

Report of Policy Workshop

On The Project

“The Impact of Covid-19 on Local Food Production and Informal Food Markets in Nigeria with Niger Delta Region as Case Study”

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The policy workshop was held on Tuesday 26, January 2021. In compliance with Nigeria government guidelines to reducing the transmission of Covid-19 infections, the project team deemed it necessary to organised the policy workshop using the videoconferencing platform-ZOOM. The virtual policy workshop was among the series of engagement meetings held with key stakeholders in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria at large to disseminate the key findings of the rapid assessment research on the “impact of Covid-19 on local food production and informal food markets in Nigeria with Niger Delta region as case study”. The workshop was held to engage with policy actors and opinion leaders who usually decide on policies in the state, local and at community levels as well as implementing them.

A total of 71 participants including, members of the Covid-19 task force, both at state and national levels, Permanent secretaries, directors and key officials of the relevant ministries and Agencies in Delta state and beyond joined the virtual event at some point as the meeting lasted. Other attendees were policy researchers and scholars from varied institutions across the Niger Delta Region, representatives of community leadership, civil society organisations and community based organisations. Media practitioners and other key stakeholders involved in tackling the challenges of Covid-19 were all invited to participate in the policy workshop.

At the commencement of the workshop at 11:00am, **Engr. Job Eronmhonsele**, Deputy Executive Director, CPED, and member of the Covid-19 food project research team warmly welcomed everyone and introduced participants who joined the meeting early. Engr. Eronmhonsele took all in attendance through the expectations for the day as well as some house rules in other to get the most of the policy workshop. Thereafter, **Professor Emeritus Andrew Godwin Onokerhoraye** made the opening remarks and briefed the audience of the origin of the research project supported by IDRC, Canada and other immersed ways IDRC have supported many other research projects in Nigeria. Professor Onokerhoraye enjoined the policy/decision makers and other key stakeholders present at the meeting to consider implementation of the policy recommendations of the project in order to reduce the economic hardship posed by the ravaging coronal virus and envisaged food crisis in Nigeria. He encouraged everyone to have open mind in their comments and observations during the discussion section and be free to share their experiences so that participants will have a lot to benefit from the policy workshop.

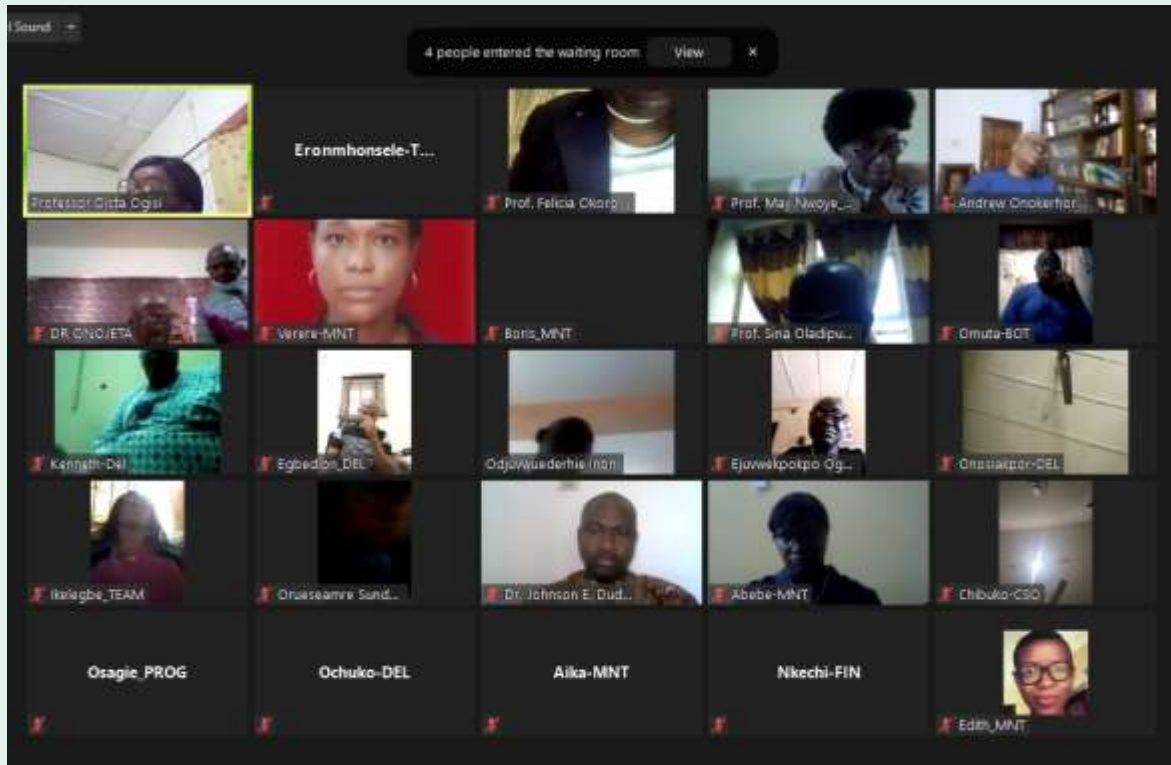


Photo: A cross section of participants during the virtual policy workshop

The opening remarks was followed by a Keynote Address by **Prof. O.E. Inoni** who is of the Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension Faculty of Agriculture Delta State University, Abraka made a clear presentation on *Covid-19 and food security in Nigeria*. The keynote speaker noted that the stay-at-home orders by various State governments in the Niger Delta region and the restrictions on movement imposed by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Covid-19 hampered farm production activities as farmers could not go to farm as at when necessary due to several check points they have to cross. He also noted that many major markets where agricultural inputs are sold were shut down and this made it difficult for farmers to procure planting materials and agrochemicals required for production. According to him, “given that the lockdowns and all manners of restrictions imposed by the different tiers of government came into force during the planting season, farmers could no longer prepare their land for planting owing to the twin effects of labour scarcity and inadequate funds to pay for such services in the face of rising hunger and deprivation. And even when States border closures were lifted, markets and business were opened between six to eight hours for three days in a week. Therefore, the combination of inter-state border closures and intra-state restrictions on markets in no small measure stifled farmers access to critical inputs required for production. And by the time lockdowns were generally lifted, the planting season had past, and only a few farmers out of desperation were engaged in delayed planting with consequential low yields”, the speaker said.

Intractable issues such as insurgency, communal clashes, farmers-herders conflicts as well as climate change have affected the levels of food availability for several decades. The activities of Boko Haram in the Northern States of Nigeria, and the rising spate of banditry and kidnappings

across the nation have made farming a very risky vocation. Farmers can no longer go to farm except security arrangements are put in place to protect them. But since many communities cannot afford this, the level of hunger is becoming unbearable. With no land cultivated, and no livestock reared, then food shortage becomes a looming danger across the nation.

In view of the foregoing, the keynote speaker, therefore, enjoined everyone present especially the policy actors and decision makers to make concerted efforts to tackle these on-going challenges alongside those that the covid-19 pandemic has brought upon the nation, if sustainable food production is to be achieved.

The keynote address was followed by CPED presentation of the findings and policy implications of the rapid assessment research on the “impact of Covid-19 on local food production and informal food markets in Nigeria with Niger delta region as case study”. **Professor Mrs. Dicta Ogisi**, Principal Investigator of the Covid-19 food project made the presentation on behalf of the project research team. Her presentation focused on the findings of the impact of the lockdown on local food production with respect to access to farm inputs, labour supply and farmland and its effects on the food security status; the impact of market closures on the informal urban and rural food markets with respect to the prevention of transactions between producers, traders, wholesalers, retailers and consumers on the one hand and the supply of food, price increases, livelihoods, incomes and food security on the other; and key policy measures to address the identified challenges so as to protect local food production and sustain informal food markets in urban and rural areas during this period of covid-19 and post COVID-19.

In her presentation, Prof. Ogisi noted that the vast majority of respondents knew about measures to prevent the spread of covid-19, although some measures were better known than others. Knowledge of appropriate social distancing measures was high, with respondents reporting that they knew that staying at home and avoiding going out as well as avoiding crowded places or gatherings could help reduce the risk of contracting covid-19. The respondents’ knowledge of the mode of contracting covid-19 was reflected in their practice of social distancing as over 70 percent of them reported that they practice social distancing.

In the area of impact of Covid-19 on food farming activities, the presenter noted that women were more negatively affected than men by the impacts of covid-19 in terms of food production activities thereby making them more vulnerable than men. According to her the findings also indicate that over 86 percent of the food farmers reported that covid-19 has affected their ability to hire the required labour for their farms as 58.67 percent of the farmers did not hire labour for their farms since March, 2020. Also in relation to farming activities, the speaker noted that covid-19 affected the prices of farm outputs as most of the respondents (56.01 percent) reported that the prices of their farm produce were higher or much higher compared with the preceding five years. Despite that, many food farmers were hesitant selling their food products because they do not know when the covid-19 restrictions will end and so they save their produce for family use. Here again the challenge of storage facilities confronted them as most of food farmers do not have facilities for the storage of perishable food items. It was found that over 76 percent of the food farmers do not have storage facilities.

In the area of food markets, the speaker stated that the food marketers in the study area were involved in the sale of a variety of food items locally consumed in Nigeria. The vast proportion of

the respondents (60.76 percent) were involved in the marketing of arable crop products such as potato, maize, yam, cassava, gari, rice, plantain, vegetable, etc. and indeed 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. The restrictions on rural-urban travels and the relocation of rural markets affected traditional mechanisms of marketing of local agricultural products by farmers, particularly in collection markets. Prof. Ogisi also mentioned that the findings of the research show that 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 speaker emphasized.

In relation to household vulnerability Prof. Ogisi in her presentation noted that Covid-19 has significantly impacted people's lives and livelihoods in the Niger Delta region. According to her, these impacts were more prevalent among women in the study area. The findings show that 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. Also talking of the impact of Covid-19 on household vulnerability, the speaker said 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. According to her about 47.75 percent of the respondents reported that essential medicine/drugs were 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.

After a clear presentation of the findings of the research, the speaker also made some recommendations which Policy makers, Decision makers and other key stakeholders can implement to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on Niger Delta dwellers and indeed other Nigerians. Some of the research recommendation are presented below:

Local Food Production

(i) Many communities rely on markets, especially in urban settings, capacity for home food production and/or processing is limited, and local production systems are unable to cope with shocks. Therefore, governments need to increase household and community food production through distributing seeds, tools, and fertilizers for small farmers and urban gardens during and after the pandemic. In addition, governments could help by providing local agricultural and livestock extension services and technical assistance.

(ii) To meet immediate needs of the most vulnerable population in rural communities, governments, non-governmental organisations and private sector actors should invest in food storage facilities in the rural areas and possibly create improvised food market channels for the rural populace to purchase essential farm inputs and food items at regular prices.

(iii) More efficient, sustainable and resilient local food production systems require careful management of land, soil, and water through integrated approaches. Such food systems also require reduction of post-harvest food losses at every stage of the value chain with improved practices. These include access to low-cost handling and storage technologies, and packaging.

(iv) Ensuring that agricultural actors and activities at all levels, particularly harvests, are not severely affected by the unintended consequences of the containment measures and restrictions on movement, while keeping safe the work environment of food producers and farm workers. How will this be implemented?

Marketing of local food

(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) 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.

(iii) 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 and post Covid-19 precautions

(iv) Allow rural markets to operate with modest restrictions and precautions. Ensure farmers can farm, which may mean guaranteeing supplies of fertiliser, 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. This will require training and empowerment of all parties involved as well as compliance monitoring.

Food Security

(i) 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. At the same time, humanitarian support to most vulnerable groups needs to be planned with food commodities secured supply chain.

(ii) Federal and State Governments and other key stakeholders should ensure that people 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).

(iii) 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, processing and food preservation.

Household livelihoods

(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.

After the insightful presentation of the research findings and the policy implications by the project principal investigator, the audience were put in different meeting rooms to discuss the presentation and what policy makers can implement as part of the recommendation in the short, medium and long term.

The event was concluded by remarks made by **Professor May Nwoye**, a member of the Covid-19 food project research team. He thanked everyone for their participation and again enjoined the key policy actors to be proactive in addressing the recommendations made. She emphasized that CPED is ever ready for productive collaboration in reducing poverty in the Niger Delta region and beyond.

The meeting lasted for about three hours. The workshop attendance list is attached below.

Workshop Attendance

SN	NAMES	ZOOM USERNAME	SEX
1	Prof. O. E. Inoni	Inoni-KNS	M
2	Awuzia Benjamin	Awuzia-DEL	M
3	Obiazi Solomon	Obiazi-DEL	M
4	Eboka Ndidi E.	Eboka-DEL	M
5	Akaeze Gift	Akaeze-DEL	F
6	Emeka Nwaokocha	Nwaokocha-DEL	M
7	Osiogun Endurance	Osiogun-DEL	F
8	Leoben Osamah	Osamah-DEL	M
9	Consolation Osamah	Osamah-DEL	F
10	Okobie Nkechi	Okobie-DEL	F
11	Kenneth Ibeaji	Ibeaji-DEL	M
12	Abraham Osekwe	Osekwe-DEL	M
13	Onwuaduegbo Kingsley	Onwuaduegbo-DEL	M
14	Orueseamre Sunday	Orueseamre-DEL	M
15	Sunday Egbedion	Egbedion-DEL	M
16	Anthony Atsegbahan	Atsegbahan-DEL	M
17	Eseoghene Omoh	Omoh-DEL	F
18	Julie Edileh	Edileh-DEL	F
19	Bright Abriku	Abriku-DEL	M
20	Ochuko Timothy	Ochuko-DEL	M
21	Bridget Oghenebrobrien	Oghenebrobrien-DEL	F
22	Rukevwe Odiegba	Odiegba-DEL	F
23	Princewill Ovie	Ovie-DEL	M
24	Purity Onosiakpor	Onosiakpor-DEL	M
25	Sharon Ogbomah	Ogbomah-DEL	F
26	Onome Prince	Prince-DEL	F
27	Praise Apare	Apare-DEL	F
28	Ejuvwekpokpo Oghorodi	Oghorodi-DEL	M
29	Santin Mode O. Augustine	Santin-DEL	M
30	Segun Odele	Odele-MEDIA	M
31	Flora Bossey	Bossey-MEDIA	F
32	Chioma Chibuko	Chibuko-CSO	F
33	Abiola Daisy	Abiola-CSO	F
34	Itua Osasunmhen	Osasunmhen-CSO	M
35	Emmanuel Aggidi	Aggidi-LGA	M
36	Julie Idiegbe	Idiegbe-LGA	F
37	Stella Mode	Mode-LGA	F
38	Akwei Ebinepre	Ebinepre-LGA	F
39	Ikpibako Victory	Ikpibako-LGA	F
40	Oki	Oki-POL/DM	M

41	Omonizua C.J.	Omonizua-POL/DM	M
42	Ishaka Reuben	Ishaka-POL/DM	M
43	Odume Okuguni	Odume-POL/DM	M
44	Efeturi Victor O	Efeturi-POL/DM	M
45	Briggs Vivian D.	Briggs-POL/DM	F
46	Ogirisen Felix	Ogirisen-POL/DM	M
47	Professor Andrew G. Onokerhoraye	Onokerhoraye-TEAM	M
48	Professor May Nwoye	Nwoye-TEAM	M
49	Professor Dicta Ogisi,	Ogisi,-TEAM-PI	F
50	Professor Gideon E.D. Omuta,	Omuta-BOT	M
51	Professor Felicia Okoro,	Okoro-ASS	F
52	Professor Onovughe Ikelegbe	Ikelegbe-ASS	F
53	Iroroturi Iyamba	Iroroturi-PROG	F
54	Dr. Johnson Dudu	Dudu-ASS	M
55	Engr. Job Eronmhonsele	Eronmhonsele-TEAM	M
56	Dr. Francis Onojeta	Onojeta-TEAM	M
57	Dr. Godwin Atedhor	Atedhor-ASS	M
58	Dr. Eddy Akpomera	Akpomera-ASS	M
59	Edith Oseghale	Oseghale-MNT	F
60	Jones-Abriku	Jones-TEC	M
61	Sido Verere	Verere-MNT	F
62	Patience Aika	Aika-MNT	F
63	Abebe-John	Abebe-MNT	F
64	Denyiye Hitlar	Hitlar-MNT	M
65	Boris Odalonu	Odalonu-MNT	M
66	Osagie Aitokhuehi	Osagie-PROG	M
67	Ernest Imonga	Imongan-PROG	M
68	Andrew Momoh	Andrew-PROG	M
69	Mercy Umuro	Mercy-PROG	F
70	Nkechi Melohe	Nkechi-FIN	F
71	Mayor Ororho	Ororho-DEL	M