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**Food Security or Food Sovereignty: Examining the Shifting Mosaic of Africa's Food Resiliency Blueprint in the Post Paris Era**

Okoh, Augustine I. Sadiq<sup>1</sup> & Owutuamor, Zechariahs Benapugha<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science,  
Benue State University, Makurdi,  
Benue State. Nigeria.  
Phone: 08067810286  
email: [sadiqok4u@yahoo.com](mailto:sadiqok4u@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Agricultural Extension & Management,  
Federal Polytechnic Ekowe,  
Bayelsa State. Nigeria.  
Phone: 08032225083  
email: [ilsignorzax@gmail.com](mailto:ilsignorzax@gmail.com)

# **Food Security or Food Sovereignty: Examining the Shifting Mosaic of Africa's Food Resiliency Blueprint in the Post Paris Era**

## **ABSTRACT**

Poverty in Africa is still alarming and undernourished. Hunger, intimately tied to vulnerability to stress is equally linked to food availability and accessibility. Finding the ultimate food paradigm to navigate the unequal exchange in food distribution within the continent is a major challenge. Two concepts compete for attention as the ultimate paradigm for endogenous food production: food security and food sovereignty. Food security, which lacks clarity of how to overcome the poverty in building a climate resilient/food secured future is the dominant approach in Africa. Can Africa thus confront this paradigm shift from agricultural trenches of food insularity or build new bridges in food rights for the smallholder farmer? We found that food security is a case of ideological subsumption aimed at material consumption, creating vicious cycles, wherein smallholder farmers are pushed to either debt or further degradations. Whilst food sovereignty aims at building resilience and stability, spurring inclusive growth through holistic integration of smallholder farmers leading to eco-efficient allocation of resources. There must be adaptation, rather than mere reactionary measures; and food secured future should be integrated into social safety nets in development policies to meet challenges that may arise.

**Keywords:** Climate resiliency, food justice, food security, food sovereignty, poverty alleviation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The year 2014 was celebrated as African Union's year of Agriculture and Food Security, in which African leaders rededicated themselves towards uplifting the living standards of the people by carrying out sweeping transformative actions aimed at improving food security. A major reason for this rededication is the gloomy picture of the future forecasted by different scientific investigations (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] 2014; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] 2014). In FAO projections, Africa will face a gloomy food insecure future in the 2030s, due in part, to agricultural output lagging behind population growth with extreme climate-related events also disrupting food production. Prior to this, between 1965 and 1990, agricultural production grew at an annual rate of 1.7%, while there was annual population growth average of 2.8% (Boon 2014). But with growing population, food supply is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity, as such, food imports and food aid increased substantially to offset the deficiencies. In early 1994, food imports were about 10% of the food consumed, but at the current growth rate, the food gap is projected to increase to more than nine times the present gap by 2020 (Agyare-Kwabi 2003).

The litany of problems such as natural hazards, conflict, agricultural dependency, weak governance, disease, hazards have increased the level of poverty experienced in the continent. Global Hunger Index of 2014 indicates hunger has remarkably improved globally, falling by 39% since 1990 (vonGrebmer et al. 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, over 70% of the population are engaged in the agricultural sector, however, the status of hunger in Africa is still 'extremely alarming' as 30% of the population remains undernourished. This indicates that Africa still lags behind other continents in food production, as such, finding an appropriate food policy to leapfrog food production is one of the defining challenges of African food politics. It is worthy

of note that hunger is intimately tied to vulnerability to stress, which is equally linked to food security.

### **Problem Statement**

A new social compass towards increasing agricultural production is, therefore, required if Africa must not only limit these crises but must also meet its Paris commitment and also the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of putting an end to hunger and poverty. The current lens for bridging the food gap is inadequate because it is fragmented and lacking in clarity for transforming agricultural production using endogenous growth variables. This prompts the questions of whether Africa can confront this paradigm shift from agricultural trenches of food insularity or build new bridges in food rights for the smallholder farmer. Can food sovereignty usher in a dawn of a food secured future without derailing the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)? What are the linkages of food security and food sovereignty in Africa's food sufficiency provisioning? Can autonomous African communities improve food production without the attendant Eurocentric dissociation of man from nature? What are the prospects of food security translating to food secured future such that ideological subsumptions are not matched by material consumption? To do justice to the issue raised here, the paper is organised into five sections. The preceding section is the introduction. Following hard on it is the second section on theoretical underpinnings. The third section is the fulcrum of the work. Here, we answer the critical question of whether or not, food sovereignty is the solution to Africa's food crisis. In the fourth section, we proffer solutions on how Africa can feed Africa, thus enabling us to draw our conclusions and recommendations.

### **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

Food security is part of the ongoing ideological subsumption of Africa's social ecologies to the logic of capital. What the mystificatory slogan of food security vehicles is not redemption from endless ecological crises, but one which only sings 'siren songs' of free market with the ulterior motive of recreating conditions for financilization and economization of nature (Cotula et al. 2009; Monbiot 2014). The reinvention of optimism in food security only creates a willing populace, attuned to upholding sanctity of the market which will sustain hegemonic aspirations and ideological purity of capital. This model of offshore agriculture (where mediation of nature is the norm) created conditions where agribusinesses have effectively dispossessed indigenous farmers, producing hunger and disease and destroying environments directly and by proxy (Wallace & Kock 2012). The resultant crises are then treated as due cause for expanding dispossession in new enclosures, whereby the means such dislocation is effected is through mystification and lionizing food security.

A major framework used to propagate this market-led drive is the food security concept. As a major liberal narrative, food security seeks to extract agro-ecological surplus from developing economies all in the name of altruistic impulse of making food available to the population, thus fostering new growth drivers. But, far less clear is the concrete step for transiting to ending hunger. Though, technology will guarantee short term gains from monoculture agriculture and Genetic Modification (GM), it is not the ultimate blueprint to end food insecurity. Quite to the contrary, it will reverse gains in food production based on the fact that monoculture and family farming are irreconcilably opposed. Food sovereignty on the other hand, is a related term, but with a different connotation, because it is a holistic people-centric concept developed by the global peasant's movement La via Campesina. Food sovereignty is an affirmation of peasant people's food rights, as it asserts peasants' rights to a clean and healthy environment according to their knowledge. The concept bestows on peasants the right to privatize their agricultural production to suit their families and societal needs. This is because the current food regime is

tilted towards industrialized agribusiness models, planned for vertical integration and dominance of all agricultural activities. States where this mercantilist logic is gaining less traction accorded higher priority to food sovereignty than food security. The reason is simple: Food sovereignty seeks to decentralize food production by placing control of the food system in the hands of the family farmers, where food is within the control of the poor, as such, access to it becomes more widespread.

To bring clarity to the hiatus in Africa's rationalization of food concept, this study adopted the O'Connor's Second Contradiction of Capitalism as the theoretical framework, thus, hinging on O'Connor's theorization as an offshoot of Marx's First Contradiction of Capitalism (Marx 1976), because O'Connor's theorization goes beyond Marx's to theorize changing relations fostered by heightened metabolism which has created an overproduction crisis. In clarifying Marx's theory, O'Connor (1998), whose theorization takes Marx' postulation a little further, is of the opinion that the first contradiction is all about capitalism's tendency towards overproduction crisis and in this vain, artificial intelligence and robots are replacing man, turning workplaces into mechanical outlets with mankind losing its grip of what is produced and how it is produced. The Second Contradiction of Capitalism is all about conditions of production and not the means of production, a situation which leads to underproduction crisis. Thus, assuming that capital accumulation is not attentive to the social cost of externalities either in the form of displacement of labour or economic crisis, that it created in the pursuit of profit. Hence, capital suffers a second contradiction resulting from not caring for the wellbeing of nature and workers, thereby eroding the very foundation upon which capital itself is built, because capital itself is neglectful of its environment, thus, fouling the natural conditions of production that it totally breaks down. The result of such breakdown is the likely effects of climate change wherein capital's underproduction crisis raises the cost of production, which also arises from increasingly depleted raw materials and from the need to invent and develop substitutes (such as biofuel production) and in finding new niches. This results in heightened economic crisis and labour movements leading to further agro-ecological crises. O'Connor's (1998) theory is deemed most appropriate for this study in that it examines the multidimensionality of the present agro-ecological crisis and its associated food complexities in Africa.

### **IS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY SOLUTION TO AFRICA'S FOOD CRISIS?**

Large agribusinesses are forcefully taking over vast swathes of arable land in the name of feeding the teeming population of hungry people in Africa (Cotula et al. 2007). Food sovereignty takes a long term view of this total control of the food system by multinational corporations and sees this as being detrimental to human health, as well as economic and socio-cultural wellbeing. Food sovereignty is opposed to market-led reforms, especially land and economic reforms, which displaces the poor for the rich and sees imperialism as being on the rise with the financialization of nature. This explains why it is vehemently opposed to progressive exhaustion of Africa's social ecologies in this new form of eco-imperialism which forces poor countries to adopt neoliberal agricultural policies. A classic example of this impediment to food sufficiency is the dislocation of farm families in Sudan, where South Korea acquired 690,000 hectares for wheat growing; the United Arab Emirates invested in more than 400,000 hectares to grow corn and other crops and Egypt also secured a similar area to grow wheat (Matondi et al. 2011).

Solution to Sudan's food crisis is not in the neo-liberalization of internal and external economies, but should rather seek policies based on the needs of peoples, societies and the environment, because there is an overlap between environmental change and food availability.

Where unfavourable conditions prevail, food is available but is equally a scarce commodity as access is controlled by economic means, as such, to make food abundant for such a community, there must be a deliberate creation of an environment that is favourable for farm families to strive. Furthermore, large swathes of land have been hurriedly grabbed for biofuel production in Mali and Niger, for which the purpose of these agricultural activities is not food security per se, but is a case of food security tenets used to promote material consumption, as their ultimate goal is an ideological subsumption aimed at material consumption.

Food sovereignty resolves this problem when all people have the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods (La Via Campesina 2009). Food sovereignty transcends cosmetic changes of food security which is simply concerned with short term food supply, but having access to food does not translate to a satisfying food, as a fulfilling food is only attainable with knowledge of being able to eat the next meal. Food sovereignty goes beyond this narrow vision to ensure that people have the right to define their own food and agricultural systems and by allowing people to determine their food system, they have the incentive to sustain the ecological integrity of their natural resources. In this way, the ordinary folks will determine their own path out of poverty, thus, bringing to an end, harmful policies which put profit before people and the environment.

With food insecurity in the world, the promise of food sovereignty is in agreement with the goals of SDGs, thus, it is a right step in the right direction for Africa. Putting an end to global hunger by 2030 is actually attainable, but such lofty goal is only attainable if the waste generated in the global food system is judiciously diverted to the less privileged world. In a world where one third of the food produced is wasted annually, ending global hunger is rhetoric and part of the unending global food paradox. If the world community is really desirous of ending global hunger as we are made to believe, we need not wait till 2030 to carry out a function which can end with loud actions, showing not just intent and resolve, but by reallocating the over \$750 billion wasted annually on food, not placed on tables in the high income countries to low income countries. It is only then that the journey towards ending global hunger can be won.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Infinite growth is not realistic in an ecologically finite world. For Africa to achieve eco-efficiency in food provisioning there must be a shift from the flawed extractive/production mentality based on eco-modernists vision of monoculture agriculture towards pro-environmental and post growth values. This is a society where there is shift from destruction entropic dynamics to equitable and eco-equivalent utilization of earth's resources. The agro-food regime arising from the ashes of this reprioritization of nature should not be based on market-led instruments for ecosystem protection, it should rather prod the continent's consumption and production towards greener technologies, which should not be at the expense of the people's material wellbeing. Shifts in the present architecture will require carefully crafted policies that realign food production towards environmental resources goals, thereby building resilience of the people to contend with climate related events ravaging the farm family's food output. This is in conformity with the 'Food Sufficiency Economy' (FSE) espoused by Okoh and Mailumo (2016), which is an eco-efficient and sufficient blueprint which burrowed bits and pieces from sufficiency economy practiced in Thailand and food sovereignty principles. This approach is in line with Africa's eco-biocommunitarianism world view where human ecological requirements are within their biophysical limits while also promoting eco-development (Okoh 2015). Africa's green future should be based on a food sufficiency economy, wherein man's total control of his food circumstance is consolidated.

When this concept is fully implemented, putting an end to hunger and poverty enshrined in the SDGs will not be another mirage or merry-go-round of broken promise of eliminating food insecurity, but, will be a model where food conceptualization deemphasizes deterritorialization and financialization, by removing avenues for agroecological contradictions that are now reinforcing neoliberalization of ecological reasoning.

Food security is a multi-layered, continental, national and local dialectics while food sovereignty strives for pro-poor and pro-ecological values, however, the imperative for an equitable blueprint and positive outlook on food is high with the decarbonization process of Paris. Africa's decarbonisation agenda must reflect commitment not just to nature, but also to present and future generations' food requirements. To meet SDGs goal of ending global poverty by 2030, Africa's food production must be placed firmly in the hands of the farm family and indeed, Africa's eco-efficient socialization of nature should follow a path wherein the farm family is inclusively involved in the journey to the green future.

Today, food resiliency is an ever changing issue with market-led rationalization, an enduring feature of its current conceptualization. In fact, Africa's food resilient subjects are subjects that have accepted the imperative not to resist or secure themselves from the difficulties they are faced with, but have instead adapted to its enabling conditions via the embrace of neoliberalism, whose dominant change agent and constant factor is capital. In place of covert drive for extraction of ecological surplus which is engendering metabolic rift, we have an overt 'accumulation by dispossession' eco-capitalist's epoch, dominated by open-ended tackling of food, security, climate risk, energy, water and poverty issues in the service of profit. This adaptation regime has tendencies for remorseless preoccupation with profit as the driver of the global economy, where the market is also seen largely as an equitable vehicle for clean energy transition, capable of elevating Africa to the green nirvana.

For now, it is a myth different from reality. To overcome this myth, Africa should use agriculture as the springboard of development, but this must be driven by the people using their abundant biomass to propel change. Since FSE is a concept for people-centred agricultural growth, and as such mindful of nature's wellbeing, it will engender a break from market-led obnoxious practices that are skewed towards large agribusinesses and oil firms. Given that industrialized agricultural and industrial practices cannot be self-sustaining in the face of sparse resources and energy inflows, it means production must be ecologically sustainable. Dematerialization is therefore necessary since materialization of critical natural capital for efficiency gains will lock the present generation into a fossil fuel dependent future with the main purpose of gaining in efficiency, which does not always imply reduction in total material and energy input. Quite to the contrary, it might increase materialization. To achieve efficient use of energy some level of (de)materialization is needed, still, this is no recipe for materialization.

Hence, Africa should reorient societal aims by reappraising its value system. As such, a re-examination of the motive for economic interaction with the extractive firms is required. Sustainable resource use must aggregate different values, creating a synergy and trade-off of values, and balancing the best values from different societies to bring about equitable distribution of resources. This is where agricultural practices of smallholder farmers are developed to sustain population growth. It is one where their outsized carbon footprints do not undermine development nor are they drivers of negative change detrimental to human wellbeing. Rather, they should add value to nature with the purpose of reproducing an amiable environment for the cohabitation of all occupants of the planet.



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