

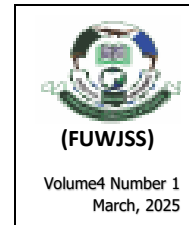
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19
PANDEMIC ON HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD
SYSTEMS IN NIGEREAST SENATORIAL ZONE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic came with far-reaching consequences for people and governments. Thus, this study examines the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on household livelihoods in the Nigereast senatorial zone of Niger State. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design involving 450 respondents and in-depth interviews with heads of households, the study explores the multifaceted consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic across various dimensions of livelihoods. The study findings revealed significant disruptions to income-generating activities, increased food insecurity, and disproportionate impact based on income, gender, age, and access to the five livelihood assets as the principal impact of Covid-19 pandemic on househouse livelihoods in Nigereast senatorial zone of Niger State, Nigeria. The study concludes that there is differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across demographic groups in Nigereast senatorial zone with low-income households, women, and marginalized groups experiencing disproportionate burdens. The study recommends that there is urgent need for a multi-pronged approach that strengthens social safety nets, promotes inclusive economic growth and fosters community resilience in communities of Nigereast senatorial zone.

Keywords: COVID-19, livelihoods, poverty, social safety nets

Introduction

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 triggered a global health crisis of unprecedented scale. To curb the spread of the infections, governments at all levels implemented safety protocols such as lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing. While these interventions were crucial for public health, they also profoundly impacted the socio-economic landscape with varying disruptive consequences on people's livelihoods. The reduction in social group interaction, work-from-home, reduction in food production/supply, disrupted human labour, and digitalization of human lives during the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 era have consequently reduced social group interaction which sustains livelihoods and social relationships among diverse human groups. Necessitating the need to examine the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households specifically focusing on livelihood outcomes in Niger State East Senatorial Zone, to inform strategies for recovery.

Livelihood outcomes were of focus in this study for two reasons. Firstly, since the Second World War, humanity has never been faced with such a dual crisis (economy and health) annihilating world systems like that of the COVID-19 pandemic. Worldwide, the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income households is particularly acute, imperiling the significant progress made in reducing extreme poverty, hunger, and inequality which will jeopardize the achievement of SDGs come 2030. However, it is necessary to say that the Northern Nigerian case has been exacerbated by pre-pandemic poverty, severe economic challenges, weak social institutions, and growing insecurity, increasing the need for a robust investigation into the cultural and socioeconomic potential long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly, livelihood outcomes which are a major part of a society's infrastructure (reminiscent of the thoughts of Karl Marx in his division of society's infrastructure and superstructure), remain an indispensable factor in shaping social relationships, behaviors, and structures. Thus, the need for this research on livelihood outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic will fill critical scholarly gaps in the field of study.

As day-to-day activities move away from the face-to-face context of social interaction caused by social distancing and lockdowns of COVID-19, coupled with the philosophy governing postmodernism, post-COVID-19 social, economic, cultural, and political realities need to be more understood. Although the COVID-19 virus has abated, the socioeconomic impact is still deeply affecting social structures. This brought a lot of hardships to the households with myriad sociological implications. Unlike other previous pandemics, COVID-19 has made the superpowers of the world that normally

provide aid to more vulnerable nations become major victims themselves, thus making IMF describe the COVID-19 pandemic as humanity's darkest hours. Despite successes recorded in the curtailment of the virus and achievements made in the health sector (through vaccines and sanitizations), livelihoods have continued to suffer immensely worldwide.

During the lockdown measures, people had to resort to a way of survival. This escalated the use of information technology and digital resources, making all spheres of life and social institutions like governance, education, social gatherings, religion, work, and health dominated by IT and carried out electronically. The question then arose as more than 70% of people in Niger state reside in areas with an inconsistent and inadequate supply of electricity, internet, and smartphones. This "machine-to-machine" communication (M2M) and its relevance are long the realities of post-modernism practiced by advanced countries. Sociologists call this "The New Normal" as it has come to improve humanity. David (2020) named it "The smart way of life". This also corroborates August Comte's Positive Stage of societies' advancement. This shift from an analog to a digital way of life has significantly affected livelihood outcomes. Questions arose as to how many households could access, afford, and adapt digital and smart tools to earn a living. National and international alleviation measures and aids adopted "Smart" and digital methods to aid the people.

There was also a major disruption and minimization of human relationships around ecological environments. Farmlands and aquatic farms were deserted, and mass production of food was altered. Importation and exportation were suspended at the pandemic's peak and, more recently, reduced, making many households experience a drastic reduction in livelihood sources. Consequently, gender-based issues arose as well as domestic frictions. Psychological trauma and socio-economic hardships increased with the unbearable burden caused by all spouses working from home. These have been supported by the increase in misery rate of 56% in 2021 and now 68% in 2022 (Statistica, 2023). Niger State's case has been worsened by the overburdening insecurity situations, which have re-directed the government's focus to the security sector, making social and economic institutions continue to fall into the quagmire.

To fill the research gaps, this article aims to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures on household livelihoods using Sustainable Livelihood Framework and Sustainable Livelihood Pentagon while answering the questions: What could be the livelihoods outcomes of households in Niger East Senatorial district after the COVID-19 pandemic? What were the 'newer cultures' concerning household livelihoods that emerged therefrom? And what were the

responses/intervention measures taken to mitigate the impact of the livelihood shocks on households?

The Sociology of COVID-19

Building upon the work of Bintube (2021), this paper seeks to address the identified need for further research into the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on people's livelihoods and sustenance. Whilst, several attempts have been made to examine the pandemic's effects on household livelihoods in various locations globally, the bulk of available literature largely focused on the global north. Studies from developing countries as well as studies on socioeconomic impacts are still unfolding. Most literature on the impact of COVID-19 on household livelihoods [Evan (2020), Tilde (2020), Heraclitus (2020), Alkali (2020), Emefiele (2020), and Peterson (2020)] has agreed on the transformational changes the pandemic has had on cultures and socioeconomic and political spheres of human life. Furthermore, it has also been acknowledged that the impacts and changes of the pandemic are not equally shared, portraying the potential widening of global social inequality [Bambra (2020), Bloomberg (2020), Milanovic (2021), Basu (2021)].

The Coronavirus is a disease referred to as COVID-19 that affects the respiratory system, which was triggered by a new virus, known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), which was discovered in December 2019 (Gentile and Abenavoli, 2020; Shan and Roa, 2020). The pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, has become one of the worst pandemics in human history, with a staggering number of more than 1.4 million infections in 177 countries and more than 85,000 deaths globally (Sayed, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly a crisis that has made humanity witness extremely uncertain moments and an unprecedented global health crisis.

Livelihood in this study encompasses how individuals or households secure basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and clothing. It's more than just employment; it includes all the activities and resources necessary for survival and well-being. Chambers and Conway (1992:8) assert that a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at local and global levels in the long and short term.

With a clear understanding of the conceptual foundation above, the study adopted the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and Livelihood Pentagon which explains the importance of access to various forms of livelihood capital (financial, human, social, natural, and physical) in enabling households to withstand an external shock like the COVID-19

pandemic. This framework considers how the crisis has impacted the different livelihood assets of Niger East senatorial zone households. We also used the Bricolage theory to explain the emergence and adoption of 'newer cultures' of digitalizing livelihood means and digitalizing government responses and intervention.

Chetty, et al (2024) found that the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities with low-income households experiencing disproportionately larger income losses and increased financial hardships. The economic impact of the pandemic, as evidenced by reductions in income, employment, and access to credit, has been a key driver of the erosion of households' economic resilience (Traoré et al., 2022) (Egger et al., 2021) (Al-Saidi et al., 2022). The loss of jobs and reduced earnings have constrained the ability of many families to meet their basic needs, leading to heightened food insecurity and a decline in living standards. In addition, Dimitris et al (2024) found that household consumption declined significantly during the early stages of the pandemic driven by factors such as job losses, income uncertainty, and precautionary savings.

Compounding the financial strain, the pandemic has also disrupted access to essential public services, including healthcare and education, thereby undermining the human capital of affected households. The coping mechanisms employed, such as the depletion of savings and the sale of productive assets, have further compromised the long-term resilience of these households, increasing their vulnerability to future shocks.

Research on national and international responses to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on household livelihoods has revealed a mixed picture. While some governments implemented effective social safety nets, such as cash transfers and food distribution programs as documented by researchers like Milanovic (2021) and Rodrik (2021), these often-faced challenges in reaching the most vulnerable households, particularly in remote areas. International organizations played a crucial role in providing financial and technical assistance; however, coordination and resource allocation were often inconsistent (Milanovic, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly altered household livelihoods, fostering the emergence of new cultural norms and practices. Research by Dionne et al (2024) on remote work culture has demonstrated the rise of remote work as a significant shift, impacting work-life balance, social interactions, and domestic arrangements. Studies conducted by Yahaya (2024) on digital divide and access have highlighted the exacerbation of the digital divide, with unequal access to technology and online resources creating new forms of social and economic exclusion. Moreover, their work on community resilience has observed the emergence of community-based support networks and mutual aid initiatives as households adapted to the

challenges of the pandemic, fostering new forms of social solidarity and resilience.

Theoretical Framework

Building on the concept of Bricolage as defined by Levi Strauss (1966/67), new and innovative livelihood means emerge in economically or resource-poor regions out of necessity. In his words, Bricolage refers to “using current resources to create new forms and order from tools and materials at hand” (Levi-Strauss, 1966). This explains how under-utilized resources can be recombined into productive resources out of necessity. This suits the objectives of this paper as it will expatiate on how households had to resort to digital resources to earn their livelihood, solve problems, and exploit new opportunities amidst and post-COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper posits that bricolage has become even more vital for livelihoods, especially for households in the Niger East senatorial zone. The region already faces resource constraints. The COVID-19 crisis has attenuated trade and livelihood means, keeping it, in some cases, limited to using the resources at hand. As important as bricolage is for households due to their limited resources at hand, it is also essential for the country because it will efficiently mobilize existing resources to ensure sustainable livelihood security.

It has also been observed that digital resources were the key medium through which stakeholders communicated amidst the pandemic and its containment measures like lockdowns and social distancing and were also used significantly during the implementation of international and national recovery measures like intervention funding and palliative distribution (Bintube, 2021; Peterson, 2020; Emefiele, 2020 and World Bank Report, 2020). In cases like Northern Nigeria, where social groups are limited based on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and residence, an alarming recovery gap can be foreseen, which has been under-researched by academic literature.

There is a huge consensus among scholars and policy institutions that COVID-19 will have huge implications on the future trajectory of healthcare, transport, and education systems (Beltrami 2020 and Elham 2020). In the context of our research. On the other hand, the social capital of the households has been strained, as the need for physical distancing has eroded support networks and communal coping strategies. The disruption to social interactions and the increased isolation experienced by many households, especially the elderly and those living alone, have exacerbated the mental health toll of the crisis (Posel et al., 2021). Michie et al (2024) argued that the pandemic had a significant negative impact on mental health and well-being with implications for individual and family functioning.

Dionne et al (2024) added that the pandemic led to both positive and negative changes in family dynamics, with some families experiencing increased closeness and support while others experienced increased conflict and strain. The pandemic had a complex and multifaceted impact on family relationships, with both positive and negative consequences. Significantly, yet undermined by scholars, is the overall increase in the care burden of households as a result of lockdowns which have overwhelmed the household's ability to participate in the digital sphere fully. This increased burden has increased the chances of loss of entrepreneurial, employment, and educational activities, thus making households more prone to dependency, abuse, and vulnerability. A recent study by Collins et al. (2020) reveals that households, especially women, are reducing their working hours or have to leave the workforce altogether due to childcare constraints. In developed countries such as the United States, it is argued that farmers growing more specialized crops could be affected more than others, and therefore, there are likely to be no significant food security challenges and livelihood disruptions as farmers who grow these crops are usually well-resourced and do not operate at subsistence level (Poppick 2020). For poorer African countries, Husain is worried that COVID-19 could produce disastrous effects for the majority of people located in developing countries more than the disease itself. He drew policy attention to the '...poor people in many countries who rely on imports for their food and fuel needs and exports of primary commodities to pay for them.

Saez et al (2023) examined the distributional consequences of government support measures implemented during the pandemic. They found government interventions played a crucial role in mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic but also had unintended distributional consequences. Hall (2023), added that how countries reacted to the challenge will define the nature of implications for livelihoods resilience and food security. Without ample groundwork, response strategies, and resources, second-order impacts on the economy, food security, livelihoods, and more will be worsened by non-data-driven and possibly inept policy responses. This indicates that comprehensive food security and agricultural policies are imperative for countries and their vulnerable populations to be able to respond to virus outbreaks and the food security and livelihoods shock they throw up.

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) guided the identification, analysis, and presentation of the research findings. At the core of the SLF's framework is the asset pentagon, which describes the relationship between people's access to five types of capital: human, social, natural physical, and financial. These assets combine to produce positive livelihood outcomes. The asset pentagon lies within the vulnerability context, which is the external

environment over which people have limited or no control (pandemics, rainfall, inflation, etc). The transforming structures and processes are the institutions, policies, and legislation that shape livelihoods. Together, the combination of these factors results in livelihood strategies that people to achieve their livelihood goals.

Research Methodology

The research area consists of 9 senatorial zones namely Bosso, Chanchaga, Gurara, Munya, Paiko, Rafi, Shiroro, Suleja, and Tafa. Amongst these 3 LGAs were purposively sampled for the survey due to their relevance to the research questions. Thus, the research covered 450 households across the 3 major districts namely Chanchaga, Bosso, and Suleja. These regions are known as some of the most diverse regions in terms of population and economic activities. Participants are heads of households at least 18 years of age and above. Female heads of household were also included as some families were headed by single mothers. We randomly selected 150 households each from each district. Each participant was notified about ethical considerations and the conduct of research proceeded within the same day of the initial study. Although not all households responded at the onset of the research, the repeated nature of our methods enabled us to achieve a response from our sample at its maximum.

A cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were combined to collect data from the respondents. Data were collected from the respondent using questionnaires and in-depth interviews with heads of households. The quantitative data was analyzed and presented using percentages, graphs, and livelihood pentagon. Qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews were thematically analyzed.

Results/Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and multifaceted impact on Niger-East senatorial district. This section addresses the research objectives outlined in the introduction. Specifically, we examine the livelihoods outcomes of households in Niger East senatorial district before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic; 'newer cultures' concerning household livelihoods that emerged therefrom; government responses/intervention measures taken to mitigate the impact of the livelihood shocks on household. The following discussion explores these findings in depth, examining the underlying mechanisms and their implications for poverty reduction and development.

Economic Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Households' Livelihood

The economic disruption has been particularly severe for low-income households and small businesses, which often lack the financial resources and resilience to withstand such shocks. Job losses were significant, particularly in sectors reliant on movements, such as agriculture trade, and transportation. Businesses experienced closures or reduced operations. This has led to a sharp decline in living standards, heightened food insecurity, and a significant erosion of household savings and assets. Corroborating evidence from the literature, our study indicates that the COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable populations with studies from South Africa showing severe mental health toll of job losses and research in Burkina Faso highlighting the pre-existing challenges of households in meeting their basic needs (Traoré et al., 2023).

These economic impacts also sprout out various income diversification strategies like an increase in door-to-door delivery of goods and logistics sector growth. Changes in work hours and shifts to non-formal entrepreneurial sectors amongst some households. Findings also revealed changes in food consumption patterns (e.g., reduced dietary diversity, increased reliance on less nutritious foods); food access (e.g., increased food prices, reduced access to markets) as well as disruptions to supply chains. The informal sector, a significant source of income for many households, was also heavily impacted due to restrictions on movement and reduced demand for services. Many households resorted to borrowing money to meet basic needs, potentially leading to future debt burdens. Households maximized the use of local resources for food and income generation, highlighting the importance of local food systems.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic significantly impacted financial capital through household income, savings, access to credit, and debt levels. Financial capital especially savings was non-existent in some households. Human capital followed suit through school closures and increased mental health burdens, reducing the capacity of households to engage in income-generating activities. Moreover, disruptions to agricultural production, access to natural resources, environmental degradation, and access to markets severely affected households. Inadequate access to physical capital in the form of infrastructure (e.g. transportation, electricity, technology, and other physical assets further eroded household livelihoods.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework and its Application to the Study Area

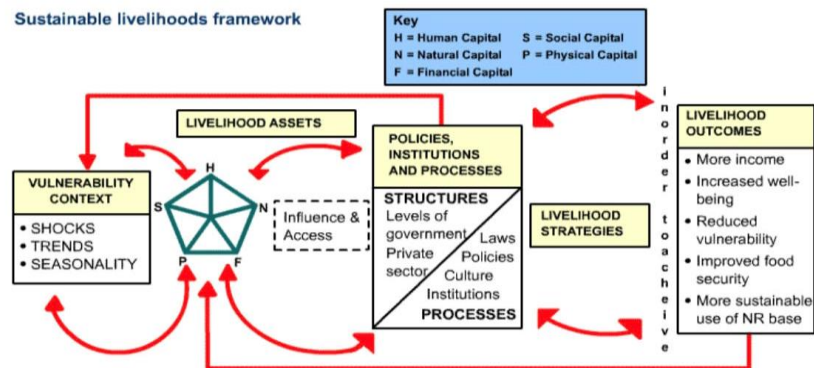


Figure 1 Sustainable livelihoods framework.
Source: DFID (2003)

Vulnerability Context	Access to Asset Type	Structures and Processes	Strategies	Outcomes
COVID-19 Pandemic	H= Poor skill set	Statutory and customary land laws contradictions	Farming within the households	Stable income but raising inflation
High Inflation	N= Vast un-utilized Agricultural lands	Insecure land rights	Side business enterprise	Income reduction and stoppage in some households.
Supply chain disruption	F= Poor access to financial capital	Time constraints because working from home was a huge burden	Online skills	Severe food insecurity
Digital Divide	P= Poor internet, transport, and electricity.	Poor access to education and credit facilities	Selling assets, borrowing, and using savings	Debt accumulation
Mental health crises	S=Medium social group networking.	Poor access to markets		Increased mental stress
Post-harvest loses		Remote work		Digital economy growth
Inadequate healthcare facilities		Social distancing		Strengthened family times
Lack of government preparedness		Hygiene practices		Community resilience
Inadequate state government capacity		Digital transformation		

Lack of international and local cooperation		Government palliatives		
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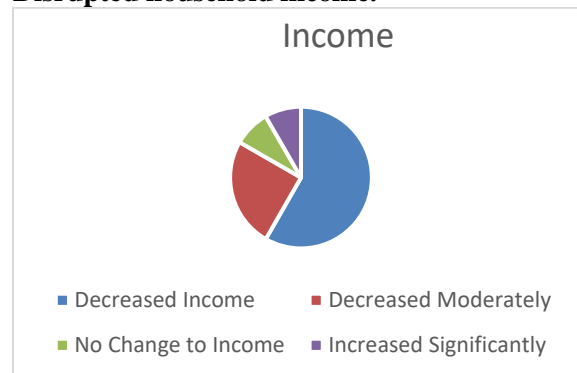
Fieldwork, 2024.

Note:

- Human **capital**: Skills, knowledge, health
- Natural **capital**: Natural resources
- Physical **capital**: Infrastructure, tools, technology
- Financial **capital**: Savings, credit, access to markets
- Social **capital**: Networks, relationships, trust

The analysis above reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound and multifaceted impact on household livelihoods significantly affecting all five capitals within the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. The interconnectedness of these capitals was evident, as shocks to one capital cascaded and impacted others. This study underscores the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to addressing the challenges faced by households, including investments in human capital development, sustainable natural resource management, improved access to financial services, and the strengthening of social safety nets. Addressing these interconnected challenges, it is possible to build more resilient and sustainable livelihoods for households in Northern Nigeria.

Disrupted household income.



Fieldwork, 2024

The pie chart reveals a severe reality as disruption of livelihood has affected a considerable portion of households in the study area. A significant proportion of households experienced moderate to strong disruptions to their income streams, indicating a significant economic shock. This study also reveals the fragility of existing livelihood strategies and the urgent need for

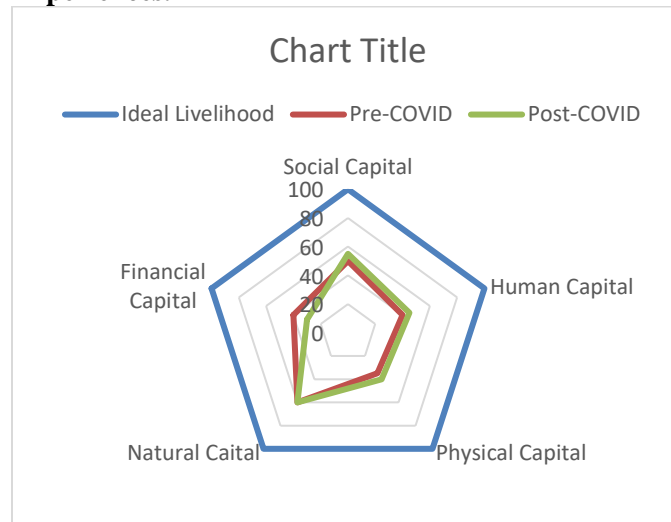
policy interventions that promote economic diversification, strengthen social safety nets, and enhance household resilience to future shocks

Income Strain based on demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Average Financial/Income strain
AGE	
18-24	6.2
35-49 years	6.3
50-64	6.0
65+ years	5.4
Income	
Quartile 1	6.6
Quartile 2	6.3
Quartile 3	5.9
Quartile 4	5.4
Gender	
Men	6.3
Women	5.8

Differences in financial strain due to the COVID-19 pandemic cut across demographic groups. Here, we asked the respondents to grade their financial/income strain (based on a scale of 0 (“not at all constrained”) to 10 (“extremely constrained”). We obtained the average score of each demographic group. The analysis of demographic characteristics concerning income strain highlights the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable populations. Households with lower incomes consistently reported higher levels of income strain, indicating a strong correlation between income and economic vulnerability. While age and gender also showed some association with income strain, the impact of these factors appeared less pronounced compared to income. This finding underscores the need for targeted interventions that address the specific needs of low-income households and mitigate the socioeconomic inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.

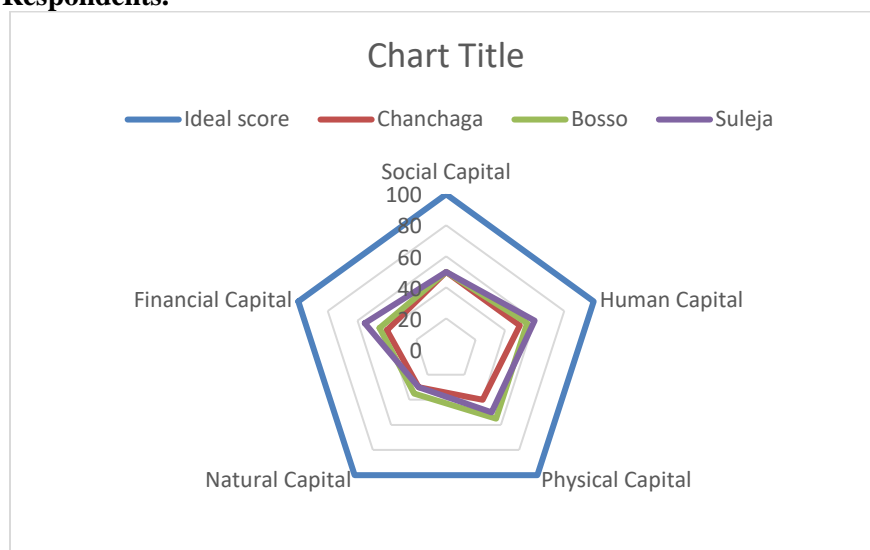
Sustainable Livelihood Pentagon based on Pre and Post-COVID Experiences.



Fieldwork, 2024

The pentagon diagrams reveal a concerning trend. Post-COVID, the average scores for all five capitals (human, natural, physical, financial, and social) generally declined, indicating a significant erosion of household livelihoods. This suggests that the pandemic severely impacted the interconnectedness of these capitals, leading to a cascading effect on household income security and overall well-being. The pre-and post-COVID pentagons illustrate the vulnerabilities to external shocks. This highlights the critical need for interventions that strengthen these capitals, such as investments in education and skills training (human), sustainable resource management (natural), improved infrastructure (physical), access to finance (financial), and community support systems (social). While the post-COVID pentagon demonstrates a decline in several capitals, it also highlights the resilience of some households. By analyzing the variations in scores across different households, we can identify coping mechanisms and resilience strategies that can be further supported and scaled up to mitigate the long-term impacts of the pandemic on livelihoods.

Sustainable Livelihood Pentagon based on the Location of the Respondents.



Fieldwork, 2024

The pentagon merged the pentagon analyses of the three-study area, findings reveal that:

Social Capital: All three locations show a significant decline in Social Capital, with scores ranging from 40 to 50. This suggests a weakening of social networks, community support systems, and trust, potentially due to the pandemic's impact on social interactions.

Human Capital: While there's some variation, all locations demonstrate a decline in Human Capital, with scores ranging from 50 to 60. This could indicate disruptions to education, increased health issues, and a loss of skills due to the pandemic.

Physical Capital: Chanchaga and Suleja show a slight improvement in Physical Capital (scores of 55), while Bosso experiences a significant decline (score of 40). This suggests varying levels of access to infrastructure, technology, and other physical assets across the locations.

Natural Capital: All locations show a significant decline in Natural Capital, with scores ranging from 30 to 35. This could be attributed to factors like environmental degradation, reduced access to natural resources, and disruptions to agricultural production due to the pandemic.

Overall, the data suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on all five capitals within the Livelihoods Pentagon across

all three locations. However, the extent of the impact varies across different capitals and locations.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Pentagon framework effectively demonstrates the interconnected nature of livelihood assets and their impact on income strain. The analysis reveals that households with weaker human capital, limited access to physical capital, and weaker social capital experienced higher levels of income strain. This underscores the importance of strengthening these assets to enhance household resilience to future shocks. The findings presented in the pie chart, analyzed through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihoods Pentagon, have critical policy implications. Interventions aimed at mitigating income strain should focus on strengthening human capital through education and skills training, improving access to financial capital through microfinance and credit programs, and enhancing social capital through community development initiatives. By addressing these interconnected dimensions of livelihoods, policymakers can effectively support households in recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic and building more resilient livelihoods.

Social Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Households' Livelihood

The pandemic exposed the limitations of social safety nets in the study area, especially in education, health, and social work. With a surge in unemployment and financial hardship, existing social safety programs were overwhelmed. Households, particularly those lacking access to monthly pay or social insurance, faced significant challenges in meeting basic needs for food, shelter, and healthcare. This situation exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and pushed most households further into poverty. The education of children was disrupted due to school closures and dropouts. Mental health issues stemming from social isolation and economic hardship have also emerged as a significant concern. Increased medical expenses, loss of productivity

Social Safety Nets: Existing social safety programs proved inadequate. Limited access to government assistance and social insurance schemes left many vulnerable households struggling to meet basic needs. Community-based support systems played a crucial role, but their capacity was stretched. Conversely, there was increased social networking as reliance on extended family and community support networks increased, especially to manage food insecurity and access resources.

The pandemic also impacted a range of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, particularly SDG 5, which addresses gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, including maternal mortality and access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV services. Learning from

previous outbreaks, and initial findings from COVID-19, the report highlights several areas where gendered gains will be reversed by the pandemic. However, there were cases of early marriage and unwanted pregnancies that were reported.

Moreover, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, who have faced heightened challenges in maintaining their livelihoods due to the disruption of informal economic activities, increased unpaid care responsibilities, and the limited reach of social protection measures. Our findings showed contrasting claims, while some women respondents reported increased bonds among family members, others (40%) reported being overburdened with household tasks.

Women-headed households often face additional challenges due to gender-based inequalities and limited access to resources. Informal sector workers: Workers in the informal sector, which constitutes a significant portion of the Nigerian workforce, are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of social safety nets and limited access to formal employment. Rural households: Rural households, which are heavily reliant on agriculture, have been affected by disruptions in supply chains and access to markets.

As suggested by Ghoshal (2021), the nationwide lockdown has “locked down” all members of the household, with an ever-increased burden on women for managing household work, care work, as well as office work. Studies also suggest an increase in domestic violence, including sexual, emotional, verbal, economic, and physical abuse, is due to the strict lockdown measures implemented by the Governments to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (Ghoshal 2021; and Nilima *et al.* 2020).

Changes in Culture and Social Relationships in Households

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly transformed household cultures and social relationships. The shift to remote work blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to both challenges and opportunities for family dynamics. While some households experienced increased stress and conflict, others reported strengthened family bonds and improved work-life balance. These shifts highlight the need to re-evaluate traditional notions of work, family, and social interaction in the context of a rapidly changing world.

The pandemic-induced changes in work patterns, social interactions, and daily routines are likely to have long-lasting impacts on household cultures and social relationships. The increased reliance on technology for work, education, and social connection may reshape social norms and interpersonal communication patterns. Understanding these evolving dynamics is crucial for navigating the social and cultural shifts brought about by the pandemic and ensuring a more equitable and fulfilling future for families.

Despite the challenges, the pandemic also highlighted households' resilience and adaptability in navigating unprecedented changes. Families developed new routines, explored new forms of social connection, and discovered innovative ways to support one another. These experiences underscore the importance of fostering strong family bonds, supporting community networks, and promoting social and emotional well-being in the face of future disruptions.

Addressing the pandemic's social and cultural impacts will be crucial for building long-term resilience. Investing in community-based support systems, mental health services, and programs that promote gender equality and work-life balance can help mitigate the erosion of social capital and foster more resilient households and communities. Findings from Ghana echo these dynamics, highlighting how the pandemic has reinforced existing inequalities and revealed gaps in service delivery and access across multiple sectors, including healthcare, business, and education.

The pandemic has also led to a re-evaluation of family structures and gender roles, as the shift to remote work and the increased burden of care responsibilities have disproportionately impacted women, potentially reversing hard-won gains in women's economic and social empowerment. It highlights that women are responsible for health-seeking behaviour in households and often provide care for the sick, therefore any increase in the number of people getting sick will directly affect women. Impacts on women will be further exacerbated if women's routine mobility is limited because of lockdown and/or childcare (for example). It also highlights the risk of increased gender-based violence, for example, linked to water collection (often considered a woman's task), and calls for protections for women and children to be put in place. The paper outlines how women's unpaid labour will increase as a result of the pandemic, affecting school participation and economic security.

National Government Response to COVID-19 Pandemic on Households in Nigeria

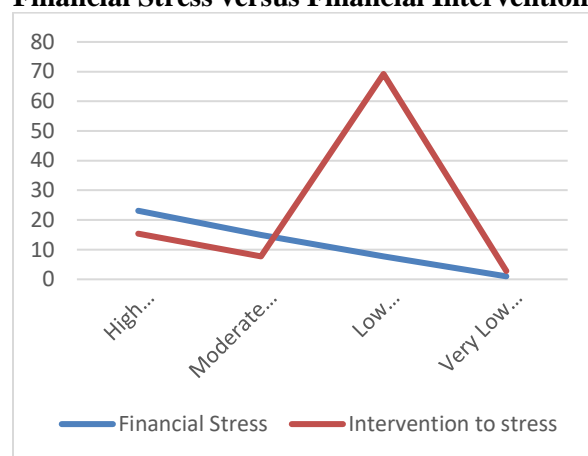
While the Nigerian government implemented various measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households, their effectiveness varied. Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, palliative, stimulus packages, loan moratoriums, increase in health workers salary interest rate reductions, and targeted support programs for vulnerable groups were some of the interventions. While some interventions provided crucial support, challenges such as limited reach, logistics, inadequate funding, and bureaucratic hurdles hindered their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable households. Further research is needed to assess the specific impact of these interventions and identify areas for improvement.

The analysis reveals significant gaps in the national government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-pronged approach, including strengthening existing social safety net programs, expanding access to financial services, and implementing targeted interventions to support vulnerable households. The findings of this study reveal the need for a more robust and targeted national response to future crises and the enhancement of disaster preparedness and response mechanisms. Furthermore, increased collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities is crucial for effective and equitable support to vulnerable households.

Significantly, the Nigerian government's efforts to support the education sector during the pandemic were hindered by the country's pre-existing digital divide, with many students from low-income households lacking access to the necessary technology and infrastructure for remote learning.

While necessary, the government's interventions have been limited in scope and effectiveness, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive and targeted approach to supporting the livelihoods of Nigerian households during the crisis and beyond (Saidi et al., 2022).

Financial Stress versus Financial Intervention Graph.



Findings reveal that financial stress was not proportional to the intervention. The graph illustrates a potential correlation between the level of government intervention and the degree of financial strain experienced by households. While further research is needed to establish causality, the trend suggests that households with access to greater government support may have experienced lower levels of financial strain during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings presented in the graph underscore the importance of effective government intervention in mitigating the economic impacts of crises on

households. Policymakers should strive to design and implement effective interventions that reach the most vulnerable households and effectively address their economic needs."

While the graph provides valuable insights into the potential relationship between government intervention and financial strain, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis. Further research is needed to establish causality and to control for other factors that may influence financial strain, such as household characteristics, access to resources, and the specific types of government interventions implemented. Nonetheless, the graph provides a preliminary indication of the potential benefits of effective government intervention in mitigating the economic impacts of crises on households."

International Responses to COVID-19 in Nigeria

The international response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, while being commendable in some aspects, faced challenges in effectively mitigating the impact on grassroots households. World Bank, IMF, UNICEF, UNDP, and IDB were very instrumental in providing various relief and technical programs to households. While some initiatives provided crucial support, challenges such as coordination issues, limited access to resources, and slow disbursement of funds hindered their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable households. Our respondents showed that 80% didn't receive or hear from any international intervention, while 10% each reported benefiting UNDP and WHO respectively.

Despite efforts from the international community, significant gaps remain in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Diversion of funding, inadequate funding for long-term recovery, limited access to technology and digital infrastructure, and insufficient support for vulnerable groups are some major challenges faced. Addressing these gaps requires increased international cooperation, improved coordination among international actors, and a greater focus on building local capacity and resilience. The findings of this study show the need for a more coordinated and effective international response to future pandemics. International interventions should be designed to be inclusive and equitable, ensuring that the most vulnerable households receive adequate support."

Role of Digital Innovations and Community-Based Initiatives

Digital innovations demonstrated significant potential in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on household livelihoods in the study area. From online platforms facilitating remote work and access to information to community-led food distribution programs and social support

networks, these approaches showcased communities' resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.

While digital innovations and community-based initiatives showed promise in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, several challenges hindered their effectiveness amongst which include limited access to technology and digital literacy, lack of adequate infrastructure, and wide digital divide among various socioeconomic groups. In the face of these challenges, digital tools have shown remarkable, adaptive, and innovative support to household livelihoods. One such example is the development of digital business networks by women, which have enabled them to continue their economic activities despite the restrictions on physical interactions (Madonna, 2022). Similarly, the acceleration of digital financial inclusion has emerged as a critical enabler of economic resilience, allowing households to access essential services and support during the crisis (Tay et al., 2022).

The findings highlighted the importance of leveraging digital innovations to enhance the resilience of households' livelihoods in future shocks. Policy recommendations include investing in digital infrastructure and literacy programs and fostering collaboration between government, civil society organizations, and the private sector to leverage technology for development.

Beyond the digital realm, community-based initiatives and religious organizations have also played a vital role in providing immediate relief and supporting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable. These efforts have ranged from food distribution and cash transfers to the provision of skills training and business development support. While these community-led initiatives have demonstrated their value, their impact has often been limited by a lack of resources and coordination with broader government and development efforts. Integrating and scaling up these grassroots initiatives, in partnership with the public and private sectors, could enhance the overall effectiveness of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a rapid shift towards digital modes of social activity exacerbating the digital divide and disproportionately impacting the livelihoods of those without access to digital technologies (Madonna, 2021). This digital transformation has presented both challenges and opportunities for households, as the ability to leverage online platforms for commerce, education, and social connection has become a key determinant of resilience.

However, the uneven distribution of digital literacy and access has meant that the benefits of this digital transition have not been equally shared. Vulnerable groups, including the rural poor, women, and the elderly, have faced significant barriers in adopting digital financial services and e-

commerce platforms, limiting their ability to maintain and rebuild their livelihoods (Tay et al., 2022). Worldwide cooperation between policymakers, regulators, and financial institutions is essential to address these challenges and unlock the full potential of digital innovations in supporting household livelihoods and sustainable development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study undertaken has provided a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on households in the Northeast senatorial zone of Niger State. Findings reveal significant disruptions across various dimensions, including income losses, food insecurity, disruptions to education, and increased vulnerability to health shocks. The analysis, framed by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, highlights the interconnectedness of these impacts, demonstrating how disruptions to one aspect of livelihoods cascaded through the system, affecting other critical dimensions. Furthermore, the study underscores the differential impact of the pandemic across demographic groups, with low-income households, women, and marginalized groups experiencing disproportionate burdens. While government and international interventions provided some level of support, significant gaps remain in reaching the most vulnerable households. The findings emphasize the urgent need for a multi-pronged approach that strengthens social safety nets, promotes inclusive economic growth and fosters community resilience. This includes investing in human capital development, supporting sustainable agriculture, improving access to financial services, and leveraging digital innovations to enhance livelihoods and mitigate the long-term consequences of the pandemic.

In light of the findings, we utilized the Sustainable Livelihood Framework to inform the following policy recommendations, that social intervention programs should be lifelong programs as development is a lifelong process, not just a four-year/tenure kind of political initiative. Investing in digital infrastructure and literacy programs to enable greater access to online livelihood opportunities and services. Supporting the development of diversified income streams and alternative livelihood strategies, particularly for those in the informal sector. Enhancing coordination between government, civil society, and development partners to ensure a holistic and well-targeted response.

Promoting inclusive, sustainable, and climate-resilient development that addresses the underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities exacerbated by the pandemic. Supporting Informal Workers: Policies that provide social protection for informal workers can improve their resilience to future shocks. Gender-responsive policies: Addressing gender-based inequalities

and empowering women can enhance their economic participation and resilience. Diversification of livelihoods: Households should diversify their livelihood sources, reduce over-reliance on vulnerable sectors, and increase their resilience to future shocks. Investment in education: Investing in education and human capital development should be prioritized as more educated people are more resilient in adopting and creating new sources of livelihoods, especially in crises. Leverage technology: Households should encourage the healthy use of technical devices and install internet services in their homes. This will promote interconnectedness with wider society and easier access in case of future shocks.

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