

Food Crisis in Nigeria: Why the Crisis Communication Professionals Should Care.

Nkemjika George Njinma

Freelance Journalist and Researcher
Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria

Ngozi Comfort Omojunikanbi

Department of Journalism and Media Studies, University of Port Harcourt
Choba, Nigeria

Abstract: Food ranks first in the hierarchy of man's needs in society. It is the nucleus in which every individual's survival is anchored. Nigeria as a nation has witnessed a series of ups and downs since the end of colonial rule. From the time agriculture and agro-allied industries were the main source of the nation's economy to the period where crude oil and allied products have become the major source of export earnings and contribute about 90% of the nation's gross income, Nigeria has experienced and is still experiencing ups and downs. With the current state of the nation where there is hyperinflation in prices of food and general services, this is perceived to be caused by government inefficiency, exchange rate, monetary policy, tax laws, subsidy removal, and insecurity/ The objectives of this study were to find out the underlying causes of the food crisis, It is believed that this study will help bridge the academic industry gap and cultural and geographical divides, as well as contribute to the current literature on crisis communication.

Keywords — Agriculture, Crisis Communication, Crisis Management Theory, Food, Strategies,

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INTRODUCTION

Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria, is experiencing a severe food crisis that is being made worse by a number of reasons, such as conflict, climate change, unstable economic conditions, and poor infrastructure. About 19 million Nigerians are already experiencing extreme food insecurity, and millions more are at risk as agricultural production drops, according to the World Food Programme [1]. This rapid increase in the population of Nigeria and the world population in general has led to high competition for natural resources, especially food resources [2]. The situation is especially bad in the north, where farming operations are disrupted by insurgent activity, resulting in severe food shortages. These difficulties have also been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects on the economy, since families' capacity to pay for essentials has been impeded by rising unemployment and inflation rates.

Professionals in crisis communication face a special difficulty in the food crisis as they must manage the difficulties of providing correct information while resolving public concerns and building community resilience. In order to lessen the effects of food insecurity, effective communication is essential because false information can increase anxiety and erode institutional confidence. False information regarding food availability, for example, can cause hoarding behaviours, which would further tax resources and exacerbate the crisis [3].

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Professionals in crisis communication are also crucial in advocating for legislative changes and rallying support for marginalised groups. By clearly conveying to stakeholders the gravity of the food crisis, they may activate governmental, non-governmental, and international entities to offer the required assistance and actions. Additionally, by promoting community involvement and increasing awareness through social media and other digital channels, they may foster a feeling of collective accountability in the fight against food insecurity.

Communication's function goes beyond responding quickly to crises; it also includes long-term tactics meant to increase community resilience. This entails supporting regional food systems and educating the public about healthy eating and sustainable farming methods. Communication specialists may make a significant contribution to reducing food insecurity and building resilience in impacted communities by being aware of the complexities of this problem.

CONCEPT OF FOOD CRISES

Food crises are shocks to food systems that lead to severe disruptions and cause a surge in acute food insecurity. Food crises refer to situations where there is a lack of an adequate food supply to meet the needs of a population, leading to food insecurity, rising prices, and potential social unrest. Coates [4] emphasises that food insecurity often intersects with other social determinants of health, including poverty and access to healthcare, thereby complicating efforts to address these crises effectively. A food crisis refers to a situation characterised by a significant disruption in the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of food, leading to increased levels of hunger and malnutrition. It encompasses various factors, including economic instability, environmental challenges, and social inequities that contribute to food insecurity. Food crises can emerge from acute shocks, such as natural disasters or conflict, as well as chronic issues like poverty and inadequate agricultural practices.

Food crises often arise from a combination of acute shocks and chronic vulnerabilities. For instance, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) [5] identifies climate change as a major driver of food insecurity, impacting crop yields and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities in food systems [5]. Extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, disrupt food production and supply chains, leading to increased prices and decreased access to food. The interplay between climate variability and agricultural practices can lead to significant fluctuations in food availability, thereby heightening the risk of crises.

The idea of a food crisis is becoming more and more pertinent in the modern world as food security is threatened by a confluence of variables including population increase, climate change, and geopolitical conflicts. The supply, accessibility, and use of food are significantly disrupted during a food crisis, which causes hunger and malnutrition in the populace. This phenomena is intricately linked to economic, social, and environmental aspects, making it more than just an agricultural problem.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE IN EXPORT EARNING IN NIGERIA

Agriculture has historically been a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, playing a significant role in export earnings and the livelihoods of millions of Nigerians. In the early years following independence, agriculture dominated the country's export sector, with products like cocoa, groundnuts, and palm oil leading the way. Over the decades, however, Nigeria's dependence on oil for export earnings grew, reducing the relative contribution of agriculture.

Cocoa: One of the major agricultural products that contribute to Nigeria's export earnings is cocoa. Nigeria is the fourth-largest producer of cocoa beans globally, with the majority of its exports going to Europe, the United States, and Asia. Cocoa has long been a key source of foreign exchange for Nigeria, particularly in the southwestern regions of the country, where it is cultivated. Although cocoa's share of total exports has declined in recent decades, it remains a staple of Nigeria's agricultural export portfolio, contributing billions of dollars to the national economy [6].

Sesame Seeds: In addition to cocoa, Nigeria has become a major exporter of sesame seeds, a crop that has gained prominence in international markets. The demand for sesame seeds, especially from countries in Asia and Europe, has surged due to their use in food processing and oil extraction. Nigeria is now one of the top producers of sesame seeds globally, with the majority of exports directed toward countries like India and Japan. This surge in sesame seed exports has helped boost Nigeria's non-oil export revenue and diversify its agricultural export base.

Cashew nuts: it also contribute significantly to Nigeria's agricultural export earnings. The country ranks among the top exporters of cashew nuts, with the majority of the exports going to India, Vietnam, and other Asian countries. The cashew industry has seen substantial growth in recent years, driven by increased global demand for the nuts. While Nigeria produces large volumes of raw cashew nuts, there is still considerable potential for growth in value-added processing, which could further enhance export revenue and create jobs in rural areas [7].

Palm oil: palm oil another important agricultural export, holds a historical place in Nigeria's economy. Although Nigeria no longer dominates global palm oil production, it remains a significant exporter, particularly within Africa and neighbouring regions. Palm oil is used in a wide range of products, from food to cosmetics and industrial applications. Nigeria's palm oil exports, despite being overshadowed by other countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, still provide a steady source of foreign exchange, and there is growing potential for expanding this sector with investments in modern production techniques [8].

Agricultural industries play a critical role in enhancing Nigeria's export earnings by adding value to raw agricultural products. Through sectors like cocoa processing, cashew processing, palm oil refining, textile production, and food processing, Nigeria can significantly increase the value of its agricultural exports and diversify its export base.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS IN MITIGATING FOOD CRISES IN NIGERIA

Food crises in Nigeria are exacerbated by climate change, poor agricultural policies, and distribution inefficiencies. Communication professionals play a crucial role in mitigating these crises by disseminating accurate information, advocating for policy reforms, and enhancing digital food supply systems. Their efforts help bridge the gap between policymakers, farmers, and consumers, ensuring a more resilient food system.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ON FOOD SECURITY

Communication professionals, as stated by Owolabi & Ekechi (2014), [9] play a vital role in educating the public about food security through targeted media campaigns. They use various platforms, including radio, television, and social media, to disseminate information on nutrition, food safety, and government agricultural policies. By raising awareness, they empower communities to make informed food choices and adopt sustainable consumption habits. This enhances food security by promoting responsible food management practices.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING FOOD SHORTAGES

Communication professionals play a crucial role in managing public perception during food crises. They collaborate with policymakers and humanitarian organizations to disseminate accurate information about food supply, availability, and relief efforts. By countering misinformation, they prevent panic buying and hoarding, which can exacerbate food shortages. Their strategic crisis communication ensures that the public remains calm and trusts the authorities' response strategies.

STRENGTHENING FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS THROUGH DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Okoli & Ifeakor (2024) [10] highlight that communication professionals facilitate digital solutions that enhance food distribution. They promote the use of mobile apps and online marketplaces that connect farmers directly with consumers, reducing food waste and improving market efficiency. These platforms provide real-time agricultural data, weather forecasts, and price trends, allowing farmers to make informed decisions. Digital communication innovations help stabilize food prices and improve accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION IN DISASTER RESPONSE

Communication professionals are essential in disaster response efforts related to food crises. They coordinate emergency messaging to inform affected communities about available food relief programs. By leveraging social media, radio broadcasts, and SMS alerts, they ensure timely delivery of critical information to vulnerable populations. Their expertise in risk communication helps reduce the impact of food shortages during natural disasters, conflicts, and pandemics.

METHODS OR PROCEDURES

Descriptive survey design was adopted to carry out this research in Nigeria. The targeted population for the study comprised all communication professionals in Nigeria. Stratified sampling technique was used to select 80 communication professionals each from South South (Akwa Ibom State), South East (Abia) and South West (Lagos) which gave a sample size of 240 used to carry out this research. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Food Crises Questionnaire (FCQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.89, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as descriptive statistics to answer research questions.

RESULTS/DISCUSSIONS

Research Questions 1: The research question sought to find out the extent of food crises in Nigeria. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the extent of food crises in Nigeria

EXTENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very High Extent	127	52.92**
High Extent	79	32.92
Low Extent	23	9.58
Very Low Extent	11	4.58*
TOTAL	240	100%

** The highest percentage frequency
 * The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field Survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the extent of food crises in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that majority of the respondents rated the extent to be “Very High” 127(52.92%), while the least respondents 11(2.58%) rated the extent to be “Very Low”. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of FAO (2018), who noted that food crisis is becoming more and more pertinent in the modern world as food security is threatened by a confluence of variables including population increase, climate change, and geopolitical conflicts.

Research Questions 2: The research question sought to find out the contribution of communication professionals in mitigating food crises in Nigeria. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the contribution of communication professionals in mitigating food crises in Nigeria

CONTRIBUTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Public Awareness and Education on Food Security	129	32.25**
Crisis Communication during Food Shortages	110	27.5
Strengthening Food Supply Chains through Digital Communication	89	22.25
Emergency Communication in Disaster Response	72	18*
TOTAL	400	100%

** The highest percentage frequency
 * The least percentage frequency

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the contribution of communication professionals in mitigating food crises in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the contribution tagged “Public Awareness and Education on Food Security” 129(32.25%) was rated as the highest contribution of communication professionals in mitigating food crises in Nigeria, while “Emergency Communication in Disaster Response” 72(18%) was rated the least. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of Owolabli and Ekechi, who stated that communication professionals, play a vital role in educating the public about food security through targeted media campaigns.

CONCLUSION

The food crisis in Nigeria demands urgent attention from crisis communication professionals due to its profound impact on national stability, public health, and socio-economic well-being. The result of the data analysis concluded that the extent of food crises in Nigeria is very high. It also showed that public awareness and education on food security among others is the major contribution of communication professionals in mitigating food crises in Nigeria. These professionals play a critical role in shaping narratives, educating the public, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, including government, farmers, and international agencies. Effective communication can raise awareness about the causes of the crisis, such as climate change, insecurity, and poor agricultural policies, while also promoting solutions like sustainable farming practices and food distribution reforms. By facilitating informed dialogue and mobilising action, crisis communication experts can help mitigate the effects of food insecurity and drive efforts toward long-term resilience.

Author Biography

Nkenjika George Njinma, Freelance writer/researcher, Enugu. njinmageorge@gmail.com

Ngozi Comfort Omojunikanbi, PhD, University of Port Harcourt, University of Port Harcourt.

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