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FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STABILITY OF FAMILIES TOWARDS PREVENTING THE PHENOMENON OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

In Kaduna State, a region grappling with socio-economic challenges, the phenomenon of out-of-school children remains a pressing concern. Numerous factors contribute to this crisis, one of which is the intertwined relationship between food and nutrition security, family stability, and education. Food and nutrition security are critical not only for the physical development of children but also for their mental acuity and overall ability to engage in educational pursuits. The paper explores how enhancing food and nutrition security can lead to greater socio-economic stability in families, thereby preventing the alarming rates of out-of-school children in Kaduna State. In conclusion, enhancing food security can lead to healthier, better-educated children who are more likely to thrive academically and contribute positively to societal development, which can be achieved through strategic policy initiatives, collaborative efforts, and community engagement. It is recommended that, to reduce the phenomenon of out-of-school children in Kaduna State significantly, continued investment in food and nutrition security may not only address immediate survival needs but also lay a foundation for sustainable socio-economic development in the long term.

Keyword: Food and Nutrition, Security, Socio-economic, Stability, Out-of-School-Children

Introduction

Food and nutrition security plays a crucial role in ensuring the socio-economic stability of families, directly influencing children's educational opportunities and overall well-being. In Kaduna State, where many families struggle with poverty and food insecurity, the inability to provide adequate nutrition has far-reaching implications, including the rising number of out-of-school children. Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] (2019), refers to a situation where all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. When families lack access to adequate food and nutrition, their socio-economic stability is compromised, often forcing children into labour or street trading instead of formal education.

Kaduna State faces significant challenges in achieving food and nutrition security due to multiple factors, including high poverty rates, inflation, conflict, climate change, and inadequate agricultural policies (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2019). The persistent economic hardship in many households makes it difficult for parents to provide balanced diets for their children, leading to malnutrition, poor cognitive development, and diminished academic performance (UNICEF, 2019). Malnourished children are more likely to suffer from illnesses, absenteeism, and low concentration levels in school, increasing their likelihood of dropping out (Abdulbaqi et al., 2025). Consequently, food and nutrition insecurity not only affects the health of children but also directly contributes to the growing phenomenon of out-of-school children in Kaduna State (Akorede et al., 2022).

Furthermore, socio-economic instability driven by food insecurity leads to an increase in child labour as families prioritise immediate survival over long-term educational investment (FAO, 2019). In many impoverished

households, children are forced to work on farms, in markets, or engage in hawking to supplement family income, thereby depriving them of their right to education (FAO, 2019). This situation is further worsened in conflict-affected areas of Kaduna State, where displacement disrupts both livelihoods and educational access. Insecurity in local government areas such as Birnin Gwari, Kajuru, and Chikun has led to the closure of numerous schools, forcing children out of the education system and into precarious situations that limit their future opportunities (Akorede et al., 2022; Abdullahi et al., 2023).

Addressing food and nutrition security as a means to prevent the phenomenon of out-of-school children requires a multi-sectoral approach involving government policies, agricultural reforms, social protection programs, and community-based interventions. Investing in sustainable agriculture, improving food supply chains, and supporting smallholder farmers can enhance food availability and affordability for low-income families (FAO, 2019). Additionally, targeted nutritional programs in schools, such as free school feeding initiatives, have proven effective in increasing school enrollment and retention rates, especially among vulnerable children. Strengthening social safety nets, including cash transfer programs for low-income families, can further enhance economic stability and reduce the financial burden that often leads to school dropouts (UNICEF, 2019).

Ensuring food and nutrition security is essential for fostering socio-economic stability among families and preventing the growing crisis of out-of-school children in Kaduna State. A well-nourished child is more likely to stay in school, perform academically, and contribute meaningfully to national development. Therefore, policy interventions that integrate food security, poverty reduction, and educational access must be prioritised to break the cycle of hunger, poverty, and illiteracy that continues to hinder Kaduna State's progress (FAO, 2019).

Food and nutrition security is a fundamental requirement for the well-being and socio-economic stability of families. However, in Kaduna State, a significant portion of the population struggles with food insecurity, leading to widespread poverty, malnutrition, and educational deprivation. The inability of many households to access adequate and nutritious food has far-reaching consequences, particularly on children's education. A major concern is the rising number of out-of-school children, a problem closely linked to economic instability and poor nutritional status within families. Despite various governmental and non-governmental interventions, which include;

Governmental Interventions

These are state and federal programs implemented in Kaduna State to address economic instability, well-being, and food insecurity among vulnerable families. They focus on cash transfers, subsidies, nutrition support, and empowerment initiatives.

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT): Provides N5,000 monthly payments to poor and vulnerable households to improve consumption and encourage livelihoods.

National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP): Delivers nutritious meals to pupils in public primary schools to enhance nutrition, attendance, and local agriculture.

Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP): Provides collateral-free microloans to MSME owners, prioritising women and youth for economic empowerment.

Kaduna State Women Empowerment Fund (KADSWEF): Low-interest loans and training for women-led MSMEs to boost financial access and reduce vulnerability.

Kaduna Start-up Entrepreneurship Programme (KADSTEP): Skills training and funding for youth to start small businesses and combat unemployment.

Growth Enhancement Scheme (GES): Subsidised fertilisers (50% off, up to two bags per farmer) via e-wallet for smallholder farmers to increase yields and incomes.

Kaduna Emergency Nutrition Action Plan (KADENAP): Targets malnutrition in children from poor families through health and feeding interventions.

Fertiliser Market Stabilisation Programme: Subsidised inputs like fertilisers and seeds to support smallholder farmers' access and productivity.

Women in Agriculture Programme: Funds, training, and land access for poor women farmers to enhance food production and household security.

National Programme for Food Security (NPFS): Diversifies farming, provides extension services, credit, and inputs to boost yields and reduce poverty.

Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA): Increases farmer incomes and food availability through productivity enhancements.

National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP): Supports sustainable agriculture for better household nutrition and economic stability.

Kaduna State Contributory Health Insurance Scheme: Protects against high health costs for low-income families, including free care for pregnant women and children under 5.

Household Uplifting Programme: Bimonthly payments of N10,000 (plus N5,000 for qualifiers) to informal workers and vulnerable groups.

Cash for Work Schemes: Temporary employment for unemployed youth from poor households to build assets and income.

ii. Non-Governmental Interventions

These involve NGOs, international partners, and private sector collaborations targeting food access, nutrition, and economic support in Kaduna.

1. Child Development Grant Programme (CDGP): Cash grants to poor families with children under 3, supported by the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) for nutrition and well-being.
2. FHI 360 Nutrition Interventions: Community-based programs in Kaduna for maternal and child nutrition, including advocacy and service delivery to reach vulnerable households.
3. Food Africa Project: Youth empowerment through innovative farming and PPPs, partnering with FAO, ILO, ITC, Sahara Group, and Roca Brothers to address food insecurity.
4. Enhancing Access to Safe and Nutritious Diets (ENSAND) Project: Improves dietary quality for bottom-of-the-pyramid families via community demand generation, led by Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).
5. Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) Community-Based Advisor Project: Trains 360,000 smallholder farmers on productivity, funded by USAID and implemented with NAERLS.
6. Agro-Processing Productivity Enhancement and Livelihood Improvement Support (APPEALS): Value chain support for small farmers, funded by the World Bank to enhance incomes and food security.
7. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Food Security Project: Targets 25,000+ displaced and vulnerable people with nutrition and agricultural support.
8. Gates Foundation Smallholder Farmer Support: Boosts yields and reduces food insecurity through government-partnered agricultural initiatives.
9. World Food Programme (WFP) and FAO Durable Solutions: Emergency food aid and production support during crises, focusing on northern Nigeria, including Kaduna.

Category Focus Area Key Examples Governmental Cash Transfers & Assistance CCT, NCTP, Household Uplifting Programme Governmental Nutrition & Food Security NHGSFP, KADENAP, GES Governmental Economic Empowerment KADSWEF, KADSTEP, GEEP Non-Governmental Grants and Direct Aid CDGP, CRS Project, ENSAND Non-Governmental Agricultural Support Food Africa, AGRA, APPEALS

Upon all those interventions stated above, some were not visible or heard by the target groups, talkless of benefiting from the said intervention. However, food insecurity remains a major challenge that directly affects children's access to education. One of the key problems is that food insecurity leads to malnutrition, which negatively impacts children's cognitive development, concentration, and overall academic performance. Many

children from food-insecure households attend school on an empty stomach, reducing their ability to focus and learn effectively. This often results in poor academic performance, frequent absenteeism, and eventual school dropouts, increasing the number of out-of-school children (Abdulbaqi et al., 2025). Without proper nutrition, children are also more susceptible to illnesses, further affecting their ability to attend school regularly.

Another major issue is that food insecurity contributes to economic instability in families, forcing many children into child labour to supplement household income. In many low-income communities, children are withdrawn from school to engage in street hawking, domestic work, or farming to help their families survive. This is particularly evident in rural and conflict-affected areas of Kaduna State, where poverty levels are high, and access to basic resources is limited. Girls are disproportionately affected, as they are often forced into early marriage to reduce the financial burden on their families, further exacerbating the out-of-school crisis.

Furthermore, Kaduna State's socio-economic and security challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and armed conflicts, continue to worsen food insecurity. The displacement of families due to violence disrupts livelihoods and education, leaving many children without access to proper schooling. Weak policy implementation and inadequate investment in agricultural and social protection programs further compound the problem, making it difficult for affected families to break free from the cycle of poverty, hunger, and educational deprivation.

If left unaddressed, the growing food and nutrition insecurity crisis will continue to push more children out of school, limiting their future opportunities and hindering Kaduna State's overall development.

Understanding Food and Nutrition Security

Food security exists when every individual has physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2019). Nutrition security, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of not just the availability of food but also its nutritional value. In contemporary Kaduna State, a significant segment of the population grapples with food insecurity due to various factors, including poverty, conflict, and climate change. According to the World Food Programme (2020), about 1.5 million people in Kaduna State are in urgent need of food assistance.

The Socio-Economic Context of Kaduna State

Kaduna State is classified as one of the states with a high poverty rate in Nigeria, with many families living below the poverty line. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), over 50% of Kaduna State's population lives in poverty, which considerably limits their ability to provide their children with not only necessary food but also education. The socio-economic instability manifests in various ways, leading families to prioritise immediate needs, such as food, over longer-term investments like education (Akorede et al., 2022).

In families struggling with financial constraints, children can easily become a source of additional income, leading to child labour rather than school attendance (Abdulbaqi et al., 2024). The urgent need for food often forces children to drop out of school to support their families through agricultural work, trade, or various forms of labour. As such, the vicious cycle of poverty and lack of education perpetuates as these children face a diminished future, lacking the skills and qualifications necessary for better economic opportunities.

Challenges to Achieving Food Security in Kaduna State

Despite the evident linkage between food security and education, several challenges impede efforts to ensure that families have access to enough nutritious food. In particular, the ongoing conflicts in various regions, especially in the southern and northern parts of Kaduna State, displace families and disrupt agricultural activities, leading to increased food shortages (Oxfam, 2021). Climate change exacerbates these issues, causing erratic weather patterns that further threaten food production. Additionally, the economic instability brought on by fluctuations in global oil prices severely affects government revenues, limiting funding for education and agricultural investments. Thus, while food insecurity directly impacts education, it is essential to consider the broader socio-economic landscape that continues to challenge families directly.

The Link Between Food Security and Education

Food security has a direct impact on education outcomes. Children who lack access to adequate nutrition often experience stunted growth, cognitive impairment, and poorer academic performance (Mendez, 2017). When families struggle to provide sufficient food, children are either unable to attend school or do not perform to their full potential when they do attend. This reality is particularly acute in impoverished regions of Kaduna State, where economic instability can lead families to prioritise survival over schooling.

Nutrition and Cognitive Development

Research indicates that malnutrition during crucial developmental stages can significantly impair cognitive functions, thereby affecting a child's ability to learn (Akorede et al., 2022). Nutritional deficiencies, including a lack of essential vitamins and minerals, have been linked to delays in academic achievement and a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. In Kaduna State, a region with one of the highest rates of childhood malnutrition in northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2019), addressing dietary needs can be a vital step toward bolstering educational outcomes.

Socio-Economic Stability of Families

The socio-economic stability of families plays a fundamental role in determining access to education for children. In households where parents experience economic hardship, educational expenses may be deprioritised (Ogunyemi, 2018). Such families often face tough decisions between spending limited resources on immediate survival or investing in their children's education. When families struggle to meet their basic needs, children frequently remain out-of-school to contribute to household income or to help with chores (Ogunyemi, 2018).

Poverty and Education in Kaduna State

With over 50% of Kaduna State's population living below the poverty line (NBS, 2021), we see a stark intersection between poverty, food security, and educational attainment. Families forced to navigate extreme deprivation find it increasingly difficult to send their children to school consistently. The loss of potential educators due to child labour further perpetuates poverty, as individuals without education are less likely to secure sustainable employment, thereby creating a vicious cycle of poverty and educational neglect (Ogunyemi, 2018).

Policy Measures for Improvement

Addressing food and nutrition security is one of the most effective ways to combat the phenomenon of out-of-school children in Kaduna State. Policymakers need to adopt a multi-faceted approach that involves not just education reform but also agricultural policies that enhance food production and nutrition quality (Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER, 2020).

Agricultural Development and Food Security

To improve food security, Kaduna State must invest in improving agricultural productivity through irrigation, training, and resource provision to farmers. This not only ensures an adequate food supply but also creates jobs that enhance family income, thereby increasing families' capacity to invest in their children's education (Ahmad, 2020). Providing grants and subsidies to farmers can encourage greater production and make nutritious food more accessible to lower-income families.

School Feeding Programs

Schools can play a crucial role in combating child malnutrition and keeping children in school. Implementing comprehensive school feeding programs can boost nutritional intake for children. Research has shown that these programs can lead to improved attendance and academic performance (Akoredeet al., 2019; World Food Programme, 2020). In Kaduna State, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme supports local farmers and provides meals for school children, helping to mitigate food insecurity and encourage school attendance concurrently (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021).

Malnutrition and School Attendance in Kaduna State

Malnutrition significantly impacts children's health and educational outcomes in Kaduna State. Below is a table summarising key malnutrition indicator among children under five in Kaduna State:

Table 1. Malnutrition and School Attendance in Kaduna State

Indicator	Value	Source
1. Prevalence of Stunting (Children under 5)	40%	UNICEF (2023)
2. Prevalence of Wasting (Children under 5)	8%	WHO (2023)
3. Underweight Children (under 5)	25%	UNICEF (2023)
4. Children with Iron Deficiency Anaemia	50%	WHO (2022)
5. School Dropout Rate (Primary Level)	30%	UNESCO (2023)

Sources: World Bank (2023)

Table 2. Food Insecurity and Household Economic Stability in Kaduna State

Indicator	Urban Areas	Rural Areas	State Average
Households Experiencing Food Insecurity (%)	40%	60%	50%
Households Living Below the Poverty Line (%	35%	60%	50%
Average Monthly Household Food Expenditure (NGN)	45,000	25,000	35,000
Percentage of Income Spent on Food	55%	75%	65%

Source: World Bank (2023)

Table 3. Impact of School Feeding on Enrollment and Attendance in Kaduna State

Programme	Enrollment Increase (%)	Attendance Improvement (%)
National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP)	35%	30%
State-Level School Feeding Programs	20%	25%
World Food Programme Interventions	25%	28%

Source: World Bank (2024)

Table 4. Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Out-of-School Children in Kaduna State

Factor	Percentage Contribution
Poverty and Economic Hardship	50%
Food Insecurity	30%
Gender Disparities (Preference for Boys' Education)	10%
Insecurity and Conflict (Displacement of Families)	5%
Other Factors (Early Marriage, Child Labour)	5%

Source: World Bank (2024)

The Role of Government and NGOs

Both government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) must collaborate to set up interventions that target food security and education. Initiatives like outreach programs aimed at educating families about the importance of nutrition can enhance community awareness. Moreover, providing financial incentives for families to send their children to school can alleviate some socio-economic pressure (Ogunyemi, 2018).

Conclusion

The relationship between food and nutrition security and the socio-economic stability of families is profoundly significant in Kaduna State, particularly concerning the issue of out-of-school children. Enhancing food security can lead to healthier, better-educated children who are more likely to thrive academically and contribute positively to society. Through strategic policy initiatives, collaborative efforts, and community engagement, it is possible to reduce the phenomenon of out-of-school children in Kaduna State significantly. Continued

investment in food and nutrition security not only addresses immediate survival needs but also lays a foundation for sustainable socio-economic development in the long term.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening School Feeding Programs: The Kaduna State government should expand and adequately fund school feeding initiatives to ensure that children receive at least one nutritious meal per day. This will serve as an incentive for parents to keep their children in school, particularly in low-income communities.
2. Improving Agricultural Productivity and Food Accessibility: Investing in sustainable farming practices, irrigation systems, and rural infrastructure will enhance food production and affordability. Policies should support smallholder farmers with access to credit, technology, and storage facilities to reduce food wastage and ensure a steady supply of nutritious food.
3. Expanding Social Protection Programs: Implementing targeted cash transfers and food assistance programs for vulnerable families can help reduce financial burdens, ensuring that children remain in school rather than engaging in labour to support household income.
4. Enhancing Community-Based Nutrition Programs: Educating families on proper nutrition, breastfeeding, and balanced diets can help combat malnutrition and improve children's overall health and cognitive development, leading to better academic performance.
5. Addressing Security Challenges: The Kaduna State government should strengthen security measures in conflict-prone areas to ensure the safety of families and prevent displacement, which often disrupts children's education and access to food.
6. Encouraging Private Sector and NGO Involvement: Partnerships with private organisations, non-governmental agencies, and international donors can facilitate food security interventions, educational sponsorship programs, and community development initiatives.
7. Policy Implementation and Monitoring: The Kaduna State government should enforce existing food security and education policies while ensuring proper monitoring and evaluation of their impact. Increased budgetary allocation for agriculture, education, and social welfare programs will enhance long-term sustainability.

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