

## **Rice Production and Food Security in Ini L.G.A. of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (1950 -1999)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper investigates rice production and food security in the Ini area of Akwa Ibom State between 1950 and 1999. Renowned as the “food basket” of the state, Ini is particularly recognised for its prominence in rice cultivation. Introduced as early as 1950, rice has been cultivated in the area for decades, supported by favourable agro-ecological conditions and extensive arable land. Given these advantages, one might expect that rice production in Ini would have significantly contributed to local and regional food security. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, this study utilises a historical research methodology based on both primary and secondary sources. Data were collected through interviews, archival materials, published and unpublished works, and relevant literature in economics and agriculture. The findings were analysed to reconstruct the historical trajectory of rice production and its implications for food security in Ini during the period under review. The study reveals that Ini possesses substantial potential for large-scale production of both upland and swamp rice, sufficient not only for local consumption but also for distribution to neighbouring communities. Such capacity could serve as a catalyst for regional food security and socio-economic integration. However, this potential*

*remained largely unrealised due to a range of political, economic, social, and cultural constraints. It was concluded that with committed political will, strategic government intervention, and targeted support for rice farmers and stakeholders, Ini could fulfil the conditions necessary to be considered a food-secure region.*

**Keywords:** Biological Utilisation, Food Security, Rice, Production, Ini L.G.A., Akwa Ibom State

## INTRODUCTION

The Ini area has been widely recognised as the food basket of Akwa Ibom State, a designation earned due to its extensive arable land and the diversity of both food and cash crops produced, consumed, and distributed within and beyond the region. Situated in what is today known as Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, the area forms part of the Ibibio ethnic group. It spans a total landmass of approximately 245,125 square kilometres and has an estimated population of over 72,000.<sup>1</sup> Geographically, Ini is bounded by Ikono to the south, Abia State to the north, Itu to the east, and Ikot Ekpene to the west.<sup>2</sup> The area is located within the humid rainforest zone, with two distinct seasons: rainy and dry. Annual precipitation ranges from 2,000mm to 3,000mm per annum.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the unique features mentioned above, in addition to its arable and large landmass coupled with its soil specifications, place the Ini area in a very advantageous position to be the food basket not only of Akwa Ibom State but of other areas beyond the state as well. In addition to crops such as cassava, yam, maize, palm produce, cocoa, fruits, and vegetables, the Ini area is also suitable for the cultivation of both swamp and upland rice. While it is not the intent to suggest that rice production and availability alone are the yardsticks for assessing or measuring food security, it is a truism, however, that rice constitutes one of the major staple foods worldwide. Fakayode, for instance, has noted the staple nature of the crop in Nigeria, observing that about 180 million people consume millions of tonnes of rice annually. He observes

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<sup>1</sup>S. B Akpan, V. Patrick, S.I. Udoka. "Analysis of Rice Transmission of Local and foreign Rice in rural and urban markets in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. (2005-2013). *International Journal of Agriculture and Forestry*. 2014 4(1) 6. 18 Doi:10.5923/jgaf.20140401.02

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

further that the crop is commonly consumed as a food crop for household food security.<sup>4</sup> The author mentions, though, that the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) standard requirement for food security minimum is 2,400 calories per person per day.<sup>5</sup> In addition, according to the World Bank, there are four dimensions of food security that determine the concept. These include the physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, food utilisation, and the stability of the three above over time.<sup>6</sup>

Using the above yardsticks, this paper examines the fortunes of rice production in the study area between 1950 and 1999 if the volume and quantity of rice produced meet the necessary measurement to adjudicate whether the area is food secure in terms of rice. It looks at the various policies, projects and programs of government aimed at boosting rice production in the area and the extent to which this has succeeded or not. The challenges and problems faced by rice farmers and other relevant stakeholders will be examined while also looking at the cultivation, production and general processing of the crop in the area.

The people of Ini, like their Ibibio counterparts, have always engaged in agriculture, which formed the mainstay of their economy even in pre-colonial times.<sup>7</sup> As Jato noted, the geographical features of an area determine, to a large extent, the occupation of the people of that area.<sup>8</sup> The same was true for the Ini people who occupy a total landmass of about 245,125 square kilometers, an area predominantly located within the humid rainforest<sup>9</sup> and the volume of rainfall in the area is estimated to be between 2000 mm and 3000 mm per annum.<sup>10</sup> Because of this ecological advantage, Ini people were predominantly farmers who grew yams, cassava, plantains, cocoyam, bananas, water yam and other food crops. Akpabio and Akankpo added that rice

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<sup>4</sup> S. B. Fakayode "Economic Analysis of Rice Consumption in Nigeria". *Journal of Agric Science Tech*, 2010, Vol. 12, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> S. B. Fakayode "Economic Analysis of Rice Consumption in Nigeria". *Journal of Agric Science Tech*, 2010, Vol. 12, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> S. B. Fakayode "Economic Analysis of Rice Consumption in Nigeria". *Journal of Agric Science Tech*, 2010, Vol. 12, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> N. A. Etim, "Perceived Act of malaria on the productivity of rice farmers in Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom state". *Global Journal of Agricultural Science*. Vol 7, 2008, p.38

<sup>8</sup> K. C. Jato, "Impact of geography on Occupations" *Open Journal of Geological Sciences*. doi: 0162.4.6341. p.3.

<sup>9</sup>I. A. Akpabio, G. O. Akpankpo Indigenous knowledge practices and the role of gender in rice production in Ini, Nigeria. *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, Vol 2, No 1, 2003. doi:10.4314.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*

cultivation was also practiced.<sup>11</sup> Aside from the cultivation of crops, the people of Ini also engaged in fishing and timber production.

The vast expanse of fertile arable land in the area is a major factor in the overwhelming numbers of Ini people becoming farmers.<sup>12</sup> The centrality of land to the socioeconomic survival of the people cannot be overemphasised as it is the basis upon which all their activities rest.<sup>13</sup> The importance of land is the reason why from earliest times, there has been a regimen guiding the use and disposition of land in such a way that it remains within family or community ownership.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the land tenure system even from pre-colonial times was communal and permanent alienation was not encouraged.

It is a commonly held belief in Ini that land, apart from being the abode of the living, is also the resting place of the ancestors; hence, the sacredness of the resource.<sup>15</sup> Beyond this, one cannot discuss any economic activity in the area without acknowledging the role of land. Farmers grow their crops on it, hunters hunt their game on land, trading activities are conducted on land and fishing is done on land which harbours water. In his words, land is one of the greatest gifts of God to the people of the area. Land is one of the resources people inherit and bequeath to their children after them.<sup>16</sup> Although the old communal land ownership system still persists in some families to this day, the old notion of the absolute inalienability of land has, to a large extent, faded away. Regrettably, land has now become an item of trade as people buy and sell this precious resource as though it were any other commodity in the market. However, land sits at the heart of the economic activities of the area and one cannot imagine any worthwhile activity that could have been done outside of it.<sup>17</sup>

Farmers in Ini produce food crops for both subsistence and commercial purposes.<sup>18</sup> About 80% of the people of the area are farmers who produce rice, garri, palm produce and cocoa.<sup>19</sup> According to Umoh Edon, there is no family in Nkari that

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<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Ignatius Essien, 49. retired teacher, Itu Mbonuso, Ini LGA on 20 January 2024.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Udo Ekere, 59. Trader, Nkari Ini LGA, on 20 January, 2024

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Ukeme Asuquo. 47 Years, Itu Mbonuso, Ini Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 29 January, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Umoh Edon, 43 years Son of Paramount Ruler of Ini – Nkari, Ini LGA, 29 January, 2024.

buys garri, as it is produced in large quantities and of the best quality'.<sup>20</sup> From the month of March to May/June, it is common to see people very early in the morning going to their farms to either cultivate or weed. In Ini, farming forms a major part of the daily life of the people and their very existence seems to depend to a large extent on it.<sup>21</sup> Besides crop production, livestock is also kept. For example, chickens, ducks, goats, sheep, pigs, and even local cattle in some places.<sup>22</sup>

One other aspect of the Ini indigenous economy was trade. Some renowned markets in the area during the period under study were *Urua Edet Inyang*, *Urua Ekpo*, *Fiong-etok*, *Fiong-aran*, *Urua Ikpa*, *Ogu Itu* in Itu Mbonuso, as well as *Urua Ikpe*. *Urua Edet Inyang* was a weekly market where agricultural products like garri, yam, cassava, palm oil et cetera, were sold not only to indigenes, but also to people from as far as Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, Oron and even parts of Abia State.<sup>23</sup> *Fiongetok* was also a weekly market. *Urua Ikpe* used to be renowned for slave trading during that era, but today it is a major market for farm produce.<sup>24</sup>

Besides farming and trading, Ini people also indulged in fishing and hunting activities.<sup>25</sup> According to Prince Edon,<sup>26</sup> Ibam Ikpe and Ibam Ukod were renowned fishing communities such that people came from other communities to purchase fish from the area.<sup>27</sup> In some areas around Ikpe and Itu Mbonuso, people carried out lumbering activities which are used primarily for carving and other woodwork. Although this industry was not large and engaging as farming and trading, indigenes of the area adopted it as a means of livelihood in addition to farming and trading.<sup>28</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a historical research methodology, integrating qualitative and multidisciplinary approaches to investigate rice production and food security in Ini Local Government Area between 1950 and 1999. Primary data were obtained through oral interviews with key stakeholders, including rice farmers, traditional leaders, community elders, agricultural officers, and local historians. These interviews

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Okon Akpan. 40 Years, Rice Farmer, Itu Mbonuso, Ini Local Government Area, AkwaIbom State, 29 January, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Ignatius Essien 49.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Umoh Edon, 43 years.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ukeme Asuquo. 47 Years.

provided firsthand insights into cultivation practices, production challenges, and the socio-political context of rice farming in the area. The oral accounts were cross-verified through multiple informants across various communities to ensure reliability. In addition, archival materials, such as government reports, colonial records, unpublished manuscripts, and documents from agricultural development projects were consulted. These sources were accessed through local repositories, libraries, and administrative offices in Akwa Ibom State, which offered critical evidence on historical policies, farming initiatives, and infrastructural development.

Secondary sources included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and relevant grey literature in the fields of history, agriculture, economics, and development studies. These materials provided theoretical and contextual support for interpreting the empirical data. The analysis adopted a thematic framework, organising findings around the economic, social, and political impacts of rice production on food security. This approach facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, historical shifts, and systemic constraints within the study period. By combining oral history with documentary evidence and secondary literature, the study offers a comprehensive reconstruction of the rice production landscape in Ini and its implications for local and regional food security.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Rice Cultivation in Ini Area

In the study area of Ini, as in other Ibibio communities, rice is referred to as *edesì*<sup>29</sup> and it is possible that this term might have its etymology from the word 'rice' itself. Official records and narratives from locals show that the rice crop is not indigenous to Ini or any community in the Ibibioland; rather, it was introduced to the area from outside. One unpublished manuscript from the Akwa Ibom State Rice Development Project mentions that rice production activities had begun in the northeastern part of Akwa Ibom State, commonly known as Enyong Creek as early as 1925.<sup>30</sup> That period was the colonial era and the activities of Christian missionaries were still ongoing in the area. According to the manuscript, it was believed that the missionaries introduced the crop to the area after observing the suitability of the terrain for its cultivation.<sup>31</sup>

The colonialist established small rice holdings at Mbiabet, Ekoi, Itu Mbonuso and Ibam Ukot, among other communities, and taught the locals the art and science of

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 62. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Unpublished AKADEP Manuscript titled "Akwa Ibom State Rice Industry". p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

rice production.<sup>32</sup> It is instructive to note that this was the period between the two world wars - a period characterised by food shortages in many British colonies; hence the introduction of policies to boost food crop production in British colonial domains. Over time, some of these rice holdings grew in size and prominence and after independence, the Eastern Nigerian Government took notice of these rice growing areas and on account of the suitability of these environments, the government took over and established government rice farms at Mbiabet, Ikpe, and Ekoi. From these two locations, rice production was taken to Itu where it was planted close to the then Leper Colony and the Mary Slessor Joint Hospital in present day Itu Local Government Area. Rice was also planted at Oku Iboku and Ayadehe, on the shores of the Cross River.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the above narrative, some rice farmers and other prominent individuals in the study area gave a somewhat different narrative. According to the village head of Mbiabet in Ini Local Government Area, Chief Effiong Udoka, rice cultivation in that area started around 1950 and was brought in by Chief Umoh Obo Esiere, who was from Ikot Udo village in Mbiabet.<sup>34</sup> To support this claim, Jahwill, the son of one of the colonial interpreters stated that Esiere was among the few Nigerian soldiers to fight in World War II, in Burma, India. Esiere learned the art and science of rice cultivation during this period and brought this legacy home; upon arrival, he began growing rice in Ini.<sup>35</sup> It was Esiere's experiment that created the awareness that rice cultivation was possible in the area. Whether this is true or not, the bottom line, however, is that the colonial era was a significant period in rice cultivation in Ini.<sup>36</sup>

### **Species and Processes of Rice Cultivation in Ini Area**

Rice cultivation in Ini area started in the colonial era. Over time, different varieties and/or species of the crop were cultivated and processed. These varieties included *nsim-enang*, *7/7*, *cap*, *sesadine*, *tose*, *nta-nta*, *bokime*.<sup>37</sup> However, the varieties of rice

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Effiong Udoka 73, Village Head of Mbiabet, Ini LGA on 20th January, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Samuel Jahwil, 59, Retired Police Officer and Rice Farmer at Mbiabet Ikpe, Ini LGA. 15 September 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Effiong Udoka, 73, Village Head at Mbiabet Ikpe, Ini LGA. 15 September 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 62. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

grown in the area are of two categories, namely swamp and upland rice varieties. The upland rice varieties include FARO-59 and FARO-15, while the swamp rice varieties comprise FARO-44, FARO-51, and FARO-52.<sup>38</sup> Faro-44 is one of many cultivars developed and recently widely distributed in the Nigerian rice sector.<sup>39</sup> Its wide acceptance cuts across different parts of the country, on account of its better quality, higher output and significant production success above average in comparison to most local cultivars. The grains of Faro-44 come in different sizes that range from between 3 mm to 5.5 mm. Other features of Faro-44 include moderate starch content, high malting and germinating quality, twice annual cultivation under irrigation, high yield and good milling quality.<sup>40</sup> It was also very adaptable to the soil in the area and can grow in lowland and swamp settings. The gestation period for all these varieties is between three months and four months except for *bokime* which as the name implies, takes about six months before it is ready for cultivation.<sup>41</sup>

On the processes of cultivation, Akaninyene Udoh observed that it starts with nurturing the seeds in nurseries first before transplanting.<sup>42</sup> The traditional method of raising rice nursery was by soaking the rice in water for 48 hours. That would make them ready for transplanting within 40 to 45 days of sowing. However, swamp rice should be transplanted between 35 and 40 days. Ini area is rain-fed, the transplanting is done between July and September,<sup>43</sup> usually done by direct sowing which involves opening the soil and affixing the already germinated seedlings. This is done between the months of May and June. Depending on the availability of rainfall and other environmental factors as well as the species cultivated. However, rice matures between 3-6 months. After which, it is harvested, parboiled and sundried before milling.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Okon Akpan, 45, Rice farmer, Itu Mbonuso, Ini, 07 April, 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Anozie Adaora "Rice Cultivar Faro 44: Improving Rice Productivity in Nigeria. NIFST May 5, 2015. available from [www.nifst.org](http://www.nifst.org). Retrieved 4 April, 2024, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> A. Anozie "Rice Cultivar Faro 44: Improving Rice Productivity in Nigeria. p .1.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Okon Akpan, 45, Rice farmer, Itu Mbonuso, Ini, 07 April, 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Akaninyene Thompson Udoh, 65, Rice farmer at Ikpe Ini LGA on 20th January, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> D. J. Udo, P. E. Asuquo, B. A. Ndon, N. U. Ndayo, *Crop Production Techniques for the Tropics*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited. 2005.p.16.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Akaninyene Thompson Udoh, 65, Rice farmer at Ikpe Ini LGA on 20th January, 2024.

### Challenges of Rice Production in Ini Local Government Area

No doubt, rice is grown in the study area and is part of what constitutes the staple food in the area. Besides *garri*, Ini people also eat rice, but at certain intervals.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding, there were certain intrinsic challenges associated with the cultivation, production, access, purchase and consumption of the crop in the area. In spite of the vast landmass suitable for massive rice production that could meet not only the rice needs of the area but that of the state and beyond, the rice farmers in the area have not (till this day) been able to meet this potential owing to several factors. Lack of finance is one of such major impediments to realising the full potential of the area in rice production.<sup>46</sup> Many farmers in Ini area are smallholders who cultivate the crop within their personal capacities with little or no support from the government and other stakeholders.<sup>47</sup>

The entire process of rice production requires money whether in the stage of buying the seedlings, catering for them in nurseries, or the labour required in the transplanting process, weeding, purchase and application of fertilizers, harvesting, processing, and even in the distribution stage. Most rice farmers in the area complained of inadequate finance - a situation that militates against massive production of the crop. Enquiring if loans, grants or other forms of support from government and other stakeholders were not available, sadly, oftentimes all they received were promises that were hardly fulfilled.<sup>48</sup>

A close examination of government intervention in the area in terms of programmes, policies and even credit support reveals quite a lot. Over the years and under successive administrations in Akwa Ibom State, there have been a series of interventions by the state government, either single-handedly or in partnership with other non-governmental bodies. An Akwa Ibom State Rice Project Agency manuscript narrated how even before Nigeria's independence, the colonial government and successive administrations established small farm holdings at Mbiabet, Ekoi, Itumbonuso and Ibam Ukot.<sup>49</sup> Many of the promises to assist rice farmers in the area

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 48. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 48. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Umoh Friday Eddy, 55, Rice Farmer at Mbiabet Ini LGA, 20th January, 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Unpublished AKADEP Manuscript. p.1.

were made, with no fulfilment.<sup>50</sup> Whether the above information is credible or not, the bottom-line is as Ajah et al. puts it:

Access to credit facilities by poor rural farmers has the potential of making the difference between grinding poverty and economically secured life as well as enhancing agricultural productivity. However, limited availability of credit service has undermined rural income activities due to lack of capital for investment and has prevented farmers from adopting improved farming practices.<sup>51</sup>

Besides the government, other alternative sources of financing small scale rice ventures in the study area would have been the banks and cooperatives societies, but these too, have been far-fetched owing to such factors as reluctance of banks to finance what they term high default ventures such as small-scale agricultural ventures. Olaiya puts it thus:

Majority of micro and small-scale farmers, whose contribution to agriculture production is crucial, are not benefiting from existing credit sources. The major constraint to this is the reluctance of banks to lend to the agricultural sector and more often than not, the loans that are offered by the banks to the rural sectors do not go to the typical small farmers. Specifically, the reasons offered by the banks for not lending to agriculture are the high default risk, uncertainty and risk inherent in agricultural production and marketing.<sup>52</sup>

High interest rates, unreasonable collateral demands and requests for guarantors that poor rural farmers could not provide made the bank option unattractive. Even when a farmer was willing and ready to meet the above criteria, they were still denied the facility<sup>53</sup>. The result of this deprivation was (and still is) the inability of rice farmers in the study area to fully maximise the potential of rice production, which abounds in Ini. This became an impediment to achieving food security in the area, especially when imported variants of the crop are exorbitant and not widely available.

Away from the issue of finance and access to credit facilities, another factor militating against adequate rice production and marketing in Ini area is the deplorable condition of access roads to and within some of the rice producing communities. The

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<sup>50</sup>Interview with Emilia Udoka 61, Wife of Village Head of Mbiabet, Ini LGA, 20th January, 2024.

<sup>51</sup>Ajah. E.A., Igiri.J.A., Ekpenyong.H.B, "Determinants to credit among rice farmers in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Agricultural Sciences* Vol 16, No 1 2017. Doi:10.4314/gjassv6ii.6. p. 1.

<sup>52</sup>Olaiya K., "Boosting the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria through Access to Credit and other incentives" *Journal of Agro Economics*, Vol 4 (6) doi: 00.1554/agec/1087.p.77.

<sup>53</sup>Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 62. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

nature of roads in many villages in the area was a cause of concern to the farmers, as they often find it difficult to move about or access their farms due to very poor road network in the area.<sup>54</sup> They added that many times, large buyers and/or wholesalers usually indicate interest in coming into the interiors with their trucks to buy from these hardworking farmers, but the poor road conditions, which make the area seem like a “death trap,” discouraged potential clients from continuing with the business. This, in their words, “lowers their morales.”

The state of the roads to some of the rice producing villages in Ikpe and Ekoi areas cannot escape the observation of a cursory observer on a first visit. In the course of gathering oral evidence for this work, the journey from Mbiabong to Nkari clan was such that half of the movement had to be completed on foot due to the deplorable nature of the roads in the area. This was a major problem for rice farmers in the study area as they sometimes find it difficult to transport their produce to markets and other selling points. He narrates further that the situation also hinders accessibility to the villages by outsiders who come to buy rice in the area.<sup>55</sup> The deplorable nature of access roads as described above was undoubtedly an impediment to the food security of the area as it negates the accessibility dimension of the food security concept. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation;

The ability to access food rests on two pillars: economic and physical access. Economic access is determined by disposable income, food prices and the provision of and access to social support. Physical access is determined by the availability and quality of infrastructure, including ports, roads, railways, communication and food storage facilities and other installations that facilitate the functioning of markets. Incomes earned in agriculture, forests, fisheries and aquaculture play a primary role in determining food security outcomes.<sup>56</sup>

As evident from the above, access to food is not limited to physical access only but also entails economic access as well. Economic access is determined by disposable income, food prices and the provision of access to social support. In a study entitled 'Comparative Analysis of Poverty Status of Community Participation in Rural Development Projects of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria' by Imoh *et al.*, which was conducted in Ini and Abak, it was indicated that most people in Ini still live in deplorable conditions with poverty very rife. Most people in Ini are subsistence

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<sup>54</sup>Interview with Emilia Udoka and Okon Akpan.

<sup>55</sup>Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 62. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

<sup>56</sup>Food and Agricultural Organization" Food Security". FAO publication. Available at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org). Retrieved 4 April, 2024.

farmers living below the poverty line with little or no support from anywhere. The obvious outcome of this state of deprivation and poverty is undoubtedly low disposable income which in turn impedes access to needed nutritious food, a major dimension of food security. Besides, the price of the produce is also on the high side for something grown and produced in the area. A cup of the short grain rice variant was sold between 200-300 naira, while the long one was between 300 naira and above as at the time of this research.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, the problem of communal clashes which has come to define certain areas in Ini not only leads to loss of lives and property but also to the disruption of viable agricultural activities, including rice cultivation, processing for consumption and sale. The dimensions of these conflicts were explained by Asuquo and Ekanem thus:

It has been established that Ini Local Government Area is blessed with abundant natural and human resources. However, these resources are wasted through the destruction of lives and properties resulting from political violence, communal conflict, unemployment and organised violence group. Political violence manifest in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing. Consequently, these affect the existing social relationship in the society. Communal conflict aggressively affects food production in the study area. This factor indicates that people, goods and services were often restricted during conflict period. This manifests in high vicious cycle of poverty among households in the period of conflict. As the socioeconomic life of the people is disrupted, widespread hunger, starvation and malnutrition remains a direct and common feature in conflict areas than non-conflict areas. All these factors have led to the inability of the government to bridge the gap between the abundant resources and what is available to the citizens, and thereby constitute hindrance to the growth and development of economic growth in Ini Local Government Area which should provide good life.<sup>58</sup>

Sadly, the above situation has negatively impacted food security in the area. The third dimension of the food security concept is hinged on the stability of food producing areas.<sup>59</sup> In other words, peace and tranquility are major factors for ensuring

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<sup>57</sup>Interview with Sunday Ekandem, 62. Rice Trader at Ikpe Ini LGA. 20th January, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> M. E. Asuquo, A. E. Ekanem Implications of violence in Ini Local Government. *Research Gate Articles*. Doi:10.131140/RG.2.2.24696.21763, October. 2023.p.54.

<sup>59</sup> M. E. Asuquo, A. E. Ekanem Implications of violence in Ini Local Government. *Research Gate Articles*. Doi:10.131140/RG.2.2.24696.21763, October. 2023.p.54.

food security, as no meaningful economic activity can thrive in an atmosphere of crisis and conflict, as experienced in the study area over the years. However, Ini area is capable of feeding the entire state and beyond, but unfortunately, this cannot materialise owing partly to violence.<sup>60</sup>

Another issue why rice production continues to remain in that state in the study area is the use of old antiquated cultivation and processing methods. In their study titled, "Agricultural Co-Operatives and Training of Male and Female Farmers on Improved Rice (*Oryza sativa*) Production Techniques in Ini Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria,"<sup>61</sup> the duo bemoaned how many farmers in the area used old traditional tools such as hoes and machetes, and of course methods which have continued to stifle production due to poor yields. For instance, farmers in the area still soak rice in water for some days believing it would make it germinate faster.<sup>62</sup> The situation also reflected in the use of old, untreated and unmodified seedlings when there are now new improved rice seeds that yield far more than local breeds. The tools are also antiquated and basic, and these have kept the farmers from fully maximising the potential of the area.

Rice cultivation in Ini Local Government Area has not been anchored on modern skills thereby affecting production. The practice is characterised by poor growth and low yield. The current state of affairs where the farmers in the area have small farm holdings and little capital to go into large scale mechanised rice production constitutes limiting factor in production.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, it is important for rice farmers in the study area to be trained in modern and mechanised methods of rice production as this would undoubtedly contribute significantly to advancing rice cultivation in the area. One of the best ways of achieving this is by the formation of cooperatives within which rice farmers could be trained collectively and could even source and secure credit facilities for themselves.

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<sup>60</sup>Umoh Edon, 43 years.

<sup>61</sup>G. J. Etim, L. E. Asquo, S. R. Osu. "Agricultural Cooperatives and training of male and female farmers on improved rice (*Oryza Sativa*) Production techniques in Ini Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, Vol. 26((9) 1583-1589, September, 2022. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jasem.v2619.18>.

<sup>62</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>G. J. Etim, L. E. Asquo, S. R. Osu. "Agricultural Cooperatives and training of male and female farmers on improved rice (*Oryza Sativa*) Production techniques in Ini Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, Vol. 26((9) 1583-1589, September, 2022. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jasem.v2619.18>.

### **Economic Impact of Rice Production in Ini**

The cultivation of rice is of critical importance to both the economy and food security of the Ini Area. As a staple food, rice plays a central role in the local economy, serving as a major source of income and daily nourishment for the population. Its production creates employment opportunities across various stages, including cultivation, processing, and distribution, thereby supporting the livelihoods of many households. The income derived from rice farming significantly contributes to the welfare of local farmers and the wider community. In Nigeria, rice consumption is characterised by inelastic demand, owing to its deep cultural and nutritional significance and the scarcity of effective substitutes. Consequently, even with fluctuations in price, consumer demand remains relatively stable, ensuring a consistent source of income for rice producers in Ini and beyond.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, rice serves as a substitute in the diet of Ini people. Rice has effectively been a perfect substitute for other local foods, such as garri, yam, and cocoyam, in the area. Rice has played a crucial role as a substitute when there is a shortage of other food items. It helps bridge the gap and ensures the population has sufficient food supply. This has led to diversification by farmers and more food options for the people of the area, thereby leading to food security.<sup>65</sup> Rice cultivation in the Ini area has a direct impact on food security. Increasing local rice production will result in enhanced food accessibility within the community. This eventually resulted in a significant decrease in the importation of foreign rice, thereby stabilising rice prices and rendering it more accessible to the local populace.<sup>66</sup>

### **Social Impact of Rice Production in Ini**

The social impacts of rice production on food security in the Ini Area are both substantial and multifaceted. Rice functions not only as a staple food crop but also as a vital element of the region's social and communal fabric. Its cultivation and consumption have far-reaching implications for the social structure and food security of the local population. Notably, rice farming in Ini often involves communal labour practices that foster social cohesion and a strong sense of collective identity. During

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<sup>64</sup>Godly Otto, Eugene Abuo Okpe, Wilfred I. Ukpere. "Rice Production, Consumption and Economic Development in Nigeria." *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series*, Vol. 21(2), 2021, p.185.

<sup>65</sup>Anon., "National Rice Development Strategy II: 2020-2023." in Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Publication. Second Edition.

<sup>66</sup>*ibid.*

planting and harvesting seasons, community members collaborate in the fields, engaging in shared agricultural tasks that strengthen interpersonal bonds. This spirit of cooperation is further reinforced through cooperative farming arrangements, which encourage mutual support and integration among farmers while simultaneously contributing to enhanced agricultural productivity and food security.<sup>67</sup> Rice production not only supports farmers but also benefits individuals engaged in related businesses such as rice milling, marketing, and transportation. This generates a ripple effect on the local economy and significantly contribute to the sustenance of several homes.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, rice production in the Ini Area has a significant impact on gender roles and the empowerment of women. Women actively participate in various aspects of rice production, including farming, processing, and marketing, which contributes to their financial independence and increases their influence within both their households and the wider community.<sup>69</sup> The income generated from rice cultivation has also had a positive effect on education and human capital development in the region. With a more stable source of income, families are better positioned to invest in their children's education, thereby fostering long-term improvements in skills acquisition and economic opportunities within the community. In addition, rice farming has facilitated social interaction and integration across genders and communities. Farmers from neighbouring towns often migrate to Ini for rice cultivation, and through their economic engagements, many establish marital ties with local women. These unions have fostered inter-community relationships, although they have occasionally led to land disputes between in-laws over settlement rights. Culturally, rice holds considerable significance in Ini, featuring prominently in local festivals, ceremonies, and traditional practices, further underscoring its role in shaping the area's social and cultural identity.

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<sup>67</sup>U. A. Asa, E. M. Archibong. "Social Capital and Food Security among Rural Farming Households in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria." *Journal of Advances in Social Science-Humanities*, Vol. 2:2, 2016, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Ekpenyong Effiong Udoh, Jacob Atser, Ansa I. E. "Sustainable Livelihood Index of Rice Farmers in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria" Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/76303904/SUSTAINABLE\\_LIVELIHOOD\\_INDEX\\_OF\\_RICE\\_FARMERS\\_IN\\_AKWA\\_IBOM\\_STATE\\_NIGERIA](https://www.academia.edu/76303904/SUSTAINABLE_LIVELIHOOD_INDEX_OF_RICE_FARMERS_IN_AKWA_IBOM_STATE_NIGERIA). Accessed on 14th May 2024.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Political Impact of Rice Production in Ini**

The Nigerian government has implemented a variety of agricultural policies aimed at boosting rice production, with the overarching objective of achieving self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on imports. Measures such as import restrictions and protective tariffs have been introduced to encourage local production and shield domestic farmers from global competition.<sup>70</sup> In the context of the Ini Area, the political dimensions of rice production have significant implications for food security. These include government policies, political stability, subsidies, trade regulations, local governance structures, international relations, and electoral dynamics. Together, these elements influence the region's capacity to attain food security through sustainable rice cultivation. To ensure consistent public access to this essential staple, political interventions must be coherent, well-coordinated, and aligned with long-term food security goals.

### **CONCLUSION**

From its modest origins during the colonial era, rice has evolved into one of the principal crops for which the Ini Area is recognised. Despite decades of cultivation and the widespread availability of fertile land, rice production in the area remains disappointingly underdeveloped. One might have expected a much higher level of productivity given these natural advantages; however, the reality reflects a largely rudimentary state of cultivation.

Several factors have contributed to this shortfall, the most significant being the lack of consistent government interest and institutional support for rice farmers. A majority of these farmers continue to operate at a subsistence level, hindered by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited technical knowledge, and recurring local crises. Notably, most of these challenges fall within the remit of government intervention, yet meaningful efforts to address them have been insufficient.

In light of these findings, it is imperative for the government to adopt more proactive measures to support rice farmers in transitioning from traditional to mechanised and commercially viable systems of production. This requires comprehensive training programmes, sensitisation on modern agricultural practices, and infrastructural investments that align with global standards. With the requisite political will and collaboration among stakeholders, Ini Area has the potential to

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<sup>70</sup> Ya Gao, Tianhui Zhao, Xiuli Xu, Agbo Patience Ndidiamaka, "Can agricultural protectionist policies help achieve food security in Nigeria?" *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, Vol. 7, 2023, p. 3.

emerge not only as a leading rice-producing region in Akwa Ibom State but also as a model for neighbouring states in Nigeria.

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