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Impacts of COVID-19 on the Economic and Humanitarian Situation of Food Security in West Africa

Alisa R. Shishkina^{1,2}  , Olubunmi Florence Ibuowo¹ 

¹ HSE University, Moscow, Russian Federation

²The Institute for African Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation

 ashishkina@hse.ru

Abstract. There has been a noticeable spike in food insecurity during the aftermath of the COVID-19 which has been on the increase in both Nigeria and Burkina Faso. This study made use of mixed methods research design to explore how COVID-19 affected the economic and humanitarian aspects of food security in West Africa. The purpose of this document is to provide clear highlight on the actions and responses of Nigeria and Burkina Faso to the emergence of COVID-19 concerning its implications on the food sector. Findings revealed that agriculture has made a significant contribution to the GDP of both Nigeria and Burkina Faso but witnessed a change during the outburst of COVID-19. We concluded that the government rolled out a series of policies both cash-based and food-based through subsidies and palliatives that ensure prices of food are monitored and that the vulnerable are provided with food. This paper therefore recommended that more work be done on how to integrate the use of technology to improve food security in both Nigeria and Burkina Faso and the rest of West Africa.

Keywords: pandemic, COVID-19, food security, disruption, policies

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Влияние COVID-19 на экономическую и гуманитарную ситуацию в сфере продовольственной безопасности в Западной Африке

А.Р. Шишкина^{1,2}  , О.Ф. Ибуово¹ 

¹ Высшая школа экономики, Москва, Российская Федерация

² Институт Африки РАН, Москва, Российская Федерация

 ashishkina@hse.ru

Аннотация. В период после COVID-19 произошел заметный всплеск продовольственной нестабильности, который усилился как в Нигерии, так и в Буркина-Фасо. В данном исследовании с использованием смешанных методов исследования было проанализировано, как COVID-19 повлиял на экономические и гуманитарные аспекты продовольственной безопасности в Западной Африке. Цель исследования — выявить действия и меры реагирования Нигерии и Буркина-Фасо на появление COVID-19 в отношении его последствий для продовольственного сектора. Результаты работы показали, что сельское хозяйство внесло значительный вклад в ВВП как Нигерии, так и Буркина-Фасо, но ситуация существенно изменилась во время вспышки COVID-19. Авторы приходят к выводу, что правительства развернули ряд политических мер, как финансовых, так и продовольственных, посредством субсидий и паллиативов, которые обеспечивают мониторинг цен на продукты питания и обеспечение уязвимых слоев населения продуктами питания. В качестве мер снижения рисков приводится рекомендация провести дополнительную работу по интеграции использования технологий для улучшения продовольственной безопасности как в Нигерии, так и в Буркина-Фасо, а также других странах Западной Африки.

Ключевые слова: пандемия, COVID-19, продовольственная безопасность, сбой, политика

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Introduction

The United Nations reported in 2017 that the world hunger rate had begun to rise as 11% of the world's population are likely to go hungry as a result of the absence of food. With the appearance of COVID-19, the condition of living had not improved [Mouloudj 2020]. Food security has received unwavering attention in recent times because of its importance to humanity and the sustenance of the country's economy globally. This could be traced back to 1974 when the first food conference was held to address the issue of hunger in the world [Ibukun et al. 2020]. Food security

in the millennium received a boost during the outbreak of coronavirus also known as COVID-19. According to [Onyeaka 2022], the socioeconomic repercussions of COVID-19 pushed approximately half a billion people into poverty and hunger, especially in economies that have low to middle-incomes, where people already live below the poverty line of \$1.90 a day, thus contributing to the pool of poor people in Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency due to the virus's rapid spread, which left the international system anxious. By March 2020 it was declared a pandemic, resulting in the death of about 6 million persons across the world [El Bilali et al. 2023]. In Africa, the first COVID-19 cases were documented on February 14, 2020, in Egypt and subsequently Algeria and Nigeria reported cases of COVID-19 [Bonnet et al. 2021; Martinez-Alvarez et al. 2020 & Osayomi et al. 2021]. Owing to the late spread of the virus to Africa, there were speculations that the warm weather in Africa could have played a significant role in curtailing the spread of the virus, meanwhile, in some quarters, others thought that the experience that African states had during the outbreak of Ebola virus came handy in controlling the virus's spread. Contrary to the widely held view that the virus will not survive in Africa, it spread to the rest of Africa, the whole of West Africa which is the focal point of the study was not left out. When the disease broke out in Africa it was anticipated to be the epicentre of the virus, but this was not so. However, due to poor health facilities, Africa recorded 170, 843 confirmed cases and 1,915 deaths of which 73, 624 were cases that were from West Africa with 1352 deaths [Taboe et al. 2020].

Beyond the consequences on health, the ripple effect of the virus resonated across different sectors, it triggered a multi-layered crisis in the financial sector, production sector, distribution sector, and agricultural sector thus leading to mass unemployment and an increase in poverty [El Bilali et al. 2020]. The pandemic disrupted global food security and agri-food system, disrupting the food supply chain, which is the distribution of food by influencing the behaviour of consumers regarding patterns of food and diet [El Bilali et al. 2020]. The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on food security was not limited to a particular section of the economy, it was felt in countries with high-income as well as middle and low-income states. Despite this, it is noteworthy to point out that the severity of loss recorded during this period also differs from country to country and how the virus was managed as well as the number of deaths recorded differs. Food security has been conceived by different scholars but the thrust of this study is to address the actions and responses of countries to COVID-19, particularly Nigeria and Burkina Faso and its implication on food security.

Literature Analysis

COVID-19 influence on global and regional trends

Numerous academic papers are devoted to various types of consequences of pandemics on global world development trends, including macroeconomic ones [Bell, Lewis 2004; Abraham 2011; Swinburn 2011; Ullah, Ferdous 2022]. One of the

important focuses in this case is the relationship between economic indicators and the consequences of the crisis caused by pandemics. Even though the connection in this case is ambiguous and some studies find economic growth after a pandemic, for example, the Spanish flu [Brainerd, Siegler 2003] or an increase in per capita consumption in the context of the HIV epidemic in South Africa [Young 2004], negative trends are also recorded by scientists [Bell, Gersbach 2004].

The discussion on the impact of pandemics on country development, in case of Africa, acquires particular importance since some regions of the continent, for example West Africa, are particularly in the focus of researchers, as they are the least prepared and protected from the devastating consequences of pandemics in both the short and long term [Jonung, Roeger 2006; Acemoglu, Johnson 2007; Bhargava, Docquier 2008; Madhav et al. 2017].

In the research and academic literature devoted to the consequences of COVID-19 on global development trends, the negative impact of the pandemic on global security is generally noted [Bjelajac, Filipovic 2020]. Thus, according to experts from the World Health Organization, one of the consequences of the pandemic has been a noticeable decline in the global economy as a whole, as well as fluctuations in food prices, serious disruptions in food supply chains, increased inequality, etc. Bergmann notes that the trends the world has faced during the COVID-19 pandemic are pervasive, ubiquitous and interdependent, and shape the crises that have emerged since then in various areas of societies [Bergman 2020].

We may also identify a cluster of studies highlighting some of the practices African states use to minimize security and food industry threats [Mouloudj et al. 2020; Aslam 2022; Ojokoh et al. 2022]. At the same time, the impact of COVID-19 on the economic and humanitarian situation of food security in West African countries have not yet been studied comprehensively, including in the field of analyzing individual responses to COVID crises in particular countries of this part of African continent. This article aims to fill this gap and examine the impact of the COVID pandemic in countries such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Case Analysis

COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa, Nigeria and Burkina Faso

An infectious disease that spreads widely over national and international borders, affecting a large number of people and capable of causing high rates of death and morbidity as well as political and socio economic instability is referred to as a pandemic [Ojokoh et al. 2022]. Through importation from Asia, Europe, and America, COVID-19 made its way to Africa; the first case in West Africa was later than was expected and even took a further time to spread to the Sahelian part of the sub-region. COVID-19 gave the world a scare, because of the rapid way it spread. Since the 2nd World War ended, the world has not been thrown into deep turmoil as was encountered during the emergence of COVID-19; considering the shock and the level of preparedness to tackle such a pandemic [Ahanhazo 2021]. West Africa's population was 367 million people with 412, 178 cases of COVID-19. This is about 14.8% per cent casualty of the

continent's record, while Africa as a continent recorded 11.2% of global deaths during COVID-19 outbreak. Two weeks later, COVID-19 was declared a public health issue that requires urgent attention. The ministers of health of all 15 ECOWAS States met in Bamako the capital of Mali to agree on the approach to respond to the virus, The ministers of health agreed on the need to put in place necessary infrastructure for quarantine or self-isolation and intensive care unit facilities and other critical materials needed in the laboratory such as personal protective equipment (PPE) [Ahanhazo 2021].

According to [Bonnet et al. 2021], Francophone countries in West Africa were predicted to be at low risk of contracting coronavirus due to limited air traffic to China, to this end the number of deaths recorded as a result of the virus in Burkina Faso was few the same few numbers was recorded across Francophone states in West Africa. However, the same cannot be said of Nigeria, a country in the same sub-regions as Burkina Faso. According to [Osayomi et al. 2021], Nigeria is the heartbeat of the sub-region's political and economic affairs. In terms of human mobility, Nigeria experiences a lot more than Burkina Faso particularly in air traffic flow within and outside the region and globally, with Lagos receiving about 2 million traffic flow in 2019 alone. Therefore, this makes Nigeria the country with the highest largest COVID cases in the sub-region. With about 14, 554 cases as well as the largest death associated with the pandemic, about 387. The reason for the low spread of the virus was alluded to the fact that Africa as a continent has the highest number of young populations with strong immune systems due to their diet which is plant-based. When the virus broke out in Burkina Faso the government had prepared for it because it was not until March that it spread to Burkina Faso this gave them a head start to prepare to tackle the virus head-on [Bonnet et al. 2021]. Although there was a low spread of the pandemic in West Africa, the result of the disease on food was huge [El Bilali 2023].

COVID-19 greatly affected the economies of Nigeria and Burkina Faso disrupting trade and heavily affecting food security as a result of some of the policies embarked upon to contain the spread of COVID-19. According to [El Bilali 2023; Ibukun et al. 2021; Taboe et al. 2020], to control the virus, some of the measures taken to curb the spread of coronavirus include basic hygiene, quarantine, lockdown, self-isolation, social distancing, closure of public spaces such as school, and worship centres. These measures adversely impacted the food system. Food production is a major contributor to the GDP of both Nigeria and Burkina Faso, as it contributes to the reduction of unemployment rate. Before the pandemic, food security was a major challenge in West Africa with a high level of undernourished persons across West Africa.

Figure 1 shows food contribution to GDP in Nigeria and Burkina Faso in pre-COVID period.

The figure revealed that Burkina Faso witnessed a sharp drop in the contribution of Agriculture to the GDP of the country, the record drop from an all-time high of 18.2% in 2019 to 17.23% in 2021. This revealed that although the country had been grappling with different factors challenging the agricultural sector such as the activities of the terrorist group al-Qaida, and climate change, the contribution of agriculture during COVID-19 witnessed a drop which is an indication that COVID-19 had a significant effect on Burkina Faso's GDP.

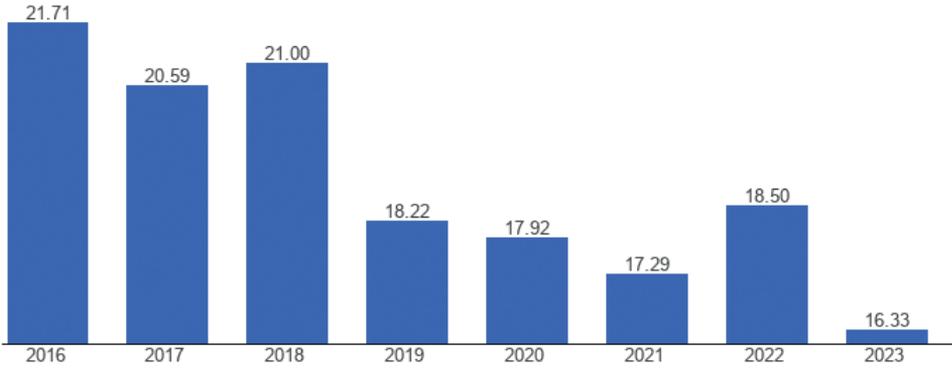


Figure 1. Agricultural product contribution to GDP in Burkina Faso in 2016–2023, %

Source: Burkina Faso Economic Indicators. Retrieved August, 12, 2025, from http://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Burkina-Faso/share_of_agriculture/

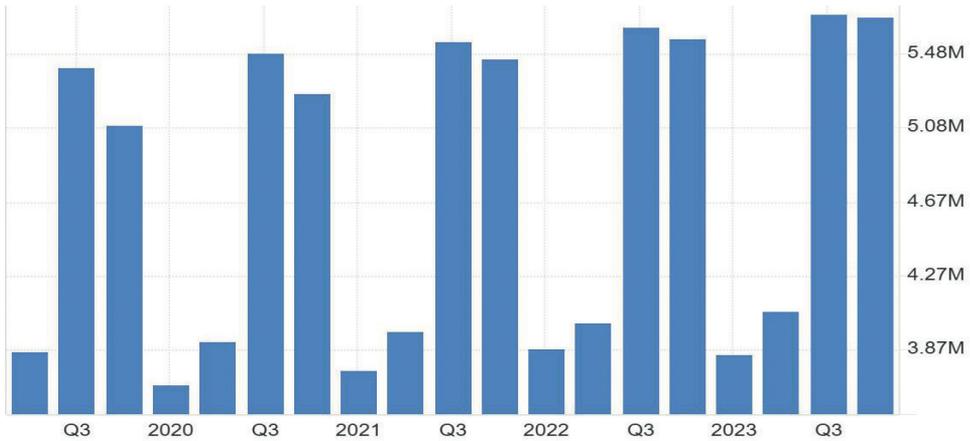


Figure 2. Agricultural products contribution to GDP in Nigeria in 2020–2023 quarterly, NGN (Nigerian Naira) millions

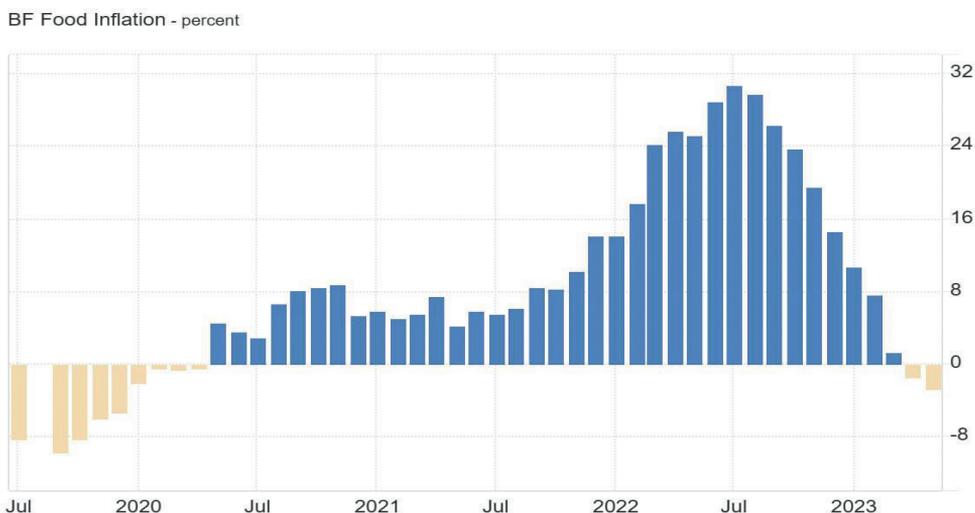
Source: Nigeria GDP From Agriculture. Retrieved August, 12, 2025, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/Nigeria/gdp-from-agriculture>

There was a noticeable decline in the contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria from the last quarter of 2019 (Figure 2), it fell from a year high of about 5.41M to 5.09M. A sharp decline was noticeable in 2020, from as the contribution of agriculture to Nigeria’s GDP continued to plummet by recording a low GDP of about 3.68M and 3.93M in the first and second quarter of 2020 respectively before a noticeable surge in the 3rd quarter of 2020.

Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security in Nigeria and Burkina Faso

Food security is a major concern to all countries in the world. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, people panicked to get foodstuff and other essential supplies that they might need, thus, affecting the prices and availability of goods and other commodities.

Figures 3 and 4 show Prices of commodities before COVID-19 and after COVID-19.

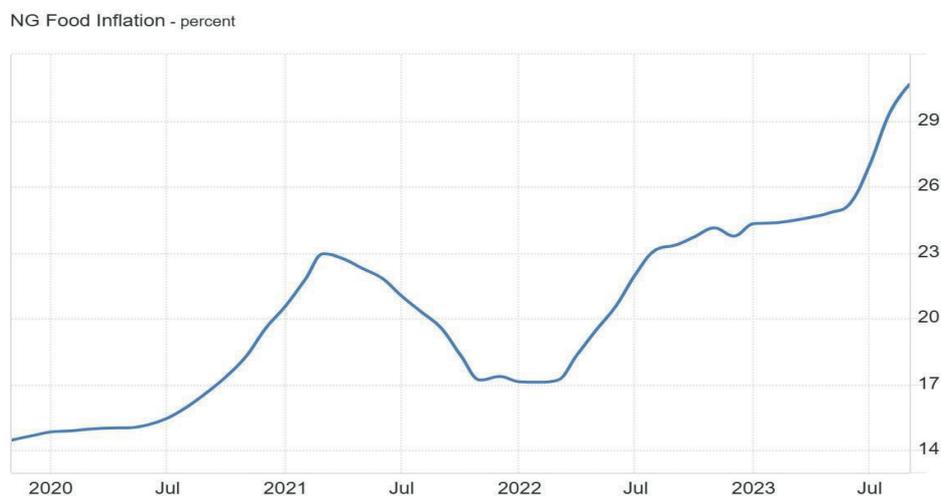


Source: tradingeconomics.com | Institut National de la Statistique et de la Demographie, Burkina Faso

Figure 3. Food inflation in Burkina Faso in 2020–2023, %

Source: Burkina Faso Food Inflation. Retrieved August, 11, 2025, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/burkina-faso/food-inflation>

As a result of COVID-19, there was inflation in the prices of commodities in Burkina Faso from 3.80 in mid-2020 to an all-time high increase of 30.70% in July 2022.



Source: tradingeconomics.com | National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria

Figure 4. Food Inflation in Nigeria in 2020–2023, %

Source: Nigeria Food Inflation. Retrieved August, 12, 2025, from <http://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/food-inflation>.

From the figure, Inflation is noticeable in Nigeria from about August 2020 at 15.91% and reached an all-time high of about 23% in July 2021. In Burkina Faso, poor households, households headed by females, and farmhouses were vulnerable during the pandemic, because the purchasing power of money decreased due to an increase in the prices of food as a result of the shortage of labour which was a ripple effect of social distance measure and lock down embarked upon by the government to tackle the virus [El Bilali 2023]. The pandemic affected the whole food chain from the procurement of seedlings to food waste management. According to [Vasseur 2021], food security in Burkina Faso increased by 50% between the month of January and June 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 was felt in the whole region of West Africa and the world at large.

Although the pandemic increased the awareness of healthy lifestyle, people became conscious of the need to pay more attention to healthy consumption of food crops that will prevent them from contracting the virus, however, the lockdown and movement restriction contributed adversely to the price hike on food experienced in West Africa. The measures affected both subsistence and commercial farmers because the virus broke out just at the beginning of the planting season, this discouraged farmers from further production of food crops, and livestock and fish farmers all suffered as a result of the policies that the government put in place to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 [Ojokoh et al. 2022].

Food is vital to human survival, nevertheless, when COVID-19 pandemic broke out, it disrupted the supply chain, thereby leading to the closure of many stores, malls and general markets were shut down as well. This lockdown greatly affected the procedure for the internal food supply chain, simultaneously obstructing cash flow from vendors to farmers. The number of days for the lockdown was very stressful for Nigerians and it had a great effect on the prices of food cost of transportation increased the hoarding of agricultural products by marketers and it reduced the purchasing power of the households. A decrease in household income in Burkina Faso resulted in lower purchases of produce and higher expenditures on unrelated food items like health and sanitation; this had great implications for the economy [Vasseur et al. 2020]. Perishable goods such as vegetables, meat and fruits farmers were gravely affected because only a small window was given to people to purchase items. As the number of customers reduces, so does the price, leaving the farmers worse off with low value for their goods [Mouloudj 2020]. This disruption in the agricultural sector was amplified by the fact that many engaged in subsistence farming under difficult conditions, which included outdated implements, poor infrastructure, and poor road network [Omotayo et al. 2022].

Furthermore, COVID-19 also greatly affected human activities, since agriculture is not devoid of humans, some people lost their jobs stemming to social distance measures and the stringent rules around lockdown, which gravely impacted transactional processes that prevented farmers from carrying out certain financial transactions and further handicapped the ability to procure farm implements, fertilisers and seedlings. The agricultural sector, due to the fear of farmers contracting

and spreading the virus downsized and did not recruit replacements, this further led to a fall in production, leading to a price hike [Mouloudj 2020].

COVID-19 endangered small and large-scale farming. It significantly affected the food supply chain, there was a huge drop in demand and supply as people made fewer trips to the grocery stores and opted to eat at home instead of public places like restaurants and imbibing the culture of storing essential food items in the house [Mouloudj 2020]. This greatly affected the price stability of food items as the supply chain was disrupted people were left to buy directly from the farmers; this took a toll on farmers who had to look for alternative ways to sell their commodities which were mostly perishable food crops. This made the increase in food waste, particularly in markets or during harvest season, worse. It also made labour shortages in the various food system sectors worse, leading to job and income losses. Restriction of movement and lockdown harmed food security and to this end, the government of both Burkina Faso and Nigeria each responded with measures to reduce hunger and promote access to food.

Fast response from both countries took the people by surprise as quick restrictions were placed on commodities creating instability in food production. This revealed the state of technological development in the sub-continent, particularly in Nigeria and Burkina Faso as both countries lack technologies for food processing and storage, which further caused food wastage as a result of the swift implementation of movement restriction and market closure [Vasseur 2021].

Results and discussion

Access to food is essential to human survival. It has been the goal of the United Nations through the policy of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure that by the year 2030, hunger will be reduced to zero level. To combat the impact of the virus in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, the government embarked on different policies to assuage the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic through the issuance of funds and credit support [Abdul 2020]. Employers of labour equally provided their employees with palliatives to reduce the effect of the disease and to ensure that the mass loss of jobs was prevented [Mouloudj 2020].

Agricultural commodities experienced disruption regarding trade and availability of commodities and labour to ensure food security, first, both Nigeria and Burkina Faso had to curb the spread of the virus. Both countries developed a response plan to COVID-19. This plan revolves around seven key indices of coordination and monitoring, epidemiological surveillance, case investigation and entry port control, prevention and control measures, biological surveillance, risk communication, case management, and evaluation and research as jointly agreed by the Ministers of Health of the West African countries [Bonnet 2021]. Some of the measures adopted by the government to contain the spread of the virus were social distancing, lockdown, and restriction of movement for a certain period, thus creating a food emergency [Bilal 2023].

The increase in the use of subsidies was deplored by the government of Nigeria to lessen the volatility of price and to improve access to food [Vasseur 2021]. Despite having enough arable land, 15% of West Africans were undernourished prior

to the pandemic outbreak in 2019 as a result of rapid population growth which had contributed to a change in nutrition and dependence on the importation of food crops [Arouna 2020]. Nigeria's minister of Agriculture confirmed recently as of the time of writing that the government has lifted the ban on the importation of certain food items such as maize, beans, wheat, husked and brown rice for a period of one hundred and fifty days (Premium times, Jul 2024), to mitigate the rising cost of food in the country.

Conclusion and policy implications

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Nigeria and Burkina Faso had suffered different degrees of food insecurity due to poor climate and the activities of Boko Haram* and the al-Qaida* (*both prohibited in Russian Federation) terrorist groups respectively which had greatly hampered food production which was further compounded by COVID-19 pandemic. The study showed that agriculture had significantly contributed to the GDP of both Nigeria and Burkina Faso. However, there was a noticeable decline from the second quarter of 2020 till the second quarter of 2021, in Nigeria about the time when the virus was rife.

The absence of the technology necessary for the preservation of food led to waste. Nigeria and Burkina Faso are economies with low and middle-income, which have not integrated technology into farming. This greatly affected the sudden shock that the pandemic presented thus leading to waste of perishable food crop. Many lost their jobs due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 and some organizations had to let go of their employees due to a reduction in patronage. In Nigeria and Burkina Faso where the agricultural sector is the largest employer of Labour, an increase in loss of perishable items discouraged farming. The government of both countries mitigated the situation through subsidies and palliative to relieve the people of some of the burden of access to food. So also, the government rolled out a series of policies both cash-based and food-based that ensure prices of food are monitored and that the vulnerable are provided with food. Individuals put in personal effort by changing their food behaviour and diet with many adopting homemade meals and adjusting their diet to meet the price hike in food products and other commodities following the pandemic.

Conclusively, although both Nigeria and Burkina Faso were having food insecurity challenges before the pandemic, the pandemic affected food security which led to government intervention through cash-based and food-based policies to ensure that the vulnerable are protected and work was geared towards sustainable food security in both countries through subsidies and palliatives. Thus, we may conclude that paying attention to the advocacy for improved farming techniques might be helpful in reducing the risks mentioned in this article.

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About the authors:

Alisa R. Shishkina — PhD (Politics), Leading Researcher, HSE University; Senior Researcher, Institute for African Studies RAS (e-mail: isleonid@yandex.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0002-2544-9184)

Olubunmi Florence Ibuowo — PhD student, HSE University (e-mail: oibuowo@hse.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0002-3606-5928)

Сведения об авторах:

Шишкина Алиса Романовна — кандидат политических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник НИУ ВШЭ; старший научный сотрудник Института Африки РАН (e-mail: isleonid@yandex.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0002-2544-9184)

Ибуово Олубунми Флоренс — аспирантка НИУ ВШЭ (e-mail: oibuowo@hse.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0002-3606-5928)