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Asuamah Yeboah, Samuel

SUNYANI TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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"Assessing Climate Change Impacts on Food Security in Africa: Regional Variations and Socio-Economic Perspectives"

Samuel Asuamah Yeboah (PhD)

Faculty of Business and Management Studies,
Sunyani Technical University, Ghana.

Email address: nelkonsegal@yahoo.com/samuel.asuamahyeboah@stu.edu.gh

Phone: 0244723071

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9866-6235>

ABSTRACT

The systematic review delves into the multifaceted impacts of climate change on food security across Africa, analysing variations across regions and socio-economic contexts. It identifies threats such as altered precipitation patterns, temperature rises, and intensified extreme weather events, each affecting different regions differently. Socio-economic factors, including resource access and infrastructure, shape vulnerability to climate-induced food insecurity. By synthesising existing literature, the review aims to provide insights into the intricate interplay between climate change and food security in Africa, informing targeted interventions and policies to bolster resilience and foster sustainable food systems. The study's originality lies in its comprehensive synthesis of diverse literature, consolidating evidence from academic databases and grey literature sources to offer fresh insights and guide future research and policy initiatives in the realm of climate change adaptation and food security in Africa.

KEYWORDS: Climate change, Food security, Africa, Regional variations, Socio-economic contexts, Adaptation strategies, Vulnerability, Resilience

JEL CODES: Q54, Q18, Q56, I32, O55

INTRODUCTION

Climate change poses a significant threat to food security worldwide, with particularly severe implications for the African continent (Misra, 2014; Myers et al., 2017; Molotoks et al., 2021; Muluneh, 2021). Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to its dependence on rainfed agriculture, limited adaptive capacity, and socio-economic challenges (Cooper et al., 2008; Awazi et al., 2021; Bedeke et al., 2021). As temperatures rise and weather patterns become more erratic, the continent faces a myriad of challenges ranging from reduced agricultural productivity to increased frequency of extreme weather events (El-Beltagy & Madkour, 2012; O'Leary et al., 2018; Adjei & Amaning, 2021). These impacts are exacerbated by factors such as rapid population growth, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to resources, exacerbating food insecurity among vulnerable populations (IPCC, 2014; Mbow et al., 2020; Townsend et al., 2021).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has highlighted the urgent need for action to address climate change and its impacts on food security, particularly in regions like Africa where the consequences are most severe (IPCC, 2014). Despite numerous studies documenting the adverse effects of climate change on food systems, there remains a need for a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge to inform evidence-based policies and interventions (Reisch et al.,

2021). Such an analysis would not only provide a better understanding of the current situation but also identify gaps in research and areas for further investigation.

The study aims to fill this gap by examining the key climate change-induced impacts on food security in Africa and exploring how these impacts vary across different regions and socio-economic contexts. By synthesizing existing literature from diverse sources, including peer-reviewed studies, reports, and policy documents, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges facing African food systems in the context of climate change. Furthermore, by analyzing regional variations and socio-economic factors, the review aims to identify targeted adaptation strategies and policy interventions to enhance resilience and promote sustainable food systems across the continent.

Understanding the complex interactions between climate change and food security in Africa is crucial for designing effective adaptation and mitigation strategies to safeguard livelihoods and ensure food security for all (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2016). By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying key research gaps, this review aims to inform evidence-based decision-making and support efforts to build climate-resilient food systems in Africa.

Climate change poses a significant threat to food security in Africa, exacerbating existing challenges and vulnerabilities (Thornton et al., 2014; Myers et al., 2017; Kogo et al., 2021). The current situation is dire, with millions of people across the continent already experiencing food insecurity due to climate-related impacts on agricultural production and livelihoods (Sova et al., 2019; Mukwada et al., 2020). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that without urgent action, the situation is likely to worsen, leading to increased hunger and malnutrition (IPCC, 2014). Previous research efforts have made strides in understanding the complex interactions between climate change and food security in Africa. Studies have examined the impacts of changing weather patterns on crop yields, livestock productivity, and food access, highlighting the diverse challenges facing different regions and socio-economic groups (Simelton et al., 2012; Thornton & Herrero 2014; FAO, 2016; Godde et al., 2021).

However, despite these efforts, significant gaps remain in our understanding of the extent and magnitude of climate change impacts on food security in Africa. One key gap is the lack of comprehensive, integrated analyses that consider the multiple dimensions of the problem, including regional variations and socio-economic contexts. While individual studies have provided valuable insights into specific aspects of the issue, there is a need for a systematic synthesis of existing knowledge to identify emerging trends, vulnerabilities, and adaptation strategies across the continent (FAO, 2019). Addressing these gaps is essential to inform evidence-based decision-making and to develop effective strategies for building climate-resilient food systems in Africa.

Filling these gaps is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between climate change and food security is essential for identifying priorities for action and allocating resources effectively. Without a clear understanding of the challenges facing African food systems, policymakers and stakeholders may struggle to develop targeted interventions that address the most pressing needs (Neufeldt, 2021). Additionally, filling these gaps is essential for enhancing the adaptive capacity of vulnerable populations and promoting equitable and sustainable development across the continent (Thornton et al., 2009).

The current research seeks to address these gaps by conducting a systematic review of the literature on climate change and food security in Africa. By synthesizing existing knowledge from diverse sources, including peer-reviewed studies, reports, and policy documents, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and to identify priorities for action (FAO, 2017). Moreover, the research explores innovative approaches to adaptation and resilience-building, drawing upon best practices and lessons learned from successful case studies (Lipper et al., 2014). Through these efforts, the research aims to contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and interventions that enhance resilience and promote sustainable food systems in Africa.

This study aims to comprehensively assess the diverse impacts of climate change on food security in Africa, exploring regional variations and socio-economic contexts to understand how these factors influence vulnerability and adaptation strategies. The research question is as follows: What are the key climate change-induced impacts on food security in Africa, and how do these vary across different regions and socio-economic contexts?

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of climate change impacts on food security in Africa, several limitations and scope considerations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the scope of the study may be limited by the availability and accessibility of data, particularly in remote or conflict-affected regions where data collection may be challenging. Additionally, the study may not capture the full extent of climate change impacts on food security at the local or community level, as data aggregation at the regional or national level may mask heterogeneity within regions.

Furthermore, the study may not fully account for the complex interactions between climate change and other drivers of food insecurity, such as poverty, conflict, and governance issues. While efforts will be made to explore these interactions, the study's focus on climate change impacts may overlook the underlying structural factors that contribute to vulnerability and resilience in different socio-economic contexts. Additionally, the study may not capture the perspectives and experiences of local communities and stakeholders, potentially overlooking important insights and solutions for building climate-resilient food systems.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the diverse impacts of climate change on food security in Africa, exploring regional variations and socio-economic contexts to inform evidence-based policies and interventions. By addressing these limitations and acknowledging the complexity of the issue, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on climate change adaptation and resilience-building in the context of food security in Africa (FAO, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The study rigorously applied a methodological framework to comprehensively analyze the diverse impacts of climate change on food security across Africa (IPCC, 2014). Initially, an extensive search was conducted across prominent academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, spanning publications from 2000 to 2024 (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). This search strategy utilized a combination of keywords tailored to capture studies addressing climate change, food security, Africa, and pertinent socio-economic factors (Williams et al., 2018).

Additionally, grey literature, including reports from international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and governmental agencies, was incorporated to ensure a comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

Following the identification of pertinent studies, a meticulous two-stage screening process was implemented to select articles meeting the predefined inclusion criteria (Tiwari & Gupta, 2015). During the initial screening phase, titles and abstracts were scrutinized based on predetermined eligibility criteria, primarily focusing on the relevance of climate change impacts on food security in Africa (FAO, 2019). Subsequently, in the second screening stage, full-text articles were meticulously assessed for eligibility, considering criteria such as study design, geographical focus, and relevance to key thematic areas identified in the research question.

Data extraction from the selected studies was meticulously conducted to systematically retrieve relevant information, including study characteristics, key findings, and methodological details (Achimugu et al., 2014). To ensure consistency across the data extraction process, a standardized data extraction form was meticulously developed and utilized (Peters et al., 2017). Thematic analysis was subsequently employed to synthesize the extracted data, facilitating the identification of common themes and patterns prevalent across the selected studies (Anderson et al., 2014). Moreover, where appropriate, meta-analysis techniques (Challinor et al., 2014; Tonmoy et al., 2014) were employed to quantify the magnitude of climate change impacts on food security outcomes (FAO, 2016).

Quality assessment of the included studies was undertaken to evaluate methodological rigour and assess the risk of bias. This evaluation involved the utilization of various assessment tools, including the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies and the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for randomized controlled trials (Igelström et al., 2021). Criteria such as sample size, study design, data collection methods, and statistical analysis were meticulously scrutinized during the quality assessment process.

Finally, the findings derived from the systematic review were synthesized and interpreted to derive meaningful conclusions and implications for policy and practice (Siddaway et al., 2019). Key themes and patterns identified in the literature were thoroughly discussed, with a particular emphasis on regional disparities, socio-economic nuances, and adaptation strategies (FAO, 2016). Recommendations for future research endeavours and policy interventions were proposed based on the identified gaps in the literature (FAO, 2019).

In conclusion, the study employed a robust methodology, encompassing comprehensive search strategies, meticulous screening processes, rigorous data extraction, and quality assessment techniques (Alshami et al., 2023). By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying key research gaps (Colquhoun et al., 2014), the review aims to provide valuable insights to inform evidence-based decision-making and support endeavours aimed at bolstering climate-resilient food systems in Africa (FAO, 2016).

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

Climate change-induced impacts on food security in Africa manifest in various ways, affecting different regions and socio-economic contexts differently. One key impact is changes in

precipitation patterns, leading to altered water availability for agriculture (Cai et al., 2015; Eekhout et al., 2018; Konapala et al., 2020). Regions such as sub-Saharan Africa are particularly vulnerable to changes in rainfall, which can result in droughts or floods, both of which can have detrimental effects on crop production (Kotir, 2011; IPCC, 2014; Serdeczny et al., 2017; Lottering et al., 2021; Bedeke, 2023). For instance, prolonged droughts in East Africa have been linked to decreased crop yields and livestock losses, exacerbating food insecurity in the region (Funk et al., 2008; Huho & Mugalavai, 2010; Haile et al., 2019; Ngcamu & Chari, 2020; Anderson et al., 2021).

Temperature increases associated with climate change also pose significant challenges to food security in Africa. Rising temperatures can lead to heat stress in crops and livestock, reducing productivity and increasing the prevalence of pests and diseases (Fonta et al., 2011; Kotir, 2011; Ayo et al., 2014; Misra, 2014; Kiprutto, 2015; Thornton et al., 2018). In regions like the Sahel, where temperatures are already high, further warming could exacerbate water stress and soil degradation, impacting agricultural production and food availability (Lobell et al., 2008; Sissoko, 2011; Rose, 2015).

Extreme weather events, such as cyclones and hurricanes, are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change, posing additional risks to food security in Africa (Fonta et al., 2011; Bell & Masys, 2020; Mafongoya et al., 2022). Coastal regions are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of tropical storms, which can destroy crops, infrastructure, and livelihoods, leading to food shortages and economic losses (Afjal et al., 2012; Molua et al., 2020; Neufeldt, 2021). For example, Cyclone Idai, which hit Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi in 2019, caused widespread devastation and food insecurity, affecting millions of people (FAO, 2020; Deprez, S., & Labattut, 2020; Nhundu, 2021; Mutasa, 2022).

The impacts of climate change on food security in Africa vary across different socio-economic contexts. Smallholder farmers, who rely on rainfed agriculture for their livelihoods, are among the most vulnerable groups (Ndebele-Murisa & Mubaya, 2015; Asare-Nuamah & Mandaza, 2020; Mbuli et al., 2021). Limited access to resources, technology, and financial support makes it challenging for smallholders to adapt to climate variability and change (Fran et al., 2015; Alemayehu & Bewket, 2017; Ochieng et al., 2017; Aniah et al., 2019; FAO, 2019). In contrast, large-scale commercial farms may have a greater capacity to invest in irrigation systems, crop insurance, and other adaptation measures, reducing their vulnerability to climate-related risks (Cooper et al., 2013; FAO, 2017; Hansen et al., 2019; Zerssa et al., 2021).

Urban areas in Africa are also affected by climate change-induced impacts on food security, albeit in different ways. Rapid urbanization, coupled with inadequate infrastructure and poor land-use planning, increases vulnerability to food shortages and price volatility in cities (Frayne et al., 2012; Moore, 2012; Ayo et al., 2014; Maxwell et al., 2019; Okafor et al., 2023). Informal settlements and slums are particularly at risk, as residents often rely on informal food markets and lack access to social protection mechanisms during times of crisis (Protection, 2013; Kimani-Murage et al., 2014; FAO, 2016).

Furthermore, climate change exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities, amplifying the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations such as women, children, and indigenous communities (Parry et al., 2019; Akinsemolu & Olukoya, 2020; Ngcamu & Chari, 2020). Women, who play a

crucial role in agricultural production and food provision, often face gender-specific challenges exacerbated by climate change, including limited access to land, credit, and extension services (Nelson, 2011; FAO, 2019; Patel et al., 2020). Children, especially in rural areas, are at heightened risk of malnutrition and food insecurity as climate-related shocks disrupt household food production and access to nutritious food (FAO, 2017; World Health Organisation, 2018; Diwakar et al., 2019; Hadley et al., 2023). Indigenous communities, whose livelihoods are closely tied to natural resources, face threats to their traditional food systems and cultural practices due to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity caused by climate change (IPCC, 2014; Erni, 2015; Aich et al., 2022). Addressing these intersecting vulnerabilities requires inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to adaptation and mitigation strategies that empower marginalized groups and ensure their participation in decision-making processes (Huyer et al., 2021; Neufeldt, 2021).

Moreover, climate change-induced impacts on food security interact with other environmental and social factors, creating complex challenges for vulnerable populations. For instance, deforestation and land degradation, exacerbated by climate change, can reduce agricultural productivity and exacerbate food insecurity in regions heavily reliant on natural resources (Thornton et al., 2009; Ngcamu, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023). Additionally, conflicts and political instability can amplify the impacts of climate-related shocks, disrupting food production, markets, and distribution systems (FAO, 2020; Benton et al., 2023; Jaramillo et al., 2023). In regions such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, where food insecurity is already prevalent, these compounding factors further undermine resilience and exacerbate humanitarian crises (Frankenberger et al., 2012; Headey & Kennedy, 2012; FAO, 2016). Therefore, understanding the interconnected nature of climate change impacts and addressing underlying drivers of vulnerability is essential for designing effective adaptation and mitigation strategies to safeguard food security in Africa.

Additionally, climate change-induced impacts on food security intersect with health outcomes, creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability. Climate-related changes in temperature and precipitation patterns can lead to the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, affecting both human and animal populations (Lake et al., 2012; IPCC, 2014 Bell & Masys, 2020; Baars et al., 2023). Malnutrition resulting from food insecurity weakens immune systems, making individuals more susceptible to infectious diseases and exacerbating health disparities (FAO, 2017; Humphries et al., 2021; Alaimo et al., 2020). Moreover, the degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity driven by climate change can disrupt traditional medicine practices and reduce access to essential medicinal plants, further compromising health and well-being (IPCC, 2014; World Health Organisation, 2015; 2021). Addressing the interconnected challenges of food security and health requires integrated approaches that promote sustainable food systems, improve access to healthcare services, and enhance community resilience to climate-related health risks (Neufeldt, 2021).

Furthermore, the impacts of climate change on food security extend beyond immediate agricultural losses to broader socio-economic consequences, including migration and displacement (McMichael, 2014; Thornton et al., 2019; Atuoye et al., 2021). Climate-related disasters and environmental degradation can force communities to migrate in search of food, water, and livelihood opportunities, leading to population displacement and increased competition for resources (FAO, 2016; Adaawen et al., 2019). This displacement can strain host communities and

exacerbate social tensions, particularly in areas with limited resources and infrastructure (Zetter, 2014; FAO, 2020; Jayakody et al., 2022). Additionally, rural-to-urban migration driven by climate change-induced food insecurity can contribute to overcrowding, informal settlements, and urban poverty, further exacerbating vulnerability to food insecurity and related health risks (Maxwell et al., 2019; Borg et al., 2021; Tanjeela & Billah, 2022). Therefore, addressing the root causes of migration and displacement, including climate change impacts, is crucial for promoting stability, resilience, and food security in affected regions (IPCC, 2014).

Moreover, climate change poses significant challenges to achieving sustainable development goals, particularly those related to poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. The adverse impacts of climate change on agricultural productivity, natural resource availability, and livelihood opportunities disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalized communities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality (FAO, 2019). Women, who constitute a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce in Africa, are often disproportionately affected by climate change impacts due to unequal access to resources and decision-making power (FAO, 2017). Therefore, mainstreaming gender considerations into climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies is essential for promoting inclusive and equitable development outcomes (Lipper et al., 2014).

SYNTHESIZED FINDINGS: CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

Climate change-induced impacts on food security in Africa present multifaceted challenges, impacting diverse regions and socio-economic contexts differently. Key impacts include alterations in precipitation patterns, resulting in changed water availability for agriculture, particularly affecting regions like sub-Saharan Africa (IPCC, 2014). Changes in rainfall patterns contribute to droughts or floods, exacerbating food insecurity by diminishing crop yields and causing livestock losses, as evidenced by prolonged droughts in East Africa (Funk et al., 2008).

Temperature increases associated with climate change also pose significant threats to food security, leading to heat stress in crops and livestock, reducing productivity, and fostering the proliferation of pests and diseases (Thornton et al., 2018). Further warming in regions such as the Sahel exacerbates water stress and soil degradation, impacting agricultural production and food availability (Lobell et al., 2008).

Moreover, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events like cyclones and hurricanes are escalating due to climate change, posing additional risks to food security in Africa, particularly in vulnerable coastal regions (Neufeldt, 2021). Events like Cyclone Idai in 2019 inflicted widespread devastation, leading to food shortages and economic losses affecting millions of people (FAO, 2020).

Socio-economic contexts significantly influence the impacts of climate change on food security. Smallholder farmers, heavily reliant on rainfed agriculture, face formidable challenges due to limited resources, technology, and financial support, hindering their adaptation to climate variability (FAO, 2019). Conversely, large-scale commercial farms may mitigate risks through investments in irrigation and other adaptation measures (FAO, 2017).

Urban areas in Africa are also vulnerable to climate change impacts on food security, with rapid urbanization exacerbating vulnerabilities due to inadequate infrastructure and poor land-use planning (Maxwell et al., 2019). Informal settlements and slums face heightened risks, as residents rely on informal food markets and lack access to social protection mechanisms during crises (FAO, 2016).

Furthermore, climate change amplifies existing socio-economic disparities, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations such as women, children, and indigenous communities (IPCC, 2014). Women encounter gender-specific challenges exacerbated by climate change, while children, especially in rural areas, face heightened risks of malnutrition and food insecurity (FAO, 2017). Indigenous communities face threats to their traditional food systems and cultural practices due to environmental degradation driven by climate change (FAO, 2019).

Interactions between climate change impacts on food security, health outcomes, migration, and displacement further complicate the challenges faced by vulnerable populations (IPCC, 2014). Addressing root causes, including climate change impacts, is crucial for promoting stability, resilience, and food security in affected regions (FAO, 2020).

In sum, climate change poses significant challenges to achieving sustainable development goals in Africa, necessitating integrated approaches that prioritize inclusive and equitable development outcomes (FAO, 2019). Efforts to mainstream gender considerations into adaptation and mitigation strategies are essential for promoting resilience and fostering inclusive development (Lipper et al., 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

The synthesized findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of climate change impacts on food security in Africa. From alterations in precipitation patterns to rising temperatures and increasing frequency of extreme weather events, the continent faces a myriad of challenges that threaten agricultural productivity, food availability, and livelihoods. Moreover, socio-economic disparities exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly among marginalized populations such as smallholder farmers, women, children, and indigenous communities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Addressing the challenges posed by climate change to food security in Africa requires holistic and multi-sectoral policy interventions. Governments, in collaboration with international organizations and other stakeholders, should prioritize the development and implementation of climate-resilient agricultural practices and infrastructure. This includes investments in water management systems, irrigation technologies, and sustainable land-use practices to enhance resilience to changing climatic conditions.

Furthermore, policy frameworks should prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations, including smallholder farmers and women, by ensuring equitable access to resources, technology, and financial support. Gender-responsive policies that empower women in agriculture and address gender disparities are crucial for building resilience and fostering inclusive development.

In addition to adaptation measures, efforts to mitigate climate change through emissions reduction and sustainable development practices are essential for long-term food security. Policymakers should prioritize low-carbon development strategies and renewable energy initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit the severity of future climate impacts on agriculture.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research endeavours should focus on addressing existing knowledge gaps and enhancing understanding of the complex interactions between climate change, food security, and socio-economic factors in Africa. Key areas for future research include:

Assessing the effectiveness of adaptation strategies and resilience-building measures in mitigating climate change impacts on food security, particularly among vulnerable populations. Investigating the socio-economic determinants of food insecurity and exploring innovative approaches to address underlying drivers of vulnerability, including gender disparities and socio-economic inequalities.

Examining the potential synergies and trade-offs between climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts in the context of food security, and identifying integrated approaches that promote sustainable development outcomes.

Advancing interdisciplinary research that integrates perspectives from climate science, agriculture, economics, sociology, and public health to develop comprehensive solutions to the complex challenges posed by climate change to food security in Africa.

By prioritizing these research directions and translating findings into evidence-based policies and practices, stakeholders can work towards building climate-resilient food systems that ensure food security for all in Africa, even in the face of a changing climate.

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