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### THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 CONTAINMENT MEASURES ON LOCAL FOOD MARKETING IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.

By

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#### PROJECT PROFILE

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## PREFACE

This policy brief is the second in the series of communication to policy and decision makers on the rapid assessment project of the *Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED)* titled “The impact of Covid-19 on local food production and informal food markets in Nigeria with Niger Delta region as case study” funded by the *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*.

CPED’s policy brief series is designed to draw attention of key stakeholders to key findings and their policy implications as projects are being executed. This edition which focuses on the effects of covid-19 containment measures on local food markets in the Niger Delta communities is based mainly on the reports and key findings in ten target areas where the covid-19 research project is being implemented in Delta state.

We are very grateful to IDRC for the support to implement this project. We are particularly grateful to the Programme Officer in charge of our project, Dr. Melanie Robertson, for her support to CPED which has enabled the Centre to continue implementation of the research project and the publication of this policy brief. We also appreciate the cooperation of leaders of various groups and community-based organisations in the target communities for their collaboration with CPED in the implementation of the project.

## BACKGROUND

As COVID-19 reaches different parts of Nigeria sometime in February 2020, Federal and State Governments made efforts to contain the spread of the virus. At the national level, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is designated as the government agency in charge of covid-19 preparedness and response activities. A corona-virus Preparedness Group was established at the end of January 2020 by the Nigerian government following the development of the epidemic in China. National NGOs, civil society organisations, international NGOs and UN agencies were also engaged in responding to the pandemic and the effects of covid-19 containment measures. Since mid-March 2020, Federal and State Governments in Nigeria have put in place several measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to the spread of covid-19 across the country. These include lockdowns, movement restrictions, social and physical distancing measures, as well as public health measures. The distribution of cases among the various states in Nigeria is uneven and has resulted in diversified response from the federal and state governments. The degree of implementation and level of compliance from the population varies from State to State; this is related to perception of the government, trust in government directives, and different levels of education and sensitisation to the measures.

Aside from the health/mortality effects of the pandemic in Nigeria, the seemingly clearer effect is the impact of the social distancing and lockdown measures on the economy. How people make a living and access markets is impacted by covid-19 across the Niger Delta region. These

disruptions are driven primarily by restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus. There are emerging signs of the negative impact of covid-19 on nutrition and food security including local food production and the informal economy's food marketing system. This report contributes to a better picture of how covid-19 and measures to contain the virus are impacting livelihoods, especially those of the vulnerable households, food security and access to markets in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The agricultural food system is one of the largest economic sectors in Nigeria, spanning production, industry and marketing services, especially after the ban on the importation of food by the government in 2015. It is also one of the leading job producers in Nigeria. Indeed, over 80 per cent of all food sales in the country is carried out through the informal food markets. Given the structure and the largely informal food production and marketing systems in Nigeria, governments will have to cater for the informal food marketing channels and also put in place measures to make them operate consistently with the COVID19virus containment strategy. Consequently, policies and programs designed to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria must be accompanied by measures to minimize disruptions to the food system. Nigeria needs to seek balance between saving lives and livelihoods. The best approach to maintain this delicate balance is ensuring that measures are pragmatic, dynamic, flexible and localized with the participation of the key stakeholders.

In order to do this, policy makers and other stakeholders need short term data including:

How interruptions in the availability of labour for food production, harvest, post-harvest handling and storage activities, especially for perishables have affected food production and marketing?; How government-imposed “lockdowns” on the free movement of people have affected the transportation of local food products between rural and urban areas and food security?; How the closure of critical food system infrastructure such as rural producer markets, urban wholesale food markets and open-air retail food markets have affected food marketing system and food prices?; How have women, who are key actors in the food production and marketing system, been affected?; and What policies should be articulated to protect the capacity of local food production and marketing.

It is against this background that the present research focuses on the collection of short-term and rapid policy-relevant data to inform government policies regarding social protection for vulnerable households, remote education, and support for informal food markets affected by shutdowns. The study examines the disruptions to food production, marketing and nutrition created by the covid-19 situation and its impact on the most vulnerable population in Nigeria using the Niger Delta region as a case study. It examines the challenges to local informal food production (quantity, types and quality) and processing and distribution in rural communities, food transport to urban markets, and supply-demand coordination problems triggered by the restrictions put in place by government to reduce the spread of the covid-19 pandemic. In effect the documentation of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on local food production and food marketing systems as well as livelihood

patterns in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region is designed to enhance the articulation of programmes that alleviates the impacts of covid-19 on local food production and food marketing in the region in particular and other parts of Nigeria in general

The *rapid assessment approach* was used to collect the required data entailing the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data were collected from 10 randomly selected local government areas including 5 urban and 5 rural areas. Within the selected urban and rural communities a total of 2,000 copies of the sets of questionnaires were administered as follows:

**(i)** 600 Food Producers; **(ii)** 600 Food Marketers and 800 Households. Furthermore, qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions in the 10 local government areas. The survey covered important issues including knowledge and concerns about the pandemic, access to food and other basic needs, employment and income loss, safety nets and coping strategies. The data collected also include the nature and types of lockdown measures imposed by various governments; data on labour availability and various farm input supplies for local food production; data on the frequency of market holdings and the types of food marketed; and data on the impact of lockdown on household livelihoods sources, nutrition and vulnerability.

This policy brief which focuses on the effects of covid-19 containment measures on local food farmers in Delta State is the second of a series of policy briefs prepared from the findings of the study. The remaining part of this policy brief is divided into two parts. The

first section summarises the key findings of the study with respect to local food marketing activities while the second section outlines some key actionable recommendations, especially in the context of emerging second wave of covid-19 in Nigeria which could lead to further lockdown strategies.

## **THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 CONTAINMENT MEASURES ON LOCAL FOOD MARKETING**

The findings of the survey shows that the partial closure of critical food system infrastructure (rural producer markets, wholesale food markets and open-air retail food markets) led to the apparent shutting down of the traditional marketing system in Delta State as in other parts of the Niger Delta region. Partial market closures by government during the covid-19 pandemic prevented transactions between producers, traders, wholesalers, retailers and consumers. With no place for transactions, supply is reduced, prices increased and livelihoods and incomes suffered, creating a major stress on food security. Insufficient and poor access to dry and cold-chain storage compounded the marketing problems, leading to increased food loss and waste. As noted earlier, women dominate the food marketing system with over 72 percent of them as food traders. The findings showed that women comprise 45 percent of the 59.66 percent of the traders involved in retailing of food items and also dominate wholesale of food items. Again, more women have been in the food trading

business for a longer period compared with the male counterparts.

The food marketers are involved in the sale of a variety of food items locally consumed in Nigeria. The vast proportion of the respondents (60.76 percent) are involved in the marketing of arable crop products such as potato, maize, yam, cassava, garri, rice, plantain, vegetable, etc. The marketing of animal products such as goats, sheep, cattle, poultry, etc. constitute 14.16 percent of the traders with women constituting 6.61 percent while men constitute the balance of 7.55 percent which indicates that slightly more men were involved in marketing livestock and livestock products compared with women.

The emergence of covid-19 pandemic and the associated protocol put in place by governments had some effects on the activities of food marketers in Delta State. Government precautionary measures have exempted the movement of people and goods related to agriculture and food products from covid-19-imposed controls. Traders, transporters, producers and businesses in Delta State, report, however, that frequent road closures, police-enforced checkpoints and government-imposed “lockdowns” on free movement of people, limited transportation of agricultural and food products between rural and urban areas. These restrictions reverberate through the food production system affecting food supplies in urban areas and the transport of food produce from rural communities to urban areas. This situation has affected the number of customers and volume of sales. It was found that the vast

majority of the respondents (80.01 percent) reported that the number of customers patronizing them declined since March 2020 with women again more negatively affected with 58 percent of them reporting lower patronage compared with men that had 22.01 percent.

With regard to the volume of sales, respondents pointed out that although government restrictions on movement tend to exempt the transport of local food items and other related goods but there were still restrictions on the movement of farmers living in localities close to urban areas that often come (daily or weekly) to the urban markets to sell part of their crops and return to the village with manufactured goods. These restrictions on rural-urban travel and the closure of rural markets thus affected traditional mechanisms of destocking of local agricultural products by farmers, particularly in collection markets. This situation also affected the marketing of livestock by pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The vast majority of the food marketers (83.34 percent) reported that their sales declined since the introduction of covid-19 precautions by government. Indeed, the sales volume of over 44 percent of the food marketers decreased by more than 50 per cent.

The stock levels of food products being sold by the marketers were also affected by covid-19 as over 76 percent of the food marketers reported that their stock was much lower due to the impact of the various precautionary measures that have reduced the mobility of the food marketers to replenish their supplies. However, about 10

percent of the respondents reported that their stock is much higher while another 9.34 percent indicated that there were no changes in their stock. These patterns of increase in stocks or lack of changes may reflect the fact that sales were poor and hence the supplies remain in stock. About 47 percent of women were affected compared with 17 percent for men.

With the negative impact of covid-19 on the ability of households to generate adequate incomes to meet their obligations, the vast majority of the food marketers (80.00 percent) reported that they provided credit to their customers during the period after March 2020 with 60 percent of them being females while 20 percent were males. It is obvious that women are more sympathetic to their customers during this difficult covid-19 period.

In situations where the covid-19 pandemic affected food production and the movements of food items for sale have been constrained, it was observed that prices of food items increased. The food marketers (80.57 percent) reported that the purchase price of their commodity increased since covid-19 pandemic started. The proportion of the respondents that reported that their commodity price did not increase was only about 18 percent. The food marketers also needed credit in the covid-19 period to sustain their trade but this was not forthcoming as over 88 percent of the food marketers reported that they did not receive any credit facility from any government agency

## ACTIONABLE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The sustainability of local food marketing during and after covid-19 will depend, in large part, on policy responses over the short, medium and long term. Some of the possible short and medium term policy issues are outlined as follows:

**(i)** Regular, consistent and concise communication with clear messages on the food situation is critical to reduce panic, maintain confidence in agriculture and food sector and feel secure about the availability of and access to food. People in rural and urban areas need information on market operations and good health practices when working and shopping.

**(ii)** Although every government will prioritize and coordinate actions based on their assessment of the situation, it is critical that governments prioritize local agricultural food system functions as an essential service that will continue to operate during periods of lockdown, emergency, curfew or other health containment measures.

**(iii)** Food marketing interventions must address all food system channels – modern, traditional (open markets, small stores) and informal (street vendors). Each channel serves different markets and parts of the population, helping to maintain a resilient food system that is imperative to minimizing the impact of covid-19 on society.

**(iv)** Just as governments need to address key regulatory barriers and policy responses that may undermine national and intra state food trade, so must they ensure that the

movement of local food continues to flow unimpeded during the period of covid-19 restrictions.

**(v)** It is essential that food and nutrition care workers be protected against exposure to covid-19, in the same manner as front-line workers and other essential staff. This is particularly important where workers interact with the general public or with large numbers of people, as in wholesale markets, food processing plants, food pantries, or in close contact with clients. Special rules for social distancing, staggering hours, or mechanizing sorting and counting processes can be useful where masks and other personal protective equipment are in short supply.

**(vi)** Allow rural markets to operate with modest restrictions and precautions. Ensure farmers can farm, which may mean guaranteeing supplies of fertilizer, seed and fuel, and in some cases, allowing seasonal labour to move for harvests. Remittances will probably fall, but for those still flowing, transmission from urban to rural areas must be facilitated.

**(vii)** For problems related to food spoilage from improper storage, governments could optimize the use of public and private storage facilities that could be used for emergency food stockpiling.

**(viii)** Food availability at markets in urban areas is declining, especially for fresh perishable foods such as fruits and vegetables and animal sourced foods. Results seem to suggest that efforts should be made to ensure supply of these fresh foods to urban areas. As for most poor

resource populations, informal markets deliver these foods, which suggest that efforts to enable these markets to continue or to find alternative ways to deliver these foods to urban households should be strengthened.

## FOOD SECURITY

**(i)** There is an urgent need for governments in Nigeria, technical experts, food producers, marketers, and other food market participants to share data, information and analysis to develop a stronger understanding of the pandemic's various effects on food security, nutrition and overall food system functioning in real time. To ensure thorough, timely collection and analysis of data related to food systems functioning, several options are available.

**(ii)** In Nigeria as in many other countries, food security is handled largely at the national level. However, during a severe pandemic like this, national governments may be overwhelmed and may be unable to provide timely assistance to every affected region or state. During such an emergency, the most important for governments to focus on is effective planning.

**(iii)** As livelihoods of millions of people are likely being disrupted, food insecurity is an urgent challenge. Among those that will require food services are expected to be urban poor populations affected by the lockdowns and are outside the purview of regular humanitarian caseloads. At the same time, humanitarian support to most vulnerable groups needs to be planned with supply chains for food commodities secured.

**(iv)** Federal and State Governments and other key stakeholders should ensure that the population must obtain the food they need, especially the most vulnerable individuals (infants, young children, women, elderly people, homeless people, people living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, disabled people, and homebound individuals).

**(v)** To end restrictions on transportation and disruptions in markets that may quickly create shortage problems, governments and allied stakeholders should educate the public about the critical need to prepare for food shortages at the household level by promoting responsible levels of stockpiling, home production, canning and food preservation.