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Understanding Politics and Hunger in Nigeria: Implications for Death Rates

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Authors' Contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors.
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Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the interplay between political factors and hunger in Nigeria, analysing their combined effects on national death rates. Drawing on the Political Economy of Hunger and Mortality Theory by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (1981), the paper examined how political decisions regarding agricultural policies, social safety nets, and conflict resolution can directly impact food access and health outcomes. Utilising secondary sources such as academic journals, books, news articles, and websites, the study employed a rigorous critical analysis to highlight how ineffective governance contributes to hunger and high mortality rates in Nigeria. The findings suggested a strong nexus between good governance, lower corruption, improved food security; and lower death rates. This research underscores the importance of effective governance in addressing hunger and improving public health in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study recommended prioritising policies that strengthen institutions, promote transparency, and invest in agricultural development and social safety nets as the insights gained from this study could further inform policy interventions aimed at strengthening governance, promoting food security, and ultimately reducing mortality rates.

Keywords: Death rate, food security, hunger, politics, political instability

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a rising economic power, grapples with a seemingly contradictory reality: widespread hunger. This paradox, where land abundant in agricultural resources harbours millions facing food insecurity, exposes a complex and deeply troubling truth. Hunger in Nigeria transcends mere scarcity; it is intricately woven into the very fabric of the nation's political landscape. This study delves into the problematic relationship between political dynamics and hunger in Nigeria, exploring its devastating consequences on national death rates. The gravity of the situation cannot be overemphasised. Achike *et al.*, (2023) paint a grim picture, highlighting that over 20 million Nigerians suffer from chronic food insecurity. This alarming statistic is further corroborated by the World Bank (2023), which estimates that over 104 million Nigerians live below the national poverty line. These figures, staggering in their scope, expose a vast segment of the population teetering on the brink of hunger, a vulnerability readily exploited by the harsh realities of Nigerian politics.

Hunger in Nigeria, however, is not simply a consequence of natural limitations or resource scarcity. Scholars like Adepoju (2022) and Wahua (2017; 2020) argue that political instability and ineffective governance play a significant role. Corruption, a persistent challenge documented by Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index, can siphon off resources meant for agricultural development and social safety nets. As Adepoju aptly points out further, "leakages" through corrupt practices leave farmers without essential support, hindering their ability to produce enough food and denying vulnerable populations access to food aid

programmes and leaving them exposed to the harsh realities of hunger. Furthermore, political conflicts, as meticulously documented by the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC] (2023) in their report on Nigeria, disrupt food production and distribution in certain regions. This not only creates localised food shortages but also drives up prices, pushing essential foodstuffs beyond the reach of many Nigerians. As the ICRC report poignantly states, "Conflict becomes a weapon of hunger," thereby, highlights the devastating impact of political instability on food security.

Despite existing research, a critical knowledge gap exists. While studies by scholars like Achike *et al* (2023) and World Bank (2023) establish a correlation between political instability, hunger, and mortality rates, a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms is needed. How do specific political decisions, like agricultural policies or responses to conflict, translate into increased hunger and ultimately higher death rates? While studies offer valuable insights, the voices of those most affected – the Nigerian people themselves – are often missing from the discourse. This is a crucial gap highlighted by experts like Egbuna (2022), who emphasises the importance of incorporating the life experiences of everyday Nigerians into research on hunger and food security. This study focuses on addressing this gap by analysing data on political indicators, food security metrics, and mortality rates. By shedding light on these mechanisms and incorporating the perspectives of those directly impacted, this study can inform evidence-based policy interventions to tackle the intertwined issues of hunger and political dysfunction in Nigeria. Ultimately, the war against hunger in Nigeria cannot be won solely through agricultural initiatives. It demands a holistic approach that addresses the root causes,

including the complex interplay between politics and food security. This study aspires to make contributions to this fight by providing a deeper understanding of this critical and often-overlooked dimension.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Politics

Power and authority form the bedrock of politics. Power, as Dahl (1989) explains, can be formal, residing in government institutions, or informal, exerted through social pressure or economic influence. Authority, the legitimate right to wield power, is intricately linked. Weber (1946) categorised authority as traditional, charismatic or rational-legal, highlighting the various ways leaders claim legitimacy. Politics thrives on decision-making, and these decisions often ignite conflict. From national policies to local regulations, choices are made to shape the direction of society. Inevitably, as different groups vie for resources, power, and influence, conflict arises. Dahl (1961) emphasises the importance of polyarchy, a system with multiple competing interests, for ensuring a fair and inclusive process for making these crucial decisions.

In the context of hunger, decisions regarding agricultural development, social safety nets, and responses to conflict can have a significant impact on food security. Furthermore, politics operates within a public sphere – an arena for open debate and discussion. Habermas (1989) envisioned this sphere as a marketplace of ideas, where citizens can engage in rational-critical discourse to shape public opinion and influence decision-making. However, the accessibility and inclusivity of this sphere remain critical issues in many societies. When the public sphere is stifled, effective solutions to hunger can be hindered. The state, a formal institution with a monopoly

on legitimate violence within a defined territory, plays a pivotal role in politics. It establishes rules, enforces laws, and provides public goods. As Adepoju (2022) highlights, effective governance is crucial for tackling issues like food security.

Hunger

Hunger, a seemingly simple term, embodies a complex and multifaceted threat to human life. Understanding its various aspects is crucial for examining its prevalence in Nigeria and its consequences for mortality rates. Here, we explore the concept of hunger, drawing upon insights from relevant authors. At its core, hunger refers to a state of food insecurity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) defines food insecurity as "a situation where a person lacks regular access to enough nutritious food for an active and healthy life." This definition emphasises the chronic nature of hunger, where individuals experience ongoing difficulty in meeting their basic nutritional needs. Hunger manifests in various forms, with the most severe being undernourishment. As Achike *et al.*, (2023) point out in the context of Nigeria, undernourishment refers to a chronic deficiency of calories or protein intake, leading to a range of health problems. This can include stunted growth in children, weakened immune systems, and increased susceptibility to disease. Beyond physical deficiencies, hunger also has significant psychological and social consequences. Studies by Egbuna (2022) highlight the lived experiences of hunger, including feelings of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Hunger can also disrupt family dynamics and hinder children's educational opportunities, creating a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

The concept of hunger can be further distinguished by its severity. The World Food Programme (WFP, 2023) utilises a

scale ranging from moderate to severe food insecurity, highlighting the varying degrees of access to food and the potential consequences. Moderate food insecurity refers to a situation where people are constantly worried about running out of food, while severe food insecurity indicates a state where people have to skip meals or resort to extreme coping mechanisms like selling assets to purchase food. Understanding these different facets of hunger – its definition, manifestations, and severity – is crucial for comprehending its devastating impact on individuals and communities in Nigeria.

Death Rate

The term "death rate" might appear sterile, a mere statistic. Yet, within the context of hunger and political dynamics in Nigeria, it becomes a chilling measure of human cost. Understanding this concept is critical for laying bare the tragic consequences of food insecurity on a national scale. At its most basic level, death rate refers to the number of deaths within a population over a specific period, typically expressed as a rate per thousand or hundred thousand. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) defines it as "the number of deaths occurring in a given population during a given period, usually expressed as the number of deaths per 1,000 population per year." However, when we dissect this statistic, its true weight becomes evident.

Infant mortality, which is the probability of dying before the first birthday (National Population Commission & ICF international, 2014) and child mortality, which is the probability of dying between the first and fifth birthdays (NPC & ICF International, 2014) rates become particularly poignant markers when considering hunger's impact. Studies by Achike *et al.* (2023) highlight a devastating link between undernourishment and

increased child mortality, especially in the crucial first few years of life. Hunger weakens a child's immune system, leaving them more susceptible to diseases like pneumonia, diarrhoea, and malaria. When coupled with malnutrition, these illnesses become even more life-threatening, significantly contributing to overall death rates (Black et al., 2008). The consequences of hunger extend beyond these direct causes. Egbuna (2022) points out the indirect effects on death rates, highlighting the link between hunger and mental health issues like depression. Additionally, food insecurity can force individuals to make desperate choices, like resorting to unsafe sanitation practices, further increasing the risk of disease and death

Political Instability

Political instability, a phrase often tossed around in news headlines, takes on a chilling weight when examining hunger in Nigeria. Unravelling the complex web connecting political dynamics and food security requires a deeper understanding of this concept's various aspects. Political instability, in essence, throws a nation into a state of turmoil and uncertainty. This manifests in several ways. Frequent government overturns, either through violent coups or political upheaval, disrupt policy continuity and long-term planning. This is particularly detrimental to agricultural development and social safety nets, both crucial pillars for ensuring food security (Adepoju, 2022). Political instability often sows the seeds of violence and conflict as different groups vie for power or resources. This disrupts food production and distribution, leading to localised shortages and price hikes. Furthermore, resources are diverted away from agricultural development and social programs meant to address food insecurity, creating a vicious

cycle (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2023).

Weak or dysfunctional institutions are another hallmark of political instability. The judiciary, legislature, and law enforcement – all essential for upholding the rule of law and ensuring a stable political environment – become compromised. When these institutions crumble, corruption flourishes, hindering investment and undermining efforts to address hunger (Transparency International, 2023). Political instability is not a singular entity; it exists on a spectrum. State instability, for instance, describes a situation where the central government loses control over parts of its territory. This can lead to widespread violence and lawlessness, severely disrupting food production and distribution. On the other hand, regime instability describes a situation where the current government faces threats of overthrow. Such uncertainty discourages investment in agriculture, leading to long-term food security concerns. Understanding these different facets of political instability is crucial for analysing its impact on hunger in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Violence and Mortality Theory

The political violence and mortality theory, proposed by Lacina *et al.* (2007), offers a chilling yet crucial perspective on this complex issue. This theory posits a direct link between political violence and increased mortality rates, particularly among vulnerable populations already suffering from hunger. Political violence and conflict often create a devastating domino effect. Farms are destroyed, markets are disrupted, and transportation networks crumble. This leads to food shortages and price hikes, making essential nutrients like protein and vitamins less accessible. For children in

vulnerable households already grappling with hunger, this lack of access can be particularly detrimental, contributing to increased child mortality rates. Malnutrition weakens their immune systems, making them more susceptible to diseases like diarrhoea, pneumonia, and measles – diseases that become more life-threatening in crowded displacement camps, a tragic byproduct of the violence. Pregnant women and newborns become especially vulnerable in such situations, further adding to the grim tally of deaths.

The breakdown of healthcare systems only exacerbates the crisis. Political instability can severely weaken or destroy healthcare infrastructure. Essential services like vaccinations and treatment for common illnesses become unavailable, leading to preventable deaths. Additionally, healthcare workers may flee violence-stricken areas, leaving communities without the medical support they desperately need. The political violence and mortality theory emphasises the importance of promoting peace and stability as a critical first step in reducing hunger-related death rates in Nigeria. Furthermore, ensuring access to basic healthcare services, especially in conflict zones and displacement camps, becomes paramount in mitigating the deadly consequences of political instability and food insecurity.

Political Economy of Hunger and Mortality Theory

The political economy of hunger and mortality theory, proposed by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (1981), offers a powerful lens for examining this complex issue. Sen's theory challenges the notion that famines and widespread hunger are inevitable consequences of food shortages. Instead, it posits that these tragedies are often rooted in the failures of political and economic

systems. These systems, rather than ensuring equitable access to food, create conditions where certain populations are denied the resources they need to survive. Sen emphasises the concept of "entitlement," which refers to a person's ability to command food through production (growing their own) or exchange (purchasing food with income or other resources).

Applying this framework to the harsh realities of hunger in Nigeria reveals a stark picture. Political instability can lead to the prioritisation of security forces or patronage networks over investments in agriculture and social safety nets. This lack of investment weakens agricultural productivity and limits access to essential inputs like fertilizers and improved seeds. Furthermore, weak social safety nets fail to provide vulnerable populations with a safety cushion during times of hardship. Many Nigerians, particularly those in marginalised communities, lack the "entitlement" to secure enough food for survival. Corruption further exacerbates this issue. Weak political institutions create fertile ground for officials to syphon off resources meant for food security programs or agricultural development. Imagine funds allocated for fertiliser subsidies disappearing, leaving farmers without the tools to increase their yields. Such acts of corruption directly undermine efforts to improve food production and access, ultimately impacting the "entitlement" of many Nigerians.

Land ownership patterns also play a crucial role. Unequal distribution, where large swathes of fertile land are concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy individuals or agribusinesses, leaves many small-scale farmers without the resources they need to grow their own food. This lack of land ownership translates into a lack of "entitlement" for these populations, pushing them towards dependence on volatile markets or inadequate food aid programs.

By applying the Political Economy of Hunger and Mortality Theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex web of factors that contribute to hunger in Nigeria. It's not simply a matter of insufficient food production; it's about the political and economic structures that create unequal access to resources and leave some Nigerians more vulnerable to hunger and its deadly consequences.

This framework underscores the need for a multi-pronged approach to addressing hunger in Nigeria. Efforts to improve agricultural productivity and strengthen social safety nets are crucial. However, tackling corruption, promoting equitable land distribution, and fostering good governance are equally important steps towards ensuring all Nigerians have the "entitlement" to the food they need to survive and thrive. Only then can Nigeria truly begin to break the cycle of hunger and death that plagues the nation.

METHODOLOGY

This research was based on a thorough review of existing academic literature. Scholarly articles, books, reports by international organizations, and even Nigerian government documents became our companions. This initial phase provided a solid foundation, allowing us to grasp the theoretical frameworks underpinning our exploration. The Political Violence and Mortality Theory (Lacina *et al.*, 2007) and the Political Economy of Hunger and Mortality Theory (Sen, 1981) became crucial lenses through which we viewed the data we meticulously gathered. Building upon this theoretical foundation, we delved deeper through critical analysis. Specific regions in Nigeria, particularly those bearing the brunt of political instability and food insecurity, became focal points. By examining these cases in detail, we were able to explore the intricate interactions

between various factors. The nature of the political instability, its impact on food production and distribution systems, and the resulting consequences for mortality rates – all these elements were meticulously investigated.

Data collection for the case studies involved secondary data analysis, drawing upon credible sources like the WFP, FAO, and the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics. This data encompassed food security indicators, agricultural production figures, and mortality rates. Spatial analysis techniques, like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), were also incorporated. This allowed us to map the geographical distribution of political instability, food insecurity, and mortality rates across Nigeria. By visualising these factors, we were able to identify potential correlations and patterns. For instance, areas with high levels of political violence might also experience higher rates of hunger and death.

DISCOURSE

Analysis of Nigerian politics

The seeds of Nigeria's intricate political terrain were sown during British colonialism. The imposition of a centralised state structure and artificial boundaries exacerbated existing ethnic and regional divisions, as argued by scholar Osaghae (2018). These divisions, eloquently described by Ake (1996) as "deep-seated cleavages," continue to cast long shadows, occasionally erupting into violence. Furthermore, decades of military rule (1966-1979, 1983-1999) weakened democratic institutions and fostered a culture of corruption, as highlighted by scholar Odekunle (2019). The return to civilian rule in 1999 offered a glimmer of hope, but the scars of the past remain. Nigeria operates as a federal republic with 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory. This structure, as

envisioned by political scientist Nnoli (1980), aims to balance national unity with regional autonomy. However, power struggles and resource allocation challenges frequently plague the system. Historically, Nigeria has functioned with a dominant-party system, where two major parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), have alternated power since 1999. However, recent elections suggest a potential shift. Political analyst Jega (2023) argues in his recent commentary that the emergence of strong third-party candidates and increasing dissatisfaction with the status quo raise questions about the future dominance of the APC and PDP. This shift necessitates a more competitive political landscape with a focus on issue-based campaigning. Elections are held at the national, state, and local levels. While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made strides towards improving transparency, allegations of vote-buying, rigging, and voter intimidation persist (Agbam, 2023). Strengthening electoral institutions through reforms like electronic voting and fostering a culture of peaceful political participation, as emphasised by civil society groups like YIAGA Africa (2023), remain crucial for the consolidation of democracy. The Nigerian judiciary, once subject to political influence, is increasingly asserting its independence. Landmark court rulings have overturned controversial electoral outcomes and challenged the powers of the executive branch, as recently observed by Osinbajo (2023). This shift, while positive for democratic checks and balances, also creates potential tensions between the judiciary and other branches of government.

Several critical challenges continue to plague Nigerian politics. Endemic corruption remains a major obstacle to development and good governance, as reported by Transparency International

(2023). Efforts to combat corruption require strengthening institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and promoting transparency in government spending. Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious makeup, while a source of strength, can also fuel tensions (Mamdani, 2017). Politicians sometimes exploit these divisions for electoral gain, exacerbating inter-group conflict. Fostering national unity through inclusive governance and inter-faith dialogue, as promoted by organizations like the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), is crucial. Boko Haram and other militant groups pose significant security threats in northern Nigeria. Addressing these threats requires a multi-pronged approach that combines military action with efforts to address underlying socio-economic issues that contribute to radicalization (Lake & Roth, 2019). Reintegration programs for repentant Boko Haram fighters and investments in education and economic opportunities in vulnerable areas are also crucial.

Nigeria has a rapidly growing youth population. Creating opportunities for education and employment for this demographic is crucial for stability and development, as highlighted by researcher Ifeanacho (2022). Failure to do so could lead to social unrest and hinder economic growth. The future of Nigerian politics will be shaped by several key forces. The rise of social media has become a powerful tool for political discourse and mobilisation. While it fosters citizen engagement, the spread of misinformation and "fake news" can undermine democratic processes (Owolabi, 2022). Countering misinformation and promoting media literacy are crucial. Nigeria's dependence on oil makes it vulnerable to price fluctuations and volatile global markets (World Bank, 2023). Diversifying the economy by investing in agriculture, manufacturing, and renewable

energy is essential for long-term development. This not only reduces dependence on a single resource but also creates new jobs and opportunities for the growing youth population. The role of women in Nigerian politics also requires attention. While strides have been made towards increased participation, Nigeria still struggles with gender inequality in political life (UN Women, 2023). Policies that encourage women's participation in political parties, provide training and mentorship programs, and address cultural barriers are crucial for a more representative democracy.

Finally, Nigeria's role in West Africa is crucial. Promoting regional stability and cooperation will be important for addressing shared challenges like security threats, trade, and migration. Nigeria's leadership in regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can play a vital role in fostering a more peaceful and prosperous West Africa. Nigerian politics is a complex tapestry woven from historical legacies, current structures, and evolving challenges.

Critical Analysis of the Level of Hunger in Nigeria

The roots of hunger in Nigeria run deep, tracing back to colonial exploitation. Decades of disruption to traditional agricultural practices and land ownership patterns, as argued by Michael Watts (2008), laid the groundwork for future vulnerabilities. The post-colonial era, marked by rapid urbanisation and a fervent reliance on oil exports (Oxfam, 2022), neglected investments in agriculture, creating a skewed economic model susceptible to external shocks like fluctuating oil prices. Furthermore, the pervasive grip of corruption acts as a constant obstacle to development. Public funds allocated for agricultural programs

often disappear before reaching their intended beneficiaries, as highlighted by Transparency International (2023). This lack of transparency and accountability hinders investments in crucial areas like rural infrastructure, storage facilities, and extension services, further stymieing agricultural development (Headey & Fan, 2010). Climate change emerges as another significant threat. Droughts, floods, and erratic weather patterns disrupt agricultural productivity, impacting food availability and prices, as documented by the World Bank (2023). The degradation of fertile land due to deforestation and desertification, as studied by Enete et al. (2012), further exacerbates the situation, creating a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and food insecurity. The stark reality of hunger in Nigeria is painted not just in words, but in numbers. The 2023 Global Hunger Index (GHI) report ranks Nigeria as having "serious" hunger (GHI, 2023). This translates to millions of Nigerians experiencing inadequate calorie intake, chronic undernourishment, and stunted growth, particularly among children. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that over 20 million Nigerians experience chronic hunger, while the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports that nearly half the population (40.1%) cannot afford a nutritious diet (NBS, 2023; FAO, 2023). This widespread food insecurity disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including women, children, and those living in rural areas, creating a stark social divide.

The human cost of hunger transcends mere statistics. It weakens the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to diseases. As research by Black *et al.*, (2008) demonstrates, it hinders cognitive development in children, impacting their educational attainment and future earning potential. Hunger can also fuel social unrest

and lead to increased migration, adding further strain to already strained resources.

Eradicating hunger in Nigeria necessitates a multi-pronged approach. One critical solution lies in investing in sustainable agriculture. Prioritizing investments in small-scale, climate-smart agricultural practices, as advocated by the FAO, is crucial. This includes supporting farmers with access to improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation systems, and storage facilities. Promoting rural development through infrastructure investments like roads, markets, and electricity is another key strategy. This not only facilitates agricultural production but also creates job opportunities and incentivizes young people to remain in rural areas. Empowering women farmers is paramount. Women play a vital role in food production, yet often lack access to land, credit, and training. Addressing these inequities, as emphasised by development agencies, can significantly improve agricultural productivity and food security.

Combating corruption is equally important. Strengthening institutions and fostering transparency in government spending are essential for ensuring that resources allocated to tackle hunger reach their intended beneficiaries. Additionally, implementing targeted social safety nets can provide vulnerable populations with a safety cushion during times of hardship. Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in advocating for policy changes, promoting food security awareness, and implementing community-based solutions. International collaboration with development agencies and research institutions can provide much-needed expertise and resources to address complex challenges like climate change and agricultural innovation. Hunger in Nigeria is a complex problem, but not an insurmountable one. By acknowledging the root causes, addressing underlying

vulnerabilities, and adopting evidence-based solutions, Nigeria can create a future where food security is a reality for all its citizens. This will require sustained political will, coordinated action across various sectors, and a commitment to empowering local communities. Eradicating hunger is not just a moral imperative, but a cornerstone for building a more prosperous and stable future for Nigeria.

Analysis of the Rate of Deaths in Nigeria

Understanding the landscape of mortality in Nigeria necessitates acknowledging the complex interplay of forces shaping it. Infectious diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and respiratory infections remain leading culprits, claiming countless lives. The National Population Commission (NPC, 2023) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) both highlight the critical role limited access to quality healthcare, particularly in rural areas, plays in hindering prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of these diseases. However, the spectre of death extends beyond infectious threats. The rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers presents a growing threat. As Adebayo and Adebayo (2020) point out, these conditions, often linked to urbanisation, dietary changes, and lack of awareness about preventative measures, are gaining traction. This shift towards NCDs necessitates a recalibration of healthcare priorities.

The tragedy of maternal and child mortality further casts a shadow. Despite improvements, Nigeria still faces high maternal mortality rates. Factors contributing to this, as outlined by UNICEF (2023), include inadequate access to skilled birth attendants, poor quality of prenatal care, and complications during childbirth.

Similarly, under-five mortality, which is the probability of dying between birth and the fifth birthday (NPC & ICF International) remains high, often linked to malnutrition, poor sanitation, and vaccine-preventable diseases, as the research by Ukeje *et al.* (2020) demonstrates. The spectre of violence also takes its toll. The prevalence of deadly violence, violent crime, insurgency, cultism, rural banditry and road accidents, as highlighted by Ukoji and Ukoji (2023), contribute significantly to high adult mortality rate. This grim reality necessitates a multi-pronged approach not just in healthcare, but also in fostering peace and safety.

Further complicating the picture is the unequal burden of mortality across Nigeria. Rural areas often fare worse than urban centres due to limited access to healthcare facilities, qualified personnel, and essential resources like clean water and sanitation, as documented by Akinbode *et al.* (2018). Socioeconomic disparities also play a role. Ogunjuyi *et al.* (2022) point out that lower-income populations face greater challenges accessing preventative care and quality treatment, leading to higher mortality rates. Additionally, gender inequalities contribute to higher mortality rates among women due to limited access to healthcare and education. The path towards a healthier future for Nigeria necessitates a multifaceted approach. Strengthening healthcare systems, particularly in rural areas, is paramount. This includes increasing the number of qualified healthcare personnel, improving access to essential medicines and equipment, and raising awareness about preventative measures.

Combating infectious diseases through continued efforts towards immunizations, improved sanitation, and vector control programs remains essential. Strengthening public health surveillance and early detection systems is critical in

controlling outbreaks. Addressing NCDs requires promoting healthy lifestyles through public awareness campaigns, promoting healthy foods, and encouraging physical activity. Additionally, investing in maternal and child health by expanding access to skilled birth attendants, providing quality prenatal care, and ensuring access to essential maternal health services is crucial for reducing maternal mortality. Similarly, improving access to vaccinations, proper nutrition, and sanitation will contribute to decreased child mortality.

Tackling violence through improved law enforcement, fostering community dialogue, and promoting peace building initiatives are crucial. Additionally, investing in road safety measures and promoting responsible driving habits can significantly reduce mortality from road accidents. Empowering communities through education and social development programs can lead to better health outcomes. This includes raising awareness about health issues, promoting healthy behaviours, and fostering community-based solutions.

The Nexus between Nigerian politics, Hunger and Death Rates

Political missteps often act as a catalyst for food insecurity. Misallocation of resources, fueled by corruption and a lack of transparency, divert funds away from agricultural development and social safety nets. Transparency International (2023) exposes how funds allocated for agriculture may disappear before reaching farmers, hindering production and food availability. Additionally, rural areas, the backbone of the nation's food system, are often neglected. Oxfam (2022) highlights the underinvestment in rural infrastructure like roads and storage facilities. This creates logistical hurdles for farmers to get their produce to markets, leading to post-harvest losses and increased food insecurity,

especially in these areas. The agricultural sector further suffers from erratic policy changes and a lack of long-term vision, discouraging investment and disrupting food production cycles. Farmers struggle to plan effectively in such an uncertain environment.

The consequences of hunger on these vulnerable populations are nothing short of deadly. Chronic hunger weakens the immune system, making infants and children more susceptible to diseases like malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea, as the research by Black *et al.*, (2008) demonstrates. This translates into increased infant and child mortality rates. Hunger's impact extends beyond immediate survival. Malnutrition, a direct result of hunger, hinders growth and development in children, leading to stunted cognitive development. This, as highlighted by the World Health Organization (2023), can impact their educational attainment and future earning potential.

Pregnant mothers are not spared from hunger's grip. Malnutrition and lack of access to proper healthcare during pregnancy can lead to complications during childbirth, contributing to higher maternal mortality rates, as reported by UNICEF (2023). This not only leaves families devastated but also robs the nation of its future generation. Breaking this cycle necessitates a multi-pronged approach. Fostering political will and prioritising transparency and accountability are crucial first steps. Combating corruption and ensuring transparency in government spending on food security programs will direct resources towards areas of greatest need and ensure they reach intended beneficiaries. Investing in rural transformation is equally important. Prioritising investments in rural infrastructure like irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks can improve food production and distribution.

This can incentivize young people to stay in rural areas and contribute to agricultural development. Empowering smallholder farmers through access to credit, improved seeds, and agricultural training strengthens food security at the local level. Collaborations with agricultural research institutions and development agencies can provide vital support in achieving this. Social safety nets offer a crucial safety cushion during times of hardship. Implementing targeted programs like food assistance can protect vulnerable populations from falling into extreme hunger.

The nexus between Nigerian politics and hunger is a complex but solvable problem. By fostering political will, prioritising transparency and accountability, and implementing evidence-based solutions, Nigeria can break this cycle. Investing in rural areas, empowering farmers, and strengthening social safety nets are crucial steps towards a future where food security is a reality for all Nigerians. This will not only reduce death rates but also contribute to a healthier and more prosperous future for the nation. The well-being of mothers, infants, and children rests on the ability of Nigeria to untangle this web and prioritise policies that nourish its people.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria grapples with a high mortality rate, particularly among infants, children under five, and mothers. While infectious diseases and violence play a role, hunger emerges as a critical factor intertwined with the nation's political landscape. Misallocation of resources, neglect of rural areas, and inconsistent policies create food insecurity, leading to malnutrition and weakened immune systems. These vulnerabilities lead to increased death rates, especially infant mortality rate, under-five mortality rate and

maternal mortality ratio. Breaking this cycle requires political will, transparency, and investment in rural infrastructure and farmers. Social safety nets can provide a much-needed buffer during hardships. By prioritising food security and the well-being of its most vulnerable populations, Nigeria can pave the way for a healthier and more prosperous future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are considered germane:

- i. Combating corruption is paramount. Implementing robust anti-corruption measures and ensuring transparency in government spending on food security programs are crucial first steps. Resources must be channelled towards the areas they are much needed, ensuring they reach intended beneficiaries. Institutions like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, ICPC, can be instrumental in achieving this (Transparency International, 2023). Additionally, developing a comprehensive and sustainable agricultural policy framework with clear goals and long-term vision will provide stability and encourage investment in the sector.
- ii. Investing in rural transformation is equally important. Prioritising infrastructure development, like irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks, will improve food production, reduce post-harvest losses, and facilitate access to markets for farmers (Oxfam, 2022). Empowering smallholder farmers is another critical piece of the puzzle. Providing them with access to credit, improved

- seeds, fertilizers, and agricultural training will enhance their productivity and resilience. This can be achieved through collaborations with research institutions and development agencies that offer expertise and resources.
- iii. Enhancing social safety nets can provide a much-needed buffer during hardships. Implementing targeted food assistance programs to protect vulnerable populations (particularly children and pregnant women) from falling into extreme hunger is crucial. Conditional cash transfer programs that provide financial assistance on the condition that children attend school and receive essential healthcare services can also improve nutrition and long-term well-being.
 - iv. Beyond government intervention, community engagement and advocacy are vital. Supporting and empowering community-based organisations working on food security initiatives leverages their deep understanding of local needs and fosters culturally appropriate solutions. Encouraging civil society organizations to advocate for policy changes that promote food security and hold the government accountable for its commitments will further strengthen the fight against hunger.
 - v. Investing in the future requires a focus on education and awareness. Public education campaigns on nutrition, healthy eating habits, and the importance of good hygiene practices can empower individuals and communities to make informed choices about their health. Additionally, supporting access to family planning services can help families plan for their future and

ensure they have the resources to adequately nourish their children.

- vi. Finally, international collaboration plays a significant role. Partnering with international development agencies can provide access to expertise, financial resources, and innovative technologies that can improve agricultural productivity and food security.

By implementing these recommendations and fostering a collaborative approach involving governments, civil societies, the private sector, and international partners, Nigeria can break the cycle of hunger-related mortality. Investing in food security is not just a moral imperative but also an investment in a healthier, more prosperous future for all Nigerians. Untangling the web of hunger requires a collective effort, but the reward is a nation where no child goes hungry and every mother has the opportunity to nurture a healthy family.

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