

PROMOTING FOOD BANK AS A WAY OF ENSURING FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Erhabor Aimien Gloria¹, Erhabor Igbinosa Norris^{2*}

¹University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Nigeria

²Department of Health Safety and Environmental Education University of Benin, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper reviewed the concept of food bank; the food security situation in Nigeria; the public health issues arising from food insecurity and sources of food for charitable organizations. The researcher advocates for an exceptional attention to be given to food bank as a system to ameliorate the health complication attributed to hunger and malnutrition. The food insecurity is emphatically high for Nigeria. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the long term potential of the food bank as a model to reduce food insecurity rate especially as food bank has the propensity to expand across the country.

Keyword: Food insecurity, food bank, and hunger

NİJERYA'DA GIDA GÜVENCESİNİ SAĞLAMAK İÇİN GIDA BANKASI TEŞVİKİ

Özet

Bu çalışmada; Nijerya'da gıda güvencesini sağlamak için gıda bankası kavramını gıda güvensizliği, gıda güvencesinden doğan kamu sağlığı sorunları ve hayırsever kuruluşlar ile ilişkileri incelenmiştir. Acil gıda ihtiyaçları için; araştırmacılar tarafından ortaya konan açlık ve yetersiz beslenme ve sağlık sorunları komplikasyonunun iyileştirilmesi için bir sistem olarak gıdaların gıda bankasına verilmesinin sağlanması çok önemlidir. Gıda yetersizliği yani gıda güvencesizliği Nijerya'da oldukça önemli bir problemdir. Bu nedenle, gıda bankası sisteminin ülke genelinde genişletilmesi ve özellikle gıda güvencesizliği oranını azaltmak için bir model olarak geliştirilmesi önemlidir. Gıda bankası konusunun ülke genelinde uzun vadeli potansiyelini incelemek ve geliştirmek çok önemlidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gıda güvensizliği, gıda bankası, açlık

* Corresponding author / Yazışmalardan sorumlu yazar

 norris.erhabor@uniben.edu

INTRODUCTION

The recent recession threat posed on the Nigeria economy initiates the need to close the gap and manage effectively the resources available to boost the economy. One of such resources which have been wasted and abused is food. Food is a fundamental human right and not just a need; this is as stated in the 1948 universal declaration of human right. Although this fundamental right is not existent among large majority of the populace in Nigeria as the rate of hunger and malnutrition is observed to be high. Thus the scenario that leads to hunger and malnutrition among the populace of a country is known as food insecurity. Therefore food insecurity occurs due to the unavailability, inaccessibility, instability or inability for food utilization efficiency by individuals in a society. Although, there is a good domestic production of food in Nigeria but the major issue with food security in the country has to do with the poor storage, marketing and distribution arrangement which greatly reduce the availability supplies of food by the market (1). This food insecurity is a reality in Nigeria as revealed by the Africa Health, Human, and Social Development information service (AfriDev.Info) and Africa Coalition on Maternal, New Born and Child Health that Nigeria with 33 points out of 100, was placed 86th country globally and 14th in Africa on global food security index (2). Furthermore, the Africa multiple indicator scorecard on hunger and food security in 2014 revealed that Nigeria top the list of 11 Economic Community of West Africa States ECOWAS countries with 12.1 million people in a state of hunger.

Food security is a global issue giving rise to health inequalities affecting population at all stages of life. It is seen as one of the social determinants of health (3). Consequently, due to poverty and food insecurity, individuals and household lack the capacity or finance to access healthy foods in adequate amounts thereby posing health risk for them. Thus food insecure individuals have a less varied, nutritionally inadequate diet with lower intake of fruits and vegetables. It has also been linked to obesity, diabetes, dietary nutrient deficiencies. Studies still linked food insecurity and poorer academic performance, school absenteeism, suspension from school, involvement

in fights, headaches, depressions and other public health issues (3).

Accordingly, the FAO reported that there is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone, yet 842 million still go hungry (4). Also lots of consumables, surplus food and groceries are lost through waste. Meanwhile foods grown, processed, produced and manufactured are never consumed due to failure to harvest, post harvest losses, product disposal due to expiration, overproduction and damaged (5). Consequently, such scenario shows the rate in which food are being wasted in the world and still the rate of hungry and malnourished individuals and households keeps increasing steadily. As a result of such events, there is an urgent need to cut the spread of poverty, hunger, malnourishment and wastages in Nigeria and the world. It can therefore be stated that reducing the prevalence of hunger can cause ripples of positive changes throughout a community. Thus one pertinent form of social protection which is likely to be of growing importance involves the redistribution of unused, surplus or donated food to those who need it (6). This brings to a fore the emphasis of food bank as an urgent step towards ameliorating the health implications of hunger and a measure taken to improve the food insecurity situation in the country especially among the poor. Food bank is seen as a vehicle which enables many of the individuals and families to bridge the gap between hopelessness and renewed hope and enable them back to their feet. In pursuance of this concept of food bank in ameliorating the public health implications arising from food insecurity, the following will be discussed therein; the concept of food bank; food insecurity in Nigeria; Health implication of food insecurity in Nigeria and sources of food for charitable organizations.

CONCEPT OF FOOD BANK

Food bank has emerged as a frontline response to the growing problem of food poverty and inequality. This food bank is necessary in Nigeria because of the inequality faced between the rich and the poor which creates a big gap in the accessibility to essential resources especially food. Consequently, food bank is seen as a centralized ware house or clearing houses registered as

nonprofit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing surplus food (donated shared) free of charge either directly to hungry people or to frontline social agencies which provide supplementary food and meals (7). This concept is sometime known as food pantries, shelves closets or soup kitchens. Food banking can be said to be in its infancy stage in Nigeria compared to what it entails in developing countries.

However, the first food bank was set up in 1967 Phoenix, Arizona in the United State of America. It started when John van Hengel decided to store food donations in a centralized warehouse where he could distribute same food to the regions hungry people (6). Meanwhile, it started with the philosophy of "simply to marry the interests of the food industry to cope effectively with surplus, unsellable food with those of grassroots poverty organization" (7). This shows that society as Nigeria which is modern, wasteful could act as one that provides resources to others who lack the capacity to eradicate their hunger impromptu or provide food aid to people who could otherwise not afford to feed themselves and their family often as a result of a temporary financial crisis resulting from redundancy, eviction, benefits changes/delay, unexpected large bills amongst others. Food banks are controlled either by charities, community group and churches or private individuals (8). They usually use "care" or "welfare" professionals and organizations such as social workers, doctors, health visitors, citizens' advice bureau and especially nurses who issue vouchers to people in acute need of food. Consequently, individuals and household access food from food bank through the following medium such as meal provided in a variety of agencies such as soup kitchens, shelters, hostels, school meal programs and community kitchen or directly from the banks or their outlets (pantries, depots, churches) which involves standing in queues and receiving an average a 3-4 days supply of groceries (7).

Therefore, it should be noted that food bank gained international recognition in 2006 when the Global Banking Network located in Chicago, Illinois was established (6). This is a nonprofit organization funded primarily by wealthy individuals and corporations including retailers and manufacturers. However, there are over 20 countries with active food bank groups under

their umbrella and Nigeria is inclusive. Food bank Nigeria is the body responsible for food banking in the country and they are clearing houses which coordinate and maximize the distributions of food through identified channels and food program (9). They assume the duty of providing food and relief programs with a reliable source of food. Their mission is to effectively address identified food gaps in the country through sourcing and distribution of food, appropriate innovative program, education and advocacy. From this brief background, it can be inferred that food bank Nigeria is geared towards emulating the model existing in the United States. This food banking system if well articulated, structured and effectively implemented, will go a long way in enabling anyone who experience hunger or in need of food assistance, can readily access timely, adequate, appropriate and sufficient food to see them safely through in the time of need. But the reality on ground actually shows that food banking in Nigeria is at its infancy stage and more need to be done to promote it in order to curb the public health issues that arise due to food insecurity in the country.

FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Since the 1974 World Food Conference, food security has developed and various countries have taken cognizance of this pertinent resource that affect the existence of her citizens. In this regard, food security is seen as a state of affairs where all people at all time have access to safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and productive life. However, it can be fully understood when analyzed from three dimensions: Food availability (which is achieved when there is sufficient supply and presence of food in large amount); accessibility (this is ensured when households and all individuals within them have adequate resources to obtain appropriate foods for nutritious diet); while food utilization is established when the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. The physiological make up of individuals tend to influence the food utilization. Although FAO revealed a fourth dimension which is food stability due to the fact that even if an individual food intake is adequate today, he or she is still considered to be insecure if there is an inadequate access to food on a periodic basis therefore risking a deterioration of their nutritional status (10). It can

be observed that for food security objectives to be realized all four dimensions must be fulfilled simultaneously.

However, 70 percent of Nigeria population is living below the poverty line from the United State Central Intelligence Agency 2010 estimated report (11). Accordingly, a score card report to reveal hunger in Africa stated that Nigeria has the highest number of hungry people in West Africa as 12.1 million are hungry or undernourished in the country (2). This report also revealed that Nigeria with 33 points out of 100, placed a distant 86th country globally and 14th in Africa on the global food security index. The same rating also showed that South Africa is the only country from Africa in the global top 40 of most food secure country at 39 and this can be attributed to their well structured and efficient food programs especially the food banking system being employed in the country. Furthermore, the World Global Hunger index in 2011 reported that Nigeria contributes 58 percent in the global hunger problem and unfortunately, little or nothing is being done to reverse this ugly trend (12). This background discussed herein describes explicitly the food security state in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, achieving food security through the four dimensions is being deterred severely by various factors. Poverty rate reduces the accessibility of food by the general public due as a result of the reduced purchasing power concomitant with poverty thereby resulting in hunger and malnutrition. Thus, the key determinant for food security in Nigeria is insufficient income to dedicate to household food budget especially among the poor. Other factors include physical, economic, socio-cultural and political environmental influences (13). In pursuance of this, scholars such as Abdulrahman and Adebayo confirmed the existence of food insecurity in Nigeria (14, 15). Although the availability of food tends to be stable due to the increasing rate of importation, but the most prominent aspect which leads to malnutrition and hunger is the accessibility of these foods. There tend to be an uneven ability to access food by people due to the exuberant food prices, poverty, unemployment and the uneven distribution of resources. In terms of the stability of food in the country, various factors play huge roles such as political instability especially with the high level of violence (terrorism) in the

northern part of the country. According to the National Emergency Management Agency report, 65 percent of the Northern farmers had migrated because of insecurity they face (16). This result to instability in the food supplied and available to the populace due to attacks these farmers that produce major crops such as beans, onions, pepper are exposed to.

Meanwhile, another pertinent factor that influences the food security in the country is climate change. This is evident through multiple stresses such as limited water resources which leads to drought, loss of biodiversity and air pollution have all increased the sensitivity to climate change and reduce resilience in agricultural sector thereby affecting the availability of food to the populace in the country. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Water resources, food crisis is unconnected with the fact that Nigeria's agriculture is mainly rainfed and she has not taken full advantage of its irrigation potential estimate of between two and 2.5 million hectares (17). Ojo and Adebahyo further asserted that the areas which are efficiently recognized for irrigation is estimated to be about 220,000 hectares or less than one percent of the total area under crop (17). This shows that irrigation has minimal impact on improving agricultural production in the country especially in areas prone to drought due to climate change. Also other extreme weather conditions culminating from climate change such as flooding, spread of pest and diseases, heat wave, hurricane, storm, erratic rainfall also deter the production of food. Thus the Gombe state emergency management agency in 2007 reported that 999 farmlands in the state were affected by flood which destroyed yams, maize, vegetables, sugar cane and cassava farms. To this end, the various scenario cited in this paper above shows that Nigeria food insecurity is looming and urgent steps need to be taken to curb its adverse aftermath on the general public in the country.

SOURCES OF FOOD FOR CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Food banking is observed to be at its infancy stage in Nigeria compared to other countries like South Africa, Ghana, United State, United Kingdom, Canada amongst others. The distribution of donated food by registered charities and NGOs is

well established practice in South Africa and other developed countries, this is attributed to the large centralized food bank which was established in 2005 in order to facilitate food distribution and reach greater numbers of food insecure individuals in these countries (6). It can therefore be inferred that an effective implementation of the food bank can play a major role in meeting the food need of the vulnerable populations.

However, nongovernmental organization which has the responsibility of providing food for the hungry do require some essential services and structures such as buildings and finance to pay staff. But the need for food is sacrosanct to the service they render to humanity. The limit of an organization's food supply often defines the scope of its operation. In this regard, as a guide for the Nigeria society or stakeholders in the food banking system, it is pertinent to highlight the six primary source of food for charity organization. They include:

-Food drive: This is the primary source of food for food bank. A food drive maybe entirely a local effort or it may be part of a longer statewide or national campaign coordinated by company or organization in order to offer donations through food to the various food banks (18). This food obtained here tends to have a very short shelf life, making it most suitable for programs like the food banking system.

-Purchasing: Many charities can raise money to be used to purchase food. This medium of getting food can lead to economies of scale, as buying in bulk is often less expensive but even in bulk food prices, purchasing by itself will not usually yield enough food to meet the need in a community on a sustainable basis (19).

-Prepared food and perishable food: Prepared food is seen as left over ready to eat food from restaurants, cafeterias, grocery stores, caterers, hotels, events and trade shows. Volunteers usually store the food in containers that are immediately refrigerated or frozen (18). For perishable food such as meat, fresh produce, milk, eggs, cheese, bakery item are usually contributed by grocery stores, produce stores, local farmers, home and community garden, food pantry gardens,

wholesalers, farmers market and road side produce stores who do not want to haul their food back home at the day's end and will gladly donate surplus to food bank.

-Gardens: food banks can get food from donations of individual home garden, community gardens. Food banks or pantries can also provide seeds and seedling to their clients to grow their own home gardens (18). This is done in order to increase family sufficiency and self esteem

-Gift cards: Gift cards from grocery or supermarket stores can supplement the donated and purchased food that food bank or pantries distribute to families because gift cards are easier and more efficient way to make money than food (18). That is to say, gift cards by pass considerable time, labour and cost because food banks do not have to buy, move, store, sort, pack, pay for or physically distribute as much food.

-Food bank and food rescue organization: Food banks and rescue agencies generally do not serve families directly but provide food at low or no cost for emergency food providers, who in turn serve low income households. They usually stock prepared and perishable food (18). They are non profit organizations that deal primarily with food manufacturers and distributors, gleaning product in quantities that would overwhelm most individual charities (19). Charitable organizations that use food bank are similar to purchasing although food bank's inventory changes more quickly than that of a grocery store and the food cost less in a food bank.

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES ARISING FROM FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is a public health issue as it affects the entire population of a community, state, country or the world. Thus, this food insecurity tends to deter or diminish the public health status of a country because various health complications arises from such scenario. However, income determines food security of an individual or household, because as income drops and food budget shrink, food choices tend to shift towards cheaper produce, thereby making those with low income nutritionally vulnerable. Thus they

tend to compromise quality and variety in order to fill their bellies. This discussed scenario brings about the various health complications from food insecurity such as hunger, obesity, malnutrition and other health complications that affects the general public. Meanwhile, food insecurity can be inferred to be a condition that signifies either hunger resulting from problems with availability, access and use or vulnerability to hunger. Therefore hunger can be said to be a subset of food insecurity. Consequently, some specific indicators of food insecurity in a given region has been identified and categorized to include the number of hungry people, malnourished people, underweight children under five years of age, proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption and people suffering from micronutrient deficiency (16). Thus, hunger which is seen as one of the main indicators can be defined as an uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient food energy consumption. Therefore, hunger tends to lead to poor health by increasing the severity of infectious disease, which results in the risk of dying from a disease once ill.

Accordingly, the Ottawa Charter for health promotion asserted that food is recognized as a prerequisite for health (3). In this regards there are lots of literatures linking health issues to food insecurity. They include mental illness, depression, impaired fetal development, child growth delay, mineral and micronutrient deficiencies, malnutrition, chronic diseases and nutritional intake (3, 20-22). People who are food insecure are more likely to report poor health, of having poor functional health, restricted activity and multiple chronic conditions of suffering from major depression and distress and of having poor social support (22). Unfortunately, pregnant and breastfeeding women and infants are often the most severely affected by food insecurity (20). This is due to the fact that women child bearing age tend to acquire more nutritional and health needs than other age and gender groups due to the physiological demands during pregnancy and child birth. Also children especially below five years of age are more vulnerable to disease. Thus inadequate nutrition among pregnant women impacts on children's growth and development throughout their life cycle. In furtherance of this, Nestel reported that short stature among women,

a symptom of past hunger was associated with higher risk of preterm and difficult birth which affected foetal development (21). Therefore, it can be ascertained that maternal malnutrition affects the health and nutrition of children, which could impact on the cognitive development and school performance of these children, with negative consequences continuing into adulthood.

Moreover, the availability and absorption of micronutrients is one of the most important determinants of health because deficiencies in Vitamin A, Iron, Zinc, Folic acid are the main contributors to the world food burden. These deficiencies results in a weakened immunity among young children and adult making them susceptible to infectious diseases. To this end, severe scenario of food insecurity has the attributes to increase the mortality rate of a particular country due to the health complications associated with food insecurity and hunger.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In view of the various health complications and the embarrassment associated with food insecurity in Nigeria, this brings to fore the need to reiterate and advocate for an urgent program that will alleviate or ameliorate the food insecurity challenges faced by the populace. Thus, food banking is proposed by the researchers in meeting the food needs of the populace in order to avoid a bridge in their human right to food and make Nigeria be at par with other advanced country in term of food security.

Therefore, the researchers proposed the following suggestions. Nigeria should fully adopt the American food banking model and encourage their cooperation with the Global Food Banking network in order to ensure effective and efficient distribution of food to the hungry. This will help in increasing the number of institutions committed to food security and streamlining food donation process.

Private sectors such as food manufacturers and retailers should be encouraged to contribute the food banking model expounds by the Global Food Banking Network and Food Bank of Nigeria. Also federal, state and local governments should commit money and political will to achieve the broader aims of the food banking system in Nigeria. In this regard, more research needs to

be done in order to ensure the effective and efficient adaptation of the food banking system in Nigeria. This study implication on Nurses is that Nurses need to become more aware of food security especially on the health complications culminating from hunger and malnutrition and then need for proper nutrition. Nurses can also act as agents to propagate health information on the adequate dieting.

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Son Kontrol Listesi

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