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Protecting Pastoral Livelihoods: The Role of Government Interventions on Food and Commodity Price Inflation

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Introduction

The rapid rise in food and essential commodity prices in recent times poses significant challenges to pastoral communities. Pastoral communities primarily depend on livestock production and natural resources and are, therefore, particularly vulnerable to price shocks due to their remote locations, limited market access, and increasing climate variability. (Tofu *et al.*, 2025; Addison and Brown, 2014; Ethiopian Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture, 2010). The impact of these price increases is multifaceted, affecting not only household food security but also livestock production costs, trading patterns, and overall community resilience, causing humanitarian emergencies (Amolegbe *et al.*, 2021; Kratli, *et al.*, 2013). This demonstrates the critical need for comprehensive government intervention to protect vulnerable pastoral communities and ensure food security. Previous Government interventions in Nigeria during periods of food price inflation have included both immediate relief measures (short-term) and structural reforms that ensures Agricultural sustainability (Long term) such as the deployment of strategic food reserves, Provision of farm inputs such as fertilizers and access to credit which had varying degrees of success (Obayelu, 2010).

This policy paper, therefore, examines the severe impact of price inflation since 2020 on pastoral communities in three Nigerian states of the Northeast region Namely, Adamawa, Bauchi, and Gombe. The policy paper further outlines targeted recommendations that could serve as a framework for effective government action to protect pastoral livelihoods while maintaining food security, based on documented evidence from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

Methodology

This study is based on action research being implemented by Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) with funding from International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, through the SPARC program to support women and girls in Pastoralism and Agro pastoralism in Nigeria's Sahel region. This study adopted the mixed method Research design. The data for this study is derived from Key Informant interviews and Focused Group Discussion, as well as household questionnaires conducted with respondents in Adamawa, Gombe and Bauchi states. A total of 30 key informant interviews and 12 focused group discussions were conducted with males-only groups and females-only group while 541 respondents completed household questionnaires.

Findings

Enormous increase in price of Food and Essential commodities

The Research findings indicate that staple food prices have increased by up to 300%, with some commodities experiencing price hikes of over 400%. This unprecedented inflation has created a

crisis affecting household nutrition, education, and social stability, requiring immediate Government intervention as shown in the excerpts below.

“Things that were bought N10, 000 before are now N70, 000. Things like livestock - almost everything has increased in prices. If you go to the market today and buy something and coming back next day, you will notice an increase in the price of that same commodity. The poor cannot farm anymore because a bag of fertilizer that was sold for N4, 000 as of 2020, is now N42, 000 per bag. A bag of maize that was sold for N10, 000 is now N50, 000 - N70,000. A bag of cement that was sold for N2, 000 as at 2020 is now N10, 000. Common pure water that was sold for N5 is now N20 and N25 in some places. The bag of pure water was N150 at a time but now is N350. Spaghetti that was sold for N120 as of 2020 is now N900”. **(KII7, Bauchi, Male, Married, National Diploma, Farmer/trader, 64 years).**”

“There are serious changes in the prices of goods in the market which have affected me badly. From 2020-2024, there are tremendous changes in prices of goods. For instance, few years ago, local rice was sold at N300 per measure and presently the price of local rice is at N 1700-1800 per mudu (a measure) and there are changes in prices of other food items. This has affected me” **(FGD-R4, HC, Bauchi, Male, Married, Secondary education, Businessman, 37 years).**”

Implications

Decline in Education of Children

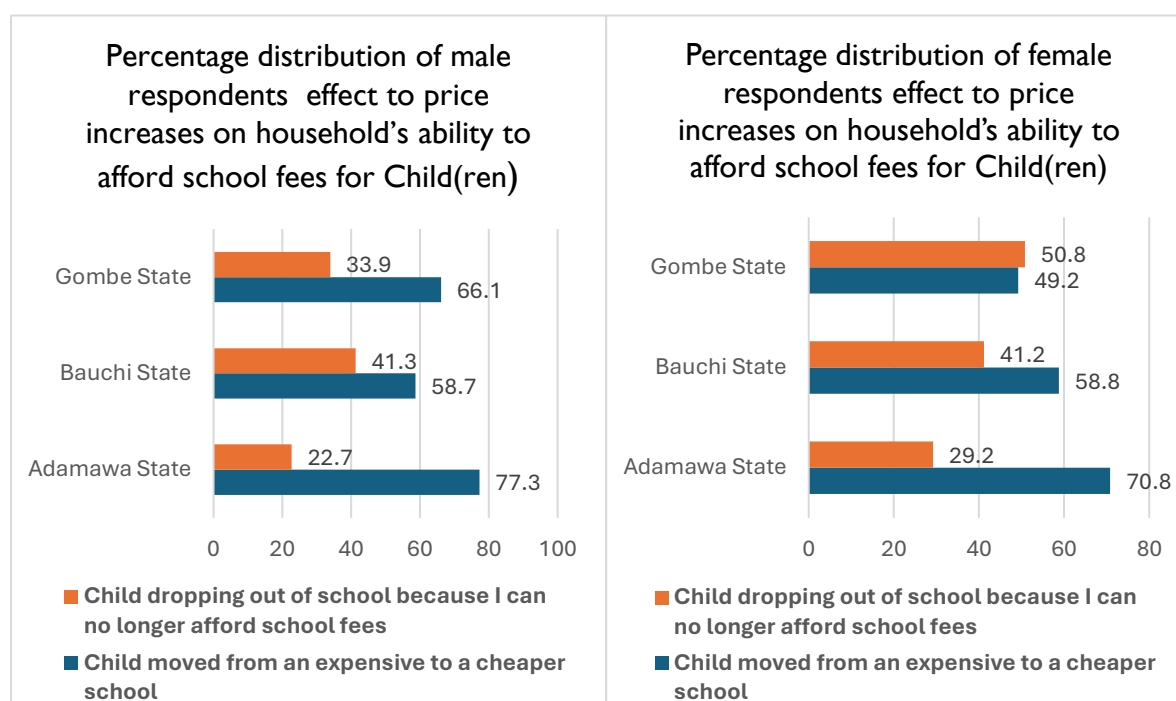


Fig. 1: The effect of price increases on household's ability to afford school fees for Children

Fig. 1 above shows the effect of price increases on school affordability for parents. The data has shown that price increases are significantly impacting access to education, with a considerable

number of children either moving to cheaper schools or dropping out entirely. This could lead to long-term negative effects on human capital development and future economic prospects for the affected regions. This excerpt captures the situation aptly.

“Children hardly go to school now. You cannot send a child to school without feeding him/her. Even if the children agree to go, school fees are not paid, therefore, they are being chased out of schools. Even when you plead with the school authorities, they don’t agree to allow the children stay without your payment. My children didn’t attend school for this second term because there is no money for school fees. What we are concentrating on now is feeding, which has been difficult”. (KII3, Bauchi, Female, Married, Secondary education, Businesswoman, 32 years)”

“For me, we have to take life easy. For example, I have to withdraw one of my children from school to allow the others to be able to graduate first. This is the situation we find ourselves. Things are far from what they should be due to high prices of produces especially food items. (FGD-R7, IDP, Gombe, Male, Married, Islamic/Arabic education, Businessman, 80 years)”

Reduced access to Health

As shown in Table 1, the ability to afford medicines and medical care has been severely compromised. The inability to buy medicines could lead to deteriorating health conditions and increased vulnerability to diseases. It could also lead to loss of time that could have been used to carry out productive activities due to sickness.

Table 1: The effect of price increases on household’s ability to afford medical bill

State	Male (191)		Female (350)	
	I can no longer buy medicines that I used to buy	I can no longer afford to visit doctor or nurse that I used to.	I can no longer buy medicines that I used to buy	I can no longer afford to visit doctor or nurse that I used to.
	%	%	%	%
Adamawa State	84.8	15.2	92.0	8.0
Bauchi State	47.6	52.4	60.5	39.5
Gombe State	77.4	22.6	59.3	40.7
Study Area	70.2	29.8	70.3	29.7

Feelings of worthlessness

One of the implications of increased food and commodities prices is the effect on the dignity and social life of people. Some persons have lost their value before people who should respect them especially their immediate families. Additionally, the effects have extended to family's intimate relationship especially between husbands and their wives who no longer find it interesting having sex as long as the crises from

Some respondents reported that the current situation has made them to made to feel less of themselves. If this situation is left unchecked for a prolonged time, it could lead to anxiety and depression as expressed by this respondent.

“The experience has been horrifying as my children disgraced me by going to neighbours’ houses to eat. My sexual life has become low and uninteresting that I hardly make love to my wife. I have to put more effort to ensure I meet my family’s essential needs. My children do not look healthy as they used to be when things were cheaper” (KII8, Bauchi, Male, Married, Secondary education, Businessman, 42 years).

Tension in the home/ Broken Marriages

Due to men's inability to provide for their households, most of them do not get the respect they deserve from the families, and this has led to tension and conflicts in their homes. In extreme circumstances, some of the couples in such homes have suffered divorce and when this is not possible, some of the men have to run away from their families as captured in this statement.

“As a man, I expect respect from my wife but because I did not provide as before, the respect was taken away. Many of us (men) are victims already of the high prices of commodities. I have seen a lot of divorces due to the high increases in price of commodities and food items. Some men have to runaway from their families due to the fact they cannot afford to feed them”. (KII8, Adamawa, Male, Married, Tertiary Education, Businessman, 42 years).

“I have trouble and nagging in the home just because I ask for something to buy little food for the children. The high prices have ruined our relationship as families. It is very difficult to cope with the rising of prices and that a very bad experience for us not good enough”. (KII4, Bauchi, Female, Married, Primary education, petty trader, 30 years)

Unhealthy Feeding/ Malnutrition

As a result of the intense hardship, what now matter to people is survival and not the quality of food they eat. Most participants in the three states have resorted to eating of low-quality food. This has resulted in malnutrition, stunted growth due to loss of essential nutrients in their diets, reducing their mental development and increase probabilities of sicknesses/health challenges. Some buy food such as cabbage and green leaves that are already going rotten meant for animals, adding groundnut cake and give to their children as food despite knowing it is not meant for human. Others go for chaffs from rice that have been milled, filled with sand because according to them “it is cheaper and we now eat food that we ordinarily cannot eat”, not minding the health implications. To some persons, cooking without complete ingredient is the way out of the increases in prices since they cannot afford all they need to make a complete meal as shown in the excerpts below.

The stomach doesn't select food. It is the mouth that likes varieties. Your stomach doesn't mind if you feed it flour. As long as it is full, it won't complain. But it is the mouth that wants to eat chicken today, cow tomorrow, ram the next day, so we have to know how to help ourselves or nobody would help us. As long as we are able to provide for our basic needs for survival”. **(FGD-R2, IDP, Gombe, Female, Married, Islamic/Arabic education, Food Vendor, 35 years).**

“I usually mill one mudu (small measure) of corn whose price has jumped from 250 naira to 750 naira, cook it, add little maggi (seasoning cube) and feed the children with it, without ingredients. I don't use red oil or groundnut oil because, I cannot even afford it”. (FGD-R6, HC, Bauchi, Female, Married, Tertiary education(diploma), Petty trader, 30 years)”

“We use sweet potatoes chaff as meal, when people pill it we get the back and cook it as meals”. (FGD-R6, IDP, Bauchi, Female, Married, Secondary Education, Housewife, 32 years).”

“In most cases, I do not usually buy what I often budget my money for, I ended up reducing the quantity and quality of food I buy and advise that my wives should manage what they have for the day and also reduce the quantity of food they give to the children. We only talk of survival now. What is important is that we are alive and not the quality and quantity of the food we eat. You cannot tell what I eat by looking at me” (KII9, Bauchi, Male, Married, Secondary education, Tailor and farmer, 40 years)”

Increased Stress

The realization by the pastoralist and Agro pastoralist that their money can now buy less as a result of increased prices of food has made them to seek for other business opportunities to make money for their families, in addition to pastoralism, which in turn leads to increased stress. This FGD captured the situation succinctly.

“I have to work hard to meet our needs. Surely, this is stressful, but as a man, you look at your duty to your family by working some more. You don’t just give up. Working on my farm, rearing my animals and now the trade I have added is helping out. Things are tough but all my hard works are helping my household” (FGD-R5, IDP, Bauchi, Male, Married, Primary education, Artisan (Vulcanizer), 32 years)”

Exposure of Children to Crimes/Labour

Children are becoming wayward and irresponsible, with some of them becoming thieves – stealing to eat. Some of the girls are turning to prostitution as a way of putting food on their stomach. Also, street begging and child labour have become rampant among them. This extract from Adamawa state put it aptly

“Children are engaging in stealing and other crimes just to get food. The girls engage in prostitution while others are begging on the street. Child labour is happening here. Many children are out of school because we cannot afford to buy learning materials for them, even the clothes we buy before we cannot buy for them now”. (KII8, Adamawa, Male, Married, Tertiary Education, Businessman, 42 years).

Maternal and Neonatal Health Risk

Expectant mothers, breastfeeding mothers as well as young children needs optimum nutrition to thrive. However, with the current situation, most expectant and breastfeeding mothers are not able to afford nutritious meals. In some cases, this has led to the failure of some breastfeeding mothers to adequately breastfeed their children because of the reduction in the milk levels in their breasts owing to inadequacy of food intake as a result of high prices of commodities. This excerpt states it this way.

“Lack of enough food for the mother leads to reduction in breast milk for newly born children. My wife was an example. Eating in our home has been a problem and this has reduced the extent my wife could feed our baby not because she does not want to, but because, she did not take any good food. There was a day I was angry with her. Her

explanation was that most time, she breastfeeds the child, she becomes dizzy because of lack of adequate food in her stomach” (FGD-R8, HC, Adamawa, Male, Married, Tertiary education (NCE), Farmer, 30 years).”

Loss of Livelihoods

Some respondents now find it difficult to continue with their farming or pastoral activities because they lack the finance to do so, having spent their money and sold their livestock to be able to feed. This is captured in the excerpt below.

The poor cannot farm anymore because a bag of fertilizer that was sold for N4, 000 as of 2020, is now N42, 000 per bag”. (KII7, Bauchi, Male, Married, National Diploma, Farmer/trader, 64 years).

Government response and Shortfalls in Current Response

The governments have tried to ameliorate the present condition through provisions of food items using the various states and sub-regional agencies. However, these responses have been very limited and inconsistent with little or no impact on the people considering the level of hardship they have been exposed to.

Government assistance has been sporadic and insufficient

Some of the respondents asserted that the responses by the Government so far have not been efficient as they have this to say:

“Honestly, we haven't seen much from the government or agencies to tackle these price increases. Sure, there have been some promises and programmes announced, but on the ground, we're not feeling the impact. It's disappointing, to say the least. We were hoping for more support, like subsidies on essential items or vouchers to help cover the cost of groceries. But so far, it's been mostly talk and little action” (KII3, Adamawa, Female, Married, No education, Petty trader, 40 years).”

Existing palliative measures have limited reach

Some respondents are yet to witness or participate in any palliative measures by the Government.

“Nothing like benefits has reached us, even if there is assistance from somewhere, it doesn't reach us. The elites of the town don't remember us”. (FGD-R1, IDP, Gombe, Female, Married, Islamic/Arabic education, Housewife, 28 years).”

Recommendation

Immediate strategies

1. **Price Control Measures:** There is need for the Government to implement price monitoring systems for food and essential commodities. Additionally, establishment of community food banks in pastoral communities to ensure food security among the vulnerable population is vital as this will help to crash price of food.
2. **Agricultural Support:** Provision of subsidized agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and seeds as well as livestock to pastoral farmers will enable pastoralist who are faced with the financial difficulty of purchasing inputs to cope with the current situation. This in turn will help sustain their livelihoods.

Long-term Strategies

1. **Economic Empowerment:** Economic empowerment by means of access to credit facilities that facilitates micro credit with low interest rates will help the pastoralist to be resilient in the face of harsh conditions such as increased food prices. It is also pertinent that the Government develop specialized credit facilities for pastoral communities and create flexible loan terms adapted to pastoral production cycle.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Improved transportation networks will help to reduce transportation cost which plays a huge role in the prices of food and other commodities.

Conclusion

The current inflation crisis requires a comprehensive government response that combines immediate relief with long-term development strategies. By implementing these recommendations, governments can help protect pastoral livelihoods while building community resilience against future economic shocks. Success will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and close collaboration with affected communities.

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About SPARC-IDRC

Climate change, armed conflict, environmental fragility and weak governance, and the impact these have on natural resource-based livelihoods, are among the key drivers of both crisis and poverty for communities in some of the world's most vulnerable and conflict-affected countries.

Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) aims to generate evidence and address knowledge gaps to build the resilience of millions of pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers in these communities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

We strive to create impact by using research and evidence to develop knowledge that improves how the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), donors, non-governmental organisations, local and national governments, and civil society can empower these communities in the context of climate change.

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