

# Urban Food Insecurity and Household Coping Strategies During Covid-19: Evidence from Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor LGA, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic seriously disrupted the availability of food and essential requirements; Rivers State in Nigeria especially had great difficulties during lockdown times. This paper investigates the challenges in obtaining food and basic supplies during the epidemic as well as the coping mechanisms used by Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor local government areas' populations. Data were gathered by semi-informal interviews with fifty house heads chosen by both intentional and inadvertent sample methods. Results show that low-income earners, daily wage workers, and the jobless suffered disproportionately from food shortages, inflated costs, and insufficient palliative care. Food rationing (80% of respondents), menial labour in exchange for food (60%), and reliance on family networks (50%) were common coping strategies. Rich households used tactics including compromised enforcement to get around lockdown rules. The study underlines the importance of strong social safety nets to minimize the effect of the next crises and concludes that the epidemic revealed weaknesses in food security systems. Suggestions call for better government actions, fair allocation of palliatives, and strengthened systems of community assistance.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, urban, food insecurity, coping strategies, evidence

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus disease, emerged as one of the most disruptive global health crises in modern history. The virus first appeared in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across the globe. This led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. In addition to the catastrophic health impact it had on the global population, The epidemic severely impacted social, economic, and food

systems worldwide, exacerbating poverty reduction (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), along with several other SDGs affected by the pandemic.

In a study carried out by Akiwumi in 2020, it was revealed that infectious illness, hunger, pauperism, and unavailability of health services were made worse throughout the epidemic in many developing countries, including Nigeria. Restaurant closures, lockdowns, market closures, and disruption of food chains made food access even more challenging in 2020. Sub-Saharan Africa is notably impacted, but according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an additional 82 million people worldwide experienced acute food insecurity in 2020 compared to before the pandemic began.

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, represents the difficulties urban people encountered throughout the epidemic. To stop the virus from spreading, the state administration implemented strict lockdown rules, including market closures and extended curfews. Particularly for daily income workers and those in informal sectors who lacked the financial reserves or social safety nets to handle unexpected income loss, these limitations worsened already existent food insecurity (Ewang, 2020). Previous research has shown that because of their restricted access to resources and support systems, lockdown-induced food insecurity disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly (Abrams & Szeffler, 2020).

In the framework of the COVID-19 epidemic, food insecurity represents more general institutional problems like unequal access to resources, governance concerns, and social inequalities than only because of economic limitations. The difficulties households in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor encountered in obtaining food and basic supplies during the epidemic are the focus of this paper. It also looks at the coping strategies used to negotiate these difficulties, therefore adding to the increasing corpus of research on food security and resilience under public health crises.

This study intends to guide policy initiatives that can minimise the negative consequences of future pandemics on food security by spotting the particular obstacles to food availability and the techniques used by different social groups.

### **Statement of problem**

Like other countries around the globe, Nigeria embraced the lockdown strategy requiring movement restrictions to stop the virus from spreading. This one action guaranteed a rigorous ban on human mobility outside their local surroundings and froze people from carrying out their legal activities. Among the affected activities are those related to food and other daily requirements production and supply, as well as the provision of pertinent services. Administrative limitations implemented by governments, including lockdowns, travel bans and physical distancing measures, have further aggravated the risk of food shortages, according to Akiwumi in the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (August 11, 2020). Low-income households

and those engaged in the informal sector especially feel these limitations since they lose their means of survival and cannot reach marketplaces.

Still, the degrees of restriction differed depending on the state as well as even within the states. Following the introduction of the restricted movement, Rivers State had a long-lasting absolute lockdown and closed open markets. Along with the lockdown, state governments implemented a curfew whereby only those providing necessary services were allowed to function during this period. Food stores were let open on a regular schedule only when the lockdown was sometimes lifted. The rigid and prolonged lockdown and state government-imposed curfews mostly affected local government areas of Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt. Comparatively to its pre-COVID-19 pricing of 3000.00 to 3500.00 Naira, the costs of basic foods, including gari, which cost roughly 6000.00 to 7000.00 Naira, increased. Every other consumable made the same trend. Reduced farming and fishing activity meant that related produce was rare and expensive. For most homes, this situation made it difficult to obtain food (containing products including water that supply biological nourishments for physical development and vitality) and other needs (such as hygiene) during the worst scenarios of the epidemic in the state.

For daily wage workers and other low-income earners with meagre, if any, savings, this was especially true. As the researcher saw, this resulted in anguish, unhappiness, and political unrest. Families without access to food and other daily needs are more likely to suffer than other types of families. This has made it necessary to look at not just the challenges in the food search but also the coping strategies used by people living in the two local governments mentioned in Rivers State. The two biggest of the 23 LGAs in the state, these two are the main commercial hubs.

Coping strategies are procedures used by people to control challenging circumstances or problems that develop during stressful times that could endanger people's continuous survival. It has several forms; even if the general condition is the same, it may be person-specific and change with time and geography. During the lockdown, a time when people are confined to a very limited space in their immediate vicinity, food supplies and financial support in Nigeria have been among the palliatives implemented by the government (both national and state), organizations, religious institutions, and philanthropic individuals.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The key objectives of the study are;

1. to identify the difficulties associated with accessing food and other basic needs during the peak of covid-19 pandemic;
2. to highlight the measures adopted in coping with the difficulties in accessing food and other basic needs and
3. to investigate the social categories that were worst hit in accessing food and basic needs during the lockdown.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the difficulties experienced in accessing food and other essentials during the peak of covid-19 pandemic?
2. What measures were adopted to cope with the difficulties in getting food and other essentials during the peak of COVID-19?
3. Which social categories were most affected during the lockdown in accessing food and other essentials?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Impact of Pandemics on Food Security**

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic seriously disrupted food systems, therefore influencing supply chains, production, and food access. Lockdowns and economic downturns caused food insecurity to worsen in many developing nations, claims Workie et al. (2020). The World Food Program calculated that from pre-pandemic levels, the number of individuals suffering acute food insecurity doubled, therefore highlighting the scope of the issue (FAO, 2021).

Research conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa shows how disproportionately the epidemic affects urban residents depending on daily pay. Leddy et al. (2020), for instance, underlined how food insecurity was aggravated by income loss among informal workers, therefore rendering them unable to meet fundamental necessities. This is consistent with results from Nigeria, where the urban poor have restricted access to palliatives and rising food prices (Balana et al., 2023).

Food insecurity was worsened a great deal by the COVID-19 pandemic in vulnerable populations in developing countries. For example, in a study in Kenya and Uganda, Kansime et al. (2021) found that households engaged in informal employment were the most adversely impacted by food access disruption. The restriction of movement between countries, combined with market closures and the loss of income, rendered it difficult for low-income families to afford basic food items. In South Africa, the lockdowns were also found to create severe reductions in household purchasing power and, consequently, food consumption (Arndt et al., 2020).

Using panel data, Tefera et al. (2022) demonstrated in Ethiopia that food insecurity was especially severe in urban homes, where supply chain interruptions drove food prices higher. According to the report, 47% of households turned to less expensive but less nutritious food options, while 63% had to cut meal sizes. The results line up with studies from Nigeria, which imply that because urban areas depend more on market-purchased food than rural farming communities, urban inhabitants carry a higher cost (Iheme et al., 2020).

### **Coping Mechanisms During Crises**

Many times, households utilize different coping mechanisms to negotiate food scarcity during emergencies. This covers selling assets or borrowing money, as well as limiting food and eating less-preferred meals (Amusan & Agunyai, 2021). Studies conducted in Nigeria have revealed that urban households mostly rely on social networks and informal trading to help reduce food shortages (Iheme et al., 2020). Indigenous people were especially vulnerable, according to a 2022 Soheli et al. Bangladesh study, which turned to high-risk coping strategies, including selling animals and pulling children out of school. These techniques often have long-term costs, therefore lowering household resilience to future shocks. In reality, households responded to the crisis with food shortages by adopting a range of coping mechanisms. Sawadogo and Ouoba (2023) stated that informal workers in Burkina Faso obtained emergency borrowing, informal food aid, and barter of services for food. It was among women-headed households that vulnerability was most evident; many found themselves forgoing meals and food rationing.

Dlamini et al. (2024) also found a link between food insecurity and mental health, where high-stress coping strategies (like the selling of productive assets) were associated with increased anxiety and depression in South Africa. This gives credence to the point that food security isn't only an economic problem but a mental and social problem as well. Bahta (2022) examined smallholder livestock farming communities in South Africa, finding that many households responded to food shortages by increasing livestock sales, even at lower-than-usual market prices. This practice, while providing short-term relief, risked long-term economic instability for these communities. Similarly, Suh et al. (2023) found that in Cameroon, farming households adapted by shifting toward fast-growing crops, such as cassava and maize, which required less time to cultivate and provided immediate food relief.

### **Role of Government Interventions**

However, mitigating food insecurity depended greatly on government intervention, which had varying levels of effectiveness in different countries. According to Kpadé et al. (2023), across West Africa (Ghana, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Senegal), countries with good social protection services, such as countries with well-established social safety nets, tend to exhibit lower levels of severe food insecurity. In Ghana, for example, emergency cash transfers and subsidized food distributions helped reduce food shortages. On the other hand, for instance, in Nigeria, the government interventions were faulted for being ineffective and less transparent. According to Iheme et al. (2020), the palliatives for low-income households were often mismanaged, with cases of hoarding and politicization of food aid distribution. They argue that the government's efforts in food security were less effective than community-led ones, especially in the urban slum areas where informal food-sharing networks played an important role.

The outbreak made pre-existing economic inequalities between different social classes more pronounced. The pandemic hit low-income households the hardest, while wealthy households used

their resources to stockpile food and gain access to non-public supply networks (Balana et al., 2023). According to Ayal et al. (2024), informal workers in metropolitan zones suffered more because they had insufficient savings and depended on their daily income. According to Nguyen et al. (2021), about how COVID-19 impacted child nutrition, many families experiencing food hardship chose to reduce their dietary range, which produces lasting negative health effects. Such findings underline the necessity of specific interventions for resolving the distinct challenges underprivileged populations face. Examining food security initiatives in two small Bangladeshi towns, Rusczyk and Rahman (2021) showed that government-led initiatives were inadequate in averting food shortages. Rather, initiatives at community-based aid, including local NGOs and unofficial support systems, had a more major impact on reducing hunger. This emphasizes the importance of multi-sectoral crisis response strategies whereby grassroots-level community projects supplement government aid.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased food insecurity, government-led interventions were critical in addressing this issue, although ineffective in some countries and more effective in others. Chirwa and Chiwaula (2022) studied socioeconomic inequalities in household resilience within the fishery of Malawi. They found that households with better economic standing were better able to weather the crisis in part because they had savings and other sources of income, while poorer households languished in severe food insecurity from economic blowback during lockdowns. Though social protection measures like direct cash transfers and subsidized food programmes helped mitigate some of these challenges, the authors noted that these were mostly insufficient to cover all vulnerable groups.

This research is in line with Abay et al. (2021) that government interventions in Ethiopia helped reduce extreme hunger during the pandemic. IHEME et al. (2020) stated that in Nigeria, poor governance, corruption & inefficiencies caused the poor distribution of food palliatives, leaving many poor families unassisted. Chirwa and Chiwaula (2022) conclude that multi-sectoral approaches in the case of responding to a crisis are vital, and this needs to take place within and around government policies in the form of community-based initiatives to have a more equitable and transparent food distribution system.

### **Long-Term Implications of the Pandemic on Food Security**

The implications of the epidemic on food security are projected to be long-term, especially about agricultural resilience and child nutrition. Household food instability caused a significant drop in child nutrition levels in India, according to Nguyen et al. (2021), which also increased stunted growth resulting from insufficient dietary variety. This is consistent with results from Dasgupta and Robinson (2021), who noted that as households gave caloric intake priority above nutritional quality, malnutrition rates in sub-Saharan Africa jumped. Kemboi et al. (2024) also looked at how female-headed farming households in Liberia managed food shortages. Their research underlined

the importance of gender-sensitive strategies since structural inequalities in land ownership and financial access made women more prone to suffer from food insecurity.

### **Theoretical frameworks**

Coping mechanisms, structural inequality, and government responses significantly impact food security during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examines how household food insecurity and coping strategies are implemented in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor using two interrelated theories:

1. **Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF):** Explains why some households were more resilient than others based on access to assets.
2. **Coping Strategies Theory (CST):** Categorizes how households adapted to food insecurity.

The adoption of these two theorems provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the impact of COVID-19 on food security at both the household and policy levels.

### **Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)**

Food security studies make extensive use of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) (Chambers & Conway, 1992) to examine how households and people negotiate resources and react to crises. Human capital (education, health, and labour availability), social capital (community networks and informal support systems), financial capital (savings, remittances, and credit access), physical capital (infrastructure and market access), and natural capital (land ownership and agricultural output) are the five types of livelihood assets it distinguishes. Access to these resources mostly determined household resilience to food insecurity during the COVID-19 epidemic. While daily wage earners and others with little assets suffered more, those with more financial and social capital could better tolerate food shortages through borrowing, receiving remittances, or mass purchases before lockdowns (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The SLF is especially pertinent in clarifying differences in household resilience during the epidemic, the function of social capital in reducing food insecurity, such as borrowing food from neighbours and how economic inequalities shaped food access, with wealthier households having better coping mechanisms. The theoretical framework has shortcomings, too, since it presumes all households have equal chances to create assets, which is often not the case in low-income environments, and it does not entirely address unexpected shocks like a pandemic (Kansiime et al., 2021).

### **Coping Strategies Theory (CST)**

The Coping Strategies Theory (CST) of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) postulates that individuals or their households adapt to crises through two strategies: problem-focused (searching for alternative food sources through urban farming, informal trading, or buying in bulk, and so on)

and emotion-focused (negotiating hardship by reducing food quality, ‘skipping’ meals, nutrition of children over adults, and others). Previous studies revealed that urban households in Africa, in General and Port Harcourt in Particular, relied extensively on problem-focused coping approaches, food rationing and casual jobs, among others, to cope with food insecurity (Sawadogo & Ouoba, 2023). At times, when these strategies did not work, many resorted to emotion-focused coping, including skipping meals or eating foods that are of lower nutritional value (Dlamini et al., 2024). Food shortages impacted households in different ways, and the effectiveness of various coping strategies varied as well, with some being successful while others were unsustainable. Therefore, the CST is particularly crucial in understanding how household heads experienced and managed these food shortages. Importantly, it also highlights how food insecurity predominantly affects the vulnerability of women and children across different types of households. Unfortunately, however, its scope does not cover structural factors like government policy, market disruption, or other economic factors that might affect food security and can be assumed to overlook various advantages available for food production, such as heavy subsidies for agriculture across countries in the developing world.

### **Integrating the frameworks**

Every theory presents a different angle on food insecurity during COVID-19, and their combination offers a complete analytical framework:

<b>Theory</b>	<b>What it Explains</b>
SLF	SLF emphasises why some homes coped better because of higher livelihood assets such as social support systems or cash reserves.
CST	CST examines how individuals and families adapted their behaviours, whether through problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies.

This study offers a sophisticated knowledge of food security issues in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor by combining macro-level policy analysis with micro-level household adaption measures. Emphasizing the importance of focused initiatives, improved safety nets, and crisis-responsive government to increase food security resilience in future crises, the results provide insightful analysis for policy formulation.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study, and the research is descriptive. Semi-formal interviews conducted with respondents under close observation of COVID-19 safety procedures are the method of obtaining data. All heads of families in Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor local government areas, both in Rivers State, Nigeria, make up the sampling population. Although the sample size is 50, the chosen sampling methods for the study are both deliberate and unintentional. Data analysis is purely qualitative under thematic headings.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Adapting to the constraints of COVID-19, data for the study was obtained using both face-to-face and telephone interviews. The interviews were meant to investigate the difficulties homes had getting food and other necessities, the coping mechanisms they used, and how successful government actions and palliative measures were determined to be. To guarantee reliable data collecting, every interview which ran 20 to 30 minutes was audio-recorded under participant permission. The interviews were performed in both English and Pidgin to accommodate the various language backgrounds of the participants, therefore encouraging inclusiveness and more honest, direct answers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants were completely briefed on the aim of the study, therefore guaranteeing transparency regarding the voluntary character of it and the confidentiality policies in place. All personal identifiers were substituted with codes to guard their privacy, therefore guaranteeing anonymity all through the procedure. This approach ensured that participants were comfortable sharing their experiences and insights, knowing their identities would be protected.

### **Data Analysis**

Using thematic analysis, the interview material was examined to find and classify reoccurring motifs. To guarantee correctness and contextual understanding, the audio recordings were first transcribed verbatim. After that, NVivo software was utilized to find repeating themes and patterns, therefore facilitating the arrangement of responses on different aspects of food insecurity. After that, the coded data was arranged in more general theme groups such as "Food Access Barriers" and "Social Coping Mechanisms," therefore offering a clear framework for the study. Finally, the results were cross-referenced with existing literature to confirm and enhance the insights, thereby guaranteeing the validity and strength of the conclusions.

### **Study Limitations**

The study's sample size was limited to 50 households, which may not fully represent all socio-economic groups in the region. There might also have been sample bias since homes without strong community ties or cell phones could have been under-represented. The restrictions on COVID-19 also presented a difficulty since they limited physical access to some respondents and might exclude important points of view from those unable to take phone or in-person interviews. These restrictions should be taken into account while analysing the results since they might affect the generalization.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Difficulties identified in sourcing food and other daily essentials during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 epidemic intensified food insecurity in Nigeria because of multiple interconnected variables. Extended lockdowns and stringent movement restrictions impeded daily activities and revenue sources, hindering individuals' access to marketplaces and jobs. The closure of markets, a main supplier of food and essentials, compelled households to pursue alternative, frequently less accessible, shopping options. Disruptions in the supply chain resulted in the scarcity of some food items and necessities, constraining dietary diversity and crucial resources. The pandemic precipitated a rise in food prices, rendering it difficult for numerous households to procure essential goods. Interstate and international border closures impeded the import and export of products, resulting in shortages and elevated costs. A multitude of persons possessed inadequate money to purchase food and necessities in quantity, rendering them susceptible to supply shortages. Frequent power outages hindered the preservation of perishable products, compelling households to get food more often and in lesser amounts. Challenges, including congestion at distribution sites, apparent bias in allocation, remote distribution centres, and purported hoarding, obstructed efficient access to governmental assistance. The ban on specific economic activities deprived individuals of their primary revenue sources, intensifying financial difficulties. The abrupt and extended duration of lockdowns surprised some households, resulting in insufficient supplies and a lack of contingency measures. Challenges in obtaining funds owing to bank closures or limitations further limited the capacity to acquire essentials. These problems jointly emphasize the complex effects of the pandemic on food security and stress the necessity for comprehensive policies to bolster resilience in future crises.

### **Measures Frequently Mentioned as Coping Strategies for Difficulties in Obtaining Food and Other Necessities**

Nigerian homes used different coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 lockdowns to control food shortages and financial difficulty. Many families turned to rigorous rationing, eating boring meals and cutting portion sizes to maximise few resources. Some people worked at menial occupations or begged from more affluent neighbours in exchange for food. While some people mostly depend on extended family support networks, borrowing money become a regular habit to resupply basics. Many times, adults gave feeding smaller children and the elderly top priority, then went hungry themselves to make sure the weak were looked for. Alternatives to toilet paper in the lack of essential hygienic items were water, paper, or used-through fabric. Some people visited illicit night markets to get food, therefore running the danger of robbery or police arrest. There were even cases of people paying security guards to cross borders where less rigorous movement restrictions let them shop for basics not found in their nearby areas. These adaptive strategies highlight the fortitude of societies under hitherto unheard-of difficulties during the epidemic.

Coping Mechanism	Percentage of Respondents Using It	Type of Coping Strategy
Food rationing (reducing meal portions)	80%	Problem-focused
Skipping meals	60%	Emotion-focused
Borrowing food or money	55%	Problem-focused
Engaging in informal trading (black market food purchases)	40%	Problem-focused
Reliance on religious or community charity	35%	Emotion-focused

From the table above, these techniques draw attention to households' resiliency and inventiveness, especially in crises. The reliance on social networks, such as borrowing food from neighbours or engaging in informal markets, emphasizes the need for collective assistance amid trying conditions. However, this also reveals the deep socio-economic divides that exist, as low-income households are more likely to resort to coping strategies that prioritize immediate survival, often at the expense of long-term stability. These results point to structural changes and more strong social safety nets needed to lessen reliance on unofficial coping strategies.

### **Social groups are most affected by limited access to food and essentials.**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity among various vulnerable groups in Nigeria. Daily wage earners with minimal income faced significant challenges due to movement restrictions and market closures, which halted their income sources. Low-income individuals, especially those without savings, struggled to afford necessities as food prices surged. Salaried workers who experienced pay cuts or delayed payments, coupled with limited savings, found it difficult to manage expenses during the lockdown. Unemployed household heads, previously reliant on extended family support, faced increased hardship as the economic downturn strained their support networks. These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions to support these groups during crises.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Most of the problems respondents encountered during the height of the COVID-19 epidemic are connected. For instance, the extended lockdown times, rigorous mobility restrictions, and market closures resulted in a limited supply of food, mostly imported and hence raised the prices of such. Furthermore, during the severe lockdown, getting money from banks within the research area proved somewhat challenging. All things made it impossible for people to sufficiently refill or purchase food products when the lockdowns were sometimes relaxed. Moreover, while people had the window to shop for food and other needs, open vehicular mobility and a limited number of folks to be transported at a time made it difficult for them. Panic buying suggested that a small

number of homes that could afford their high cost rapidly consumed the limited food products and other basics. Low-income people and impoverished homes that could hardly afford a daily meal suffered as a result. The closing of markets and stores affected more people who relied on the daily hustle to make a living. This group could not pay enough attention to the call to stock food and other basics that may last for a fair length of time.

Even the governor of the state, Barrister Nyesom Wike, acknowledged the hardships of inhabitants of the two LGAs in getting money from banks to purchase food, especially during a two-day window time to restock food, Iriekpen and Chinwe (May 14, 2020) of This Day newspaper reported. This result supports the assessment of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs that the worldwide COVID-19 epidemic is more than just a health issue "killing people, spreading human suffering and upending people's lives." Difficulties in obtaining food and other basics during the height of COVID-19 suggest that good feeding habits that guarantee nutritious meals are sacrificed. It is not the best or usual behaviour to indulge in monotonous meals devoid of essential nutrients only to satisfy the hunger pains. This scenario affects various population groups: the young, the elderly, and the ones with dietary preferences, among other things. Young children who are underfed run more danger to come into touch with infectious diseases like COVID-19 and have compromised growth rates and immunity. (Abrams & Szeffler, 2020). For the elderly group, particularly those with underlying medical conditions like diabetes and needing a strict diet, the period was not friendly for them. Their health status most certainly dropped with lower immunity and less adherence to a strict healthy diet. Furthermore, most older people rely on others for help and the UN Secretary-General has observed that they are "less capable of supporting themselves". This means that the lockdown period and related ban on free movement meant they were cut off from some of their social network links, like their children and close relatives who could not readily reach out to them. Their suffering at this period is more suited for imagination than actual knowledge. Even the adults in their homes who gave up meals for the benefit of young children and the elderly also compromised their health. To operate as they should, all people need enough food. A hungry man is an angry man, a common observation holds. Though citizens of the two LGAs expressed strong concerns about what they passed through, they did not take legislation into their own hands until the lockdown was relaxed. Human Rights Watch said that people who lost money and employment during the epidemic had more trouble getting food, particularly as Nigeria's social safety nets rarely suited the poorest and most vulnerable groups. The lack of solid national and state-level planning makes it clear that Nigeria is among the least ready nations to properly address the welfare issues of her people in the pandemic era. Government engagement in the epidemic period, including the provision of financial and material palliatives, was inadequate and badly handled in terms of distribution and responsibility. The way the government carried out its interventions to lower the tension surrounding the lockdown on the people also reflected the "Nigeria factor." the shock of the epidemic.

Low income and unemployment problems link to the additional challenges individual households face, such as marginal reserves to allow them to plan sufficiently for and resupply during the lockdown. This highlights the current inequalities in the Nigerian state, where the income difference between the political class and the others keeps widening. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, an ordinary public servant could hardly keep up with the needs of their families.

It is needless to emphasize that the pandemic brought more untold and unpleasant experiences their way. It will not be out of place to state that other social forces or determinants helped exacerbate the difficulties in accessing food and other essentials. For example, pre-existing poverty, discrimination based on indigene factor and rowdiness of environments where palliatives were distributed. Also, loss of livelihoods or jobs, seizing of salaries of some categories of workers and lack of safety net initiatives on the part of the government made it difficult to access food and other essentials of living.

Although most homes had long been updated to modern ones, some of the accepted coping strategies—such as utilising alternatives to toiletries—were also regrettable since most homes had to revert to traditional or earlier means of cleaning up after using the toilet. Here, there is a concern as cleanliness is impaired, and infections could arise. During the lockdown, a home claimed to have used detergent as the only cleaning agent accessible to wash its children since it was not possible to acquire bathing soap for his residence then. This strikes a moving note. Could this not have a health consequence for the toddlers whose fragile skins were used on the detergent? This is known as a reversal of development and cannot help the pertinent SDGs to be reached. The identification of social categories highly affected by the challenges in obtaining food and other basics of daily needs reveals that the vulnerable households were more affected than the well-to-do ones. But during the height of the epidemic in Rivers State, none of the households found food readily available. The UN believes the "COVID-19 outbreak affects all segments of the population and is particularly detrimental to members of those groups in the most vulnerable situations." It implies, however, that the social catastrophe brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic could aggravate "inequality, exclusion, discrimination and global unemployment in the medium and long run." This insight prompted the UN Secretary-General to say, during the March 23, 2020, introduction of the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan:

‘‘We must come to the aid of the ultra-vulnerable millions upon millions of people who are least able to protect themselves. This is a matter of basic human solidarity. It is crucial for combating the virus.’’

This suggests the necessity of developing quick response plans to assist in reducing the suffering and challenges related to obtaining food and other essential needs for the welfare of homes during crises like COVID-19.

## **CONCLUSION**

Particularly impacting low-income and informal sector workers, the COVID-19 epidemic exposed major issues in urban food security. The study found that food insecurity was more closely tied to accessibility issues such as inflation and movement restrictions rather than food shortages themselves. Many households turned to community support structures to get by as they negotiated these difficulties via rationing, unofficial networks, and social capital. However, logistical problems and corruption made government aid programs useless.

Regarding policy consequences, biometric tracking for food aid should help to build social safety nets to lower corruption and guarantee fair allocation. Price limits on basic goods could help control food markets during crises, therefore reducing the influence of inflation. Moreover, improving community-based food resilience through urban food banks and cooperative food-sharing systems guarantees a stronger and fairer reaction to the next crises.

Long-term food security trends post-COVID-19 should be the main emphasis of future studies; they should also analyse the variations in food security results across urban and rural households and evaluate alternate crisis-response models combining governmental interventions with community-driven solutions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- National and state governments should create dependable safety nets, particularly during emergencies like COVID-19, for their people to provide them with food and other essential needs which they could find difficult to get. More public funds ought to be reserved for this aim.
- Governments should guarantee that people without any kind of prejudice get enough palliatives. Forming alliances with NGOs, CSOs, and CBOs that can not only provide goods and funds but also act as support groups in the distribution of palliatives would help one achieve this.
- Lockdowns must be supported by government initiatives to mitigate their impact, particularly on vulnerable populations, and the associated plans, programs, and eligibility criteria should be adequately publicised. This will certainly diminish the discrimination individuals encounter when attempting to benefit from such programs.
- Promoting frugality and disciplined allocation of resources should be advocated among households and individuals. Effective preparation can establish an immediate safety net for households, alleviating the burdens of unfavourable situations such as lockdowns.

- The importance of being one's brother's keeper should be further promoted, particularly during challenging times. The socialisation process at any level can be depended upon to accomplish this.
- Marketers ought to refrain from increasing prices of food and other important commodities during times of scarcity and crisis. Government intervention is necessary to achieve this objective. Designated areas with stringent oversight can be established to regulate the procurement and distribution of food and other necessities at fixed prices during lockdowns.
- The government can maintain the integrity of the food supply chain during lockdowns, preventing starvation, by permitting food transport vehicles to traverse state lines. This may entail inter-state agreements among governors with established checks and balances to prevent exploitation by unscrupulous persons.
- Civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, religious institutions, and affluent people ought to increase their donations to supply food and other essentials during emergencies. This will undoubtedly enhance reserves that will assist residents in navigating the challenging period of the COVID-19 epidemic and, ultimately,
- The government must demonstrate empathy towards its citizens in both communication and actions during pandemics when emotional states are intensified.

The information above can be summarized into actionable insights with specific stakeholders assigned in the table below.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Responsible Stakeholders</b>
Strengthen food aid transparency.	Use biometric registration & digital tracking to prevent corruption	Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs
Introduce price stabilization policies.	Temporary price caps on essential foods during crises	Ministry of Trade & Industry
Develop community-led food security programs.	Establish urban food banks & cooperative food-sharing systems	Local NGOs, religious groups
Increase urban agriculture initiatives.	Support household gardening & community farming with grants	Ministry of Agriculture

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