

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN CROSS RIVER STATE, 1999-2023

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Abstract

This paper addresses government policy on agriculture and its implications for rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State from 1999 to 2023. The cardinal objective of successive administrations' agricultural policy in the state was to alleviate rural poverty and promote food security. Unfortunately, this objective has yet to be realised, largely due to poor policy implementation and the lack of a rural infrastructure development master plan for the state. It is argued here that poor policy implementation and lack of planning to uplift the occupational base of rural crop producers are responsible for rural poverty and food insecurity. Successive administrations should implement the state's policies and master plan to address the prevailing circumstances of rural poverty and food insecurity. This is one way to bring about a decisive structural change in the welfare and well-being of rural dwellers. The analysis in this work is anchored in a historical research framework that draws on secondary sources and interdisciplinary methodology. The work concludes that the Cross-River State government should adopt a well-coordinated poverty-alleviation development strategy, including, but not limited to, a rural infrastructure development master plan, which successive administrations should strictly implement. The infrastructure master plan should be targeted at uplifting the occupational base of rural crop producers and enabling them to carry out their daily activities in a conducive environment, thereby alleviating rural poverty and food insecurity.

Keywords: *Government Policy, Rural Poverty, Food Insecurity, Rural Areas, Infrastructure, Master Plan*

Introduction

Policy formulation and a well-coordinated master plan designed to alleviate poverty and suffering in Cross River State are of immense importance because the state remains one of the least developed in Nigeria. These have been the dilemma of successive administrations and policy-makers in the state. Therefore, the phenomenon of food insecurity and rural poverty requires careful attention if poverty, which has contributed to both social and economic insecurity in the state, will be alleviated. Hence, the cardinal objectives of successive administrations in Cross River State between 1999 and 2023 ought to have been targeted at the transformation of the lives of the rural dwellers who, although they are the major food producers for the urban dwellers, have been subordinated. Also, the interdependence between the rural food producers, the urban sector, and the middlemen was to the disadvantage of the rural food crop producers. Evidence suggests that what the rural farmers need are policies capable of stimulating their social growth process as well as provision of services like basic education, health and nutrition, water supply, and access roads to help them carry out their daily activities in a conducive environment.

Food security crises began in the 1970s when food production levels began to plummet viz-a-vis burgeoning population growth, which informed Federal and State governments' drive towards self-sufficiency in the 1980s¹. This development led to aggressive approaches to the formulation of rural policies and food programs in Nigeria and in different states of the federation. The thrust of the earliest policy objectives was government participation in agriculture to achieve national self-sufficiency in food production². The National Institute for Policy and Strategic

¹ M. Watts, *Silent Violence: Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, Merkeley: California University Press, 1983, xxi.

² F.S. Idachaba, "The Nature of the Nigerian Food Problem" in *Journal of Agricultural Science and Technology*, UAM, Vol. 1, no. 1, June 1991, 1-11.

Studies (NIPSS), Kuru-Jos, gave the idea a boost by emphasizing the policies geared towards self-sufficiency in food production in the 1980s³.

Generally speaking, the food and development policies in Cross River State followed the pattern of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, both of which are characterised by one weakness inherent in the colonial ideology bequeathed to independent states, in which, despite flamboyant policy statements, the rural sector remained the same, and very few elites benefited. Therefore, this paper is a critique of the poor policy implementation and lack of a well-coordinated master plan for Cross River State agencies between 1999 and 2023, during which period rural poverty got worse despite several efforts to ameliorate it. The argument that follows is situated within the context of historical materialism and orientation. This Marxist theory has it that the incorporation of the African economies into the capitalist system was the seedbed of contemporary African impoverishment and dependence⁴. Thus, the critique of the Cross-River State political economy and underdevelopment over time stands as a challenge to Cross-River State policymakers who continue to patronize unhealthy capitalist orders and thus allow unhelpful policies to be perpetuated. However, one sees it, rural poverty in Africa is largely traceable to European imperialism as rightly conceived by the materialist conception of history.

Appraisal of Government Policy, Rural Poverty, and Food Insecurity

To address the phenomenon of rural poverty and food insecurity, the Cross River State Government and other development partners in the state, developed a state-level agricultural

³ M. D. E. Nwulia (ed), *Studies in Food Production*, Kuru-Jos: NIPSS Publication, 1986, 1-6.

⁴ M. O. Odey, *Food Crop Production, Hunger, and Rural Poverty in Nigeria's Benue Area, 1920-1995*, Nigeria, Bahiti and Dalila Publishers, 2011, 42.

policy, that sought to actualize the vast untapped growth potential of the state agriculture, strengthen rural infrastructure to support faster agricultural development, promote value addition, accelerate the growth of the agro-industry, create employment in the rural areas, secure fair standard of living of the farmers and agricultural workers and their families, discourage rural-urban migration and address the challenges arising from economic short-falls emanating from waning oil revenue to the state⁵. The basic problems of the rural dwellers in Cross River State include illiteracy, lack of access roads, potable water, and primary health care. This situation has manifested in serious cholera epidemic outbreaks (waterborne disease) in different parts of Cross River State during the administrations of Donald Duke, 1999-2007, Liyel Imoke, 2007-2015, and Ben Ayade, 2015-2023 respectively.

The realities of poverty and food insecurity experienced in both urban and rural areas in Cross River State are the justification for examining the food policy underlining the Phenomenon. It should be pointed out that there is an inseparable nexus between food crop production and rural life in Cross River State as a dynamic dialectical process invariably referred to as rural poverty. As evidence of the level of poverty in rural areas of Cross River State, life is indeed deplorable and frustrating, to say the least. For example, some rural areas hardly see a car or lorry for months, especially during the rainy season because of the absence of motorable roads linking them to urban centers in the state. Examples of such areas include Belegete in Obanliku L.G.A., Ukirong in Obudu L.G.A., and Ukelle South in Yala L.G.A., to mention just a few areas in northern Cross River State. Similarly, there are people in most rural areas of Cross River State who seldom use

⁵ Government of Cross River State of Nigeria Agricultural Policy: Supported by USAID “Feed the Future Nigeria Agribusiness Investment Activity”: To Cross River State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2023, p. 1.

ordinary pain-killing medications like Panadol or any orthodox medicine for that matter, either because of the absence of such medications or because they cannot afford them. For the most part, the lives of these farming communities have been ravaged by contagious diseases. The problems are the same throughout the rural areas in Cross River State, and the issues involved are equally intertwined as the people continue to suffer from an impregnable cycle of epidemics and a life of desperation for the commonest things.

Also, to determine the extent of rural poverty in Cross River State requires an examination of the state of rural roads, rural water supply, rural health care, electricity supply and literacy level of rural communities, and the small-scale food producers who are contributing to economic growth through food crop production. This appraisal is informed by the need to provide easy access to factors of production and facilitate the provision of basic needs to rural dwellers. Hence, the easiest way to poverty alleviation is to enhance the living conditions of the rural poor and to empower them to participate in the alleviation process themselves by utilizing their services during policy implementation by both federal and state governments. For instance, during the implementation of the program of the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), a federal agency mandated to transform the high level of deprivation in rural areas in conjunction with Cross River State agencies such as Rural Development Agency (RUDA), Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (RUWATSSA), State Electrification Agency (SEA), amongst others. The operational objectives of the rural infrastructure policy were as follows:

- i) the improvement of the quality of life of the rural people to stem the tide of rapid rural-urban population drift or, possibly, reversing it;

- ii) the promotion of more equitable distribution of public sector investments between the rural and urban areas;
- iii) the promotion of a sustained and orderly development of the vast resources available in the rural areas for the benefit of the rural population in particular and the nation in general; and,
- iv) the creation of an infrastructural base that is conducive to profitable investment in rural areas⁶.

To achieve these objectives, the local government areas and communities, as well as the state government in collaboration with either the World Bank or United Nations Donor Partners were involved. The following were strategies to be adopted:

- i) Government was supposed to promote the construction of new feeder roads and waterways to facilitate the opening up of new lands for development, enhance social interaction among the rural populace, and enhance the ease of getting inputs to farmers and evacuating agricultural products;
- ii) Government was supposed to focus on the provision of potable water for rural inhabitants, drinking water for livestock, and industrial water supply for rural-based industries;
- iii) Government was supposed to promote rural electrification as an amenity to rural dwellers as well as a stimulus to industrial development in the rural areas;

⁶ Government of Cross River State of Nigeria Agricultural Policy: Supported by USAID “Feed the Future Nigeria Agribusiness Investment Activity”: To Cross River State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2023, pp. 59-60

- iv) Government was supposed to provide adequate agricultural marketing, educational, health, postal, banking, and recreational facilities to ensure a more fulfilling life for rural dwellers. The strategy will aim at eliminating existing disparities in the quantity and quality of social facilities between the urban and rural areas. It will also provide an institutional framework and a monitoring device for focusing the attention of responsible government ministries and agencies on the infrastructural needs of the rural population;
- v) Government was supposed to actively involve the rural communities themselves in the initiation and implementation of rural infrastructural development projects and the maintenance of rural infrastructure through self-help efforts. In this regard, cash and material grants will be offered to cover a percentage of the cost of rural self-help efforts, but also as a means of increasing national investment in the rural areas;
- vi) Large-scale farmers were supposed to be encouraged to support the development of rural infrastructure both for their benefit and that of rural people in general⁷.

In providing an appraisal of rural services in Cross River State, it is important to determine the extent to which poverty has been reduced in terms of the living standards of rural farmers whose welfare is closely linked to food crop production. There was a lack of continuity in rural development policy between the successive administrations covered by this paper from 1999 to 2023. For instance, the focus of Donald Duke's administration

⁷ Government of Cross River State of Nigeria Agricultural Policy: Supported by USAID "Feed the Future Nigeria Agribusiness Investment Activity": To Cross River State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2023, pp. 59-60.

between 1999-2007 was urban transformation. Empirical evidence from rural areas and the suburban areas of Cross River State during Duke's administration shows that the rural areas were neglected and impoverished. The few rural roads that opened up access to food markets were seasonal because of their poor maintenance. This typified rural backwardness and utter neglect despite the proliferation of federal agencies to catalyze rural transformation.

Away from Duke's urban development policy, the administration of Liyel Imoke from 2007 to 2015, focused on rural transformation. The objectives of Imoke's rural transformation policy were to improve the quality of life of the rural dwellers to stem the tide of rural-urban migration and possibly reverse it by the promotion of more equitable distribution of public sector investments between the rural and urban areas. He targeted the promotion of a sustained and orderly development of the vast resources available in the rural areas for the benefit of the rural population in particular and the nation in general, through the creation of an infrastructural base conducive to profitable investment in the rural areas. To achieve the policy objective of rural transformation, Imoke constructed new feeder roads to facilitate the opening up of some rural areas for development and social interaction among the rural populace and enhanced the ease of getting inputs to farmers and evacuating agricultural produce. A few examples of such roads in the three senatorial districts of the state include but are not limited to Awi-Mbarakong road in Akamkpa L.G.A., the Eyamayong-Eyमितet road in Obubra L.G.A., and the Betukwel-Ukorshe road in Obudu L.G.A. The administration also focused on the provision of potable water, rural electrification, education, and health as amenities to ensure a more fulfilling life for rural dwellers, as well as a stimulus to industrial development in the rural areas. These include the provision of boreholes to provide potable

water in rural communities by the Community and Social Development Agency at Bebuatsuan village in Obudu L.G.A. Wula in Boki L.G.A. Bebuabong and Bebuawhan villages in Obudu L.G.A., to mention just a few. The government also renovated and provided equipment in some primary health facilities including but not limited to the primary health center in Amunga in Obanliku L.G.A., the primary health center in Akpet in Biase L.G.A., the primary health center in Alege in Obudu L.G.A, amongst others.

Following Imoke's rural transformation efforts on roads, water supply, and services to enhance rural living standards, the net results of the development efforts through the different agencies such as the State Electrification Agency (SEA), Rural Development Agency (RUDA), amongst others were palpable. For instance, regarding the role of the Rural Development Agency (RUDA), in rural transformation in Cross River State, Eko Atu, the Director General of RUDA from 2007 to 2015, maintained that within the period of his tenure in the agency, many roads, bridges and borehole projects were commissioned⁸. He maintained that there is no LGA in the state that did not benefit from the projects of the agency. It is generally claimed that most rural farmers began to convey their farm produce to urban markets and suburban areas with relative ease. Despite the intervention by RUDA and other agencies, most rural communities in the state were not covered because of paucity of funds, hence food producers in such areas still have to travel long distances to get some necessities. As a consequence, most rural farmers in Cross River State are still far away from twenty-first-century technological advancement. They are still predominantly involved in un-mechanized agricultural production.

⁸ Eko Atu, Director General (RUDA 2007-2015), Calabar, Oral Interview, 23-07- 2024.

The rural transformation initiative of Liyel Imoke was abandoned by the administration of Governor Ben Ayade (2015-2023), who adopted the policy of industrialization. The reality of the rural areas during the period is that they suffered backwardness and utter neglect despite the proliferation of agencies to catalyze rural transformation. These agencies tried from time to time to mobilize rural communities to carry out self-help projects as a way of stimulating development from within rather than depending on government that was not readily available. The effects of such mobilization efforts were hardly felt by the rural people because of a lack of basic infrastructure including a paucity of health facilities and medical personnel. For instance, according to available statistics, the entire Cross River State did not have up to 50 medical doctors between 2015 and 2023 for both rural and urban areas⁹. In the rural areas, there are complaints of lack of doctors, essential drugs, and the basic infrastructure to alleviate the morbidity level of rural farmers¹⁰.

This section of the study focused on the link between food crop production and the welfare of the food producers and emphasized the role of government in the provision of roads, water, and other desirable facilities, which can reduce rural poverty levels and enhance the food supply. The point of departure regarding policy formulation on food and rural development of the whole gamut of the Cross River shows that the bane of rural peasant farmers has been the lack of clear-cut objectives on food production and distribution system with which to deal with the problem. The results are obvious with far-reaching implications. For instance, despite its history of food production activities, the forces of production remain untransformed and the

⁹ Dr. Austin Oshie, Medical Director, General Hospital Sankwala, Oral Interview, 20-07-2024.

¹⁰ Frank Agida Abuh, Nurse/Lecturer, College of Nursing Sciences, Obudu, Oral Interview, 21-07-2024.

people are poor. Peasant farmers need more than mere political rhetoric; they need revolutionary policies directed to the actual needs of rural peasant farmers so that the production level can increase.

Factors Responsible for Rural Poverty and Food Insecurity in Cross River State

The current food production in Cross River State is grossly inadequate and cannot play the role of both cash and food crops simultaneously. The important issue arising from the central argument of this paper is that the huge agricultural potentials of Cross River State have not yet been fully exploited and utilized. The reasons for the underutilization of fertile land include the traditional farming practices which primarily depend on the amount of rainfall and climatic conditions as well as the predominantly un-mechanized nature of agricultural production. Also, food production is solely in the hands of small-scale peasant farmers, who are basically without well-articulated and relevant food-economic policies in such a way that, instead of ameliorating the problem of food insecurity, it rather exacerbates environmental risk. Cross River State can feed itself but only when these issues are addressed.

There is a combination of forces responsible for rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State, and unless the production process is radically transformed, this scenario will continue. Also, hunger in the Cross River is not merely a seasonal occurrence during the “hungry months of the years” (June -September), but sometimes an artificial deprivation created by middlemen within “the food chain”. The implication of this is that since hunger is sometimes experienced amid plenty, traditional methods of food production may not be the best strategy for dealing with the phenomenon. Cross River rural farmers have not been educated on the best way to manage their harvest and use food crop production as a strategy

to reduce their poverty level. The result of this is the poverty cycle in which food producers have to recourse to selling their foodstuff, sometimes before harvest, and resort to searching for food during times of scarcity when food is scarce. The farmers tend to lose their staples for the lean months of the year and rely on ancillary economic activities for survival and sometimes re-purchase the same staples from the middlemen, often at exorbitant prices. This timeless process continues to reinforce the cycle of poverty in the State.

It is difficult to analyze the living conditions of the rural poor in Cross River State. For instance, it is difficult even for wage earners in the state to budget their monthly salaries specifically for food, clothing, medical care, school fees, and others, signifying that their standards of living are low, which makes the analysis of that segment of society difficult. Similarly, the average rural diet of Cross River people is deficient, and this is by no means easy to analyze. Malnutrition and protein-calorie famine are part of the everyday life of most Cross River village farmers, and this particularly affects old people, pregnant women, and children who are perpetually exposed to infectious diseases without any choice or prospect of dealing with the problem. The Cross River rural poor are mostly non-wage earners, poorly fed children, women, and other people who manage to earn their living through the production of food crops through traditional methods.

Although there have been efforts to raise the income level of the peasant farmers by making them more productive to enhance their purchasing power as well as yields of their subsistence production, they seem to be still entrapped in the poverty cycle without much hope of how to escape¹¹. Poverty in rural areas of Cross River State is almost personalized and is passed down

¹¹ R.E. Will, and H.G. Vatter, eds., *Poverty in Affluence*, 2nd ed., New York, H. Brace and Co., 1965, 27.

from generation to generation along family lines as if living in rural areas is synonymous with poverty. In Cross River, it is easy to see rural poverty among rural dwellers, who, for most of their lives are lumped together in mud houses with thatched roofs in most villages. What may be regarded as urban areas amid this prevailing rural pattern of life in Cross-River, are towns like Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja, Obudu, and a few other emerging local government headquarters.

Some consequences of rural poverty which further explain the meaning of rural poverty and serve as the connection between food production, hunger, and rural poverty, include deficiency in protein intake, impaired growth/development, and malnutrition in large numbers of children and the aged. The rural poor eat starchier food without protein content, and they go around with dirty, torn, and old clothing. They travel long distances bare-footed to markets and other places to sell their wares including foodstuff and whenever they are sick, they have to be treated in government hospitals. They sometimes depend on gifts from good-spirited individuals and sometimes they need to sell whatever property they have to get medical treatment.

Also, not many regular rural farmers have a strong liquidity base to reinvest the cash derived from the sale of food crops into other areas which one may regard as new economic ventures for future development. There are a few yam and rice farmers who could do so but the overall outlook is what may be considered as growth without development¹². The earnings from food crop farmers are not enough to provide for the maintenance of extended families,

¹² G.K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria*, Homewood, Illinois, 1966, 84

payment of school fees, purchase of luxurious clothes, and living in comfort. All these constitute the financial burdens of the Cross River peasant farmers whose general pattern of life has not yet experienced a radical departure from the austerity of the predominantly rural poor so far described.

The rural poor peasant farmers have over time, provided both cheap labour and food for the urban dwellers in the area. This has been activated through the activities of middlemen and non-indigenes from outside the area in local markets who bought Cross River foodstuff cheaply, hoarded, and resold the same at exorbitant prices elsewhere. Rural poverty is used here in an inclusive sense to imply sociological, economic, and several other dimensions of the terminology. It signifies that a large percentage of Cross River agricultural communities live in rural areas as petty commodity producers. Finally, rural poverty as used in this discourse encompasses a lack of material comfort and necessities of life in the modern sense like goods and services and, indeed, the inability of these food crop producers to use the sale of their farm produce to alleviate their sufferings in specific and general ways. However, increased production of food crops cannot reduce this phenomenon.

Strategies for Reducing Rural Poverty and Food Insecurity in Cross River State

Both food producers and policymakers should look at the food question as a triangular relationship between food production, distribution, and consumption¹³. Cross River State government has made some effort through fiscal policies and agencies charged with the responsibility of rural development. The agencies placed undue emphasis on the campaign for

¹³ A. Sen. "Food Entitlements and Economic Chains" in L. E. Newman, et al. (eds). *Hunger in History*, Oxford 1990, 374-385.

boosting food crop production towards self-sufficiency in general. The strategy essentially left aside important aspects like intervening variables of production cost, how to transform the means/process of production, and whether and when to sell or withhold foodstuff from the markets. To exercise such encompassing critical abilities in the food production system is to get to the roots of rural poverty and food insecurity as well. Food insecurity in Cross River State was instigated from the beginning of the process of food crop production, right across to food marketing operations up to the consumption level. Therefore, the search for the solution should equally involve all the sides of the triangular relationship. However, a careful examination of the local areas of dysfunction in the Cross River food chain suggests that the most serious problems of rural poverty and food insecurity lie with the distribution/marketing system, which is yet to be effectively addressed.

Cross River peasant farmers often sell their food items rather than eat everything, since they expect to use the proceeds to purchase inexpensive food from somewhere else and also get other necessities of life. However, a reorientation of the peasant farmers towards the reality of the food chain exposes this behavior as ultimately irrational because selling most of their foodstuff to outsiders does not yield the desired result, since cheap food is seldom available to them. The peasant farmers need a fresh understanding of their behavior pattern, especially about food marketing and its implications on the Cross River State economy as it relates to their welfare.

Today, the phenomenon of rural poverty and food insecurity encompasses the very real problems of living daily without the necessities of life for the vast majority of Cross River rural dwellers. These problems include gender dimensions of poverty, illiteracy, and lack of

pipe-borne water, electricity, good roads, schools, clinics, or nearby local markets to sell farm produce. If the integrated rural development program of the government is to have an impact, then all of these must be considered. A well-articulated and effective rural development program will most likely increase the life expectancy of the people and decrease the mortality rates for both infants and the general population as well as reduce rural poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and dependency burdens.

Recommendations for Boosting Food Production and Reducing Poverty and Food Insecurity

The Cross River State government should identify or reevaluate the areas of food problems and formulate the relevant food policies accordingly. Such areas requiring more focus include the ecology and the general living conditions of Cross River peasant farmers, a transformation of their infrastructural and physical environment, as well as the forces and means of production. It is also important for the Cross River State government to reevaluate the poverty indices in line with the contemporary meaning of poverty, which goes beyond the description of GNP per capita income on paper.

Furthermore, to alter the prevailing circumstances of rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State, the nature and structure of Cross River's agricultural economy and fiscal policies should be overhauled, and reformulated with a people-oriented and grassroots approach. To achieve this, community participation and change of agronomic attitudes through the operations of the Cross River State Rural Agricultural Development Program (CRSRADP) and local government councils must be encouraged. It is common knowledge that fiscal policies are paper declarations of what the government intends to do, which to a rural farmer

is meaningless. The village farmers want to know what the government wants to do for them, when, and how. Cross River State has the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Cross River State in Obubra, which can proffer solutions to the food insecurity in the state. Also, for practical purposes, the Faculty of Agriculture, of the University of Calabar, can be made less academic and funded to adopt collaborative extension programs that work side by side with rural farmers and the state government for better results. To the vast majority of Cross River people, the relevance of situating the universities in the state is not yet apparent after several years of their establishment.

Another way of reducing food insecurity in the state is to establish an organic fertilizer blending plant. While the naturally rich alluvial soil of Cross River State permits extensive crop production, the law of diminishing returns is already taking its toll on that comparative advantage. Poor cropping practices have led to erosion and the depletion of soil nutrients, hence the dire need to set in motion the necessary framework for a fertilizer factory, which if implemented, will supply fertilizer to both Cross River and the neighbouring states. Cross River State has experienced all adverse factors for the establishment of a fertilizer plant. The state is a high producer of food crops with a diminishing soil nutrient. Its rain-fed culture which is incapable of maintaining high yields is another good reason. By establishing a chemical fertilizer plant in Cross River State, disputes over farmland and misappropriation of fertilizer or other fraudulent activities in the Ministry of Agriculture will hopefully stop and food crop production will be boosted. And gradually, rural poverty and food insecurity will be reduced.

Another strategy for reducing rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State is to adopt other successful traditional farming techniques, such as a combination of traditional and

modern farming methods. This method was adopted by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines to encounter and halt severe problems in food crop production¹⁴. The strategy also involves a flexible interplay between shifting cultivation and crop rotation, the introduction of high-yielding/pest-resisting seeds, and sophisticated water management approaches for large farming activities with or without artificial water supplies. The combination of old and modern farming techniques is like a marriage of convenience as most farmers may be unwilling to relinquish their old methods of farming to adopt new methods. These strategies do not undermine the significance of either agricultural engineering technology or the traditional ways of farming as practiced in Cross River State. Rather, it is a synergy that brings together diverse approaches to food production for better results. Furthermore, local farmers and extension workers are familiar with traditional agricultural techniques that are adaptable and can be improved upon within the proposed institutional framework. From time to time, obstacles to the adoption of new techniques should also be identified and resolved, such as the case of yam minisett in South Eastern Nigeria¹⁵.

Also, it is necessary to identify and empower genuine peasant farmers who are literate with at least a primary school education. They should be given access to loans and credit facilities for the specific purpose of boosting rural food production. The genuine farmers should be identified and the frustrating problem of loan procurement avoided. The category of people most in need of loans for food crop production include the poor and small-scale rural farmers who are mainly women and poor families. These groups of people have been the main

¹⁴ G. O. I. Abalu et al., (eds). *The Green Revolution in Nigeria?* I. A. R. Zaria, 1984, 283-291

¹⁵ M. C. Madukwe, "Obstacles to the Adoption of Yam Minisett Technology by Small-Scale Farmers of South-Eastern Nigeria", in *Agrosearch*, vol. 1. No. 1., January 1995, 1-6.

producers of food crops in Cross River State and as vanguards of sustainable economic growth, their access to loans or other factors of production such as land, capital, labour, and markets, will substantially reduce poverty and rural food insecurity. Peasant farmers can be organized into self-help groups, based on crops, loan schemes, and so on. The poor people and the hungry who are victims of the circumstances are the best cornerstones of a comprehensive program of poverty reduction. This is because some retired civil servants and political office holders who dabble in farming and food storage activities do not use agricultural loans to generate the surplus necessary for dealing with food shortage in the state. It is the peasant farmers that know how and where poverty pinches most and stakeholders should determine how they can be genuinely assisted.

In the foreseeable future, small-scale, illiterate farmers will remain the vanguard of food crop production in the state. Therefore, it will be more cost-effective to facilitate them with loans to boost food production than trying to marginalize them with large-scale mechanization. Apart from ensuring that only genuine farmers are the main beneficiaries and recipients of farm loans in cash, production loans could be secured in “kind” in the form of tubers, grains, and chemical fertilizer amongst others. The main advantage of giving loans to farmers in “kind” is that, unlike cash loans, the issue of the money being diverted for uses other than the expansion of food crops will not arise. And if these measures are adopted, the liquidity base of Cross River State rural farmers will be enhanced and this will bring about a reduction in the excruciating poverty in the state in the long run.

Another way to ameliorate rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State is for the state government to diversify into non-farming/agricultural economic programs targeted at

specific age groups. The government should examine the needs of each of the so-called poor communities and should be determined to spend on the specific target areas of need to facilitate economic growth throughout the state. Experience has it that the most important ancillary activities of the Cross River State rural farmers include hunting, arts and crafts, farming, fishing, and a few other economic activities that do not directly lead to dependable cash earnings but for mere survival. Apart from these, rural poverty and food insecurity levels can be ameliorated if Cross River peasant farmers are mobilized to use their spare time outside their farming hours for self-help projects that do not require full-time work, such as building houses, work on road construction sites, gardening, etc., which can easily be accommodated within the rhythm of agricultural production. Also, domestic units could be made to keep local and other domestic animals in more organized ways. This formula has been used with a successful track record elsewhere in non-agricultural activities to transform rural China, India, Korea, Japan, and the Philippines¹⁶. From these, we can derive invaluable lessons for our local development needs. Under this proposal, primary and secondary school graduates as well as women should be trained in myriad skills to generate off-farm employment or cottage industries, which will boost the industrial base of Cross River State. To achieve this, the government must use what the people have as a starting point to give them what they need, and to fast-track this, the people themselves must be involved in their development process.

There is a link between farming and non-farming activities, which is central to poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth in rural areas. If rural dwellers are made to be self-sustaining so that their agricultural products are channeled to local transport, processing, and

¹⁶ Mike Odey, *Food Crop Production, Hunger and Rural poverty in Nigeria's Benue Area, 1920-1995*, 2014, 226.

marketing activities, it will help to check rural-urban drift and the income base of food crop producers will be enhanced. By so doing, the spending abilities of the people will also be enhanced, and poverty will be reduced in rural areas. Farmers will then be able to acquire capital with which to procure food items even during periods of low farming activity when they engage in agricultural business and other ancillary businesses. Rural farmers can be encouraged to go beyond food crop production into a secondary level of production. For instance, the rural farmer can go into fruit drink production, starch making, yam flour, and glucose making. They can also diversify into agricultural technology and the processing of raw materials through communal efforts with implications for poverty reduction.

Furthermore, to reduce rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State, the government and the governed need to establish grain and root crop reserves. Storage systems that are simple to maintain in and out of harvest seasons should be established in all the local government areas. This ought to be the case because foodstuff that cannot be sold at good prices during harvest time or distributed, should be stored for the interest of consumers during months of scarcity. This will forestall the profiteering operations of middlemen who hoard foodstuff at harvest to resell and make a prohibitive profit. The idea of bulk purchase of grains by the government was introduced in the late 1940s through the Produce Marketing Boards under licensed buying agents of the UAC, John Holt, amongst others¹⁷. In Cross River State, a food marketing board could be re-established to monitor standard weights and prices of foodstuffs and arrange storage systems, especially during harvest times when food glut is

¹⁷ G. K. Helleiner, "The Fiscal Role of the Marketing Boards in Nigerian Economic Development 1947-1961", in C. Lieldholm (eds), *Growth and Development of the Nigerian Economy*, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1970, 16.

common. The local government headquarters can be used as distribution centers where food will be sold at controlled prices during the hungry months of the year, between May and September.

Also, peace is a vital instrument for the reduction of rural poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in particular¹⁸. This is because some communities in the state are notorious for communal clashes over farmlands, which has led to loss of lives and destruction of food crops and other properties. By ameliorating the frequency of such land disputes and establishing an institutional mechanism for dialogue and mutual coexistence between such communities, the economy will grow and poverty and food insecurity will be reduced. The embers of land conflicts should not be allowed to smolder and then flare up before government intervention. This will bring about mutual distrust, and tension and slow down farm activities.

To end the scourge of rural poverty and food insecurity in Cross River State, the struggle must be well calculated and refocused from time to time, especially in food-producing areas. Poverty and hunger are sometimes problems of the mind, attitude, habit, and orientation of people in life. Therefore, it is important to address rural poverty and hunger from such perspectives as well. It is also important to undertake research into a wide variety of nutritious food supplements that can enhance Africa's staples. In Cross River State, such food supplements that can be encouraged include homemade foods such as soybean foods, "Kunu" made from sorghum, "Zobo" made from dried leaves of hibiscus sabdariffa, and a host of other nutritious foods. They should be encouraged to revert to the use of sesame oil for cooking and

¹⁸ E. Harsch, "Peace is vital to ending hunger" in *African Farmer*, no. 14, January-April, 1995, 8-14.

soap making for income generation. Also, consumption of purely traditional foods like vegetables and fruits that grow abundantly in the bush without consumption by rural farmers should be encouraged. There is a sense of making use of what is locally available to reduce the poverty and food insecurity that have long afflicted rural dwellers in Cross River State.

Conclusion

Despite the abundant food resources in Cross River State, a vast majority of the rural dwellers are still hungry and generally poor. Poverty and hunger are growing phenomena that will continue to persist until something drastic is done to stem the tide. That is the situation in the 24 years of Cross River State government policy on agriculture covered in this study. This was largely because of poor policy implementation and lack of a rural infrastructure development master plan for the state. During the period, the strategies for coping with the realities of rural poverty and food insecurity were poorly implemented by successive administrations. Rural poverty and food insecurity were such commonplace occurrences that seasonal hunger or “hungry period” was no longer the only problem of food supply. The period showed that rural poverty and food insecurity in the State were pervasive and unhindered and had become concrete societal maladies. However, admitting that poverty and food insecurity exist amid plenty in Cross River State is not enough. It should be pointed out that the options are broad enough to address the challenges of the current situation. The call for policy reforms and a master plan for the Cross River State food system has become imperative because food insecurity and rural poverty amid food crop production is a ridiculous, inexcusable contradiction and must be resolved¹⁹. The significance of this work lies in the

¹⁹ Mike Odey, 2014, 229.

insistence that we must take advantage of our food and agricultural endowment and work out food security management strategy capable of ending both natural and man-made food and poverty problems in the state. The food question is of relevance to everybody, just as poverty and food insecurity history should be to Cross River State government.