A Philosophical framework for Addressing Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Introduction

I argue that food insecurity is a complex issue that can be cross-examined philosophically through an intersectional lens, by incorporating the idea of Phillip Hallie's institutionalized cruelty, Iris Young's idea of oppression, Beauvoir's second sex, Jurgen's public sphere, and John Dewey's democracy, in order to identify and address the inequalities, power imbalances, systemic injustice and undemocratic way of life that contribute to the perennial problem of food insecurity in Nigeria.

Nigeria prides itself as the giant of Africa with its economy becoming the largest in Africa in 2020, but the poverty rate in the country is alarming. The country is grappling with a range of challenges in its entire food system, including food insecurity, environmental degradation, lack of sustainability, poor agricultural practices, and unequal distribution. It is shocking to state that not less than 70% of the Nigerian population is surviving on less than a dollar per day. This reality seems to contradict Amartya Sen's theory that no functioning multiparty democracy can experience famine because democratic institutions—regular free and fair elections, independent courts and legislatures, free press and vibrant civil society—are all effective mechanisms of upholding the basic rights of citizens, including the right to food (Sen, 1999:178).

Food security exists when an entire population at all times has 'physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets its dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. There are four main dimensions to this definition: the physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, food utilization, which determines people's nutritional status, and the stability of the other three dimensions over time (Alinovi, L et al, 2005). Each of these dimensions can be undermined by a range of factors, which are

consequently drivers of food insecurity: climate change, violent conflict, Covid-19 and the rising cost of living. A combination of these four mutually reinforcing drivers can contribute to food insecurity. There is an urgent need to address food security issues in Nigeria, which is predicted to become the world's third most populous nation by 2050 (Oguniyi, A.L. et al, 2021). It is imperative to interrogate the essence of a democratic government whose citizens are under severe threat of food insecurity. How can we re-conceptualize the Nigeria food supply chain that would guarantee equitable and sustainable food availability?

Food insecurity is a many-sided issue that requires a philosophical framing that will examine specifically the social and political factors that contribute to the unequal food distribution in the country. This paper maintains that the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria can be theorized through the lenses of Iris Young's idea of five faces of oppression and Beauvoir's idea of second sex. It offers Jurgen's idea of the public sphere, as the pathway to correcting the structural inequalities that contribute to the unequal distribution of food resources and uses John Dewey's idea of democracy to recommend the importance of democratic values and all-inclusive public deliberation to building a more sustainable food system in Nigeria.

Consequently, my intent in this paper is to critically examine how the ideological framework of philosophy can be used to analyze the main causes and possible solutions to the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. I express the idea that understanding the political and social structure that trigger food crisis is a necessary pathway to finding solution.

I divide the paper into five sections. The first part of my paper examines food insecurity as a problematic. The second part uses Iris Young's five faces of oppression framework to theorize the how food insecurity is a form of oppression. The patriarchal structure in Nigeria is one of the drivers responsible for the vulnerability of women to food insecurity and poverty. Thus, in the

third part of the paper, Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the "second sex" would be used to understand the intersectionality between women and food insecurity, and show how gender inequality contribute to the problem of food insecurity. The fourth part thematize the solution to the problem of food insecurity using exposes John Dewey's idea of democracy and Jurgen Habermas's concept of public sphere. The part explains how the synthesis of good democratic principles and public deliberation can complement other approaches aimed at addressing the pressing issue of food insecurity in Nigeria. In the final analysis, the paper will evaluate the philosophical framework and show that addressing food insecurity in Nigeria requires a value-based approach that prioritizes justice, gender balance, equal opportunity for employment, access to education, collective responsibility and creates the space for all-inclusive participation of local communities in decision and policy-making processes that promote economic growth and social justice.

1. **Food Insecurity as a Problematic**

Food insecurity is a global problem impacting individuals and families of all economic backgrounds. It is the converse of food security. According to FAO (2001a), 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 preferences for an active and healthy life. Generally, food security rests on four pillars, namely: availability, access, utilization and stability. Availability refers to the overall abundance of food but the availability does guarantee accessibility to people due various reasons. The pillar of utilization relates to how well people utilize the food they can access (Barrett, C.B et al. 2009). These pillars raise questions that examine the interplay of different actors within the food supply system, and understand how their activities lead to food insecurity. We can consider questions such as: what are the social and political structure that hinder the availability of food? What are the institutional or patriarchal

restrictions that limit the accessibility of food to people? If foods are available and access; but people find it difficult to utilize the food, then how do we solve the problem of food insecurity at the various food supply chains?

Food insecurity is a serious issue that affects millions of people around the world. It can have devastating physical, mental, and social consequences for individuals and their families.). In the view of US Department of Agriculture, food insecurity arises when sufficient food supplies exist but remain inaccessible to particular individuals and families due to social and economic constraints such as poverty or unemployment (USDA, 2019). Some of the indicators for food insecurity include skipping meals; reducing portion sizes at meal times; having to choose between paying for food and other basic needs such as rent or electricity; relying on food pantries, free meal programs; and being unable to afford a balanced diet.

The framing of food insecurity as a problematic issue would help us to address the underlying causes of this issue, rather than just providing short-term solutions such as food aid. The breadth of the problematics associated with food insecurity goes beyond health conditions. Framing food insecurity as a problematic can provide a framework for developing more just and equitable solutions to address food insecurity.

2.   Iris Young's Five Faces of Oppression and Nigeria's Food Insecurity Predicament

In our Society, we deal with many forms of oppression in our daily lives. Food insecurity can be seen as a form of oppression because it is often linked to systemic inequalities, such as poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Iris Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" framework provides a useful lens to interpret the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. The framework identifies five types of oppression that can interact with and reinforce one another,

namely exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence

Food insecurity is a form of exploitation, which is one of the faces of oppression. Food insecurity is a kind of food injustice that diminishes the capacity of people to flourish well in the society. Iris Young asserts that justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation (Iris Young, 561). In Nigeria, many farmers who labor to cultivate land and produce food are often exploited by middlemen who buy their crops at a low price and sell them for a higher profit. This exploitation is often enabled by the lack of regulation, which often leave farmers struggling to make a living and eventually contribute to food insecurity. This kind of injustice of exploitation, Iris says is most frequently understood on a distribute model. The injustice of exploitation consists in social processes that bring about a transfer of energy from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in the way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more (Iris, p.49)

Moreover, the oppressive form of food insecurity is in the marginalization of people living abject poverty, particularly in the rural areas. Marginalization is the act of relegating or confining a group of people to a lower social standing or outer limit or edge of society. Overall, it is a process of exclusion. In Nigeria, people living in rural communities, especially local farmers are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect food production. These people lack access to timely information that would have enhance their agricultural practices. They are usually excluded from programs or scheme that would have provided assistance or resources to boost their farming operations. This situation resonates with the idea of Iris, when she wrote that "marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole

category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (Iris, p.51). I agree with Iris's claim that "while marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distribute justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction. (Iris, p.53).

The problem of food insecurity in Nigeria relates to Iris Young's idea of powerlessness. For Iris Young, most places are not organized democratically, direct participation in public policy decisions is rare, and policy implementation is for the most hierarchical, imposing rules on bureaucrats and citizens. Thus, most people in these societies do not regularly participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of their lives and actions, and in this sense most people lack significant power (Iris, p.59). This is applicable in Nigeria, where the ministry of agriculture and other food regulatory bodies have developed policies that affect smooth accessibility and availability of food, leaving the ordinary powerless citizens neglected without the political or economic capacity to challenge the condition.

Food insecurity is a major problem in Nigeria, and it can be interpreted in terms of cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism refers to the domination of one culture over another, often through the spread of cultural products, values, and beliefs. It involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm (Iris, p.62). Relating this to Nigeria, the problem of food insecurity can be traced back to the legacy of colonialism and the imposition of Western food systems on the country. The spread of Western food culture has also contributed to the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. Western fast-food chains have become increasingly popular, especially among the urban population. This has led to the displacement of traditional Nigerian food culture, and the

adoption of foreign food practices. The food supply chain has been overshadowed through the influence of cultural imperialism. One effects of this problem is in rice consumption. Rice is one of the major foods consumed in Nigeria. Many people prefer imported rice to locally produced one. This appetite for imported rice has led to high cost of imported rice which many citizens cannot afford to buy it.

The problem of food insecurity in Nigeria under the influence of cultural imperialism reflects the domination of Western food systems and culture over traditional Nigerian food culture. Thus, Iris opines that "those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominating meanings they experience as rising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them" (Iris, p.63). Addressing this problem will require a concerted effort to promote local food production and distribution, and to challenge the dominance of Western food culture.

Violence is the most obvious and visible form of oppression in the view of Iris Young. Food insecurity and violent conflict are intrinsically linked (Delgado, C. et al., 2021). Conflict has a detrimental effect on food production, as farmland and surrounding rural areas often become conflict epicentres (Vos, R. et al., 2020). In Nigeria, conflict and violence disrupt food production and distribution systems, leading to food insecurity. This can be seen in regions affected by conflict, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, where farmers and food traders have been targeted by militants. The clashes between herdsmen and farmers also disrupt farming activities, causing non-cultivation of farmlands, death and population displacement. In Borno State, violence and displacement of people disrupts agricultural production and makes people dependent on emergency food assistance.

3.   Simone de Beauvoir's "Second sex": Intersectionality of Gender Inequality and Food Insecurity Crisis

Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the "second sex" refers to the social, cultural, and political oppression of women in society. This concept can be applied to the issue of food insecurity in several ways. Nigeria has a patriarchal social structure that gives men greater power and control over resources, including land ownership. This has led to food insecurity for women, who have limited access to land and other essential resources for food production. It is paradoxical that women that are mostly involved in agricultural production are the most vulnerable to the problem of food insecurity. The traditional roles of caregivers and homemakers place the burden of providing food for the families on women even when resources are limited. This leads to increased stress, malnutrition and depression. The idea of power dynamics and economic dependence in relationships, specifically the master-slave relationship, which can also be applied to the gender inequality in Nigeria and its link to food insecurity is mirrored in Simone de Beauvoir's words when she asserts that:

> "master and slave are also linked by a reciprocal economic need that does not free the slave. That is, in the master- slave relation, the master does not *posit* the need he has for the other; he holds the power to satisfy this need and does not mediate it; the slave, on the other hand, out of dependence, hope, or fear, internalizes his need for the master…. Now, woman has always been, if not man's slave, at least his vassal; the two sexes have never divided the world up equally; and still today, even though her condition is changing, woman is heavily handicapped" (Simone de Beauvoir, p.607)

The quote implies that the slave, or in this case, the disadvantaged group, internalizes their need for the master, or the more privileged group, which perpetuates their subjugation and dependence. In Nigeria, women have been historically marginalized and treated as subordinate to men, which has created an unequal division of power and resources. This gender inequality is a significant factor in the issue of food insecurity in Nigeria, as women often have limited access to

education, employment, and resources, making them more vulnerable to poverty and hunger. Women's economic dependence on men, which is rooted in gender roles and cultural norms, reinforces their subordination and perpetuates gender inequality.

In Nigeria, women are majorly involved in food production, processing, preparation and marketing; despite these activities, women's contributions to food and agricultural production are still largely undervalued. Simone de Beauvoir's quote also emphasizes that the master holds the power to satisfy their needs and does not mediate it, while the slave's need is internalized. This notion can be applied to the relationship between men and women, where men hold the power and resources, and women's needs are internalized, making them more vulnerable to the effects of food insecurity.

Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the second sex can also help us understand the intersectionality of gender and food insecurity. Women who belong to marginalized groups, such as women of color or women living in rural areas, are even more likely to experience food insecurity due to the intersection of gender, race, and class. In Nigeria like in many other sub-Saharan Africa countries, women are limited compared to their male counterparts in channels through which they can have easy access to productive inputs such as improved seed varieties, extension services, and land input (Aguilar, A et al, 2015). Nigerian women have less and limited access to agricultural assets like inputs and service than their male counterparts. Simone de Beauvoir underscores the gender-based economic inequality that exists in Nigeria, and how it intersects with the issue of food insecurity in her words:

> "Economically, men and women almost form two castes; all things being equal, the former has better jobs, higher wages, and greater chances to succeed than their new female competitors; they occupy many more places in industry, in politics, and so forth, and they hold the most important positions. In addition to their concrete power, they are invested with a prestige whose tradition is

reinforced by the child's whole education: the present incorporates the past, and in the past all history was made by males" (Simone de Beauvoir, p.607)

The quote highlights how men and women almost form two distinct castes, where men have access to better job opportunities, higher wages, and greater chances for success. This economic disparity further exacerbates the issue of food insecurity in Nigeria, particularly for women who are disproportionately affected. In Nigeria, women are limited in the level of participation in cooperatives and farmer groups, such as producers' organizations and marketing groups and labor-saving cooperatives, which may also contribute to reduced access to markets with implications on food and nutrition security (Joe-Nkamuke, U. et al, 2019). As a matter of fact, many programs fail to offer credence to the multiplicity of women's life experiences.

Moreover, the societal perception of men as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers contributes to the marginalization of women in the workforce and limits their economic empowerment. As a result, women are more vulnerable to food insecurity, as they lack the resources to access sufficient and nutritious food for themselves and their families. However, to understand and address the many forms of discrimination and inequality that affect them concerning food security, an all-inclusive approach is required. Addressing gender inequality and empowering women is crucial to reducing food insecurity and creating a more equitable society.

4.   The Synthesis of Dewey's Idea of Democracy and Habermas's Notion of Public sphere: On the Possibility of Food Security in Nigeria

Dewey's Idea of Democracy as a Response to Food Insecurity

In a piece called *'Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us',* Dewey reflects on the nature of democracy, and argues that democracy, as a way of life requires constant recreation by each generation. Dewey's idea of democracy, not just a form of government, but also a way of life that requires active participation from citizens to take responsibility to build individual capacity and

collective development, is an approach that can help to solve the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. His democratic ideas emphasize the importance of critical thinking in promoting social progress. He argued that democracy could only work if citizens were informed, engaged, and willing to work together to solve problems. In addressing the issue of food insecurity in Nigeria, individuals can be encouraged to participate in informed decision for addressing the problem of food insecurity. By developing the critical thinking capacity, the citizens can also question conventional practices and political structures that disrupt the availability of food supply. When citizens are engaged in the policymaking process, they can help to identify the root causes of food insecurity and provide valuable insights into how to address them.

Central to Dewey's idea of democracy is the need for pedagogical development. He believes that education was essential for democracy to function properly. Despite the challenging political atmosphere, Dewey remains optimistic, asserting that democracy is a way of life that is sustained by a working faith in the potential of human nature., backed not solely by faith, but by trust in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action where proper conditions are provided (Dewey, 1988, p.227). In his words: "democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness … Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained…Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education" (Dewey, p.529).

To achieve food security in Nigeria, it is necessary to promote agricultural education and enlighten people on sustainable food system. Agricultural education is essential to achieving food security in Nigeria. It plays a critical role in promoting sustainable agricultural practices, improving agricultural productivity, and increasing food production to meet the growing demand

for food in the country. Presently, food supply system is threatened by climate change. Agricultural education provides farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to improve agricultural productivity despite the negative effect of climate-induced factors. This includes knowledge of modern farming techniques, crop management practices, and the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Dewey's idea of democracy emphasizes the importance of building individual capacity. This idea would be helpful to encourage farmers to innovate and develop new approaches to farming, which can lead to increased agricultural productivity and improved food security. Dewey's concept of democracy is pragmatically-inclined and could be used as the tool for solving problems like food insecurity. Thus, an ideal democratic government need to recognize the importance of protecting human rights, including the right to food. This includes ensuring that all citizens have access to food, regardless of their social, economic, or political status.

Habermas's Concept of Public sphere as a tool of Addressing food Insecurity

Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a space for critical dialogue and debate in society, where individuals assemble to share ideas and perspectives, and to shape public opinion and policy by means of their conversations (Habermas, p.667). But, how does this public sphere relate to issues of food insecurity in Nigeria? In what ways can we employ the idea of public sphere as a tool for addressing the problem of food insecurity? The relevance of Habermas's idea of public sphere to the debacle of food insecurity in Nigeria lies in its potential to create a space for individuals and groups to engage in dialogue, raise awareness and innovate solutions.

In the context of food insecurity in Nigeria, the public sphere could serve as a tool for discussing the root causes and consequences of the food crisis in Nigeria, and to discuss potential

solutions. Public deliberation can help to identify the root causes of food insecurity, such as poverty, lack of access to markets, or environmental degradation. This can help policymakers to develop targeted policies and programs to address these underlying factors. It will also afford individuals to participate in public deliberation that bothers in issues relating to food production, distribution, and consumption. By so doing, this can lead to greater food sovereignty and a more resilient food system.

Food insecurity is a complex problem that requires collaboration among various stakeholders and actors including farmers, government, retailers, and private sectors. Jurgen's idea of public sphere opens a dialogical tool for addressing food insecurity because it provides a platform for different stakeholders to come together, share their perspectives, and find common ground on ways to address the issue. Hence, through mutual dialogue which the public sphere creates, stakeholders can identify the root causes of these challenges and develop strategies for addressing them. For example, farmers can engage in dialogue with policymakers and investors to advocate for better infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities, to improve food production and distribution. The importance of the dialogue is evident in the words of Nussbaum who asserts that "we need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether ethnic or gender- based or religious. We should also work to make all human beings' part of our community of dialogue and concern, base our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the circle that defines our humanity special attention and respect" (Nussbaum, p.741)

Iris Marion Young emphasizes the importance of public spaces as a platform for dialogue and interaction among people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives when she asserts that: "in such public spaces people encounter other people, meanings, expressions, issues, which they

may not understand or with which they do not identify. The force of public demonstrations, for example, often consists in bringing to people who pass through public spaces those issues, demands, and people they might otherwise avoid" (Iris, p.737). The public sphere can also serve as a tool for promoting the inclusion of marginalized voices, such as small-scale farmers, women, and youth, who are often excluded from decision-making processes related to food security. Women, who play a significant role in food production and distribution, often face specific constraints that limit their productivity. Women's inclusion is also crucial in public spaces, as they play a significant role in food production and distribution. Through public spaces, women can share their experiences and challenges in agricultural production, access information and resources, and engage in decision-making processes. Through mutual inclusion of marginalized groups, particularly women, policymakers and other stakeholders can identify constraints that hinder the women for sustainable food production and develop targeted interventions to address them. This can be achieved through policies and programs that increase women's access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs

Moreover, Jurgen's idea of the public sphere support public demonstrations as a powerful tool in raising awareness and advocating for policy change to address food insecurity. By bringing issues and demands related to food insecurity to public spaces, demonstrations can generate public attention and pressure policymakers to take action. It will also facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative solutions to improve food access and availability in Nigeria, such as community gardening initiatives, sustainable agricultural practices, and advocacy campaigns. Knowledge sharing and exchange of ideas are integral component of the public sphere that can be employed to tackle the issue of food insecurity. For instance, farmers can learn about new agricultural technologies and practices that can improve their yields, while policymakers can gain

insights into the needs and challenges of farmers and develop policies that are more responsive to their needs.

5.   Evaluation and Conclusion

Food insecurity is a global problem impacting individuals and families of all economic backgrounds. It occurs when people lack access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle due to inadequate resources or limited access to safe and nutritious foods. Food insecurity also be interpreted as a form of oppression because it is often linked to systemic inequalities, such as poverty, exploitation, and other forms of discrimination. It is also be a result of systemic oppression in the form of policies and practices that disproportionately impact certain groups of people.

From the lens of Iris Young, oppression occurs when individuals or groups are denied accessed to the recourses, they need to live a decent life, such as adequate housing, healthcare, education and food. By using Iris Young's five faces of oppression framework, we can better understand the multiple dimensions of food insecurity and work towards addressing the root causes of this social problem. By addressing the economic, social, and cultural factors that contribute to food insecurity, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable society where everyone has access to nutritious food.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the second sex has helped us to comprehend the ways in which women are disproportionately affected by food insecurity due to systemic inequalities, intersectionality, and cultural norms. By addressing these issues, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable food system that ensures everyone has access to nutritious food.

From the preceding analysis, it is sufficing to state that food insecurity is a complex issue that is linked to larger social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate inequality and

oppression. Addressing food insecurity requires addressing these underlying systems of oppression and working towards creating more equitable and just food systems. An ideal democratic government in Nigeria is central for the promotion of food security and creating structural balance that will dissolve the oppressiveness in food supply chain. The government must provide an enabling environment for sustainable agricultural practices, increases agricultural productivity, improves access to food, ensures accountability and transparency, and protects human rights, which are important components to addressing food insecurity.

The gender inequality needs to be addressed in the dialogue for addressing food insecurity. In Nigeria, women are responsible for about 70% of agricultural production, and they also contribute significantly to the processing, storage, and marketing of food, thus, they must be included in the scheme for finding solution to the food shortage. Another important tool that can create a synergized pathway for addressing food insecurity in Nigeria is through critical dialogue within the public space. Essentially, dialogue will help in addressing food insecurity because it provides a platform for collaboration, problem-solving, innovation and ensure that food security initiatives are gender-sensitive and address the needs of all stakeholders.

Conclusively, by using Jurgen's idea of public sphere for public deliberation and informed decision-making, this will help to addressing the problem of food insecurity by identifying the root causes of the problem, developing effective policies and programs, ensuring transparency and accountability, promoting public awareness and education, and encouraging citizen participation in the food system. By recognizing and addressing the systemic inequalities, industrial food production, and food waste that perpetuate harm and suffering, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable food system where everyone has access to nutritious food.

Main Text:

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