Paradigm Shift for Food Sovereignty and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa

Oladiran Afolabi, PhD
Department of Political Science and Diplomatic Studies,
Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria.
(E-mail: oladiranafolabi73@gmail.com,
oladiran.afolabi@bowen.edu.ng)

ABSTRACT

Food sovereignty connotes the capacity to define and design food policies that fulfil the expectations of a nation's citizens, while limiting or downplaying dependence on external forces or actors and simultaneously developing agriculture systems and practices that encourage national and regional needs. In Africa, feeding the citizens has continued to be a mirage as national and State-centric approaches to food and agricultural policies has remained nebulous, inconsistent and insufficient in addressing the seemingly perennial and chronic problems of food availability, accessibility, affordability and proper utilisation- the key pillars of food security. This paper argued that for real and genuine domestication of the sustainable development goals in Africa, there is the need for a shift in paradigm on food and agriculture policy options. Accomplishing

any significant success in the second goal of the SDGs in relation the African people, therefore requires a comprehensive strategy that recognises the combined commitment of states, citizens, advocacy movements and other stakeholders in the processes of formulating and implementing policies on food and agriculture. It is only through proper adherence to the fundamental tenets of food sovereignty that 2030 targets of the SDGs would not end up like the 2015 targets of the MDGs which had been adjudged a failure in terms of the capacity to address world hunger.

Keywords: SDGs, Food Sovereignty, Food Security, Africa

Introduction

The food problem has been one of mankind's major challenges since recorded history; making the provision of adequate food to assume prominence through the ages in every country of the world (Olayide, 1976). Access to adequate supply of food is the most basic of human needs and rights. Therefore, ensuring that people have enough to eat is not only a moral duty of governments; it is also in their economic and political interests. Food availability, accessibility and affordability are major issues in any food production system that aims at food security. This is because hungry people cannot work;

hungry children cannot learn; without a well-nourished, healthy population, development is a mere dream that may practically never be accomplished. It is due to this reasons that the issue of Food security has become central to our survival as individuals, households, communities, nations and humankind.

Food is very important. There is in fact nothing more basic. Food is the first of the essentials of life, our biggest industry, our greatest export, and our most frequently indulged pleasure (Ajakaiye and Akinbinu, 2000). It then follows that any serious nation or region of the world that desire sustainable development must be determined to institute mechanisms that will ensure high level of food availability, accessibility, affordability, adequacy and utilisation.

Subsequently, and given the fact that many African countries still lack the real capacity to process the effects of globalisation; coupled with the unfavourable conditionalities of the world trade organisation towards the developing nations of the world, sustainable food security could only be achieved through a genuine purpose and people-oriented policy direction that will see the these countries, especially African countries to a considerably large extent, be in charge of their respective countries policy on food or better still their continent's

efforts at making food available and utilisable. The central argument of this paper is that for adequate and genuine purpose effort at food security in Africa, through achieving the second goal of the SDGs, there is the need for a concerted effort and commitment towards the principles and practice of food sovereignty.

Conceptualising Food Sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty actually became popularised from a parallel summit to the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, when international NGOs together with newly formed transnational social movements denounced "food dumping" and called for "food sovereignty," a concept that had earlier been developed by La Vía Campesina (LVC), the international peasant coalition (Canfield et al, 2021). In the wisdom of the LVC, food sovereignty is a vision of democratic, territorially controlled food systems not subject to market-control of the global North and its transnational food corporations (Canfield et al, 2021).

Food sovereignty connotes the capacity to define and design food policies that fulfil the expectations of a nation's citizens, limit or downplay dependence on external forces or actors while simultaneously developing agriculture systems and practices that encourage national and regional needs (Afolabi, 2019).

There are now agitations and struggles from many social movements for the inclusion of the principle of food sovereignty in the agenda of many governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental international organisations. The argument is that focusing attention on the small scaled local farmer would commence the process of thinking globally and acting locally in food policy decision making for the overall interest of the mass majority of the people; and hence commence the proper process of food sovereignty. As further explained by Schultheiss (2011), "We also felt it was important to educate as many people as we could on the importance in supporting small scale farmers and the injustices they face on a daily basis".

Food sovereignty is therefore, a concept, idea or movement that emerged in the wake of the increased globalization of food systems and the spread of corporate power into the lives of small-scale food producers, encroaching on their livelihoods and nature (Pimbert, 2009). It has since provided a robust and galvanizing critique of the organization and the impacts of the dominant food system and as such plays a central role in global food governance, towards the accomplishment of food security.

The argument in the vein of the foregoing is that food sovereignty promotes agrarian and food rights for peasants through a highly prescriptive agenda focused on reducing global food trade and reorienting food systems around local and seasonal production grounded in agro-ecological principles (Afolabi, 2019; Clapp, 2014; Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010). Food sovereignty, as vision, project, and movement, has been conditioned by the contours of the food regime, emerging as a project in the 1990s during a period of intensifying global agrarian crisis, rapid trade liberalization and structural adjustment policies that saw a loss of support for domestic agricultural sectors across the global South (McMichael, 2014). It has since become a "powerful mobilizing frame for social movements, a set of legal and quasi-legal norms and practices aimed at transforming food and agriculture systems" (Edelman, 2014:659). Food sovereignty is a concept and principles of practice that gives to the state and the people the autonomy to formulate food and agricultural policies in line with local preferences. The constituent principles of food sovereignty as adopted by Charlton, 2016, are well represented thus:

Principles Constituting Food Sovereignty

Principle	Explanation

Focus on Food for People	The right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry or living under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalized. Food sovereignty rejects the proposition that food is considered a commodity for international agribusiness
Values Food Providers	Values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; Rejects policies, actions and programs that undervalue these groups and threaten their livelihoods.
Localizes Food Systems	Brings food providers and consumers together in common cause, placing them at the centre of decision-

	making on food issues; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted (sic) with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations
Makes Decisions Locally	Seeks control over and access to territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations for local food providers. Promotes use and sharing of these resources in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity. Promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and different sectors to resolve conflicts. Rejects privatization of natural resources through laws,

	commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes

Builds Knowledge and Skills	Builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems. Develops appropriate research systems to support this and facilitate transfer to future generations. Rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering
Works with Nature	Uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximize the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, in

	the face of climate change. Rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialized production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming

SOURCE:http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisa tion-mainmenu-44/what-is-la-via-campesinamainmenu-45 Retrieved 12 July, 2018.

These fundamentals of food sovereignty as presented above actually find solace in the conceptualisation that it is a:

> political movement that emphasises the rights of food producers, distributors and consumers to have control over the food system, as opposed to corporations and market institutions. It has been defined as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to

define their own food and agriculture systems (Carlile, et al, 2021: 18).

From the MDGs to the SDGs: A General Appraisal

In 2000, the member states of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration as a renewed commitment to human development. The Declaration includes eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), each with quantified targets, to motivate the international community and provide an accountability mechanism for actions taken to enable millions of poor people to improve their livelihoods (Rosegrant, et al, 2006:1). The MDGs are as follows:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

It is observed that all the eight MDGs may not be reached if we cannot meet goal number one – to

eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and more specifically, the success or failure of one goal (especially goal number one) affects the success of the other seven – like a domino effect" (Rosegrant, et al 2006). In this wise, one sees lack of access to food as not only a symptom of severe poverty, but a clear indication of the realities that the other seven MDGs seek to imperatively address. The targets of the MDGs were set for the year 2015; but when the realities of the failure to achieve these goals became clear to the framers of the MDGs, another meeting was held to appraise the MDGs and to institute other sets of goals whose agenda was set for 2030. As succinctly observed:

> On September 14, 2010, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published its estimates concerning the number of people suffering from hunger in 2010: 925 million. This figure was below the 1,020 billion in 2009, but it was higher than the number reached before the 2008 global food crisis. The 2010 figure corresponded to 13.5% of the world population, while the 2015 objective (millennium development goal (MDG) number 1) was 8%. The FAO concluded that we were still far from achieving MDG 1, that is, halving the number of hungry people worldwide by 2015 (Sasson,2012:1).

On the other hand, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 25-27 September 2015 agreed a new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, built around 17 goals and 169 targets (UN, 2015a). Significantly, the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but are much broader in scope and ambition, encompassing the eradication of poverty and hunger and improved health and nutrition; reduction of inequality; the building of peaceful, just and inclusive societies; the protection of human rights; the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. It also aims to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities.

The 2030 Agenda advocates sustainable development in all of its three dimensions, for all countries (developing and developed), based on the fundamental recognition and protection of human rights, dignity and equity. Specifically, the SDGs include:

1)   End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

2)   End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

3)   Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

4)   Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

5)   Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

6)   Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

7)   Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

8)   Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

9)   Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.

10) Reduce inequality within and among countries.

11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (taking note of agreements made by the UNFCCC forum).

14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

The African Food Situation: A Synoptic Overview

The present state of food security and widespread malnutrition in Africa is not

Ideal as one would like it to be, as a good number of African countries are still food deficit and insecure (Dodo, 2020). Sub-Saharan Africa has continued to have the highest share in the number of the millions of the people going to bed poor and hungry with some of them dying of starvation. In the 1970s the number of hungry and malnourished people in Africa was in the neighbourhood of 80 million (Nana-Sinkam, 1995: 110). The figure rose to more than 100 million in 1984 while in 1995 the number of the poor and hungry in Africa was estimated by Nana-Sinkam to be within a range of 140-150 million.

Jean Ziegler, U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, alerted the more than 500 delegates at a three-day meeting hosted by the Conference of Non-governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) and the United Nations Millennium Campaign about the eradication of hunger, the Civil Society Development Forum in Geneva, June 2007; of the dangers in the current global system of food production and distribution. As Ziegler observed:

> while 854 million people went without
> food in the world last year (that is in the

year 2006), enough food was actually produced to feed 12 billion people. He further informed the delegate that over recent decades, food production has grown faster than population everywhere but Sub-Saharan Africa (Ziegler, cited in Westhuizen 2007)

However, since the 1990s, agricultural and food production in sub-Saharan Africa has grown much less than that in other regions of the developing world (Sasson, 2012). Between 1996 and 2005, food production rose 2.6% (compared with 3.3% in all developing countries). Of all farmland, 3.5% was irrigated (compared with 22.4% in the rest of the developing world), and fertilizer use amounted to 13.4 kg per hectare (compared with 115.2 kg per hectare). The balance of food in African countries had a deficit of more than US$900 million in 2004, while it was in excess in Brazil by US$15.5 billion, in Argentina by about US$10 billion, in France by US$5.7 billion, and in India by almost US$4 billion (Sasson, 2012:27).

Taking a further cursory look at the African food situation in more recent time, it is observed that the condition has not fared better at all, as food security is deteriorating and expected to worsen in some African countries between October 2019 and January 2020

(World Vision Staff, 2019). Reports show that in the year 2018, Africa was home to more than half of the global total of acutely food-insecure people, estimated at 65 million people. East Africa had the highest number at 28.6 million, followed by Southern Africa at 23.3 million, and West Africa at 11.2 million; all indicating that hunger has continued to be increasing at an alarming rate in Africa (World Vision Staff, 2019). The situation seems not to have fare better as over 100 million people in Africa are today facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity and the situation may worsen in the coming months due to the effects of COVID pandemic (IFRC, 2021).

Amongst the reasons for the continuous suffering of Africa from food shortages, insecurity, and prevalence of malnutrition are: a number of failed internal economic policy tools and international policy prescriptions (Dodo, 2020). The internally induced factors include:

> (1) the never-ending political instability and crises; (2) the short or long protracted civil conflicts and wars; (3) the endemic, persistent, and Institutional corruption; (4) the misdirected economic policies and mismanagement; (5) the lack of committed political leadership; (6) the sheer neglect towards the farmers; and

(7) the lack of clear financial and economic investment into the agricultural sector (Dodo, 2020:4).

Apart from the internal factors, there are also a number of external factors that has continued to contribute to the perennial state of food insecurity in Africa. A case in point here is the ever present influence of international financial institutions. For instance, starting from the 1970s till date, the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) influenced the prescriptions of economic policies that made the already comatose economic situations in Africa worse. These largely neo-liberal agricultural focused policies advised sub-Saharan African governments and leaders to cut aid and slash subsidies to their farmers; and let the markets take care of everything in the economy including the production and distribution of food, in order to speed up modernisation and quicken their incorporation into the liberal-based global market economy (Dodo, 2020).

Paradigm Shift for Food Sovereignty in Africa
Most Africans live in rural areas and derive their incomes from farming; but because African governments follow policies that are adverse to most farmers' interests, these countries have largely failed to produce enough food to feed their populations (Bates, 1981). For

many decades international trade kept the price of food artificially low and undermined farmers' incomes in developing countries. This has continued to make the least developed countries heavily dependent on the global markets for their food supply and the poor find it increasingly difficult to afford even the bare minimum they need to sustain themselves and their families. The cumulative effects of this practice and system of food supply are the recent dramatic increases in food prices on a global scale and its social and economic consequences. This served as a wake-up call for many governments and development experts, who have unanimously recognized that some drastic change is, needed (Mousseau, 2009: 75).

Africa's enormous endowment in huge human and natural resources cannot be overemphasised. But despite these natural blessings in the forms of arable land, crop variety, human population and other endowments, hunger is still prevalent in the continent. It has been observed that there has been a policy somersault as one government replaces another and this has brought about frequent changes of policies on food and agriculture. It is observed that inadequacies, inappropriateness and inconsistencies have characterized the African food policy. Writing specifically in the Nigerian context, Idachaba (2009) observed that the implication of this

inconsistent policy posture is that we have always had to start afresh with every new regime .This is the African situation in terms of food policy. Consequently, the real journey to the 'promised land' of African food security should rationally begin with the formulation and implementation of food policies that derive almost directly from the inputs and contributions of the citizenry in line with their food desire.

In view of the foregoing, a strong political will is required by African leaders to accomplish the sustainable development goal two which aims at ending hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. This is very strategic in view of the observation that hunger is a political creation which requires largely political solution (Clover, 2003); and that hunger and poverty are problems that can be addressed if humanity, particularly those better off can summon the political will to do so (Diaz-Bonilla, 2001).

Therefore, the major shift in policy paradigm would see African leaders and policy makers looking inwards in coming with policies, initiatives and programmes that would address the food situations of the continent. Partnership may be entered into with experts and professional outside Africa in implementing these policy options, but the *modus operandi* and the *modus Vivendi*

would reflect predominantly local content in terms of human and material resources and most importantly in terms of who gets the greatest benefit from such programmes.

In line with the fundamental principles of food sovereignty, the food policies of most African states would need to depart from the system where African leaders and governments follow policies that are adverse to most farmers' interests, and hence failed largely to guarantee food availability, accessibility and affordability for their people. Food policies should henceforth reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the people (who have the rights to derive the maximum benefit from their leaders' policies) and not the whims and caprices of international trade and the global market, which undermined farmers' incomes in developing countries; and also practically makes it difficult for the poor to afford even the barest minimum of the food they need to survive.

Furthermore, African government should justify their political sovereignty through a strong political will aimed at food sovereignty. To be sovereign in food production and utilisation means that wider vision of African food security would encapsulate the following issues as articulated by Lucas (2010):

- The need for reform of a fundamentally unfair international trading system,that currently makes it difficult if not impossible for Southern producers to compete on a level playing field with those of the North.
- The need for participatory democracy in countries with the worst food shortages, so those afflicted by hunger can have a say in redesigning the policies that now threaten their livelihoods.
- The potential of current communications technology to provide people, in new and powerful ways, with the information they need to make knowledgeable decisions about their personal food security.
- There should be a link between food security and collective human security.
- Importantly, Policy shifts would focus on moving from a pre-occupation with jobs to a framework for sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

The central position of this paper, at once implicit and explicit, is that, to domesticate the sustainable development goals in Africa with particular reference to accomplishing the food security objectives of the leaders and the people, governments must look inwards in policy

formulation and implementation. In other words, the fundamental tenets of food sovereignty must be strictly adhered to in defining and designing food policies. The focus would have to be on food and agricultural programmes and policies that fulfil the expectations of a nation's citizens, while limiting or downplaying dependence on external forces or actors. A consideration for the food preferences, the food culture and food ecology of the people become germane in the efforts at providing food for the people.

In the final analysis, for the SDGs not to turnout as failures in the vein of the MDGs, requires that urgent measures are taken to tackle world hunger and to ensure that the right to food becomes a reality for all human beings. And given the fact that many African countries still lack capacity to process the effects of globalization, a commitment to the principle of food sovereignty, in policy formulation and implementation is the most practical route to achieving the SDGs, particularly the second Goal that is expected to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture in the world by 2030.

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