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### **Nigeria: Improving human rights for food security**

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world, with a population over 174 million people according to the CIA World Factbook (1). Seventy percent of Nigerians are employed in agriculture (1). A typical Nigerian family consists of six to eight family members (2). Until recently, polygamy was common, but today most marriages consist of one man and one woman. Since Nigerian culture traditionally believes that it is a woman's duty to bear as many children as possible, a typical family also usually has four to six children. The typical diet usually consists of rice-based dishes served with meat and beans, along with other vegetables and traditional spices (3). The Nigerian government provides six years of mandatory primary education, three years junior secondary schooling, three years of senior secondary education, plus four years of university education towards a degree (4). However, many students drop out after six years of primary school because of their families need for them to work.

Although there is a public health care service in place, most Nigerians also have limited access to doctors and other health-care services. There is also a greater discrepancy in the north part of the country, where access is more limited than in the south (5).

Despite the fact that most of the population is employed in agriculture, food security is an issue for many Nigerians. This is because most land is not usable for farming, and many of those involved with agriculture and food production farm only a few acres at a time (6). This subsistence farming takes place under the fallow system and is labor-intensive, since there are few tractors for mechanized farming. Common crops that a Nigerian farmer might grow include cocoa beans, rice, cassava, plantains, and palm oil. Cassava, millet, and sorghum are some other important food plants grown by Nigerian farmers. One of the major barriers to agricultural productivity and food security is lack of infrastructure. Poor roads restrict the ability for farmers to access markets, so they cannot sell their goods. Post-harvest losses also account for twenty to forty percent of each year's crop (7). This is mostly due to lack of good preservation and storage methods. Much of Nigeria's arable land also lacks good soil quality. It has been rated from low to medium in productivity. Agricultural productivity has also been impacted by environmental degradation. Air and water pollution from urban areas, rapid deforestation, and oil spills have all damaged the soil, and contributed to lack of farm productivity. Nigeria's aging farmers are creating a void that needs to be filled with young people and modern technology (7).

While lack of infrastructure, soil quality, and outdated equipment contribute to food insecurity, one of the greatest challenges to Nigeria's food security is its human rights situation (8). Abuses of human rights are committed by all levels of government officials. Rampant corruption also is present in Nigeria. Some of these abuses have an impact on the day-to-day lives of farmers. Often, political corruption and excessive bureaucracy prevent essential funds and subsidies from reaching where they are needed most. Since there are no titles for land, farmers cannot get credit or loans from banks, and these funds would help the

agriculture industry the most. The police system in Nigeria is also extremely corrupt. Due to embezzlement by higher level police officials, junior officers are often times left underfunded. Most of the time, they make up the difference in money by extorting cash from citizens. If citizens refuse to pay, police often make threats of arrest and physical harm. This can disproportionately affect poor Nigerians, who are struggling to make ends meet as it is. Often, wealthy citizens will buy personal police protection from corrupt officers and officials. Citizens are also plagued by another kind of violent conflict. The militant Islamist group Boko Haram has been targeting police and security officials, Christians and other Muslims. Its tactics have included suicide bombings and gun attacks. The estimated death toll from their campaign is 1500 citizens, according to Human Rights Watch. Security forces responded by killing hundreds of Boko Haram suspects. The security forces were accused of using excessive force, physical abuse, extortion, stealing money, and extrajudicial killings. These human rights abuses from both sides add up, affecting many of Nigeria's working and farming population. Without government funds, loans from banks, and facing rampant police corruption, many poor farmers are negatively impacted. This leads to loss in profits for farmers, and reduced ability to buy seeds and new equipment (8).

According to many outside observers, the human rights situation in Nigeria is dire (8). Political corruption remains rampant, and affects almost every Nigerian. Transparency International ranked Nigeria 139th out of 176 countries in corruption levels (9). The Nigerian police force is widely perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country. It has a long history of corruption since its inception in the 1930's. The police have constantly been accused of unlawful detentions, arbitrary arrest, assault, and torture. Many police officers extort money from citizens under pretext of arrest. The money that they are paid in bribes is then paid to their superior officer through a secret system of "returns". Sometimes commanding officers will even set quotas for the amount that they want the officers under them to collect. Many times, upper level commanders will participate in large scale embezzlement of public funds. Usually these funds were intended to be used for police operations to protect public safety (8). The rights of Nigerians are indirectly affected by these scandals. Rank-and-file officers desperate for funds for equipment, operations, and health costs have to resort to extortion of money. Freedom House currently ranks Nigeria as "Partly Free", due to its rampant corruption, and sometimes authoritarian social policies (10). Other abuses of human rights by the Nigerian government include electoral fraud, politically motivated killings, torture, degrading treatment of prisoners, and infringement of freedom of speech and assembly. In addition to unlawful abuses, twelve northern states have adopted Sharia law, which deals harsh punishment for alcohol consumption, homosexuality, and infidelity (8). Women in Nigeria are particularly disadvantaged. They face discrimination in education, employment, and in receiving equal rights. Often women have little choice in deciding the number of children that they want to bear, and are subject to their husbands' bidding (8).

The Nigerian human rights situation has fluctuated over the years. After gaining independence in October of 1960, Nigeria was declared a republic three years later. The first republic abruptly ended in 1966 when a series of military coups brought the country into civil war. Following the civil war, the country was subject to authoritarian military rule. In 1979, the human rights situation greatly improved as Nigeria began a brief "second republic phase." However, this republic was also overthrown by the military. Nigeria again entered a period of rule under an authoritarian military regime. This continued until 1999, when the country adopted a new constitution. It was modeled after that of the United States, and provided democratic rule. It was an improvement over military rule, and gave citizens more rights. However, the

Freedom in the World reports published by Freedom House puts Nigeria's status as "partly free" for every year since adopting its new constitution. The human rights situation has been improving some, but for the average Nigerian family, the situation has stayed the same (11).

Improving the human rights situation in Nigeria would greatly impact the security and quality of food. First off all, eliminating corruption and excess bureaucracy, funds and subsidies would be able to reach the farmers that need them. With these funds, the farmers would be able to grow more food crops and purchase modern equipment that could help increase yields and store crops more efficiently. A second problem that needs to be addressed is lack of property rights for small farmers. By securing land titles for small farmers, they would be able to have access to credit or loans from banks. This way, many farmers wouldn't need government subsidies, and would still be able to buy the machinery that they need to increase agricultural productivity. Without corrupt politicians embezzling public funds, money could reach public works projects to improve Nigeria's infrastructure. The improvements to vital infrastructure developments would drastically improve food security by allowing farmers to reach market in areas where roads are scarce or non-existent. Eliminating police corruption would also help small farmers. Firstly, they would not have to pay corrupt officers bribes to avoid being arbitrarily arrested, and therefore could keep the money that they earn. The money saved could be reinvested into agriculture. Also, an uncorrupt police force could focus its efforts on protecting citizens from crime, and groups like Boko Haram, instead of extorting money. In addition, equal footing for women in Nigerian society would also greatly improve its food security and productivity. By providing equal opportunity education and employment to women, all areas of Nigeria's economy will be positively impacted. The World Bank has tied equal employment of women to higher economic efficiency and higher gross domestic product. Equal treatment for women could help Nigeria in another way. If women have equal say in family planning, such as deciding the number of children that they want to have, the high population growth rate could come down. This could help the problem of overcrowding in Nigeria's major cities like Lagos.

Other factors present in Nigerian society also affect the wellbeing of many Nigerian families. One of the most challenging is Nigeria's large population and high growth rate. Currently, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa in terms of population, and growing (1). This high growth rate will create increased demand for food and energy as more people move to already crowded urban areas. Increasing urbanization will create other problems for rural Nigerian families. As people move out of rural areas and into large cities, a shortage of farmers is created. More young people and better technology are needed to ensure future success in the field of agriculture. Finally, pollution has an impact on the lives of Nigerian farm families and agriculture. Air and water pollution from urban areas negatively affects soil productivity. Oil spills from the petroleum industry also pollute water and arable farmland, affecting millions of small farmers and their families.

To start improving Nigeria's agriculture system and food security, the most obvious flaws should be addressed first. The most important item to undertake would be the rampant corruption that plagues the country. The Nigerian government first needs to focus efforts on eliminating unprofessional practices in its police force by: 1) arresting and prosecuting corrupt top-level officials who embezzle funds for basic police operations; 2) implementing internal control mechanisms such as anonymous complaint systems. This would allow for disciplining any officers who engage in extortions or other corrupt practices, and to investigate higher-level embezzlement scandals. Also, complaints by citizens should be taken into

account, so that the people of Nigeria have more control over the police force that is supposed to be protecting them; 3) allowing audits of its police force by external non-governmental organizations; 4) performing background checks on prospective police officers, along with more professional training. Another way to improve human rights in Nigeria is to get rid of excess administration and bureaucracy. Eliminating unneeded and excessive agencies like the Federal Ministry of Agriculture could dramatically improve the efficiency of Nigerian agriculture. Without the excess administration, funds could reach the small farmers that need them. State and local governments would also be able to take charge of their local agriculture system. A localized system would prove much more cost effective and efficient. Small farmers would have greater say in the regulatory policies and decisions that would affect them. Also, by eliminating wasteful bureaucracy, funds for development of infrastructure, like roads, and equipment such as tractors, could get distributed better. There would be less waste in funds, and more results in the form of higher yields and productivity. Providing land titles and securing more property rights for small farmers would also improve food security. By providing land titles, smaller farmers would be able to get credit and loans from banks. Low-interest or no-interest loans should also be provided to small farmers to help them get the supplies and equipment that they need. One model that could be replicated across Nigeria was an experiment in the Shonga region. The model was an experiment in public-private partnerships that provided low-interest loans and infrastructure. The experiment did in fact increase yields (7). Another way that improving human rights would help with food security in Nigeria would be to provide equal opportunities in education and employment for women. Also the UN Millennium Development Goal number three, this would have a huge impact for Nigerian society (12, 13). The Nigerian government should take extra steps to ensure women's equality and success in education. For starters, it could provide incentives for girls to complete their primary education and enroll in secondary schools. It could also make sure that women have equal treatment by law, and that women have control over their own decisions about childbirth and parenting (14). The government should also take steps to abolish Sharia law in the twelve northern states that adopted it, due to the fact that it discriminates against women and has unfairly harsh punishments for minor offenses.

Barriers to realizing many of these goals are also present in Nigerian society. An entrenched culture of corruption among government officials and police will prove difficult to overcome. Many will be reluctant to give up on unethical practices, or to punish fellow officers and officials. Also, it will be challenging to implement new farming methods and bringing in new equipment in isolated rural areas. Since many areas have poor roads, this will also have to be overcome. Finally, it will be hard to improve various areas of human rights due to long standing cultural traditions. For women, many religious beliefs could prevent women from succeeding in economic sectors traditionally dominated by men. Also, it will prove difficult to convince the Northern states to abolish Sharia Law due to traditional Muslim beliefs. Progress here will be slow, and may take some time.

Finally, many different organizations will have key roles to play in providing food security for Nigeria's future. Local communities all across the country need to take charge of their own agricultural production. They can do it more efficiently, more cost effectively, and can substantially increase yields. The national government also has some enormous challenges ahead of it. The first challenge is to eliminate corruption. By eliminating police corruption, Nigeria's poor farmers will be able to keep more of what they make, and reinvest it into the next season's harvest. The police will also be able to effectively run basic operations, and protect the safety of Nigeria's citizen's. The national government should cut wasteful

bureaucracy in order to more efficiently allocate funds to where they are needed. Without excess administration, agricultural operations will run more effectively, and yields can substantially increase. Human rights need to be protected in other ways as well. Land titles to farmers will help them get the credit and loans that they need. Equal rights for women will boost economic efficiency and help control high population growth. Private companies and corporations can partner with state governments to increase agricultural productivity. Finally, average Nigerian families should take an active role in their communities in order to help combat corruption and effectively plan for farming in the years ahead.

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