NIGERIAN FOOD SHORTAGES: A STUDY OF IMPORT DEMAND FOR SELECTED CEREALS, 1950–79

By

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INTRODUCTION

The diversified nature of agricultural production in Nigeria reflects the wide variety of ecological zones prevailing in the country. Starting with the rain forest zone in the South, the country stretches to the dry savannah belt in the North with intermediate vegetational zones lying between these two extremes. This diverse agro-climatic variation produces a beneficial complementarity in foodcrops production for the entire economy. Whilst the southern parts are suitable for the cultivation of rootcrops, fruits and cereals such as maize, the northern zone supports the raising of a variety of fruits and vegetables and especially cereal crops such as millet, sorghum, wheat, cowpeas, soybean, rice, etc...

When the output of these crops is low in some parts of the country due to adverse agro-climatic causes, it is often made up by output in some other parts of the country, except perhaps in the case of general drought like that of 1973 which affected many parts of the country simultaneously.

For several years now, the advantage derivable from the existing ecological diversity has gradually dwindled so much so that there have been national food shortages. This phenomenon occurs inspite of the abundance of land and labour resources. The Third National Development Plan, 1975–80, has aptly identified one of the problems by stating that not only is land under-utilised in the quantitative sense but the quality depreciation of most of the land under cultivation is also even more apparent.

Figure 1 gives a bird's-eye-view of the naira value imports of selected foods into Nigeria, 1960 to 1979, while Table I presents the growth in the quantity of imports of maize, rice and wheat for selected years.

Apart from the abundance of agricultural resources with which Nigeria is endowed, one other paradox about the food situation in the country has been the impressive list of programs, strategies and projects that have been formulated and executed to boost food production. Some of those contained in the Second National Development Plan, 1970–74, are the National Seed Multiplication Scheme, the National Agricultural Credit Bank, the Water Resources Division in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources whose primary objectives are the promotion and coordination of water resources development for irrigation purposes (rice and wheat cultivation), and the Federal Participation in Special

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FIG. 1: TRENDS IN NAIRA VALUE OF SELECTED FOOD IMPORTS OF NIGERIA, 1960–79 (1960 = 100)

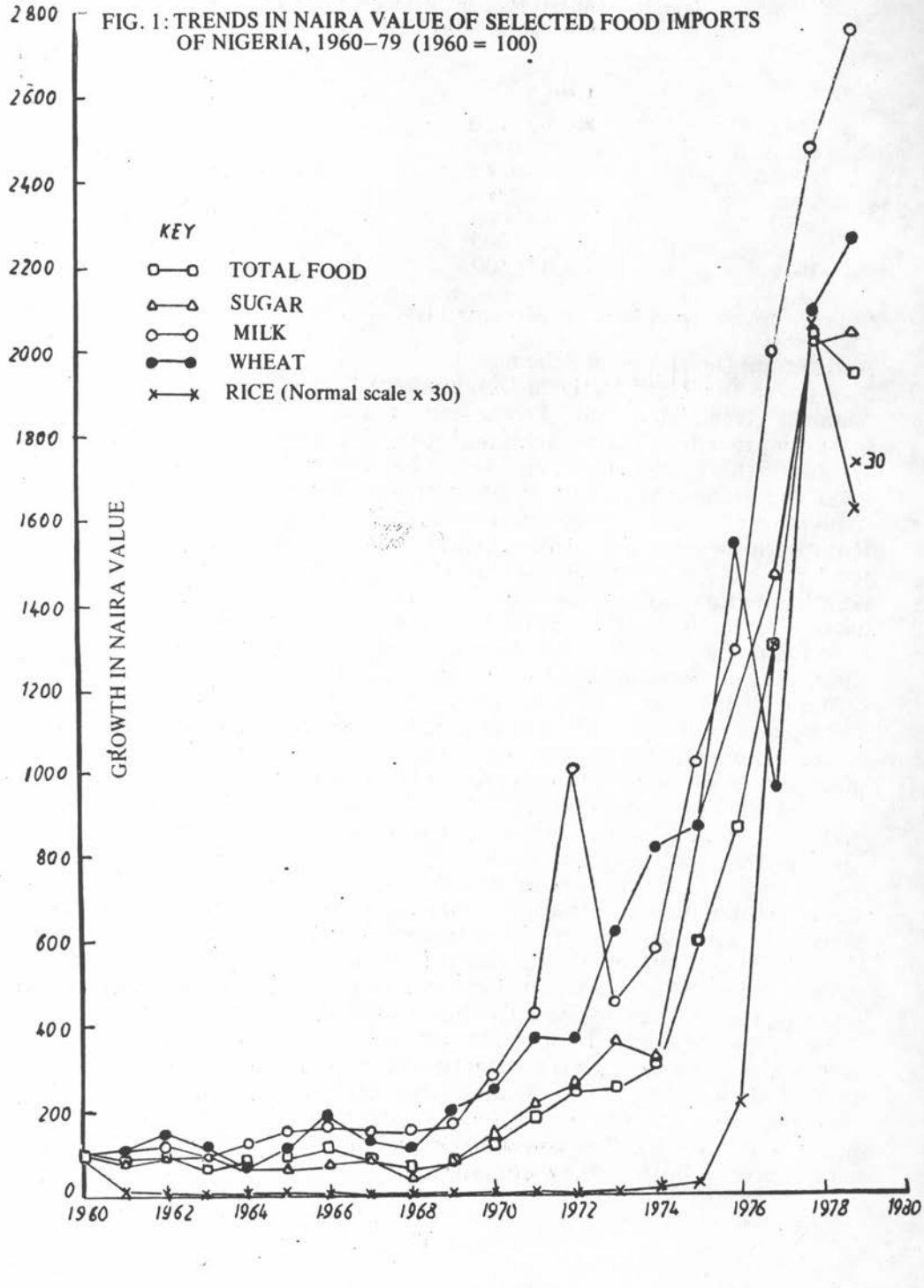


Table I: Imports of Maize, Rice and Wheat in Nigeria (metric tonnes) for selected Years

Years	Maize	Rice	Wheat
1950	0.023	3.46	12,380
1955	0.860	647.00	29,415
1960	48.000	2,447.00	61,630
1965	145.000	1,420.00	55,842
1970	8,882.000	1,749.00	264,740
1975	2,211.000	6,652.00	407,734
1979	40,481.000	567,899.00	806,023

Source: *Nigeria Trade Summary*, December Issues of Selected Years.

Agricultural Development Schemes.

In the Third National Development Plan, 1975–80, there are the National Accelerated Food Production Program whose objectives was to bring improved practices such as high-yielding seed varieties, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, credit, etc.. to the farming population; the Operation Feed the Nation by which an attempt was made to mobilise the entire population for food production; the establishment of nine additional River Basin Development Authorities in 1976 to exploit water resources for food production in virtually all the states; the strengthening of the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank through the Federal grant of ₦ 150 million for on-lending to farmers; the establishment of the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme and the related network of rural banking program; the program of research on foodcrops, notably rice, maize, wheat, beans, rootcrops; the fruit and vegetable research and demonstration; the South Chad Irrigation Project, the Bakolori Project, the Gombe Agricultural Development Project, the Funtua Agricultural Development Project; the establishment of the National Centre for Agricultural Mechanisation.

The current program, – the Green Revolution which seeks to make the country self-sufficient in food production, replaced the Operation Feed the Nation at the inception of civil rule in 1979. Its strategy is to use a package approach such as land clearing services, credit, the River Basin Development Authorities, massive fertilizer imports, Commodity Boards. Agricultural Insurance programs, etc., to boost food production.

The objective of this study is to attempt to explain the factors responsible for the phenomenal growth in the demand for major cereals imports. namely rice, maize and wheat during the period 1950–79. These three crops are selected for study for two major reasons: First, consideration was given to Nigeria's potentials to be self-sufficient in the production of these crops. Second, the choice of these crops was prompted by their importance in the overall food import list. The choice of maize was based largely on the first consideration while wheat and rice were selected on the basis of both of these considerations.

The objective may be spelt out as follows:

(i) to develop a theoretical and empirical framework for analysing import demand for maize, wheat and rice in Nigeria between 1950 and 1979, and to estimate the quantifiable parameters of this model,

(ii) to derive both the marginal propensity to import as well as the income elasticity of import demand for these commodities and

(iii) to make tentative recommendations as regards policy control of the factors that have led to the growth in these imports.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND LITERATURE REVIEW

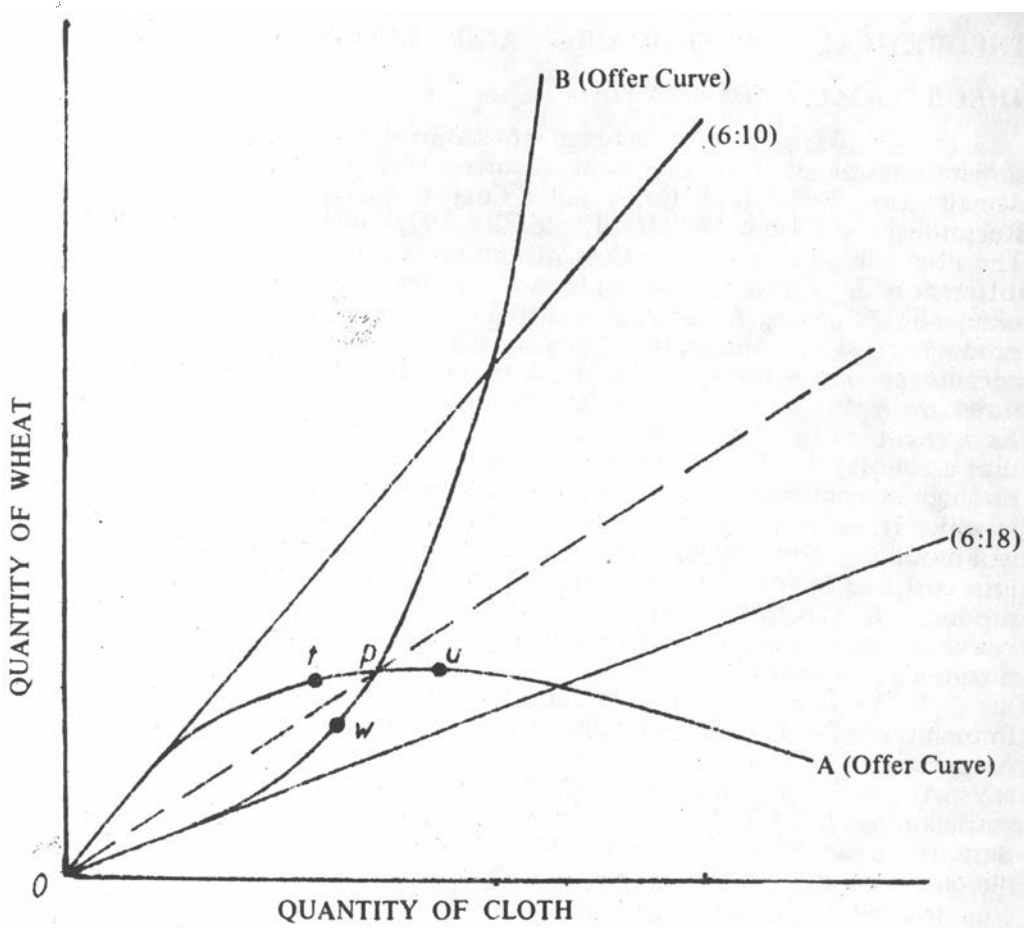
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The basis for trade among international communities forms the subject matter of two important theories of international economics, namely, the «Principle of Comparative Cost Advantage» and the «Law of Reciprocal Demand» (KINDLEBERGER, 1973 and JOHNSON, 1958). The Principle of Comparative Cost Advantage is based on the premise that differences in factor endowments such as land, climate and technical «know-how» among nations cause differences in the comparative costs of producing a given commodity. Thus, a basis for trade arises among nations because no one nation is consistently more efficient than others as measured by factor inputs per unit of output of every possible commodity. As a result of this, the classical and neo-classical economists both agreed that a country would produce for export, a commodity in which it enjoys the highest comparative cost advantage and import the set of commodities in which it suffers the greatest cost disadvantage. In other words, a country will produce for exports, the commodities in which it has the least opportunity cost and import those for which it has the highest opportunity cost to produce. KINDLEBERGER op. cit. (Chap. I) has demonstrated that trade based on this principle confers mutual benefits *(1)* on the countries so involved in international trade.

The Law of Reciprocal Demand postulates that the price at which foreign trade will take place depends on the offer curves *(2)* of the countries concerned. The point of interception of the offer curves, say of two countries, A and B represents the equilibrium point whereby the terms of trade sufficiently clear the market as shown in figure 2. In the figure, p represents the point of equilibrium of the two offer curves for the two commodities traded by the two countries. The price, OP will prevail for both commodities in the two countries. At any other point different from P, say, t, w or u, equilibrium point will not be attained because the terms of trade are not sufficient to clear the market.

However, the theories of International Trade discussed in the foregoing paragraphs have generated a lot of criticisms, particularly in relation to its assumptions *(3)* which are believed to be unrealistic, static and partial (KINDLEBERGER, op. cit. p.49). Thus, modern international economists have introduced the concept of dynamic equilibrium to the Principle of

FIG. 2: LAW OF RECIPROCAL DEMAND: Intersection of two offer curves



Source: *Kindleberger op.cit., (p.40).*

Comparative Cost Advantage to explain changes in tastes, factor endowments and level of technology. For example, changes in consumers' tastes and preferences can bestow advantages or disadvantages on a commodity which hitherto has suffered a disadvantage or vice versa. Similarly, advancement in technology does not only reduce costs of production by improving efficiency but does also lead to the utilization of cheaper factor endowments which at the lower level of technology were not utilizable. In this way, a country that used to suffer comparative cost disadvantage in the production of a commodity may come to enjoy considerable cost advantage over other countries in producing the same commodity.

It should be noted however that despite the criticisms of the theories of comparative cost advantage and reciprocal demand, they still tend to be useful in explaining a great deal of the trade between the Less Developed Countries (L.D.C.'s) and the Industrialized Countries today. The opening of trade between the L.D.C.'s and the Industrialized Nations had led to expansions in the demand for exports, the production of which was intensive in the use of the abundant land and labour resources of the former – leading to a fuller utilization of the previously underutilized land and labour – (MYINT, 1958). This resulted in cumulative growth in incomes, employment, government revenues as well as in investments in infrastructures such as roads, ports, railways and banking institutions which are essential to growth. According to ESSANG (1975), economic growth in Nigeria was closely associated with the expansion of agricultural exports until the mid-1960's when petroleum assumed a dominant role.

The principle of comparative cost advantage, however, has not been found adequate in explaining the broader issues relating to the political economy of a country and the related concept of «economic nationalism» which dominates the economic policies of many countries of the world today. For instance, country A may be comparatively disadvantaged cost-wise vis-a-vis other countries in producing commodity X. For political economy considerations country A may find it undesirable to prefer importing commodity X particularly if commodity X is a strategic item and/or if commodity X contributes much to the drain of the scarce foreign exchange reserves of country A. Thus, the theoretical tools of the economist may sometimes be inadequate in providing guidelines for public policy, especially where broader issues of political economy are involved. This study is undertaken within the broad framework of Nigeria's political economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three empirical studies having relevance to this paper are available for review. OLAYIDE (1968) was concerned with the objective of estimating the parameters of the determinants of Nigeria's import trade for the period, 1948 to 1964. Fifteen items of import were included, six of which (sugar, salt, flour, biscuits, fish and milk) are food items. He postulated that food import demand is determined by the relative price, real disposable

income, custom duties and a trend factor. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that the demand for sugar, flour and fish were price elastic while the demand for fish and flour were income elastic.

FAJANA (1977) set out to study import demand for a number of food items in Nigeria, namely, flour, biscuits, fish, milk, confectionery, salt and sugar, using data for the period 1960 to 1974. In a multiple regression model, he estimated the coefficients of real income, foreign reserves lagged one period, relative price and war dummy as explanatory variables. The evidence indicated that the demand for the first five items were price elastic while the demand for all except for fish was inelastic with respect to foreign reserves. The imports of milk, fish, biscuits and flour were all income elastic. With the different kinds of elasticities shown, he concluded that the same type of policy instruments would not have the same degree of impact in dealing with the problems of different types of food import items.

MABAWONKU (1980) examined the policies and regulations of food importation in Nigeria using 1966 to 1975 data. His hypothesis was that food imports in Nigeria were determined by the levels of external reserves, domestic price index for food, unit landing cost and a trend variable. The multiple regression analysis revealed that food import demand for the period was price inelastic for all food items while demand was foreign exchange elastic for fresh fish and meat only. Thus, it was recommended that the use of tariff measures would not be effective for controlling food import but that imports of meat and fresh fish only would be responsive to changes in the level of foreign reserves.

This paper while endeavouring to draw on the experiences of the previous work just reviewed, will also attempt to extend the frontiers of knowledge in the area of food import demand in Nigeria by (i) considering new set of commodities (maize, wheat and rice) (ii) postulating some new variables, (iii) using more recent data, thereby covering larger range of observations and (iv) deriving the marginal propensity to import the selected cereal crops, an effort which other studies have not given attention.

DOMESTIC PRODUCTION AND IMPORT OF MAJOR CEREALS

In spite of the efforts being made by the Nigerian governments to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, the imports of some food items have exhibited a discernible secular trend at least over the past one decade as can be observed in Table 2. Rice and wheat imports revealed a more remarkable increase than maize imports. Judging from Nigeria's agricultural endowments, there is no justified reason for it to import rice and maize. Even though Nigeria is relatively more self-sufficient in maize production, a 100 percent self-sufficiency and even production for export should have been more easily attained.

Up to 1976, Nigeria was almost self-sufficient in rice production with between 98.6 and 92.2 self-sufficiency ratio. But beginning from 1977, the ratio fell to 62 percent and thereafter has shown a downward trend.

Table 2: Nigeria's Imports of Major Cereal Foods, 1970–80

	Domestic Production (000 tons)		Imports (000 tons)			Self-sufficiency Ratio	
Year	Maize	Rice	Maize	Rice	Wheat	Maize	Rice
1970	2,201	345	9	1.7	225	99.6	99.5
1971	2,126	383	4	0.3	353	99.8	99.9
1972	715	447	2	5.9	292	99.7	98.6
1973	1,374	487	88	1.1	1,069	94.0	99.7
1974	591	525	124	4.8	313	82.6	99.1
1975	1,620	515	2	6.7	400	99.9	98.7
1976	1,814	534	10	45.4	720	99.4	92.2
1977	1,411	400	36	413	719	97.5	61.7
1978	2,010	695	65	770	863	96.9	47.4
1979	1,986	850	21	700	660	98.9	54.8
1980	1,330	925	75	650	615	94.7	58.7

Note: *Data on domestic production of wheat are not available.*

Sources: *(i) National Cereals Research Institute, Badeggi.*
(ii) Nigerian Trade Summary, December Issues.

As for wheat production, the data from domestic sources are not readily available; all that could be obtained are production figures for 1975 and 1980 which were 20,000 tons and 15,000 tons respectively. Wheat imports, however, have shown figures which are several times greater than the available figures on domestic production. Nigeria has been found to possess production potentials at least in four main areas of northern Nigeria, namely, (i) the Rima river valley near Sokoto, (ii) Hadejia on the River Hadejia, (iii) the Yo area near Lake Chad on the Kamadugu Yobe and (iv) Gambaru to the southwest of Lake Chad on the Ebedji river. These four areas have been selected for development under irrigation schemes and farmers in these areas are reported to have obtained yields of between 1,200 to 1,800 lb of grain per acre (1,345 to 2,018 kg per ha). Results of variety trials at the Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria, indicate mean yield of between 3,032 and 6,971 kg per ha (ANDREWS, 1968).

MAJOR SOURCES OF CEREALS IMPORTS, 1970–79

Nigeria has had its imports of maize, wheat and rice largely from Europe and America (Table 3). In actual fact, the USA remained the single largest supplier of these cereal crops to Nigeria, supplying 46.8 percent of maize, 48.6 percent of rice and 84.5 percent of wheat.

Table 3: Major Sources of Nigeria's Cereals Imports 1970–79

Sources	Maize (%)	Rice (%)	Wheat (%)
U.S.A.	46.8	48.6	84.5
U.K.	15.3	13.2	–
GDR	8.6	14.8	–
Netherlands	–	9.2	5.8
France	–	8.1	1.5
Canada	–	–	5.5
African countries*	16.8	2.3	–
Total supplied	87.5	96.2	97.3

Note: **These include Cameroun, Benin Republic and Liberia.*
Source: *Nigeria Trade Summary Dec. Issues, 1970–79.*

MODEL SPECIFICATION AND REGRESSION RESULTS

Based upon the postulates of economic theory, data availability and the operation of the Nigerian economy, it is hypothesised that the Nigeria's import demand function for maize, wheat and rice may be characterised by equation d:

$$X_{it} = f(C_{it}, Y_t, E_{t-1}, D_{it-1}, P_t, U_{it}) \ldots\ldots (1)$$

where

X_{it} = quantity in metric tonnes of the ith cereal food import in year t,

C_{it} = unit landing cost of the ith cereal food import deflated by the corresponding consumer price index for food,

Y_t = real national income (deflator was the food price index),

E_{t-1} Nigeria's external reserves (without gold) lagged one year,

D_{it-1} Index of domestic production of the ith cereal crop lagged one year,

P_t = population estimates and,

U_{it} = error term in respect of the ith cereal crop.

Positive signs are expected on the coefficients of Y_t, E_{t-1} and P_t while the coefficients of C_{it} and D_{it-1} are expected to bear negative signs.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The ordinary Least Squares was used to estimate the parameters of the above function and the results are presented in equations 2, 3 and 4 below. (The Standard errors are in the brackets).

$$\underline{\text{RICE}}\quad \text{Log}X_{1t} = -3.23 - \underset{(0.59)}{1.17}\text{Log}C_{1t} + \underset{(0.47)}{1.04}\text{Log}Y_t + \underset{(0.27)}{1.08}\text{Log}E_{t-1}$$

$$+ \underset{(0.24)}{0.56}\text{Log}D_{1t-1} + \underset{(1.64)}{3.48}\text{Log}P_t \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \quad (2)$$

$$R^2 = 0.74,\ F = 17.23,\ D.W. = 1.65$$

$$\underline{\text{MAIZE}}\quad \text{Log}X_{2t} = 86.78 - \underset{(0.63)}{1.24}\text{Log}C_{2t} + \underset{(1.25)}{0.52}\text{Log}Y_t + \underset{(0.10)}{0.21}\text{Log}E_{t-1}$$

$$- \underset{(0.38)}{0.83}\text{Log}D_{2t-1} + \underset{(4.78)}{12.10}\text{Log}P_t \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots \quad (3)$$

$$R^2 = 0.91,\ F = 56.76,\ D.W. = 1.66$$

$$\underline{\text{WHEAT}}\quad \text{Log}X_{3t} = 5.68 - \underset{(0.43)}{0.73}\text{Log}C_{3t} + \underset{(0.40)}{0.87}\text{Log}Y_t + \underset{(0.05)}{0.16}\text{Log}E_{t-1}$$

$$+ \underset{(1.00)}{2.03}\text{Log}P_t \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots \quad (4)$$

$$R^2 = 0.61,\ F = 9.57,\ D.W. = 2.20$$

The above results show that the postulated explanatory variables explain between 61 and 91 percent of the variations in the quantities of the cereal foods studied. The standard errors reveal that the coefficients of the unit landing cost are consistently non-significant at the 5 percent level for the three cereal foodstuffs. This evidence tends to suggest that although the variable might have some impact on the quantities of cereal imports, this influence is rather a weak one. The only other variable whose coefficient is not significant at the 5 percent level is $\text{Log}Y_t$ in equation (3).

The Durbin-Watson (D.W.) statistic was subjected to the serial correlation test, and the test showed absence of auto-correlated residuals at the 5 percent level. The overall result as evaluated by the «F» statistic supported the theoretical construct at the 5 percent level for all the three commodities.

The sign on the coefficient of each of the variables is consistent with a priori expectation with the exception of the positive sign on the coefficient of D_{it-1} which suggests that an increase in the quantity of domestic rice production causes larger rice imports, other things being held constant. From the standpoint of logical reasoning, this seems to characterise perverse behaviour. However, when viewed from the Nigerian socio-economic context, this behaviour may be rationalised by the quality factor argument. It is common knowledge that the domestic rice production is poorer in quality relative to the imported rice varieties. As incomes increase over time, there seems to be a tendency for households to shift their preference to the imported rice varieties even in spite of increases in local production.

When step-wise regression was applied in the rice model, the result revealed that the national income variable accounted for 55.3 per cent of the change in R^2, followed by population (11.2 percent), external reserves (9.3 percent), unit landing cost (3 percent) and index of domestic production 0.10 percent. For maize, population variable contributed 90.4 percent to the change in R^2 while the remaining variables together accounted for 2.1 percent. The step-wise regression for wheat also showed population variable as contributing 55.5 percent of the change in R^2, followed by the national income (6.4 percent), foreign exchange (4.4 percent) and the unit landing (0.08 percent).

To improve our economic understanding of the results, the income elasticity coefficients as well as the marginal propensities to import (MPI) the cereal commodities were computed and presented in table 4. The table reveals that Nigeria has a rather high MPI for cereal food commodities.

Table 4: Nigeria's estimated income elasticity of cereal imports and MPI

Commodity	MPI	Income Elasticity
Maize	0.0001	0.5200
Rice	0.0017	1.0410
Wheat	0.0054	0.8730

Source: *Computed from the results of the analysis.*

For example, an increase of one million naira in the national income, other things remaining fixed, will, on the average, encourage the import of 1,700 metric tonnes of rice, 5,400 metric tonnes of wheat and 100 metric tonnes of maize. These expenditures are surely an avoidable drain on the nation's scarce and dwindling foreign reserves as these commodities can be produced in sufficient quantities locally and the qualities improved so that they can be comparable in quality with the imported varieties.

The table also indicates that the import demand for rice is income elastic, suggesting that this commodity is regarded as a luxury item which must be highly income sensitive. As for the import demand for maize and wheat, the table reveals they are income inelastic, but their magnitudes are sufficiently large to give rise to some concern, especially from the political economy point of view. Nigeria can produce larger quantities of maize from domestic sources to meet national requirements and can possibly do so to a lesser extent with respect to wheat.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence of this analysis has shown that much of the imports of maize, wheat and rice in Nigeria between 1950 and 1979 were caused by factors such as increases in population, national income, foreign exchange reserves and shortages in domestic production. The effect of changes in unit landing costs was found to be significant statistically. Thus, raising import duties as a policy measure to control the import of these commodities may not have much of the desired result. In the alternative, however, the government may place these items on licence so as to regulate the amount that is imported. Thus, physical control measure will prove more effective than fiscal measures.

The crucial policy variables which should be manipulated are national income, population growth and shortages in domestic production. As regards the national income what needs be done is to affect redistribution in such a manner that favours the masses of the low-income class. It is a known fact that most of the imported foods in Nigeria are purchased by high income urban dwellers who have acquired strong tastes for foreign foods as revealed by ADESIMI and LADIPO (1979). A redistribution of income in favour of the low income group will tend to reduce the purchasing power of the relatively few powerful rich. It is, however, recognised that as income is more evenly distributed, the «demonstration effect» may cause the low-income class to consume more imported foodstuffs. This, of course, may not be true for all, particularly for the rural people.

The second policy measure of significance is the control of population growth. This is a long-term measure. In all the regression results, the population variable was found to be an important factor which contributed to the increase in the import demand. It should be pointed out that apart from the impact of population growth on food demand, population growth also affects food supply through its influence on the land-man ratio, household savings, dependency ratio, the capacity to invest in new high-yielding technical inputs and on farm structure and pattern of organisation. In the light of these disadvantages, it is suggested that a national population control policy be formulated which will be implemented by a National Population Control Board to be set up to assume responsibility for working out family planning and birth control programs all over the Federation.

It is admitted that a National Population Control Plan is a difficult program to execute within the framework of Nigeria's socio-political culture. The difficulties will arise because of the practice of polygamy, the preference for male or female children among the people depending on whether you are a southern or a northern Nigerian, the high rate of infant mortality which encourages having many children as an insurance to increase survivors, the ignorance of the majority of the educationally disadvantaged, the resistance of the church to such policies and the overt political advantage gained by states having large population. Despite these formidable forces, it is believed that Nigeria should seriously consider population control measures if food demand is to be kept in tune with domestic production.

On the supply side, the long-term solution inevitably rests on policy measures to effectively increase production and productivity. The various programs reviewed in preceding sections seem to be ineffective because of the lack of political will to execute these plans. Governments should separate politics from purely developmental programs if these are to have effective impact on the growth of the economy.

It is suggested that the strategy for raising food output and productivity should be based on the following two broad policies:
(a) encouragement of small-holders to increase their productivity through the use of high-yielding seed varieties, the use of appropriate fertilizers, irrigation, the acquisition of technical skills by the farmers and availability of credit and subsidy.
(b) encouragement of large-scale mechanised farms to be set up by private individuals and private commercial institutions. The government should restrict its activities to demonstration and research and provision of infrastructures, and should relinquish the idea of direct participation in food production as this often leads to inefficiency and wasteful use of resources.

The idea that small-holders cannot promote innovation and productivity increases in agriculture is not supported by history. For example, experiences of Japan, Taiwan and Korea clearly demonstrated that small farmers could be highly productive and innovative. Coming home to Nigeria, the Nigerian agricultural history reveals that the small farmers substantially increased the production of cash crops to make Nigeria a major producer and exporter of groundnut, cocoa, palm produce and cotton in the early 1950 up to the mid 1960's. This great stride was achieved through the existence of guaranteed markets and payment of remunerative prices.

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RESUME

La croissance phénoménale des importations nigérianes de céréales durant ces dix ou vingt dernières années a posé un sérieux problème aux planificateurs, aux hommes politiques et aux économistes spécialistes des problèmes liés à l'agriculture.

Cet article – à travers une analyse statistique, examine les facteurs qui ont joué des rôles importants dans cette poussée de la demande de maïs, de blé et de riz pendant la période couvrant les années 1950 à 1979. Des preuves ont révélé que la croissance des revenus, des populations, des réserves extérieures et la chute de la production intérieure en étaient responsables. La mauvaise qualité de la production nationale a contribué aux accroissements considérables de la demande pour un riz importé mieux traité.