KEY MESSAGES

- COVID-19 restrictions are negatively impacting households’ livelihoods, specifically in urban areas, as federal and state governments implement lockdown measures and movement restrictions. These measures have also decreased both formal and informal trade across the country. The combined loss of household income, and in some cases price increases, has led to an increase in the population facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

- Households affected by insurgency, mainly in Borno and parts of Adamawa and Yobe States will continue to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes through September. Populations in hard to reach and inaccessible areas are likely facing similar or worse outcomes, and the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) continues in these areas. Displaced households living in camps who are largely dependent on humanitarian assistance are experiencing Stressed! (IPC Phase 2i).

- Displaced households in the northwest and central states of Nigeria, particularly in Benue, Plateau, and Katsina, and others in Zamfara and Sokoto States are unable to engage in normal livelihood activities. Coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic impacts more households are expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes through May. Households worst affected by conflict coupled with the COVID-19 impact in Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states will experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) between June and September.

- Households outside of the conflict affected areas are consuming own foods although staple food prices are a bit high for market dependent households. Food distribution and cash transfers, particularly by the government, have been scaled up in response to COVID-19. Additionally, the off-season harvest is underway which has stabilized most households access to income and food. As a result, most households across the country are continuing to face Minimal (IPC Phase 1) outcomes.
CURRENT SITUATION

The Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) as of April 30 reported a total of 1,932 confirmed COVID-19 cases. Lagos State is the epicenter with 976 confirmed COVID-19 cases, while Kano State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have 219 and 178 confirmed cases, respectively. Presently, 34 states across the country and FCT have confirmed cases of COVID-19. To combat the spread of the disease, the federal government declared a 14-day lockdown across Lagos, FCT, and Kano states on March 30 and extended the lockdown for another 14-days on April 14. Federal and state governments have implemented restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 through state border closures and curfews, to total lockdowns, varying by state, and many workplaces and markets have been closed. Enforcement of these restrictions is occurring more strictly in urban areas. In northeastern parts of the country, Borno, Adamawa, and Taraba States are in total lockdown from April 22 through the first week of May, while Gombe, Bauchi, and Yobe states only closed their borders restricting population and vehicular movement. During the lockdown, essential businesses are functioning as normal, and it is understood that physical access to markets has not been significantly restricted.

Government revenue and the economy is heavily dependent on oil exports for access to foreign exchange. At the beginning of 2020, despite previous improvements in the economy in 2019, the macroeconomy started to decline initially driven by the border closure. The annual inflation rate in March was about 12.26 percent largely driven by the impacts of the border closure and increase in the value-added tax rate to 7.5 percent. The National Bureau of Statistics noted the current lockdowns across the country are not reflected in the March inflation figures. In April, global oil prices crashed associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and large quantities of oil in the global market. The Nigerian Government has decreased its production quota while oil prices remain very low and exports have decreased. In April, The Nigerian Central Bank could not continue its fiscal intervention to stabilize the Naira (NGN), which resulted in a significant depreciation of the NGN compared to the United States Dollar (USD). Similarly, government foreign reserves have decreased as the result of a decline in oil exports.

International cross-border trade continues to be mainly informal and limited as borders remain closed and is likely further limited due to the lockdown. Similarly, imports are constrained across the country as sea, air, and land ports remain closed. Despite the strict border closures along international and state borders, essential goods such as food and medicine are allowed to move between states from surplus to deficit producing areas of the country. Most traders in urban markets have resorted to purchasing goods through mobile transfers with traders at source markets across the country, though delivery times are delayed. Demand is slightly elevated due to the usual increase associated with Ramadan and some panic buying associated with the COVID-19.

In northwestern and central states, surplus producing areas, most markets remain well supplied with staple foods including millet, maize, sorghum, and local rice. Although, market supplies are declining faster than normal and are atypically low in the southwestern, southeastern, and extreme southern areas that are typically structural deficit staple production areas for cereals. Staple food prices notably increased between February and March (Figure 1), and are slightly above previous months, and higher than last year on average across markets. The COVID-19 pandemic associated restrictions coupled with Ramadan increased demand has resulted in the price increases.

Unskilled and skilled labor demand declined across the country as the restrictions associated with the pandemic persist. Urban poor households, who depend mainly on daily labor have been more significantly impacted as their movements are now restricted, and informal and unskilled labor opportunities are limited. Some urban populations are returning to their rural homes to engage in both agriculture and unskilled labor. Agricultural laborers have been less impacted as the lockdown is less enforceable in rural communities and demand remains near normal as land clearing and preparation have started with the rainy season. The rainy season is underway normally in the southern areas and farmers are engaged in land preparation, though at below-average levels. Households are prioritizing agriculture-related activities to enhance production for the growing season; however, generally, these activities are occurring at below-average rates due to conflict and insecurity and restrictions associated with COVID-19.

Figure 1. Pearl millet, maize grain, and brown sorghum prices in NGN/100kg on average across Nigeria

Source: FEWS NET
Insurgent attacks in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States continue due to increased attacks of non-state and state actors. According to IOM Round 31, as of mid-February, there were over 3.7 million IDPs and returnees with over 2.0 million people displaced across Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states. According to the IOM, between April 6 and 12, a total of 2,050 population movements/relocations were recorded, composed of around 1,500 arrivals and 550 departures across Borno and Adamawa states. Additionally, almost 150 others arrived from Cameroon and Niger within the same period. The IOM assessments identified movement was most related to conflict and voluntary relocation. Despite the continued movement of people and those fleeing conflict, UNOCHA estimates indicate about 1 million people remain in inaccessible areas of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States.

Insecurity in the northwest and central states persists. On April 19, bandit attacks resulted in nearly 50 fatalities in Dutsinma, Dannusa, and Safana LGAs with some associated displacement. Similar attacks are reported in Gatare village, Sabon Birni LGA of Sokoto State in mid-April where over 20 persons were killed, and several others displaced. In Plateau and Kaduna States communal conflict continues. Similar bandit attacks were reported in Zamfara, Benue, Niger, Taraba and Plateau states with resultant population displacement and fatalities. The displaced populations across the zone remain displaced where the conflict persists; however, as households are able, they likely return to their home of residence while others are in major urban areas within the region.

The government through the National Conditional Cash Transfer Office (NCTO) under the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development expanded its program providing transfers to 1.1 million people impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, direct food distribution to the vulnerable population through state governments is underway. The federal government approved the release of 70,000 tons of assorted foodstuffs and distribution is ongoing for vulnerable populations across the COVID-19 worst affected states including Lagos, FCT-Abuja, Ogun, Kano, Osun, Oyo, Edo, and Katsina.

Humanitarian food assistance delivery to the northeast remains restricted. The latest information available from February indicates about 1.5 million beneficiaries were reached across Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, with over 1.3 million people reached in Borno State alone. Key informants have indicated that assistance delivery is being prioritized for northeastern parts of the country and that the states border restrictions are not expected to have significant impacts on distribution, though some assistance delivery delays are expected as typical.

Poor urban households are typically completely reliant on markets for food and access incomes through petty trade, daily labor, casual labor, domestic work, and food vending. The government lockdown, which has been strictly enforced in urban areas, has limited access to income as these opportunities are largely unavailable. Additionally, market prices atypically increased, amidst decreasing household purchasing power. Worst affected households have lost their access to income and are reliant on borrowing, community support, among other coping strategies to purchase food. In some extreme cases, begging has been reported. The COVID-19 and associated restrictions are driving an increase in the Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in urban areas especially in Lagos, FCT-Abuja, and Kano.

Many households in the northwest, northcentral, and some riverine areas of the country are trying to engage in their normal livelihood activities; however, flooding, armed banditry, kidnapping, communal conflict, and farmer/pastoralist conflict are interrupting normal livelihood activities. However, many of these households are consuming their own-produced food, while also facing some difficulty meeting their nonfood needs due to COVID-19 restrictions that make accessing income more difficult. Consequently, these households are in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) with more households within these areas facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes are present across much of the northeast and the population in need is expected to have slightly increased as the number of households that are having difficulty accessing foods due to some movement restrictions and increases in food prices has increased. Despite, the restrictions on state borders, in the interim there are no serious movement restrictions associated with COVID-19 within Borno State, as such there are no extensive impacts on food security in some heavily conflict-affected areas. Households affected by conflict who are in urban areas and IDP camps are mainly dependent on humanitarian assistance for food and are in Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!). Those populations who have limited access to humanitarian assistance remaining outside of urban areas and unable to engage in normal livelihood activities are facing food consumption gaps and are likely to remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Populations in partly accessible or inaccessible areas and who are cut-off from markets and humanitarian assistance are facing wide food consumption gaps indicative of Emergency (IPC Phase 4). The risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) continues in a worst-case scenario where conflict shifts and would significantly restrict household movements and humanitarian access.
UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the Nigeria Food Security Outlook for February to September 2020 remain unchanged except for the following updated assumptions:

- Based on available information, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue in the near to medium term, and an increasing number of cases are likely due to both the spread of the virus and increased testing. While it is difficult to predict the length and severity of the outbreak as this will depend heavily on global and government actions and capacity, it is anticipated that the effects on food and income sources will persist through the scenario period.

- Urban to rural movement of persons has increased and will likely continue despite movement restrictions put in place by the federal and state governments as households return to their rural homes to access labor opportunities or engage in upcoming agriculture season.

- The COVID-19 pandemic will lead to a prolonged and significant decline in global oil prices, consequently, revenue to the government and foreign currency reserves are expected to significantly decline. The dual (fixed and floating) exchange rate of the NGN will most likely discontinue. The NGN to USD and other foreign currencies exchange rates are expected to further depreciate. As a result, inflation is expected to remain high in the double digits though at levels higher than previously anticipated.

- Prices of food are expected to increase and remain elevated, although following seasonal trends (Figure 2). Although, the prices of imports, specifically food, are expected to increase even higher, due to increased transaction costs.

- The government will likely slowly lift restrictions in phases in the short-and medium-term. Some businesses will most likely somewhat resume operation, while others remain closed. This will most likely continue to constrain labor demand leading to a substantial reduction in wages and food access, especially among the urban population.

- Many households are expected to face difficulty engaging in a normal level of agriculture activities and cultivation due to below-average incomes and access to agricultural inputs coupled with persistent conflict and flooding compounded by COVID-19 related income losses and market constraints. Similarly, government support related to agricultural production is expected to be limited as revenue to government declines. As a result, area planted for crops is likely to be below average as well as the main harvest in most areas.

- Poor households will engage in limited self-employment opportunities, casual labor, and informal employment as some restrictions associated with COVID-19 continue and the economy contracts. Labor demand will be below-average, while labor supply remains elevated and wages will be below average. Pastoralists will likely sell more livestock in the medium to long term to earn income and purchase food.

- Remittances to persons at homesteads from relations working abroad or in urban areas are likely to be below average due to the negative impact of the pandemic on the global economy.

- Cross border trade activities with Niger, Chad, Benin, and Cameroon are expected to remain mainly informal due to the continued border closure. Food flows into the Sahelian countries will remain at below-average levels as smaller vehicles and motorcycles will continue to be used to convey such items through illegal routes, limiting flows. This will worsen with the COVID-19 pandemic and tighter restriction on population movement across the border and will likely substantially limit population flow and cross border trade, including livestock flows. This will most likely limit income opportunities and food access for affected households.

- Livestock flows from neighboring countries, mainly from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon are expected to be constrained due to the stringent enforcement of the border closure as the COVID-19 escalates in the region. Livestock prices will most likely remain elevated and continue to increase and peak towards the Tabaski period in July and August.
• Humanitarian assistance is expected to continue as previously anticipated. Additionally, the government has indicated the intent to scale-up assistance through its social safety net programs to about 3.6 million people to some of the most vulnerable households; however, the ability for the government to scale-up assistance will depend on its revenue.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2020

Households across the country are consuming their own-produced foods during the postharvest period. As a result, much of the country is expected to continue facing Minimal (IPC Phase 1) through at least September 2020.

Many households in conflict-affected areas of the northwest, remain displaced and are dependent on atypical livelihood activities. Coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, many households are expected to only minimally meet their food needs and are expected to be in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through May 2020. As the conflict in the northwest typically escalates towards the start of the lean season, worst-affected households in Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina states will likely face food consumption gaps and experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) from June to September 2020. Labor dependent households will mainly depend on indebtedness, and community and government support for income and food as the pandemic persists.

In areas worst affected by the Boko Haram conflict in the northeast, households will likely remain highly dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic food needs, particularly IDPs in major urban areas and those who reside in camps. As humanitarian assistance delivery is expected to be prioritized to some of the most vulnerable populations, Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) is expected to continue in these areas. Communities outside of the IDP settlements within the Sambisa axis, northern and central Borno, northern Adamawa, and southern Yobe, and generally outside of main urban centers in the northeast, will continue to receive limited humanitarian assistance and are dependent on market purchases for food, these households will likely receive limited COVID-19 related assistance from government and community support and will likely remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

The increase in market prices is expected to lead a deterioration in household purchasing power, resulting in a slight increase in the population in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4). The households in difficult to access areas and those worst-affected by the conflict who are unable to engage in normal livelihood activities, and have constrained access to markets and assistance provisions, will most likely continue to face larger food consumption gaps. As a result, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are expected to persist among these households. Households experiencing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes will increase with increased shock related to the COVID 19 pandemic as food access are further constrained. Areas where populations remain inaccessible to humanitarian actors are likely facing similar or worse food security outcomes as adjacent, accessible areas. Extreme levels of acute food insecurity, including Famine (IPC Phase 5) are possible in a worst-case scenario in which conflict shifts or humanitarian access is restricted.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE
This report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates the FEWS NET’s Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work here.