

COVID-19 Pandemic and Food Security Situation in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The current state of food insecurity engendered by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, especially in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State is quiet worrisome and alarming. This paper critically assesses the impact of COVID-19 on food security in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State. This study analyzes the factors responsible for the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, examine the impact of COVID-19 disease on food security, and examine the strategies used by the Plateau State government to avoid food crisis. Based on the objectives, the following research questions were asked to provide answers: What factors significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria? How does COVID-19 disease affect food security? What are the strategies used by the Plateau State government to prevent a food crisis? Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. The paper identified an increase in the price of food commodity, loss of job/salary reduction, reduction in food purchase, reduction in food production and distribution, disruption of food availability and accessibility as the main effects of the global pandemic on food security in the Plateau State. It concludes that the inability of government (Federal and State) to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened efforts at achieving food security. Based on the above conclusion, the paper recommends that governments at all levels should step up the fight against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Providing testing capacities in all Primary healthcare centres, and security for local farmers to keep the agricultural sector going would be efforts in the right direction.

Keywords: *Global pandemic, COVID-19, Food crisis, Food security*

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Background to Study

The world is far from being secure today due to the reoccurrence of global pandemics. Several of pandemics of diseases had been recorded throughout history, such as smallpox and tuberculosis. The 14th century recorded the most deadly pandemic in human history called the Black Death (also known as The Plague). This pandemic led to the death of an estimated 75–200 million people. Other notable pandemics include the 1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish flu) and the 2009 influenza pandemic (H1N1). These global pandemics had its impact not only on public health but also a significant impact on other areas of human activity, including food and nutrition security, livelihoods, and social unrest (Johnstone, Phillips, Thilsted and Belton, 2020). Today, the human race is threatened with pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and the Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Similar to many modern-day viral epidemics (such as MERS, SARS), SARS-CoV-2 developed from the folds of the food system. It has been alleged that its earliest sign was discovered in the wet market of the Chinese city of Wuhan, where wild animals are also traded (Zurayz, 2020). However, in another account SARS-CoV-2, which is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, may have developed in intensive livestock farming systems, possibly pig farming (GRAIN, 2020; Zurayz, 2020). Apart from the fact that this virus originates from the food system, it also infiltrated it and endangered its systemic weaknesses. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are now threatening the food security of half a billion people, mostly the poor and vulnerable (Johnstone, *et al.* 2020). Indeed, after initial declarations that COVID-19 posed no concerns to global food security, as the world's storage tower was well stocked (Zurayz, 2020), the tone has now changed radically. We are now being warned that global hunger could double due to food supply disruptions caused by the pandemic, especially in poor nations and in Africa (De Sousa, 2020).

It has been forecasted by the United Nations that because of COVID-19, the number of people that would face severe food insecurity worldwide could double to 265 million. The same week, in the United States, the five-week total of job losses rose to a shocking 26 million, pushing millions more into food insecurity (Welsh, 2020).

In Africa, though the spread of the corona virus is at an earlier stage. But there is every reason to believe that impacts will be devastating as governments of South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, and many others, have already begun to shut down many businesses and put travel restrictions in place. The possibility of social disorder in response to the health, economic, and food security crises looms (Howard & Simmons, 2020).

In Nigeria, reports gathered that COVID-19 could double the number of people in low and middle-income facing acute food insecurity by the end of 2020. The catastrophe is still recounting, and the initial observations include the following: transportation and economic restrictions are disrupting food systems; export bans and border closures may make things worse; job losses economy-wide will rapidly diminish the food purchasing power of many households; future agricultural production is threatened by the lack of labour, services, and

inputs; and Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that provide most production and post-farm agricultural services face financial ruin as a result of the economic shutdowns mandated for pandemic control.

In Plateau State, the problem is compounded, because the threat to food security caused by the conflict of interest over land between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers is not resolved. The State is still facing a new wave of food insecurity arising from COVID-19 pandemic. Crops and vegetables are a key part of our global food systems and a highly nutritious food group of major social, cultural and economic significance. Disruptions in the supply of chains for crops and vegetable foods are already happening due to disruption in transportation, trade, and labour.

Against this backdrop, it is urgent to study the threat caused by COVID-19 pandemic on food security in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State. This is because a lot of instruments have been used for achieving some measure of success in issues relating to global pandemics in other parts of the world. These instruments include conferences, summits, meetings, to mention just a few, organized by government and non-governmental organizations for resolving the nature of the pandemic for maximum contribution to the food security situation of the world.

Conceptual Clarifications

COVID-19

Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new corona virus that has spread throughout the world. COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild (or no symptoms) to severe illness (Center for Disease Control, 2020). Cennimo (2020) further sees COVID-19 as “illness caused by a novel corona virus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China.” It was initially reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009 (Cennimo, 2020; Qian, *et al.* 2020).

Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. The virus, however, can be prevented through: social distancing; stay at home (self-isolation); wearing of face-mask that covers your nose and mouth in public settings; avoid public transportation; stay away from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks; clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, and then avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes; wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (Center for Disease Control, 2020; WHO, 2020).

Food Security

Some political concepts have turned out to be difficult to explain or define. Security falls into this category. Etymologically, the English word “security” originates from the Latin word “se-

curus". "Se" means "without" and "curus" means "uneasiness" (Ekot, 2015). That is, "security" originally meant without uneasiness, or a peaceful situation without any risks or threats (Mesjesz, 2004). The English word "security" has a wide range of meanings. Security means a state of being protected from bad things that can happen to you (Ekot, 2015). It also means, to feel safe and to be protected. Real security cannot be bought or accomplished with bombs. There is more to it than that. It is a process. It is the dire awareness that we are all mutually supporting and that one action by one being in one locality has detriment everywhere. Real security is the ability to tolerate mystery, complexity and ambiguity (Enslor 2005).

Food security is a difficult concept to measure since it deals in very broad terms with the production, distribution and consumption of food. The definition that has acquired the broadest acceptance is that of the World Food Summit (WFS) in November 1996: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2018; Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; De-Muro and Mazziotta, 2010). Today, the concept of food security is generally understood to incorporate four main components: *availability, access, utilization, and stability*; although some see stability as a separate cross cutting factor. For a state of food security to exist, all of these components must be sufficiently present (Fraanje and Lee-Gammage, 2018).

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised:

- i. What factors significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria?
- ii. How does COVID-19 disease affect food security?
- iii. What are the strategies used by the Plateau State government to prevent a food crisis?

Aim and Objectives of Study

The broad aim of this study is to critically assess the impact of COVID-19 on food security in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. To analyze the factors responsible for the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the impact of COVID-19 disease on food security.
- iii. To examine the strategies used by the Plateau State government to avoid food crisis.

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted which enabled the researchers to collect and analyze data from a sample of the entire population without any manipulations. The population for the study was all residents in Jos, Plateau State. The sample consisted of 133 respondents included the following age groups of people; 18-25, 26-35, 46 and above years of age living in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State via purposive sampling technique.

A well-constructed Google survey (questionnaire) was used to gather the information needed in this study. This Google form was divided into four sections namely section A, B, C and D. Section A sought for the demographic data of respondents, Section B consisted of items that

elicited responses on the factors responsible for the spread of COVID-19 from the respondents, section C elicited information on Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on Food security from the respondents while Section D sought for the Strategies used by the Plateau State government to prevent food crisis. Data generated through Google survey were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of percentage (%) and table.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

Section B contains question items designed and carefully tailored to provide answers to research Question one (RQ1). Thus, research question 1 poses as, “What factors significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria”?

Question I: What factors significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria?

Table 1: Showing responses obtained from respondents

S/N	Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Air droplets (from patient sneezing/coughing)	42	31.6%
2	Contact with contaminated surfaces	42	31.6%
3	Close contact with people who have the virus	56	42.1%
4	All of the above	98	73.7%
5	I don't know	0	0%

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 1 reveals that the major factors responsible for the spread of COVID-19 are All of the Above (73.7%). However, 42 respondents ticked Air droplets (from patient sneezing/coughing) as the cause of the spread (31.6%). Another major factor as rated by 56 respondents was close contact with people who have the virus (42.1%). 42 respondents also regarded contact with contaminated surfaces as a factor that significantly influences the spread of COVID-18 (31.6%). 0% ticked I don't know.

Question 2: How does COVID-19 disease affect food security?

Table 2: Showing responses obtained from respondents

S/N	Effects	N	Yes	No	Maybe	Total
1.	Loss of job/salary reduction	133	52.6%	26.3%	21.1%	100%
2.	Reduction in food purchases	133	63.2%	26.3	10.5%	100%
3.	Reduction of food production and distribution	133	84.2%	6.8%	9%	100%
4.	Extent of COVID-19 effect on food production and distribution	133	78.9%	21.1%	0%	100%
5.	Disruption of food availability and accessibility	133	84.2%	9%	6.8%	100%
6.	Increase in price of food commodity	133	89.5%	0%	10.5%	100%
7.	Food storage facility	133	5.3%	57.9%	36.8%	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 2 reveals the effects of COVID-19 on Food security in Jos-North LGA. The respondents agreed that the major effect of the global pandemic is increase in price of food commodity with 89.5%. Other effects of COVID-19 as agreed by the respondents are loss of job/salary reduction (52.6%); reduction in food purchase (63.2%); reduction of food production and distribution (84.2%); COVID-19 affect food production and distribution to a large extent (78.9%); disruption of food availability and accessibility (84.2%); increase in price of food commodity (89.5%); and lack of food storage facility (57.9%).

Question 3: What are the strategies used by the Plateau State government to prevent a food crisis?

Table 3: Showing responses obtained from respondents

S/N	Government strategies	N	Yes	No	Maybe	Total
1.	Hunger prevention	133	15.8%	31.6%	52.6%	100%
2.	Sharing of food items and money to the poor and vulnerable	133	10.5%	26.3%	63.2%	100%
3.	Effectiveness of item 2 above	133	0%	42.1%	57.9%	100%
4.	Government effort in combating the outbreak and its effect on food security	133	5.2%	63.2%	31.6%	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

Table 3 reveals the strategies used by the Plateau State government to prevent a food crisis. The respondents agreed that the government effort to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on food security is not enough with 63.2%. Other strategies as agreed by majorities of the respondents were left at probability (maybe): hunger prevention (52.6%); and sharing of food items and money to the poor and vulnerable (63.2%).

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed that the major factors that significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria are air droplets (from patient sneezing/coughing), contact with contaminated surfaces, and close contact with people who have the virus. Others includes crowded places like school, church, mosque, clubs, sports, and viewing centres, thus, research question one (1) is adversely captured. This result agrees with the findings of World Health Organization (2020) and the Center for Disease Control (2020) who listed the causes for the spread of COVID-19 to include crowd places, air droplets from patient sneezing/coughing, contact with contaminated surfaces, and close contact with people who have the virus.

The findings of this study also revealed that the major effects of the global pandemic are increase in price of food commodity, loss of job/salary reduction, reduction in food purchase, reduction of food production and distribution, disruption of food availability and accessibility, increase in price of food commodity, and lack of food storage facility. By this analysis, research question two (2) is adversely captured. In addition, the fact that most of the residents hold that government (Local and State) have not done anything serious to help in the

spread of the pandemic also tends credence to this analysis, thus, research question three (3) is also adversely captured. Against the background of the foregoing analyses, one feels safe to reach the conclusion that COVID-19 pandemic has caused a serious setback to food security of Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State, neighbouring States, and even the Nation as a whole.

Conclusion

This paper explores the effects of COVID-19 on food security in Jos-North LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria. It can be concluded that the factors that significantly influence the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria are air droplets (from patient sneezing/coughing), contact with contaminated surfaces, and close contact with people who have the virus. The effects of the global pandemic are increase in price of food commodity, loss of job/salary reduction, reduction in food purchase, reduction of food production and distribution, food production and distribution, disruption of food availability and accessibility, increase in price of food commodity, and lack of food storage facility. It was further concluded that the Local and State government have not done anything serious to help reduce the spread of the pandemic and its effects on food security.

Recommendations

1. The geographical location of Plateau State is very favorable for cultivation. Therefore, there is need for the State government to build food storage facilities across the entire State to maintain food stability so that in a time like this, the State will depend on its food reserve and also prevent perishable food from getting spoilt.
2. The State government needs to top-up its fight against COVID-19 pandemic by providing testing capacities in all Primary healthcare centers within the State.
3. The major markets within the State are structured in a way that social distancing is hard to maintain, thus, create room for over-crowding. The government should go back to their drawing board and find an alternative.
4. There is need for proper re-orientation of the essence of COVID-19 preventive measures irrespective of the religious and ethics background.
5. Government should be firm and fair in its implementation of decisions in order not to jeopardize the lives and means of livelihood of its citizens.

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