

## AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND FOOD SECURITY IN THE SOUTH EAST OF NIGERIA

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### ***Abstract***

*The study examines the impact of agricultural transformation on food security in the South East region. The paper employed a content analysis approach while the underpinning theory is on Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF). The findings reveal that despite attempts on Agricultural Transformation, food insecurity persist in the region. It became clear from the work that the problem of food insecurity is multifaceted. Contributing to the challenges include: the political class responsible for policy formulation, the bureaucrat responsible for policy implementation, the farmers who will not give room for mechanized farming but rather divert loan or grant meant for agricultural transformation, the youth that preferred white collar job, those fermenting violent and insecurity like the bandit, Boko Haram, the herders whose clash with farmers depletes production, banking sectors that will make loan process and interest discouraging to farmers, among others. We therefore recommend a multi-faceted transformational approach that encompasses radical policy on agriculture, capacity building, private sector investment and improvement of security to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities.*

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Agricultural transformation, Food security, Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), capacity building.

### **Introduction**

Food security also known as food sufficiency denotes a scenario where a nation has the ability to meet consumption needs from internal production rather than purchasing or importing from other country (Asoya & Obi, 2021). According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (2016), the interplay of food security variables impacts a person's, households, and state's level of food security. Food security at the national level does not always equate to sustainable food security at the family level.

In Nigeria, it is a known fact that the oil boom of the 1970s led to over reliance and dependency on revenue from the oil sector leading to drop in agro production and overdependence in oil. Nigeria was once reckoned as self-sufficient and sustaining in food production and was a heavy exporter of food to several geographical locations in the world back then in the 1950s and 1960s (West Africa Insight, 2010, cited in Chigbu, and Onukaogu, 2012). Some of the issues responsible for food insecurity include but not limited to: rising general insecurity in form of

banditry, kidnapping, unrest and corruption, inconsistent policy implementation; government neglect of the agricultural sector manifesting in the poor state and shortage of social amenities; insufficient supply of subsidized modern farm inputs; misappropriation of funds voted for agricultural programmes.

Nigeria has experienced the highest number of farmer-herder fatalities in West or Central Africa over the past decade. This trend has been largely upward, with 2,000 deaths recorded in 2018. Violent events between pastoralist and farming communities in Nigeria have been concentrated in the northwestern, Middle Belt, and recently southern states (Leif Brottem, 2021). This has impacted seriously on the food security of the country.

However, the onus of the work therefore is to examine the policy initiatives on agricultural development and to interrogate why the food insecurity persist in Nigeria in spite the agricultural transformation policies.

## **Operational definitions**

### **Security**

Security is the protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the daily activities, at home, office or communities (United Nations Development Program, 1994 in Oranusi and Oparah, 2021). However, Oriakhi and Osemwengie (2012) in Asoya & Obi (2021) gave a more elaborate definition of security that is encompassing when they said that security in a nation is a state where the unity, well-being, values and beliefs, democratic process, mechanism of governance and welfare of the nation and her people are perpetually improved and secured through military, political and economic resources. From the foregoing, security depicts a dynamic process that ensures all round safety and well-being of lives and property in a people in a given area ensured through good governance and participation of the people. Security remains a cardinal function of any government.

### **Insecurity**

Insecurity denotes a state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection (Beland, 2015 in Oranusi and Oparah, 2021). It is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being exposed to risk of anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion experienced in anticipation of some misfortune...those affected by insecurity are usually not aware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threat and danger when they occur (Oranusi & Oparah, 2021:131).

### **Food Security**

Food security is stated to exist when food is produced and distributed in an amount, quality, and variety that is readily available, accessible, utilised, and stable enough to allow for individual

desire (Emelife, Nweke & Obi, 2023). Food security or sufficiency does not connote that any one country can produce all they consume, rather it suggests that a country can be said to have food security when the domestic capacity of food production meet domestic need in sufficient quantities and qualities (Asoya & Obi, 2021).

### **Food Insecurity**

A country is said to have food insecurity when the dependency for food production is sorely or majorly on importation. In other words, the quantity and quality of food needed for livelihood cannot be sufficiently produced locally or where there are (acute) shortfall in local production. From the understanding garnered from the definition of insecurity, food insecurity is a state of being open or subject to danger or threat of hunger, where this danger of hunger causes anxiety, where anxiety is a vogue unpleasant emotion experienced in response to the condition.

### **Agricultural transformation**

Agricultural Transformation involve the leveraging on policies and processes, technologies and innovations, diversification, market and research oriented agricultural system aimed at to increased production, reduce poverty, increased nutrition and enhanced storage mechanism for sustainable livelihoods.

### **Livelihood**

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a living is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Chambers, 1995; Scoones, 1998).

### **Sustainable Livelihood**

Sustainable livelihood is not amenable to a precise definition. However, sustainable livelihood denotes a living condition that guarantees stable income, reliable and consistent financial resources, diversified income sources, financial resilience, social sustainability, social protection that culminate into access to healthcare, education, and social services, ability to make informed decisions, environmental sustainability, ability to adapt to climate change and minimal environmental impact. Sustainable livelihood revolves around food security, stable income, access to clean water, access to quality healthcare and education, good shelter and housing, social connections and environmental sustainability.

## **Empirical Review**

Emelife, Nweke and Obi (2023) carried out a study aimed at examining the causes of food insecurity in South-East Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Multi-stage sampling was used to select 280 farmers. Data were collected using questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis. The study highlighted some of the root causes of food insecurity in the region. They include long era of neglect by government, population growth, and degradation of natural environment, traditional agricultural practices, and poor involvement of the youth among others. The study shows that majority of the farmers indicated that they were into cassava production (58%), maize production (35%), poultry production (62%), 22% were into fish farming and piggyery (16%). For South-East Nigeria to attain food sufficiency, the study recommends proactive policy responses in support of farmers. Also required is infrastructural support in terms of good road networks and marketing facilities to best support agricultural activities.

Okpara and Nwaorgu (2021) in their work observed that one of the major problems confronting the Nigerian State is how to provide enough food for its teeming population, through the rejuvenation of the agricultural sector. The agricultural transformation policy (ATA) was the government's response to this challenge between 2011 and 2015. This paper evaluated how the ATA impacted on food security in Nigeria within the said period. Data for the study were generated through secondary sources, and analyzed qualitatively. Using Marxist political economy approach, the paper argued that the inability of Nigeria to meet its expected potentials in the agricultural sector could be because of the personal interests of a few individuals, which food importation serves. The paper recommended that focus should be shifted to the mechanization of agriculture as a way of boosting local food production.

Obasanmi and Enoma (2022) examined the herder and farmer conflict on social economic development of Nigeria. The study presented the structural theory and the Frustration-Anger-Aggression Hypothesis to provide possible explanations for the crisis. The causes of farmers/herders clashes in recent times were identified to be a function of several factors not only limited to climate change resulting in drought and desertification soil degradation; growing population size, global terrorism, crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling) amongst others. Previous and present government responses to this crisis have been most disappointing with no clear cut and sustainable policy both by the federal and state government. This crisis has resulted in displacement of people from their communities, women and girls' vulnerability to sexual and economic predation, huge economic burden on the government leading to loss of revenues, dwindling food supply and rising cost, increasing division among the Federating states and threat to National Security amongst others. The study recommends that the crisis should be addressed quickly to avert impending food crisis, government should strengthen the mechanism for conflict resolutions, and above all herdsmen should know that the imperatives of a modern economy require that pastoralism should be laid to rest, while embracing improved modern methods of animal husbandry with improved high yields and disease resistant species (cattle). When this is done a win-win situation would be achieved for all stakeholders.

Okoro (2018) did a study on the prevalence of herdsmen-farmers conflict and its effects on socioeconomic development in Nigeria. He opined that increase in competition for limited resources has often times led to violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in many parts of Nigeria. The conflict has in recent years taken more dangerous dimension as the herdsmen now carry sophisticated ammunitions with which they kill and maim perceived opponents at will. The study is anchored on frustration aggression theory, and the theory dialectical materialism. The research adopts qualitative approach to data analysis which relies on secondary sources like journals, textbooks, newspapers and online publications. Results show that the conflicts have resulted to loss of lives, displacement, distrust, destruction of properties etc. The study concluded that the Herdsmen-farmers conflict created food insecurity, distrust and unemployment. The study recommended that State governments should designate grazing fields for the nomadic herdsmen and make them pay tax to the state.

Gertrud (2005) investigation proved that evidence from most continents over the last decade shows that the share of rural household income from non-farm sources is growing in the process of rural development. Recent empirical research found that non-farm sources account for 40-45% of average rural household income in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, 30-40% in South Asia, and 30-50% in Central and Eastern Europe. Most of this income originates from local rural sources rather than urban migration. Thus, non-farm rural employment (NFRE) is gaining prominence in debates on rural development. The term NFRE is used to mean any non-farm employment by a rural household, including urban jobs and remittances. Hence, it is related to employment, income and livelihoods not directly derived from crop and livestock production. This contribution aims at giving an overview of the research issues on NFRE, its findings and policy recommendations as it concerns rural poverty reduction. The policy recommendations identified are embedded in the sustainable livelihood framework as it can serve as a guideline to explain why some farm households tend to specialize in agriculture and others to diversify their activities. It can further be used to analyze the factors determining demand-pull and distress-push diversification.

However, this study is aimed at examining the agricultural transformational agenda and its impact on food security. The crux of the study therefore is to interrogate why the food insecurity persist in Nigeria in spite the agricultural transformation initiative.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework [SLF] was developed by the British Department for International Development (DFID) in the 1990s in collaboration with various researchers and organizations. Robert Chambers, Gordon Conway, Ian Scoones are part of the scholars that made contribution to the theory. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a living is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Chambers, 1995; Scoones, 1998).

Nithya, Andrew, Jonathan, and Diana (2022), opined that “The practical importance of the sustainable livelihoods 'turn' is clear”. The SLA has directed the development interventions of governmental, multi-lateral and non-governmental organisations; shaped how scholars and practitioners think about conditions in the rural South; provided a framework for data collection and informed survey methods; and justified the allocation of billions of dollars of international assistance at livelihoods-focused programs and projects. It has also played a leading role in other related developments, such as the participatory and empowerment turns in development studies, and an ideological reorientation that has placed emphasis on poor households as drivers of poverty alleviation in lieu of more structural analyses. To be sure, SLA thinking was more drawn to the conceptual repertoire of entitlements, capabilities, relational inequality, well-being and new institutional economics (Leach, Mearns, & Scoones, 1999).

However, the approach was subsumed into the broader turn towards methodological individualism inherent in neoliberal development policy at the time (Harriss, 2001). For Solesbury (2003: 14), the sustainable livelihoods concept has "all the qualities of a classic 'paradigm shift'". But even this was not enough to challenge the near-axiomatic status neoliberalism acquired in the 1990s, partly because the overall notion of power relations and to a certain extent power asymmetry are overlooked in the SLA. In line with new institutional economic thinking, SLA positions institutions, markets, policies, and their role in (re)shaping livelihood options as matters of technical rather than political concern. It sought to illuminate how populations 'get by' through a people-centered, holistic, participatory and inclusive view of matters, seeking to understand what people have, what they do, why, and with what consequences for their quality of life. Like all models, the SLF is a simplification and does not represent the full diversity and richness of livelihoods, which can only be understood by qualitative and participatory analysis at the local level.

### **Assets of livelihoods**

1. **Human Capital:** Skills, education, health, and well-being. Human capital” is a very wide used term with various meanings. However, in the context of the SLF it is defined as follows: "Human capital represents the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health that together enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood objectives" Kollmair and Gamper (2002).
2. **Social Capital:** Networks, relationships, social cohesion, and community support. There is much debate about what exactly is meant by the term “social capital” and the aspects it comprises. In the context of the SLA it is taken to mean the social resources upon which people draw in seeking for their livelihood outcomes, such as networks and connectedness, that increase people's trust and ability to cooperate or membership in more formalized groups and their systems of rules, norms and sanctions Kollmair and Gamper (2002)
3. **Physical Capital:** Infrastructure, technology, equipment, and transportation. Physical capital comprises the basic infrastructure and producer goods needed to support livelihoods,



such as affordable transport, secure shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, clean, affordable energy and access to information. Its influence on the sustainability of a livelihood system is best fit for representation through the notion of opportunity costs or 'trade-offs', as a poor infrastructure can preclude education, access to health services and income generation. For example, without irrigation facilities long periods are spent in non-productive activities, such as the collection of water – needing extra labour force that could be of use somewhere (or would be a time resource to go to school). Since infrastructure can be very expensive, not only its physical presence is important, but as well the pricing and secure disposition for the poorest groups of society must be considered (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002)

4. Natural Capital: Environment, natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Natural capital is the term used for the natural resource stocks from which resource flows and services (such as land, water, forests, air quality, erosion protection, biodiversity degree and rate of change, etc.) useful for livelihoods are derived. It is of special importance for those who derive all or part of their livelihoods from natural resource-based activities, as it is often the case for the poor stakeholders, but also in more general terms, since a good air and water quality represents a basis for good health and other aspects of a livelihood. Within the framework a particularly close relationship exists between natural capital and the vulnerability context and many of the devastating shocks for the livelihoods are natural processes that destroy natural capital [e.g. fires, floods, earthquakes] (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002).
5. Financial Capital: Income, savings, credit, and financial services. Financial capital” denotes the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives and it comprises the important availability of cash or equivalent that enables people to adopt different livelihood strategies. Two main sources of financial capital can be identified: Available stocks comprising cash, bank deposits or liquid assets such as livestock and jewelry, not having liabilities attached and usually independent on third parties. Regular inflows of money comprising labour income, pensions, or other transfers from the state, and remittances, which are mostly dependent on others and need to be reliable. Among the five categories of assets financial capital is probably the most versatile as it can be converted into other types of capital or it can be used for direct achievement of livelihood outcomes [e.g. purchasing of food to reduce food insecurity]. However, it tends to be the asset the least available for the poor, what makes other capitals important as substitutes.

The whole essence of Agricultural transformation is to leveraging on policies and processes, technologies and innovations, diversification, market and research oriented agricultural system aimed at to increased production, reduce poverty, increased nutrition and enhanced storage mechanism for sustainable livelihoods. A successful agricultural transformation will amount to building up the assets of livelihood. A risk in any of these assets poses a serious threat to food security and by extension, livelihood. The South East has been bedeviled with some dangers already such as herders-farmers clash which threatens food security in the region.

## Methodology

The work is purely based on content analysis. Therefore, we employ the use of secondary sources in the data generation and analysis.

## Discussion

The study is set to discuss the Agricultural transformation policies of government and how it has affected food security particularly in the south east region. Therefore, we shall begin with a brief chronicle of government policies on food security over the past administrations in Nigeria as presented by Joshua, Akunna, Anthony, Benjamin (2018).

### Synopsis of Government policy on food security over past regimes in Nigeria

They opined that Nigerian successive government had made concerted efforts directed at restoring agriculture to its former status before the oil boom in the national economy in terms of its higher contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Gen. Yakubu Gowon led military government embarked on a gargantuan importation of rice in the early 1970s to stave off hunger. But Nigerian ports did not have the facility to handle the huge importation of what came to be called the Rice Amada. The ports were choked by rice and a decongestion committee had to be set up (Ekpu, 2009 in). In 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo government started what was known as Operation Feed the Nation, (OFN). This was intended to be some kind of agricultural revolution in which everyone was asked to be involved to plant something, anything, anywhere. Those who didn't have farms as gardens resulted to flower pot farming (Ekpu, 2009 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018). Sheu Shagari took over as President in 1979, he continued the Obasanjo's initiative with jut little change in name. He called his own initiative Green Revolution without any significant change in conception, content or context of the policy. Then the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida introduced the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DFRRI in 1985. It was supposed to be a comprehensive, integrated programme for massive food production and rural transformation. However, with the advent of civilian administration in 1999 greater attention was given to food production. The Minister for Agriculture publicly restated government's commitment to combat hunger and malnutrition by providing adequate food for the people and ensures food security for all. To achieve this goal therefore, a number of food security initiatives were launched (Bello, 2004 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018). They include:

1. Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS): This is a programme by which government sought the assistance of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in disseminating information on proven and accessible technologies to 109 farming communities across the country to enhance food production and substantially increase income levels of the farmers.
2. Root and Tuber Expansion Programme: This is an agricultural programme supported by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which made available to farmers the necessary information on improved processing technology and expansion technique for cassava and cassava products.



3. Fadama Development Project: The Fadama project is for ensuring all-season farming through large scale irrigation system or naturally flooded areas (Fadama) of a number of crops, plants, fruits and vegetables.
4. Community-based agricultural and rural development schemes: This comes under different names such as farm settlement or back-to-land programmes. In this type of schemes the participants who are usually men, are encouraged by the government to take to farming by providing them with material and financial support.
5. Provision of infrastructures: Such as linking up the rural areas through new access roads and grading the old ones; supplying energy through rural electrification; distributing farm inputs like seedlings and fertilizer; selling or leasing tractors and harvesters to farmers to encourage mechanized farming and providing improved storage facilities to reduce post-harvest loss of agricultural products, put at between 25 and 30 percent (Vanguard, October 27, 2004 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018).
6. In collaboration with the United States, the government commissioned the American-based International Centre for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development (ICSFAD), to study the problems militating against increased agricultural production in the country. The main objective here is to assess the soil type and use the result to determine the appropriate type of fertilizer that would be used by the farmers.
7. Policy instrument and direction by which the government (a) banned, among other items, the importation of some agricultural products. The effect of this ban is said to have “unleashed boundless productive energy in the areas of livestock production and agriculture” (Presidential National Day Broadcast, Nigerian Tribune, October 1, 2004 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018); (b) sold fertilizer to farmers at subsidized rate and (c) facilitated increased investment in agriculture by strengthening the financial capacity of state-owned agricultural banks to grant soft-loans, and pleading with the private commercial banks to extend low interest loan facilities to large-scale and small-scale farmers. The plea has been largely ignored by the commercial banks probably because of the perceived risk in agricultural financing and the negative consequences of volatile agricultural market (Larson *et. al.*, 2004 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018), NEEDS Document, 2001 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018), Davies, 2009 in Joshua, *et al*, 2018).

The Olusegun Obasanjo regime (1999-2007) adopted the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), and its state counterpart adopted the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS). The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document was a response to the demands and strategies of the Millennium Development Goals (MPG). Specifically, the National Agricultural Policy assigns supportive roles to the government, while investments in the sector were left to the private sector initiative. At the State level, it was known as the State Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (SEEDS). Obasanjo also initiated the National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS), launched in 2002 in all the 36 states with the objectives of increased food production and elimination of rural poverty, and also the Root and Tuber Expansion

Programme (RTEP). The Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration (2007-2010) introduced the Agricultural Transformation Agenda ([www.fmard.gov.ng](http://www.fmard.gov.ng) cited in Joshua, *et al*, 2018). The administration made food security and agriculture one of its seven-point agenda. His agricultural policy, therefore, involves not only activities in agricultural production but also includes feeding the industries, food processing and manufacturing, distribution and marketing, trade and consumption with the output from the major employer of labour. The sector raised the level of industrialization by providing food for the labour force.

Goodluck Jonathan took over after Yar'Adua's death and continued with the transformation agenda. He also introduced Vision 20:20. The primary focus of Vision 20:20 was on supplying fertilizers directly to the rural farmers and not through middlemen; providing seeds with high yield directly to the small-hold farmer, providing telephones to the rural farmers for easy communication, and encouraging the value chain in such a way that agricultural produce is being processed locally to finished produce and export. The regime also has a programme to provide storage facilities and export perishable goods, such as tomatoes, by providing infrastructure, including perishable sheds, at major airports in Nigeria. The Youth Empowerment in Agriculture Project was another programme initiated by the Jonathan Administration. The current regime of Muhammadu Buhari from May 2015 to date is continuing with the Agricultural Transformation Agenda and Youth Empowerment in Agricultural Programme (YEAP), which he inherited from Goodluck Jonathan (Awa and Rufus, cited in Joshua, *et al*, 2018). We acknowledged that the Nigerian government had made a frantic effort towards improving agricultural development in the nation. But our attention is particularly on the Agriculture Transformation Agenda.

Okpara and Nwaorgu (2021:241) outlined the achievements of Agriculture Transformation Agenda (ATA) to include:

The creation of a database for Nigerian farmers. The database is said to contain 10.5 million farmers. Again, the ATA benefited 45,300 small-holder farmers in the rural areas, while the agricultural sector contributed an average of 21.09% to the GDP between 2011 and 2015 (PTCIJ, 2017). Another major success recorded was the granting of loans to small-scale rural farmers. Corroborating this assertion, Anyanwu (2015), in a study on peasant farmers in Imo State, disclosed that as at the end of 2014, more than 700 rural farmers had been granted soft loans to improve the scale of their farming. No doubt, the introduction of the ATA, in keeping with the Jonathan administration's transformation agenda, was out of a genuine interest in improving food security in Nigeria. Within the 4 years that it lasted, the government, through this policy, managed to put structures in place, structures which, if further consolidated, could drive agricultural development in Nigeria.

Food security is stated to exist when food is produced and distributed in an amount, quality, and variety that is readily available, accessible, utilized, and stable enough to allow for individual desire. However, food insecurity would result from the opposite. The question begging for answer is why food insecurity should persist despite all these concerted efforts made by successive administrations to arrest the monster of food insecurity. Evidence abounds that the

Southeast Geo-political zone is the worst hit of shortage and high cost of food in the nation. Okafor (cited in Emelife, Nweke and Obi, 2023:24) agreed thus:

There are evidences that the issue of food insecurity is more pronounced in Southeast relative to other regions of the country. Evidence from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report revealed that prices of staple food items in the Southeastern region pose a greater threat for its residents as it has more than doubled its fellow regional counterparts in the last 2 years. The data also revealed that on a year-on-year comparison, food prices in this region grew by more than 45-50 percent on the average as compared to other regions that witnessed 30-40 percent price increases within the same period.

Emelife, Nweke and Obi (2023), observed that demographic changes, such as rapid population increase, strain on the environment, and competition for arable land, as signs that the region's ability to produce enough food to meet the requirements of its growing population is declining.

Chigbu & Onukaogu (2012) identify several major causes of food insecurity in Southeast Nigeria, emphasizing rapid urbanization and significant changes in land use that have led to environmental degradation. Emelife *et al.* (2023) further argue that the region's food crisis stems from multiple factors, with government negligence being a central issue. Government neglect is reflected in the poor state and shortage of social amenities, inconsistent policy implementation, insufficient supply of subsidized modern farm inputs, and rising insecurity. These failures, coupled with misappropriation of agricultural funds, undermine progress.

In general, this has impeded agriculture and halted economic activity, leading to famine. Funds allocated to the agricultural sector are often diverted by political office holders and government officials, leaving insufficient resources for meaningful impact. Additionally, the unsuccessful implementation of agricultural programmes has not helped check food insecurity, as seen in the Green Revolution of Shelu Shagari and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), both of which, despite promising concepts, were plagued by corruption and frustration (Joshua, *et al.*, 2018). Poor awareness creation on best agricultural practices and inadequate credit facilities also contribute to food insecurity. The Southeast primarily cultivates tubers and maize, while major livestock farming includes poultry, fishing, and pig farming, indicating the region has yet to diversify fully. As a result, household heads face psychological distress over providing a stable food supply to their families (Egbutah, 2009; Emelife, Nweke, and Obi, 2023). Youth involvement in agriculture remains low, despite being the main source of labour in the absence of mechanization. Many young people perceive non-agricultural pursuits as more appealing, making farm labour costly according to the law of demand and supply. Furthermore, reliance on traditional agricultural practices, such as overdependence on rainfall, poor extension service delivery, rudimentary tools, pre- and post-harvest losses, and limited use of improved inputs, continues to exacerbate food insecurity (Ayinde *et al.*, 2014; Emelife, *et al.*, 2023).

Poor policy implementation is central to food insecurity in Nigeria. While agriculture once held a significant share of GDP, its decline is largely attributed to frequent changes and failures in policy implementation. Although Nigeria's climate and soil once enabled robust production and

exports, poor follow-through on policies has reduced agricultural output and income.

Insecurity, particularly the herdsman-farmers conflict, represents a major driver of food insecurity in Southeast Nigeria. During periods of agricultural activity, competition for land between herders and crop farmers often escalates into violent conflict. These clashes not only increase insecurity but also threaten food supply by causing loss of life, property, and agricultural output.

A further critical challenge is Nigeria's inadequate food storage and processing infrastructure. Despite substantial output, much of the harvest is lost due to poor storage, leading to paradoxical importation of food that Nigeria produces in abundance. These deficiencies increase costs and perpetuate food insecurity.

Farmer capacity and training gaps also contribute to food insecurity. Survey data indicate that insufficient training for agricultural stakeholders, especially farmers, leads to policy failures. Without the necessary skills, farmers often fail to adopt mechanized techniques and may misuse funds intended for agricultural advancement. Education is thus an essential tool for enabling effective participation and decision-making in agriculture.

Historical context further illuminates the persistent herdsman-farmers conflict. Dating back to biblical times, this recurring tension is rooted in disputes between crop cultivators and livestock keepers (Okoro, 2018). The devastating human and economic cost of herdsman-farmers conflicts is acute. According to Okoro (2018), thousands have died over recent years, costing Nigeria significant potential revenue annually. The violence brings not only loss of lives and property, but also displacement, reduced income, and increased distrust, all of which threaten food and national security.

The government of Nigeria, over the years, has employed various strategies in tackling the farmers/herders problem (Obasanmi & Enoma, 2022). Unfortunately, their efforts have not yielded much result. However, following the spread of farmer-herder clashes to the south, the governors of 17 southern states issued a joint resolution in May 2021 to ban open grazing in their territories. This, in turn, makes long-term conflict de-escalation in Nigeria more difficult. For example, the Nigerian government and many other political actors strongly support the implementation of the 2019 National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), which aims to improve security and reduce farmer-herder conflict by settling herders into ranches. Because the law favors local indigenous populations, it often supports farmers who wish to raise cattle. Pastoralists are often excluded from ranch development, however, as they commonly originate from other states or neighboring countries. This results in a framework that offers little help to seminomadic pastoralists and instead creates further barriers to land use and access. It does not address, therefore, the underlying drivers of polarization between farmer and herder communities (Leif Brottem, 2021). A study conducted by Joshua, et al (2018) indicates that Difficulty in farmers' access to bank facilities is one of the major factors responsible for food shortage in the region. Results indicate that 55% of the respondents affirmed that farmers do not have access to bank facilities, which results in policy flaws. This is contrary to the opinions of 45% of the respondents.

## Findings

From the research, it became obvious that despite the government's Agricultural transformation agenda, food insecurity persists in the South East. The following are the findings of the work:

The poor implementation of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda renders the initiatives ineffective. Again, the general insecurity is another major cause of food insecurity in the region. Lack of a mechanized storage facility is a major problem, causing food insecurity in the region. The herder-farmer clash is another major issue that has been negatively and continues to pose a threat to sustainable livelihood in the South East and the country in general.

## Conclusion

From the research, it is clear that food insecurity is a multifaceted problem. Every sector and segment of the country is involved: the political class, the bureaucrats responsible for policy formulation and implementation, farmers who resist mechanized farming and divert loans or grants meant for agricultural transformation, youth who prefer white-collar jobs, and individuals inciting violence and insecurity, such as bandits and insurgents. The clashes between herders and farmers continue to reduce production. The banking sector discourages loans with complex processes and high interest rates. In summary, we must all commit to agricultural transformation to avoid increasing hunger.

## Recommendation

We recommend a comprehensive transformational approach that includes radical agricultural policy, capacity building, private sector investment, and improved security to address challenges and maximize opportunities. In addition, strong awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate farmers on the need for mechanized agricultural processes, which are central to the agricultural transformation initiative.

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