

A fight against scarcity

World Food Day is commemorated every year on 16th of October in honour of the establishment of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations in 1945. The World Food Day theme for the year 2010 is "United against Hunger".

Hunger is described as a social condition of people who experience the physical sensation of hunger. To avoid hunger, malnutrition and starvation death, food security is essential. Food security refers to the availability of food and ones access to it. According to FAO, food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation.

FAO has reported that 882 million people are chronically hungry due to acute poverty, while up to two billion people lack food security very often due to varying degrees of poverty. Further, it is reported that 17,000 children die of hunger everyday and six million every year as a result of loss of agricultural land to residential and industrial development, global population growth, export restrictions and panic buying, increased farming for use in biofuels, growing consumer demand and extreme climate change.

If left unaddressed, hunger

sets in motion a wide range of outcomes that perpetuate malnutrition, reduce the ability of adults to work and give birth to healthy children and erode children's ability to learn and lead productive, healthy and happy life. This truncation in human development undermines a country's potential for economic growth for generations to come. The first Millennium Development Goal of UN calls for halving hunger and poverty by 2015 in relation to 1990 and it was set to free a major portion of humanity from the shackles of extreme poverty and hunger.

Poverty and hunger in Nigeria: World Development Report, 2008 published by the World Bank points out the existence of extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria. The report has observed that the share of the poorest 20 percent of the population in national consumption or income remains at a very low level of 5 per cent. This unequal distribution of consumption or income reflects extreme poverty and hunger. Nigeria has been classified in the cluster of low human development countries with an HDI value of 0.470 ranking 158 among 177 world countries. Further, Human Development Report 2008 points out life expectancy remains at 46.5 years. The report added that 70.8 per cent population earns less than one dollar a day and 92.4 percent receive two dollars a day.

The MDG goal states that the UN has to eradicate ex-

treme hunger and poverty by the year 2015 and population control and agricultural productivity are likely to play a vital role in achieving the goal through food security. Agricultural productivity is the key for reducing insecurity and increasing income of rural people who form 70 per cent of the world population.

Moreover, subsistence farming being practiced by the small and marginal farmers in low income countries without the benefit or pro-poor techniques and access to markets should be changed to commercial farming through the following methods such as implementation of agrarian reform measures, provision of finance, boosting agricultural science and technology, enhancing human capital through education and improved health facilities and good governance.

Increased agricultural productivity facilitates farmers to raise more food grains production which translates into better diets and higher farm income. With more agricultural marketable surplus, farmers are likely to diversify production benefitting not only themselves but also the economy as a whole. Poverty and hunger anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere. Therefore, let us unite and fight against hunger for shaping our bright common future.

