



# Nigeria: VSLA Women and the Global Food Crisis

CARE Nigeria implemented discussions with Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSA) engaged in the Food and Agriculture Organization, and CARE, where they implemented the Livelihood and Resilience Building Project in Mairi of Jere Local Government (LGA). The participant’s cohort was integrated by 10 women. Many of them were married to farmers and/or have been farmers in the past and at the present. **The main goal of the discussions was to understand the impact of the current food crisis and how it is affecting food security, inflation, and raising the costs of living for small-scale farmers.** Also, the project team attempted to understand how the current food crisis is aggravated by climate and by the 12-year protracted armed conflict in northeast Nigeria.

Women stated that farming inputs and labor costs have gone up almost **3x** since October 2021.

## Livelihood and associated barriers to access

The discussions started with what primary and secondary livelihood alternatives have women explored. They provided multiple answers, such as:

- The VSLA group was formerly supported with an **oil milling machine** which was jointly managed and used by them to **process oil from ground nuts**.
- They were farmers but merged this with **oil processing as an extra source of income**.

The women also mentioned that since arriving in Maiduguri as IDPs, most of them stopped farming because of a lack of access to safe lands and mentioned the persistence of security incidences involving casualties. Additionally, their priority was to feed and stay alive, detached from comfort. They also explained that they are not eating enough much less investing in farming due to the high rates of land rent and of laborers' pay for the day jobs. **These rent prices went as high as 500%, and women believe this is a consequence of the rapid and**

Women noted that the reason **they will not farm this year** (2022) is because of the high cost of living and the risks involved, since **there is no guarantee of harvesting**, despite investment.

*“Recently, some farmers were apprehended by members of the organized armed groups (OAGs) in their farms while they were preparing for this farming season. They were freed and sent back with a warning to discourage anyone who attempts to cultivate in those areas, and to make sure their message was visible as it was audible, they cut off the ears of some of the workers on the farms and amputated the hands of the owner of the farm.” Hearing of such reports, **we cannot take the risk of going back to farm** even if we want to”*

**consistent rise in the cost of living.**

## **Impact of food crisis on families, and coping strategies**

Women also mentioned that the prices of food doubled between October 2021 and 2022. For example, rice price used to be #800 naira but now it is #1800 naira. Before the food crisis women were able to cook enough for their families, neighbors, and friends. But **now most of them eat twice or even once, daily.**

Also, women are struggling to earn a livable income, some of them are barely making #1000 naira a day (\$2.41 US dollars), which is a low amount to be able to provide food for their families. **The food crisis is pushing women to buy low nutritious food and to cut food rations.** This is driving women and children to a position of surviving on unbalanced diets. And impacts the mother-child time since women must go toiling for food every day.

Besides this, women are doing their best effort to cope with the crisis and keep feeding their families, for example, some of them jointly engaged in the oil milling business from ground nuts. Some of them also started working in food vending, livestock farming, cap making, buying, and selling textiles, clothes, and condiments. For some of the married women, they pointed out that their husbands are also contributing but that was still not enough to address daily needs.

*They mentioned they were all farmers, but the insurgency made them flee their homes and fleeing their livelihood as well.*

## **Impact of fuel crisis on families, and coping strategies**

For cooking, families do not rely on petroleum sources. **Their main source of cooking energy is firewood** and, not that often, charcoal. **Firewood's price did not change dramatically** like charcoal price did. Therefore, women mentioned that they kept using firewood.

## **Impact of fuel related economic crisis on farming**

Considering the different areas impacted by the price hikes such as availability of land, improved seeds, cost of labor, fertilizers, and pesticides; **farming is being jeopardized.** Some farmers that cultivated seeds last year were not able to harvest them due to the pesticides and fertilizer price increase. Another activity that became challenging is feeding livestock, which feeding regime was changed and adapted to the food prices making the livestock not sale worthy (not for a good price).

### **Conclusion**

Women and farmers in general are seriously affected by the global food crisis. The continuous increase in the prices of food, pesticides, and fertilizers is a threat to food security worldwide. **As this continues, farmers' output will decline, and women will continue to work more for less money. Both actions leading several households worldwide to barely feed themselves.**

**Authors:** This brief was written by Raphael Ifenna Joshua and Nkeki Mbode Ndirmbita in July 2022.