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Food Security among Urban Households: A Case Study of Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract: Urban areas are faced with the problem of increasing population and consequently inadequate supply of food items. Many urban households and individuals in Nigeria merely eat for survival. This study was therefore designed to assess the state of food security among urban households in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents from the study area. Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics and Food Security Scale. The results revealed that 70% of the urban households in the study area are food secure, while only 30% are non food secure. The major coping strategies against food shortages were the purchase of less preferred food and reduction in the quantity of meals. The study recommends that efforts at reducing food insecurity among urban households should focus on increasing urban household income and food supply.

Key words: Food security, urban households, coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

Food security is defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). Food security therefore, exists when all the people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preference for an active and healthy lifestyles (National Special Programme for food Security, 2005). Food security is a critical factor for economic growth and development of a nation (Akanji, 1993; Adegboye, 2004 and Onyido, 1997). It has therefore invoked a global concern that calls for the need to evolve strategies that are workable and sustainable for minimizing or possibly eliminating the obstacle against full realization of universal food security (Onyido, 1997).

Greater attention has been paid to food and nutrition issues at the levels of national government especially in the less developed countries as well as by the international community. This is in recognition of the importance of adequate food and nutrition in the development process and in supporting world peace and stability (Ojo, 1991). In recent times, the global focus has been on food security and poverty alleviation. This is in response to increasing food insecurity and poverty in the world. The incidence of food insecurity and poverty are particularly devastating in the developing countries as a lot of resources are being channeled towards programmes aimed at eradicating food insecurity and poverty by various international organizations and government of developing nations (Babatunde *et al.*, 2007). This implies that the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) target of having the number of hungry people from 800 million in 1990-1992 to 400 million by 2015 will not be met; unless the anaemic trend in hunger reduction observed since the beginning of the 1990s is

strengthened. It will take many decades before the number of hungry people is brought down to 400 million. Hence, meeting the need for adequate and nutritious food for large segments of the world population will continue to be at the centre of the development debate on food policy for many years to come.

Among the development problems facing Nigeria, food insecurity ranks topmost. The level of food insecurity has continued to rise steadily since the 1980s. It rose from about 18% in 1986 to about 41% in 2004 (Sanusi *et al.*, 2006). The national per capita growth in the production of major food items in Nigeria has not been sufficient to satisfy the demand for an increasing population. The result is a big gap between national supply and demand for food. Several reports have been published that shows a consistent increase in the production of staple food in the country especially between 1999 and 2005, but there is still an observable gap between food demand and food supply (Sanusi *et al.*, 2006). Maziya-Dixon *et al.* (2004) reported that over 40% of households across all agro-ecological zones in Nigeria face the problem of severe food insecurity. Food insecurity therefore remains a fundamental challenge in Nigeria (Hall, 2002). The concept of the food problem is complex and goes beyond the simplistic idea of a country's inability to feed its population (Ojo, 1991). Idachaba (2006) also reported that many households and individuals in Nigeria merely eat for survival. The fight against food insecurity therefore demands an integrated set of actions (FSM, 2006). Furthermore, urban areas such as those in Gwagwalada Area Council are faced with the problem of increasing population and consequently inadequate supply of food items. Due to the increasing prices of consumer items especially food, the quantity and quality of food intake among urban

Table 1: Scale Construction

Item	Criteria
ITEM 1	Binary item
I (we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 2	
In the last 12 months did you or other household member ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there was not enough food or money to buy food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 3	
In the past 12 months were you and your household member worried that your food will run out before you have food or money to buy more?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 4	
In the last 12 month were you ever hungry but did not eat because you couldn't afford enough food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 5	
In the past 12 month did you have to eat same food daily because you did not have varieties of food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 6	
In the past 12 month did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there was no food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 7	
Did you or any adult household stop eating for a whole day because there was no food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 8	
Did you rely on few kinds of low cost food because you do not have money?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 9	
Did you ever comment that the food you bought did not last and you did not have money to get more?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 10	
Did you or any adult household member lose weight during the past 12 months because you did not eat enough food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 11	
I couldn't feed my children with balanced and enough meal because there was no enough food?	
1= Yes	No = 0
0= No	Yes = 1
ITEM 12	
Which of the following describes your household food consumption during the past 12 months?	
(a) Always enough of what is required () (b) Enough but not always what is required () 1 = 0	
(c) Sometimes enough food () (d) Often not enough food ()	2-4 = 1

households has continued to decrease and a large proportion of urban households earning is being spent on food. The aim of this study was to assess the state of food security among urban households in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory. The specific objectives are to (i) estimate the food security status of the urban households and (ii) identify the coping strategies used by the urban households in the case of food shortages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Gwagwalada Area Council of Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. It is located at the extreme South west near the flood plain of River Gurara which transverses the territory from North to South at an elevation of 70m above sea level. The area lies between latitude 07^o.57N and longitude 07^o.7E. The vegetation combines the best features of the southern tropical rain forest and guinea savanna of the North. This

reflects the full transitional nature of the area as between the Southern forest and Northern grassland which have the woods and shrubs respectively. The soil is reddish with isolated hills filled by plains and well drained sandy clay loams which supports farming of the major crops such as sorghum, millet, melon, yam, soybean, benniseed, cassava and rice cultivation (Abuja ADP, 2004). The duration of sunshine ranges from 8 to 10 hours per day. The average rainfall per annum is 163.2mm. The original settlers are Gwari, Koro, Bassa, Gade and the Hausa Fulani as well as immigrants population of other Nigerians and expatriates. The Area Council has a population of about 50,000 people. It is the industrial zone of the Federal Capital Territory and over 26 headquarters of Federal agencies are situated in the Area Council including the University of Abuja and a Specialist hospital. It has over 40 primary school and 7 secondary schools (GAC, 2004).

Sampling Technique: Three urban wards namely Quarters, Central and Kutunku were purposively selected for the study. 40 household were randomly selected from each wards. Therefore a total of 120 respondents were used for the study.

Method of Data Collection: Primary data were used for the study; this was collected with the aid of an interview schedule which was administered to the household heads. Data were collected over a period of 2 weeks by the authors and two trained enumerators. Data were collected on household food situation and coping strategies.

Analytical Techniques: The food security scale and frequency counts were used to analyze the data. The food security scale was developed by Freedom From Hunger (FFH) an international development organization and have been used in a similar study by Gabriela and Manfred (2007). FFH's scale incorporates 17 items that account for a maximum scale score of 9 points (Melger-Quinonez, 2004). The scale that was used for this study was similar to the FFH's scale, but includes only 12 items. The scale was designed to capture the food security status of the households (Table 1). The classification into 3 food security groups was done according to the following criteria:

- Total score of 0 or 1 meant a food secure household
- Total score of 2 to 5 meant a moderate food secure household
- Total score greater than 5 meant a non-food secure household.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Proportion of the Respondents by Food Security Score: The proportion of the respondents with different food security scores are presented in Table 2. It can be

observed that the scale varied with different scores. The highest score was found in the score of zero while the lowest score was found in score of 12. The mean score was 3.48. This implies that on the average, the urban households in the study area are moderately food secured. This agrees with the findings of Swaminathan (1986) who reported that hunger is primarily a rural phenomenon in Africa particularly in Nigeria.

Table 2: Proportion of the respondents by food security score

Food Security Score	Frequency	Percentage
0	33	27.50
1	18	15.00
2	17	14.17
3	6	5.00
4	5	4.17
5	5	4.17
6	4	3.33
7	10	8.33
8	4	3.33
9	7	5.83
10	8	6.67
11	2	1.67
12	1	0.80
Total	120	100.00
Mean	3.40	

Sources: Field Survey, 2008

Proportion of the Respondents by Food Security Status:

The proportion of the respondents by food security status is presented in Table 3. It can be observed that 42.5% of the households in the study area are food secure, 27.5% are moderately food secure while only 30% are non food secure. This implies that urban households are relatively food secure. This may be attributed to higher household income and education which gives the household access to good jobs that can enable afford the right type of food thus enhancing their food security status.

Table 3: Proportion of the respondents by food security status

Food security Status	Frequency	Percentage
Food Secure (FS)	51	42.5
Moderately Food Secure	33	27.5
Non Food Secure	36	30
Total	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

Coping strategies used by urban households in the case of food shortage:

The coping strategies that are used by the urban households in the case of food shortage are presented in Table 4. The purchase of less preferred food is the major strategy used by urban household (31.85%) as a measure against the food shortage. This is followed by reduction in the quantity of meals (30.37%). The high market price of the basic food stuffs was the driving force behind the use of the two strategies.

Table 4: Coping strategies used by urban households in the case of food shortages

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Skipping of meals by members	25	18.52
Reduction in the quantity of meals	41	30.37
Purchase of less preferred food	43	31.85
Sales of asset	12	8.89
Borrowing from friends and relations	15	11.11
Total	135*	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2008. *multiple response is allowed; hence the total frequency exceeded the total sample size of respondents.

Conclusion: The study has shown that the incidence of food insecurity is not only prevalent among rural households or essentially a rural phenomenon. Based on the findings of this study the followings are therefore recommended: Food security and poverty alleviation programmes should be extended to cover both rural and urban areas of Nigeria. Furthermore, Policies that will lead to increase in farm income should be the priority of government as the high income level of urban household heads was a major driving force behind the food security status of urban households.

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