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OPINION PIECE

A Human Security Emergency

Climate Outlook - October 2025



Source: Business Day



Source: African Liberty



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Nigeria's Food Emergency is a Human Security Emergency — are we treating it as one?



Source: Business day - The hunger crisis in Nigeria tells a different story

On the 15th of April 2025, the opening of the 6th African regional conference on irrigation and drainage, [President Bola Tinubu declared a state of emergency on food security](#), it signaled more than just a supply chain problem or inflationary spiral. It signaled a national alarm. But what many fail to realize is that this food crisis is only the visible tip of a much deeper crisis — one of human security, driven by a deadly triangle of climate change, violent conflict, and systemic fragility. This is not just about empty plates. It's about destabilized communities, broken childhoods, insurgent recruitment pipelines, collapsed health systems, and a national future slowly slipping into hunger-fueled unrest.

To continue to view food security as a siloed agricultural or economic challenge is to ignore the obvious: [In Nigeria today, food security is human security](#).

Hunger is No Longer Just a Symptom — It's a Weapon

Across the Middle Belt, farmers abandon their fields out of fear of conflict with pastoralists or bandits. In Borno, [children living in Internally Displaced Persons \(IDP\) camps scavenge for meals](#), while their peers are lured by violent groups promising food in exchange for loyalty. In Sokoto and Zamfara, mothers sell off assets to feed their families, their bodies and babies [weakened by chronic undernutrition](#). Meanwhile, in the south and South-South, floods repeatedly wipe out fishing communities and farmlands, turning once-thriving livelihoods into stories of loss and abandonment.

We are not merely witnessing a humanitarian crisis; we are witnessing a multi-system collapse, where climate-induced scarcity breeds conflict, and conflict breeds deeper food insecurity, further weakening our ability to respond.

Climate Change is the Arsonist Behind the Crisis

Nigeria's changing climate is a silent arsonist. From the Sahelian droughts in the North to the destructive floods in the South, entire ecosystems of food production are being razed. The floods of 2022 alone displaced over two million people, drowning not just homes, but hectares of farmland and hope.

And yet, despite these grim realities, investment in climate-resilient agriculture remains staggeringly low. We are [still largely rain-fed and season-bound](#), despite the fact that Nigeria has [3.1 million hectares of irrigable land](#). Instead of unleashing this potential, we continue to gamble with rainfall patterns that grow more unpredictable by the year.

Conflict is Not a Coincidence — It's a Consequence

The violence in our rural areas isn't disconnected from hunger — it is, in many cases, caused by it. Whether it's farmer-herder clashes, banditry, or insurgency, many of these [conflicts are rooted in the desperate struggle for shrinking natural resources](#). Climate change reduces what's available, poverty magnifies the desperation, and weak institutions fail to mediate the fallout.

In the absence of state protection, [armed groups step in — offering food, protection](#), and dignity to the disenfranchised. When people must choose between starvation and submission, insurgency doesn't look like extremism — it looks like survival.

The Forgotten Health Crisis of Hunger

Beyond the headlines, another crisis is unfolding quietly: the health crisis of food insecurity. In Nigeria, nearly [75% of pregnant women face moderate to severe food insecurity](#), with malnutrition [stunting growth, cognition](#), and immunity. Hospitals are overwhelmed by ailments that would never have taken root had families had access to nutritious meals.

What we are witnessing is a slow erosion of human capital, and unlike buildings or infrastructure, the loss of human potential is irreversible. Hungry children cannot learn. Malnourished workers cannot produce. Traumatized, food-insecure families cannot build peace.

If You Want Peace, Feed the People

We cannot continue to chase peace through military solutions alone, guns cannot till land, bullets cannot irrigate fields. A truly secure Nigeria must be one where people are fed, healthy, dignified, and rooted in their own livelihoods.

This is why food policy must evolve beyond fertilizer distribution and anchor borrower schemes. What we need is a national food-human security framework — one that ties together climate adaptation, conflict prevention, nutritional support, and emergency relief.

Five things we Must Do - Now

1. **Expand Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Invest in irrigation, drought-resistant crops, and smart agro-technologies that mitigate climate shocks.
2. **Strengthen Local Peace Architecture:** Revive and support community-led mediation systems that can reduce farmer-herder clashes and protect agricultural zones from violence.
3. **Rebuild Livelihoods in Fragile Zones:** Channel aid and investments toward rebuilding food-based livelihoods in conflict zones, particularly for women and youth.
4. **Elevate Nutrition in National Planning:** Nutrition must be a primary metric in health, education, and food policy — not an afterthought.
5. **Integrate Food in National Security Strategy:** Food systems must be seen as a frontline defense against radicalization and state fragility.

We Cannot Afford to Wait

The time for declarations is over. The President's emergency pronouncement must now be matched with decisive, integrated action. We cannot afford to wait for another wave of displacement. If we fail to treat this food crisis as a full-blown human security emergency, we will find ourselves constantly fighting the symptoms while the disease spreads.

Our children do not deserve to grow up hungry, displaced, or radicalized. Nigeria's farmers do not deserve to be killed or impoverished for trying to feed the nation. And the nation itself does not deserve to be broken by a crisis we have the power — and the responsibility — to solve.

If we feed the people, we stabilize the nation and nourish peace. If we fail, the consequences will be written not in policy memos; the cost will not just be measured in naira but in mass suffering and generational loss, prolonged conflicts, and shattered futures.

Food is peace. Food is power. Food is human security. The choice is ours. And it must be made now.