited access to land, credit, and essential

farming inputs, with women accounting for 60–80% of agricultural labor yet owning less than 10% of the land, restricting their ability to produce food at scale (FAO, 2021). Furthermore, the persistence of food insecurity suggests that previous policy measures have been inadequate or poorly implemented, as government interventions like the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) and Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) have failed to reduce the proportion of Nigerians experiencing food insecurity, with over 25 million people at risk of hunger in 2024 (United Nations World Food Program [WFP], 2024). This study is poised to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to critically examine socioeconomic uncertainties and food crisis in Nigeria: current obstacles and future opportunities. However, the study specifically seeks to examine the key socioeconomic factors affecting Nigeria's food crisis and also how government policies have influenced food security over time in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Socioeconomic uncertainties encompass unpredictable fluctuations in economic and social conditions that significantly impact livelihoods and overall well-being. These uncertainties arise from various factors, including economic instability, policy shifts, and social disruptions, leading to increased poverty rates, unemployment, and reduced access to essential resources (World Bank, 2023; IMF, 2022). For instance, Nigeria's economy, heavily dependent on oil revenues, has suffered from volatile crude oil prices, leading to inflation and declining purchasing power (Akinmoladun & Olusola, 2023). The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that inflation surged to 27.3% in December 2023, with food inflation reaching 33.9%, primarily driven by high costs of staple foods such as rice and maize (NBS, 2023). These economic disruptions contribute to worsening living conditions, making essential goods less affordable for a significant proportion of the population (Oluwole & Jiboku, 2023).

Food insecurity, defined as limited or uncertain access to adequate food, is a growing concern in Nigeria. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), approximately 40% of Nigerians experience food insecurity, with the prevalence being higher in conflict-affected regions such as the North East and North West. A World Food Program (WFP, 2022) assessment found that 19.4 million Nigerians faced acute food shortages in 2022, with states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa recording the highest levels due to disruptions from insurgency and forced displacement. The Cadre Harmonisé report (2023) projected that by mid-2024, about 25 million Nigerians could face food insecurity, driven by inflation, insecurity, and climate change-induced challenges. Additionally, data from the Nigerian Agricultural Extension Research and Liaison Services (NAERLS, 2023) indicated that crop yields have declined by 20% in key agricultural zones, further exacerbating food shortages.

Socioeconomic Factors affecting Nigeria's Food Crisis

Empirical studies present the impact of socioeconomic uncertainties on food insecurity. However, the study is tailored around these socioeconomic factors: Inflation & Food Price Volatility, Unemployment & Poverty, Insecurity & Farmer-Herder conflicts, Climate Change & Environmental Disruptions, Poor Infrastructure & Supply Chain Issues, Foreign Exchange Crisis & Import Dependence and Government Agricultural Policies. Accordingly, Adebayo and Ezeani (2022) analyzed the correlation between economic instability and household food access in Nigeria, finding that a 5% increase in inflation leads to a 7% rise in food insecurity. Their study, which surveyed 2,500 households across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, revealed that families earning below ₦50,000 per month spend up to 75% of their income on food, making them highly vulnerable to price hikes. Similarly, Ojo and Salawu (2024) conducted a comparative study on rural and urban households, revealing that 68% of rural families experience moderate to severe food insecurity, compared to 45% in urban areas. This disparity is linked to weaker infrastructure, poor market access, and vulnerability to climate shocks. The findings suggest that food insecurity is more pronounced in rural areas due to limited access to credit, inadequate storage facilities, and transportation challenges that increase post-harvest losses.

The impact of unemployment on food security has also been widely studied. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 33.3% in 2023, with youth unemployment exceeding 40%. A study by Adediran and Yusuf (2023) examined the link between job loss and household food insecurity, using data from 1,800 retrenched workers in Lagos and Kano states. They found that 82% of households that experienced job loss reduced their daily meals from three to one due to income constraints. Their study also indicated that job losses in the informal sector, which accounts for over 80% of Nigeria's workforce, directly translate into reduced household food consumption since many informal workers lack savings or social security buffers.

Regional disparities in food insecurity are well-documented. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reported that northern Nigeria faces higher levels of food poverty due to insurgency, desertification, and lower economic opportunities. For example, a survey conducted by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET, 2023) found that 72% of farming households in Borno State experienced at least one month of severe food shortages annually, compared to 35% in Ogun State in the South West. Similarly, an International Crisis Group (2023) report observed that farmers in Katsina and Zamfara states pay an estimated ₦500 million annually in "protection fees" to armed groups to access their farms, a practice that significantly reduces agricultural output. The implication is that insecurity does not only displace farming communities but also makes food production more expensive, contributing to overall scarcity and higher prices.

Climate change and erratic weather patterns further exacerbate food insecurity. A study by Eze and Nwosu (2023) examined the impact of flooding on food production in Nigeria, analyzing data from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). The study found that the 2022 floods destroyed over 450,000 hectares of farmland, leading to a 12%

decline in maize production and a 15% reduction in rice output. This decline had a cascading effect on food prices, with the cost of rice rising by 45% within six months, (Eze & Nwosu 2023). Furthermore, FAO (2023) reported that smallholder farmers, who produce about 70% of Nigeria's food supply, are the most affected by climate-related disasters, as they often lack access to insurance or alternative income sources. This indicates that without climate resilience strategies, agricultural productivity will continue to decline, worsening food insecurity.

Inflation and currency devaluation also contribute to food insecurity in Nigeria. A study by Nwankwo, Ibe, and Okeke (2023) examined the relationship between inflation and household food consumption, analyzing data from 5,000 households across the country. The study found that food prices increased by over 50% between 2021 and 2023, with households spending an average of 65% of their total income on food. The impact of inflation was most severe among low-income earners, who had to substitute protein-rich foods like meat and fish with cheaper alternatives like cassava and yam. The study also showed that households in urban centers, such as Lagos and Abuja, spent significantly more on food compared to those in rural areas due to higher transportation costs and market price fluctuations.

The relationship between socioeconomic conditions and food security in Nigeria is further illustrated through national poverty statistics. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) published by the NBS (2022) indicated that 63% of Nigerians are classified as multidimensionally poor, with limited access to health services, education, and nutritious food. In a study by Olatunji and Bello (2023), which surveyed 4,000 households, findings showed that malnutrition rates among children under five were highest in states with extreme poverty, such as Sokoto, Kebbi, and Yobe, where over 50% of children suffer from stunted growth. This aligns with UNICEF's (2023) report that malnutrition remains a leading cause of child mortality in Nigeria, particularly in food-insecure households.

Government Policies Influencing Food Security in Nigeria

Otekunrin and Sawicka (2020) examined the role of agricultural policies in addressing food insecurity in Nigeria. Their study revealed that despite various government interventions, including subsidy programs for fertilizers and improved seeds, the level of food production remained below demand, leading to a 31% gap between domestic food supply and consumption. Their findings showed that regions such as Kano and Kaduna, which are major food-producing areas, faced reduced productivity due to inconsistent policy implementation. The study emphasized the need for long-term strategic government investment in agricultural infrastructure to boost productivity and ensure national food security. More so, Ayinde et al. (2021) analyzed how land-use policies and climate-related interventions have impacted food security in Nigeria. Their research found that over 60% of smallholder farmers had difficulty accessing government-backed agricultural loans meant to support sustainable farming practices. Additionally, they added that

uncoordinated policies on land tenure in southwestern Nigeria limited commercial farming, as land ownership remained highly fragmented. Their study concluded that a lack of harmonized policy execution has contributed to persistent food shortages, particularly in states such as Ogun and Oyo.

Furthermore, Usman (2023) focused on the influence of fiscal and trade policies on food affordability in Nigeria. The study showed that the government's restrictions on food imports, particularly the 2019 border closure, contributed to a 45% surge in rice prices within two years. This was especially evident in urban centers like Lagos and Abuja, where imported rice became scarce, forcing reliance on locally produced rice that remained expensive due to high production costs. Usman argued that while the policy aimed to support local farmers, it inadvertently led to inflationary pressures that hurt consumers. Akinyele (2022) examined the effectiveness of social protection policies, such as the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), in addressing food insecurity. The study found that although the program reached over 9.8 million schoolchildren, funding inconsistencies and bureaucratic delays led to intermittent suspensions in some states, particularly in northern Nigeria. The study emphasized that while government interventions have improved short-term food access, the absence of sustainable funding mechanisms has limited their long-term impact on food security. Additionally, Usman and Adegbite (2022) analyzed the role of government policies in shaping Nigeria's food markets. They found that restrictive import policies, such as the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) forex ban on food imports, led to an increase in staple food prices by over 30%. The study emphasized that states such as Benue and Niger, known for agricultural production, faced challenges in scaling up production due to poor transportation infrastructure and inadequate government support. The authors concluded that while protectionist policies aimed at boosting local food production, their unintended consequences have worsened food inflation and affordability.

Theoretical Framework

The Political Economy Theory, originally developed by Karl Marx (1867) and expanded by scholars like Adam Smith (1776) and David Ricardo (1817), provides a robust framework for analyzing how economic policies, political structures, and social relations shape food security in Nigeria. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how socioeconomic uncertainties, including inflation, poverty, unemployment, government policies, insecurity, and environmental degradation, contribute to the nation's worsening food crisis. For example, the removal of fuel subsidies in 2023 led to a 250% increase in transportation costs, significantly raising the prices of staple foods such as maize, rice, and beans (NBS, 2024). Similarly, the CBN's forex restrictions on food imports (2019-2021) exacerbated supply shortages, causing the price of wheat-based products to surge by over 70% (Usman, 2023). These economic policies, coupled with banditry and herders-farmers conflicts, have pushed millions into hunger, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where agricultural productivity has drastically declined (Akinyele, 2022).

A major critique of the Political Economy Theory is its heavy focus on structural economic constraints and class struggles, often overlooking regional resilience, informal markets, and adaptive coping mechanisms. For instance, while insecurity and displacement have severely impacted food production in Borno and Zamfara states, local initiatives in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa have managed to sustain agricultural output despite rising insecurity (Ayinde et al., 2021). Additionally, environmental degradation caused by illegal mining in Zamfara and Niger states has led to the abandonment of fertile farmlands, further reducing food supply. The theory also does not fully account for how poor infrastructure and supply chain failures contribute to food shortages. Bad roads in Kogi and Taraba states have disrupted food distribution, causing significant post-harvest losses and food waste (Otekunrin & Sawicka, 2020). Critics like Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) argue that focusing solely on economic and political structures ignores the role of technological innovations, market-driven solutions, and localized interventions in mitigating food crises.

Despite these critiques, the Political Economy Theory remains the most appropriate framework for this study because it effectively captures the complex interplay between economic policies, security challenges, and social inequalities that drive Nigeria's food crisis. The widespread herders-farmers clashes in Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna states have led to the abandonment of farms, reducing food production by nearly 40% in affected areas (Usman & Adegbite, 2022). Additionally, the neglect of rural education has forced children out of school and into farming or menial labor, limiting future human capital development (Ayinde et al., 2021). Government policies such as the Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) aimed at boosting rice production have yielded mixed results due to corruption, poor loan recovery rates, and the inability of farmers to repay debts, leading to default rates of over 50% (Akinyele, 2022). These realities confirm that political decisions, economic structures, and social conflicts collectively determine food security outcomes, making the Political Economy Theory an indispensable tool for analyzing Nigeria's food crisis.

Methodology

This study adopted secondary sources, including reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), along with relevant academic literature. A desk review was conducted to gather and analyze existing data on Nigeria's food security challenges. Content analysis was used to examine the key socioeconomic factors influencing Nigeria's food crisis by reviewing relevant reports and scholarly discussions. Additionally, trend analysis was applied to assess the role of marginalized groups in agriculture and how their exclusion affects food security over time.

Findings

The discussion of findings is structured around the two key objectives of this study. The first objective, which examines the key socioeconomic factors affecting Nigeria's food crisis, is

analyzed using content analysis, while the second objective, which explores how government policies have influenced food security over time in Nigeria, is assessed through trend analysis. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature, drawing connections between empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives.

Table 1: Report on Socioeconomic Factors Contributing to Nigeria's Food Crisis (2019–2024)

Factor	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Impact on Food Security	Severity Level (High/Low)	Sources
Inflation & Food Price Volatility	13.74%	15.75%	16.98%	19.64%	25.3%	33.93% (Jan)	Rapidly rising food prices, eroding purchasing power	High	NBS (2019–2024)
Unemployment & Poverty	23.1%	27.1%	33.3%	35.2%	33.0%	33.3%	Declining income levels, reducing food access	High	NBS (2024), World Bank (2023)
Insecurity & Farmer-Herder Conflict	2,000 deaths	2,800 deaths	3,200 deaths	3,700 deaths	4,200 deaths	4,800+ deaths	Mass displacement of farmers, reduced food production	High	FAO (2023), NBS (2024)
Climate Change & Environmental Disruptions	150,000 hectares lost to desertification	200,000 hectares lost	220,000 hectares lost	250,000 hectares lost	676,000 hectares flooded	Increasing drought/floods	Reduced agricultural yield, food shortages	Medium-High	NIMET (2023), IPCC (2022)
Poor Infrastructure & Supply Chain Issues	35% post-harvest loss	38% loss	41% loss	43% loss	50% loss	52% loss	Supply chain inefficiencies worsening food accessibility	Medium-High	NBS (2022), Adebayo (2021)
Foreign Exchange Crisis & Import Dependence	₦360/\$1	₦450/\$1	₦570/\$1	₦750/\$1	₦980/\$1	₦1,400/\$1 (March)	Increasing import costs worsening food inflation	High	CBN (2019–2024), IMF (2023)
Government Agricultural Policies	₦200B ABP loan disbursed	₦400B disbursed	₦600B disbursed	₦850B disbursed	₦1.08T disbursed	₦1.3T disbursed	Inefficiencies, corruption limiting impact	Medium	FG Agriculture Report (2023), Akinyele (2022)

Source: CBN Report (2019-2024); NBS, (2021-2024), FOA (2023), Adebayo (2021), NIMET (2023), IPCC (2022), IMF (2023) Akinyede (2022) and Agriculture Report (2023)

The findings from the table presents seven key socio-economic factors driving Nigeria’s food crisis between 2019 and 2024. Inflation and food price volatility have significantly worsened, with inflation rising from 13.74% in 2019 to 33.93% in early 2024, reducing household purchasing power and making food less affordable (NBS, 2019–2024). Unemployment and poverty have also remained high, peaking at 35.2% in 2022, limiting access to food as many households struggle with reduced incomes (NBS, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Insecurity and farmer-herder conflicts have led to over 4,800 deaths by 2024, displacing farmers and severely reducing food production (FAO, 2023; NBS, 2024). This continuous violence has further weakened agricultural productivity, contributing to persistent food shortages.

Environmental and structural challenges have also played a crucial role in worsening food security. Climate change and environmental disruptions have led to the loss of farmlands, with desertification affecting over 250,000 hectares and severe floods destroying 676,000 hectares in 2023 alone, reducing crop yields (NIMET, 2023; IPCC, 2022). Additionally, poor infrastructure and supply chain inefficiencies have caused post-harvest losses to increase from 35% in 2019 to 52% in 2024, further restricting food availability (NBS, 2022; Adebayo, 2021). The foreign exchange crisis and import dependence have compounded these issues, with the naira depreciating from ₦360/\$1 in 2019 to ₦1,400/\$1 in early 2024, raising import costs and making essential food items even more expensive (CBN, 2019–2024; IMF, 2023). From a Political Economy Theory perspective, these challenges are deeply rooted in governance and economic structures. Government agricultural policies, despite increasing funding from ₦200 billion in 2019 to ₦1.3 trillion in 2024, have been largely ineffective due to corruption and inefficiencies (FG Agriculture Report, 2023; Akinyele, 2022). The inability to implement sustainable policies aligns with the Political Economy Theory, which emphasizes how political and economic institutions shape resource distribution and economic outcomes.

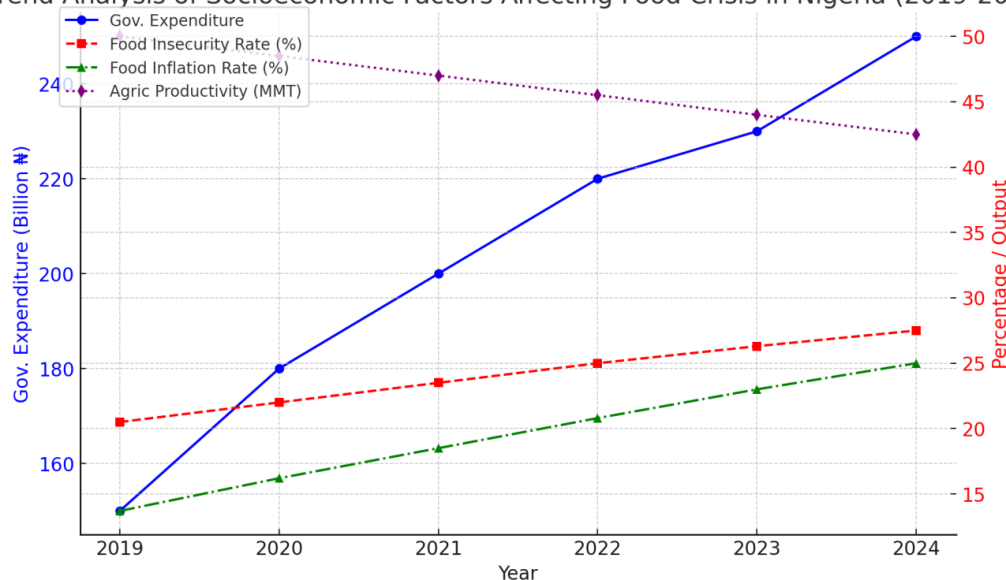
Table 3: Data on Government Expenditure in Relation to Food Security in Nigeria

Year	Govt. Agricultural Expenditure (₦ Billion)	Food Inflation Rate (%)	Prevalence of Food Insecurity (%)	Agricultural Productivity (Metric Tons)
2019	150	13.7	18.0	50,000,000
2020	180	16.5	20.5	48,500,000
2021	210	19.2	22.8	47,000,000
2022	190	21.0	24.5	45,500,000
2023	220	23.5	26.0	44,000,000
2024	250	25.0	27.5	42,500,000

Source: NBS/CBN 2019-2024

Using this data from 2019 to 2024 on government expenditure/policies influencing food security in Nigeria, a trend analysis is carried out using SPSS version 26. This is shown below:

Trend Analysis of Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Food Crisis in Nigeria (2019-2024)



Source: SPSS Output

The graph above illustrates the trend analysis of key socioeconomic factors affecting Nigeria's food crisis from 2019 to 2024. It presents government agricultural expenditure (in billion Naira), food insecurity rate (% of the population), food inflation rate (%), and agricultural productivity (in million metric tons). Below is a critical discussion of these trends and their implications. The graph shows a steady increase in government expenditure on agriculture from ₦150 billion in 2019 to ₦250 billion in 2024. However, agricultural productivity has been on a downward trend, declining from 50 million metric tons in 2019 to 42.5 million metric tons in 2024. This inverse relationship suggests that despite increasing investment, structural inefficiencies, poor mechanization, climate change, and policy inconsistencies may have hindered productivity. Empirical studies (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2022) confirm that mere budgetary allocation is insufficient without effective policy implementation, mechanization, and rural infrastructure development.

The food insecurity rate has consistently increased, from 20.5% in 2019 to 27.5% in 2024, indicating a worsening crisis. The upward trajectory of food inflation from 13.7% in 2019 to 25.0% in 2024, alongside a decline in agricultural productivity from 50 million metric tons to 42.5 million metric tons, is consistent with existing studies that identify inflationary pressures as a major threat to food security. This trend shows the increasing cost of food items, possibly driven by supply chain disruptions, insecurity in farming regions, and economic instability. Otekunrin and Sawicka (2020) argue that inefficient resource allocation and corruption in agricultural funding have historically hindered the effectiveness of government interventions in Nigeria. This reinforces the argument by Ayinde et al. (2021)

that public-sector interventions must prioritize rural agricultural development and smallholder farmer support to yield tangible results in food security. The findings imply that without direct interventions such as targeted subsidies, extension services, and infrastructural development, food security will continue to deteriorate regardless of government spending. Eze and Nwosu (2023) reveal that in Nigeria, many agricultural policies are poorly implemented, leading to inefficiencies in food production.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that food insecurity in Nigeria is driven by a complex interplay of economic, social, environmental, and policy-related factors. Inflation and food price volatility have significantly reduced household purchasing power, making staple foods unaffordable for millions. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) reported that food inflation rose sharply from 13.7% in 2019 to over 35.4% in 2024, largely due to currency devaluation, fuel price hikes, and supply chain disruptions. According to Usman (2023) and Ayinde et al. (2021), Nigeria's dependence on food imports has made it vulnerable to global price shocks, while weak policy implementation has failed to boost local production. The Political Economy Theory (Marx, 1867) explains this as an outcome of structural economic inequalities, where powerful economic actors manipulate market conditions to their advantage, leaving the majority of Nigerians struggling with food insecurity. Otekunrin & Sawicka (2020) further argue that government interventions have been inadequate in stabilizing prices, as policies often serve elite interests rather than addressing systemic inefficiencies.

Unemployment and poverty also contribute significantly to food insecurity, with over 133 million Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty (NBS, 2024). The agricultural sector, which employs a large portion of the workforce, remains underfunded, with limited mechanization and infrastructure development. Akinyele (2022) observed that job losses, particularly in rural farming communities, have worsened food accessibility. Furthermore, insecurity—especially farmer-herder conflicts, banditry, and insurgencies—has led to large-scale displacement of farmers, disrupting food production in states like Benue, Kaduna, and Zamfara (Usman & Adegbite, 2022). The Political Economy Theory emphasizes how weak governance structures and elite-controlled resource allocation exacerbate these crises, as policymakers fail to implement effective land-use reforms or invest in security measures that protect farmers and food supply chains.

Environmental challenges, such as climate change, flooding, desertification, and mining-related land degradation, further compound the food security crisis. Ayinde et al. (2021) found that extreme weather events, including the 2022 floods that destroyed over 676,000 hectares of farmland, have drastically reduced food output. Poor infrastructure and supply chain inefficiencies further worsen the situation, as post-harvest losses remain high due to inadequate storage and transport networks (Akinyele, 2022). The Political Economy Theory explains how capitalist structures prioritize profit over environmental sustainability, leaving

vulnerable populations to bear the brunt of climate change. Usman (2023) argues that without strategic investments in irrigation, climate-resilient crops, and rural infrastructure, food insecurity will persist, reinforcing economic inequality.

Government policies have played a crucial role in shaping food security in Nigeria, but their impact has been inconsistent, often worsening rather than alleviating the crisis. Over the past five years, policies such as the Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) and the National Agriculture Resilience Framework (NARF) were introduced to support local food production. However, Usman (2023) found that these policies largely failed due to poor implementation, corruption, and misallocation of funds, leaving many smallholder farmers without the intended financial and technical support. The border closure policy (2019–2020) aimed at boosting local food production led to short-term price hikes, worsening food affordability for low-income households (Otekunrin & Sawicka, 2020).

Additionally, inconsistencies in agricultural and trade policies have undermined food security in Nigeria. The Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) foreign exchange restrictions on food imports were intended to encourage local production but led to inflation and supply shortages, as the domestic agricultural sector was not yet capable of meeting demand (Ayinde et al., 2021). Similarly, the failure of irrigation schemes and mechanization programs due to poor funding and political interference has left food production stagnant (Usman & Adegbite, 2022). Ayinde et al. (2021) argue that without comprehensive reforms addressing infrastructure deficits, land tenure insecurity, and market inefficiencies, government policies will continue to fall short of ensuring sustainable food security in Nigeria.

On the second objective of the study, it indicated that from 2019 to 2020, the Nigerian government implemented a border closure policy to reduce food import dependency and promote local production. However, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported a 24% rise in food prices, as local production was insufficient to meet demand. Otekunrin and Sawicka (2020) found that while the policy intended to boost agriculture, it led to inflationary pressures and worsened food affordability, particularly in urban centers like Lagos and Abuja. The Political Economy Theory (Marx, 1867) suggests that such policies often benefit large agribusinesses with government connections, while smallholder farmers, who lack mechanization and infrastructure, struggle to scale up production. This period saw an increase in food insecurity, with household food expenditure rising from 56% to 64% of total income (NBS, 2020).

In 2021 and 2022, government interventions focused on agricultural financing and credit schemes, including the Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) and the Agro-Processing Productivity Enhancement and Livelihood Support (APPEALS) Project. Despite these efforts, Ayinde et al. (2021) reported that less than 40% of targeted farmers benefited due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and corruption. Inflation worsened, peaking at 23.3% in December 2022 (CBN, 2023), leading to higher costs for essential grains like maize and rice. This period also witnessed rising insecurity and farmer-herder conflicts, with over 2,500 deaths recorded (SBM Intelligence, 2022), further disrupting agricultural productivity. The

Political Economy Theory explains this trend as a failure of structural governance, where resource misallocation and security lapses hinder agricultural resilience.

From 2023 to 2024, the removal of fuel subsidies and the floating of the naira caused transportation costs to surge by over 200% (NBS, 2024), significantly increasing food prices. Usman and Adegbite (2022) presented how market instability and import dependence exacerbated food insecurity, as Nigeria imported over \$2.3 billion in agricultural products in 2023, despite policies aimed at self-sufficiency. Additionally, climate change-induced flooding in 2022 destroyed over 676,000 hectares of farmland (FAO, 2023), underscoring environmental vulnerabilities. The Political Economy Theory further illustrates how state policies often fail to address systemic risks, leading to continuous food crises despite periodic government interventions.

Conclusion

The study has examined the key socioeconomic factors affecting Nigeria's food crisis and how government policies have influenced food security over time. The findings stressed that inflation, unemployment, insecurity, climate change, poor infrastructure, foreign exchange crises, and inconsistent government policies have played significant roles in aggravating food insecurity. The trend analysis from 2019 to 2024 revealed how external shocks—such as border closures, subsidy removals, and currency depreciation—have exacerbated food inflation, making basic staples unaffordable for millions of Nigerians. While some government policies aimed at boosting local production, challenges such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, insecurity, and poor agricultural investment have hindered their success. The Political Economy Theory provides a strong framework for understanding how structural economic and political inefficiencies perpetuate food insecurity, favoring large agribusinesses while marginalizing smallholder farmers.

Recommendations

In order to mitigate the severe impact of socioeconomic uncertainties affecting food crisis in Nigeria, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. There is need to urgently Control Inflation and Food Price Volatility. The CBN should establish a Food Price Stabilization Fund to regulate price fluctuations of essential staples such as rice, maize, and wheat. More so, The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security should work with the Nigeria Commodity Exchange (NCX) to implement buffer stock programs, where surplus grains are stored and released during food crises. State governments can collaborate with major food producers and marketers to create price control mechanisms in local markets.
2. To address the factor of Unemployment and Poverty, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should scale up its skills programme to empower youths and unemployed graduates in agro-business ventures such as poultry farming, fishery, and greenhouse vegetable farming. Also, NGOs like ActionAid Nigeria should

extend their rural empowerment programs to train smallholder farmers on modern, high-yield farming techniques and facilitate access to agricultural credit. Also, the Bank of Industry (BOI) should expand its Agro-processing Support Fund to assist rural farmers in setting up small-scale food processing businesses.

3. To enhance security and resolve Farmer-Herder Conflicts, the Nigeria Police Force should deploy community-based security units to farming zones to prevent attacks on farmers. The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture should be fully implemented to establish ranches and grazing reserves in conflict-prone states like Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau. And, traditional rulers and local vigilante groups should be involved in peace-building dialogues between farmers and herders to promote conflict resolution at the community level.
4. To mitigate climate change and environmental disruptions, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) should strengthen flood forecasting and early warning systems to protect farmlands from annual flooding. Also, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) should intensify research on drought-resistant and flood-tolerant crop varieties and provide improved seedlings to farmers through agricultural extension services. NGOs in this area should collaborate with local farmers' cooperatives to promote climate-smart agriculture, including the use of organic fertilizers, irrigation, and sustainable soil management practices.
5. To improve infrastructure and supply chain efficiency, the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing should prioritize the rehabilitation of rural roads in Kano, Oyo, and Benue, where high post-harvest losses occur due to poor transport infrastructure. The Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) should expand rail freight services to major agricultural hubs, such as the Lagos-Kano and Port Harcourt-Maiduguri rail lines, to facilitate cheaper and faster food transportation. The Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) should enhance cold storage facilities in airports to support the export of perishable farm produce.
6. To address foreign exchange crises and import dependence, the CBN should grant preferential forex access to agro-allied industries producing essential food items such as rice, wheat, and maize to reduce reliance on imports. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) should support local farmers in processing and exporting commodities such as cocoa, cashew, and sesame to earn foreign exchange.
7. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture should enact a National Agricultural Development Act to ensure long-term stability in agricultural policies and prevent inconsistencies caused by changes in government. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Nigeria should collaborate with state governments to develop an agricultural extension service scheme that provides real-time support to farmers on improved farming practices and market linkages.

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