

## An Overview of Food Insecurity in Orashi Region

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### Abstract

This article examines the rising food insecurity in the Orashi area, which comprises four local governments in Rivers State. From 2012 to 2022 there have been rising food shortages in the region as a result of many known factors such as climatic changes, rural insecurity, exchange rate and global food prices among others. Some works on food insecurity suggest factors like drought and diversification, but the food insecurity in the Orashi region area is caused mostly by natural forces and man-made actions of non-state security actors (cultists and militias) and activities of the royal fathers whose activities frustrate peace and promote food insecurity. The paper relied mostly on primary sources and some secondary data for answers to its interrogations in the research and has the finding that other than the natural causes of food insecurity like flood, and drought, other factors like crises, and activities of militia groups led to the food insecurity in the region. The paper concludes that if peace and security are not achieved food insecurity would be accentuated and negatively affect food security and destroy the fledgling economy of the Orashi region.

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## **Background to the Study**

Arguably the Orashi area has been faced with challenges ranging from flood, militia crises, communal crises, rural-urban migration and poverty. The challenges have ushered in food insecurity in the region. Before 2012, there have been crises that amplified food insecurity but after the 2012 phenomenal flood in Orashi which was intensive and brought untold hardship to the people of Orashi, there has been heightened food insecurity. The 2011 elections brought a proliferation of small and light weapons in the communities. However, the issue of weapons and other issues of poverty and rural migration set the ball rolling for intense food insecurity. It is generally alleged and held that the Orashi region is a political creation of the former Governor of Rivers State Sir Dr Peter Odili in order to advance his political interest when he was vying for Governorship. The Orashi area includes Ahoada East and West, Abua/Odua local government area and Ogba Egbema/Andoni local government area. Instead of this area given an etymological name, Orashi derived from the River Orashi which flows from Dikenafa in the Imo state and empties into the Atlantic In Ocean. The Orashi area is bounded by two major rivers Sombreiro and Orashi which are the Benue River distributaries. However, in the rainy period, the overflow affects communities, The communities in the Orashi area were not spared from the devastation of the 2012 and, 2022 floods in Rivers State.

Orashi areas witnessing food insecurity, even though the area is blessed with God-given resources. The level of poverty in the area is alarming. Many multinational companies operate in the region such as Shell, Agip, NDPR, and Total among others. Most youths in the Orashi area are unemployed making them ready and willing tools in the hands of the politicians who use them as political thugs. Traditional rulers equally use them against their traditional opponents. The victims of the frequent floods displaced people accentuated the unemployment rate and raised the level of food insecurity witnessed in the Orashi region. However, this insecurity has driven the population from the rural area to the urban areas and has also depopulated the region, able body men who are supposed to drive the economic development have either died or fled the Orashi region for fear of being killed. Worse still, people left in the communities are afraid of going to the farms where the cultist and hoodlums operate, raping women and girls on the farms, and frustrating food production. The series of problems faced in the Orashi region of Rivers State, which are natural and man-made have caused acute food insecurity. It is perhaps pertinent to examine the concepts of food insecurity, its causes, especially in the Orashi region; and its effects as well as the government's responses towards stemming the tide.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Orashi Region**

Epistemologically, the word Orashi is derived from the lower Niger River Basin and tributary of Oguta Lake, southeast of Nigeria (Wodaz.com). For the sake of this research, the Orashi area covers the four local Governments of Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Abua/Odua Onelga/Ogba Egbema/Andoni local government Areas in Rivers State. of Rivers States.

### **Food Insecurity**

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000), defined food insecurity as limited or uncertain availability of nutrition and food in socially acceptable ways.

(Oyinloye O.D, Akinola O.D et al 2018) sees food insecurity as a lack of access to safe and sufficient food by everyone at all times. Within the context of this research food insecurity is little or no presence of food or nutritionally safe food.

#### MILITIA

Militia according to the Oxford dictionary is a military force that is raised from the civil population to oppose activities of the regular army. Militia according to (vocabulary.com) posits that they are a band of fighters who are not soldiers, they fight for political power. For this research militia will be used as non-state actors who bear weapons illegally oppose the government and disturb the peace within communities. They include cultists, ethnic fighters, and hoodlums area boys among others.

The term food security and food insecurity are new that arose four and a half decades after the world food day conference organised in 1974 by the Food and agriculture organization (FAO). It was an attempt by scholars in the conference to try to find a way to tackle the issue of food insecurity for the needy and hungry by ensuring that adequate food was supplied (fee 2021). However, there are three major types of food insecurity namely Acute, Occasional and chronic. Acute has to do with intense hunger and malnutrition to a point where life is threatening; Occasional food insecurity is the presence of food insecurity as a result of temporary solutions e.g. floods and communal crises; Chronic food insecurity is a situation whereby food is consistently under attack or threat e.g. earthquakes, tycoons etc. however, in the Orashi area it is occasional food insecurity that emanates as a result of perennial flooding. Activities of the militia groups who inhabit the bushes and therefore constitute a menace to farms making people avoid their farmland for fear of being killed, raped or molested causing food shortages.

#### **Causes of Food Insecurity in the Orashi Region**

There is no single cause for food insecurity in the Orashi region. These areas have witnessed floods, as a result of climatic changes, exchange rate problems and inflation that lead to the increase in the price of food commodities, conflicts and poverty. All these combined with the lack of robust economic activities in the region have engendered food insecurity.

#### **Boost in Population**

The Orashi region happens to be one of the fastest growing areas in Rivers state as it plays host to Agip oil company, Total, NDPR etc., hence the presence of these companies caused a good number of people to find their way into the Orashi area. the level of population increase affected a variable that was conducive as a result it affected food security. Tavarshima T. (2022). Nafees Ahmed et al (2021) analyse the relationship between population and resources, and how it often causes a burden on scarce resources. However, periodic famine is unavoidable as a result of population growth. In the Orashi area growth in population has put pressure on the level of environmental degrading due to the growing population's activities e.g. oil, and indiscrete dumping of refuse. Oil bunkering has caused food insecurity as the pollution from the sites has adversely affected the land and also water bodies. (Personal communication 2023)

### **Climate Change**

Climate change has brought enormous challenges, and physical impacts on the Ecosystem, food chain, income, etc. Adaku (2022) offers that despite the devastating flood in 2012 and 2022, where a good number of persons were displaced, lost their lives, and properties worth millions were destroyed, food insecurity in Orashi had been before the flood. The flood made it worse as many residents lost their crops to floods. The Logo dam in Cameroon is said to be the source of the flood in Orashi, policymakers have not made connections with those affected to see how they could remedy the situation to cushion the effect of the flood in the Orashi region as it has become a recurring decimal.

### **Non-State Security Actors/Cultist Groups**

The activities of militia and cultists have been prevalent in the Orashi region. John E.F and Nwabueze E.E (2022) are of the view that cult supremacy and war are one of the causes of flood insecurity in Ekpeye land and Orashi at large. Robert L. (1999) confirm that cult clashes cause insecurity as their activities erode farming capacity thereby increasing the price of food commodity in the market. However, the activities of these non-state actors/cult groups have caused insecurity and displaced families. These families are traumatised by these cultists who rape their daughters on the farm or even kill farmers as most of their hideouts are on the farms. However, This situation has frustrated farmers to produce food and livestock for both commercial and domestic consumption.

### **Conflict**

The consequences of conflict and food insecurity are closely related, as conflict does not permit a better ground for the market, and the collapse of the market creates scarcity thereby causing serious problems for the people of Orashi. The Tide (2016) hived a sign of relief when a notorious cultist, assassin and robbery gang leader Igbudu was killed in the Orashi area. Some of their activities included kidnapping, the killing of people perceived as rival cult groups, and forcing taxation on businesses. Premium Times (2018) narrated how another notorious killer and cultist known as Igwe Tibia a.k.a Don Wannu operated around the Ogba/Egbema /Ndoni local government and the people of Orashi to the point where he killed citizens returning from new year church service on the first of January 2018 and a bounty of 200 million was placed on him.

From 2015 to 2018 when this cultist reigned, many businesses relocated out of the Orashi region reducing commercial activities and the number of able body yours were killed either by stray bullets or as a result of cult supremacy fights. It went as far as causing serious food insecurity as the supply of food in the region was minimal. Fishing and farming activities were affected.

### **Food Insecurity and Exchange Rate**

Household accessibility to food and basic needs is dependent on the determinant of the market economy. People work to earn either from the services they render, their production or the labour they provide. FAO (1992) posit that change in the foreign exchange rate affects government services and imported goods such as capital equipment and fuel. FAO (1989) also support that the prices farmers face are very crucial for food produced locally and in the

urban markets. The forex rate influence agricultural inputs such as machine, fertilizer, and equipment consumed locally that were gotten internationally and could be distorted as a result of the overvalued exchange rate as well as taxes and export duties paid. Exchange rates (2015) that the average exchange rate on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015 was 179 naira to one dollar. By February 12/2015, it rose to N204 to one dollar. However, by 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2016, the exchange rate has risen to 348 Nigerian nairas. By 2020 the exchange rate was pegged at N380; by 2022 January it rose to N 410 and by Feb 2023 it climbed to 462. It should be noted that the exchange rate above is the central bank of Nigeria's official exchange rate. The ratio in the black market is extremely high and only a few businessmen could afford it.

In the Orashi area, the price of food commodities increased by almost more than 200 per cent, compounding the problem of the already food insecurity in the area where the people cannot meet their needs. For instance, a bag of 50kg of rice which was sold for 6000 Nigerian nairas in the year 2015 now sells for about 40,000 Nigerian nairas in the year 2022. The exchange rate increase from the year 2015 till 2022 shows that there is about a 90% increment in the food price of rice, however, it cut across another food commodity.

### **Urbanisation/New Field of Occupation**

The emergence of new occupation and the growing spate of urbanisation is factors that have also caused food insecurity in the Orashi area. Before this period, the predominant occupation in the Orashi area was fishing and farming or the cultivation of food crops e.g. yam, cassava, cocoa yam, plantains were planted in large quantities. (Szarbo 2015) define urbanisation as the increase in the size or proportion of a population living in an urban area, thereby forming cities. Orashi areas have over time increased sizeably with smaller cities emerging like Omoku, Ahoada, and Mbiama. Nafee Ahmed, et al (2021) posited that two-thirds of the world's population will migrate to urban centres, thus implying that fewer farmers have to meet the growing food demand in urban centres. In the Orashi area, most of the population concentrates in the local government capitals like Mbiama, Ahoada main town, Akomma, Ndoni, and Omoku. Migrants of the population have reduced food production and have tried to concentrate on new skills which they deem as better and more prestigious thereby causing the growing spate of urbanisation to occasion inadequate food supply in the cities.

### **Effect of Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity has its side effect as it can cause violence, malnutrition, depression, hunger and poverty. Inability access to food and required supplement lead to malnutrition and being underweight. These are the effects of food insecurity. Depression is another effect of food insecurity as most people who are suffering from this ailment suffer food shortages and food insecurity (Griffin et al, 2002). Food insecurity has a direct link with poverty.

### **Government Efforts to Curb Food Insecurity**

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in the world with a population of more than 200 million people (ReliefWeb 2022). In order to maintain proper nutrition in Nigeria, there must be adequate food at an affordable price. However, the case is different with Nigeria as there are



a lot of factors that militate against food security ranging from poverty to insecurity, Climate changes among others. Challenges like the food chain, production, distribution, processing and storage problems continuously push the price of food upwards, thereby making the sustainable development goal of "zero hunger" hard to archive.

However, the federal government have put in a lot to ensure food security in the Orashi area and Nigeria at large. Adegbola et al (2011) highlighted the federal government's efforts with the following programmes:

**National Food Programme (NAFP)** which was a voluntary programme, the programme focused on rapid change in Agriculture to encourage productivity/processing and promote agricultural values. Notwithstanding, the objective of this programme was achieved through the production of an improved variety of maize, millet, Wheat, Cassava, Cowpea, and rice and also the provision of a good fertilizer, processing facilities loans to farmers to form co-operatives, extension etc. The programme failed because of the launch of another programme, Operation Feeding the Nation, and our dependence on agriculture varies. Lack of manpower to sensitize the popularisation, and premature withdrawal of funding by the federal government. However, this programme was a pilot scheme designed to move to the other state, but it only stopped at Imo.

#### **Operation Feed the Nation**

This was another effort of the government to eradicate food insecurity and ensure food security, it was launched in 1988, and the river basin authority was established to take care of groundwater resources, dams, boreholes, dykes etc.

**National Seed Sservice (NSS)** saddled with the responsibility to produce certified seed, was established in 1975.

**National Seed Policies (NSP)** were given the mandate of setting up guidelines for developing seed sub-sector. In 1977. The Agricultural credit guaranty scheme (ACGS) was set up for loans for farmers, directorate of Food and rural infrastructure (DFRI) was established in 1986 to drive the performance of agriculture in the rural area. Structural adjustment programme 1986 to diversify. Nigerian agriculture co-operative and rural development bank, established in the year 2000, in 2002 it was followed Nigerian agriculture development fund saddled with the responsibility of agricultural research and development of the national food reserve agency established in 1977 in charge of exporting food to other countries. (Adegbola 2011).

Various agriculture institute was established in other to meet and provide hybrid seeds and animal. Some of these research institutes include the Institute for agriculture research (IAR 1924), the National Cereal Institute established in 1975, the national root crop institute 1975, and the Lake Chad research institute 1960. There are so many to mention, however, all these are efforts of the federal government of Nigeria to ensure food security.

Apart from these various programmes and research institutes, the government through its agencies had handed down palliatives in the event of environmental hazards or outbreak of pandemic diseases, for example, the outbreak of covid 19, where food production activities were halted in the Orashi area.; also in 2012 and 2022 flood in the area where farm produce were submerged in flood and destroyed.

### **Pros and Cons of Food Insecurity**

There have been various efforts of the Government to eradicate food insecurity in Nigeria, some of the examples are, Operation Feed the Nation (OPN) Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and the International Food and Agricultural Development (IFAD) among others. Although these programmes to eradicate food insecurity, have been criticised by many scholars; these programmes to boost food security and eradicate food insecurity have not been genuine as they are based on Western loans and aid with conditionalities inimical to agricultural growth. Furthermore, there is a nexus between food insecurity and crime because where conflict and crime thrive, the rate of food insecurity would increase; there would be distortion in food production and supply chain.

On like other factors that food insecurity in other areas like drought, environmental factors, increase in foreign exchange and population burst, and conflicts, the Orashi area is affected by the rest except drought as there is sufficient rain all through the year. There is a popular saying that a hungry man is an angry man, this is the case of the Orashi area as the Orashi area of Rivers State is blessed with an abundance of mineral resources but yet they live in abject poverty as the activities of the multinational companies in the region have caused food insecurity as the oil spillage and environmental degradation caused by these companies as a result of oil exploration, has caused the farmer's bad harvest. International organisations like World Bank, the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, play vital roles in agricultural and agro-industrial programmes and policies on food security. The effort of the Nigeria government in flagging off research institutes and food security have been geared towards Western biddings, for instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) does not play a direct role in eradicating poverty, the IMF's duty is to provide funding and financial stability, however, the food and agriculture Organisation (FAO) just like the world bank its objective is to eradicate poverty by distributing food and making policies. In the 1980s World Bank engaged in the structural adjustment loan programme (S.A.P) it has to seek the approval of the World Bank and the approval came with IMF imposing a condition on how the loan recipient needed to craft microeconomics policies (Schanbacher 2010).

The proliferation of small and light weapons, and supremacy tussle between the various cult group as a result of the patronage of politicians and also the traditional, has caused able body men who are supposed to engage in food production to see crime as the fastest way to emancipate themselves from poverty.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined some concepts associated with food insecurity, the causes of food insecurity as well as the government's efforts to curb food insecurity in the Orashi region

and Nigeria at large. The challenge of food insecurity is the lack or absence of initiative to fight food shortages and enhance food security by proffering proactive measures to secure the vast ungoverned space in the Orashi region and Nigeria at large. Food security cannot thrive where there is violence or crises, irrespective of the various programmes and the establishment of various agricultural programmes and research institutes. This is because as long as the activities of the Non-state security actors and traditional rulers compromise security and peace, there would be food insecurity.

### **Recommendation**

To address the problem of food insecurity in the Orashi region, we recommend the following measures:

1. Provide proper security in the rural areas which have a lot of ungoverned space a haven for criminals, and a breeding ground for hoodlums who could no longer stay in Urban areas. If proper intelligence security coordination and joint security operations are provided in rural areas, food security is. could be encouraged.
2. Food Security could be enhanced by the government providing employment, improvements and evaluation of fiscal and monetary policies; other incentives like reduction of taxes and interest on loans, as well as value-added added tax (VAT) and duties imposed on food.
3. Food supply chains should be protected to encourage as food chain is the backbone for ensuring adequate food supply network.
4. Tackling the problem of unemployment could lead to food security in the Orashi area. If the unemployed youth who addressed, a lot of people will be encouraged to go into backyard gardens and even commercial food production as an alternative source of income.
5. Giving nutritional assistance, will benefit the government and also the people of the Orashi area, in maintaining good health, because without good health individuals can not engage in food production.



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