

Achieving Food Security in Africa: The Urgent need of Stemming Climate Change

Asikia Ige¹

Abstract

Food is a basic necessity of life; it is the bedrock and anchor point of survival. Its basic relevance transcends barrier of race, colour, nationality, religion, gender, circumstances of birth etc. without food life if it ever exists is devoid of meaning. The right to life presupposes as a minimum the right to food. Food is a basic need for all human beings. Food security is the access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life; its essential elements are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it.

Food security has become a recurrent issue in Africa because of poverty, the increase in population, politics of food, good governance, agricultural practices of developed nations, and natural disasters among other factors. Achieving food security becomes very important in the light of the teeming population of African youths who needs adequate food to be able to function optimally and who invariably are the future of the continent.

The quest for food security in Africa becomes a mirage in the face of the phenomenon called Climate Change. Climate Change is a large scale long term shift in the planet weather patterns or average temperatures. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has estimated that by 2100, the global temperature is set to climb significantly between 1.8C (3.2F) at the low end and 4C (7.2F) at the high end. Sea levels are expected to rise by the end of twentieth century by between 11 and 17 inches, threatening small islands.

What does it portend for Africa? Africa is expected to suffer extreme measures; for example, the temperature is expected to rise from 0.2C (0.4F) to 0.5C (0.7F) per decade. Warming will be very intense along the semi-arid regions of the Sahara and central southern Africa. Large parts of Africa will experience seasonal rains, which could translate to droughts, failed harvests, flooding and more desertification. The IPCC notes that climate change will worsen food crisis in Africa.

This paper seeks to examine food security in Africa from the premise of climate change. It argues in that in order for Africa governments to tackle food crisis, attention must be paid to the scourge of climate change. This is because efforts at solving the food security crisis with agricultural policies and laws will not achieve the desired results. It is therefore imperative for African governments to take the phenomenon of climate change very seriously and not to see it as one of the gimmicks of the western world. Already, the effect of climate change is being felt in Africa through desertification, flooding and landslides.

¹ Lecturer in Law, University of Lagos Nigeria and Postgraduate Researcher, Keele University, Keele Staffordshire ST5 5BG United Kingdom rige@unilag.edu.ng/asikiaige@gmail.com

The paper is therefore divided into five parts: part 1 will examine the concepts of food security and climate change; part 2 discusses food security crisis in Africa; part 3 examines the impact of climate change on Africa especially in relation to agricultural yield; part 4 will proffer solutions to the scourge of climate change and how food security can be achieved. A succinct conclusion ensues.

1.0 The Concepts of Food Security and Climate Change

The food question is one that we can ignore or gloss over only at our own peril. This is more so that food, as a currency of power occupies prominent place in international politics, as he who feeds the piper dictate the tunes.

According to Sinekam, food security is defined as follows:

‘Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and health life; its essential elements are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it’.

The concept of food security is nothing but an assurance that every country will have enough food supplies to meet its emergency requirements through interalia the establishment and maintenance of basic food stocks. The objective f food security is therefore food availability: to balance annual supply fluctuation and to improve food distribution.

The basic principle of climate change is simple. Several types of gas can reflect or trap heat, and so cause the world to warm up, rather as if a blanket had been wrapped around it, or as if it had been placed in a greenhouse (hence the so called greenhouse effect) these gases include carbon dioxide, methane, CFC gases, ozone, water vapour and nitrous oxide (laughing gas). These are known as ‘greenhouse gases’. Carbon dioxide is the main contributor to the greenhouse effect.

2.0 Food Security Crisis in Africa

The grave food crisis that is afflicting Africa where a great number of the world's hungry and ill live and where also a good number of the population produce about one third of the world's food imbalance which threaten to increase in the next few years is not only fraught with grave economic and social implications for the continent. Food insecurity is exacerbated by natural disasters, environmental degradation, poverty and debilitating hopelessness fuelled by increasing population, bad governance, stale agricultural policies and the developed world. It should be noted that the developed countries retain significant barriers to trade, particularly agriculture. Agricultural subsidies to OECD countries are worth over \$320bn a year; this is roughly equal to the GDP of Africa as a whole. Every cow in the European Union is subsidized to the tune of \$2 a day, the same amount that 450 million people in sub-Saharan Africa subsist daily.

3.0 The Impact of Climate Change on Africa

Africa feeds herself mainly through production by her army of family farmers, especially women, representing almost 70% of the population. This farming largely depends on direct rainfall and thus climate change is a unique threat here. The continent is already persistently affected by drought. Local droughts occur every year and continental crisis seems to occur at least once in a decade.

Africa is completely surrounded by water, but suffers annually from droughts that sometimes reach crisis levels. Coastal erosion, flooding and subsidence have already affected most of its coastline and problems are bound to increase unless urgent actions are taken to build resilience.

4.0 Towards Achieving Food Security in Africa

Food security or the right to food is both an individual and a collective right. It is sad that there is food insecurity in Africa despite its land mass and population. What we need to know is that food security cannot be achieved only through national obligations held by various African states towards those living under their jurisdiction. International co-operation and assistance under the UN Charter, international conventions, sharing of technology on produce preservation, good governance, and sound agricultural policies. Africa must join the in the fight to stem climate change as this is the only way to save her people from hunger and war.

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