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Nigeria, Factor 11: Malnutrition

## **NIGERIA'S FOOD INSECURITY [Malnutrition]**

### **Introduction**

A typical subsistence farm family in Nigeria is a little family that probably can't afford three meals a day and depends on their farm produce for feeding and to gain a good living for the family and children. A subsistence farm family consists of people that are living together and depend on their farm to eat. They probably don't have enough to eat if they don't cultivate their farm land. Some of them have education while others do not. Some might place their children in government owned schools in order to afford the school fees and requirement for their child's education. Most of the farm families don't have access to health care because they might not have the finances. A large amount of farm land is occupied by subsistence farmers in Nigeria, mostly as heritage from their parents or grandparents in order to earn a living for themselves. They usually grow crops that can provide income for them and crops they eat, for example; corn, yams, ginger, groundnuts, palm oil, guinea corn, soya beans, and many more. They mostly practice small scale farming because they lack equipment and machinery to produce large scale farm produce. They usually produce enough to feed themselves and sell a little to be able to meet some of their needs.

### **Malnutrition in Nigeria**

Malnutrition is a devastating problem in Nigeria, not only to its people, but also to its security and economy. Although malnutrition in Nigeria has been a problem for the past years, it's improving, yet some children are still stunted and some mothers are malnourished. The lack of micronutrients in the country such as vitamin A and iodine are also sources and causes of malnutrition in Nigeria. Lack of quality education, ignorance, and lack of access to good and quality health service and care can also be considered as causes of malnutrition. Nigeria, a country known as the giant of Africa, has some great treasures such as lead, petroleum and crude oil, but it also has a large problem in the case of food malnutrition to some urban and mostly rural communities of the country. Most children suffer from malnutrition in the country. Nigerian children in the rural areas lack food security and are therefore malnourished, undernourished and food insecure.

The ministry had conducted a survey on all the 36 states of Nigeria. The results show that most of the malnourished children are located in the northern part of the country, which was also caused by the insecurity in the northern part of Nigeria. Research has shown that the north-west part of Nigeria has the highest population of malnutrition. This is a problem that can be resolved if everyone in the region can work hard and do what he/she is supposed to do in order to prevent malnutrition. The battle between security and the insurgents has turned the north to a comfortable place of refuge for them. This has caused native people to go without food and to be malnourished, resulting in some people leaving the country and moving to other neighboring countries in search of nourishing food. This has also brought so much discomfort to some citizens in the north. This problem has to be tackled as quickly as possible in order to prevent immigration in the near future because the problem of insecurity in the north which is causing

food malnutrition and starvation might just make some citizens start to migrate to other countries. I think the government should be able to handle this problem and hope it doesn't get worse.

The government should also be able to help supply some tools, equipment, and machinery. This will help subsistence farmers produce good and large amounts of crops to the nation so that the level of malnutrition in the country may be reduced to a lesser level. Based on firsthand experience, as a citizen of Nigeria, I observe that many Nigerian youth, children and even some parents lack education about food nutrition, malnutrition and the effect of malnutrition in Nigerian communities. The government still needs to provide good education to be able to fight malnutrition in the country. Nigeria is a country that has enough land to grow crops that can feed twice its population, but ignorance, lack of quality education and laziness among individuals and youth have made malnutrition common in the country.

Malnutrition has caused Nigeria not to progress in many sports. There are youth that are good in sports all over Nigeria, but you don't expect someone that is malnourished to go and win a medal in the Olympics or any worldwide sport events. When citizens of a nation are malnourished, the nation is malnourished because the citizens make up the country. You don't expect to fight Ebola when you are malnourished. When citizens are malnourished the country only keeps getting weaker instead of getting stronger. The more Nigeria fails to fight malnutrition, the more it loses its value and pride both continentally and worldwide even within its citizens. The production of crops in the agricultural sector has gone down in recent years. Adding to the fact that Nigeria is the most oil exporting country in Africa, more people lose interest in agriculture and prefer to study and work in the oil sector because it has more economy value and is financially valued. When citizens abandon interest in agriculture to develop more interest in oil production, then malnutrition has been given the chance to conquer the nation.

Many hospitals in the north have had to treat many children with diseases and sickness caused by malnutrition, the sum total of the processes involved in the ingestion and utilization of food substances by which growth, repair and maintenance of the body are accomplished. Nutritious food are the food that contains all the seven types of food; carbohydrate, protein, vitamins, minerals, fat and oil, water and roughages including fruits and vegetables that help our body grow in a good way to keep us away from sickness and diseases that can critically affect us both physically and mental, a certain research from the UN states that malnutrition causes the most non-communicable diseases that affect humans. There is no doubt Nigeria is a large oil producing and exporting country, but could use some technical assistance from the world strongest countries to help in cases like malnutrition. The world Nutrition Situation in the fifth report stated that,

“Almost 147 million pre-school children in some developing countries are stunted and Nigeria is said to have the population of 10 million pre-school children in such cases”.

An organization in Nigeria known as the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) which has been in Nigeria since 2003, stated that “all children, particularly under the age of five, have a fundamental right of access to good nutrition”. This doesn't seem to be apparent presently in Nigeria. There has been some emphasis growing around the country about good nutrition, which has in recent years turned malnutrition and good nutrition into a rising issue. Some experts stated that a child needs to get six months of good breastfeeding, 24 months of complementary feeding and consuming some good food nutrients, such as vitamins in order to help them grow into healthy, happy and strong adults.

It has been realized in recent years that malnutrition in Nigeria can only be reduced in children and women only by following and obeying the rules of good nutrition. That entails a preventive approach which doesn't seem to be obeyed by some citizens who prefer to do their meals the way they think they like it, without listening to the good nutrition rules or bothering about how what they eat affects their body. However, we need assistance from the international community and organizations in order to tackle malnutrition in the northern part of Nigeria and also in states sharing borders with Niger republic.

The UNICEF expert stated that in Katsina State alone, more than 45,000 children who were suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) have received treatment at some designated stabilization centre. It was stated that about 141,043 others were rehabilitated last year across 11 states in the country; this is a good sign of trying to stop severe malnutrition in the country. The report states:

“Nutritional activities should be increased to eradicate malnutrition in northern Nigeria considering the fact that the northern part of the country has the highest incidence of malnutrition, if compared to the southern part.” The children admitted into hospitals for treated of diseases caused by severe malnutrition should be given special attention and special feeding, and therapeutic care to help them. Outpatients Therapeutic Care Program (OTP) are one-stop shops that are supposed to be located in the community to provide children with the access to both nutritional help and medical service such as childhood immunizations”. (UNICEF)

Nigerian youth need to keep away from the habit of laziness and apply hard work into their daily activity in the aspect of food, nutrition and agriculture. There should be the willingness to cultivate, not to be forced to cultivate. The youth also need encouragement and opportunities to succeed and help rebuild a country of good nutrition and agricultural produce. The government should create awareness programs, job opportunities, build good schools and do things that will motivate the youth to try to protect themselves and their community from malnutrition. From my hometown where I grew up as a child, malnutrition is just a way of living, wake up daily, eat any food that you get and move, disregarding whether the food is good or not, healthy or not, they have no other choice. All they need is awareness, education, encouragement which will give them a brighter future. The federal, state and local government needs to rise and take over their responsibilities. The people voted, but they don't see any impact. The government has to take good care of its citizens, whether in the urban or rural areas; they are all humans and have the right to all good things in life. They don't have the opportunity to get good nutrition daily. Normally, Christmas is the day they get to eat well-nourished food. What is it to eat a well-nourished food 1 day in 365 days? It feels like normal to them, because that was how they were born, that is how they grew up. Malnutrition has played a major role in destroying the rural areas.

### **Summary**

Malnutrition, for me, is a major factor in the lives of many Nigerians and I think it should be placed as the second major agenda of the federal government behind security. I recommend that the federal government of Nigeria takes the matter of malnutrition seriously in order to stop or reduce the rate of food insecurity in the country. The government should set up projects that will improve and secure food supply to the rural areas. They should identify problems and areas of food insecurity and malnutrition in the country for more success and for the good image of the country. Communities should also play a major

role in providing food security for themselves and fight malnutrition and undernourishment. Local and state governments should try to implement rules around their surroundings in order to protect the food of that community. Children should be given the chance to gain access to high and standard education. Children are the future, and therefore are supposed to be educated on food security, malnutrition, and under-nourishment in order to prevent ignorance of food security in the nation. When every child and adult is educated, it makes it easier to fight food insecurity and malnutrition; a typical subsistence family can be involved in implementing these if only they get the necessary level of education needed. An old African proverb, “A hungry man is an angry man,” needs to be taken seriously.

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