Will Nigeria Achieve Zero Hunger by 2030? – A Focus on the Sustainable Development Goal Two

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Abstract

This study interrogated key indicators for the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and found the likelihood of non-achievement of the goal within the stipulated timeframe. This came about through the dialectical analysis of secondary data obtained from various sources including UN, USAID, STATISTA and FAO. The non-achievement was considered inevitable because zero hunger by 2030 was not in Nigeria's front burner as she faced the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, little or no positive fruits have resulted from whatever efforts governments have put in to safeguard food output levels, improve agricultural productivity or stem steep food price rise. As a developing nation, Nigeria was considered incapable of breaking out of the trend of non-fulfilment which seemed to be a world-wide phenomenon. The study concluded that hunger cannot be ended in Nigeria by 2030 or any time soon. It was recommended that SDG 2 should be placed in the priority group of goals to be addressed by the country. It was further recommended that banditry should be dealt with by government as a step towards securing present agricultural output when farmers return to their farms, and improving output when more land get cultivated.

Keywords: Zero hunger, SDG 2, Sustainability, Agricultural productivity, 2030

Introduction

The concept of sustainability embraces continuity, the prospect of reaching into the distant future, infinity, if at all possible. As a policy concept, it entered world discourse with the report of the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). Faced with declining ecological health and increasing extreme poverty in the wake of industrialization, the need to harmonize ecology, prosperity and social justice was recognized, giving rise to the 'Brundtland Commission', which came up with the landmark definition of sustainable development as "*...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*" This definition secured the three pillars of sustainable development, namely environment, society and economy, all of which must come into harmonious play for development to be considered sustainable.

It was a bumpy road to the adoption of the concept of sustainable development by the world community, a common world-view in which concerns encompassing the environment, economy and society were viewed holistically. The efforts culminated in the first world climate conference in 1979 and the Kyoto Protocol two decades later, and finally, in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were unanimously agreed to at the Millennium Summit in New York. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, then followed. All 17 goals came complete with performance targets and indicators for monitoring progress, and together they represent a bold triumph of good-willed partnership for development.

They appeared well thought-out, incorporating extant research findings, concern for one's neighbor and a good dose of political courage (UN, 2024). Achieving the goals would thus deliver on the vision of sustainable development for all, which is the final aim of human societies and development economics (World Bank, 2009). As such, progress with the goals could be deemed to be progress for the peoples of the world. For Nigeria, any progress towards the goals represents the extent to which the impediments to the structural transformation of the economy, long desired by all, yet extremely challenging to past and present Administrations, have been addressed.

This work focuses on the second global goal which is to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' because it is existential and cannot be ignored or glossed over if any progress is to be made with human development. In addition, less than one half of the period proposed for achieving the goals is left, and the trending political, environmental and economic challenges such as wars, mass migrations and climate emergencies appear to trigger hurdles that were hardly envisaged at inception (UN, 2022). These threaten the achievement of this goal. A review is therefore urgently necessary as there is barely time enough for policy shifts. Furthermore, hunger is the number one failure of governments of poor and developing countries. There really is nothing progressive that can be done where the scourge of hunger has not been addressed. The rest of the paper is presented as follows: Section 2 addresses the agriculture agenda. Section 3 undertakes a brief review of extant literature. Section 4 outlines the targets and indicators of SDG two as originally conceived. Section 5 reviews the performance of Nigeria with regard to this second goal while section 6 concludes with policy recommendations.

Agriculture Agenda

The agriculture agenda comprises the role thrust upon agriculture by nature. This is prescribed for all societies of the world as an existential agenda. As such, it remains essentially the same irrespective of the political and religious persuasions of different societies. The first seven items of the full agenda are strictly applicable to all societies in the order specified but here we shall consider only the first four. These are: Food, Medicine, Employment and Education (Aniebo *et al*, 2023). Food is the very first item on the natural agriculture agenda. Agriculture's fundamental role which fulfills an important existential need of man is to feed the people. For settled communities, food comes from agriculture. The degree to which this role is addressed determines the success or otherwise of the nation's agricultural endeavor, and reflects also the degree of economic development. It is very proper that availability of food features as a major goal adopted by all nations as part of sustainable development. This is equivalent to unitedly setting a goal for sustainable agriculture through which food is obtained. Food should be the number one goal because of its fundamental nature, unlike poverty.

Food as provided by nature is medicine. This is the second item on the natural agenda. The human body is only one of the living bodies produced and cared for by nature. From animals we learn of natural habitat where each creature lives and thrives, and which includes appropriate food and medicine found therein. The things that serve as food and medicine for others have on their part adapted to the environment as their own natural habitat. To produce medicine by way of food and other non-food plants is thus an important task of agriculture. Having lost our way in this, we now have painfully to first learn through science that indeed food is medicine (Nat Med., 2023; Steen *et al*, 2022).

Employment is the third item on the agriculture agenda. Agriculture provides the basic tasks that facilitate our existence, and the number and effort of those engaged with these tasks, largely outside the labor market, is high (Obiakor *et al,* 2021). It also provides us with basic education concerning the cosmos, our interaction with other living and non-living things. The success of agriculture in each nation is thus directly determined by how well it is doing with the provision of deeply rooted knowledge and high-quality jobs as a distinct item on the agenda. The score card with regard to food speaks to the degree of economic development (Bene *et al,* 2022). It is clear that nations on the path of development successfully address their food needs, which can also be stated as addressing their agricultural sector and promoting food security. The realization of agriculture agenda is therefore the only route to the achievement of SDG 2 (Aniebo *et al,* 2023).

Brief review of extant literature

SDGs (unlike MDGs) are firmly linked with the development and growth agenda of nations. According to WHO (2024) approaches such as scientific research and innovation, sustainable financing, monitoring and evaluation, provide driving handles which meet the needs of developed and developing nations alike. Granted that conceptually, SDGs strove to harmonize concerns for the environment, society and economy, complaints of misalignments have not ceased. Adopting a social ecology perspective Einsenmenger *et al* (2020) find that SDGs prioritize economic growth over ecological integrity, pointing to resource use connected therewith as responsible for important trade-offs among SDG targets. They further find that the SDGs rely mainly on those institutions responsible for unsustainable resource use, and partly propose measures that even reinforce current trends towards less sustainability.

Measurability of the very broad objectives has repeatedly come up as a major concern. So also has monitoring (Swain, 2018). Although Macfeely (2018) believes it was a major triumph for the selection and measurement of statistical indicators to be entrusted to UN Statistical Commission, who generally did a good job of defining the concepts and selecting the indicators, SDG 2 is widely held to be unable to capture the intricacies of food systems (Lile, Ocnean & Balan, 2023).

An emergent new manner of proceeding expected to deliver on all SDG 2 fronts is inter-sectoral action of multiple stakeholders (Sporchia *et al,* 2024). As the very first world-level agreement on hunger which was fashioned democratically, the SDG 2 Agenda is expected to guide hunger and poverty issues on a global level for the next decade and more.

Lile, Ocnean and Balan (2023) traced the link of SDG 2 with other SDGs declaring that a holistic and integrated approach are required to address the multifaceted challenges faced by SDG 2. Some specific challenges include rapid urbanization, climate change impacts and the imperatives of sustainable agriculture. Food waste, a global phenomenon, proved to directly negate some of the effort to achieve SDG 2 (Balan *et al,* 2022). This calls for determined and collaborative action on the efficiency of food waste reduction strategies. When prepared food is not eaten but wasted it is a double loss. It fails to feed the people and contributes to global warming.

Timely completion of the goals is a further concern. According to Walter *et al* (2023) an unfortunate combination of unfavorable events played a serious role in this development. A ready example is the globe wide COVID-19 scourge which dove-tailed into the Russia-Ukraine war. UN (2023) echoed the likelihood of non-completion, and cites further destabilizing events such as civil

rights violations and climate crises as eroding earlier gains and limiting progress. For better prospects of achieving the goals in the light of these developments, Shulla and Leal Filho (2023) evaluated strategies and actions that can match the leadership role of the European Union (EU), and recommended a major transformation in SDGs financing among others, calling for an overarching strategy for the SDG agenda. Finance as a major hurdle to the achievement of SDG 2 had attracted the interest of researchers. Diaz-Bonilla (2021) focused on options for financing zero hunger by 2030 and recommended the creation of a Zero Hunger Alliance and Fund. Mobilising funds in the order envisaged by this plan appears to be far-fetched for developing countries, especially a country like Nigeria which is troubled by public debt. For FAO (2024a), Africa's funding gap for zero hunger by 2030 amounts to 21 billion USD per year, which sum requires doubling the current financial flows to the agricultural sector of 19 billion USD per year. Doubling the fund flow to the agricultural sector is hardly possible in Africa in view of the troubled state of most of the economies.

Although all SDGs are conceptually equal and closely interrelated, for practical purposes the managers of national economies hardly accept that the goals carry equal weight. This can be attributed to peculiar pressures faced by different economies some of which are decidedly national while some are international. Striking a balance between national and international demand has not just become important but has metamorphosed into a major concern (Macfeely, 2020). This concern has led many nations to prioritize SDGs in quest of meaningful progress. Nigeria has done so, yet Akpan *et al* (2024) in reviewing Nigeria's journey to zero hunger in 2030 conclude that the country's current efforts are grossly insufficient. This study considers the likelihood of achieving this same goal by closely interrogating key indicators, adopting the dialectical methodology.

Targets and Indicators of SDG 2.

SDG two is a collective vow by all nations of the world to end hunger by 2030. To make the enormous task tractable and achievable, targets and indicators were established at inception. Altogether there are eight targets, five direct or major targets and three facilitating ones. According to UN (2024), the targets are as follows:

   i.   End hunger.
  ii.   End malnutrition. By 2025, achieve the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age
 iii.   Double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers.
  iv.   Implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change
   v.   Maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species
        a.   Increase investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks
        b.   Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets
        c.   Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information

From the above, the targets appear comprehensive, ranging from agricultural research and genetic diversity to the ultimate, which is food on the table. To monitor and measure implementation,

indicators were provided for all targets. While some targets have one indicator, others have more than one. The number of indicators is largely determined by the number of distinct branches each target contains. All are nonetheless convergent on the goal, which is to end hunger by 2030. As determined by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UN 2024) the indicators are as follows:

1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment
1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population
2.1 Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age
2.2 Prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age
2.3 Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, by pregnancy status (percentage)
3.1 Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size
3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status
4.1 Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture
5.1 Number of (*a*) plant and (*b*) animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in
      either medium- or long-term conservation facilities
5.2 Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk of extinction
a.1 The agriculture orientation index for government expenditures
a.2 Total official flows to the agriculture sector
b.1 Agricultural export subsidies
c.1 Indicator of food price anomalies

Performance review.

In 2020, Nigeria reviewed her own progress towards achieving the SDGs. This took place within the framework of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) organized by the United Nations. Alongside 46 other nations on that occasion, Nigeria reiterated her commitment to achieving the SDGs and stated her focus to be on: poverty (SDGs – 1), inclusive economy (SDGs – 8), health and wellbeing (SDGs – 3), education (SDGs-4), gender equality (SDGs – 5), enabling environment of peace and security (SDGs – 16) and partnerships for the goals (SDGs – 17). These were considered central to President Buhari Administration's development objectives and programmes (The Presidency, 2020). Although all 17 goals, as configured, are interconnected, developing a focus group made up of selected SDGs was expected to hew a feasible implementation path. This was in tandem with the trending perspective at the time that the targets were too many, too wide and too expensive for meaningful impact. The prevailing wisdom was that the sphere of engagement should be narrowed through the selection of a focus group, more so for developing countries who are likely to be better off focused on their social and environmental policies (Swain, 2018). But there was also the view that such a move might prove to be a further challenge to development, especially when goals that should be more centrally positioned in the development experience of a particular economy are sidelined. Whenever such move was adopted, an immediate effect would be to take the achievement of goals not selected off the front burner. This might account for the judgment of Akpan *et al* (2024) that Nigeria was 'off track' with regard to SDG 2, which at that time was not one of the goals selected for special attention by the Nigerian government.

Reviewing global progress on the zero-hunger goal, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023) paints a grim picture of performance. Rather than beat a downward track, hunger has been on the increase since 2015 and has progressed more steeply in recent years. 2.4 billion people or

29.6% of global population, were food insecure in 2022 up from 25.3% as recently as 2019. The Russia-Ukraine war has progressed since then as well as the war in Gaza; so, has weather catastrophes in locations around the world (e.g. flooding in Bangladesh), all exacerbating food insecurity. According to CEPA (2024) nearly one in ten persons faced hunger in 2022 globally, and if current trends persist one in five children under 5 years will be affected by stunting in 2030.

When compared with other regions, Africa is home to the greatest proportions of food insecure population, although the greatest number resides in Asia on account of their high population. High food prices have worsened, hitting sub-Saharan Africa and least developed countries the most. These are regional and global trends which seem to sweep Nigeria along, and which the country seems unable to break out of.

With regard to key indicators for Nigeria there are:

Prevalence of Undernourishment: Prevalence of undernourishment as percentage of the population stood at 9.3% in 2015 and retrogressed to 15.9% in 2021 (World Bank, 2024). There is no development in the horizon which suggests that the very steep decline of the prevalence of undernourishment in Nigeria will be arrested any time soon.

Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity: Between 2019 and 2022 the share of population suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity in Nigeria increased to 69.7% from 58.5%, a whopping human quality decline of over eleven percent of the population (Statista 2024). For severe food insecurity alone, 26.5 million people are expected to face that acute condition this year (2024), up from 18.6 million in 2023 (FAO, 2024).

Prevalence of stunting. Nigeria bears the 2nd highest burden of stunted children under 5 years in the world**.** No positive change from 2015 has been recorded when this metric stood at 37% (USAID, 2021)

Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture. According to The Presidency (2020a), baseline findings for the 2nd SDG came from MDGs reports. For the crucially important indicator - the proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture – the estimate was 56.5%. This has not improved but we are left with trends in the absence of reliable data as submitted by government to establish this position. In this connection we note that Nigeria's agriculture is predominantly rain fed. This has, along with flooding occasioned by climatic challenges, rendered agricultural sustainability questionable. Banditry has been in the upsurge in some of the very areas where food is grown in reasonable quantities. Along with the now well-known farmer- herder conflict around the nation, food security has been gravely affected through constrained access to and use of farm lands (Lekan *et al,* 2022).

Indicator of food price anomalies. Nigeria is at the centre of sub-Saharan African nations which are hard hit by high food prices. In addition, the country suffers great food price volatility. While high food prices have been attributed basically to climate change, conflicts and wars have been cited as exacerbating them (FAO, 2023). Nigeria suffers from local conflicts of her own which aggravate the globally shared threats to food security. Udeaja and Isa (2024) opine that the principal driver of food price volatility in Nigeria is not climate change but terrorism. Violence has remained on the escalatory path, with each year recording greater conflict related deaths, if not

from insurgents, terrorists and herdsmen, then from cultists, bandits and separatists. Chances of low and stable food prices by 2030 are truly low.

Conclusion

The key indicators relating to the second sustainable development goal - to end hunger by 2030 - show that for Nigeria this goal cannot be achieved by then and not any time soon. This conclusion agrees with the findings of other scholars that Nigeria's efforts seem grossly insufficient to achieve the goal, more so as some globe wide developments such as geopolitical hostilities are only disruptive of the national endeavor. The outcome spells disaster for Nigerians and their economy as there is not just hunger in the land but also great disaffection powered by hunger.

The trend towards non fulfillment for SDGs in general is a worldwide phenomenon. However, the brunt usually gathers on the poor and undeveloped nations who have little means to ward off the adverse effects. This is an important reason for a troubled nation such as Nigeria to seriously commit to the accomplishment of sustainable development goals. And in particular, the goal that focuses on hunger, which is an existential threat.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

i.   Government should recognize the existential nature of SDG two, and accelerate its achievement by naming it as the first of the primary group of goals to be achieved. The focus by government on the need to end hunger will attract and focus the attention of the private sector and the entire society. This in turn will encourage and galvanise resource allocation to this end.
ii. Government in collaboration with various communities should stand up to banditry in the country. Addressing the prevailing brutal lawlessness will see more farmers return to their farms. It will also see more agricultural land come under cultivation. These two will directly impact agricultural output and food on the table.
iii. The third area is macroeconomic management, specifically high food inflation. Improved performance in this regard will help to moderate the escalating food prices. Rising food prices is particularly worrisome because of the deeply rooted poverty. Poverty diminishes resilience in the face of worsening climatic challenges such as flood. All these exacerbate hunger.

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