

COVID-19 and Hunger in Africa: a crisis within a crisis

Olutosin Ademola Otekunrin¹ and Oluwaseun Aramide Otekunrin²

¹Federal University of Agriculture, Nigeria, E-mail: otekunrin.olutosina@pg.funaab.edu.ng

²University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

In this paper, we assess Africa's readiness towards attaining the zero hunger target by 2030 in the face of COVID-19. We found that most African countries have recorded steady reduction in their child mortality rates but high prevalence of undernourishment, stunting and child wasting coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic indicate significant challenges hampering the achievement of the zero hunger target. The study recommends that African governments should prioritise sustainable agricultural practices while serious attention should be given to the formulation and implementation of policies that reduce hunger in the face the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Hunger is “an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy. It becomes chronic when the person does not consume a sufficient amount of calories (dietary energy) on a regular basis to lead a normal, active and healthy life” (FAO et al., 2019). To further gain more understanding about hunger, broad definition of the phenomena including chronic hunger, hidden hunger and related problems need to be considered (Godecke et al., 2018; Otekunrin et al. 2019a). In 2019, 2 billion (25.9% of population) people did not have access to nutritious and adequate food while 3 billion people could not afford high- quality diets, drawing attention to the huge task of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) target by 2030 (FAO et al. 2020a).

SDG 2 was set to address the importance of food security and nutrition within the wider agenda with specific targets by 2030 (UN, 2017; Otekunrin et al. 2019a). It has been projected that 841.4 million people globally, with Africa having 51.5% (433.2 million) share, will be undernourished by 2030 (FAO et al. 2020a).

The prevalence of malnutrition poses a major hindrance to achieving this target with serious implications on human health and environment (Global Panel, 2016; Fanzo, 2019; Global Nutrition Report, 2020). Notably, five African countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Nigeria (northern) are

among the top ten (10) countries that experienced worst food crisis in 2019 (FSIN, 2020). Sustainable food production system and implementation of resilient agricultural practices are highly important to keeping a country stable at all times especially in a pandemic such as the COVID-19. In this paper, we assess Africa's readiness towards attaining the zero hunger target by 2030 by reviewing patterns of Global Hunger Index (GHI) scores and its indicators across Africa in 2000-2019 before the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, the possible implications of the outbreak on the African continent and mitigation measures to cushion its effect in Africa.

Materials and Methods

This review rely mainly on secondary data available from reputable sources. Other sources, relevant to this study, have been succinctly and carefully consulted.

Results and Discussion

Hunger in Africa

The major factors aggravating hunger in Africa are poverty, severe pre- and post-harvest losses due to high incidence of pests and diseases, unemployment, conflicts, wars, insurgencies and corruption (Otekunrin et al., 2019a; Graziano da Silva, 2019). Poverty, corruption and conflict events are positively associated with hunger in most African countries. Furthermore, there is positive association between prevalence of stunting and attainment of SDGs in Africa by 2030 (Smith and Haddad, 2015; Otekunrin et al. 2019b; Otekunrin et al., 2019c; Otekunrin et al. 2020b).

Patterns of GHI Scores and Indicators in Africa before COVID-19 Pandemic

The Central African Republic (CAR) has the highest GHI score of 53.6 in Africa in 2019 falling in the *extremely alarming* category while Tunisia, in the *low* category, scored 6.2. There were reductions in Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) in all the African sub-regions except West Africa which experienced an increase from 12.3% in 2005 to 14.7% in 2018 (von Grebmer et al. 2019; FAO et al. 2019). Also, CAR and Nigeria had higher stunting prevalence values in 2019 than in 2010. Furthermore, Kenya and Ghana had reduced child wasting prevalence rates since year 2000 (von Grebmer et al. 2019).

Extended Abstract

All African countries captured in 2019 GHI experienced steady reductions in their under-five mortality rate since year 2000.

Olutosin A. Otekunrin is a PhD scholar from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic; Food Security; Global Hunger Index; Zero Hunger; African countries

“A crisis within a crisis”- COVID-19 and Hunger

In the world today, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is having monumental impact on all areas of human endeavour. The disease was first reported in Wuhan City, China. The Chinese government officially reported the first case to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 8 December, 2019 (Verity et al., 2020). As at 1 July 2020, the number of cases has risen to 10, 357,662 with 508,055 deaths globally while Africa had 402,581 cases with 10,165 fatalities and 193,169 recoveries (WHO, 2020 AfricaCDC, 2020).

Although, there are fewer cases of COVID-19 among children, country's responses to the disease can have grave consequences for child nutrition and educational outcomes (FAO et al. 2020b; Otekunrin et al. 2020a). Also, malnutrition rates are believed to have gone up, leading to higher fatality rates. The elderly and those with underlying health conditions are highly predisposed to infection and high risk of death (WFP, 2020b). Generally, health and nutrition of people will be further jeopardized due to worsening financial situations. Food supply chains may be adversely affected if not properly coordinated while funds meant to develop the agricultural sector might likely be diverted to support the fight against the disease (FAO 2020; Otekunrin et al. 2020a,c).

Mitigation measures

On the African continent, nature-induced mitigating factors that can hinder COVID-19 spread include warmer climate and young populations (WFP, 2020a; WFP, 2020b Otekunrin et al. 2020). However, most African governments have put various measures (financial and economic) in place to ameliorate the impact of COVID-19 on their economies and the general wellbeing of their people (Otekunrin et al. 2020a).

Conclusion and Recommendations

African governments should redouble their efforts in expanding and improving emergency food assistance and social protection programmes for the poor and vulnerable. The food value chain should be kept active by finding solutions to logistic disruptions to enhance unhindered movement of food within and across countries amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the afore- mentioned, sustainable agricultural practices should also be encouraged.

Biography

Extended Abstract

Management, Federal of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Nigeria. He is a researcher with publications in reputable journals including *Global Food Security*, *Data-in-Brief* among others and has been serving as an editorial board member of reputable journals.