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### THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 CONTAINMENT MEASURES ON THE WELFARE OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AND THEIR LIVELIHOODS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.

By

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#### PROJECT PROFILE

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## PREFACE

This policy brief is the third in the series of communication to policy and decision makers on the rapid research 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 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 the welfare of households and their livelihoods, in the Niger Delta communities is based mainly on the reports and key findings in ten target communities 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 COVID-19 virus 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 the welfare of household members and their livelihoods in Delta State is the third 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 household welfare and their livelihood 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 THE WELFARE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR LIVELIHOODS**

Covid-19 has significantly impacted people's lives and livelihoods in the Niger Delta region. The widespread disruption to livelihoods has already translated into loss of jobs or income for a large proportion of the respondents, particularly impacting local food farmers and food marketers. These impacts were also slightly more prevalent among female respondents. While a lot of attention has been given to the consequences of covid-19 for societies as a whole, the debate on vulnerable groups is much quieter. Understanding the extent to which different groups are at risk, and how certain policies and programme can protect and support them, is crucial for promoting effective and equitable interventions as well as preventing the worsening impacts as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. Vulnerable groups include those living in poverty, informality, conflict and fragility, often in overcrowded settings with limited access to sanitation and healthcare and who do not benefit from subsidized wages or unemployment benefits. It also includes

young people, who may struggle even harder to find decent work, women, who lack decision-making power and are disproportionately represented in healthcare, childcare and vulnerable work, and other marginalised groups who may not be able to access the resources they need for their wellbeing.

## **HOUSEHOLD ACCESS TO MARKETS:**

A major challenge to households during the period covid-19 pandemic has been their ability to have access to markets for the purchase of essential items particularly food. The vast majority of the respondents (91.25 percent) indicated that there were times that they could not access the markets to purchase what they needed in their households because of movement restrictions and closure of markets. The covid-19 pandemic had considerable impact on the supply of fresh food items due to the restrictions in the movement of food items between rural communities and semi-urban and urban areas. The inability to perform normal farming and food processing activities led to crop losses and food shortages which affect different communities.

The availability of basic food items such as rice, bread, garri, yam, etc. was equally affected by covid-19 pandemic precautions. A major impediment to food security is limited distribution options. The covid-19 pandemic has interrupted all aspects of the food supply chain, including the logistics related to food handling and distribution. Even when food supplies are available, there are barriers for it reaching consumers, most

especially due to movement restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the virus.

### HOUSEHOLD ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FACILITIES:

As the covid-19 pandemic spreads across Nigeria, many people are heeding the advice of health experts to wash their hands. Many people in rural communities in Nigeria do not have access to running water and soap to wash hands as required by Covid-19 protocol. This is due to inadequate water infrastructure in rural communities and further, the fact that during the first few weeks of the pandemic available hygiene supplies were bought making it difficult for some households to have access to these basic hygiene materials. The survey shows that while 53.50 percent of the respondents indicated that their households always got hygiene materials to buy some 42 percent reported that these materials were partially or only sometimes available for them to buy.

Essential medicines are those drugs that satisfy the priority healthcare needs of the population. As a result of the surge in the pandemic, which led to the inevitable lockdown of the Nigerian economy, there has been a noticeable decrease in production and exportation of raw materials as well as finished products (drugs) across different countries. These greatly affected the ease of access to these medicines by the consumers who need them either for treating acute ailments or for the management of chronic diseases. Nigeria is in its early stages of pharmaceutical development; thus, they rely on importation of drugs, raw materials, and equipment from

other countries, notably India and China. Nigeria is highly dependent on other countries for its medicinal needs. The covid-19 pandemic also caused an increase in the prices of medicines, hand sanitizers, face masks, personal protective equipment, and other medical equipment used for providing health care. Some 47.75 percent of the respondents reported that essential medicine/drugs are not available in clinics and pharmacies within their reach all the time since the covid-19 pandemic while 34.75 percent indicated that these essential medicines/drugs were partially or sometimes available but usually expensive.

### HOUSEHOLD AND FOOD PRICES:

The combination of reduced supply resulting from restrictive measures and panic buying that reduced the availability of certain food has resulted in price increases in markets. Staple food price trends were mixed during the post-covid-19 period through May in the region on a month-on-month basis. Two contrasting effects were observed. The measures reduced business activities and increased unemployment, resulting in reduced demand. At the same time, transport delays including screening of truck drivers at borders adversely affected supplies. The net effect was a slight elevation of prices moderated by reduced demand and purchasing power.

Likewise, the border closure limited food imports, further shrinking the supply chain. These developments have led to increases in price of food items which impacted on household ability to purchase the food they wanted. This observation is confirmed by the

fact that the consumer price index for food has increased all through the pandemic period. It rose from 14.9 percent in February 2020 to 15.18 percent in June 2020, showing an increase of about 0.28 percent within only four months. It rose sharply to 17 percent by September 2020. This is a considerable rise from 13.39 percent in July 2019 and 14.09 percent in October 2019. The survey shows that over 94 percent of the households reported that there have been increases in food prices since March 2020. Thus, households in the study area have experienced dramatic increase in prices of food constituting a major challenge to their standard of living and adequate nutrition.

### **HOUSEHOLD SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR:**

The outbreak of covid-19 has already caused an array of changes in shopping behaviour among households in the study area. It was found that 92 percent of the respondents reported that the covid-19 pandemic and the measures introduced by governments have led to changes in their shopping behaviour compared with the situation before the pandemic. A major component of the behavioural shopping changes relates to buying smaller quantities (85.25 percent). This phenomenon is a reflection of the declining resources available to the households.

### **HOUSEHOLD AND LIVELIHOODS:**

The livelihoods of vulnerable rural households in fragile environments such as Niger Delta region have been strongly affected by the unprecedented

circumstances of the covid-19 pandemic. As traditional resilience mechanisms falter, vulnerable households in Niger Delta are confronting worsening economic conditions and a breakdown of the traditional resilience mechanisms that they rely on. The survey result shows that 94 percent of the respondents reported that the covid-19 pandemic affected their ability to carry out their livelihood activities while just 6 percent reported that the reverse was the case. This is explained in terms of movement restrictions, reduced demand for the goods and services which they provide and their concern about leaving the house so as not to contract the virus. It was in this context that 71 percent of the respondents reported that the covid-19 pandemic had severe impact on their livelihood sources while 19.75 percent pointed out that covid-19 had only a moderate impact on their livelihood.

### **ACCESS TO EDUCATION:**

The Covid-19 pandemic and the containment measures introduced by government had considerable impact on the access of households to key social and economic services. The focus of this section is mainly on education which most households regarded as a major challenge to their welfare and that of their children. Governments in Nigeria closed down educational institutions early in March 2020. School closures prompted by the pandemic are reducing children's opportunity for class room or face to face learning. Closures of educational institutions hampered the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to nutritious food, affect the ability of many

parents to work, and increase risks of violence against women and girls.

Over 80 percent of the respondents reported that they had children in primary or secondary schools during the period schools were closed down by government. Of the respondents that had children in primary and secondary school about 44 percent of them reported that their children have been engaged in some form of education or learning activities since Mid-March 2020 while 37.25 percent indicated that their children have not been in school. For those children that were engaged in some form of learning, these were engaged in a series of largely informal education or training including studying or learning on their own (21.74 percent), taught by parent or other household members (15.03 percent) and session/meetings with lesson teachers (15.0 percent). It is obvious that these forms of engaging the children in education were temporary and not sustainable in terms of advancing the learning programmes of the children. It can therefore be concluded that basically covid-19 has not allowed the children to make progress in their education since March, 2020.

## **ACTIONABLE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The welfare of household members 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)** Compromised livelihoods and especially reduced food consumption in many households call for urgent action. Safety nets and other economic and health policies are needed to address these shortfalls. Currently, few of survey respondents are receiving support from social safety net or palliative programmes.

**(ii)** Moreover, policy options to provide a cushion for the poorest of the poor may face challenges due to lack of data and ability to clearly identify those that would desperately need help. These challenges highlight not only the importance of data collection to facilitate interventions but also collective efforts in a constrained environment.

**(iii)** The Federal and State Governments should expand the coverage of existing social protection schemes to provide livelihood support, otherwise known as palliatives, directly targeted at vulnerable women (cash or food transfers), with priority attention to women in the informal economy and female-headed households.

**(iv)** The Government, private sector and development partners should adopt affirmative procurement measures through the procurement of goods and services from women-owned businesses and cooperatives.

**(v)** Women need to be supported in order to improve and secure their productive bases. They need access to good quality arable land, a sufficient supply of good quality water, and certified seeds. They need to be supported and encouraged to adopt sustainable production systems by means of incentives, like specially adapted agricultural

insurance products, storage and preservation infrastructure. The resources and leadership capacities of community-based feminist and women's rights movements must be stepped up so that they can provide women a voice and make sure that their concerns are taken into account in the strategies for coping with Covid-19.

**(vi)** Between 50 percent and 60 percent of the food produced by women is intended for family consumption in the study area. Men, on the other hand, generally tend to farm crops for sale and/or the agro-food sector in order to secure an income for their families. Even if their role is often forgotten or little appreciated, women are the ones who mainly ensure their families are food secure. It is therefore very important to encourage and support them at every step of the value creation chain so that they can play their central role in rebuilding the policies for the security and autonomy of food supply while diversifying their sources of income.

**(vii)** The Federal and State Governments should support the development and dissemination of messages specifically targeted at and easily accessible by vulnerable women, including women with disabilities (through use of sign language, local language). Messages should recognize women's roles as caregivers and communicate information on when and how women can access health facilities.

**(viii)** When it comes to food and nutrition security, women play a significant role in food production as well as transformation and food preparation. With school closed, women have an additional burden of care. Governments should sensitize men, boys

and other non-gender binary people to consider sharing home chores. Governments should also ensure that all measures and policies are gender-sensitive and do not further widen the gender gap.

**(ix)** The Federal and State Governments should systematically collect disability, age and sex-disaggregated data on the outbreak to facilitate more targeted and effective planning and implementation of the emergency response and to facilitate enhanced understanding of the gendered differences in prevention, exposure and treatment.