

# The Impact of Trade Liberalization on Nigeria's Food Security

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**Abstract**

The world today, no doubt, is now more integrated than ever before. With the integration and interdependence of global economies, which globalisation has come to symbolise, virtually all aspects of human endeavour have been influenced significantly. Trade has grown significantly over the last few decades on a global scale. Food security remains the centre of focus in Nigeria's agricultural sector. For some decades now, with the introduction of the trade liberalization policy, Nigeria has experienced some level of food insecurity as a result of mindless importation of foodstuffs like rice, beans, sugar, and wheat, to mention a few. The Unequal Exchange Theory was adopted, and the paper employed a qualitative data collection approach, extensively dependent on an in-depth interview and secondary data. This paper attempts an analyzes of the impact of trade liberalization on food security in Nigeria. The findings of this paper shown that trade liberalization policy on agriculture has not improved food security in Nigeria. Rather, it has undermined food security. This owed to the fact that local food production has been on the decrease while food importation and dumping are on the increase. However, recommendations were made, among which is that, Nigeria should insist on the removal of export subsidies and domestic support enjoyed by agricultural producers of developed countries from their governments.

**Key Words:** Trade, Liberalization, Food, Security, Nigeria.

## 1.0 Introduction

The world today, no doubt, is now more integrated than ever before. With the integration and interdependence of global economies, which globalisation has come to symbolise, virtually all aspects of human endeavour have been influenced significantly. Trade has grown significantly over the last few decades on a global scale. Since the 1980s, a growing movement to liberalize trade has occurred in reaction to the global development of liberal economic policies. However, the precise impact of trade liberalization on food security remains a point of contention (Mohammed & Mijah, 2015). The prevalent narrative advanced by proponents of trade liberalization is that an open trading economy improves food security. Specifically, pro-liberalization trade advocates argue that a more open trading environment fosters more efficient agriculture production, resulting in an increase in food supply and, consequently,

reduced food prices. In other words, they contend that more liberal trade policies should result in increased availability and affordability of food.

Food security remains the centre of focus in Nigeria's agricultural sector (FMARD, 2016). For some decades now, with the introduction of the trade liberalization policy, Nigeria has experienced some level of food insecurity as a result of mindless importation of foodstuffs like rice, beans, sugar, and wheat, to mention a few. The necessary incentives needed by the local farmers to aid food production have been wiped off by government policy of trade liberalization introduced by the Structural Adjustment Program(SAP) and later the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Iloh, et al., 2020). Despite good weather, a large expanse of arable land and huge human resources, Nigeria currently ranks as one of the major importers of food in the world. Even the various programmes

and projects initiated by various governments in Nigeria aimed to rapidly improve the sector, reduce poverty and foreign exchange drain through food importation, such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) introduced in 1976, Green Revolution (GR) in 1980, National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS) in 2004, among others.

At present, Nigeria faces two gaps in food security. First is her inability to meet domestic food requirements, and secondly, her inability to export at the quality levels required for market success (FMARD, 2016). Pro-liberalization trade advocates argue that a more open trading environment fosters more efficient agriculture production, increasing food supply and reducing food prices.

From independence until the end of the civil war, agriculture and the export of agricultural products were the mainstays of the Nigerian economy. With trade liberalization, it is envisaged that with the removal or even reduction of barriers to and tariffs on international trade, the weak agricultural producing countries with little or no mechanization in agriculture and food production could count on other countries to meet their food requirements. But the application of the WTO's trade liberalization has resulted in a frightening situation in Nigeria's agricultural sector. This paper, therefore, investigated and analyzed the impact of trade liberalization on food security in Nigeria, specifically our lacklustre progress in this area.

### Conceptual Clarification

**Concept of Trade Liberalization:** Trade liberalization can be defined as a system in which trade between or within countries flows unhindered by government-imposed restrictions. Such government interventions generally increase goods and services costs to consumers and producers, including taxes and tariffs and even intergovernmental, managed trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), contrary to their formal. Trade liberalization encompasses the processes, including government policies, that promote free trade, deregulation, the elimination of subsidies, price controls, rationing systems, and, often the downsizing or privatization of public services (Woodward, 1992).

**Food Security:** According to the World Food Summit (1996), food security is "a state when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". This definition is hinged on four pillars or dimensions: food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and stable food supply. These four dimensions of food security depend on each other hierarchically. That is, food availability is necessary but conditioned on food accessibility, a dimension that in isolation is not sufficient to achieve adequate nutritional outcomes.

### Theoretical Framework

The paper is predicated on the unequal exchange theory. According to Emmanuel (1972), when two unequal countries produce different commodities in such a way that they do not compete directly with each other, there is an unequal exchange. Since wages are low in less developed countries, the cost of production is also small, and so is the price of production. On the other hand, since wages are higher in developed countries, the cost of production is high, so is its price. As a result, the commodity of less developed countries being cheaper than that of developed countries causes unequal trade between them. Emmanuel's theory is based on Marx's theory of 'production prices' to determine international prices and technological changes in production. He believed that the main reason for economic inequality between the periphery and the centre lies in differences in production techniques and wage differences, which lead to unequal trade (Udeala, 2010:72).

Amin (1976), argued that in presenting his theory of comparative advantages and international trade, Ricardo had reversed his usual economic outlook, developing an argument based not on value generated in the production and formation of production prices, but rather on supply and demand. Rooting his argument in the then-realistic assumption of the international immobility of capital and labour, Ricardo saw trade in the international realm as dictated to production rather than the other way round. This reversal of the argument of classical economics represented by Ricardo has distracted attention from the facts. The reality for Amin is that the Ricardian comparative advantage theory was one of unequal exchange

associated with different productivity and labour intensity in different countries. Amin thus sums it up by stating:

All that this theory (the Ricardian theory of comparative advantages in international trade) allows us to state is that, at a given moment, the distribution of levels of productivity being what it is, it is to the interest of the two countries to effect an exchange, even though it is unequal (Amin, 1976:134)..

Udeala (2010), argues that unequal trade has been used in many more or less broad ways in relation to inequalities or unfair gains or losses associated with economic exchange. Unequal trade is central in the reproduction of capitalist relations and growth on a national and international scale. It is a reflection, not an explanation of the underdevelopment of the productive forces in the periphery. In his study of exchange within capitalism, Karl Marx showed why exchange in terms of labour value must be unequal.

Adopting scholars such as Samir Amir, Immanuel Wallenstein, Raul Prebisch and Andre Gunder Frank to name a few divisions of the world capitalist economy into the 'middle' and the 'periphery,' Marxists argued that over-transfer has restricted the economic development of the periphery and increased the income gap between the centre and the periphery. The principle of unfair exchange in the field of international trade between developing and underdeveloped countries holds that developed countries have a higher value in the labour inputs of their goods because these countries use superior technology and manufacture on a large scale. On the other hand, developing countries have a lower value of the labour inputs of their goods, because these countries use outdated equipment and manufacture on a small scale.

For Baran (1957), imperialism presented an obstacle to development. Rather than directly promoting economic development, imperialist penetration acted as a brake on the development of the countries of the Third World. Far from being an asset to progress, capitalism was in prevailing conditions hostile to it. Arguing further, Andre-Gunder Frank (1967), posits that, far from encouraging development, bilateral relations, exchange and penetration was, in fact, the cause of the condition he termed 'underdevelopment.' The developed capitalist countries, he argued, may, at

one point, have been developed, but they had never been underdeveloped. Following Baran, Frank argued that it is false to suppose that economic development occurs through the same succession of stages in all countries, or that the underdeveloped countries were merely at a stage that had been long surpassed by the developed countries. Capitalism had produced both 'development' in the metropolitan countries and 'underdevelopment' in the periphery by fully penetrating these societies.

Rodney (1972), in his classic and captivating piece *'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa'* postulates that the incursion of Europeans into the African continent is one of the central reasons for the underdevelopment of the African continent. He explains that not only was the African continent invaded, but was also exploited and continues to be exploited, its land, resources and people. Thus, Rodney charges the Africa people to reject all forms of neo-colonialism and imperialism, which are a tentative block to economic growth and development. For him, development must start from within and not from external (Rodney, 1972). Foster and Holleman (2014), demonstrate that the principle of unfair trade was developed to counter the Ricardian theory of the international economy. The theory is very relevant to this study because it is most appropriate. The theory explains the unequal exchange between the periphery and the core. The principle of an unfair exchange, for example, describes the trade imbalance between Nigeria and the West as a result of the West absorption of its comparative advantage over Nigeria. It is on this premise that the paper adopted this theory.

## 2.0 Methodological Perspective

The general population of the study is Nigeria, which according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) has a population of 216,783,381. The target population of this study comprises Officials of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigerian Ministry of Trade and Investment, Nigerian Investment Promotion Council, Nigerian Export Promotion Council, Economic Experts, Chinese Embassy, Diplomatic Corp, and Academicians. These categories of people formed the target population of the study because of their link and knowledge regarding the subject matter under study. The paper employed a qualitative data collection approach, extensively dependent on an

in-depth interview on the subject matter. This was used in conducting interviews with the key informants through which data were generated. The reasoning for using the qualitative approach is to draw an analytical inference to arrive at fair conclusions on the data analysis.

The paper generated data from both primary and secondary data. Primary data were generated using in-depth interviews with key foreign and trade policy expert. The secondary source of data comprised mainly of books, magazines, government publications, academic journals and articles on various websites. In this regard, many available works on trade liberalization and food security, both published and unpublished and official documents were consulted.

### **Impact of Trade Liberalization on Food Security in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the term trade liberalization became pronounced through the adoption of the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, which primary aim was to restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy. The SAP was designed to establish a realistic and sustainable exchange rate for the Naira through trade and payment liberalization, tariff reforms, commercialization and privatization of public enterprises

According to the advocates, trade liberalization is economic integration for increasing global output since it allows investment capital to flow freely from developed nations to underdeveloped nations where they are most needed. Reduced tariffs make goods produced in high-tech developed nations cheaper to purchase, which benefits consumers as well. In a same vein, manufacturers of goods benefit from selling to a larger market, while nations will profit from access to cutting-edge technology and discussions about multilateral and/or bilateral trade. While opponents contend that trade liberalization is a deliberate attempt by the western world to impose certain of its economic practices that may not be advantageous to the receiving economy in order to continuously contribute to the underdevelopment of the less developed countries. It is perceived as an additional post-colonialist tactic that discourages independence, self-determination, and indigenization. They also contended that protectionism and subsidies, rather than free trade,

are the reasons why the majority of wealthy countries have succeeded (Ha-Joon, 2007).

Since the second half of 1986 when Nigeria embraced the implementation of trade liberalization, it had remained a leading importer of food items. This is in spite of the fact that about 65% of the total labour force are engaged in small-holder food production that contributes about 35% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The major food items imported are rice, wheat, maize, or their products, sugar and dairy products, majority of which comes from the USA, EU, who are major actors in the Doha round and who grant subsidies to agricultural products and hinder market access to its agro-commodities from other developing countries – Nigeria inclusive. The cheap food imports reduce the market for domestic agricultural product and leave many farmers and workers in the agro-allied industries without source of income unless they are able to switch to more profitable production (Nyangito & [Odhiambo](#), 2003).

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that, the Nigerian agricultural sector has always been a strong part of the country's economy and people's lives. It provides food, jobs, national income, and industrialization. It has also struggled to do the above things over the years, even though policy attention has become less effective since the 1980s. Since the 1960s, Nigeria's main source of jobs, income, and foreign currency has been the agricultural sector, which has been exploited. This was because of focused regional policies based on the relative advantages of different goods. The sector employed more than 70 percent of the workforce and fed a population that was estimated to be 55 million in 1963 and 60 million in 1965. This made sure that most households had enough food to eat. During the same time period, exports of cash crops brought in 70 and 62.2 percent of Nigeria's total foreign exchange in 1960 and 1965, respectively, and 56.7 and 66.4 percent of GDP in 1960. During this time, there was no doubt that agriculture was the most important part of Nigeria's economy. The commercial use of oil resources, on the other hand, changed the trend away from agriculture and its related industries for the rest of the 1970s and beyond (Adeokun, 2005).

Meanwhile, from the primary data obtained and in response to a question on the impact of trade liberalization on food security in Nigeria, a respondent in an interviewed answered that:

The impacts of trade liberalization have not translated to any significant increase in Nigeria agricultural output and export despite the arguments of its proponents. Since Nigeria rectified the agreement on trade liberalization it has not reaped the benefits of economic integration and interconnectedness. The government has implemented certain projects and programmes to promote agriculture and export trade to help farmers move to the next level, all of these has not translated to food self-sufficiency and availability (Interview, 2023).

In addition to the above, another respondent avers that:

The main goal of liberalization in agricultural trade has been the provision of enabling environment for a majority of the world's poorest to take advantage of the enormous opportunities to improve incomes and enjoy healthy lives. Trade liberalization in agriculture, by encouraging the removal of farmer subsidies by government has led to increase in the production cost. Removal of subsidies induces farmers to reduce their output. Similarly, removing export subsidies raises the prices to food-importing countries (Interview, 2023).

Another respondent argued that:

Trade liberalization with respect to Nigeria's agricultural sector was expected to have a positive impact on the agricultural sector and its export sub-sector through various transmission channels: mainly through exchange rate, capital formation (machinery, equipment, buildings, fertilizers, pesticides, animal feed, drainage and irrigation water and other structures), and prices etc. While food security has improved in some developing countries, in Nigeria and many countries in West Africa, an extremely high number suffer from food insecurity and undernourishment (Interview, 2023).

From the foregoing, it can be establish that, trade liberalization does not have the expected impact on food security in Nigeria. This owed to the fact that, trade liberalization supposed to have positive impact on Nigeria's food security by promoting our

agriculture in terms of export trade, improvement in mechanized farming, among others, as well as translating them to food self-sufficiency. On the contrary, Nigeria is still hoping to experience these.

### **Challenges of Trade Liberalization on Food Security in Nigeria**

In 2018, more than 113 million people in 53 countries witnessed acute hunger requiring urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods support. Similarly, the worst food crises in 2018, in order of severity, were: Yemen, DR Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and northern Nigeria. These eight nations accounted for 2/3 of the total number of people facing acute food insecurity, approximately 72 million people. Sadly, northeast Nigeria is expected to remain among the world's most severe food crises in 2019 (FSIN, 2019).

Food insecurity exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This might be occasioned by unavailability of food, insufficient purchasing power, inadequate use of food or inappropriate distribution channels at the household level. Food insecurity in a country or region may be chronic, seasonal or transitory (FAO et al., 2018).

With over 180 million people, Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and represents about 47 percent of the population of West Africa. Agriculture is the major occupation in Nigeria, employing almost two-thirds of the active work force and contributing 40 percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (2012), rates Nigeria as the number one producer of yam, cassava and cowpea in the world; yet Nigeria remains a food insecure nation and relies heavily on importation of grains, livestock products, rice, fish to mention a few.

Meanwhile, with respect to trade liberalization, according to Iloh et al. (2020), trade liberalization was forced on Africa in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in the 1980s. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a combination of factors that created a large-scale economic crisis in Africa. First, there was a global economic crisis occasioned by the two oil crises of 1973 and 1979 which strongly and negatively affected the demand for African exports and

resulting in falling commodity prices. Secondly, interest rate hikes dramatically increased the cost of servicing foreign debt. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of the region plunged from 4.3% per annum in the period 1971–1975 to 1.1% in 1981–1985. In response to this economic crisis in Africa, the World Bank and IMF advocated and imposed a policy package of market-oriented reforms, otherwise known as SAP or economic liberalization. As a result of these structural adjustment programmes, agricultural policy in many developing countries (including Nigeria) was characterized by a high level of market openness even before the Uruguay Round reforms. Before this period, trade policies in Nigeria were characterized by extensive state involvement in the economy, both in production and in marketing. In the decades following independence, Nigeria adopted heavily interventionist policies. Government was involved in agricultural marketing and food processing through the creation of marketing boards, parastatal processing units, and government controlled cooperatives.

The trade policies in Nigeria was informed by the doctrine of Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI). This is from the 1960s to the 1980s. ISI was widely accepted then as a viable policy package to help Nigeria achieve structural transformation and lessen its dependence on primary products. This strategy by the Nigerian government advocated the protection of the domestic market from foreign competition in order to promote domestic industrial production. The domestic market in Nigeria was shielded from foreign competition through these policy measures. Non-tariff measures (NTMs) such as quantitative import restrictions and government licenses were used profusely to restrict imports. However, with the introduction of SAP, Nigeria started the process of economic liberalization (Iloh, et al., 2020).

It is important to restate that Nigeria's employment in agriculture (% of total employment) accounted for an average of 37.5% between 2012 and 2018 (World Bank, 2019). Notwithstanding, the country has been a net importer of food. The enormous challenges facing the agricultural sector, Nigeria has continuously been unable to achieve food self-sufficiency and food security. Consequently, she spends about \$3billion on annual food importation, while the agricultural sector subsists on subsistence

scale, riddled with low productivity and poor return to investment.

In recent time, Imoagwu, et al. (2023), asserts that Nigeria's unemployment rate averaged 4.11% between 1981 and 1999. In 2000, the rate increased at a greater than geometric rate. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nigeria's unemployment rate rose from 13.1% in 2000 to 14.8% in 2003. The rate decreased slightly to 11.9% in 2005 and has been increasing since then. There was a 12.3% increase in 2006 and a 14.9% increase in 2008. There has been a noticeable increase in the unemployment rate in Nigeria in recent years, rising from 20.4% in 2017 to 23.1% in 2019, a 1.13% increase from 2018, 27.1% in 2020, a 1.17% increase from 2019 and 33.3% in 2021, a 1.23% increase from 2020. In 2022, however, Nigeria's unemployment rate will reach 35% (NBS, 2022). In comparison with the United States, Nigeria's inflation rate stands at 3.7% for the same period (World Development Indicator, 2021).

To further buttress on the above secondary data, majority of the interview respondents argued that food importation increases the rate of unemployment because it does not encourage the growth of local industrial innovations and advancement since it encourages dumping and inflation which are not good for our local industrial development. Most of the imported food do not have proper food safety certification and are over processed with lots of preservatives which destroy vital nutrients in the food and cause diseases. They explained that Nigeria has all the human and material resources that could help increase food production, so why the country imports food. Food dependence has put the Nigerian economy in perpetual economic bondage and reliance on other countries for survival, this they argued is a security risk for Nigeria. It should be noted here that sometimes importation is not an indication of food shortage but an issue of preference. For instance, local rice is stony and not properly processed which has reduced its preference. Thus the government has to improve the quality of our local products to attract buyers.

To be specific, a respondent stated that:

Trade Liberalization diminished the importance and role of local agro based industries. Meanwhile government is opening its borders to import more to frustrate farmers and destroy local market.

Openness has not taken the country anywhere; rather it has placed the economy in a vulnerable position which is to its disadvantage in global trade. Thus liberalization for Nigeria means deindustrialization and high cost of food production with all its attendant ills (Interview, 2023).

Based on the above analysis, this paper is of the opinion that, trade liberalization has several challenges on food security in Nigeria. Some of the major challenges are trade liberalization has made Nigeria to be over dependent on food importation which has diminished the importance and role of local agro based industries as well as frustrate farmers and destroy local market. Food importation courtesy of trade liberalization also increases the rate of unemployment because it does not encourage the growth of local industrial innovations and advancement since it encourages dumping and inflation which are not good for our local industrial development. Also, most of the imported foods are over processed with lots of preservatives which destroy vital nutrients in the food and cause diseases. Lastly, food dependence has put the Nigerian economy in perpetual economic bondage and reliance on other countries for survival.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has shown that trade liberalization policy on agriculture has not improved food security in Nigeria. Rather, it has undermined food security. This owed to the fact that local food production has been on the decrease while food importation and dumping are on the increase. These are direct effects of trade liberalization. This negative trend is made possible partly because of disincentive to continue production which is linked to the WTO's policy of discouraging the government's support and incentives to food producers in the country. The resultant effect is the dumping of food products by the industrialized countries on Nigerian markets which undermines local food industries and drives them out of production because of the uncompetitive prices these foreign products offer. This has serious implications for food security and by extension, Nigeria's national security.

However, based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Since a Nigerian is the present Director-General of the WTO, Nigeria should move for the reform of the WTO agreements in general and the Agreement on Agriculture in particular, especially market access of Nigerian commodities into developed countries' markets. A review of the Agreement should be such that it affords Nigeria with a policy space that gives the government allowance to pursue independent policies such that food security objectives are given precedent over WTO trade obligations. This will speak to our realities and address the issue of negative impact of trade liberalization on Nigeria's food security as started on our findings.
2. The seemingly over dependence on food imports should be discouraged through food import rationing to encourage domestic farmers. Government and other stakeholders should partner and make the necessary investment and cash injection into the sector thereby taking advantage of the opportunities the market can offer.
3. Nigeria must priorities increase rate of employment by encouraging the growth of local industrial innovations and advancement. This will go a long way in reducing the increasing rate of unemployment in the country.
4. Although no state can exist in isolation, therefore those foods that have to be imported must be thoroughly assessed and checked by the Nigerian government to avoid lots of preservatives. This will help in solving the problem of vital nutrients destruction in the imported food and diseases.



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