

POSITIONING FOOD PROCESSING FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

DR. FORSTER E. IHEJIOFOR(

Commissioner for Agriculture, Anambra State

@ THE 11th EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL FOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SUMMIT (ReFoSTS) 2025.

I. Introduction

- **What is Food Processing?** Food processing refers to the transformation of raw ingredients into food products that are safe, palatable, and suitable for consumption or storage. Food processing enhances food safety, extends shelf life, and adds value to raw agricultural products, thereby influencing food availability and accessibility.
- **Definition of Food Security:** Food security is the availability and accessibility of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets people's dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
- **What is National Development?** National development refers to the overall growth and improvement of a country in terms of the economic, social, political, and cultural well-being of its people. It involves sustained efforts to raise living standards, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life for citizens. A nation's development hinges on its ability to sustain food security, as it affects health, economic stability, and social harmony. Borrowing the cliché of the 2024 Governor of the year and Anambra State Sheriff (Prof. Charles Chukwuma Soludo CFR), it is transforming the nation to a preferred place to live, learn, work, relax and enjoy. A choice destination rather than a departure land.

II. The Current State of Food Security in Nigeria

According to WFP (World Food Program, a UN parastatal), Nigeria is currently confronting a deepening food security crisis, with projections indicating that approximately 33.1 million people could face acute food insecurity during the upcoming lean season (June–August 2025). This marks a significant increase from the estimated 25.1 million affected individuals between October and December 2024, highlighting a worsening trend in the nation's hunger situation.

Key Drivers of Food Crisis in Nigeria

- i. **Economic Hardship and Inflation:** Nigeria is experiencing record-high inflation, with food prices surging by 40.9% and overall inflation reaching 34.2% as of June 2024. Staple foods have seen dramatic price increases. For instance, the cost of beans rose by 282%, and local rice by 153% compared to the previous year. These spikes are attributed to the devaluation of the naira, the removal of fuel subsidies, and broader economic challenges.
- ii. **Climate Based Disasters:** Severe flooding has devastated agricultural lands, with over 9.2 million people affected and 4.5 million hectares submerged in 2024. This includes approximately 1.6 million hectares of farmland, leading to an estimated loss of 1.1 million tonnes of staple crops like maize, sorghum, and rice which would have been enough to feed approximately 13 million people.
- iii. **Conflict and Insecurity:** Ongoing violence, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, continues to disrupt food production and distribution. Additionally, armed banditry and farmer-herder conflicts in the northwest and north-

central regions exacerbate the situation, hindering access to food and displacing communities.

- iv. **Agricultural Practices:** Predominant reliance on subsistence farming and wide spread adoption of conventional chemical agriculture degrade the ecosystem, impoverish sustainability and limit productivity.
- v. **Post-Harvest Losses:** Estimated at 30% - 40% for staple crops due to logistical challenges, inadequate storage and processing facilities.

Impact on Vulnerable Populations

The crisis disproportionately affects children and women:

- Approximately 5.4 million children and nearly 800,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are at risk of acute malnutrition.
- An estimated 1.8 million children could face Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), requiring urgent nutritional intervention.

Government and International Responses

In response to the escalating crisis:

- The Nigerian Senate has passed a bill to criminalize the export of large quantities of unprocessed corn, aiming to curb food shortages and stabilize domestic supply.
- The United Nations has launched an appeal for \$910 million to address the humanitarian needs in the northeastern regions, targeting support for 3.6 million of the 7.8 million people in need.

Regional Hot Spots

The most affected areas include:

- Northeastern states: Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe
- Northwestern states: Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto
- North Central states: Niger, Plateau, and Benue States

These regions are experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, necessitating immediate and sustained intervention.

III. Understanding Food Processing

Food processing can be broadly classified into three main types: primary, secondary, and tertiary processing. Each type involves different methods and serves distinct purposes, from making raw food edible to creating convenient ready-to-eat products.

1. Primary Food Processing

This involves basic preparation of raw agricultural products into forms that are edible or usable for further processing. It typically occurs right after harvest or slaughter. Its' purpose is to make raw food safe and suitable for storage, cooking, or further processing.

Examples:

- Sorting and Cleaning vegetables, fruits, and grains
- Milling wheat into flour
- Pasteurizing milk
- Slaughtering animals for meat
- Drying spices, fruits, and seeds
- Shelling nuts or grains

2. Secondary Food Processing

This involves turning primary processed ingredients into actual food products that are more familiar and palatable to consumers. It combines or alters ingredients to create foods for

direct consumption. Techniques used include slicing, fermenting, blending, seasoning, emulsifying, cooking,

Examples:

- Making Ugba from oil bean seed
- Producing Ogiri from castor seed
- Producing Akamu or custard from maize
- Producing spices from different herbs
- Baking bread from flour and yeast
- Making cheese from milk
- Producing sausages from ground meat
- Brewing beer from barley

3. Tertiary Food Processing (Ultra-Processing)

This refers to the production of highly processed, ready-to-eat or heat-and-eat foods, usually with multiple ingredients and additives. This method offers convenience, shelf-stability, and ready-to-serve products that require minimal preparation. Often includes preservatives, flavour enhancers, colourings, and emulsifiers, longer shelf life, may have reduced nutritional value compared to less processed foods.

Examples:

- Instant noodles
- Frozen pizza
- Canned soups
- Soft drinks
- Packaged snacks (e.g., chips, cookies)
- Ready meals (microwavable dinners)

IV. Strategic Positioning of Food Processing in Nigeria

The strategic positioning of food processing in Nigeria will play a transformative role in the country's economy, food security, and national development. Below are some key strategic opportunities and areas for positioning food processing in Nigeria:

Infrastructure Development:

- Investments in cold storage, processing plants, and transportation networks are essential to ensure year-round availability of fruits, vegetables and other perishables. Initiatives like the National Agricultural Technology Innovation Policy encourage infrastructure support.
- Establishment of food processing hubs near farming communities to extend shelf life and preserve nutrients. This will reduce post-harvest losses, enhance food availability and reduces economic waste.
- Promoting processing of local staples like cassava, millet, yam, and sorghum into flour, snacks, or fortified products. This will not only improve nutritional outcomes, especially in rural and underserved areas but will make seasonal or perishable foods available year-round for local and international trade content.
- Promotion of investment in smart food tech, solar dryers, automated packaging, and food safety standards to improve efficiency, compliance with global industry standards (HACCP), thus extended shelf life and cross-border acceptability.

Capacity Building:

Capacity building is an ever green requirement for growth and development in every walk of life. Therefore, we must:

- Develop and deploy Programs to train farmers and processors in sustainable modern techniques and technologies leveraging partnerships with citadels of learning and research institutes like the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Root Crop Research Institute, National institute For Oil Palm Research (NIFOR).
- Consistently invest in agro-processing clusters (SAPZs/ ATCs), empowerment of SMEs especially women-led food businesses. This will directly reduce youth unemployment and strengthen non-oil sectors.
- Introduce relevant technology for modernizing and upscaling indigenous food processing

By strategically positioning food processing, Nigeria can unlock its agricultural potential, ensure food sufficiency, create millions of decent jobs, enhance food tourism and promote sustainable economic growth. Success will depend on diligent pursuit of coordinated policies, infrastructure development, and private-sector involvement.

V. Policy Frameworks Supporting Food Processing

Several policy frameworks in Nigeria support food processing as part of the broader goal of achieving food security, agricultural transformation, and economic diversification. These policies aim to encourage investment, improve infrastructure, and foster value addition in the agricultural sector.

1. **National Food and Nutrition Policy:** Its goal is to improve food security and nutritional status of Nigerians by encouraging food fortification, preservation, and processing to reduce malnutrition and food wastage. It is focused on the processing of nutrient-dense foods, Support for local production of fortified foods.
2. **National Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP):** Its goal is to Diversify Nigeria's economy and develop industrial value chains. It identifies agro-processing as a high-priority sector for job creation and import substitution. It is focused on Food manufacturing clusters, Export promotion of processed foods, and Technology transfer and infrastructure support.
3. **National Agriculture Technology and Innovation Plan (NATIP):** Its goal is to enhance productivity and agribusiness through technology and innovation. It focuses on scaling agro-processing through innovation, mechanization, and value chain development.
4. **Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP),** led by CBN is aimed at linking smallholder farmers with processors to ensure a steady supply of raw materials. This is targeted at strengthening agro-processing supply chains and promotes contract farming. It provides Financing for raw material production, Direct linkage between farmers and processors to reduce import dependency.
5. **Zero Reject Initiative** targets to Improve the quality of Nigerian agricultural exports. It focuses on meeting international food safety standards in processed foods which involves Training on food hygiene and standards, inspection and certification of food processing facilities to reduce border rejection of Nigerian goods.
6. **Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZs),** led by African Development Bank (AfDB) in partnership with Nigerian government has its goal to create zones with infrastructure for processing and value addition close to production areas.

VI. Case Studies: Successful Food Processing Initiatives in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed several successful food processing initiatives that have significantly contributed to the country's food security, economic growth, and employment generation. Here are detailed examples:

- 1. Tiger Foods Limited**, established in 1996 and headquartered in Anambra State, Nigeria, has emerged as a significant player in the country's food processing industry. The company's contributions span product innovation, quality assurance, and support for local agriculture, thereby enhancing food safety and economic development in Nigeria. Tiger Foods offers a diverse range of over 70 products, including spices, seasonings, dehydrated vegetables, and beverages. The company adheres to international quality standards, including ISO, Halal, NAFDAC, and SON certifications. It is worthy of note that their raw materials are sourced locally and the company employs approximately 500 individuals and has been instrumental in promoting Anambra State as an industrial hub. The company's emphasis on "Made in Anambra" products challenges perceptions about locally manufactured goods and contributes to the state's economic development.

Through its commitment to quality, innovation, and local sourcing, Tiger Foods Limited significantly contributes to Nigeria's food processing sector, addressing food safety concerns, supporting local agriculture, and driving economic growth.
- 2. Von Food and Farms Limited**, established in 2017, is a prominent agro-processing enterprise in Nigeria, specializing in cassava starch production. With facilities in Aba, Abia State, and operations extending to Anambra State, the company has significantly contributed to Nigeria's food processing sector through technological innovation, sustainable practices, and community engagement.

Von Food and Farms operates a state-of-the-art facility capable of processing over 250 metric tonnes of cassava roots daily, yielding approximately 50 metric tonnes of high-quality cassava starch. The production line is fully automated, incorporating advanced technology, ensuring efficiency and product quality. Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability, the company repurposes cassava processing by-products, such as fiber, into animal feed, thereby reducing waste and supporting the livestock industry.

Through robust in-grower and out-grower programs, Von Food and Farms collaborates with farmers across multiple Nigerian states, providing them with farming inputs, technical support, and market access. This initiative not only ensures a steady supply of raw materials but also fosters economic development in rural communities. Von Food and Farms adheres to stringent quality standards, holding certifications from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON). The company implements comprehensive quality management and food safety systems to ensure product excellence.

Through its integrated approach to agro-processing, sustainable practices, and community engagement, Von Food and Farms Limited continues to play a pivotal role in advancing Nigeria's food processing industry.
- 3. Imota Rice Mill – Lagos State**, located in Ikorodu, Lagos State, is one of Africa's largest rice processing facilities. Inaugurated in 2023, the mill occupies 22 hectares and has the capacity to produce 2.8 million 50kg bags of rice annually. It is expected to generate 1,500 direct jobs and 254,000 indirect jobs. The facility includes 16 silos, each with a capacity of 2,500 tonnes, and utilizes advanced Swiss Bühler machinery for automated processing.
- 4. Johnvents Cocoa Processing – Ondo State**, a Nigerian agribusiness company, has made significant strides in cocoa processing. In 2025, the company secured a \$40.5 million investment from the UK's development finance institution to expand its cocoa processing capacity from 12,000 to 30,000 metric tons annually. The investment aims to acquire machinery and refurbish their factory in Ondo State. Johnvents exports cocoa butter and

powder, including to Europe, and plans to achieve 90% certification under the Rainforest Alliance sustainability and traceability program by 2027.

5. St. Gabriel Coconut Oil Refinery – Akwa Ibom State

In May 2022, Akwa Ibom State inaugurated the **St. Gabriel Coconut Oil Refinery** in Mkpát Enin. This multi-billion Naira facility is the first of its kind in Africa and has the capacity to process 1,000,000 coconuts daily. The refinery is expected to employ no fewer than 3,000 direct and indirect staff, contributing significantly to the state's economy and Nigeria's position in the global coconut oil market.

6. Ady's Agro Processing Limited – Lagos State

Founded by **Adanne Uche** in 2016, **Ady's Agro Processing Limited** focuses on providing healthier cooking ingredients. Starting from her kitchen, Adanne has grown the business into a globally recognized brand that empowers and motivates both the young and old generation. The company is based in Lagos and continues to make strides in the food processing industry.

7. Roki Foods – Nigeria

Ifeyinwa Ogar, the founder of **Roki Foods**, has created a company dedicated to helping middle-income earners in Nigeria save money on grocery shopping. With a background in commercial banking, Ifeyinwa brings experience as a Relationship Manager and Branch Manager to her entrepreneurial venture. Roki Foods focuses on food processing and bundling, aiming to make grocery shopping more affordable for Nigerians.

These initiatives demonstrate the potential of food processing to entrench food security and drive upward economic developments.

Thank you!