



ADDRESSING FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA: INSIGHTS FROM NEWSPAPER RECORDS

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ABSTRACT

Food is the most important basic need of man in his social and physical milieu. This does not mean that man lives to eat, but he eats to live. This research evaluated the extent Nigerian dailies reported food scarcity issues as well as the framing, prominence and challenges journalists faced while covering food security issues. The study adopted two frameworks such as the framing theory and agenda settings. Both the qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the descriptive content analysis. In-depth interview was also conducted in selected key informants-farmers, editors, food vendors and final consumers. Vanguard newspaper was used and the period covered was 2022. The choice for vanguard was because the researcher did not carry out a comparative study of newspapers published in 2022 as it concerned the issue of food security. Results found that Nigerian dailies reported issues on food security. However, the coverage was very low. The way forward was proffered.

Keywords: Food insecurity, Framing, Agenda setting

Introduction

Abraham Maslow, as cited in Agboola (2015) conceptualized that there are five levels of human needs. According to Maslow, these basic needs are grouped according to their scale of preference and importance. They are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. He sees good and quality food as the foremost element of the first needs. The physiological needs; this is the thematic preoccupation of this study. Food in this study represents all kinds of edible items that are not harmful to the body of man.

Among these are those edibles from plants which include the following crop categories:

1. **Cereal grain crops** such as maize, wheat, sorghum, millet, rice, oat, barley and rye.
2. **Tubers:** Cassava, potato, yam, cocoyam etc.
3. **Spices:** Garlic, pepper, thyme, cinnamon, cumin etc. (Bissegger, 2023).
4. **Vegetables:** Waterleaf, pumpkin leaf, bitter leaf, Okra etc.
5. **Fruits:** Orange, mango, cashew, pawpaw etc. Food also includes animal products such as Poultry and Livestock products like meat and milk. All the above foods supply the six classes of food to man according to their nutritional values.

It is however unfortunate that the discovery of Oil in Nigeria in 1956 has made the country to ignore agriculture which was formerly the main stay of its economy and livelihood. Crude oil exploration, as argued by Okorobia and Olali (2018), has created “the negative unintended consequence of turning Nigeria

from being an essentially Agro-state into a Petro-state, with the attendant consequences of neglect of agriculture..." The irony is that Nigeria was richer during her agro days than now she swims inside the so-called oodles of revenues from petroleum products. Her citizens were well-fed and their per capita income better during pre-oil exploration.

The resultant consequence of abandoning agriculture is untold general hardship and an increase in the poverty level. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), the poverty rate in Nigeria is 133 million out of 210 million people (that is, 63%). This rate is high. The implication of this is that 63% of Nigerians have no access to good and quality food every day. Poverty is synonymous with hunger and starvation. Kralovec (2020,p.11) corroborates the foregoing fact: "*Economic Growth is one of the biggest variables to measure the economy and can be closely connected to food security... the better the economic growth, the more people are likely to be food secure. Hence a weak economy or an economic crisis can lead to food insecurity in a country.*"

Regrettably, the whole of Africa looks up to Nigeria for sustenance and yet she can hardly sustain herself, locally. Nigeria is like the unscrupulous mother whose children are hungry and unfed and she takes food to other famished families while her children die from hunger at home. The resources the Nigerian Government could have invested in agriculture are rather used for charity outside the country. For instance, in 2022, President Muhammadu Buhari spent public money to the tune of \$2.7 million (₦1.4 trillion) on ten Toyota Land cruiser SUVs he gifted the neighboring Niger Republic. Gifts are good but should be wisely given. Those vehicles were to assist Niger republic tackle their security quagmire, even when Nigeria was cocooned by food and social insecurities. Irede (2022), quoting Zainab Ahmed, Finance minister, "the vehicles were purchased for the government of Niger for security purposes."

Kralovec (2020), citing Obi' et al (2020) and World Bank (2020) quip that (agriculture is the income for Nigeria" apart from oil. This is because everyone in the rural areas is involved in it than in oil. Efforts were made in the past government in Nigeria to boost agriculture for adequate food production but many of those programmes yielded little or no positive results.

In their flesh tack, Arua (1982); Bamisaye (1985); Nwosu (1990) and Elijah (2019) reveal that Operation Feed the Nation (1976) was introduced by the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976. The aim was to address "The chronic inability of the agricultural sector of economy to satisfy the food needs of the country, there was hope in the revival of interest in agriculture". It was also reported that the programme became a total failure after two years of its inception, because "The scheme did not achieve its expected goals"

The reason for this total fiasco was because the rural peasant farmers who were meant to be target were not reached. Therefore, their response was not encouraging. Farmers were not provided with adequate material assistance such as technical advice and the supply of farmers with essential farm inputs including seeding, fertilizer, pesticides, farm implements, livestock and poultry. (Uwakah, Nweze &Nwosu, 1980).

There was yet another agricultural programme that failed woefully like the OFN. That was the Green Revolution which replaced the OFN. The GR was better than OFN because "large, medium and small scale farmers received a number of incentives to boost their production level during the implementation of the programme. Livestock and crop components were introduced" (Daneji, 2011). Nigerian government should wake up to feeding the nation through agriculture

The Nigerian media has been severally accused of under reporting stories on agriculture, agricultural programmes, food insecurity and other agro concerns. Amannah et al (2016) hold the following view in corroboration to the foregoing allegation:

The media pay attention to information that is mind blowing or human interest oriented. Even though the media may decide to report agricultural activities of farmers or government actions towards boosting agriculture, the frame of presentation may show significant difference from other news events.

The Nigerian media should wake up to its role of surveillance, information and education concerning agricultural activities and issues.

Statement of the problem

It is obvious that in Nigeria, food grows in an arithmetic progression while population of the citizens who consume gallops daily in a geometric progression. This has led to serious imbalance in the ratio of food to consumers. The other problem is that the price of the available food items is constantly growing in abnormal rates. This is worsened by serious economic meltdown which has thrown 13 million Nigerians into abject penury. These people hardly feed themselves and families and many may have also died of hunger, starvation, mal-nutrition and diseases induced by these variables. The government and the media appear to be silent. This conspiracy of silence has aggravated this problem as the government has failed to invest adequately in Agriculture and couple with the likely under reportage of the media on the neglect of the agricultural issues in the nation.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

- a) Find out whether Nigerian newspapers covered issues concerning food security and food insecurity in 2022, and Vanguard reporters of this issue in 2022
- b) Find out the frequency of the newspaper coverage of food security in 2022
- c) Investigate the source of newspaper coverage of food security in 2022
- d) Investigate the prominence given to stories concerning food security in newspapers
- e) Study the story category of coverage of food security in newspapers in 2022.

Research Questions

- a) Did Nigerian newspapers cover issues on food security and who were the vanguard reporters of this issue in 2022?
- b) What was the frequency of coverage of food security in Nigerian newspapers in 2022?
- c) What was the source of news on food security in Nigeria dailies in 2022?
- d) What was the prominence given to newspaper coverage of food security in Nigeria?
- e) What was the story category coverage of food security in Nigeria in 2022?

Literature Review

Conceptual framework

According to Lauffer (2011), cited in Waldt (2020) et al, a concept refers to “mental image or abstraction of a phenomenon”. This image or abstraction is better certified in a study through literature review. In their studies, Maree (2012, p.34) and Silverman (2005, p.9) argue that some concepts have low degree of abstraction while others possess very high degree of abstraction. Those objects that we can physically see, feel, touch or have contact with have very low abstraction degree because they are easily understood by way of their physical characteristics. Example are table, book, pen, cars etc.

Abstract ideas and unseen phenomenon are called constructs because we cannot see, touch or physical feel them. Examples are democracy, politics, policy, human behavior, personality, customer or consumer behavior, perception and so on. Food security is a construct. It cannot be seen, touched or felt; but can only be conceptualized. This is what this section of this study sets out to achieve.

Concept of food security

Gebre (2020) defines food security in terms of food availability at the family, community, national and global levels. In other words, if households are able to feed well, then the world feeds well. This is food security to Gebre.

However, Gebre (2020) fails to distinguish between food availability and food sufficiency. This is because, the food that is available may not be sufficient for the households. In this case, food security should not be viewed only on the basis of availability but also on sufficiency. Peng and Berry (2019) refer to the definition of food security by Food and Agriculture Organization (2022). They quip that:

Food security is a Situation that exists 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 preference for an active and healthy life.

In its 2009 conference, the FAO included “Stability for Food” in its definition of food security. That is to say that availability and sufficiency of food supply must be stable and regular. (FAO,2009). The fact remains that food security is a hydra-headed issue whose conceptualization is almost difficult. The reason is that it is currently impossible in the world today to have all peoples of the globe enjoy sufficient, sustainability, stable and regular food supply. In addition, it is hard to see all nations of the world become food-sovereign.

From time to time, there can be natural disasters such as drought, earthquakes, flooding and depletion of the Ozone layer, War can also erupt. These factors make food production, agricultural activities, among other things highly impossible. Available foods are also destroyed by these natural and man-made disasters.

The concept of food insecurity is the direct opposite of food Security. Food insecurity is synonymous with hunger, starvation, mal-nutrition, and diseases due to poor feeding and on a more serious note, death. These foregoing mentioned factors explain that a family (household), community, nation or the globe does not have steady access to quality food. This however, is the current situation in Nigeria. (Attah, 2012). Idris (2020) sees food insecurity as a mark of underdevelopment.

Causes of food insecurity

There are many factors that can cause a household not to be food secure. The community, nation and the globe are no exceptions.

Kutyarikpo, et al. (2021) mention climate change as a major factor affecting agriculture activities in national, continental and global levels”. They give the following as examples of climate change: abnormal temperatures, flooding, drought etc. Ayo et al give the effects of climate change on agriculture as reduced yields, increased irrigation, changes in planting and harvesting, decreased arability, more pests, and risks of fishery. Oyo and Adebayo (2012); Duru (2022) _all report increase in the price of food items. This increase is quite abnormal that average families hardly get patronize seller. Duru reported a case in Benue __ The food basket of Nigeria; where herdsmen attacks on farmers had led to very low production.

Consequently, supplies were very low production. Consequently, supplies were low and prices skyrocketed. Oji and Anih (2021) included that political factors and economic reasons also induce food insecurity in Nigeria. They argue that all the conflict-affected countries have an average higher rates of food insecure people than countries not affected by conflict”. The four pillars of food security have been given as the indicators of food security. These are as given by Odesanya andBabatunde (2015) as availability, Affordability, Accessibility and Safety

Empirical Review

Chijioke and Rasak (2018), in their comparative study assessed the extent Nigerian newspapers covered the agricultural transportation agenda in the country. Using the agenda setting the magic bullet theory, they

found out that “most of the ATA news by Vanguard and the Guardian newspapers and as mostly in the first year (2012) with steady decline in subsequent years (2013 and (2014)”. They further found out that Nigerian Tribune picked up its frequency of coverage as years rolled by. Again, the Guardian and Nigerian Tribune allocated more space compared to the Vanguard.

Another comprehensive study was done by Amannah, et al. (2016). They investigated the Vanguard, the Nation, Daily Sun and the Guardian and the extent, prominence and direction of their coverage of the agricultural policies and programmes during Jonathan’s administration (2011 - 2015). They were also discovering that news on insurgency appeared 64.7% while food issues won only 26.3% in their summary; they regrettably stated that “the coverage of agricultural issues in the Nigerian newspapers was very poor.

Theoretical Framework

This study as guided by two frameworks—framing theory and agenda setting. The framing theory Trueman (1978) quoted in Nibre (2020) teaches that it is the way the media wants the audience to perceive a given message. Framing theory is best for issues like food security. The reason is given by Hansen (2010). He says framing concerns emphasis, selection and presentation style to persuade on to focus only on what the reporter presents to him framing is to the reporter what selective exposure is to the audience.

Agenda setting and framing are related in certain ways. Both want us to see news reports through the eye and perception of the reporter. Through repeated coverage or focus, agenda setting tells us what to think more about and in a certain predetermined manner (Alphonsus, Etumnu, Talabi, Fadeyi, Aiyesimoju, Apuke, & Gever, 2022). Gills & Adam (1988) cited in Adesanya et al (2015) round it off like this: “*The concept (of agenda settings) describes the way in which the mass media decides which information and which issues are most important for the Public consumption and debate*”. The foregoing is that Vanguard reporters adopted during their reports or coverage of food security in 2022.

Methodology

The descriptive qualitative content analysis was used for the study. The unit of analysis was the news stories on food security as published in Vanguard newspapers. The choice of Vanguard was because it is one of the elite newspapers widely subscribed, bought and read by the elite. Again, the researcher also selected only Vanguard for more reasons:

The work was not comparative, and specification also demanded that the researcher choose only one national daily.

Vanguard was studied for a period of twelve months (January 1 – December 31, 2022). It was a year almost all the 36 state and Abuja were inundated by flood. Farmlands were consequently covered for months. This seriously affected food availability and price. Secondly, it was also a year farmers and herdsmen frequently clashed and cows destroyed crops by foraging them. This also affected food availability and price, not only in 2022 but also in the subsequent years (see Egwuatu et al, 2022; Adonu, 2022; Adegbe, 2022; Hassan Wayo, 2022; Marama, 2022). Data was collected, analyzed and presented on tables. The study area was Nigeria, a country in West Africa. Nigeria has the largest arable land for crop production and animal husbandry as compared to other African nations. The population of Nigeria is currently put at 210 million with 133 million people living in poverty and no access to quality food. (Komolye, et al. 2022). The population of study was the total number of Vanguard Newspaper published during the period under study; that is, 2022. This gave us a total of 365 editions of Vanguard in 2022.

The sampling method was the composite week procedure developed by Riffle, Aust and Lacy (1993) as cited in Amannah et al (2012). They write that in a composite week/month sampling, the editions of newspaper for the week or month under study were grouped according to the months of the year. After this, two editions within the months of the year are then selected at random. Using the above method, this researcher had 12 months in 2022. Four papers rather than 2 were selected by random method. So, out of the 365 editions, 48 issues of Vanguard were studied as the sample size

Data collection, analysis and discussion

This study content analyzed 48 edition of Vanguard newspaper selected. Information was collected as data and presented on tables, in line with the research questions raised in the study.

RESEARCH QUESTION NUMBER 1: Did Nigerian newspaper cover stories on food security and who were the reporters of this issue in 2022?

Reporters and their locations

S/N	REPORTER	LOCATION
1	ChineduAdonu	Enugu
2	JimohBabatunde	Lagos
3	Peter Duru	Makurdi
4	Peter Egwuatu	Lagos
5	Victor Young	Lagos
6	GodferyBivbere	Lagos
7	Elizabeth Adegbasan	Lagos
8	Emmanuel Imaize	South-South
9	NdahiMarama	Maiduguri
10	Gabriel Ewepu	Abuja
11	AdemolaAdegbite	Ibadan
12	Ibrahim Hassan-Wayo	Kaduna
13	EmemIdir	Yenegoa
14	Festus Ahom	Asaba
15	Samuel	Yenoagoa
16	Juliana Taiwo	Asaba

Above presents information about the reporters who covered stories on food security, agriculture and climate change and so on. This table however does not represent the full list of those reporters. In summary, there was coverage of food security in 2022.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2: What was the frequency of news coverage on food security in Vanguard in 2022?

Factors	News Type					Total	%
	Frequency	Hard News	Editoria	Opinion	Feature		
Insecurity: Herdsmen, Boko Haram, others	94	6	2	10	16	128	58
Environmental Issues	17	1	2	2	+	22	10
Economy, Food prices and food shortages, others	10	4	5	7	36	62	28
Agricultural Policy and Programmes	3	1	2	1	3	10	4

Total	124	12	11	20	55	222	100
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Source: Field work, 2023

RESEARCH QUESTIONS NO 2: What was the frequency of news coverage on food security

Factors	News Type						Total	%
	Hard News	Editorial	Opinion	Feature	Advertisement			
Insecurity: Herdsmen, Boko Haram, others	94	6	2	10	16	128	58	
Environmental Issues	17	1	2	2	+	22	10	
Economy, Food prices and food shortages, others	10	4	5	7	36	62	28	
Agricultural Policy and Programmes	3	1	2	1	3	10	4	
Total	124	12	11	20	55	222	100	

The above shows the frequency of coverage of food security issues in 2022. The information as shown on the table explains that security-related issues were mostly covered. This is represented as 58%, included in these security issues were Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen, among others. It then means that insecurity affected food production and agricultural activities more than other factors. Following insecurity was economy, food price increase and food shortage. This affected food production, availability and sufficiency by 28%. Writing under “133 million Nigerians poor”. Komolade et al (2022) quotes the National Bureau of Statistics as saying that the level of economic hardship and rate of poverty was high, especially in the north. On the other hand, news stories obtained from hard news (straight news) on the issue of food security were put at 94, 17, 10 and 3 according to the order of insecurity, environment, economy and policies respectively. This gave total number of 124 stories.

Advertisement followed hard news with 55 news stories. Owing to the fact that Vanguard published food price fluctuations that was what gave rise to the high news stories on advertisement. However, Vanguard only focused on three agricultural commodities such as Coffee, Cocoa and Sugar. Environmental Factors got 22 news items. This made it to come 3rd on the table. 2022 was a year flood inundated farmlands and consequently, crops and aquatic animals and floods were all wasted.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS NO 3: What was the source of news in Nigerian newspapers

S/N	VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Staff Reporter	68	70.8
2	Government Agency	20	20.8
3	NGO	2	2.1
4	Foreign Scene	-	-X
5	Individual	6	6.3
6	Interview	-	-
Total		96	100

The highest number of news came from the Staff reporters from the various locations in the Country. There as a total number of 68 of them with 70.8% of the news source. News from government agencies was 20.8%. Individual writers (Freelancers) were only 6 with 6.3%. There was only 2 reports from NGO with 2.1%. No news from the foreign scene. No interviews granted. The implication of the above was that in 2022, Staff reporters performed wonderfully. Government agencies and specialists in agricultural issues did not perform well. Again, individual writers should write to state their Observations and those of the

communities' within which they operate. Their writing on food security should spur the government to action.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: What was the prominence given to news coverage by Nigerian newspapers? Under prominence, we look at Placement of new position, Size of page, Headline features.

Page Size (page allotment) of news item

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Full Page	4	14.3
2	Half Page	20	71.4
3	Centre Spread	4	14.3
Total		28	100

Placement of news item (Position)

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percent
1	Front Page	10	5.1
2	Back Page	X	X
3	Inside Page	140	72.2
4	Top Page	20	10.3
5	Hidden Corner	24	12.4
Total		194	100

Headline Features

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percent
1	Bold	58	32.6
2	Not bold	34	19.1
3	Upper case character	20	11.2
4	Lower case character	66	37.1
5	Italics	-	-
6	Tiny character	-	-
7	Underline	-	-
Total	178	100	100

DISCUSSIONS

Full page news items got 14.3%, half-page allotment got 71.4%. Others were centre Spread 14.3%. Summarily, news coverage on food security according to page allotment was encouraging while centre-spread and full-page allotments were not encouraging. Most of the news stories on food security were put inside pages (72.2%) this was followed by news items that were published inside but in hidden corners of pages. This wasn't encouraging as many readers might be in a hurry to discover this. Those published on page-tops got 10.3% while front pages got 5.1%. Though some of the headlines were cast in bold characters (32.6%), yet they were presented in small letters (37.1%). No italicized headlines. No underlined headlines and no tiny headlines.

Summary of findings

1. There was 58% coverage on insecurity-induced food crisis in Nigeria in 2022, but only 4% of food security news came from agricultural issues.
2. 72.2% of food security issues were published inside the pages of newspapers, only 5.1% was published on the front page.
3. News on food security from government was only 20.8% while reporters were able to cover 70.8%.

4. Most of the headlines on food security were done using small letters 37.1%, making them not to be conspicuous.

Conclusion

The coverage of food security news was not encouraging. If not for the efforts of newspaper reporters, the government of Federal Republic of Nigeria had little or no interest in food security. That was why news published from government quarters was only 20.8% while staff reporters covered 70.8%. With this, Nigeria citizens will still remain hungry, malnourished and poor.

Recommendations

1. The researcher hereby recommends that both staff reporters and freelancers should give more coverage considerations and attention to agricultural activities in Nigeria; if Nigeria will be food-secure.
2. The Nigeria government should as a matter of urgency, improve agricultural activities by funding the agricultural sector, providing improved varieties, giving loans and grants to farmers, etc. it can do this by revamping the management of the sector and through viable policies.
3. Government should also put functional measures in place and tackle insecurity of any kind.
4. Government should also ensure that the prices of agricultural products are moderate.

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