

## Awareness and Implementation of Covid-19 Safety Protocol Among Selected Fresh Food Marketers in Yenagoa Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

**CD Nnadi\***

*Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria*

**\*Corresponding Author:** CD Nnadi, Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

**DOI:** 10.31080/ASNH.2022.06.1146

**Received:** October 03, 2022

**Published:** November 04, 2022

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### Abstract

This study analyzed awareness and implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols among selected fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The objectives that guided the study were to; determine the level of awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols among food marketers and to ascertain the level of implementation of the COVID-19 safety protocols by food marketers. Data from five (5) fresh food marketers each from meat, fish, fruits and vegetables sellers was collected by first a purposive selection of all seven (7) markets in Yenagoa Metropolis and thereafter the marketers randomly drawn from the marketers associations' lists; giving a total of 140 randomly sampled fresh food marketers. Descriptive statistics of percentage, range, mode and mean were used to analyze the data. The results indicated high level of awareness (94.29%) and poor implementation (1) of the COVID-19 safety protocol among fresh food marketers in YELGA. Increased incentive by gifting with some of the safety items such as hand sanitizers, face masks among others by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as good and spirited individuals was recommended.

**Keywords:** Awareness; Implementation; COVID-19 Safety Protocol; Fresh Food Marketers; Yenagoa Local Government Area

### Introduction

Food remains a basic need of man. It's availability, affordability, accessibility and usability remains central in the growth and development of the people of a nation. To this end, developed and developing nations alike, strive to sustain or attain food security; either by production or purchase. Indeed being food secure at all times has been and still remains the greatest basic struggle confronting man. Guina, Ferrao, Bell, and Fernandes (2021) agree that the world is still plagued by hunger; with some 10% of her population food insecure. They further stated that while some countries are unable to get enough food on daily basis (for example 20% of Africans and particularly children; a higher percentage than elsewhere in the world) many others are living under the spectre of starvation. Thus, Bonuedi, Kamasa and Opoku (2020) stated that sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is home to the world's poorest countries.

In view of this, Africa as a continent therefore, tends to be synonymous with poverty and hunger; with many of her nations struggling to achieve food security.

Nnadi, Nwajiuba, Onubuogu and Nnadi (2018) noted that the spate of global hunger, food and nutrition crises, malnutrition and poverty, occasioned by world politics, global economic meltdown/downturn, induced and natural disasters, global warming and climate changes among other changes; that seem to be pressing the world to a threshold, is far likely reaching a crescendo. There is no doubt, that poverty and hunger have further pushed man to the edge following the recent global pandemic outbreak of the dreadful disease of the novel Corona Virus otherwise referred to as COVID-19 disease; that came in a sweep around the world. In agreement, Guina., *et al.* (2021) reported that the potential impact of

COVID-19 on African and global societies in the year 2021 has even, more concerning outlook because the world is facing famines driven by conflicts, aggravated by climate change and yet the COVID-19, driving human misery to a bewildering scale. Similarly, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2021) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has had unprecedented effects on all dimensions of human life, and the full economic and social impacts are still unfolding, as the disease continues to spread around the world.

The COVID-19 reality dawned on many, when the world seemed to be brought to a standstill; with shut down of global economy, close down of nations' borders, lockdown of people of the world, skyrocketed death tolls of humans and emergence of new normal of physical/social distancing, regular hand washing with soap and water, use of face mask among others, to check individual and community transmission of the disease. Whereas safe food buying and selling as well as eating should be considered important for man's healthy life and living, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic could have no little implication for human food and feeding. Thus, Bhullar (2020) stated that the lock-downs, shutdowns and imposition of curfews, necessitated to check the spread of COVID-19, have disturbed the food supply chains resulting in food shortages and price volatilities. Similarly, Guina, *et al.* (2021) expressed that the turmoil set in motion by the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts food supplies by driving smallholder farm families and communities into deeper worries and sufferings, and also exposing the most vulnerable people - women and their offspring, working in informal agricultural and other family sectors, to experience catastrophic repercussions on their livelihoods and food security. Most family farmers do not have access to markets; which is an important determinant of economic development, as well as safe and sufficient/adequate food [3]. Furthermore, while poor trade facilitation constitutes a significant driver of food insecurity in Africa, the pandemic is inter-linked with food systems in complex ways and the market proven to be an unreliable governor of food production, distribution, pricing, and consumption [3,4].

According to Singh (2020) agricultural markets are central to agrarian transformation. Despite the seeming importance of marketing and markets, Nigeria, Bayelsa State and Yenagoa Metropolis food markets in particular, remain largely unorganized; operating in open places where people in their numbers troop in and out for transactions, and body contacts inevitable. Indeed, physical/body

contacts among others; in market and other public places were old normal that were ignorable in the past as it remains unavoidable. This however, by the new normal has or should have changed following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020, and its safety protocol put in place to checkmate spread and reduce havoc by the virus. Although many nations have put up resistance and fight against the novel COVID-19 virus disease to ensure safe living, COVID-19 disease seem not to be leaving the world soon. This hold serious implications for food marketing and consumption and calls for worry. Thus, fresh food markets of meat, fish, vegetables and fruits were used as focal points in this study. Therefore, fresh food marketers in YELGA and elsewhere should consider the option of compliance to the implementation of the COVID-19 safety protocols. Currently, no empirical evidence exists on a study of food marketers' implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols hence this study. This work is considered timely and very appropriate, as it seeks to close the knowledge gap existing on food marketers' implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols in YELGA, Bayelsa State. Specifically therefore, this study sets out to determine the level of awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols among food marketers and to ascertain the level of implementation of the COVID-19 safety protocols by food marketers in YELGA, Bayelsa state.

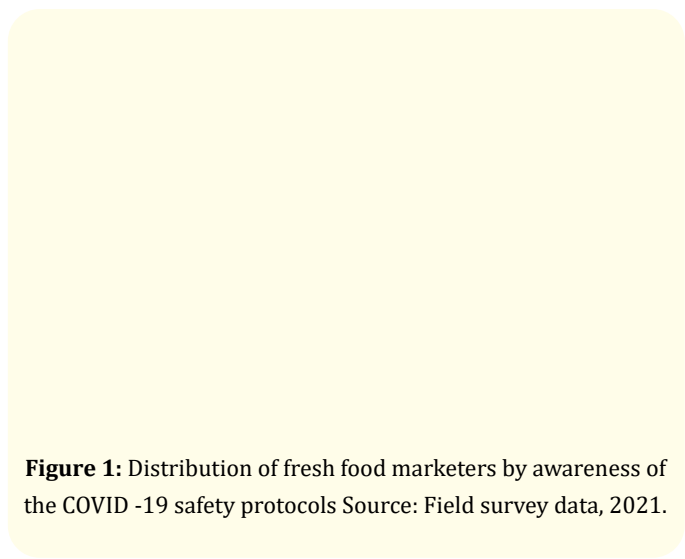
### Methodology

This study was carried out in Yenagoa Local Government Area (YELGA) of Bayelsa State. YELGA, housing the state capital Yenagoa, has her headquarters in Yenagoa, located on the banks of Ekole Creek; one of the major river courses making up the Niger Delta (Bayelsa State Council of Arts and Culture, 2006). YELGA is bounded by Mbiama communities of Rivers State on the North and East, Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA on the Northwest, Ogbia LGA on the South and Southern Ijaw on the West. She has an area of 706 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 352,285 with an annual exponential growth rate of 2.9 (National Population Commission (NPC), 2006). Thus, the population projection for YELGA in 2021 is 495,309 persons. While the vegetation is characterized by mangrove forest, riparian forest and freshwater swamps; annual rainfall is about 2400mm with a mean temperature of about 27°C (Bayelsa State Council of Arts and Culture, 2006). Crops such as water yam (*Dioscorea alata*), cassava (*Manihot spp.*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), potato (*Ipomea batatas*), plantain and banana (*Musa spp*) and vegetables grow abundantly in the area. Fish among other sea foods as well as snails and spices among other forest products are the natural products of the area.

The seven (7) markets in Yenagoa Metropolis were purposively sampled in this study; because of high concentration of marketing activities involving marketers from within and outside the state and predominance of fresh food marketers. A total of five (5) fresh food marketers each from meat, fish, fruits and vegetables were randomly drawn using the marketers associations' lists. This gave a total of 140 respondents. A set of structured questionnaire was therefore administered to the one hundred and forty (140) fresh food marketers that composed the sample size. Descriptive statistical tools of percentage, range, mode and mean were used to discuss the results; presented with chart and table.

**Results/Findings**

**Awareness of the covid-19 safety protocols by fresh food marketers in YELGA**



**Figure 1:** Distribution of fresh food marketers by awareness of the COVID -19 safety protocols Source: Field survey data, 2021.

Results on awareness of COVID -19 safety protocol by fresh food marketers in YELGA is presented in Figure 1. the result, shows that 91.43%, respectively of the Meat and Vegetable marketers and 97.14%, respectively of Fish, and Fruit marketers in YELGA are aware of the COVID -19 safety protocols as opposed to 8.57% respectively of the Meat and Vegetable marketers, and 2.86% respectively of the Fish, and Fruit marketers in YELGA that are not-aware of the COVID -19 safety protocols. An aggregate percentage of 94.29% for awareness and 5.71% non-awareness were obtained for the fresh food marketers in YELGA.

**Level of implementation of covid-19 safety protocols**

Results from table 1 above shows the level of Covid-19 safety protocols implementation by the food marketers in YELGA. Using

Index	Food marketers
Minimum	0
Maximum	4
Range	4
Mean	1.44
Mode	0

**Table 1:** Level of Covid-19 safety protocols implementation by the food marketers in YELGA.

**Source:** Field survey, 2021.

the pooled data on the fresh food marketers of meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, a minimum number of 0 (zero) protocol implementation was recorded while a maximum number of 4 protocols implementation was recorded. Again, a mode of 0, range of 4 and mean of 1.44 protocols being practiced by the food marketers in YELGA was obtained.

**Discussion**

**Awareness of the covid-19 safety protocols by fresh food marketers in YELGA**

The result on the awareness of COVID-19 safety protocol is quit impressive. This could be consequent upon the unprecedented education, sensitization and publicity by Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The effort of the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) is notable; giving updates on casualties, emphasizing observance of safety protocols as well enforcing policies aimed at compliance. The roles of the media; through text messages on safety awareness, publications and adverts are commendable. The religious bodies, health and other organized groups, etc. were not left out. Probing further through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the major areas of awareness included social and physical distancing, use of face masks, avoidance of crowd, regular hand wash with soap and water, use of hand sanitizers, vaccination. The result signals that the YELGA fresh food marketers are likely to be implementing the COVID-19 safety protocol. The high percentage of awareness recorded, could be linked to the high level of education, sensitization and publicity by the Nigerian government to the masses through media information of radio and television, and daily situational reports and updates on Covid-19 cases particularly during the lockdown in 2020. This result suggests that the government has done well in enlightening the people [1-8].

**Covid-19 safety protocols implementation**

Despite the high percentage record of awareness (94.29%) of the COVID-19 safety protocol among fresh food marketers in YELGA, an implementation of just approximately one (1) COVID-19

safety protocol was recorded. The implementation on the average of approximately one (1) safety protocol out of fourteen (14) identified protocols; representing 7.14% calls for worry. The enforcement of face masks in public places and functions for example, could have yielded this less than ten percent (< 10%) safety protocol implementation. This, could hold serious implications for fresh food marketing for safe eating if action is not swift. More effort therefore is required to increase the level of compliance and implementation to contend with community transmission and spread of the disease and its attendant consequences.

### Implications to research and practice

This research has implications both for policy and advocacy among stakeholders in food and agriculture, health and government. The main contribution to theory development involves the confirmation of poor implementation of the Covid-19 safety protocols.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Despite overwhelming awareness of Covid-19 safety protocols by 94.29% of the fresh food marketers in YELGA, implementation of approximately one (1) protocol on the average was noted. This level of implementation of less than ten percent (< 10%) is considered poor and calls for check to help contend with spread of the disease and also make for safe marketing and eating of fresh food. Increased Covid-19 safety protocols implementation among fresh food marketers is advocated to enhance their safety and that of their customers. This could be achieved through increased incentive by gifting with some of the safety items such as hand sanitizers, face masks among others by the government, non- governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as good and spirited individuals.

### Future Research

Future research could build upon this study through replication across other food marketers and markets in other states and across the country. This study can serve as a basis for hypotheses formulation for future research in this area.

### Food marketers' level of agreement to importance of covid-19 safety protocol implementation in YELGA

The result in table 2 below shows the level of agreement by the food marketers in YELGA with the Covid-19 safety protocols

implementation. Wearing of facemask (mean = 4.14) ranked 1<sup>st</sup>; with the food marketers in strong agreement that it is important. This is followed by regular washing of hands with soap and water (mean = 4.10) that the food marketers also agree strongly that it is important having ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>. Other protocols the food marketers just agreed to their importance include physical and social distancing with mean = 3.74 (6<sup>th</sup>), vaccination with mean = 3.25 (12<sup>th</sup>), coughing and sneezing into elbow with mean = 3.76 (5<sup>th</sup>), use of hand sanitizers and avoid touching surfaces in public areas which tied at mean of 3.53 (9<sup>th</sup>). Also avoid close contact with someone who is sick with mean = 3.19 (13<sup>th</sup>), avoid touching of nose and mouth with mean = 3.48 (11<sup>th</sup>), self-isolation with mean = 3.82 (4<sup>th</sup>), staying indoors when observing lockdown with mean = 3.61 (7<sup>th</sup>), alerting authorities of suspected cases with mean = 3.59 (8<sup>th</sup>) and going to the hospital for tests and checkups with mean = 3.83 (3<sup>rd</sup>). Lastly, the food marketers disagreed that avoiding crowd of over 50 persons with mean = 2.80 (14<sup>th</sup>) is an important protocol to implement. In as much as the food marketers were not undecided nor strongly disagreed to any of the protocols as important for implementation, the least ranking of avoiding crowd of over 50 persons (14<sup>th</sup>) and to which they disagreed - Table 2, is a pointer to the undeveloped and unorganized nature of our markets. This calls for worry even though there is room for improvement.

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