

Report

Nigeria Zero Hunger/IITA Policy Brief No. 1: Nigeria Zero Hunger Strategic Review – Nutritional Status of Children under the Age of 5 in Benue State, Nigeria

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Background

In the Global Nutrition Report (GNR) of 2015, Nigeria was grouped along with other countries where only a minority of children are growing healthily [1]. This was further complicated by the worrying coexistence of stunting, wasting and overweight in children under five. In the same year, 2015, Nigeria was ranked 93 out of 117 countries (with sufficient data for analysis) on the Global Hunger Index (GHI), which places the country in the category of those with a serious hunger problem-worse than the global level of hunger and malnutrition [1,2]. Also, according to a World Bank survey, 53.5% of Nigeria's population lives on less than US\$1.90 a day at 2011 purchasing power parity [3]. The above alarming situation called for attention by policy makers.

In September 2015, the Federal Republic of Nigeria committed to achieving the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (also known as Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs). Among the goals, numbering seventeen, Nigeria prioritized SDG 2, the so-called Zero Hunger goal, calling on member states to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030 [4]. The Nigeria Zero Hunger Strategic Review was established that sought to articulate what Nigeria must do to achieve SDG2

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(zero hunger) by 2030 through an open and consultative process led by His Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was deemed necessary to conduct a baseline survey to establish the true situation at the start of the review and enable tracking of the progress. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) was charged with the responsibility to lead baseline surveys in partnership with the Farm & Infrastructure Foundation (FIF) in five states-Benue, Ebonyi, Kebbi, Ogun, and Sokoto-spread across four of Nigeria's six major agro ecological zones. Following a design workshop by stakeholders, field activities for data collection were conducted with full support of governments in the states, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). The preliminary findings of the surveys were reviewed and validated by the representatives of the five states and other stakeholders at IITA, Ibadan in 2017. This policy brief summarizes findings for key parameters for Benue state to provide guidance for policy formulation and implementation.

This brief focuses on the issues of poverty, hunger, nutrition & health care, and other nutritional outcomes in children under 5 years of age. It ends with policy recommendation to attain the goals of SDG2. The statistical comparisons summarized are between Benue state and the average from all 5 surveyed states.

Household Poverty and Hunger

24.8% of households in Benue state lives below US\$1.9 per person per day compared to an average of 28.9% of households in all five surveyed states. On hunger, 12.3% of households experience hunger broken down to 9.6% at moderate level and 4.7% as severe compared to an average of 27.7% for the five states (with 17.1% and 10.6% of households in the surveyed states experiencing hunger, moderately and severely respectively). The combined effects of poverty and hunger on households was even more devastating for Benue households where 54.9% are poor and suffering severe hunger (Figure 1), compared to an average of 45.4% of households in other states (Figure 2).

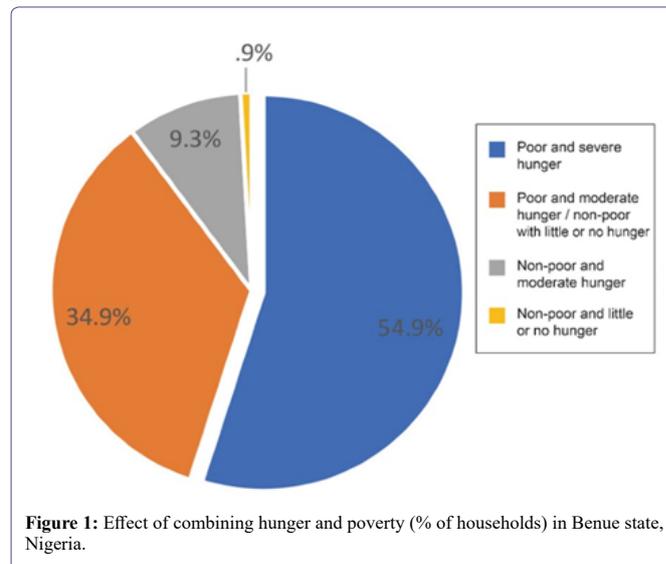


Figure 1: Effect of combining hunger and poverty (% of households) in Benue state, Nigeria.

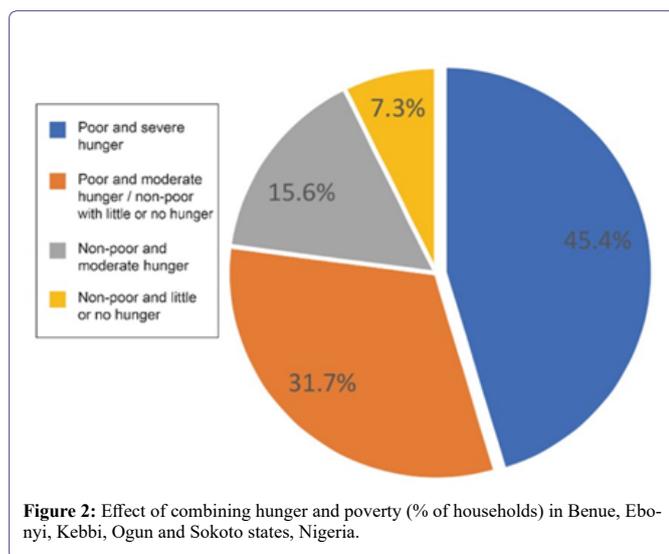


Figure 2: Effect of combining hunger and poverty (% of households) in Benue, Ebonyi, Kebbi, Ogun and Sokoto states, Nigeria.

Child Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding

Child nutrition was studied in terms of infant and young child feeding practices and complementary feed offered to infant (during weaning). Breastfeeding practices had similar profiles in Benue state compared to profiles for the rest of Nigeria presented in Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA2) in WHO [5] (Figure 3). However, a large majority of mothers and caregivers offered unfortified local cereal of doubtful dietary quality as complementary feed (Figure 4). They were slightly ahead of the overall average in offering infant formulae and/or supplementation of local cereal. The net effect of the lop-sided proportion of unfortified cereal meals compared to fortified meals offered will impact the nutritional status of children as it is shown later in this paper. Analyses by age showed that the worst cases of malnutrition occurred during the second year of infancy which also coincides with when complementary feed is given.

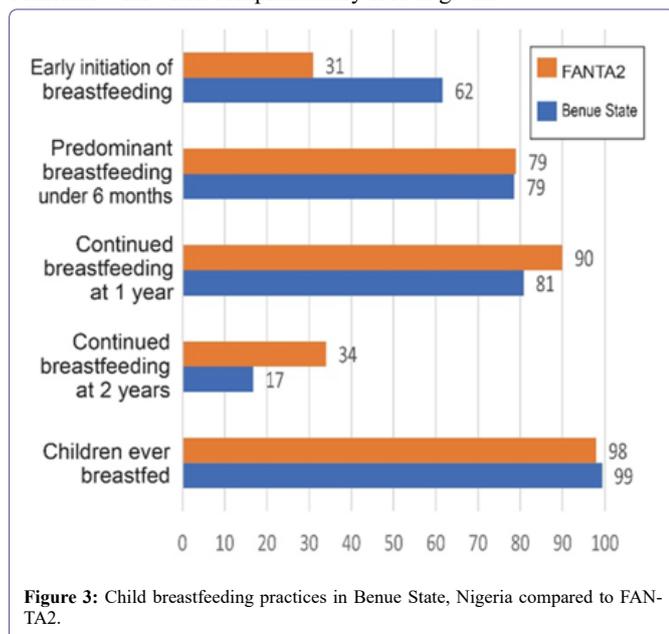


Figure 3: Child breastfeeding practices in Benue State, Nigeria compared to FANTA2.

Child Health Care and Nutritional Status

Benue state compared to other surveyed states Mothers in Benue state were ahead of the surveyed states in starting and completing

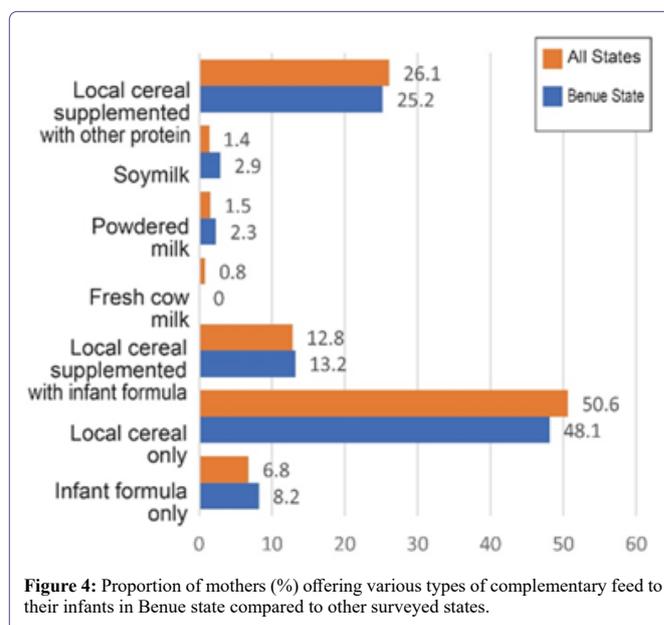


Figure 4: Proportion of mothers (%) offering various types of complementary feed to their infants in Benue state compared to other surveyed states.

child immunization. However, still a high proportion (33%) of infants have no access to complete immunization as they received only part of series needed for a full programme on immunization. They also had fewer cases of visible signs of oedema, ringworm, recumbency & disability, cough, fever and diarrhoea compared to the other states surveyed (Figure 5). Although Benue stands better compared to others, this is not good enough and needs to be addressed.

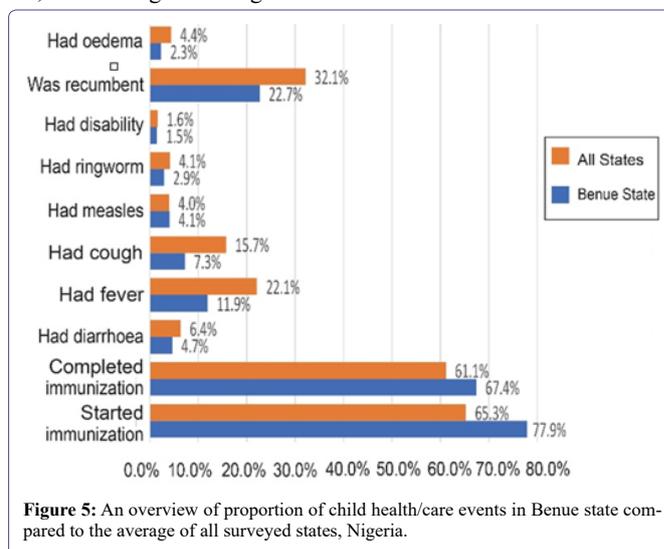


Figure 5: An overview of proportion of child health/care events in Benue state compared to the average of all surveyed states, Nigeria.

Bringing it all together and analyzing the combined and measurable impacts of poverty, hunger, nutrition and health on the well-being of children and infants, Benue state falls behind both the global average for developing countries and the average for the studied states for Weight-for-Age Z-scores (WAZ) and Height-for-Age Z-scores (HAZ) which measure short-term and longer-term nutritional status of children respectively. For example, while global average for underweight was 8.9% in 2015 [1], figure 6, shows that 12.5% of the children in Benue state were underweight of which 8.9% were severely underweight. Of great concern is the coexistence of underweight and overweight as 7.8% of the children were overweight with 5.8% of them obese.

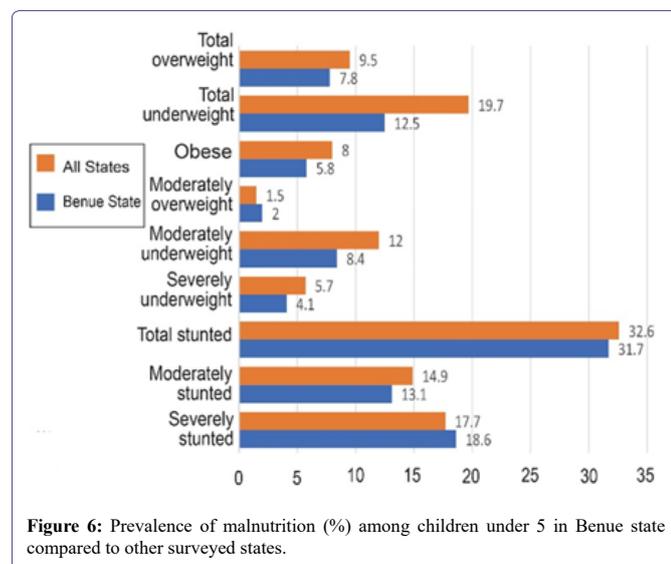


Figure 6: Prevalence of malnutrition (%) among children under 5 in Benue state compared to other surveyed states.

For stunting, the global average for developing countries in 2015 [1], was 25% compare to 31.7% stunting in Benue state out of which 18.6% were severely stunted. Policy makers in Benue state must be alarmed by these figures and determined to take every possible measure to address them.

Policy

The policy analysis component of the baseline study investigated the state for the presence or absence of programs, projects, and other initiatives of the public authorities required to create and sustain an enabling policy environment for achieving Zero Hunger targets by 2030. The results are detailed in the main report. However, here is a summary of the key findings:

Policy articulation

The current two active policy documents are economy-wide in scope: Benue State Development Plan (2016-2025) and Our Collective Vision for New Benue (2016-2019). A specific policy document for the agricultural sector in the State was still in draft form (i.e., Benue State SMART Agriculture Policy). The current policy thrust is “agriculture-driven industrialization” in order “to strengthen domestic, national and international resource mobilization for agricultural development in the State” without specific reference to nutrition.

The review of policies revealed the need to produce a concrete policy document for agricultural and food security with popular participation by stakeholders in the articulation of policy documents. There is a lack of philosophical context on which to anchor the contents of the policy documents for food security in the state. Recognizing the role of infrastructure as the backbone in agricultural development; it is recommended a systematic provision of rural infrastructure in the policy documents of the state, consistent with the provision for agriculture or food security in the Constitution. In many instances, no data was available to access the potency of policy instruments in respect of certain targets required for meeting the SDG2, implying that little or nothing is going on in these States relating to these aspects. The need arises for Benue state to conduct a comprehensive review of its food and nutrition security policy, in order to explore opportunities for meeting the Zero Hunger targets and to incorporate the tenets of food as a human right in the new policy, both of which are in consonance with global trends.

Policy implementation

The state government was partnering with Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) on the implementation of several projects-FADAMA III, IFAD; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)-through Synergos (NGO) on capacity building (capacity building and policy development project); Oxfam (on Women in Agriculture); International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Ibadan (high quality livestock feed ingredients from cassava peels), World Bank (Rural Access Mobility Project; Sasakawa Global, etc.).

In addition to policy articulation, other problems and challenges occur at the stage of implementation. Such constraints are usually shortage of funds and inadequate human and material capacity for effective implementation of policies. To ensure that the goal of Zero Hunger is met in the state, the above challenges could be addressed through the exchange of experiences with other states, improved internal coordination, and better and focused support of the national and international agencies during implementation. It is paramount to explore opportunities for integrating objectives of Zero Hunger into state projects and programs for attaining food security such as those implemented in collaboration with the private sector and in partnership with international agencies such as UNDP, FAO, IFAD, and the World Bank. It was observed that this cooperation or partnership has led to the superior responsibility of the state for agricultural development being subjugated and subordinated to the above national and international agencies. This process undermines the constitutional provision for the States to be in the lead as drivers of the policy processes for agricultural development. The well-entrenched practice does not augur well for the sustainability of policy efforts for meeting the SDG in the long term in these states.

Conclusion

Benue State has a long way to go to reach the Zero Hunger. As written the sustainable development goals require all countries and their citizens to act together to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. Setting targets is a good first step, but actions need to follow quickly. Policy action must be designed to reduce malnutrition in all its forms and be adequately funded. Strategies must be evidence based, implemented at scale, and include both broad based and targeted actions aimed at the most nutritionally vulnerable people. The rapidly escalating threats posed by malnutrition represent a planetary challenge on a par with poverty and climate change. An appropriate response at the required scale is top priority for decision makers in Benue state.

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