

Transcript for Food scarcity in Nigeria:

Hello and welcome back to Retrospect, the official podcast of the Fordham Observer. I'm your host, Sukriti Varma, along with Shine a light, bruh. Alright, so today we're going to be talking about food insecurity in Nigeria. So what exactly is food scarcity or food insecurity?

Food scarcity or food insecurity. It is the shortage of food in a society. Typically, there is not enough to eat and the next meal is unknown. When a family or a nation is worried about the current and next meal.

- <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

Got it. So the questions we'll be discussing today is Why does it occur? And on a smaller scale, food scarcity happens when the person has no money to buy food due to poverty and unemployment. And on a larger scale, it's due to climate change factors like climate change, economic instability, insecurity, and conflict, also rapid population growth and overpopulation.

So we'll be discussing these factors and what exactly causes it. In Nigeria.

Unfortunately, these are all the cases for Africa's giant country, Nigeria. A very big factor is climate change that is affecting all around the world. But because of climate change, sand dunes are replacing farmland in northern Nigeria, an area that was formerly home to agriculture as a result of desertification, this results in less grass for cattle and arable land. Eleven states in the north are especially impacted such as Brno and Sokoto. Another factor to climate change is the water and wind erosion, especially in farming areas, degrade that degrade the soil. Reducing its fertility and leading to lower crop yields. This problem affects both infrastructure and agriculture productivity, driving up food prices.

- <https://authorityngr.com/2024/02/28/food-crisis-soaring-food-prices-food-insecurity-and-climate-change-in-nigeria/>

Interesting. So just for our listeners climate change is literally the changing of environmental factors due to human interference.

- <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change#:~:text=Such%20shifts%20can%20be%20natural,like%20coal%2C%20oil%20and%20gas.>

Things like pollution and Whatever the official term for cutting down trees is and things like that, so that's really interesting because, Nigeria is obviously known, or used to be known, at least, for its fertile soil, and clearly, this is a big issue, and it's probably become more and more difficult to produce crops now.

I have a question: What is the population in Nigeria that relies on agriculture? How big is the agricultural economy in Nigeria?

I would like to do a little clarification. Yes, the soil is currently damaged by climate change. However, Nigeria still has a lot of fertile soil and still has an opportunity to grow a lot of crops.

It's just that in some parts of Nigeria, that is not the opportunity given to them because of the factors. But yeah, to answer your question, the part of [Nigeria that depends on agriculture is 21 percent of the population](#), which would be a lot because the population is big in Nigeria.

- <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/countries/nigeria>

And speaking of population, another factor to Nigeria's food scarcity is that the population continues to grow rapidly, and this increases demand for food in a time when agricultural production is already struggling to keep up in certain parts of Nigeria. Population growth is caused by.

A lot of, because a lot of Nigerians tend to have a lot of children. [There are families of 10, 12, even 18 families](#). And, this can cause a high demand for food.

- <https://www.afsusa.org/countries/nigeria/#:~:text=Most%20Nigerian%20households%20consist%20of,many%20as%20seven%20to%20ten.>

I see. Okay, so this seems to be like a cultural thing, that you raise a big family, which I am Indian I understand that, and in India, the government has put in a lot of protocol, not protocol necessarily, but initiatives to implement family planning, so if that means emphasizing the fact that, any more than two kids is a lot of kids or something like that, or, increasing sex education and contraceptives and things like that. Obviously, population growth is a large issue and one of the main factors that contributes to food scarcity there.

What is the government doing to try to combat this population growth? Are there family planning initiatives and, yeah, what's being done?

I'm not too sure about what the government is doing with the family planning, but I do know that there has been an enlightenment to Nigerian families.

For example, my own family is just me and my brother. And then some of my friends that I know, there's just two or three siblings. It has even been reduced to just five other siblings. So there is a really big progress in reducing family numbers compared to my family, my external family. I know that I have a lot of cousins.

There are a lot of aunties, a lot of uncles, but now in this modern world, I think people, especially in Nigeria, realize that. You don't need that many children, and it is probably best to prioritize yourself, especially with food scarcity.

Yeah, and that's definitely something we're seeing across the world, family planning.

[I know China's having a big problem getting women to actually want to have babies. So that's really interesting.](#)

- <https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/the-journal/china-wants-more-babies-many-women-are-saving-no/2fb1d60f-8d81-4783-a85b-f66e2aea9879#:~:text=Women%20in%20China%20have%20a,and%20aging%20parents%20as%20well>.

And just like an off topic question, but is this kind of enlightenment that you mentioned among a certain socioeconomic class? Like I know food scarcity, obviously most likely is among the lower socioeconomic classes.

Has this enlightenment reached or trickled down to the. Lower socioeconomic classes.

Yes, I would say that you would see more families in lower socioeconomic classes. I think this is really prevalent in villages in Nigeria. I see They tend to have more children than the working class. I think this is obviously because the working class doesn't have the same amount of time taking care of children and would like to put more emphasis on getting money.

The exception to the more higher classes would be religious families, especially Islam families who like , the men would have multiple wives or even just one wife with a lot of, Children and it would just be her taking care of the children and I think obviously the man would work and provide for his family.

They don't like it, this is not a problem, of course, if they manage to feed all their children, give All their children their necessities, this is absolutely okay. I see,

That's very interesting. Now another factor of food scarcity in Nigeria is general security, the security concerns, so literally insecurity.

So over time, robbers and terrorists have sought refuge in various cities in Nigeria. And especially in areas like the northeast and northwest Nigeria where farmers traditionally work. Could you expand a little bit more on that?

Yes. In the north, there is the terrorist group Boko Haram.

Causes this food scarcity because of wars, naturally it would be hard for people in the North to get access to food. I see.

Interesting. Boko Haram, do they specifically take food? Or is it just that they jack up prices to the point where you just can't afford, or especially families that are mainly agricultural centric simply just can't afford that food? Or is it taxes?

What exactly does Boko Haram do to cause this?

Yes. They do bomb the place. Oh yeah, I see how that might cause insecurity. Bombings do
yeah,

they do bomb the area.

They destroy all the land that destroys all the fertile soil, and the north is, like I said previously, already really known for farming, and that's where agriculture really stems from. So if you take that away from them, that not only reduces food for the north, but also reduces food from places of Nigeria where they get food from the north and import like export food.

So this not only affects states like Renu, but it also affects the rest of Nigeria as a whole. Of course, I would say that not all of Nigeria is going through food insecurity. FCT Abuja mainly has food insecurity because of high prices. There has been a really big inflation going on in Nigeria at the moment.

I remember when I left to come to America in January, the Price of the Naira to a dollar was around 900 and currently it is now 1, 500. Oh my god, which is like it's going up pretty high. When I first came back to Nigeria, it was 500 and it was steady. It was steady at 500 but during COVID it's increased a lot.

- <https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-ngn-2023>
- <https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-ngn-2024>
- <https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-ngn-2020>
- <https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-ngn-2021>

But like I said, it's not like Abuja or Lagos, it's more of an access issue. Yes, that makes sense. That makes sense.

I see. Okay. You have places like in the north of Nigeria, which is obviously where it is very agricultural focused.

And just to put some statistics, agriculture employs more than 36 percent of Nigeria's workforce, so that is a very large population. And also is like your major source of livelihood, especially, I assume, in the northern regions. And it also generates a significant amount of income.

- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288871/agriculture-sector-share-in-employment-in-nigeria/>

For the country itself. So that is genuinely a food scarcity issue. And due to Boko Haram and terrorist organizations and things like that. But now we're in central Nigeria and this is now a food insecurity issue where it's not like you have the food. It's just so incredibly expensive that it can be hard to afford.

I would say though in Lagos. This July, this summer, there was flash flooding. I see. This was due to not only climate change, but there were also illegal infrastructures that were blocking drains. Because during the summers when Nigeria goes through its wet season, it's raining all the time.

Monsoon season? I don't know if you guys,

that's. Cause like the Southern. Part of Asia or so into Africa and like South Asia. They have like monsoon season So it's every year like incredible flooding and

Yeah, like we call our dry season Hamilton. Okay, so I don't know what we call our wet season

But yes, It was really bad. I was there in the summer of Nigeria interning and it was raining so, so very much and this caused a flash flood in Lagos, which I don't think has happened before when I lived in Lagos, that didn't really happen often. I think these illegal infrastructures might have happened recently because of the flash flood . In Nigeria, it is common for lower classes to sell food on the street, so they would store a lot of peppers, ground nuts, bananas with them. But because of this flash flood, That affected not only the higher parts of Lagos, but also the downtown area of it. This destroyed a lot of people's crops.

This set back the lower class because they could not only sell their food, but they couldn't buy food from other lower class people because it destroyed a lot of it. I think the situation has changed. But since then the flooding has stopped, there's no more flooding.

There's still some recovery here and there, but yeah.

So this is a little bit off topic, but what has the government done, or is the government really that who you look to in Nigeria to help solve these issues or is it mainly, private? That really, comes in and solves these issues or, who here, who is the main helper in all of this, if you will?

I would say that obviously I don't know too much about the flooding situation, but I do know that the government. The section that handles flash flooding. The president of that section showed a lot of videos and tweets and stuff like that, where they did work on taking away the blockages on the drains.

- <https://persecondnews.com/2024/07/18/climate-change-strikes-close-to-home-lagos-govt-warns-of-looming-floods/>

I think that they did the best that it could, and the flooding has stopped now. A lot of the drains have been released. Yeah. Is what I would say about that.

That's awesome. And you talked about these drains being clogged in illegal infrastructure. Yeah. So it seems poor agricultural practices and illegal infrastructure seems to be a big reason for food scarcity.

Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Yes. , yes. In Nigeria, I'm not gonna say that we live in huts. We don't. We do have buildings. We do have, we do have places to live. However, there are parts where technology wise, There aren't like they're not fully developed. Yeah, absolutely. This causes outdated farming techniques where many Nigerian farmers still rely on old farming techniques, rain fed agriculture, and lack access to modern farming inputs like fertilizers, agro chemicals and irrigation.

This obviously limits crop production. And food distribution is hindered by illegal taxation on trucks, transporting goods across states, and this increases costs for traders and consumers alike. I would say that the infrastructure problem, of course, with the Boko Haram bombings, there are some random like parts of buildings all over the place.

Yeah. And with FCT, sometimes they can't, the permit to build is too expensive or just too much of a hassle. So people just take matters into their own hands and just build. And plus, if you pay people enough, they'll just build over a drain because.

I see, yeah,

it's just a drain. They don't really see the consequence of that.

Not to say that it's oh, people in Nigeria are like, inconsiderate. It's just that there, there is, there's so many things going on. Things need to

happen. And sometimes, The legal way is not always, oh, by the way, I'm not encouraging illegal practices, I just want to put that as like a disclaimer, but I know this it's definitely reduced a lot in India and I'm from India, which is why I'm using this as an example.

As my point of reference, but it's like I would say that sometimes the legal process is just so long and disorganized that oftentimes that it's just not feasible and it's honestly just easier to do the illegal thing and it's just so common And it's not even really considered illegal, it's just considered the way of the world.

I don't know. Yeah, it's

not even these, I think these buildings have been around, and obviously most people knew about the drains and the blockage of the drains. It's just that I was like, oh, okay. It was only addressed when the flooding happened, and that does happen a lot. In Nigeria.

Yeah. I'm

not saying that it defines the entire country. I'm just saying that sometimes it's just looked over until it's gotten to the point where it's oh, it's really bad. And then it causes these problems. I say, of course, the problems are resolved really quickly when it is done. But this is just what happens.

It's just a way of life. It's just what people just pay them off. Oh. Just do it. Go ahead. I need a bigger place or something like that. It doesn't matter.

Yeah, absolutely. It's a very nuanced problem, food scarcity. Obviously, you have, according to you, what would be, maybe the three biggest things that could be changed to, at least in the short term, solve this problem.

I feel like for one, If the technology is definitely developed so that farmers can get the correct technological tools for their farming things, I feel like that would really help out. I also feel like I know it's a culture and a way of life, but if population growth could be reduced, that'd be fantastic.

I feel like Nigeria is already overpopulated and it's just causing problems. A lot of problems.

Yeah.

I just think that there should be more promotions to decrease families from to at least five children per family. At most five children. Oh, yeah. To at most five children.

To

at most

five children per

family.

Because,

I feel like Fifteen, eighteen is a bit too much. Yeah, that's stretching it a little. It's stretching a little bit. I do the whole point of a family. I remember from history class, thank you so much to my history teacher, that the reason that this tradition was a thing was because the more children you had, the more prosperous a man would be, I think.

I see. So it's a very

cultural thing as well. So I see how that could be difficult and it's a systemic problem, I think.

Yeah, I think. From then to now, the generations have reduced families but I assume for reasons like food scarcity. Yeah, but I feel like it could reduce some more.

And I think another way food scarcity can be reduced is if, not food scarcity, but maybe But the access to food can be easier if The inflation goes down. Now I'm not an economic business major. I don't know how that's supposed to go down.

I took economics once for my IGCSE. I just wanted to pass. I did pass. Did I remember everything? Not really. Yeah. But economy, inflation, decrease,

Like decreased demand, which is like. Overpopulation, just, I feel like increased supply through,

maybe education about smart agricultural practices, maximizing crop production, as well as retention and things like that.

I assume war is a very big one, Boko Haram causes quite a few problems. I think both for physical security, but also for food. And with that comes food insecurity as well. Yeah and it seems barring war and terrorist organizations this sounds very similar to where we live.

What factors do you think are similar in Nigeria that are similar to New York City and food scarcity here?

The similarities is the rise of food costs, especially during COVID 19. Yes. A lot of. Prices really did go up and living in New York, you can definitely feel that. Also, these countries have been dependent on food aid, and then another similarity is poverty and low income.

The cost of living has become difficult.

Absolutely. Yeah COVID 19 I think, Really? Really? Obviously, people lost jobs. People had lower income. So the reliance on food banks, especially in generally lower income areas like boroughs like the Bronx, Brooklyn, things like that. I think people had to rely more and more on food banks and Public programs to get, their source of nutrition and just at least three meals a day, and I think also part of this is the high cost of living you and I both know how expensive it is to Live here and to live especially where we live, which is the Upper West Side, Now, despite New York being an incredibly wealthy city and one of the main sources of economy for the U.

S. It also has a very significant wealth gap. Almost one in five residents live in poverty. And that's an incredible amount. And it's honestly not hard to fathom. If most of your money is going towards literally just having a roof over your head, you have less and less money to budget towards groceries and food and things like that.

Yes, I would say that The cost of living is really high in Nigeria. Even for my own family, I just call my mom. My mom would be like,

ah, this food thing. She'd be like, oh, don't you know what I did today?

I went to the markets and oh, this food, this groundnut that used to be 2, 000 now it's 9, 000, 9, 000, I'm like, oh my god, yes mommy, and I'm sorry mommy, so a lot of that, obviously we talk about other things,

yeah, it's just really frustrating when a week ago, something would be 9, 000, and then just maybe, The next week now it's like 12, 000, 13, 000 and you can't even bargain it down.

She was like complaining, you can't even bargain with these people anymore.

Yeah, and people. Everyone's trying to make a living. Yeah.

I just feel like, yeah, that's a really

Yeah, a dangerous thing to think about. It seems like some of the similarities, obviously, are the rise of food costs.

I certainly have a physical reaction when I go grocery shopping at the prices of produce. Genuine gasps and heart pain, I swear.

Doing groceries here is just sometimes I'm just I'm, like, sweating right after just buying pasta and sauce. My wallet hurts.

Oh my goodness.

OMG. Yeah, absolutely. I think and like I said, one in five people live in poverty, and so that's a significant population that's dependent on food aid and obviously if you I looked at the average income you need to comfortably live in New York, and now it used to be about 60k, and now it's gone up to about 100, 000 to 120, 000 a year to be able to comfortably afford, and that's comfortably, not have a happy life that's, and have enough money for rent and groceries, and 120, 000, that's not feasible for some people, and some careers like you, it's it's a lot for sure.

Now what are some differences that you've noticed between Nigeria and New York in terms of food scarcity and insecurity?

I'm so sorry, I was just about to add about also the minimum wage in Nigeria. Oh, that's a good point. It causes a strain on the cost of living. I remember back in summer, I think people were fighting for the minimum wage to be at least 60, 000 and it was currently, the government put it at 40, 000. Okay. Just 40, 000 is like less than 40. So The monthly minimum wage for hard labor jobs would be less than 40. Oh my god. And it was Less than 40 a month.

Yeah, and it was a little less than that. I think people were fighting for a hundred thou No, I think just even 80, 000. And before I left, it landed at 60, 000. But There were obviously a lot of protests and I can imagine stopping a lot of activity So yeah, that's really bad. Less than 60 per month especially for the hard labor jobs who probably have A lot of children to feed, so it just wouldn't do much for them.

It would be really difficult. If

you have a family of four and you said, your mom's complaining about the prices and that's what it goes from 9, 000 to 12, 000. That's Like easily about 50 percent of your income. Yeah, and that's for a week

right

That's it.

That's all you got Yeah, like monthly you only get like less than 60 dollars and before it was like less than 40 dollars Yeah, you're pretty much you're cutting like you're cooked today. But that's why people kept on protesting I think even during Independence Day that happened October 1st, there were still protests.

To think that on Independence Day that people are protesting. To still fight for some level of financial independence. Yeah,

and security all around, food security, just security, yeah, if you can just imagine a country protesting on the independence of the country, I think you can get the picture of what's going on.

Yeah, absolutely. , I know obviously in New York it's maybe not as big of an issue regarding food scarcity, but more food insecurity and not having a high demand or, yeah, like having a high demand and low supply, which, results in very high costs for food and so New York, it's like, More about the access to food, like you mentioned in central Nigeria.

It's more of that issue really than scarcity You also have a lot of economic and inequality I mean you walk on Fifth Ave and you keep walking down Fifth Ave you reach the Bronx and there's food banks around the corner and I would say overall, New York is rich in food, but people with low income, like I said, would have, it would be hard to access food.

And food insecurity rates range between 5 percent and 32%, and nationally, the food insecurity rate is about 13. 5%. That's pretty high. 32 percent in New York City. And rising, because of rising food and living costs, displacement, and unsteady employment all factor in the circumstances of nearly 2 million hungry New Yorkers.

So that's 596, 000, about 596, 000 people being children. Children who probably are in the middle of their school day having to skip lunch because they just can't afford it. And, at the end of the pandemic, food aid really increased. I remember in my school we luckily got free lunches for the year.

And that was a big one. So there was a famous chef I don't know if you know this restaurant called Bungalow, but his name is Vikas Khanna, and he talked about how in India he never experienced food insecurity, he always had something to eat because there were just so many places you could go to eat temples, and gurdwaras, and, food banks, and things like that, but In New York, it just wasn't that common, you, and if you were of a certain socioeconomic class, if you are of a socioeconomic class, it's if I show up at a food bank, they might not even give me food,

So it's like that type of thing.

Now what are some resources That, our listeners can donate to or even use in the case of food insecurity in New York and especially at Fordham.

So a resource that Fordham students could donate to is donating their meal swipes and dining dollars. I know that there is this one student led organization. I forgot what that, Fordham Food Walks? I say, I don't know. I think in Rose Hill, they donate meal swipes and dining dollars, and especially if you like, I don't know, you overestimated how many meal swipes and dining dollars you actually needed.

You could donate them to other people. You don't have to keep them for yourselves.

And I, every freshman on campus here has a meal plan. So definitely consider doing that because I was often left with more than enough meal swipes that I ended up donating. Just a simple act of swiping your ID could be helpful.

Could help so many of your fellow Fordham students.

Yeah. And across New York there are various charities. Obviously, you have things like Catholic charities, but there is one called Food Help New York City. This program basically provides an interactive map for food pantries with filters for boroughs, facility types, service types, and kosher needs.

And so you can use this map to find in person assistance for SNAP benefits, which is basically if you are below a certain income, the government pays for, pays for your food or a certain percentage of your food. And so you can call the organizations ahead of time to confirm their operating hours and you can go to these food pantries and get food.

Another one called Food Bank New York City is very similar. So it's an interactive map that you can find, where you can find providers who can offer, grab and go meals. And pantry bags. So this is something that obviously if you're working multiple jobs and things like that, you just go, you get a meal, you move on with your life.

Now, some places you can donate to the Catholic Charity so you obviously, so they offer food not only to bring home and some hot meals on site, it also provides support to reduce people's need for emergency food and supplements. It includes information on food pantries, soup kitchens, and SNAP benefits.

These are just a few of the charities, the vast amount of charities that you can donate to help ameliorate this issue in New York City. And that also includes volunteering at food banks. And, every Sunday In my hometown, I would go and serve soup. So I really enjoyed it.

Cura personalis is one of our Fordham mottos, which is to serve the whole soul. And I genuinely believe that helping fellow New York citizens and Fordham students really makes your soul feel good.

There is also the Neighborhood Opportunity Network, Neon Nutrition Kitchens, and they are a neighborhood food pantry that help people transitioning from the justice system to stay on the right track, but you don't have to be on probation to come to a Neon Nutrition Kitchen. I think this is very beneficial to anyone

Who is incarcerated or has recently been released. I think it is incredibly helpful. And you can of course visit the New York Public Library website to find more communities and more charities to either donate to or make use of if you need it. Thank you so much for being on today, Shine.

I think this was an incredibly insightful conversation on a huge issue in Nigeria and also in New York and how you can be across the world but have people who face very similar issues.

Thank you so much for being here. This was Retrospect hosted by Sikriti Varma along with Shaina Lagba, your contributor,

and we'll see you next time.

Bye!