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IMPACT OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ON THE MUMUYE PEOPLE IN ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY IN ZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the multifaceted role of the United Methodist Church (U.M.C.) in promoting food security among the Mumuye people in Zing Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria. Through a combination of agricultural development programs, women's empowerment initiatives, health services, and emergency relief efforts, the U.M.C. has significantly contributed to improving food availability and sustainability in the region. The research employs qualitative methods, including interviews with local stakeholders and analysis of U.M.C-sponsored initiatives, to assess the church's impact in enhancing food security in Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. Findings reveal that, U.M.C interventions have improved crop yields, diversified households diet, empowered women, and mitigated the impact of climate related risk. There are also challenges of limited funding, lack of access to mechanisation, high dependency on external aids. The study recommends strengthening partnership between faith based organisations and Government agencies by expanding agricultural training, empowerments and promoting climate- smart farming. In conclusion, food insecurity in Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria has been a nagging challenge, which the U.M.C act as model for enhancing food security in Zing Local Government by providing necessary support. To enhance food security in Zing Local Government Area among the Mumuye should be champion in order to salvaged the entire land from food insecurity.

Keywords: Food security, Mumuye, United Methodist Church, Zing and Sustainable Agriculture



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Introduction

The Mumuye people are the largest ethnic group in Taraba State, primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture, with yam being the predominant crop. Despite their agricultural prowess, the community faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, traditional farming methods, and limited access to markets, which hinder their economic growth and food security (Daily Trust, 2024). Like many agrarian societies in Nigeria, they face challenges such as climate change, poor infrastructure, and limited access to modern farming techniques. These challenges often result in food insecurity and poverty, especially in rural communities like Zing.

Food insecurity remains a pressing issue in many parts of Nigeria, particularly among rural communities like the Mumuye people in Zing LGA. The United Methodist Church has played a pivotal role in addressing this challenge by implementing various programs aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity, empowering women, and providing essential health services. This paper explores the extent of the UMC's involvement and its impact on food security among the Mumuye people. U.M.C.'s Agricultural Development Programs. The U.M.C. has initiated several agricultural development programs to support the Mumuye farmers. In view of the above, the paper seeks to unravel the impact of the United Methodist Church on the Mumuye people in enhancing food security in Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the impact of the United Methodist Church (U.M.C.) on enhancing food security among the Mumuye people in Zing Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. It aims to assess how faith-based agricultural interventions contribute to improving rural livelihoods, increasing food availability, and promoting sustainable development in the region.

The study focuses specifically on U.M.C-sponsored programs and their influence on smallholder farming, women's empowerment, nutrition, and disaster relief. It evaluates both material support (such as provision of improved seeds, farming tools, and food aid) and capacity-building initiatives (including training in modern farming techniques, food processing, and health education).

The scope of the study is limited to Zing LGA, where the Mumuye people form the majority population and where U.M.C. has established a strong presence through churches, clinics, and development projects. This research draws from field interviews, church records, and secondary data to provide an evidence-based analysis of the role of faith-based organizations in addressing food insecurity in rural northern Nigeria.

Brief History of Mumuye People

It is really qualitative to reckon with most of the sources obtainable or reliable on the origin of the Mumuye, which most oral accounts of tradition claim that, Mumuye originated from Egypt from there to their present home at Yorro (Nyazing 1998). On a similar note, (Dong et al 2001) observed also that, "Mumuye migrated from Egypt and settled at Kang, they moved upward North and settled at Yorro hill from hence, they migrate to other places like Appawa,



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Monkin, Pupule, Lamma, Bitako, Kakulu, Yonko, Jeng, Zang, Manang, Dila, Kayya, Gampu, Dong, Mika, Binyeri, Jada, Kwajji, Manang, Mabang, Sensi-Nyapu, Tola, Sagwe, Bivirki, Kozang, Dongkin, Yorro Bang, Gangtakani, Volashaki, Kotsensi, Danzang, Tola etc.” (2001).

Another excerpt on the origin of the Mumuye posits that:

Mumuye originated from ancient Egypt Empire. They migrated into their present location during the Fulani Jihad, which extended from 17th century to early 19 centuries, along with their neighbors, whom they have much in common. They Mumuye fled Southwards into the hills of Eastern Nigeria where they were divided in small communities that remained relatively isolated from one another (Nyabun, 2014).

Meek (qtd. in Neyt 2006) remarked on Mumuye habitation in this excerpt thus:

Mumuye live in the foothills of the Shebsi Mountains not far from the southern banks of the upper Benue. They occupy the upper highlands and several rock-strewn pockets in the mountains. They originated according to several sources; they came from the south west either from the region of Kam [Kang], or from the area around Cross River.

Literally speaking, Yorro means “a stock” or where Mumuye originated from or settled before migrating to other places”. Yorro could also mean a cave that housed the Mumuye unleaven Kang (Reeti, Oral Interview). Kang means “all” meaning: where all Mumuye once settled before migrating to Yorro. Kang is also a settlement between Garba- Chede in Bali Local Government Area, Taraba State, North Eastern Nigeria. However, because of wrong pronunciation, it was misspelled and written Kam instead of Kang which stand to be corrected despite repeated and wrong spellings (Nyameh, Oral Interview).

As succinctly further observed, the land at Kang became too small due to rise in population, explosion and threatening cases of *nwungvaa* (witchcraft) the next option was to resettled at Yorro (Nyazing 1997). Hence, Kang became their first settlement in Kwararafa territory (Esthons, Oral Interview). But they were not originally part of the Kwararafa kingdom in terms of ancestral descent because there is no common apology that associated them with Kwararafa Empire (Nyabun 2014).

In the same vein, Bonzena also asserts that Mumuye came to Adamawa province through Postiskum. They were together with the Kare- Kare people of Yobe State, and they were later on driven further North East (3). It is very interesting to note also that the exact stay at Kang was probably approximated to be during the stone Age, while that of Yorro was also probably during the Iron Age (Dong et al 2001).

On the exact and historical origin of Mummy, there would be more facts to emerged as curiosity of researchers or historians deepened in excavating the exact place of origin. Other sources would just have to be accepted since the work of archaeologists and historians are still ongoing.

Brief History of Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State

Zing Local Government Area was created in 1976 during nationwide Local Government reforms carried out under the military regime of General Murtala Ramat Mohammed who was the then Head of the State. Zing Local Government Area is one of the sixteen LGAs in



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Taraba State, located in the northeastern part of Nigeria. Formerly known as Zinna, the area was renamed Zing and carved out of the old Gongola State when Taraba was created in 1991. Zing serves as the administrative headquarters of the LGA and is predominantly inhabited by the Mumuye people, the largest ethnic group in Taraba State (Zing, Proud Host of I.B.B Cup, 1993).

Historically, the Mumuye were organised into decentralised communities with clan-based leadership, practicing subsistence agriculture, traditional religion, and communal living. British colonial administrators introduced indirect rule through local chiefs, and Christian missionary activities especially by the Sudan United Mission (SUM) and later the United Methodist Church began in the early 20th century. These missions played a central role in introducing Western education, health services, and modern agricultural practices (Hickey, 2005).

Zing LGA shares boundaries with Yororo, Lau, and Ardo-Kola LGAs, and its economy remains largely agrarian. Major crops include yam, maize, guinea corn, cassava, and groundnuts. Despite infrastructural and economic challenges, Zing has emerged as a center for religious and educational development, largely due to the influence of churches and faith-based organisations (Zing Proud Host of I.B.B. Cup 1993).

Geographic and Cultural Overview of the Mumuye People in Zing Local Government Area

The Mumuye people are the dominant ethnic group in Zing Local Government Area of Taraba State, located in the northeastern region of Nigeria. Zing LGA lies within the Guinea Savannah ecological zone and is characterised by rolling hills, fertile plains, and seasonal rivers that support farming and livestock rearing. The area shares boundaries with Yororo, Lau, and Ardo-Kola LGAs and serves as a major agricultural hub in the state.

Culturally, the Mumuye are known for their strong communal identity, rich oral traditions, and deep-rooted indigenous religion, although many have since embraced Christianity, largely due to missionary activities led by the United Methodist Church and other denominations. Historically, Mumuye society was organised into clan-based, decentralized settlements led by elders and spiritual leaders known as Garkuwas.

The Mumuye are primarily subsistence farmers, cultivating crops such as yam, maize, guinea corn, millet, and cassava. Livestock like goats, sheep, and poultry also form part of their agrarian economy. Despite limited infrastructure, the people are known for their resilience, industriousness, and traditional knowledge of farming practices.

Cultural expressions such as woodcarving, drumming, initiation rites, and festivals (e.g., the Dodo masquerade) continue to play a vital role in their social life. The spread of formal education and Christianity in the 20th century particularly through the work of the Sudan United Mission and later the United Methodist Church has greatly influenced their cultural transformation and socio-economic development.

The Impact of United Methodist Church in Enhancing Food Security in Zing L.G.A. Taraba State



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The Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) play a crucial role in rural development, especially in food security, due to their deep community roots, moral influence, and wide-reaching networks. In regions like rural Nigeria, where Government presence is often limited, FBOs act as vital agents of social and economic transformation.

Community Trust and Access: FBOs, such as churches and Islamic organisations, are trusted institutions embedded in rural communities. Their influence enables them to mobilize people quickly, communicate effectively, and implement programs with community support (Agbiji & Swart, 2015).

Agricultural Extension and Training: Many FBOs provide agricultural education, introduce modern farming techniques, and distribute improved seeds, fertilizers, and tools to farmers. They help close the knowledge gap where formal extension services are lacking (FAO, 2019).

Women and Youth Empowerment: FBOs often lead initiatives in empowering women and youth through vocational training, small loans, and leadership roles—improving household food security and income generation (World Bank, 2018).

Churches and religious clinics contribute to food utilisation by offering nutrition education, child feeding programs, and health outreach, particularly in underserved rural areas.

Emergency Relief and Social Safety Nets: FBOs respond quickly to food crises caused by drought, displacement, or conflict by distributing food and relief materials often faster than state agencies (Tsele, 2001).

Economic Activities

The economy of Zing Local Government Area is predominantly agrarian, with the Mumuye people relying heavily on subsistence farming as their main economic activity. The major crops cultivated include yam, maize, sorghum, millet, groundnuts, and cassava. In addition to crop farming, many households engage in livestock rearing, such as goats, sheep, poultry, and occasionally cattle. Women also contribute through small-scale trading of agricultural produce, food items, and locally made crafts.

Other complementary economic activities include:

- Traditional crafts such as weaving, pottery, and wood carving
- Local trading in periodic markets like Zing and Monkin
- Hunting and forested areas during dry seasons
- Seasonal migration for labor, especially among the youth, to urban centers or commercial farms in neighboring states.

Despite these efforts, most economic activities remain at a subsistence or informal level, with minimal access to modern tools, credit, or infrastructure to enhance productivity.

Agricultural Practices and Challenges



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Agriculture is the mainstay of the Mumuye people in Zing Local Government Area, with over 80% of the population engaged in subsistence farming. The region's fertile soil and seasonal rainfall support the cultivation of staple crops such as yam, maize, guinea corn, millet, cassava, and groundnuts. Farming is typically done using traditional tools like hoes and cutlasses, and practices such as shifting cultivation, mixed cropping, and bush fallowing are common. Livestock such as goats, sheep, and poultry are also reared on a small scale, often serving as a source of income and food security (Zing Proud Host of I.B.B Cup, 1993).

Challenges of Food Security in Zing Local Government Areas of Taraba State

1. **Outdated Farming Tools and Methods:** The continued reliance on manual labor and traditional tools limits efficiency and output.
 2. **Limited Access to Inputs:** Many farmers lack access to improved seed varieties, fertilizers, and pesticides, which hinders crop yield.
 3. **Climate Variability:** Erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, and occasional flooding due to climate change significantly affect planting and harvest seasons.
 4. **Poor Storage and Processing Facilities:** Post-harvest losses are common due to inadequate storage systems and lack of modern food processing technology.
 5. **Inadequate Extension Services:** There is limited governmental agricultural extension support in rural areas like Zing, reducing farmers' exposure to modern farming knowledge and innovations.
 6. **Land Tenure Issues:** Communal and inherited land systems often create disputes and limit opportunities for large-scale farming and investment.
 7. **Poor Market Access:** Bad roads and lack of organised market systems make it difficult for farmers to sell their produce at fair prices, discouraging commercial farming.
8. Another major nagging challenge of food security in Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State is the early sell of farm produce, which buyers followed farmers to their farms and purchased. This has also resulted in a challenge of food security today.

Food Insecurity Profile

Food insecurity remains a significant concern in Zing L.G.A., characterised by seasonal food shortages, malnutrition, and poverty. The causes of food insecurity include:

Low agricultural productivity due to traditional practices, climate change, and poor access to inputs. There are also post-harvest losses resulting from poor storage facilities and inadequate preservation techniques.

Limited income sources, which restrict the ability of households to buy diverse and nutritious food, poor road infrastructure that hinders market access and transportation of foodstuffs and inadequate health services that exacerbate the effects of food scarcity, especially among vulnerable groups and population pressure on land and environmental degradation reducing the availability of arable land as a result, many households experience food shortages during



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the “rainy season” (usually between June and August), leading to reduced meal frequency, reliance on less nutritious food, and increased vulnerability and balanced diet, especially among women and children (Philemon Linus, 60 years, Oral Interview, April18th, 2025).

Role of the United Methodist Church in Agricultural Development

The United Methodist Church (U.M.C) has become a central force in promoting agricultural development among the Mumuye people of Zing Local Government Area, thus, below are samples of the church’s role in enhancing food security:

Land Expansion and Communal Farming

U.M.C. has encouraged the formation of church-based cooperative farms, offering community members access to farmland for both subsistence and commercial agriculture. In an interview, Philip Buba asserts thus: “Our church acquired land not only for worship but for farming and other economic ventures” (65 years, Oral Interview, April 1st, 2025). According to Titus Nyandang also, “these church-run farms grow staple crops such as yam, maize, and groundnut, with proceeds used to support widows, orphans, less privilege and displaced families (62 years, Oral Interview, April 12th, 2025)

Introduction of Modern Agricultural Techniques

U.M.C., in collaboration with international partners such as Global Ministries and Faith and Food Initiative, has trained farmers on sustainable land use methods (e.g., mulching, crop rotation). Small irrigation systems were introduced in swampy for dry-season farming (Nuhu Ibrahim, 56 years’ Oral interview, April 12th, 2025). Farmers here are now growing crops even in dry season using methods learned in church-led training” (Agbiji & Swart, 2015).

Training and Capacity Building

According to Wushi Alex “U.M.C. regularly hosts training workshops in Zing and surrounding villages on post-harvest storage (to reduce spoilage), agro-processing (especially cassava, maize, and soya beans) (60 years, Oral Interview). In another related view, Indiana Davoro maintains also that, livestock and poultry management were well introduced and training on how to take care of them were given by church sponsored trained veterinarians (40 years, Oral Interview, April15th, 2025). As further observed, these are often led by local experts, retired extension workers, and missionaries with agricultural backgrounds.

Women Empowerment and Food Security

The United Methodist Women’s Fellowship has taken a lead role in engaging women in food production and small businesses. They are involved in backyard gardening, small-scale poultry and goat farming (Hanatu Robinson, 55 years Oral Interview). Ladi Briska also asserts that cooperative Tomato’s processing and sales have been implemented” (60 years, Oral Interview 22nd April,). As maintained further, the church gave us training on Cassava and Tomato’s processing. We are no longer just housewives but providers too” (Fahimi Ignatius, 57 years, Oral Interview, 12th April,2025).



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Youth Involvement and Agro-Initiatives

To discourage rural-urban migration, the U.M.C. has established youth farms through the Young Methodist Farmers Club, where youths are trained in crop production, livestock rearing, agri-business and entrepreneurship (Tome William, 40 years, Oral Interview, April 18, 2025). Hence, U.M.C partners with other organisations and stakeholders to address food security issues, leveraging resources and expertise to maximise impact (Wuthnow, 2004).

These collaborations help to promote a more just and equitable food system among the youth (Allen, 2010). According to (Brown & Korten, 1991), partnerships between faith-based organisations with youth and other stakeholders has helped to address complex social issues like food insecurity. Through partnerships with N.G.Os and government agencies, the U.M.C. has introduced improved farming implements and drought-resistant crops training for the youth. These efforts similarly, have significantly reduced post-harvest losses and increased household food stocks with youth active involvement (Adebayo, 2017).

Advocacy and Policy Influence

The U.M.C advocates for policies supporting sustainable agriculture, recognizing the importance of environmentally friendly practices in ensuring long-term food security (Altieri, 2002). By promoting policies that prioritise sustainable agriculture, UMC contributes to a more resilient food system (IAASTD, 2009). According to (Pretty, 2008), sustainable agriculture practices can improve crop yields, reduce poverty, and enhance environmental sustainability.

Role of United Methodist Women in Enhancing Food Security

The United Methodist Women have played a crucial role in advancing food security, rural development, and women's empowerment in Zing Local Government Area. Through their grassroots presence, faith-driven leadership, and social mobilization, they have transformed rural livelihoods, especially among the Mumuye people, by engaging in sustainable agriculture, food processing, and economic empowerment initiatives (Rifkatu A. Istifanus, 60 years, Oral interview, April 18, 2025).

Rahab Jehora maintains also that, "women manage women's cooperative farms across several communities in Zing L.G.A. These farms cultivate key crops like rice, cassava, maize, groundnuts, and vegetables. Women work collectively, sharing labour, inputs, and profits, reduced individual burdens, improved household food access, and Strengthened women's roles in agriculture (61 years, Oral Interview, April 22, 2025).

The United Methodist Church Women promote home gardening and kitchen farms, especially for widows and less privileged households. These gardens supply fresh vegetables and legumes, improving family nutrition and reducing dependence on market-bought food (Esther Jonathan, 55 years, 2025). Thus, excerpt aligns with global research affirming that women's control of household food production leads to better child and maternal nutrition (FAO, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic and local droughts, United Methodist Church Women mobilised food items for distribution to at-risk families. These efforts are often coordinated through church clinics and mission stations, showing the women's role in disaster response



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and community resilience. "when there was no rain last year, our church women brought maize and oil to those who couldn't farm. It saved many from hunger," said Ezekiel Thomas, a local elder in Zing (Interview, April 2, 2025).

Microfinance and Support for Small-Scale Farmers

The United Methodist Church Women offers microfinance and loan programs to support small-scale farmers, enabling them to access resources and improve their agricultural productivity (Yunus, 2003). This initiative helps to empower marginalised communities and promote food security (Ledgerwood, 1999). According to (Morduch, 1999), microfinance programs can help reduce poverty and improve livelihoods among small-scale farmers. Food, clothing, and health kits were distributed to internally displaced persons. Through the "Empower Her" initiative, microloans are provided to women for starting or expanding agricultural ventures and small Businesses (U.M.C.N, 2014).

Challenges and Limitations:

Despite its contributions, the UMC faces challenges such as limited funding, poor rural infrastructure, and resistance from traditional religious groups. Furthermore, climate change remains a significant threat to food security despite church interventions.

1. Traditional Practices/Outdated Farming Tools and Methods: Cultural rites delay yam consumption and continued reliance on manual labor and traditional tools limits efficiency and output.
2. Limited Access to Inputs/ Resource Constraints: Funding and scalability remain issues and many farmers lack access to improved seed varieties, fertilizers, and pesticides, which hinders crop yield.
3. Climate Variability: Erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, and occasional flooding due to climate change significantly affect planting and harvest seasons.
4. Poor Storage and Processing Facilities: Post-harvest losses are common due to inadequate storage systems and lack of modern food processing technology.
5. Inadequate Extension Services: There is limited governmental agricultural extension support in rural areas like Zing, reducing farmers' exposure to modern farming knowledge and innovations.
6. Land Tenure Issues: Communal and inherited land systems often create disputes and limit opportunities for large-scale farming and investment.
7. Poor Market Access/ Infrastructure Deficits: Bad roads and lack of organized market systems make it difficult for farmers to sell their produce at fair prices, discouraging commercial farming.

Recommendations

The study has the following recommendations:

1. The United Methodist Church should partner with all relevant stakeholders such as Government Agencies, Non-Governmental Organization that specializes in food security



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and community development this partnership will foster the exchange of knowledge, expertise, continuous training, sustainable farming techniques, improved seedlings and farm implements tailored to the Mumuye farming system.

2. The United Methodist Church should empower local farmers by assisting them with micro – finance loans, cooperative societies and savings groups particularly targeting women and youth to enhance productivity and reduced poverty related food insecurity.
3. The United Methodist Church should initiate collaboration project with other churches, Non-Governmental Organization, and local authorities to pool resources, share expertise, and advocate for pro-farmer policies and infrastructure, like roads, irrigation, and storage facilities.
4. The Mumuye people should come together to support each other through community food banks by storing surplus produce, during harvest season and distributing them during time scarcity with their communities to ensure that no one goes hungry.
5. The Mumuye people should create social cohesion within communities, to have community garden and collaborative projects that will bring people together and create a sense of belonging and sharing of responsibilities toward food security.

Conclusion

The United Methodist Church has significantly contributed to enhancing food security among the Mumuye people in Zing LGA through comprehensive programs that address agricultural productivity, women's empowerment, health services, and emergency relief. While challenges remain, the church's integrated approach offers a viable model for faith-based interventions in rural development.

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic method combining oral interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted in Hausa and translated into English for reporting purposes. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants based on their roles in church and agricultural activities

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