

Man's Survival: Way out of Food and Energy Crisis

Abstract

It pops up in the media regularly. A hydra headed monster which has posed serious threat to man's survival. Generally referred to as food and energy crisis, one wonders whether there is no more land to grow food or that energy resources are beyond man's reach. Some say the world increasing population is the bane of the issue. This essay proposes way out of the problem in a pragmatic way.

Wikipedia carefully describes an energy crisis as “any great bottleneck (or price rise) in the supply of energy resources.” It further states that energy crisis refers to the shortage of oil and additionally to electricity or other natural resources; this can also be referred to as oil crisis, petroleum crisis, energy shortage, or electricity shortage. Food crisis, on the other hand, is an abnormal or difficult situation where demand of food products cannot meet supply. It can also be referred to as food shortage. What are the ways out?

A careful look at the evolution of food crisis could be traced to the bible when Egypt sold to all the earth (Gen 41:57). The secret of Egypt as a super power then was the power of dream. She was able to envisage crisis by planning ahead. One good way to mitigate the effect of crisis is the principle of effective planning. In our contemporary society, dreaming and planning ahead is akin to a national visualizing her demography and duly preparing against any negative tendencies lurking unnoticed.

Practically let us consider the principle of comparative cost advantage which countries of the world glue their hope today. It is a gospel truth that resources are not evenly distributed; some countries have advantage over others in terms of food and energy resources and have learnt to do well for themselves by having more to export to other countries. For instance, Nigeria produces oil cheaply as well as cocoa, Malaysia is noted for her oil palm, Thailand is known for her gross rice export etc.

The failure of comparative cost advantage is that there is still food shortage or crisis; hence we must pause to make a u-turn and strive for self-sufficiency. Countries of the world must strive to reduce importation of food by addressing their agricultural policies.

The relationship that exists between developing countries and the developed ones is that the former is at ease with food importation with the agricultural sector neglected. Ewa Audu confirms this:

“Many African countries now depend on importation and trade for their existence exchanging any little money obtained from the sale of mineral deposit for food produced in advanced countries.”

The importation cost and other inadequacies are responsible for food crisis.

For instance, according to a figure released by Muhammed Ishikayu of the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, as cited in the Nigerian Guardian (Dec7, 2008), Nigeria's consumption of cowpea is 2.5million tons whereas the country produces 2million tons. This puts the nation at a deficit of 500000 tons and an importation cost of N20 billion. The amazing thing about this huge importation cost is that it can be invested in the country to yield handsome result both for the country's need as well as exportation. What are the modern ways to boost yield internally as against sole dependency on import?

Technologists in the agricultural sector have developed a technical way of boosting food supply. They call it biotechnology. Biotechnology entails the use of genetically modified crops to increase farm yield. According to experts, yields can increase 30-40 percent if biotechnology is embraced.

I hereby propose that the few countries such as Thailand who have the wherewithal as well as the technology should practice the concept—build, operate and transfer (BOT). Conversely, countries whose agricultural system is wallowing in failure should seek to learn this technology and apply it. In a more realistic way, international organizations such as the UN, World Bank should challenge member countries by helping them invest in self-sufficiency programmes to make the world a better place.

So far, my point is not completely against economic cooperation. It is that, in the process of leaning on others for particular resources, one's eyes must be on ground to break loose from the shackles of dependency. Much as Egypt was able to sell to the whole world in the time of adversity, countries that patronized them must have done so with difficulty. On the other hand, if all the earth was as buoyant as Egypt then, one can imagine how sufficient the world would be.

Swerving to energy crisis, one cause is increased competition for fuel, as well as war and pipeline vandalism. China, India and the US are consuming far more oil than they did a few years ago. One is also aware that the world's population is jumping beyond control. This must have informed a suggestion by David Pimentel, Professor of Ecology and Agriculture at Cornell University, that there should be a massive reduction in world's population to stem the tide of energy crisis. But events in our world shows that energy crisis goes beyond controlling population but by seeking other alternative energy such as biofuel, biomass, hydropower, solar power, tidal power as well as wave power, as against the reliance on fossil fuel. Man has been destined to subdue the earth and not otherwise.

Nations of the world must harness other energy resources as mentioned to meet the growing demand. Denmark is a good example where electricity is generated by wind turbines. Barack Obama in his campaign promised to address America's energy crises by building solar panels and wind farms as alternative energy resources. Other economies must follow suit.

Since the unrest in the Middle East (the world's major oil producer) with Iraq struggling to increase production in the face of repeated terror attack against her oil production infrastructure, is getting out of control, situation demands that we seek and develop alternative energy resources untapped to help the situation.

The issue of food and energy crisis from the foregoing is such that if the world must stop complaining about its effect, each country must, in the course of relying on others for a particular resources, opt for alternative means from her own environment. In the words of Elizabeth Carter, "you might not be able to help the whole world but you can make a difference in your community." Indeed, making a difference in one's community would go a long way to change the world.