CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES TO THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ON FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sparked a highly international violent conflict, which has been global in impact. The conflict's global impact has manifested in severe disruption to global agricultural systems and activities, resulting in food insecurity. As shown in food inflation, Nigeria has borne the brunt of this impact, resulting in heightened food insecurity. However, how civil society has responded has remained a knowledge gap amidst the developing corpus of literature. This paper fills this gap by interrogating civil society's responses to the conflict. Using a qualitative approach and drawing on the Human Security Theory (HST) as its theoretical framework, the paper finds that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly disrupted global supply chains, with Nigeria experiencing severe impacts due to its reliance on imports of fertilisers and agricultural commodities. The war halted fertiliser deliveries from Russia, a key supplier, due to logistical challenges and sanctions, leading to months-long delays and reduced agricultural productivity. This strain on farming inputs has further deepened food insecurity in Nigeria, particularly for small-scale farmers who struggled to afford increasingly scarce and expensive fertilisers. The findings reveal that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly disrupted global supply chains, with Nigeria experiencing severe impacts due to its reliance on imports of fertilisers and agricultural commodities. The war halted fertiliser deliveries from Russia, a key supplier, due to logistical challenges and sanctions, leading to months-long delays and reduced agricultural productivity. This strain on farming inputs has further deepened food insecurity in Nigeria, particularly for small-scale farmers who struggled to afford increasingly scarce and expensive fertilisers.

Introduction

Intense combat between the national militaries of Russia and Ukraine since February 2022 has remained a global hot topic. The sustained interest in this conflict derives from the status of both countries. Both countries are major grain producers, responsible for a significant chunk of global grain trade through their contributions of 40% to global grain exports (Lin et al., 2023). Expectedly, the conflict between these two countries has been connected to severe adverse consequences, which have been determined to exacerbate food insecurity through the innovation of new challenges and exacerbation of existing weaknesses due to disruptions to food production and supply chains (Behnassi & El Haiba, 2022), as well as drastic reductions in wheat exports from both countries (Mottaleb et al., 2022) resulting from the continuous entanglement of the grain trade with war politics (Neji et al., 2024). The consequent state of play has had drastic implications for countries across Asia and Africa that rely on both countries to meet most of their wheat demand. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2022), with substantial academic literature documenting the extent of the impact on African countries (Feng et al., 2022) as a result of the vulnerability occasioned by excessive dependence on the two warring countries by African countries (Nweke et al., 2022). West Africa has directly been impacted by these consequences, with the number of people at risk from acute food insecurity rising by as much as 9.7 million (Filho et al., 2023). Nigeria, by its membership in the West African region, shares in the burden of the food security crisis occasioned by the conflict. Indigenous scholarship has indicated that the conflict has "heightened food insecurity in Nigeria" (Ekoko, 2024, p. 724), augmenting broader conversations that have pointed towards an increased threat to food security arising from the consequences of the war (Adebayo, 2023, Balana et al., 2022). This article situates itself within the context of these conversations, focusing on exploring the responses of the civil society sector to the food security crisis occasioned by the Russia-Ukraine war. As proximate actors to the communities affected by food security crisis, it is considered a given that civil society organisations may be better placed to effectively address the needs of vulnerable communities exposed to the impact of food security crisis. Furthermore, the complementary roles played by civil society actors in support of state institutions is a documented modern political reality. The paper's focus on this issue augments a gap in the literature. For its discussion, the paper adopts a six-part structure. Following this introductory part, it reviews literature related to the paper's central focus and attempts to clarify keywords. In the next section, an outline of the methodology is presented. This is followed by a results and discussion section, where the paper discusses the main findings made during its inquiry. The final section concludes and summarises the paper. Ultimately, the paper's discussions address the limited scholarly focus on the contributions of civil society in mitigating the impact of the significant food security crisis in Nigeria exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict by exploring how actors from that domain have responded.

Conceptual Clarification

Conceptualising Food Security

Food security, at the conceptualisation level, presents an interesting challenge for scholars who seek to delineate it. This is a result of its flexibility, which is reflected in the existence of various definitions, estimated to be roughly close to 200 (Maxwell, 1992) that have often had research and policy implications (Peng & Berry, 2019). The vast complex of definitions surrounding the concept reflects the imperative of presenting a perspective of the concept which allows for its proper conceptualisation in keeping with events in the evolution of modern global history. Peng and Berry (2019) have demonstrated that evolutions in the conceptualisation of the concept have closely shadowed price disruptions in agricultural commodity markets, energy markets and evolutions in global thinking about national security. That said, classical definitions of food security, particularly in the 1970s, underscored notions such as "food availability" and "price stability of basic foods" (Peng & Berry, 2019:2). Such ideas could be seen in World Food Conference delineation of the focus of food security to be:

> *"…availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food-stuffs, particularly so as to avoid acute food shortages in the event of widespread crop failure, natural or other disasters, to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption in countries with low levels of per capita intake and to offset*

fluctuations in production and prices" (United Nations, 1975, p. 14).

From the perspective of the Food and Agriculture Organization, this availability was not restrictive but universal, and it was to be made possible in physical and economic dimensions (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1983). Arguably, this definition set the pace for a rights-based perspective of food security. The rights-based perspective, which associated food security with human rights, entered into the lexicon with the publication of the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme in 1994, which rather brought a less coherent approach to conceptualising food security (Peng & Berry, 2019). Yet this, and subsequent evolutions, set the context for the evolution of the definitions of food security to arrive at that offered by the Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, in 2008. According to this definition, food security is assessed as a collection of four interrelated components: availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008). In that sense, this disposition contends that food security exists only when the supply side and the ability of the consumer to generate effective demand are guaranteed. Furthermore, according to the FAO, disruptions to any component can drastically alter the existence of food security, leading to varying levels of food insecurity, and such may emanate from social and political conditions (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008). Armed conflicts are one such shock that may severely jeopardise food security. The literature, within the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, has documented that such impact emanates from a variety of mechanisms that affect agricultural activities. Violent conflicts can generally feature the forceful redirection of human capital away from agricultural activities towards combat activities or instigate significant forced migration, which often means that agricultural and food production activities generally come to a halt (Filho et al., 2023; Rabbi et al., 2023; Hassan & Bilali, 2022), which coupled with the destruction of agricultural infrastructure, frequently means food production capacity is reduced (Filho et al., 2023). Furthermore, direct impacts on food distribution are often the case in conflicts given violent conflicts often feature restrictions to markets which may be produced by the direct actions of conflict actors to secure their food supplies (Hassen & Bilali, 2022) or inadvertent restrictions occasioned by fighting (Shemyakina, 2022; Halmaghi et al., 2023). Distribution disruptions may reflect pressures from conflict-induced disruptions to food production and accessibility through impacts such as increased costs for agricultural inputs like fertilisers and food production costs, resulting in higher food prices (Rabbi et al., 2023; Hassan & Bilali, 2022). Such can often produce micro-level changes to the food utilisation capacity of households, which undoubtedly experience income disruptions that affect their ability to cope and diversify their nutrition (Bruck et al., 2019a; 2019b), thus producing such effects as increased dependence on less preferred food and drastic cuts to meal portions (George et al., 2020).

The rights-based approach to food security establishes it as a social problem that demands collective, comprehensive action from society's political, social, and economic sectors. Vyas (2000) has demonstrated that this need has increasingly attracted interventions from state and non-state actors, including civil society. This participation of CSOs, as has been argued, tends to moderate the quality or output of interventions by state actors (Walsh-Dilley & Wolford, 2015) and is often a significant contributor to the legitimacy and relevance of state-initiated policies (Kepple & Segall-Correa, 2017).

Increasingly, civil society organisations have been grafted into global institutional frameworks for combatting food security. They have become shared partners in the efforts to address hunger coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, owing to the FAO's recognition of the impact that can be generated by leveraging the capacity and capabilities of CSOs and their status as the nearest institution and representative of the poor (Food and Agriculture Organisation, n.d.). Increasingly, civil society actors have taken prominent roles, including complementing state responses to the food security problem induced by the coronavirus pandemic by way of distributing food relief to vulnerable populations (Brunet et al., 2021). In Africa, action has also taken the form of advocacy for the development of sustainable food systems and revisions to existing policy frameworks that will re-orient such frameworks to be rooted in inclusiveness and accountability (African CSIPM Popular Consultation Space, 2023), mirroring successful advocacy led by CSOs for reforms to global institutional frameworks, such as the UN Committee on World Food Security (Duncan, 2016). In one instance, civil society partnership

with the Burkinabe state resulted in the creation of the Agricultural Bank of Burkina Faso (SNV, 2020).

Civil society engagements in advancing food security in Nigeria have been ongoing for decades. Indeed, tangible evidence accumulates to buttress the fact that a collection of civil society groups has been engaged in efforts to promote food security both at micro and macro levels. The contributions of faith-based organisations may well be noted in this regard. Catholic Church-backed groups have implemented several initiatives which have been targeted at the extension of capital credit facilities to farming groups and households to support food security (Morse & McNamara, 2021). Another important factor has been cooperative societies. These groups, especially those operating in urban centres, have featured the mass mobilisation of private finance for the mass purchase of food items (Adedapo & Alabi, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The Human Security Theory

Civil society engagements in the theatre of guaranteeing food security fit within the perspective of the Human Security Theory. As a theoretical position, human security conceptualises the objective of all actions carried out by social institutions as oriented towards guaranteeing the welfare of the human being. According to Alkire:

> *"Human security is "people-centred"; it focuses the attention of institutions on human individuals and their communities worldwide. This emphasis on human beings distinguishes human security from the objective of protecting state territories that dominated security policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Human security shifts that focus to persons, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, or other distinguishing characteristics". (Alkire, 2003, p. 3)*

The food security crisis resulting from the Russia-Ukraine war aligns closely with these concerns raised within the purview of the Human Security Theory as it threatens individual and community welfare through increased food prices, disrupted supply chains, and reduced food availability and accessibility.

CSOs, as proximate actors to affected populations, play a critical role in mitigating these threats. By addressing the availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability dimensions of food security within a human security framework, they can help stabilise vulnerable communities.

Guided by this people-centred perspective, CSOs can advocate for inclusive policies that prioritise vulnerable populations by lobbying for government support packages for smallholder farmers and subsidies to cushion the impacts of increased agricultural input costs. They can also provide emergency relief, such as food aid and financial assistance, to alleviate immediate hardships, complementing state efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond immediate responses, CSOs can build resilience by training farmers in sustainable agricultural practices, promoting alternative fertilisers, and supporting climate-resilient farming methods, aligning with the long-term goals of human security. Additionally, CSOs can monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of state and international responses, providing data-driven recommendations to ensure equitable and inclusive policies.

Methodology

This paper is rooted in a qualitative methodology. Data is collected from secondary sources, which include peer-reviewed academic journals and documents published by major international organisations such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Nigeria. Documents downloaded from the NBS' electronic library were particularly useful for extracting data on food inflation from 2021-2024, with which this paper constructed a dataset for subsequent analysis and visualisation using charts and graphs. The paper also draws on the media narratives documented in national dailies. Such media narratives were extracted using a search query combining "civil society" and "food security".

Findings

Impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on food security in Nigeria

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a dominant source of disruptions to global food systems. The Food Price Index, a mechanism launched by the FAO to monitor global food prices, witnessed a major increase, unprecedented since the mechanism's establishment, just one month after the outbreak of fighting between Russia and Ukraine (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Nigeria's vulnerability to the impact shocks of the war extends from its dependence on Russia for agricultural products. In 2021, Nigeria accounted for 76% and 31.2% of Russia's potassium and nitrate fertiliser exports (Aminu, 2022). Such dependence relatedly pushed policy changes, some of which occurred within three months from the commencement of hostilities. By May 2022, Nigeria had redirected its focus to non-Russian sources for fertiliser.

Such a decision was based on supply chain deficiencies. A Nigerian government official said, "Russia was unable to deliver, so we bought spots from traders in Canada." (Nnodim, 2022, p. 1). Within the local media, there was an understanding that Russia's inability to deliver its obligations was essentially not 'deliberate' but rather a consequence of political dynamics, as its ability to deliver became constrained by Western sanctions imposed. This was especially concerning against the backdrop of already documented existing deficits occasioned by the Coronavirus pandemic (Okojie, 2020). Such changes affected farmers and reduced their output by a significant amount, as told in the following story about a farmer in Gombe:

> *"It was July 2022, five months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the beginning of the peak season for farmers applying fertilizer. He placed an order for 700 bags of urea — a form of nitrogen — with a Nigerian manufacturer. Not until October, four months after the peak season, did he finally receive his shipment. This year, Mr. Abubakar ordered 2,100 bags of NPK, a mixture of the three primary nutrients, from an agribusiness supplier in Lagos. He prepaid the full balance — 48 million naira, or about $61,000. Several weeks later, a sales manager informed him that production had been halted at the factory. Mr. Abubakar never received his shipment, while waiting four months for a refund. With limited inventory, his sales have dropped by half. In the Gombe area, a shortage of fertilizer worsened." (Goodman, 2023, p. 1)*

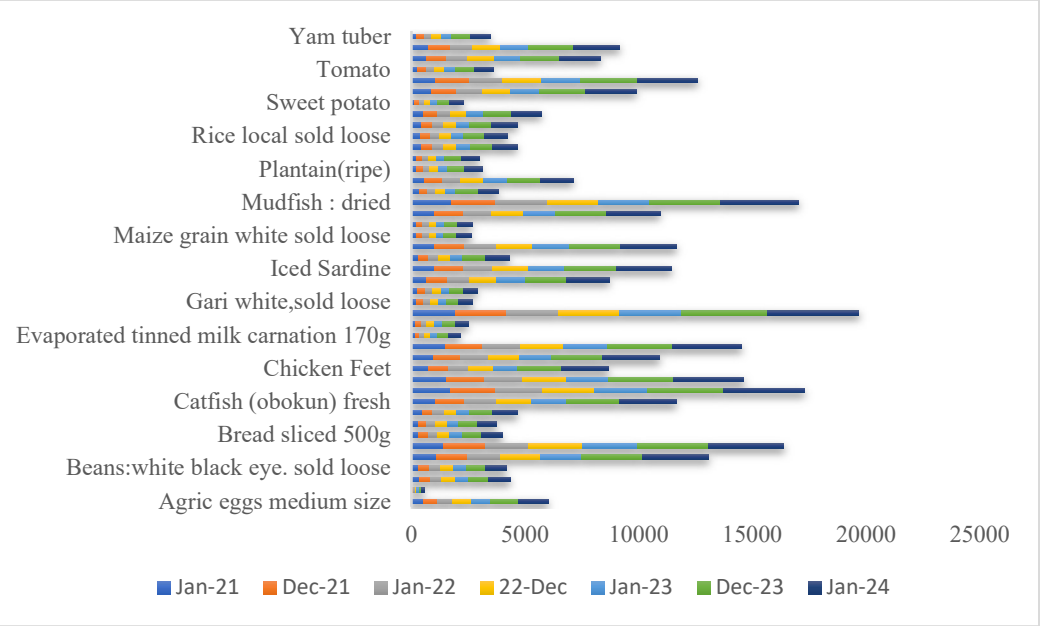
Such delays in fertiliser delivery, such as Mr. Abubakar receiving his order months after the peak season, reduce crop yields, strain farmers' financial resources and limit their capacity to invest in subsequent farming activities, further reducing productivity. As seen in areas like Gombe, fertiliser shortages escalate market prices, making it unaffordable for many small-scale farmers and deepening inequality in access to agricultural inputs. Consequently, reduced fertiliser availability and application result in lower crop yields, shrinking the food supply and driving up prices, exacerbating food insecurity at both household and national levels. It becomes thus unsurprising, given that background, that food prices have continuously proceeded on an inflationary trend.

These inflationary trends are captured by annual publications by the National Bureau of Statistics.

As shown by

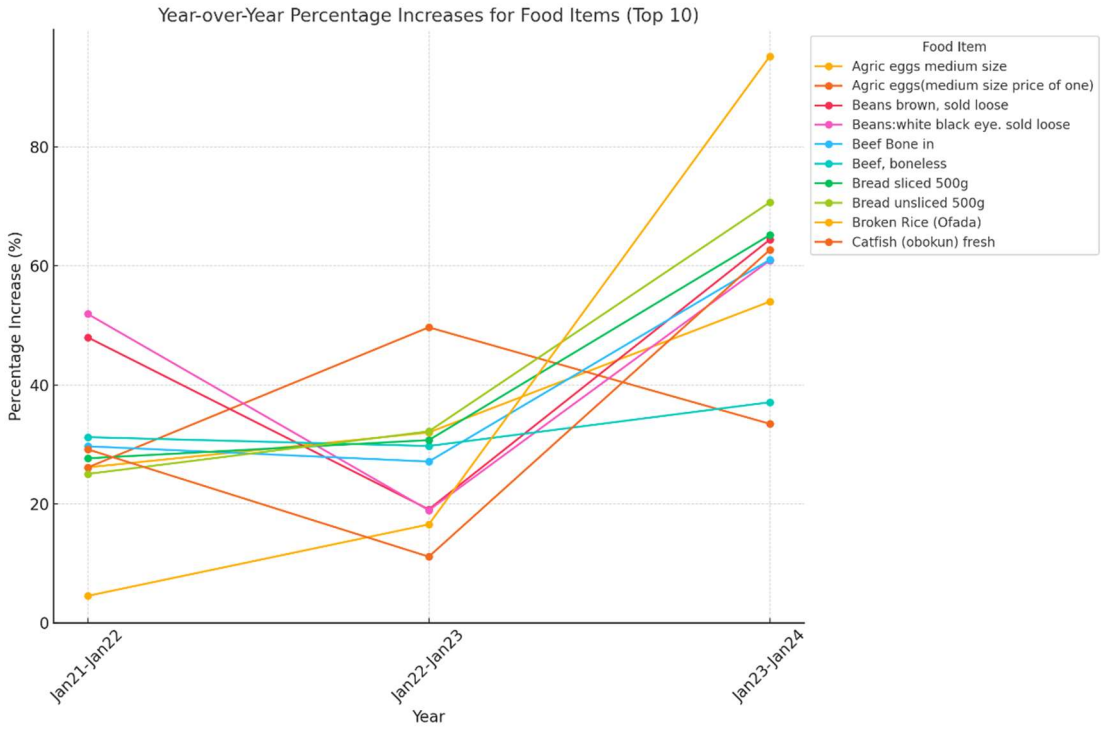
Figure 1, there has been a steady and often dramatic rise in food prices between January 2021 and January 2024 across various commodities in Nigeria. Protein-rich foods like boneless beef and frozen chicken saw some of the most substantial price hikes, with boneless beef increasing from ₦1,421.14 in January 2021 to ₦3,315.78 in January 2024, reflecting a 133% rise. Similarly, staples such as beans and rice, essential to the average household, experienced significant price escalations. For example, the price of white beans increased from ₦316.92 in January 2021 to ₦921.38 in January 2024—a nearly 191% rise.

Figure 1: Food Price Watch for Selected Food Items



Source: Authors' compilation from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports.

Figure 2: Year-over-Year percentage increases for food items



The year-over-year analysis of food prices from January 2021 to January 2024, as illustrated in *Figure 2*, reveals substantial variability across commodities, driven by inflationary pressures and global market dynamics. A notable trend is the sharp rise in prices of protein-rich and processed foods such as boneless beef, frozen chicken, and smoked catfish, reflecting increased production and distribution costs. Staples like eggs and bread also experienced consistent price increases. At the same time, items like white gari and yellow gari exhibited more subdued fluctuations, with occasional declines for specific items, such as onions, due to seasonal supply variations.

These inflationary surges are strongly tied to disruptions in the global fertiliser supply chain caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As major exporters of fertilisers, Russia and Ukraine's supply chain interruptions led to a steep rise in global fertiliser costs. In Nigeria, where a large portion of agriculture relies on imported fertilisers, the result was reduced crop yields and higher production costs for staple crops such as maize, rice, and beans. These agricultural challenges and heightened transportation costs due to inflation contributed to the cascading effects on food prices. For instance, maize prices increased by over 200%, from ₦210.74 in January 2021 to ₦633.91 in January 2024. Again, given Ukraine and Russia's agricultural prowess in wheat production, the disruptions caused by the fighting further complicated an already extensive issue of high wheat prices. This is evident when one considers the narrative that:

> *"Rises in the prices of wheat flour and bread have been witnessed since the war began. Wheat flour and bread prices have generally been high since 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic until 2021, when prices began to decline marginally. However, global market disruptions due to the war led to rising domestic prices of wheat, especially in March 2022 and this has continued since. For instance, wheat flour prices increased by about 24% from January 2022 to December 2022, while that of bread increased by about 29% within the same period" (Asante-Addo et al., 2023, p. 4)*

Civil society responses

To the extent Nigeria's food crisis has been severe, civil society organisations' response has been mainly streamed as "advocacy." In October 2024, the Nigerian Red Cross Society held a fundraising event to increase advocacy for the plight of vulnerable populations worst hit by the food security crisis, buttressing a need for urgent action (Nigerian Red Cross Society, 2024).

Nonetheless, instances of civil society organisations delivering food aid directly to vulnerable populations have also been noticeable (Redaction Africanews, 2024). Beyond Lagos, there have been distributions in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Niger State (Voice of Nigeria, 2024), Anambra (Vanguard , 2023) and Osun (Ogunwade, 2023). Such operations increasingly have been shaped by resource constraints. Non-governmental organisations involved in food aid distribution have increasingly complained about having to work with donor funding cuts and reduced the volume of aid extended because of deteriorating purchasing power (Okay Africa, 2024).

However, as it should be noted, these efforts have been mainly driven not by an intent to address food security within the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. Instead, various efforts made by civil society organisations have been as a response to localised events, such as fuel subsidy removal (*cf.* Redaction Africanews, 2024; Okay Africa, 2024; Voice of Nigeria, 2024; Vanguard, 2023; Ogunwade, 2023).

Conclusion

From all indications, Nigeria has been exposed to several vulnerabilities, as its dependence on external actors ensures that the country is far from insulated from the extreme shocks of conflicts outside its borders, no less its external borders. Thus, while there has been little by way of direct interface between the Russia-Ukraine conflict and food security and civil society responses, the indirect effects of this conflict have mainly added to the complexity of socio-economic problems faced by Nigeria, especially in the post-Covid era. Mitigating the exposure of the Nigerian state and enhancing its capacity to respond to shocks entail several concerted policy steps and measures.

Recommendations

To that end, the study recommends that the Nigerian government prioritise establishing and expanding local fertiliser manufacturing plants to reduce reliance on imported fertilisers and

address supply deficits, which were accentuated by the Russia-Ukraine war. Nonetheless, partnerships between the government and civil society are also necessary for such efforts. Such partnerships should be designed or actively pursued to scale food aid initiatives and advocacy efforts through various measures, including increased funding and the development of early warning systems and mechanisms to track global supply chain risks and local food security challenges, thus enhancing the capacity for timely, proactive, and comprehensive responses to crises like the Russia-Ukraine war.

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