

Abigail Shaka  
Urbandale High School  
Urbandale, IA USA  
Nigeria, Malnutrition  
August 15th, 2025

## **Nigeria: A place of Education, Abundance of Resources, and Malnutrition**

Nigeria is one of the most well-known countries in Africa. Along with other countries like Egypt, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, these countries are among the first that come to mind when people think of Africa. Africa is home to an abundance of natural resources. Proof of this is a direct sentence from the UNEP's website, where in the first paragraph it states, "Africa is rich in natural resources ranging from arable land, water, oil, natural gas, minerals, forests, and wildlife. The continent holds a huge proportion of the world's natural resources, both renewables and non-renewables." ([UNEP.org](https://www.unep.org/)). Yet even though Nigeria has modernized and is an abundant country, it's also a country that is facing a nutritional crisis. In fact, 40% of children under 5 have a stunted growth rate due to this, and 8% of those children end up wasted.

The term malnutrition stems from the Latin-derived prefix 'mal', which means bad, and nutrition. In literal terms, malnutrition is bad nutrients. This paper will cover the multitude of factors that cause such extreme malnutrition in Nigeria. To start to understand why malnutrition has become such a significant problem, let's first start with the demographic that's most impacted, the people.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a population of 236,747,130 people. ([CIA.gov](https://www.cia.gov/)) Not only is the country known for its large population, but also its education system. Nigeria is ranked eleventh out of the top educated countries in Africa ([GlobatexResearch.com](https://www.globatexresearch.com/)), with a literacy rate of 63.2%, 53.3% women, and 73.7% men. ([CIA.gov](https://www.cia.gov/)) With the continual increase in population, there are structures and traditions that are still upheld even by the wealthiest individuals within Nigeria. Families follow the extended family structure. Meaning that the responsibilities of raising children and providing financial support does not fall solely on the married couple, but also are taken upon by extended family, close relatives, and/or even by the community. ([demographic-research.org](https://www.demographic-research.org/))

The extended family structure has proven beneficial for communities, as it allows for a stronger support system and foundation. The family structure enables positive child development, as it provides a steady emotional support system to help raise children. However, before places in Nigeria started modernizing, there was pressure put on the wedded couple to bear more children. According to ([demographic-research.org](https://www.demographic-research.org/)), this pressure stemmed from traditional beliefs and the need to continue the lineage and history that many families were proud of. ([demographic-research.org](https://www.demographic-research.org/)) Outdated practices like polygamy, which is the practice of having more than one wife, were common for these households because it encouraged the idea of a more rooted lineage. ([demographic-research.org](https://www.demographic-research.org/))

One thing that contributed to the decline of the extended family structure was modernization. As Nigeria continues to advance, the ideals of the extended family structure become less important as married couples, whilst still being connected to relatives and grandparents, choose to move into cities or urban areas to live closer to better job opportunities. ([demographic-research.org](https://www.demographic-research.org/)) While these practices are not as common in the current day, modernization is just one factor that contributed to the decline of the extended family structure. According to the W.H.O., previous studies have shown that household structure, such as nuclear and extended family, was associated with children's nutritional status (worldhealthorganization). It's been established, though, that children's health in Nigeria has declined.

According to UNICEF, 1 in 9 children do not survive past their fifth birthday, whilst 1 in 16 children pass away within their first year of life. There are 105 million children and adolescents in Nigeria ([UNICEF.COM](https://www.unicef.com)); this demographic makes up nearly half of Nigeria's population, and yet children are still facing the more severe end of the issue with malnutrition and poverty altogether.

So many countries, not just Nigeria, are facing high percentages of their populations below the poverty line. Both poverty and malnutrition are the result of a multitude of historic and current actions. Yet even though Nigeria has modernized and has an abundance, malnutrition and poverty are still a threat to the Nigerian people.

The cases of Malnutrition are not decreasing in Nigeria either; in fact, it can be predicted to only increase in future years if not dealt with accordingly. Cases of malnutrition in children, especially, have increased by 24% between 2023 and 2024 alone (John, et. al). According to the CIA, this spike in malnutrition cases could very well be due to the population strain the country is facing, but in this paper, several other possibilities will be discussed. From the underpaid workers and the overpriced goods, as well as the population strain, these factors all contribute to why Nigeria is continuing to struggle with malnutrition.

According to the World Health Organization, Malnutrition refers to deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, an imbalance of essential nutrients, or impaired nutrient utilization ([worldhealthorganization.com](https://www.worldhealthorganization.com)). This means that Malnutrition cannot be boiled down to just “not eating enough.” Malnutrition is, at its root, an imbalance of nutrients that is vital for the body to function properly. Obesity is just as much an example of Malnutrition as emaciation is. There are multiple forms of malnutrition. Obesity and emaciation are just two examples; iron deficiency is also a form of malnutrition. However, the case of malnutrition isn't the over- or underconsumption of nutrients for the Nigerian people; it's the fact that there is no opportunity to access these nutrients in the first place. People can't afford food.

In Nigeria, 75.8% of the land is arable ([CIA.GOV](https://www.cia.gov)). From small villages to busy city streets, many people take part in agriculture for a multitude of reasons. Whether to save money on food, feed their communities, or sell crops for profit. Thanks to Nigeria's rich soils and minerals, farmers can grow a wide diversity of crops. For example, cassava, yams, maize, oil palm fruit, rice, taro, bananas, vegetables, sorghum, and groundnuts ([CIA.GOV](https://www.cia.gov)) are just some of the diverse cash crops grown in the country.

Agriculture is not the only form of business in Nigeria. Crude oil, coal, tin, columbite, rubber products, and wood are other sources of profit ([CIA.GOV](https://www.cia.gov)). This shows how Nigeria's wealth of natural resources can create a variety of job opportunities and can contribute to economic growth. Trade is another form of business in Nigeria.

If Nigeria has so many agricultural practices, though, and such a diversity in foods, how can malnutrition have become as large a problem as it is? Some believe that technological advancements have improved living conditions globally, and while that's true for some places, this isn't the case in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country that is the perfect example of the urban bias. Urban bias is the uneven development in policy and resource allocation that favors urban areas over rural ones. Typically, these policies include setting low prices for agricultural goods while subsidizing urban industries and food, which hurts rural farmers.

Nigeria has a labor force of 113.35 million people. This includes people over the age of 15 who are either working or seeking work. ([CIA.GOV](https://www.cia.gov)) With such a large available working force, paying any higher than minimum wage would result in increased taxation from the government or less profits for companies. Since businesses prioritize profit, many workers remain stuck earning minimum wages. Meanwhile, food prices continue to rise, while wages remain stagnant

This forces people who are in the workforce to work harder and longer hours as a result just to make enough to feed themselves or their families. Food prices are so high that it takes exhausting labor to earn enough to get by. It is clear that the only reason many communities continue to hold strong is not because of government subsidies, but because of the support they receive from their neighbors, children, and friends.

Overall, the world is still facing major issues that threaten economic stability and unity, and poverty remains one of the biggest challenges that people face. In Nigeria alone, 40.1% of the population lives below the poverty line. ([CIA.GOV](#)) Government officials are ignoring rural communities in Nigeria, causing the infrastructure in these rural areas to slowly deteriorate, while making it harder for people to reach markets to buy or even sell food. Roads are too dangerous to traverse, and people have resorted to extreme lengths to try and survive in a world where food is a luxury for some.

Why is this? Well, Nigeria has been struggling with political turmoil for years. Although Nigeria now follows a democracy, similar to the United States, this has not always been the case. For much of its history, the country functioned under military rule. Nations with unstable governments and corrupt political leaders have historically struggled to thrive, and Nigeria is no exception. With a deep-rooted history in conflicts from civil to international wars, Nigeria is still healing from historical wounds to this day.

Even as Nigeria continues to recover from years of internal and external conflicts, the issue of food pricing remains. One major cause is inflation. Over time, inflation has increased the pricing of goods and services all over the world. More recently, tariffs are now adding new challenges. Though it is not the fault of the ordinary citizen, at the end of the day, they will be the ones who suffer most from these decisions. With tariffs in place, food prices will only climb higher.

When interviewing people who recently visited Nigeria, it was revealed that food prices and living conditions had only worsened. For example, a single bag of flour could cost up to 80,000 Naira, which is the equivalent of 52 USD based on the current exchange rate([fxexchangerate.com](#)). If the average person makes a salary of between 100-500k Naira, which is equivalent to 65-325 USD, then an assumption can be made that it would take long work hours and hard labor to be able to afford things like basic necessities.

Labor plays a significant role in rising costs. The amount of work and money it takes to produce a single product increases its market value. This creates a cycle where the more time and effort that go into making a product, the higher the cost becomes. A cost that is invariably passed down to the consumer.

Now we can see the consequences. Basic ingredients that should be easy to purchase are now too expensive for the average person to afford, and Nigeria's population, especially those below the poverty line, is already malnourished. 18.4% of children under the age of 5 are underweight([CIA.gov](#)), in a country where the second-highest stunting growth rate is found in children.

Solutions are required, not optional. If the conditions continue as they are, according to the W.H.O., without any solid arrangement, then by 2030, nearly 582 million people globally will end up malnourished. Many organizations are helping to find solutions, like the World Food Prize, where youth and adults continue to brainstorm and come up with new ideas on how to solve this underlying issue.

Some solutions people have come up with include Subsidy Policies, which are aimed to assist people in the agriculture industry, and the Output Price Policy, which aims to help with food price and the impact food pricing has on people's diets (World Health Organization). A good example of a policy that has taken appropriate action is the New Hope Agenda, which aims to focus on child well-being in Nigeria. UNICEF partnered with the private sector, development partners, and civil societies to support this policy. The reason this policy is a good example of appropriate action is this: Due to the financial,

public, and foundational support, nearly 1 million children received critical treatment for malnutrition across Nigeria. (UNEP)

Policies administered by government officials require funding, along with public awareness and approval, to thrive in the area where they're implemented. If a policy is difficult to implement in society, governments with instability will reprioritize different policies instead. This leaves many policies and solutions unimplemented. For a solution to be effective for malnutrition in Nigeria, it needs to be sustainably funded, accessible to all people, easy to enact and execute, and truly have the needs of the population at heart. Exactly like the New Hope Agenda.

Food pricing needs to go down if organizations wish to start making a dent in the increasing malnutrition cases. People can't afford food, and that's going to be a barrier that needs to be eliminated before tackling solutions to other factors. Before you can begin to educate a population on proper nutrition intake, you first have to make sure the population has access to food. As established, food prices in Nigeria have shown a continuous increase. The majority of jobs in Nigeria are agricultural, due to the fertile soil, plentiful equal opportunities when growing crops, and the ability to provide for communities and loved ones. Because Nigeria is a country with an urban bias, though, the majority of policies include setting low prices for agricultural goods while subsidizing urban industries and food, which hurts rural farmers.

Because of this, in the agricultural business, food prices for harvested crops aren't set in stone. For the population below the poverty line, which is 40.1% for Nigerians, this is a problem. With the ever-increasing pricing on goods and food, the bare minimum a buyer is willing to pay will also go down. One year, rice could sell for 5\$. The next, its value will decrease to only 2\$. For farmers and people in the agriculture sector, this unstable price range on goods means they can never predict what their pay will be for that year's harvest.

Families need to be fed, and needs need to be met, but the future can only seem bleak for those who are unable to find stable employment. Only around 10% of people in Nigeria can access all three basic hygienic needs (Federal Ministry of Water Resources, The World Bank, National Bureau of Statistics & UNICEF).

A solution to this issue of food pricing in Nigeria is stable or set pricing for certain harvested goods; then, farmers and workers would be able to estimate their yearly income each harvest and plan accordingly. Unlike the unpredictability that is provided when it comes to haggling and negotiating prices with buyers, if a set price range is created for this industry, farmers will be able to provide for their families, improve living conditions, and, overall, eventually, improve the quality and quantity of food, causing food prices to go down.

To most, it would seem like retail pricing, which is a set price on a good that can't be haggled over, would be a favorable solution. However, the issue with retail pricing is that you pay the same amount of money for a lesser quality product as you would for a greater quality product. So there really is no incentive for people to put in the work needed to produce greater quality products. The set pricing can only be increased or decreased by the retailer.

My recommendation is that, instead of a retail pricing model, the country adopt something similar to a performance-based pricing model, where the quality and quantity dictate price. Currently, markets in Nigeria, especially in areas struck with poverty, are overflowing with people trying to make ends meet. Good harvests go undercharged, so they can be upsold to the public, and the buyer is the one who makes the profit. If pay can be fair and honest, it's believed communities can start to thrive.

To implement such a policy, though, requires government approval, the people's support, and adequate funding. If non-profit organizations can support/fund this solution, it would provide an already

solid backing foundation. The next step would be to start raising awareness. Charities and fundraisers are other ways to raise money to support a cause, and changing the pricing model for a market that has existed for years is a rather large cause. Awareness would also help raise the people's approval as well, and one way to do this is media.

The media has become a significant part of today's society. The media is where most people get their news, or updates on what's going on in the world, as well as the latest trends. While media like CNN or BBC do tend to report on issues in Nigeria, these issues are either heavily dramatized to appeal to the public or don't gain enough recognition without the theatrics. Issues like political standings, funding, protests, and the economic state of Nigeria are all potential stories that are glossed over by media networks, and are all hidden gems that could open the public's eyes to Nigeria's current conditions.

Raising awareness internally is another way to help policies gain the support of the public. Implementing educational courses to learn about business, and teach people how to recognize what exactly is occurring to make the food prices go up. Government officials need to realize that only focusing on the urban parts of Nigeria, the pretty parts, the parts that attract tourism and money, will only cause the ugly parts to get uglier if neglected long enough. Petitions or protests are ways the people can stand up and voice their struggles and the need for change. When it comes to Nigeria, the issue of malnutrition isn't black and white. Malnutrition itself is only part of a larger issue, one that, if identified and resolved, could mean significant progress towards the right direction. If you first have to make sure the people have access to food to educate them on nutrition, then you also must first make sure that people are aware and truly understand the complexity and diversity of malnutrition in people, before starting to chip away at this global problem.

Nigeria is a wonderful place to live in terms of scenery and resources, if you have enough money to enjoy it. Nigeria is only ever enjoyable to those with wealth, and for a large portion of the population below the poverty line, there is no luxury to enjoy their country's abundance. With daily tasks of trying to keep yourself or your community fed and alive, to the unhygienic conditions and crumbling infrastructure of villages and towns, money is tight. Money will only continue to get tighter for Nigerians unless something is done about it. Raising awareness not only of the problems but also of the solutions may be what Nigeria needs to finally start moving forward.

To conclude, Africa is a beautiful continent with a rich history and culture that the population continues to carry with them and pass down through generations. It may remain uncertain whether the issue of Malnutrition will ever be solved globally, but with the continued assistance of world organizations and media portrayals that raise awareness for serious issues that people commonly face, the Malnutrition issue can slowly but surely start to be fixed. This may be the day when, by 2030, instead of nearly 500 million people, only 100 million, or 100 thousand, will be facing malnutrition. We, as people, have the power to see the day when no one in the world, child or adult, man or woman, will have to be malnourished.

## References

- Central Intelligence Agency. (2025, March 27). The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>
- Federal Ministry of Water Resources, The World Bank, National Bureau of Statistics & UNICEF. (2021). Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene National Outcome Routine Mapping. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/5956/file/2021WASHNORM%20Infographics.pdf>
- Globatex Research. (2023). Top 15 African countries with the best education system: 2023. <https://globatexresearch.com/blog/top-15-african-countries-with-the-best-education-system-2023>
- John, C., Poh, B. K., Jalaludin, M. Y., Michael, G., Adedeji, I., Oyenusi, E. E., Akor, B., Charles, N. C., Buthmanaban, V., & Muhandi, L. (2024). Exploring disparities in malnutrition among under-five children in Nigeria and potential solutions: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 10, 1279130. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2023.1279130>
- UNICEF. (2021). Nigeria: Nutrition. UNICEF: For every child. <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/nutrition>
- World Bank Group. (2024, September 30). Gender data portal: Literacy rate. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-adt?gender=male>
- World Health Organization. (2024, July 24). Hunger numbers stubbornly high for three consecutive years as global crises deepen: UN report. World Health Organization: News. <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-07-2024-hunger-numbers-stubbornly-high-for-three-consecutive-years-as-global-crises-deepen--un-report>
- Wusu, O. (2006). *Interconnections among changing family structures*. <https://demographic-research.org>.
- Environment, U. (n.d.). *UN environment programme*. UNEP <https://www.unep.org>

