

1 Dr. Jones M. Jaja¹

2 ¹ Rivers State University of Science and Technology

3 *Received: 8 December 2011 Accepted: 3 January 2012 Published: 15 January 2012*

4

5 **Abstract**

6 One of the critical challenges facing the Nigerian polity today is the need to adequately feed
7 her citizenry. Within the indigenous economies of pre-colonial ethnic groupings, most dwellers
8 produced enough food to cater for the society and exchange. The colonial economy
9 disarticulated the food production equilibrium to the extent that in recent times, rapid
10 urbanization and environmental degradation occasion by the exploratory activities of
11 multinational corporations have impacted negatively on food production activities hence the
12 call for a state of emergency in this sector.

13

14 **Index terms**— The colonial economy disarticulated the food production equilibrium to the extent that in
15 recent times

16 **1 Introduction**

17 food" is anything eaten to relieve-hunger or sustain life; and we really hardly need any extra amounts of that
18 at anyone time; say a bag of gari or a barn of yams. Assurance of daily subsistence is all needed in accordance
19 with the prayer, "Give us this day, our daily bread". It is when that assurance of availability of daily sufficiency
20 is threatened, necessitating greater cost to achieve a desired quantity or quality of food, that crisis begins to
21 manifest. To allay or eliminate anxiety, panic or similar crisis in the food situation, it is necessary that food
22 be available, at affordable price in wholesome condition. The latter conditionality is usually taken for granted
23 until crisis strikes emanating from poor food quality or contaminated food. Irrespective of the definition, the
24 importance of food should not be taken for granted. Why is food important? II.

25 **2 Importance of Food**

26 Food is generally acclaimed as being next in importance to air and water for supporting life. Specifically, man
27 takes food for the following reasons: 1. To provide energy for work 2. To provide heat and warmth 3. To
28 replace worn-out cells 4. To facilitate growth To accomplish the above objectives food after ingestion, is digested
29 and its nutrients assimilated into the system. Nutrients, the only factor which gives relevance to food or the
30 eating thereof, are: i) Sugars from the starchy foods such as the cereals (rice, maize, millet, guinea-corn etc).
31 ii) Amino-acids from such protein foods as beans, fish, meat, eggs, etc. iii) Fatty acids from oils and fats. iv)
32 Vitamins and essential salts from different sources including fruits and vegetables.

33 Students of history may recall that (King Jaja of Opobo's) main stratagem of winning the war against Bonny
34 was to hurry up-river to the upper reaches of the Imo River estuary and plug the supply of food and economic
35 power to the mother city-state of Bonny ??Ofonagoro, 1979:40). He succeeded immensely, a coup begetting its
36 own legality. Chief Will-Bride (Igbanibo) of Kalabari later followed suit in 1879 when the Kalabari civil war
37 erupted. His kinsmen followed in hot pursuit and thereby enacted the Kalabari civil war, not on Kalabari soil,
38 but on Ikwerre land-on the banks of the New Calabar River which still bathes the shores of Choba in present-day
39 Obio-Akpor Local Government Area (OBALGA).

40 Food, according to Ward Hunt, J. of the U.S. Supreme Court in Sewall V. Jones, I Otto (91 US), 187: "Is
41 less brilliant, but more useful, than all the inventions for the destruction of the human race that have ever been
42 known" III.

43 **3 Food Crisis in The River State**

44 There is no doubt whatsoever that, in Nigeria, the food situation in Rivers State has attained alarming proportions
45 that describing it as "critical" may be euphemistic. Whereas a 50kg bag of imported rice during the presidency

5 THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

46 of Shehu Shagari was N42.00, in 2008 the same weight costs N9,500. The locally grown stuff which costs N500.00
47 in 1979, in 2008 is N6,800. Even if indecorously, gari costs even higher -about N1,200.00 for the same quantity.
48 Traditionally costlier than refined petroleum itself, palm oil stands at about N180.00 per litre. A bunch of
49 plantain now sells for between N600.00 and N800.00 ??Moro, 1976).

50 Whereas the gloomy picture above may be the spectre mocking at most Nigerians who neither produce their
51 own food nor inject some other consolation into the mainstream of productivity, the picture is infinitely worse
52 for the Rivers man whose last refuge is his home-state.

53 He certainly has basket-loads of other crisis waiting for him, especially when the Bible has made it abundantly
54 clear that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Mathew 4:4).

55 A consideration of the food crisis in the Rivers State should be seen as more than a simplistic topic comprising
56 and ending with the physical availability of food in the market place or on the table. It should be seen as a
57 holistic subject -matter of interest, not just to the citizen of Rivers State but to others. This last aspect of the
58 consideration of the food crisis, from the economic perspective, should be of ultimate concern to women who,
59 through the ages have the major responsibility for growing food. For example: 1) When, following the abolition
60 of the slave-trade and the consequent development of plantation agriculture over vast tracts of the heart land of
61 Africa, "thousands of men were drawn to work on the plantations for very low wages, the major responsibility for
62 growing food, caring for the elderly and bringing up children" was thrown on the women-folk. 2) Recall also how,
63 during the ill-fated Nigerian Civil War, women in Port Harcourt were trooping right and left on reconnaissance
64 missions for food and returned with cassava roots raked from abandoned farms.

65 When barn is bare, she rakes the roots, be It in peace time or in war".

66 3) It has since been admitted that the bulk of farm labour is contributed by women, particularly land
67 preparation after clearing and slashing by the menfolk, as well as weeding which accounts for a quarter of
68 the time expended on the farms. 4) In some areas of Bayelsa State, the menfolk precipitate a chronic food crisis
69 by habitually consuming food while deliberately refusing to subscribe to food production or other productive
70 activity. It is women who absorb the resulting punishment by providing thankless meals for the drowsing husbands.
71 5) The case of Panya, the Bomu woman who went to Kula to support her fisherman husband, but ended up
72 providing, in addition, Okra and other vegetables for herself and others. "She went, she saw, she conquered".
73 Casting the past behind us, we may prayerfully hope that the natives of Kula and other Kalabari settlements will
74 copy Panya's example and utilize the innumerable virgin lands dotting their geography. 6) Food crisis neither
75 begins nor ends with the farm or barn. Food crisis can only effectively be dispelled or disproved on the table
76 where food is shown to be available 'as and when due'. Needless to say, it is woman who achieves this feat
77 everyday without leave or respite, usually unclapped and unsung. What then is responsible for food crisis in
78 Rivers State? We shall examine the immediate causes of the crisis. It is hoped that knowledge of these causes
79 would contribute immensely to the improvement of food production and consumption.

80 IV.

81 4 Oil Activities

82 In this regard, the effect of oil activities would embrace exploration, exploitation, spillages, etc and culminate in
83 the Injection of inflation into the economy via payment of bloated staff salaries, fringe benefits, etc. No doubt
84 seismic activities attendant to oil exploration affect the fragile vertebrae of insect life in the soil. Incessant
85 gas-flaring for decades cannot but decimate insect life so vital to pollination, distort the day/night phenomena
86 essential for a balanced photosynthesis and, by its unabating noise, upset the life scheme and pattern of the
87 surrounding fauna. It is a living fact that leopards, elephants and other wild animals have been scared away to
88 safer zones (Onyige et al., 1989:152).

89 But the worst hazard concomitant on oil exploration and exploitation may be spillage. The effect is immediately
90 visible and far-reaching. It decimates all life-plant, marine and animal -immediately and for the foreseeable future.
91 Nor is potable water spared ??Nzewtunwa, 1980).

92 The vanishing of cocoyams from our markets has long been blamed on oil activities. The same goes for fishing,
93 although other factors may share the blame .

94 Movement to the nation's new capital of Abuja and the resultant decentralization of oil administration has
95 caused an upsurge of population in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital. Discounting the effect of that lurch
96 on housing and transportation in Port Harcourt and its environs as being outside our purview, the effect on an
97 already hopeless food situation can better be imagined. The fantastic take-home pay and terminal benefits of oil
98 workers would simply aggravate the crisis out of proportion.

99 V.

100 5 The Nigerian Economic System

101 Unfortunately, the Rivers State shares the same economic system with the rest of the country. The system seems
102 to have no room for micro units. For example, if you took a well-priced, good-quality product from some other
103 part of the world and passed it through the Nigerian system, it would emerge transfigured, its former feathers
104 becoming such vibrating quills, that you would not wait for advice to keep your distance. That magic-lantern
105 effect has happened with rice, newsprint, cars and iron rods, to name but a few.

106 The siege on the Nigerian economy has been partly blamed on the exchange rate. Once at par with the
107 pound sterling, the Nigerian naira (Which is also our own currency) is now about 1/50 of the former, reflecting
108 the stupor into which it has sunk and the proportionate hardship for its adherents. A false, refracted economy
109 economy in which anything that goes up/never comes down; that is the picture of the Nigerian economy.

110 Hence, it would appear that the worst calamity that can befall the Nigerian in the street is for the country
111 to decide on the production of any article. Whereas rice was N42.00 per 50kg bag in Shagari's regime, the
112 price rocketed immediately prohibition was slammed on the importation of the essential commodity in a bid to
113 stimulate local production ??Moro, 1976). The story is the same for any product one cares to name.

114 **6 VI.**

115 **7 Lack of Rural Infrastructures**

116 The Rivers State government cannot be commended too highly for its emphasis on road development, without
117 which other facilities cannot develop. This fact underlies the wisdom in setting up DFRRI, the Directorate for
118 Food, Roads, and Rural infrastructure .

119 If power, potable water, healthcare facilities, banking services and good schools for the proper education of
120 the young are added to the rural package, it would re-direct the population drift to the village, to rejuvenate
121 the stock of our dwindling food supplies. The very air is purer there and man, relaxed, tends to measure life
122 with the ferrule, rather than with the wheel. With clean hands and pure heart, there may not be a better place
123 to worship than the garden at the back-yard or the shrine in the woods where man can marvel afresh at the
124 commonest mysteries of God -the re-enactments of creation. The absence of the needed infrastructure makes it
125 impossible for those that would farm the land and settle. Their drift therefore have a direct bearing on the food
126 situation in Rivers State.

127 **8 VII.**

128 **9 Government Involvement in Agriculture**

129 Apart from research institutions and rare ventures like Risonpalm, government's grandiose agricultural pro-
130 grammes and projects have ended in failures. The result is that instead of alleviating our food situation, they
131 have compounded and aggravated the crisis. A few example would illustrate this point. i) The integrated poultry
132 project at Atali, complete with staff, a feed mill and hatchery capable of producing ten thousand chicks per day
133 has collapsed, while day-old chicks are imported from private hatcheries outside the state. ii) At Rumuodarnanya,
134 headquarters of Obio-Aicpor

135 Local Government Area (OBALGA), is another feedmill, the establishment of which can hardly be rationalized,
136 considering the idling facilities at Atali and Elingbu. iii) Iriebe on the Port Harcourt/Aba Express Road hosts
137 a modern gari factory, of capacity, but its impact on the dreary food situation in the state is yet to be felt.
138 iv) There is another integrated poultry project at Aluu in the same OBALGA, with a hatchery to the bargain.
139 Complete with silos and offices, the feed-mill alone is worth a fortune. But all these, the bore-hole and generator,
140 tractors and other structures and some staff merely wasted away. Like others owned across the country by the
141 many different river basin development authorities, the entire farm was slated for sale to the public in accordance
142 with guidelines enunciated by the Technical Committee on Commercialization and Privatization (TCPC). There
143 was a surfeit of farm equipment and other heavy machinery. v) The project at Isiokpo was an integrated piggery
144 project complete with structures, cassava farm, generator, bore-hole and pump spread on about ninety-three
145 (93) hectares of land. Even after payment, the host community refused its sale to the public. vi) Unlike the
146 two projects listed under (iv) and (v) above and owned by the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority, the
147 Peremabiri Rice Project owned by the same authority, before the Nigerian Civil War, was reputed to have a
148 capacity to feed West Africa. Yet, nearly a quarter of a century after the cessation of hostilities in 1970, the Rice
149 project is unable to feed the Yenagoa Local Government Area (Yelga).

150 What do the above catalogues add up to? Expensive structures including warehouses, offices and living
151 quarters, which are in decay, miscellaneous equipment that are better seen than described superfluous, staff,
152 wasting assets and depreciating gear, un-utilized resources that could have generated so much activity and
153 employment and, in the process, created so much wealth. This could have thrown quantum of food into the
154 market through the combined hustle and bustle of human activity and the melody of the various machines (Moro
155 and Onyige, 1989).

156 From the latent resources above, particularly of land and materials on the ground, Rivers State would have
157 been exporting feeds for poultry and other livestock; every poultry product up to the feather; pigs and bacon for
158 sausages; and rice to Sierra Leone, of all places.

159 The failure in Nigeria of government participation in business has become proverbial, until the disproofs
160 contained in the achievements of Nigerdock and Risonpalm where Engineer Showemi and Andrew Uchendu have
161 respectively given the lie to the truism above. The message appears clear: Government should concentrate on
162 providing infrastructure-s and support in the form of extension services. Thus motivated, the citizenry will spring
163 into action.

17 A) RAINFALL

164 Mobility is indispensable to such staff who, among other things, have to update the farmer's (or fisherman's)
165 knowledge, try to reconcile the farmer's results in the fields with the latest research findings, to monitor the
166 farmer's activities generally and to submit reports to headquarters.

167 To begin with, mobility is often lacking and, where the extension staff dares to use personal initiative to
168 reach the targets, he is very likely not to be reimbursed or, if at all, after such agony that will dissuade him
169 from a repetition. The frustration of the extension staff will undoubtedly seep to the farmer, whose production
170 will inevitably diminish to the ultimate chagrin of the house-wife or even of the bachelor. Lack of funds, office
171 stationery, farm equipments and input will all be part of the package of frustration with which the extension
172 staff is confronted.

173 10 VIII.

174 11 Free Education

175 The concept of providing free education at all levels to the Nigerian citizenry is in accord with S. 18(1) of the
176 1979 Constitution and is reflected in S. 19(1) of the 1989 Constitution which came into effect on 27:8:93. Free
177 education tends to shift emphasis to educational priorities, resulting inevitably in a decline in the workforce
178 formerly available or the farm and, pro-rata, in the availability of food in the market (Nanka, 1979). The same
179 rationalization would apply to fishing and, hence, to fish availability in the market.

180 The notion of free and universal education can hardly be faulted, even though some thinkers wonder the
181 relevance of providing universal education without assurance of employment opportunities for all beneficiaries
182 of the policy. Attention is only drawn to it here in an attempt to outline the morphology of the food problem,
183 particularly in the Rivers State. When the loopholes and leakages in the apparatus are properly identified, it
184 should be easier to re-deploy available resources to make up for resultant short-falls. We shall now examine the
185 immediate causes of food scarcity.

186 12 IX.

187 Immediate Causes of the Food Crisis in the Rivers State a) Paucity of Land

188 With more than three-quarters of its 50,000 square kilometers occupied by water; with a considerable part of
189 the remaining 12,500 square kilometers comprising wetlands, leaving very little of well-drained land for arable
190 agriculture, with the proneness of the residue to flooding and erosion; with the dense vegetation which makes land
191 clearing an intimidating exercise; even if we discount the host of a thousand other constraints on food production,
192 it is no surprise that food scarcity in the Rivers State has degenerated into a crisis.

193 13 X.

194 14 Climatic Factors

195 Climate factors such as wind, rainfall and drought seem to have an immediate effect on food production.

196 15 XI.

197 16 Winds

198 A storm may not only have disastrous consequences for fishing crew and craft at sea, it may even prevent others
199 from setting out to sea. The result in either case needs no further telling; scarcity of fish. But the effect of strong
200 winds appears more telling on the availability of plantains in both the long and short run.

201 Strong winds occur in late February or early March every year in this part of the country, felling numberless
202 plantain trees. Consequently, the markets are temporarily inundated with surplus plantain bunches. After the
203 momentary glut, there follows a sustained scarcity till July when the oldest of the lucky survivors of the gale
204 may have matured. This is the sequence every year.

205 17 a) Rainfall

206 More than the general importance of rainfall or water to plants, it is the pattern and quantity of rainfall which
207 may have greater relevance to food production. There can be no better stimulus for the happy farmer than early
208 rain. Early rain induces early planting and, hence, early harvest, examples are maize, vegetables and yam, the
209 king of crops. Conversely, late rains signal late planting and late harvest, between which extremes there is bound
210 to occur protracted food shortage.

211 Even early rain may sometimes need to be watched, for the periodicity of the available rains and also for the
212 total rainfall in the year. Where, for example, a lull of drought follows a deceptive early rain which might have
213 triggered early planting, the planted crops may be fatally scorched, necessitating a repeat exercise.

214 Moreover, the quantity of rainfall may precipitate flooding and even affect salinity and pH value of the sea,
215 particularly in the brackish waters of Niger Delta. Thus, in the depth of the rainy season oysters around
216 Abonnema, for instance, lose their taste, while many other fishes hibernate beyond the usual range of the local
217 fishermen.

218 **18 XII.**

219 **19 Natural Factors a) Flood and Erosion**

220 Besides the cumulative and long-term effect of flooding and erosion prompting a resignation to the frustration
221 attendant on frequent recurrence of such phenomena, there is the immediate agony of being condemned to
222 unsettled living and concomitant planlessness. Such mode of living is clearly antithetical to farming or food
223 production.

224 **20 Global Journal of Human Social Science**

225 Volume XII Issue IX Version I(D D D D) F b) Vegetation

226 The high forest which succeeds the mangrove belt of the Rivers State makes land clearing a forbidding
227 operation. The result is that the potential land clearing involved, limits the scale of farming to be undertaken
228 and, hence, the quantity of food capable of production by a given farmer. The use of bull-dozers for mechanized
229 clearing of land is Less helpful than it may sound because of the scrapping, off the land, of the top soil by the
230 equipment; the plant food being concentrated in the top soil. Also, the heavy rainfall of the state predisposes to
231 the inevitable growth of weeds which, thereby, calls for constant weeding.

232 **21 c) Pestilence**

233 The development alone of veterinary medicine is enough indication of the importance which modern agriculture
234 accords to the incidence of disease among livestock. Cattle, pigs, goats and poultry all have their prevalent
235 diseases. Native chicken, for instance, are susceptible to fatal coccidiosis around December every year, about the
236 time when they would have been most needed.

237 Although very rare, locust invasion is not completely unknown in these parts. So also is the attack of the
238 mottled grass-hopper.

239 **22 d) Weeds**

240 Although, it might have been glossed over earlier, weeds constitute such a grave menace on the farm as to compel
241 further attention here. About onequarter of labour expended on the farm goes into weeding which is further
242 aggravated by the heavy rainfall in the state. Some common weeds are the Guinea Grass (also called "elephant
243 grass") and other types of grass.

244 **23 XIII.**

245 **24 Human Factors a) Abandoned Farms**

246 Negligence and indolence, both of which have already been cited have short-term effects which seem to be
247 compounded in the abandonment of farms. At Obigbo, and Degema, for example, there are hectares upon
248 hectares of unharvested cultivated oil palm, not to mention the thousands of wild palm waving in the virgin high
249 forests of the former DELGA. There can be no doubt that full exploitation of the yawning plantations could
250 bring down the cost of palm oil which, funny as it may sound, costs twenty times as much as refined mineral oil,
251 notwithstanding the sophisticated technology and incomparable cost involved in the production of the latter.

252 The case of idling facilities at Atali, Aluu, Etingbu, Isiokpo, Peremabiri, Rumuodamanya, etc have already been
253 cited. During a recent conversation with an agricultural official, the discussion centred on a capacity production
254 of 18,000 eggs daily. When I asked for the possible effect of such injection into the market system, the extension
255 worker replied, "it will bring down the price of eggs".

256 **25 b) Lack of Enterprise**

257 The "Concise Oxford Dictionary, Edition at page describes "enterprise" as:

258 1) An undertaking, especially one that needs courage or offers difficulty; 2) Innovativeness Panya applied her
259 knowledge of traditional agriculture, as practiced in Bomu in Gokana Local Government Area, to the virgin
260 lands of Kula and reaped a roaring harvest, whereas the Kalabari natives of Kula, for want of enterprise, simply
261 sat down and bought their vegetables, maize, etc from several distances away. The same common denominator
262 of enterprise pushed several Ogbia communities to steal the show from the vicinity of Peremabiri. While some
263 Izon men droned over draught boards, their more enterprising womenfolk scoured the fields and ponds to provide
264 thankless meals for the husbands. The "cocoa" bean, seed of the plant "cacao", was introduced into Nigeria by
265 a Rivers man from Grand Bonny, but what is the position of the Rivers man in the scheme of the cocoa business
266 today? The foundation of industry, even before capital, labour or other elements of production, it is enterprise
267 that introduced the cultivated oil palm from Nigeria to Malaysia. That country is now exporting palm oil whereas
268 Nigeria has since stopped exporting the product. On the other side of the spectrum, it may even be added that
269 it was "enterprise" of one that introduced the Nipper palms from Indonesia to the Imo River estuary. Today
270 the Nipper palm has edged out its host (the mangrove tree) from the brackish waters of Opobo and changed
271 considerably the ecosystem of the area. If one may refer dispassionately to history, late Chief Awolowo's reason

272 for insisting on applying different strokes to cocoa and to mineral oil in computing revenue derivation was the
273 investment of personal enterprise in the production of the former.

274 The coaxing flattery above is at best a euphemism. It does not even brush the tip of the iceberg. c) Ignorance
275 i.

276 26 Ignorance of the Soil:

277 The soil is generally assumed to be available to take our crops, but in reality we bother less about its it may not
278 be readily appreciated how much of food scarcity can directly be attributed to ignorance, For, although empirical
279 conclusions may have been established in the course of generations, yet the full import of certain factors may
280 be lost while the bases are taken for granted. A few exam pies: nature, quality and attendant possibilities -the
281 incidence of soil acidity and the danger of over-living.

282 ii. Ignorance of Eugenics:

283 While any crop may bring forth its kind, there is the fact of eugenics and the possibility of its profitable
284 application. If some plantain bunches too hefty to be lifted by one man are compared to some low-yielding species,
285 the most fitting retort may be "The difference is clear". Science seems to have come a long way in developing
286 better rains of crops and livestock, making available higher-yielding, sturdier inputs as seeds, seedlings, cuttings
287 and breed-stocks for the farmer's gratuitous use. It is for him to extricate himself from the web of ignorance and
288 use what is his for the mere asking or taking.

289 iii. Ignorance of the Potency of Chemicals:

290 Ignorance of the potency of fertilizer could lead to its indiscriminate or wrong application with untoward
291 consequences.

292 A fore-knowledge of weather conditions, gained through weather forecasts, may make it easier to preempt
293 some "acts of God" like drought or flooding.

294 27 XIV.

295 28 Population Growth and Rural Drifts

296 Some demographic factors militate against food production and, therefore, induce food scarcity. Roads and
297 infrastructure for industrial, commercial and residential accommodation are sine qua non for development. Simply
298 put, land appropriated for such development purposes can no longer be available for cropping inasmuch as no
299 one can eat his cake and have it.

300 To worsen matters, both the alienated citizenry and the influx of immigrants develop a distaste that tend to
301 hold agricultural activity in disdain, although they continue consuming scarce food in order to keep alive. The
302 end result remains the same: Vanishing food stocks without any hope of replacement.

303 In particular, the case of Port Harcourt may bear further amplification. At once the capital of the Rivers State
304 and headquarters of the City Local Government Area (PHALGA); a railway terminus as well as a seaport and
305 the only international airport serving Rivers and the other six Eastern States; the citadel of the oil companies,
306 an industrial hub which boasts two refineries and a giant petrochemical plant, a vast fertilizer company, with
307 another in the offing, and a countless host of other industrial concerns, hosting three universities and a ruyriad
308 of ancillary educational institutions, three five-star hotels, sports stadia and inimitable conference venues; with a
309 population of a million people, the City of Port Harcourt has since metamorphosed into a sprawling conurbation.

310 29 XV.

311 30 Declining Workforce

312 Labour is an indispensable component of agricultural activity or food production and will remain so, no matter
313 the level of mechanization employed. Conspiring to whittle the force available for work on the farms are several
314 factors, a few of which may be mentioned.

315 31 XVI.

316 32 Rural Drift

317 The objective is to find greener pastures and the immigrants come from the countryside. Arriving at the city,
318 they obviously continue to consume food, but now at others 'expense (since they no longer produce anything),
319 and more so before they gain another employment. In the context of food production, the immigrants who surge
320 into the cities and other urban centres become a dead weight on those who remain back at home, wedded to the
321 soil.

322 33 XVII.

323 34 Waning Family Size

324 Whereas an important reason for raising large families was to ensure a sufficiency of farm hands, the woeful
325 national economy and a free nationwide education policy have rendered the average size of the Nigerian family
326 ineffective for appreciable assistance on the farm. The result cannot be otherwise -reduced farm activity and
327 consequent fall in food production.

328 35 XVIII.

329 36 Women's Upliftment

330 Against a background in which culture and, even religion, ensured woman's confinement to inferiority and servility,
331 the special roles of women in the home and on the farm may not be very surprising. However, the real shocker
332 may be the scale of women's involvement in farming generally and, particularly, in food production. Apart from
333 clearing the bush, planting and staking the king of crops, nearly every other job on the farm is done by woman:
334 From planting nearly every other crop to weeding, harvesting, processing, (e.g. melon seeds) and marketing.
335 Specifically, weeding takes not less than three tedious operations.

336 In the production of gari, it is women who harvests the cassava roots, conveys them home, peels and washes
337 them for grating which, formerly done by men, is now done by machine, it is women who ties up the grated mash
338 in sacks to squeeze out the water, later sift the fairly dry mash and ultimately try it to yield the final product,
339 garri which is the most popular staple food in these parts (Hopkins, 1973).

340 But now many forces operate to diminish women's irreplaceable contribution in food production. Discounting
341 the effect of death in reducing population generally, polygamy itself is on the wane, thereby reducing the necessary
342 workforce. Education, apart from disenchanting recipients from the farm, takes such

343 37 Global Journal of Human Social Science

344 Volume XII Issue IX Version I(D D D D) F

345 facet of life that is not graced by a feminine presence from the judiciary and other branches of the civil service
346 to the professions, and even in politics. The unfolding of the umbrella National Council for Women's Societies and
347 the Better Life for Rural Women Programme seems to have capped the many laudable efforts and attainments
348 in women's emancipation. If only it is remembered that from immemorial times food production was thrown
349 on the female population after their male counterpart had been forcibly drafted to more physically challenging
350 professions. The decline in food production is directly proportional to the stampede in women's education and
351 consequent emancipation, reducing the number of hands earlier engaged in agricultural activities.

352 38 XIX. Education

353 Having glossed over the involvement of women in education and the possibility of such involvement in distracting
354 that vital group of farm hands from food production; and rather than open up a can of "worms" by digressing to
355 the relevance of education generally in the of availability or scarcity of food; I would here attempt to concentrate
356 on the effect of prolonged regimentation in reducing the necessary workforce which could otherwise have been
357 deployed on the farms or in fishing thus boosting food" production. Apart from the diversion of their combined
358 workforce away from food production, the distraction of children of school age, who otherwise would have
359 contributed in the agricultural sector should not be overlooked (Duruji, 1980).

360 Another factor to contend with is the duration and pattern of children's education. Whereas, before 1970, the
361 child might have to spend only eight years (living with the parents) to complete his primary education and even
362 stop there at to seek employment, the child may now have to school away from home for six (3 + 3), ten (plus
363 four additional years for university education) or more years, in the event of his doing postgraduate studies.

364 What do all these explanations add up to? Depletion of farm labour, less hectarage planted and, as a result,
365 diminished harvest, paving the way for food scarcity and higher prices for whatever may be available.

366 39 XX.

367 40 Agricultural Factors a) Out-Dated Technology

368 Because of the old-fashioned tools and methods used, the different processes of food production become tedious,
369 laborious and the resultant yields necessarily small Whether for land preparation, making mounds, weeding or
370 some types of harvesting the most popular implements used are the matchet and the hoe. Even the lowly rake is
371 hardly used in our traditional farming, not to talk of the wheel-barrow to lighten potterage. What poor matches
372 these primitive instruments are against a D6 or D8 bull-dozer for land clearing, the tractor-driven plough and
373 harrow for land preparation or the combined-harvester for harvesting. In such a situation, the consequences
374 cannot be otherwise, fast-ageing practitioners and minimum and costly products in the market-stalls. Some of
375 the processes entailed are worth recapitulating, if only in acknowledgement of the pain and sacrifice which go to

43 POST-HARVEST LOSSES

376 ensure the meals we almost take for granted. i) In the initial preparation of the land prior to making mounds
377 and planting, the forest or bush has to be cleared and the debris allowed to dry before burning.

378 In the packing which follows and which precedes a second burning, not even the humble rake is used in our
379 traditional farming. ii) The next stage comprises making the mounds or heaps and the real planting of the crops
380 which, apart from the usual yam sets, cassava cuttings, maize and okro seeds, may have to include melon (egusi)
381 to act as cover-crop to minimize the need for weeding. iii) The different crops having been plated, the next stage
382 is the very important one of maintenance when the three weedings must be done in due succession before the
383 cassava leaves converge in a canopy. It is also at this crucial stage that yams (the main crop for men) are staked
384 and their tender vines trained. In rice cultivation, this is the stage during which birds have to be incessantly
385 scared from the farms. iv) The fourth stage, harvesting, involves a lot of carrying by head ("potterage"), whereas
386 the wheel-barrow could come in handy here. Except for yarn which may have to be stored in a barn on the farm,
387 the harvests are invariably conveyed home on the head and by foot. v) Mechanical hulling has taken the sting
388 off the processing of rice, but the processing of melon seeds from gourds and the extraction of "ogbono" seeds
389 from their fruits (by splitting the fruits open with knives) yawn for mechanization. The mechanical production
390 of gain from cassava roots, from peeling to frying, is a tearless operation in factories equipped with modern,
391 electrically-operated machines. Yet, like the subsistence farmer who bears the brunt of feeding the Nigerian
392 nation, practically all the gain we consume is produced by manual frying in slowlyheated, custom-made pots.
393 The process is so laborious that, before now, the reward from garri production never justified the labour entailed.
394 Although there is now the mechanical grain grater to ease the traditional production of garri, the entire seem to
395 opt for medical studies. There is hardly any c) Peeling. d) Washing. e) Grating, now usually done by the power
396 driven garri grater. f) Tying to extrude the water and thereby facilitate drying of the grated mash. g) Sifting. h)
397 Frying. i) Bagging. j) Conveyance to the market by foot, land or marine transport The Nigerian woman trekking
398 long distances to the market, her garri or other commodity on her head, is a very familiar sight.

399 XXI.

400 41 Over Cropping

401 It has been known from earliest times that planting on a given piece of land consistently for some years leads to
402 a rapid degeneration of the soil and, accordingly, to a reduction in the yield from a given parcel of land. This
403 is the bane of farmers in Gokana Local Government Area (of the state) due to insufficient land for the available
404 farmers.

405 The knowledge of the danger of "over cropping" has given rise to the practice of "shifting cultivation" to allow
406 the depleted land to fallow and thereby regain some of its lost nutrients. Another method is the application of
407 fertilizer to the crops on the same land in order to boost production.

408 42 XXII.

409 43 Post-Harvest Losses

410 It may not readily be appreciated how much of food scarcity may be attributable to post-harvest losses. But
411 the real scale of the frequent disaster appears frightening, judging from casual observations around the market-
412 places. But for our purposes the term "post-Harvest losses" will be expanded to include any untoward event
413 which overtakes an otherwise available food item "between the cup and the lip". The item of food could be meat,
414 fish or other edible marine productnot only "food" per se.

415 Among farm products the following areas may be identified: a) Injuries inflicted on yams during harvesting
416 predispose victims to rotting; hence the need to take the greatest possible care in harvesting yams in order to
417 minimize injuries to the tubers. Such fleshy fruits as pawpaw, avocado pear, mango, orange, etc. which may
418 fall to the ground during picking may start softening at the point of impact. Sooner or later, the fruit may
419 start to deteriorate from the impact. A way out is to harvest the mature fruits before they ripen so that the
420 ripening occurs in transit. A practical application of this technique is in the export of pineapples or bananas
421 -both overseas and the latter "locally" from Akain in Abua-Odual Local Government Area ABOLGA) to Kano
422 to support religious fasting. The mature bunches are brought in huge canoe-loads to Degema (in the same Local
423 Government Area) from where they are loaded in lorries for the journey to Kano, ripening taking place in transit.
424 This was the process adopted by the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) even before the birth of the
425 Cameroon Republic, although refrigerated vessels were used from Duala or Victoria (Jaja, 1986) to Europe. b)
426 In the cattle trade, disease may strike before the animal is slaughtered and, consequently, (hopefully) declared
427 unfit for human consumption. Not only will such disaster precipitate a fall in the stock of beef in the market, but
428 the value of the loss will also be worked into the total value of the remaining head of cattle, thereby increasing
429 the price of beef, and, hence, reducing the affordability of the product in the market. c) In fishing three points
430 may be identified at which "post-harvest" loss may occur. (i) In trawling a breakdown of refrigerating facility
431 may cause deterioration of the catch, whereas among local fishermen a surplus catch, Le. a catch which is too
432 much for the capacity of the canoe, may compel a rejection of part of the catch for reasons of safety, apart from
433 which local fishermen these days seem to have little problem of post-harvest loss. (ii) Their catch is bought off
434 them by fish-mongers (who dry the fish on their own for later sale) or by others who transmit their procurement
435 by speed boat to Port Harcourt for disposal. Post-harvest loss may set in here from yet three other angles:

436 i.) The fish might have been caught by violent means e.g. by the use of dynamite or other explosive, leading
437 to speedy deterioration of the harvest of the sea. ii.) Undue time lag between the time of catch and arrival at
438 the point of sale. iii.) Delay in arriving at the point of sale due to the craft developing a fault on the way.

439 Often enough, the fish-monger who re-sells her stock to other users may be unable to do so fast enough or
440 the fish may have been spoilt at source due to violent means of fishing. Thus the middleman ends up being
441 saddled with a quantity of spoilt fish on her hands. (iii) At other times it is the consumer who ends up with the
442 deteriorated fish on her hands, perhaps after cooking. To such a loser, the disaster may well be a double tragedy;
443 he loses both the goods and the cost (money) as well.

444 **44 XXII.**

445 **45 Transport Problem**

446 Transport problems range from lack or unworthiness of roads to prohibitive cost of vehicles and maintenance,
447 not to talk of looming fuel costs which at best may have been denied by the authorities. Without good roads it
448 may be impossible to evacuate even available farm products, thereby precipitating a double

449 **46 Global Journal of Human Social Science**

450 Volume XII Issue IX Version I (D D D D) F tragedy; non-availability or shortage of food items in the markets
451 and impoverishment of the producer who remains saddled with the products of his labour, without any customer
452 to buy them from him. In recounting the farmer's transport problems, it appears fashionable to forget the foot-
453 paths that lead to the actual farms. The farm roads should be wide enough to take a motorcycle to the farms,
454 as one sees around Abuja, to mitigate the tedium of the farmer, especially returning home after a hard day's job
455 on the farm. Besides, farm roads would be invaluable for evacuating farm produce.

456 To facilitate fishing, all that need be done is general canalization to abridge meandering distances, align curves
457 and bends of the creeks, dredge (where necessary) shallow creeks and provide berths and general navigational
458 aids.

459 Apart from providing roads and improving routes, the cost of vehicles and spares are prohibitive. Needless
460 to say, these costs are ultimately transmitted to the end user who is thus forced to pay higher prices for the
461 available goods. Everybody should be grateful that wiser counsel prevailed on the issue of raising fuel prices.
462 Any indiscretion on that could have sparked off a riot.

463 **47 XXIII. Extinction in the Imo River Estuary**

464 In 1987 a woman spoke in trenchant Pidgin English on Radio Rivers. She was blaming an oil company for the
465 near extinction of periwinkles in the Andoni ecosystem. Poor shell, what a load to bear? I itched to reply the
466 concerned woman immediately and offer a layman's opinion, not necessarily to mitigate shell's liability, but to
467 suggest that the real culprit might be the ungrateful Nipper palm introduced over a century ago from Indonesia
468 by one staff then working with John Holt. The obstinate palm has stifled the native mangrove tree, to extinction
469 and completely colonized the area (Nzewunwa, 1980).

470 The densest mangrove jungles nevertheless permit rays of sunlight to bless the marsh beneath. Simultaneously,
471 air filters through to aerate everything around. In such a system which allows sunlight and air to interact with
472 the saline marsh of the brackish environment it is not surprising that other forms of nature thrive and happily
473 reaffirm their faith in "live and let live". But it is not so with the Nipper guests. No streak of sunlight strays
474 into a Nipper vegetation which, as a result, becomes an impenetrable, forbidding maze suggestive of a spreading
475 denizen of dreaded reptiles. No crabs to gallivant on the mud flats or on the mangrove props, no mud-skippers
476 to flirt around, no periwinkles to creep along. With no bestriding mangrove trees, there is no conch or whelk to
477 clamp on to mangrove roots and trees, nor razor-edged oysters to adhere to interlacing mangrove roots. Where
478 have these Without attempting to hold brief for the Kalabar, I guess that their geography might have seduced
479 them away from Agriculture. Used to raking immediate harvest from the sea over countless generations, they
480 seem to have lost the patience of planting and having to wait for as much as three months to expect the earliest
481 results, e.g. fresh maize. Nor is the impatience diminished by their arrogance of daring to close down, at times
482 for considerable periods, alien markets which might have offended them, and the eventual arrival of emissaries
483 from the "penalized" community suing for peace and consequent re-opening of their markets. Such bluff hardly
484 conduces to subjecting oneself to the painstaking discipline of the hoe.

485 XXIV.

486 **48 Lack of Proper Motivation**

487 It is a known fact that it is the peasant farmer who feeds the Nigerian nation, It is the balance from his crop,
488 after his domestic ration, which filters to the markets for sale. Therefore, it follows that, were his crop larger, his
489 balance for the market would be larger, since his domestic ration would be fairly constant. Could the subsistence
490 farmer think bigger, i.e. increase the scale of his farming, the market-places would be fuller with foodstuffs for
491 sale, as would be seen from the following corollary.

492 The annual New Yam Festival is a very vibrant note of the Nigerian culture, even formerly among the Kalabari's
493 who do not farm. They once had their "buru alali" (yarn festival) which was, significantly, an annual event.
494 The festival cuts across the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, i.e. the present seven Eastern States of the
495 country. It surpasses Christmas festival among the Ekpeyes of Ahoada Local Government Area and Ogbas of
496 Ogbia/Ndoni/Egbema Local Government Area (ONELGA), for example.

497 But many cultures now seem to miss the kernel of the festival -the Yam title called "Eze-ji" in Igbo language.
498 Making much ado every year about the "New Yam Festival" without being famous for farming, reenacting the
499 festival is very reminiscent of the nostalgia of watching a latter-day performance of the famous "Agiri" masquerade.
500 delicacies gone, with the erstwhile superintendent of the brackish Imo estuary? "The real actors have gone with
501 the steps; now we merely watch the mask-heads." Fortunately, the "steps" survive among some people today.
502 At least in the former Obubra Local Government Area which now embraces Obubra, Yakurr and ABI Local
503 Government Areas the Yam title is the only accolade recognized by the communities. It consists of a display of
504 four hundred ropes of Yam, each rope carrying twenty yams. What this means is that an aspirant for the title
505 will demonstrate his farming prowess by displaying a barn of eight thousand (400 x 20) yams, excluding yams
506 for the celebration and seed yams for the next cropping.

507 The point being pursued is that under the cultural stimulus of producing such a great surplus of yams, the
508 title holder is contributing a lot to food availability in the community. It is about time we stopped chasing the
509 shadow of merry-making attendant on the New Yam Festival and start chasing the substance, the "real thing",
510 feeding the state, the nation and beyond.

511 That is what others do, even without the fanfare of a festival.

512 XXV.

513 49 Conclusion

514 From the foregoing, an attempt has been made at uncovering some of the challenges which inform food crisis in
515 Rivers State. Some scholars no doubt would have thought that the period saw Rivers State food situation as
516 vibrant. Based on the diversity and the dynamics of the food production, one can safely say that the people were
517 able to evolve and engage in divergent viable economic endeavour that addressed their local needs.

518 Although one could add that like every other society, no matter how developed, they were not entirely self-
519 sufficient. An investigation into the food situation reveal the poor productive level and the factors responsible
520 for that. Whereas, one cannot deny various attempts made to shore-up food production in the state, however,
521 these have become very infinitesimal as large numbers of people flow into the state to further increase demand
522 for food which itself is not increasing. The hallmark of this argument is that Rivers State between the period
523 under review, even with the rich endowment of natural environment were unable to develop the necessary food
524 requirement to sustain the increasingly populace. Consequently, there is an urgent need to revolutionize food
525 production within the state or between them and their neighbour or both. ^{1 2 3 4}

¹Food Crisis in Rivers State 1985 -1990 A Critical Reflection

²© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

³© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US) Year a long gestation these days as to look like a life sentence. Moreover, more women than men now go in for higher education. Similarly, more women than men

⁴© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US) Year



Figure 1:

526 [Onyige ()] *A Social Survey of Port Harcourt Ibadan*, P U Onyige . 1979. Heinemann Educational Books.

527 [Jaja ()] *A Study of Social Institutions from 1870 to Present Unpublished M*, J Jaja . 1986. Dept of History
528 University of Benin (A. Thesis)

529 [Moro and Onyige (ed.) ()] *Agriculture, Trade and Industry*, R S Moro , P U Onyige . E. J. Alagoa and Tekena
530 Tamuno (ed.) 1989. Land and People of Nigeria: Rivers State

531 [Hopkins ()] *An Economic History of West Africa*, A G Hopkins . 1973. Longman Group Ltd. UK.

532 [Duruji (1980)] C A Duruji . *Educational Foresight Hindsight and Insight. Nigerian Stateman Tuesday*, 1980.
533 June 17, 8.

534 [Nduka ()] 'Educational Development in Port Harcourt -Retrospect and Prospects'. A O Nduka . *Ogionwo, W*
535 (ed) *The City of Port Harcourt: A Symposium on its Growth and Development*, 1979. Ibadan Heinemann
536 Educational Books.

537 [Ikime ()] *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, O Ikime . 1980. Heinemann Educational Books Ibadan.

538 [Cookey ()] *King Jaja of the Niger Delta*, S J S Cookey . 1974. New York.

539 [Onyife (ed.) ()] *Oil Industry in*, W Onyife . E.J. Alagoa and Tekena Tamuno (ed.) 1989. Land and Paper of
540 Nigeria Rivers State

541 [Jaja ()] *Oral Evidence. Nembe Id09/89*, J Jaja . 1989.

542 [Pearson ()] *Petroleum and the Nigerian Economy*, S R Pearson . 1970. Stanford. California Stanfod.

543 [Onyige ()] *The Impact of Mineral Oil Exploitation on Rural Communities in Nigeria: The Case of Ogba/Egbema*
544 *District Unpublished Ph*, P U Onyige . 1979. University of Birmingham (D Thesis)

545 [Nzewunwa ()] *The Niger Delta: Pre-Historic Economy and Culture. Cambridge Monographs in African*
546 *Archaeology Bar International*, N Nzewunwa . 1980.

547 [Ofonagoro ()] *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria 1881 -1929*, W I Ofonagoro . 1979. New York: Nok
548 Publishers.