

**ASSESSMENT OF RUSSIAN–UKRAINE CONFLICT ON FOOD
SECURITY IN AFRICA: NIGERIA AND KENYA PERSPECTIVES**

By

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Abstract

Food security has remained one of the major challenges in Nigeria, Africa and the world today and this cannot be emphasized enough. Africa's population have long been suffering from hunger due to an alarmingly declining land and water resources as well as harsh climatic and natural conditions that has resulted in food insecurity. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine on food security in Africa. The study adopts descriptive and historical methods and secondary data as evidence based on analysis on the realist theory. Findings revealed that the impacts of the conflicts on food security in Africa is quite severe since about 80 per cent of the continent's food is dependent on food import. The paper therefore recommends that the governments and regional leaders must provide all the necessary funding, modern technology and infrastructure needed to achieve food security for the continent. Again, the global community must also employ diplomacy to bring the conflict to an end for the sake of humanity since both countries are global food producers.

Keywords: Africa; Food security; Crisis; Impact; Russian-Ukraine War

Introduction

Russia and Ukraine were both part of the former Soviet Republic and shared deep cultural, economic and political bonds. Following the changes introduced in the domestic politics and economy by the then Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev which misfired and resulted in the disintegration of the republic thereby, seeing the once-mighty Soviet Union disintegrate in to sovereign states (Palmer & Perkins 2010). According to McGlinchey (2017), the then Soviet Union which dissolved in the early 1990s gave way to a range of newly independent post-communist states that redrew the map of central Europe and led to the emergence of fifteen new countries with Russia and Ukraine inclusive. McGlinchey (2017), further posits that those nations that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union have continued to face problems as Russia tries to reclaim its lost territory and protect what it called the interest of ethnic Russian populations caught on what they see as the wrong side of the new borders. According to Reals & Sundby (2022), Russia spent weeks building up a huge military force along its borders with Ukraine and in neighboring Belarus until the Russian president Vladimir Putin launched an invasion on Ukraine on the 24 of February 2022; and the latter had to defend its self thereby marking the start of the Russian – Ukraine conflict, that is still on-going. They further stated that three days prior to the invasion, President Vladimir Putin of Russia unilaterally recognized the independence of two (2) break away regions in Donbas – the self-declared ‘People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The aforementioned has resulted in the United States and its allies’ imposing sanctions on Russia while supporting Ukraine with military assistance. Apart from being a humanitarian tragedy, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also emerged as an exogenous shock to global food supply security as both countries are major supplier of cereals to the world; with severe consequences for many African countries in particular and with global ripple effects generally as the conflict rages on (Hatab, 2022). He further posits that this is made possible as African countries rely heavily on the international market to meet its domestic demand of food consumed locally. In other words, the continent relies on food imported from outside its shores to the tune of over 80 per cent thereby increasing its vulnerability while putting pressure on efforts aimed at eradicating hunger, reducing poverty and achieving food security continent-wise. In addition, this heavy reliance on international food markets by African countries together with the fact that the cost of basic commodities currently takes a large chunk in household’s expenditure implies that the ongoing conflict has decreased food supply on the one hand and on the other hand, led to increase in domestic food price inflation as evidence at the onset of the

conflict prior to the United Nations and Turkey's brokered grains deal that helped in averting global food crisis in July 2022. That effort resulted in million metric tonnes of grains been shipped out of Ukraine to the rest of the world. According to Hatab 2022, cited in Zainab (2013, page 252) the ongoing conflict is not just a threat to food security but has the capacity to inflame and destabilize African government and political institutions hence the objective of this study is on the impact of Russia – Ukraine conflict on food security in Africa.

It is against this background that this study is divided into the following: conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, research methodology, historicizing Russian – Ukraine conflict, food security status in Africa, discussion of findings with focus on impacts of Russian – Ukraine conflict on food security, conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual clarification

Conflict – by its nature is a natural phenomenon, and this stems from the fact that in every society, there are bound to be disputes, claims, counter-claims, contestation over resources, values, and wealth which are part and parcel of human interaction. Crises can manifest in various forms and can be caused by a wide range of factors, including natural disasters, economic downturns, political instability, public health emergencies, and social conflicts. There is no generally accepted definition of the concept. However, scholars have defined the term based on their various perspectives. Conflict connotes a clash or disagreement between two or more groups who have incompatible differences and conflict has been regarded as an integral part of human existence and social relations because it is inevitable in any social gathering, community, societies and states at large (Olagbaju&Awosusi, 2019). According to Wilmot &Hocker (2011), conflict is described as a struggle between two or more independent individuals, communities or countries over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values and goals or differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness. Coser (1956) perceives it in terms of struggle between parties over desirable values. He further posits that it is the struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals and collectivities.

Review of literature

Food Security – can be conceptualized as a state when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life, Food

security requires that there is an adequate supply of food to meet the needs of the population. (FAO, 2012). Similarly, Anderson (2009) views food security as a situation when all people at all times have physical, and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Furthermore, Adebayo 2010, (cited in Ajayi and Fashagba 2014) posits that food security exists at both macro and micro levels. The macro level is the ability of a nation or a continent to provide enough food to feed its population either through production or imported foods such as food aid. On the other hand, the micro aspect of food security is the household and individual food security. However, a country may be food secured at the national level, but still have local pockets of food insecurity at various periods of the agricultural cycle (IFSS, 2002). Thus, Adebayo further gave four different but inter-related dimensions to food security as follows:

1. Food Availability: This has to do with effective and continuous supply of food at the household level. A food secured continent must have food available for all its citizen in appropriate quality and sufficient quantity.
2. Food Accessibility: This depends on income levels as the citizens must have the resources to purchase appropriate foods.
3. Food Utilization: This refers to the consumption of safe and nutritious food. An individual that gets adequate quantity of food must also be able to make use of quite a commensurable quantity. Thus, a country whose citizens are unable to utilize the quantity of food available because of frequent ailment and conflict has not yet attained food security.
4. Stability of Access: Food security is determined by the ability to preserve or store produced food. This refers to the stability of supply over time. However, due to inefficient harvesting, processing and storage facilities on the continent heavy post-harvest losses in supply of food is widespread.

Today, food security is a big issue not only due to food production and hunger but also other factors such as population pressures, food prices, climate change, disparities of wealth, and income and also very importantly, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The issue of food security now is more alarming as a result of failure of past efforts and approaches to resolve food insecurity problems such as famine and malnutrition in developing countries.

Therefore, achieving food security has become a complex issue since it cuts across the globe, its affected by ongoing issues such as: climate change, disasters,

urbanization, conflicts and more recently, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Presently, millions of Africa's populations are in dire need of food on the continent as they continue to suffer from hunger and famine.

Africa – is the second largest continent in the world with an area covering 11,700,000 square miles and an estimated population of 877 million people. It comprises of 54 independent countries and a rich mix of native peoples, cultures, economies and history and is considered by many scientists to be the origin of mankind (Livingstone, 1855, cited in Encyclopedia Britannica). The scenic beauty and variety is quite stunning; a home to vast deserts, tropical rain- forests, rugged mountains and fertile grasslands. It has abundant flora and fauna that is unsurpassed by any other continent. Despite its massive natural wealth and beauty, Africa parades the fifteen least developed nations of the world. Over 70 per cent of its population survives on less than \$2 a day, as diseases and famine continue to kill millions of its people every year (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the realist theory as its tool of analysis and investigation. Realist theory is one of the leading and most contentious theories in the field of international relations. Pundits have postulated it as the most essential while studying relations amongst nations. The Realist theory gained currency towards the end of the Second World War. However, it's significantly rooted in the writings of Nicolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Thucidides and Sun Tzu. These writers have been seen as the founding fathers of the theory, although Hans Morgenthau and E. H. Carr are considered the modern founders (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Realism theory is dominant in explaining the driving force of states in its pursuit for power in the global arena and this is done to advance self-interest of states and this sometimes make states to avoid morality in its agenda. This accounts for Russian attack on Ukraine to show the world that it is still a force to reckon with. Additionally, the theory traces the root of conflicts in society to flaws in human nature which is seen as the selfish pursuit of personal interest defined as power. It further sees the world as an arena of conflict and believes that there are genetic defects which make human beings to behave negatively (Best, 2012). This is evident in president Putin's denial of attacks on Ukraine even as he ordered the buildup of troops around the latter's borders before the invasion. The mass murders and other atrocities that took place across Ukraine and especially in Butcha; the bombings and shelling on civilian residences, schools, hospitals, energy

infrastructure and water supply can all be correctly viewed as evidences of someone with genetic defects and negative behaviours.

According to Morgenthau 1948 cited in Brown & Ainley (2005); McGlinchey (2017), the theory of realism has the following basic principles namely: that the state is the key actor in international system, that within the global arena, the states pursues interests that are defined in terms of power, that states like humans are selfish and pursuing selfish interests known as national interests, that states behave and responds in accordance to its national interests, thus states seek power in other to achieve these interests. That conflicts are unavoidable, perpetual thus making war common and inherent to humans. McGlinchey (2017) further posits that the realists believe that human beings have no potential for good as people behave according to their own needs without taking the needs of others into account. It further asserts that these stem from the anarchical nature of the international system hence states are forced to look after themselves. Morgenthau famous statement that 'all politics is a struggle for power' goes a long way to demonstrate the realist view that politics is primarily about domination as opposed to cooperation between states thereby magnifying war and conflict in the world. And since states need to secure itself and continue to survive as a state, It has to defend and truly rely on itself. Thus, Realism sees the international system as one where conflict and war is dominant and periods of peace are merely times when states are preparing for future conflict as witnessed after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, it then paused, prepared itself before launching the current invasion. Thus, all scholars of international relations agreed that interest and survival are the basic dictums guiding and driving the relationship between nations.

The realist theory is very relevant to this study as its principles has given us the best explanation as to why Russia invaded a Sovereign nation -Ukraine and the response of the latter which is fighting for its existence and the survival of itself and its citizens hence the conflict. It can be correct to assert that the realist theory was able to offer answers as to why human beings will engage in negative acts such as the unilateral invasion of a sovereign country, engage in massive bombing, shelling of humans and massive destruction of critical infrastructures as being carried out by Russia in Ukraine for over a year now. The continuous engagement in acts that promotes the free killing of innocent civilians on a daily basis, mass abduction of Ukrainian children to Russia, rapes, torture, stealing of grains, annexation of lands are all acts of criminality that are inherent in humans although condemnable.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive and historical method using secondary and progressive data evidence to assess the impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on food security on the continent. This is predicated on the fact that since the start of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the global media especially, BBC, CNN, Aljazeera had provided live and current data as the conflict progresses which by and large had influenced the decisions of world leaders like the European Union, the United States President and NATO members on their subsequent policy actions taken thus far, such as the imposition of sanctions on Russia.

Historicizing Russian – Ukraine Conflict

Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains the biggest threat to peace and security in Europe since the cold war. According to the Global Conflict Tracker (GCT) (2022), the present Russia – Ukraine conflict is traceable to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine that erupted in 2014 following Russian annexation of Crimea. This followed a protest that took place in 2013 in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, against the then President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject a deal with greater economic integration with the European Union (EU). The said protest was met with violent crackdown by state security forces. The protest widened and escalated to conflict which made the former President Yanukovich to fly in February 2014. A month later, in March 2014, Russian troops took control of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, while Russian president Vladimir Putin cited the need to protect the rights of Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Crimea and southeast Ukraine. Russia then formally annexed the Peninsula after Crimean's voted to join the Russian Federation in a disputed local referendum. The aforementioned action led to a heightened crisis along ethnic division that resulted in pro-Russian separatist in the eastern Ukraine regions of Donetsk and Luhansk to hold their own independence two months later. This led to armed conflict between the Russian backed forces and the Ukrainian military. Although Russia denied involvement, both the United States and NATO had earlier reported the build-up of troops and military equipment near Donetsk and Russia, and cross-border shelling that followed Crimea's annexation. Thus, the conflict transitioned to an active stalemate with regular shelling and skirmishes occurring along frontlines separating Russia and Ukraine controlled eastern border regions (Global Conflict Tracker, 2022).

In 2015, efforts to negotiate an end to the violence through the Minsk Accord kick-started in February led by France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. The agreement framework included provision for a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry and

full Ukraine government control throughout the conflict zone. All efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement and satisfactory resolution however remained unsuccessful. According to Ukrainian ambassador to the United Nations in an interview with CBS News, he stated that Putin had an ambition to ‘restore the Russian Empire’ beyond the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula that was seized in 2014 by Russian forces hence, the current invasion. Sharing the same view is the former United States national security adviser McMaster, who opined that the invasion of Ukraine was more of Putin trying very hard to ‘restore Russia to national greatness’ because he (Putin) still sees the 1991 disintegration as a disaster, hence driven by obsession to make Russia great (CBS News, 2022).

Consequent on the above assertions, the CBS News also reported that prior to the current invasion president Putin had demanded that NATO rules out admitting new members from the former Soviet states and most importantly Ukraine, and that in addition, NATO forces should pull back from positions in countries near Russia. However, the demand to preclude the admission of new members were rejected by both the United States and NATO – and many believe that Putin’s agenda is to topple Ukraine’s current government so it can be replaced with a new pro-Russian regime. It is also very clear that Ukraine on its part has made the quest for NATO membership a cornerstone of its national security policy and will not back down from that ambition even as Russia’s invasion became more brutal (CBS News, 2022).

Food Security Status in Africa

According to World Bank (2020), over 80 million people are confronted with inadequate food and nearly 37 million are facing acute hunger crisis. Figures showed that East Africa alone lost almost 2 million livestock in one year as a result of recurrent drought. In a related development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020) stated that the sub-saharan annual food import rose from \$15 billion to \$43 billion presently and, it is expected to rise to \$110 billion in 2025. Food security is an integral part of overall national security. It guarantees that the critical threshold for health and nutrition is not significantly violated, particularly at the societal level. Conflicts can severely impoverish the food security level of any territory, and ripple effects can occur, thereby giving rise to food crisis and unrest. An example is the prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict. Although food security challenges in Nigeria and Kenya are not a direct outcome of the prolonged conflicts, the ripples - diversion of foreign aid, declining agricultural output, high reduction in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and industry's collapse - are largely impinging on food security and different levels of overall national security.

In Nigeria, over a decade long Boko Haram terrorist activity in the North East region and the general insecurity in most part of the country accompanied with the killing and abduction of farmers in demand for ransom has resulted in the abandonment of farmlands thereby adding to the soaring prices of commodities forcing many households to spend the largest share of their income on food. Corroborating the aforementioned gloomy status of food security in Africa, the World Bank posits that at least one in five Africans goes to bed hungry with an estimated 140 million people on the continent facing acute food insecurity (World Bank, 2022). This therefore calls for urgent action by the continent's leaders, governments and institutions to address food insecurity in order to safeguard the calorie and nutrition needs of Africa's one billion people and to protect their human development. Adebayo 2010, (cited in Ajayi and Fashagba 2014), consequent on the full invasion of Ukraine by Russia last year, food insecurity in Africa went from bad to worse based on the fact that both warring countries are at the center of global agriculture markets and their conflict has major implications for global food security and particularly in Africa. Firstly, Russia and Ukraine are among the world's largest producer and exporters of cereal crops such as wheat, barley and corn (United States Department of Agriculture, 2022). It is estimated that in the past five years, both countries collectively represented 13 per cent of the world's overall wheat production and 30 per cent of global wheat exports (International Grains Council, 2022). Russia and Ukraine are the third and fourth leading exporters of barley, and together they make up around 20 per cent of world's barley production. According to the International Grains Council, 2022, The two countries jointly provide nearly two thirds of traded sunflower oil and collectively supplied agricultural food products to African markets worth a total of USD 7 billion (Hatab, 2022). According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (cited in Rochat 2022), Ukraine is also the world economy's third largest exporter of corn, supplying 16 per cent of global corn exports. By implication, the ongoing conflict between both countries presents a very dire food insecurity scenario for the world in general and Africa in particular.

Discussion of Findings

Impacts of Russian – Ukraine Conflict on Food Security in Africa

Africa's food insecurity problem is not entirely a new one as it has always been there but has increased over the years to reach the present alarming proportion due to wrong policy actions and inactions on the part of successive African governments, institutional/regional leaders as well as the fall out of the Covid-19 pandemic, natural disasters like droughts, famine and adverse activities of climate

change. Similarly, the facts that most countries in the horn of Africa heavily dependent on the importation of essential staple crops from Russia and Ukraine to the tune of about 60 per cent of wheat imports (International Grains Council, 2022), gives this conflict the capacity to be the world's worst food crisis ever. It is also worthy of note that although the Horn of Africa is presently very vulnerable, other regions of Africa are not immune as they are also facing severe food crisis that has amplified due to the ongoing conflicts, hence the impacts can be viewed as follows:

1. Disruption of trade routes –the Russia military action against Ukraine is a major disruption on the trade routes as the conflict has made the Black Sea route very dangerous and impassable which resulted in the closure of most Ukrainian ports which were the main access route from where over two thirds of Ukraine foods and grains exports exit for distribution. Again, according to the BBC news (2023), a third portion of Ukrainian lands are presently covered with mines and might take years to demine for farming activities to commence even if the conflict is brought under control. This also adds to the already bad situation as regards food shortages as the farmers cannot grow their crops thereby worsening food insecurity on the continent.

2. High prices of foods /grains - Closely related to the first impact mentioned above is the price of oil and energy products which has added to higher ocean shipping charges for food commodities as well as increased costs for alternative air and rail transportation. Since Russia is a major exporter of oil and energy products globally, the increase in the price of oil which exceeded the USD100/barrel for the first time in eight years made a mark on the prices of food as the additional cost of transportation and distribution of food commodities are now billed into the original price thereby resulting in hike in prices of grains across the world and is causing food shortages in some countries and putting many families on the risk of malnutrition (Hatab, 2022).

3. Shortages and rising cost of fertilizers – Russia as one of the top producers of natural gas a major component of ammonia and urea that is used in the fertilizer industry; is also a top exporter of nitrogen fertilizers, second in potassic fertilizers and third in phosphorus fertilizers. Rochat,2022, (cited in Zainab 2013, page 263). Furthermore, Russia had placed a temporary embargo on the export of fertilizer in the wake of the conflict so as to secure the supply for their local farmers. Prior to the conflict, there was an inadequate supply of fertilizers and with the sanction imposed on Belarus by the European Union and the United States of America in 2021 for its role in the conflict and the increase in price of natural gas, it is now more difficult to export fertilizers to Africa which consumes about 20 – 80 per cent

(Hatab, 2022). Therefore, the shortage of fertilizers and the inability of farmers to afford the high cost of the product and other input will result in a dwindling agriculture product thereby adding to food inadequacy on the continent while pushing up prices of food further. It goes without saying that the conflict is damaging the prospects of small-scale farmers by disrupting supply and resulting in low crop yields thus exacerbating food insecurity on the continent. It is therefore a major setback to the efforts of the farmers that rely on these inputs to produce their crops.

4. Result of indirect sanction on Russia – it has been stated that there are over 9,000 different sanctions imposed on Russia by NATO and its allies making it the world’s most sanctioned country presently (Hatab, 2022). By implication, the supply of fresh vegetables and fruits that are exported to both Russia and Ukraine by small scale producers and exporters from African countries like Egypt, Morocco and Kenya has been put on hold due to the closure of ports leading to huge losses due to inadequate storage facilities on the continent thus a loss of livelihood for those farmers. For instance, South Africa’s export of oranges, mandarins, lemon, pears and apples to both Russia and Ukraine in 2020 was put at USD 260 million (Hatab, 2022). One can correctly assert that with the ongoing conflict, it is a huge loss to both farmers and exporters on the continent.

5. Social and political unrest on the continent – the heavy reliance on imported food by Africa and the increased rise in household expenditure has the capacity to trigger social and political unrest continent-wise. For instance, the cost-of-living index is now 54 percent and 45 per cent in Nigeria and Egypt respectively since the start of the conflict. With the rising food prices and the shortage of food supplies, the purchasing power of an average house hold on the continent is reduced and the demand by workers for increase in wages can manifest in growing resentment and might lead to food riots which will invariably trigger social and political unrest in the continent according to Hatab (2022). For instance, food price inflation was a major catalyst of the Arab Spring in North Africa.

6. Economic impact – economically, the world has witnessed a general slowdown of economic activities since the conflict started. There have been massive job cuts across the globe and a general dull in business activities too. It can be correct to posit that the direct impact of the conflict on food prices and supply has also robbed off with a broader economic impact that is contributing to the global economic slowdown and reducing investment in agriculture and food systems. This has further triggered a food security crisis in Africa as many countries rely on these investments to support their agricultural sector and ensure food security

Conclusion

It is obvious that the two countries locked in conflict are global giants in the food and agriculture production business hence the implications are not only on food security on a global level, but it has particular consequences for African countries who are heavily dependent on food sources from these two countries and are among the most susceptible to price fluctuations in the global agricultural markets due to its peculiar food characteristics. Expectedly, a continent that is home to over 600 million hectares of uncultivated arable land that represent about 65 per cent of the global total land mass with over 70 per cent of its population earning a living from agriculture (Rochat, 2022) has no business importing food from the international markets. This study strongly feels that despite the gloomy status of food security on the continent and the exacerbation of food insecurity by the ongoing conflict; African leaders can still act now by utilizing the conflict as a spring board to bolster and mobilize support by charting a new policy framework as regards agriculture on the continent. The starting point will be for African leaders and policy makers to adopt a strategy to reduce its dependence of imported grains in a manner similar to how the European countries collectively initiated a gradual process of reducing its dependence on Russian energy.

As the protracted conflict continues unabated, disruptions in agricultural production will continue to perpetuate problems of food insufficiency in the whole of the continent. This conflict is an empowered opportunity for African leaders to overcome their collective problem and pursue a bold strategy that promotes food security through agricultural independence. In addition, by the year 2050 the continents population is expected to reach about 2.5 billion and with the current worsening situation, Africa needs to rally its investment partners to invest more in the agricultural sector so as to boost food security to meet its growing population.

Recommendations

The African Development Bank (ADB), should lead the way by coming up with a policy that will support small –scale farmers, and agriculture entrepreneurs to boost and improve trade and supply chains that will mitigate the impact of the conflict. This can be a coordinated effort between governments, the private sector, and civil society all working together to ensure food security for all through adequate funding, improved seedlings as well as the introduction of modern technology and infrastructure into the system.

Again, the conflict presents opportunity for African countries to evolve a policy that will ensure greater self-sufficiency in essential grains through harmonization

that ensures that most foods produced in the continent stays and is consumed in the continent. Continental leaders can also utilize the urgency of the moment to push forward an agenda that puts Africa's food security needs at the forefront of the global agenda.

African countries should utilize in full the African Continental Free Trade Area to increase intra-African food trade as this will go a long way in reducing their reliance on imported food.

Oil producing countries in Africa such as Angola, Nigeria and Libya can help boost food security by investing more in fertilizer production on a large scale for continental usage as well as for export.

Finally, world leaders should put all hands deck to bring the conflict to an end immediately by employing diplomacy.

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