

# Building Resilience: How Africa Can Secure Its Food Future in a Fragmented Global Economy.

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## Africa's Reliance on Food Imports Exposes it to Vulnerabilities in the Global Geopolitical Landscape

Africa's reliance on global food and input imports exposes the continent to direct impacts and vulnerabilities in a new world order characterised by an increasingly fragmented and complex geopolitical landscape. This situation has raised concerns about how the continent can secure its food future and build resilience. Conflict in any form, whether a geopolitical incident such as the Russia-Ukraine war, has the potential to reshape the course of trade. Commodities such as wheat, corn, and various cash crops for daily consumption, as well as inputs like fertilisers and inoculation drugs for livestock, are import-dependent. Although Africa can indeed produce these commodities, developmental issues present a significant obstacle. Recent developments highlight the necessity of prioritising food as part of security, alongside physical security, in Africa's hierarchy of needs. If Africa cannot secure its food supply and industrialise to produce critical inputs, it will continue to rely on imports. The continent will remain vulnerable to any form of conflict, such as the situation between Gaza and Israel, or the Russia-Ukraine conflict, or any other skirmishes occurring globally, as these conflicts will impact supply chains and trade into Africa, especially if any of the crops and inputs it depends on pass through those trade routes.

Logistical and infrastructural gaps persist in Africa; road infrastructures and networks are in poor condition, as are all types of ports, including human, garage, river, sea, and air. Storage facilities and distribution networks are also deficient, as is data collection in these areas. Even though governments are saddled with the responsibility for ensuring the adequacy of infrastructure, the citizenry have not held them accountable as they should; therefore, to overcome the supply chain infrastructure deficit, a fundamental behavioural change from both the government and the citizenry, along with the re-engineering and reprogramming of our ports and processes, will be necessary.

## **Existing Trade Agreements and Regional Blocs Must Be Leveraged Effectively to Build Resilience Against Shocks**

To reduce dependence on global markets and build regional food supply chains, the effectiveness of existing trade agreements, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), must be leveraged to mitigate the impact of shocks. The AfCFTA has the potential to ease shocks if implemented correctly. Although the AfCFTA is still in its infancy, it is intended to operate within a trade and security framework and architecture that addresses the current challenges on the continent, which are currently absent. Firstly, AfCFTA is dependent on security across the continent; however, insecurity persists in some countries on the continent, specifically in the DRC, Rwanda, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and the northeastern part of Nigeria. Secondly, AfCFTA has not prioritised supply chain development at the core of its implementation, which has prevented its full potential from being unlocked.

Furthermore, the significance and influence of continental blocs, such as the African Union (AU) or the G77 platform, in opposing harmful policies, including export bans and subsidy discussions, as well as other global rules that disadvantage Africa's food systems, cannot be overstated. The entire African continent is not a single entity and thus cannot be represented solely by the African Union (AU). Therefore, the sovereignty of each nation must also be considered collectively. The AU has responsibilities, and until the member states delegate those responsibilities to the AU, the union will lack the strength to oppose policies that harm the continent as a whole. Economic zones or communities, such as ECOWAS, tend to be stronger in this aspect than a larger organisation like the AU.

## **Food Security Must be Recognized as a Matter of National Security**

African countries face unique and often diverse challenges. In Nigeria's case, concerns focus on managing rising food imports as a heavily import-dependent economy amid currency devaluation and foreign exchange shortages, without worsening inflation or risking food security for the most vulnerable. For Nigeria, government priorities and political determination are vital in efforts to reduce food inflation driven by reliance on imports; notably, the current administration has emphasised achieving food security as a key goal. First, it is important to recognise that food security is a matter of national security. Understanding its role as a crucial pillar of our national security is essential. Without food security, instability can develop. Therefore, understanding its impact and giving it priority is vital because food is fundamental to life. If people do not eat, they become restless and act irrationally, which can threaten stability. Second, it is critical to frame food security as an imperative at every level—national, federal, state, and local—especially since local governments now have greater autonomy. This is important for addressing specific issues related to food inflation. We need to define what food insecurity entails, understand the components of the food security ecosystem, and identify the roles that governments at various levels must play

in addressing these issues. Afterwards, issues such as nationwide inadequate food storage and supply chain inefficiencies — significant contributors to high food inflation — must be tackled. The lack of storage facilities prevents Nigeria from benefiting from the prolonged availability of out-of-season produce. A reliable supply chain extends the shelf life of products and maintains their quality, delivering both economic and health benefits.

Food security includes not only food affordability, sustainability, availability, quality, and safety but also the wholesomeness and nutritional aspects of food, which are often overlooked. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the food consumed in the country is both wholesome and nutritious. For this to happen, Nigeria must be able to preserve the food and extend its shelf life, which requires a robust supply chain to support it. This alone can help move the country from red to amber, as the current reason for high food inflation is the lack of availability, primarily caused by poor or absent supply chains supporting food distribution.

### **The Role of Sub-National and Local Governments in Creating an Enabling Environment Cannot Be overemphasize**

Furthermore, in Nigeria's case, the role of sub-national and local governments in tackling food insecurity warrants careful examination and a coordinated strategy, considering the recent rise in insecurity in key food-producing states such as Kaduna, Benue, Zamfara, and others. Government can intervene by creating an enabling environment for businesses that are willing to operate within the food security ecosystem, enabling them to thrive. It is critical to improve infrastructure by ensuring that the road networks and electrification for numerous facilities are sufficient for effective food distribution and adequate storage, with one key element being the establishment of essential supply chain infrastructure. Post-harvest losses occur due to poorly developed supply chain networks.

Regarding insecurity, although security is a responsibility of the government at the federal, state, and local levels, citizens must hold the government accountable for its security duties. State governments, local authorities, ministries, and agencies should implement soft or non-kinetic strategies within their jurisdictions to motivate the population. These efforts collectively contribute to what is known as economic security, as insecurity and unrest often originate from food scarcity—people do not have enough to eat or sufficient economic power, which leads to discontent. Such discontent can be exploited by malicious actors, resulting in banditry and similar crimes. Additionally, community policing is necessary due to the inadequacy of Nigeria's current security framework, as security personnel alone cannot effectively secure Nigeria's geopolitical landscape. Therefore, everyone has a role to play—government, NGOs, businesses, and citizens all have a part in making Nigeria secure



## **Africa Must Embrace Long-Term Planning and Evaluate the Role of Trade Liberalisation**

Climate-related shocks, such as climate-induced crop failures, have revealed a lack of long-term planning by African countries and have highlighted the need to evaluate the role of trade liberalisation, including import duty waivers, in cushioning food shocks and identifying measures to prevent undermining local food supplies. Although the definition of trade liberalisation can vary depending on the government in power and its progressive stance, countries in Africa generally neglect long-term planning. They tend to be reactionary with policies; as such, it is only when food security becomes an urgent problem that they respond with immediate solutions, without considering that these short-term measures might create long-term issues.

Given the climate-related issues and crop failures, the continent needs to focus on building resilience and anticipating future challenges in agricultural food security over the next 50 years, rather than just reacting to problems. Although some form of trade liberalisation is necessary to facilitate the import and export of crops, the continent must also protect its own countries, farmers, and food ecosystem within its borders. Countries must seek to balance trade liberalization with policies to protect local producers and ensure they develop internal capacities. Additionally, they should consider how trade can be harnessed to enhance security in neighbouring nations.

## **Investment in Research and Development and Structured Data Collection Frameworks Must Be Prioritised**

In conclusion, a major challenge faced by most African countries is their insufficient investment in research and development, as well as in well-designed data collection frameworks, which are essential for implementing smart agriculture. Amidst rising trade barriers, increasing competition in global markets, and climate-related risks, other countries, such as Nigeria, can learn from South Africa's experience with agricultural technology and climate-smart farming practices. To achieve current levels, South Africa invested in data collection, utilised technology and smart agriculture, and built upon indigenous methods. South Africa has effectively integrated Western innovations with local, indigenous practices. Nigeria and other nations across sub-Saharan Africa should take note of this. What South Africa has accomplished in smart agriculture and agricultural technology is admirable, and there remains scope for further progress. Their understanding of their environment and cultural context is crucial, and Nigeria, among others, has yet to fully develop this approach. In terms of data, our cultural orientation is not data-driven, unlike in advanced economies where data on key indicators has been available for centuries. Since our societies are not developed in this manner, that alone presents an issue we must address. Data is a critical factor that influences policy and decision-making. Accurate data reflecting current realities is crucial for developing policies that address real-world problems.

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Kingsgate Advisors Institute.*

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