Political Will, Policy Implementation and Food Access, in Uganda.

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Abstract. Despite Uganda's plentiful of food production, the awareness that food security affects national development and the existence of government's food policy, food access remains a big challenge to many households. What explains persistent food insecurity in a food sanctuary in East Africa? While drought and other natural hazards may trigger famine, resulting into food insecurity in a nation, this paper argues that government's action and/or inaction determines people's access to food. If governments can influence the state of food security through policy processes, then why persistent food insecurity in a food-producing economy? The paper concludes that food access is greatly influenced by people's capabilities and that no matter how good the Food and Nutrition policy is, political will is a crucial determinant of whether or not implementation will be adequate. This paper generated answers to these puzzles through an analytical framework.

Keywords: access, capabilities, policy.

1. Introduction

Although Uganda, suffers food insecurity in some areas, it is said to produce sufficient food for its growing population [1]. Most regions in the country have surplus food during harvest periods, but many people cannot access it, most of it goes to waste due to challenges of redistribution [2]. The different geographical characteristics and rain patterns determine the intensity of food production in the different regions in the country, for example, the Western region is food secures for most of the seasons, Central region is insecure some seasons. Yet, the country's North Eastern and Northern regions remain food insecure for most of the year [3].

The Uganda National Food Security Assessment Report shows the Eastern Uganda's Elgon subregion as moderately food insecure sighting lack of sufficient food to cushion households to future harvests [4]. The communities, families, and unscrupulous intermediaries have attributed this to unchecked sales of foodstuffs. Natural hazards consequently result in food insecurity - so far, the biggest contributors to food insecurity in the country - by causing total scarcity and hence increasing demand and consequently prices. This persistent food insecurity – regional inequality in food access, persistent qualitative and quantitative food consumption, and natural-hazard-induced food shortages - contradicts analysts' arguments that endowed societies have enough means of sustaining their populations.

Government's commitment to ensuring food security for it citizens is observed through the formulation of the National Food Policy and other food programmes and strategies under the overall National Development plan [5]. Despite this policy, citizens continue to struggle with food access challenges. What makes this challenge more puzzling is that the country is naturally endowed with fertile soils, regular and reliable rainfall, moderate temperatures, and water bodies. The country's

⁺Corresponding author. Tel: +25 6777649391 *E-mail address*: cswdoreen@yahoo.com. natural endowment would boost food production, resulting in food access to all citizens. It also presents the irony that in a food- abundant world some people "cannot access food." This then prompted an extensive analysis of the subject under study at a national level. The questions to guide the study, therefore, are why food insecurity in a country with a food policy? How can government intervention ensure food accessibility? What are the drawbacks of the policy in answering the food accessibility question?

These questions are better answered through an analytical focus on the puzzle of food access through examining political will and policy implementation in relation to food security.

2. Theoretical Framework

Amartya Sens' food, economics and entitlements approach 1986 is very relevant to this study because it highlights the role of public policy in addressing the deprivation of food [6]. Famine and hunger arise not because of inadequate production but because of inadequate distribution. The food question can best be answered by examining the distribution mechanisms for instance in the event of famine, distribution is dependent on imports, thereby increasing food supply and consequently reducing the prices of food.

The approach stipulates that availability of food at the national level will not necessarily result to access to food. People need entitlements that enable them to command from the market. These can be means of production, trade bases, inheritance and transfer entitlements from relatives or relief. Famine results due to a decline in the entitlements [7]. Additionally, unstable prices affect negatively the purchasing power of the poor, implying therefore that government intervention is fundamental to ensuring citizens' food access. Sen argues that the entitlement approach does not on its own address the challenge but can be successful alongside long-term policies directed to securing and guaranteeing entitlements. However, he highlights the shortfall of food policies; noting that they are usually characterized by levels of bureaucracy and red tapes', poor response levels, inadequate resource allocation, and failure to regulate food prices. Irrefutably, the analysis shows that entitlements are just one variable to food acquisition, as it can be seen that food acquisition at national and regional level is conditioned by, poverty, food distribution, food prices and policies.

3. Discussions

3.1. Political will and food access

By taking political will as government's commitment to address a problem [8], this definition ignores the vagueness and makes it difficult to accurately quantify it but rather be observed through various indicators, Such as government inaction, resource allocation, commitment to particular objectives and political outcomes both positive and negative. To analyze political will in relation to food access, it is imperative to re-examine the concept food security. Broadly, a nation is said to be food secure when there is availability (Supply of food at the national level), accessibility (capabilities of households to acquire food), consumption, and utilization (Value and amount of food intake measured by calories), of food in quantities sufficient [9].

Food access the central focus of this paper refers to the capability of the households to obtain food either by buying from the market or through producing for consumption. Do all citizens have 3 capabilities to purchase from markets characterized by price volatility or alternatively have means of production? Households may fail to purchase or acquire food due to poverty resulting from unemployment, lack of means of production such as land. Increasing food prices due to economic forces and inadequate information about markets further, has negative consequences to food access. Food access is largely determined by the state policies of income distribution. Inequitable, distribution mechanisms explain why some people starve and why others remain food secure [10]. The scarcity of food occurs because people do not have access to enough food and not due to

limited supply [11]. The analysis of political will in relation to access to food is on two crucial areas that affect the capabilities of households to acquire food. These are the food markets and the main means of production "land "in Uganda.

About 50% of Uganda's food calories are purchased from the market a connotation that high prices would definitely worsen citizen's susceptibility to food insecurity [12]. Food prices in Uganda, especially for staple foods such as maize, beans, sweet potatoes, cassava, sorghum and plantain have seasonal variations [13]. These staples account for 40% caloric intake and yet command less political sensitivity [14]. It is also common for farmers to sell their harvest during the harvest period with no buffer for the scarcity period due to challenges such as limited access to credit, and storage.

Uganda in the 1990s had the produce marketing board a government parastatal, which mandated government to regulate food prices. However, its collapse resulted to the liberalization of food prices [15]. Political factors rather than economic factors explain food production and distribution better. [16]. Political unwillingness to interfere in the liberal food market has led to the selloff of all foods with no stocks left at household, district, and national level. Politician's self- interest often overrides their actions and decisions for the public good [17]. They are motivated by incentives not to change the status-quo that impede access to food by especially the most vulnerable citizens. Therefore, public servants role in implementing the food and nutrition policy towards ensuring food security in the community remains of great stance.

3.2. Source: UBOS Report 2015

From the above presentation, it is noted that some districts registered low price range and this was recorded in Jinja and Mbale. While some districts like Kamuli and Mbarara had mild price range denoting reasonable price increment. However, there were districts with notable high price range and this was manifested in Kiruhura with high increment while Gulu registered high decrease in price range. There were also cases of extreme price volatility denoting sharp price change most especially in Arua but also Masaka. Therefore, the variation in the price index across the different districts shows that there is no institutional control framework to safeguard pricing whether through economic or political means to achieve price stabilization. It is therefore important to note that the concept of abdicating price stabilization to be, undertaken solely by the market is one factor that has exacerbated food insecurity across the country.

Additionally, unequal distribution of land threatens food security, especially for the rural communities whose only source of production is land [19]. Land does not only ensure food security for households, it is also a means of livelihood. Meaning that the income needed to purchase food from the market in rural communities is based on people's entitlement to land. Land problems are a big issue nationally; however, the women are more vulnerable in the country. The Land Sector Strategic Plan and Article 21(1), 26(1), 32(1) of the Republic of Uganda recognizes the vulnerability of women in relation to security of tenure [20]. Translating this law into action has taken longer, signifying the state's low level of commitment to harmonize the dynamics of land ownership, use and inheritance.

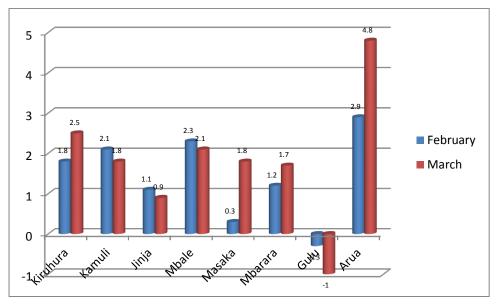


Fig. 1: Food Crop Consumer price index, February-March 2015

3.3. Policy implementation and food access

Policy is widely defined as a course of action or inaction by public authorities to address a particular problem [21]. Policy entails what governments do and not just their intentions or what bureaucrats say they are going to do [22] Policy is allied to politics which has more to do with the willful allocation of scarce resources more often authoritatively to meet public demands. The relationship between political will and policy implementation is that the former precedes the latter hence implementation can never succeed in the absence of will power that is deliberate. [23]. Implementation of policies is not an easy task, yet equally crucial as their formulation, to the extent that when it fails all deliberations will be a waste of time [24].

The acknowledgment of implementation gaps is critical in availing a knowledge base from which policy makers can redesign and come up with the most effective policies. Implementation is the missing link separating program formulation from program success [25]. Despite adequate experience gained on policy formulation, deficient is true for successful policy implementation. [26]. Sapru notes that no matter how good the political systems are, the organizational structures are, the goals of a policy are, success cannot be attained if implementation is not in line with policy objectives.

Policy implementation is dependent on political will and policy success dependant on implementation, an inference that no matter how good Uganda national food policy is on paper its success is dependent on effective and efficient implementation resulting from the "will" of politicians, institutions and bureaucrats. If political will is only about formulation and adoption of policies then it is, existing. "Do governments really implement the good policies they formulate as desired? "Are leaders genuinely committed to policy platform or take commitment for strategic reasons or under pressure from external forces and implement policies in a self- defeating manner" [27].

To draw conclusions, this paper analyzes policy implementation in Uganda in relation to the capacity of institutions, funding, accountability and participation. These specific areas have been selected because of the multifaceted nature of food security and the difficulty in measuring the success of policy implementation.

Agriculture a key sector in ensuring food security has been 5 percent below the 10 percent recommended by CAADP declaration [28]. Reduced resource allocation to nutrition work in the ministry of Agriculture and nutrition is evident. [29]. UBOS and WFP 2013, in their

Comprehensive Food Security and vulnerability Analysis report (CFSVA) noted a decline of 15% funding in the agricultural sector since financial year 2006/2007 and 2012/2013 and even further an additional decrease in financial year 2015/2016 [30]. Generally, most of the thematic areas of the food policy are not funded and implemented at all. Funding is a major challenge to successful policy implementation; the government can formulate policies, ratify policies and approve programmes with no funds allocated for its implementation.

Ideally, policy formulation and implementation should be in line with problems and priorities of a state however, politicians might be forced to support unpopular policies due to incentives tied to international assistance [31]. As a result, they may not adequately implement policies.

3.4. Source budget: 2014/2015

The figure above presents budget allocations for different sectors for two financial years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. The information clearly shows that agriculture the backbone of the economy has received the least funding for the two financial years, while security, received uniform funding for the two financial years. Health, Education, Energy and transport, received increased funding in financial year 2014/2015. Limited allocation of resources to agriculture is an inference therefore that agricultural funding is political and requires political decisions for it to meet the food security needs of its citizens and thereafter boost economic development.

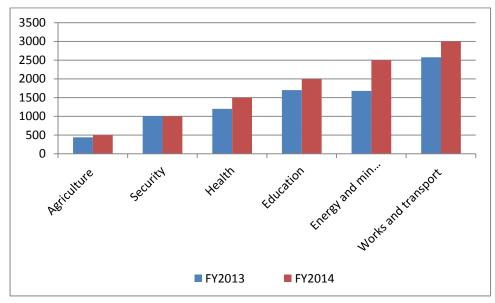


Fig. 2: Sector allocation

Implementation gaps can be seen from the poor performance of sectors especially agriculture, the most crucial to food security. The Food Policy has 12 thematic areas [33] that are implemented by different sectors whose funding proportions and priorities differ [34]. There are no clear institutional linkages between these sectors and legal frameworks to specify these linkages. It is unlikely that sectors commit themselves to implement the food components under their operation as required. Multiple accountabilities mean no single sector is held liable for the food insecurity situation of citizens in totality, which leaves the food situation to test. Successful implementation of policies is possible when adequate coordination coupled with clear rules, regulations and responsibilities are functioning appropriately. [35]. Stakeholders responsible for implementation do not translate the policy into practice or if it is implemented, it is on piece meal basis.

Although the constitution of the republic of Uganda provides for the right to food it is not strongly emphasized in chapter 4 of the constitution that provides for the human rights of the citizens. Low awareness and participation of citizens in relation to making demands on the state has

been very limited, and could be the reason policy implementation is not taken seriously in the country. Gender Informed Nutrition and Agriculture (GINA), Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP) and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) failed to meet intended objectives due to massive corruption on the side of both politicians and implementers. [36].

3.5. Source: Government of Uganda Budget 2014/2015 [37]

Figure three above shows agriculture as the worst performing sector in the economy in the four financial years in comparison to other sectors in the economy. There was a further decline in the performance of the agricultural sector in financial year 2012 before a slight improvement in 2013 all through to financial year 2014. While other sectors such as industry has registered significant progress throughout all the financial years and so is the service sector. This therefore is a signal that governments priorities are likely to be implemented to succession.

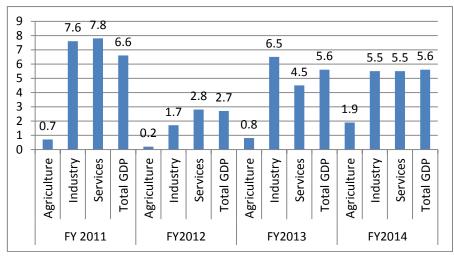


Fig. 3: Economic growth by sector

4. Policy Implication

The food and nutrition policy with the necessary conditions such as adequate funds, appropriate institutional capacity with proper coordination, legal framework and adequate personnel will be very instrumental in addressing the challenge of reliable access to food by the households in the country.

Equitable distribution of land is key to food security, although this is provided for in the 1995 constitution of the republic of Uganda; it contradicts traditional patriarchal provisions that govern the ownership, use and utilization of land that marginalizes women. Harmonization of these two parallel provisions will answer the biggest challenge to food security.

5. Conclusions

The paper has argued that beyond the capabilities of citizens, the role of policy is crucial in ensuring food access and that, the Ugandan government is aware of the food insecurity facing its people, has a food security policy, but the problem seems to be implementation gaps. Therefore, deliberate government interventions that are responsive to the reality of impending food insecurity, spelt out by the food security policy, are inadequate. This explains the current food insecurity in the country, yet food insecurity impacts on national development by threatening lives of otherwise productive communities. Given the multifaceted nature of food security, the policy needs to be mainstreamed in various sectors such as health, education, finance, planning and economic development together with sound coordination, monitoring and evaluation systems coupled with effective leadership.

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