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Research Paper

Policy responses to food insecurity during economic crises: a comparative study of two west african countries (ghana and nigeria)

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ABSTRACT

The study provides a comparison between the responses of Ghana and Nigeria to food insecurity in cases of economic crises. Both nations are endowed with strong agricultural resources, but still experience severe food shortages, particularly in times of deteriorating economic situations. The study was based on the effectiveness of various government policies in assisting individuals to procure adequate food in times of need. The study adopted a survey approach to gather data on households in the two nations and evaluated their food security, coping behaviors, and perceptions of government policies. It was established that food shortages occur in many households in Ghana and Nigeria, but the situation is more critical in Nigeria. The coping strategies used by families include decreasing the size of meals, eliminating meals, borrowing, or selling assets. Although the Ghana policies, such as the agricultural subsidies and social protection schemes, are considered to be useful, the Nigerian concentration on the emergency food aid and economic diversification has also played a role. The findings indicate that the two nations are improving, although there are still difficulties. Ghana has been able to enhance food security and availability, whereas Nigeria has seen an increase in agricultural production and a bit less dependency on food aid. The study concludes that even though the policies are coming in positive ways, further effort is required to ensure that food security is guaranteed to everyone, and the most vulnerable in particular. To make improvements lasting, stronger policy implementation, improved price controls of food, and continuous monitoring are suggested.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One such problem, brought about by economic crises, is food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in such countries as Ghana and Nigeria [1], [2]. Although both nations are highly endowed with natural resources and possess immense farming potential, they are still experiencing enormous challenges of food shortages [2], [3]. This has been so because of unstable economies, political issues, and fluctuations in world markets, such as the increase in value of the US dollar, which impacts the prices of commodities in local markets. Food prices tend to increase with economic crises in both Ghana and Nigeria [3]. An increase in prices makes the families, and particularly low-income families, less able to purchase adequate food. Farm production also reduces due to crises, either due to the inability of farmers to afford seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, or due to the inability to access markets and store [3]. Concurrently, the income of people is lowered, and it becomes even harder to afford food. This has seen a lot of households being unable to afford food, and hence an increase in hunger and malnutrition [4].

Food insecurity is a greater problem when economies are facing crises because the cost of living increases, and the capacity of individuals to afford the necessities, such as food, is reduced [4]. Although food insecurity may still prevail during normal periods, economic hardship aggravates the problem, particularly in areas where a large portion of the population is already living in poverty. Ghana and Nigeria have experimented with various means of handling food insecurity, particularly when the economy is at its worst. The initiatives are referred to as policy responses and consist of the measures undertaken by the government to assist in enhancing food accessibility and help provide farmers and needy families [4].

The Government of Ghana has experimented with various measures to enhance food security. Others involve subsidization of farm inputs such as fertilizer and seeds to make farming affordable to local farmers [5]. The other measures should involve establishing price controls to ensure that the price of food does not increase at a high rate and providing social protection programs to assist poor and vulnerable families [5]. The Planting for Food and Jobs initiative is one of the most popular programs in Ghana that should be used to boost food production and generate work in the farming sector [6]. Households also receive the necessary social protection programs like LEAP to assist them at the time of need [6].

The government in Nigeria has paid more attention to changes in the economy in the long term. The most significant strategy has been to diversify the economy of the nation and minimize its reliance on oil [7]. Nigeria has also put in place programs to boost food production through the assistance of local farmers through training, tools, and financial assistance [7], [8]. Such policies include ATA and NFSP. During a crisis, the Nigerian government has also arranged emergency delivery of food, whereby it delivers food to the starving households [8].

Though the two countries are attempting to address food insecurity, they do not do so in a similar manner. Ghana appears to depend more on the promotion of agriculture and the direct assistance of vulnerable populations with the use of social welfare programs [8], [9]. Instead, Nigeria is more concerned with altering the economic structure and also employs emergency food aid where necessary [9]. The opportunity to compare and learn from the experiences of other countries is provided by different policy responses. Through Ghana and the Nigerian case, we would have a better idea of what works and what fails to work in addressing food insecurity during economic disasters.

The two countries are relevant to study together since they both contribute significantly to West Africa and have common struggles. Nevertheless, their reaction to food insecurity is not similar, and comparing them can assist us in comprehending which policies work better. To illustrate, Ghana has enjoyed some success in maintaining food prices, but Nigeria has recorded some improvement in food production. The experience of each country provides good lessons to others who have been facing the same issues.

The objective of the study is to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of policy actions to food insecurity in Ghana and Nigeria during economic crises. Taking a glance at the way households in both countries have been impacted and their response, we can gain more insight into the actual effect of governmental activity. The research also attempts to reflect the sentiment of the individuals on the policies, whether they believe they have been beneficial or not, and whether they have really changed their lives or not.

Both Ghana and Nigeria have demonstrated their desire to resolve food insecurity. Their success, however, depends on the effectiveness of the policies that are planned and implemented. Good policies do not always work due to poor policies or ineffective institutions. Small yet well-adopted programs can make a difference at other times. This is the reason why this study does not just consider policies on paper but also the actual effect of the policies on the lives of people.

The study will be used in future decision-making since it will demonstrate the types of policies that can positively contribute to alleviating the problem of food insecurity during economic crises. It will be of help to the government officials, development partners, and researchers who will be interested in developing stronger food systems in Africa. It will also provide a voice to average citizens who live amidst crises and who have to discover how to survive daily.

The general objective of this study is to assess and compare the effectiveness of policy responses to food insecurity during economic crises in Ghana and Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks:

- To assess food security status during economic crises.
- To identify coping strategies adopted during economic crises.
- To assess the perception of policy interventions.
- To investigate the impact of policies on food security.

2. RELATED WORK

Case studies of Ghana and Nigeria are frequently used in the context of West Africa due to their high population and impact on the economy in the area. Several works have revealed a close connection between economic crises and increasing food insecurity. As an example, [9] observed that economic instability in Nigeria, such as recession and inflation, directly influenced food access and affordability.

On the same note, [10] noted that the Ghanaian economy has been experiencing several recessions, which have led to high food prices, particularly in the urban centers. The low-income earners are the worst hit when the food becomes expensive, which may cause undernourishment and hunger. In the downturn, governments have little budget, and they can hardly afford to import food, encourage local farmers, or keep prices steady. This makes most families resort to coping mechanisms like minimizing food intake, skipping meals, or using less nutritious food.

The results are supported by the work of [10], who determined that the economic hardship compels families to resort to negative coping strategies that may damage their health and well-being in the long term. Ghana has adopted several policies that are meant to enhance food security, especially in hard economic periods. Among the most popular initiatives is the Planting for Food and Jobs program, which was initiated in 2017. The program is said to support farmers by offering them access to fertilizers, extension services, and seeds as described in [11]. Their study established that the program boosted crop production and food supply in the rural regions.

Other policy responses in Ghana are subsidies on farm inputs, market price stabilization, and social safety net programmes such as the LEAP. LEAP offers financial support to poor and vulnerable families to enable them to afford food and other basic necessities. According to [11], this type of program is very necessary in economic shocks as they provide direct assistance to those who are the most vulnerable in terms of food insecurity.

But not every research concurs on the effectiveness of policies. Although certain scholars focus on the positive results of the agricultural policies in Ghana, others mention the problems of ineffective planning, implementation, and corruption. Indeed, as an illustration, [12] suggests that even when policies are on paper, they cannot work because they lack proper monitoring and accountability. Nigeria has also taken measures to solve the problem of food insecurity, especially in times of economic crisis. The diversification of the economy, particularly the quest to lessen reliance on oil and enhance agriculture, is one of the significant strategies.

The ATA was initiated by the Nigerian government in 2011 and subsequently by APP in 2016. Programs were created to assist farmers, enhance food production, and minimize food importation. As indicated in [12], policies assisted in the development of more production of rice, maize, and other staple

foods. Other programs that were introduced by the government include the ABP, which offers loans and support to small-scale farmers. A study conducted by [13] indicated that the programs enhanced productivity in the farms and provided farmers with improved accessibility to the markets. Nigeria also introduced emergency food distributions and cash transfers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic constraints.

The NSIP that contained conditional cash transfers was increased to give temporary relief to poor households. Although the efforts were commended, a few reports reported issues with targeting, delivery, and transparency. Food insecurity is a major challenge in Nigeria because the country has numerous policy initiatives. Studies such as [13] believe that the reaction of the government is usually reactive as opposed to proactive. Most of the policies are implemented in crises without long-term planning, and thus, it is difficult to have long-term solutions.

There have been some studies that have attempted to compare food insecurity and policy responses in Ghana and Nigeria. As one example, [14] conducted a comparative analysis of the response of the two countries to food shortages in the 2008 global food crisis. The research discovered that Ghana was more coordinated and Nigeria was more fragmented. The other study conducted by [14] was aimed at the effects of social protection programs. This research established that the LEAP program had a more direct and quantifiable effect on the food security of households than the broader but less targeted efforts in Nigeria. The study, however, also established that the agricultural programs in Nigeria were reachable since the country has a huge population and land to support its agricultural programs.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research centers its attention on Ghana and Nigeria, in Sub-Saharan Africa, which have been experiencing serious problems with food insecurity in times of economic crisis. Ghana and Nigeria, with their changing agricultural sectors and changing policy approaches.

The study uses a quantitative method to give an analysis of the policy responses to food insecurity in Ghana and Nigeria amid economic crises. The research collected quantitative information on the food security indicators, such as food availability, access, and utilization, using the national statistical data on food security indicators in government agencies, including the Ghana Statistical Service and the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria. Structured instruments were also used to collect data by administering to sampled households in selected areas of Ghana and Nigeria to collect information on the food security status, coping behaviors during economic crisis, and perceptions of government policies.

A purposive sampling method was applied in the study to sample regions in Ghana and Nigeria that have experienced high food insecurity in cases of an economic crisis. At the regional level, a stratified random sampling approach was used to sample households to participate in the survey and ensure that there is a representation of various socio-economic groups. The research used descriptive statistics to describe demographic factors and results on the food security situation in economic crisis, coping measures applied in economic crisis, the perception of policy interventions, and the effects of policy on food security in terms of percentages. The researcher was ethical as they received informed consent from all participants, ensured the study had confidentiality and anonymity, and reduced potential harm to participants to a minimum.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in the form of tables, organized according to the study's objectives. Additionally, demographic information of the survey respondents is provided.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Ghana (N=200/%)	Nigeria (N=200/%)
Gender		
Male	48	50

Female	52	50
Age Group		
18-29 years	30	35
30-49 years	50	45
50+ years	20	20
Education Level		
No formal education	10	15
Primary education	25	30
Secondary education	40	35
Tertiary education	25	20
Household Income Level		
Low	60	70
Middle	30	25
High	10	5

The demographic findings, as illustrated in Table 1, indicate that there are significant similarities and differences between Ghana and Nigeria.

The research discovered that the gender composition is nearly equal in both Ghana and Nigeria, with males constituting 48% and 50% of the respondents in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively, and females being 52% and 50% in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively.

The age distribution of the respondents depicts that in Nigeria, there is a higher proportion of younger respondents (18-29 years) (35%), whereas in Ghana, there is a higher proportion of older respondents (30%). Ghana and Nigeria have the highest percentage of 30-49 years, 50% and 45% respectively, showing that a substantial number of the working age population was represented in the survey. Ghana and Nigeria have the 20% of people who are aged 50 and above.

A smaller proportion of respondents in Ghana (10%) is uneducated compared to Nigeria (15%). The highest level of education is secondary education, which is the most common in Ghana (25%) and Nigeria (30%), although higher education is higher in Ghana (40%) than in Nigeria (35%). In Ghana, tertiary education is more widely prevalent (25%) than in Nigeria (20%).

There is a great difference in the household income levels in Nigeria and Ghana. In Nigeria, a greater proportion of the respondents (70%) are in the low-income group than in Ghana (60%). Middle-income households, on the other hand, are higher in Ghana (30%) as compared to Nigeria (25%). The high-income group is very small in Ghana and Nigeria, but it is smaller in Ghana (10%) than in Nigeria (5%). The importance of income differences lies in the fact that this issue directly influences the purchasing power and access to food, and low-income groups are more susceptible to food insecurity.

Assessing Food Security Status during Economic Crises

Table 2. Food Security Status

Food Security Indicator	**Ghana**	**Nigeria**
Households experiencing food shortages (%)	45	55
Average meals per day (Mean)	2.1	1.8
Households relying on food aid (%)	30	40
Increase in food prices (%)	25	35

According to Table 2, the findings indicate that there is a high percentage of food shortages in both Ghana (45%) and Nigeria (55%) in terms of households. The fact that a higher percentage in Nigeria indicates that the food shortages are more pressing in this country, which could be explained by the more drastic economic disruptions or the ineffective food security interventions. This demonstrates an urgent demand for stronger action to ensure the availability of food, especially in Nigeria.

In Ghana, the daily meals consumed average higher (2.1) than in Nigeria (1.8). This disparity indicates that Ghanaian households have better access to food than Nigerian households. The average below the mark in Nigeria indicates more evident food insecurity, where most households probably do not consume meals or eat smaller portions of the food supplied. A higher percentage of households in Nigeria (40%) depend on food aid as opposed to Ghana (30%). This indicates a higher reliance on external help in Nigeria to satisfy the basic food requirements, indicating more dire food insecurity circumstances.

This dependency on food assistance demonstrates the need to have efficient emergency food delivery systems and social protection programs to help vulnerable groups during economic crises. Ghana and Nigeria have seen a profound rise in food prices, 25% of households in Ghana and 35% in Nigeria display the problem.

The greater figure in Nigeria indicates that prices of food are more inflated, increasing the problem of food access among households already faced with low income. Raised food prices lower purchasing power and may result in low food intake and nutritional quality.

The results indicate that food insecurity is a significant concern in Ghana and Nigeria in the case of economic crisis, with Nigeria bearing the brunt. Food shortages, reduced average meal consumption, dependency on food aid, and increases in food prices are also higher in Nigeria than in Ghana.

Coping Strategies Adopted During Economic Crises

Table 3. Coping Strategies for Economic Strategies

Coping Strategy	Ghana (%)	Nigeria (%)
Reducing meal portions	40	50
Skipping meals	35	45
Borrowing food or money	25	30
Selling assets	20	25
Seeking food aid	30	40

The findings, as indicated in Table 3, depict that the proportion of households in Nigeria (50%) who turn to the minimization of the meal portions is high relative to Ghana (40%). This demonstrates that Nigerian households are increasingly being compelled to reduce the size of the food intake that they have per meal, which in the long term may cause nutritional deficiencies and health complications.

Another popular method of coping is skipping meals; 35% households in Ghana and 45% in Nigeria, respectively, use this method. The increased rate in Nigeria indicates that more families are experiencing serious food insecurity, which is causing them to skip meals altogether. Borrowing of food or money is a common coping strategy in Ghana and Nigeria, and 25 % of Ghanaian households and 30% of Nigerian households practice this.

The participation proportion in Nigeria is greater, indicating higher dependence on the social networks and community support system to satisfy the immediate food needs. Less frequently, but still a major coping mechanism, is selling assets, with 20% of households in Ghana and 25% in Nigeria engaging in this coping mechanism.

The sale of assets, including livestock, land, or household items, is a last-resort measure that will compromise economic stability and resilience in the future. The increased percentage in Nigeria indicates that more households are struggling in a pathetic economic situation, and as such, they have to sell precious commodities to get food.

Food aid is a major coping mechanism among most households, and 30% and 40% of Ghanaian and Nigerian households rely on this type of aid. The high dependence of food aid in Nigeria indicates a worse food insecurity scenario, where a large number of the population is unable to sustain their own basic food requirement without foreign assistance. This dependence demonstrates the significance of effective food assistance programs and social protection to reduce hunger in economic crises.

Perception of Policy Interventions

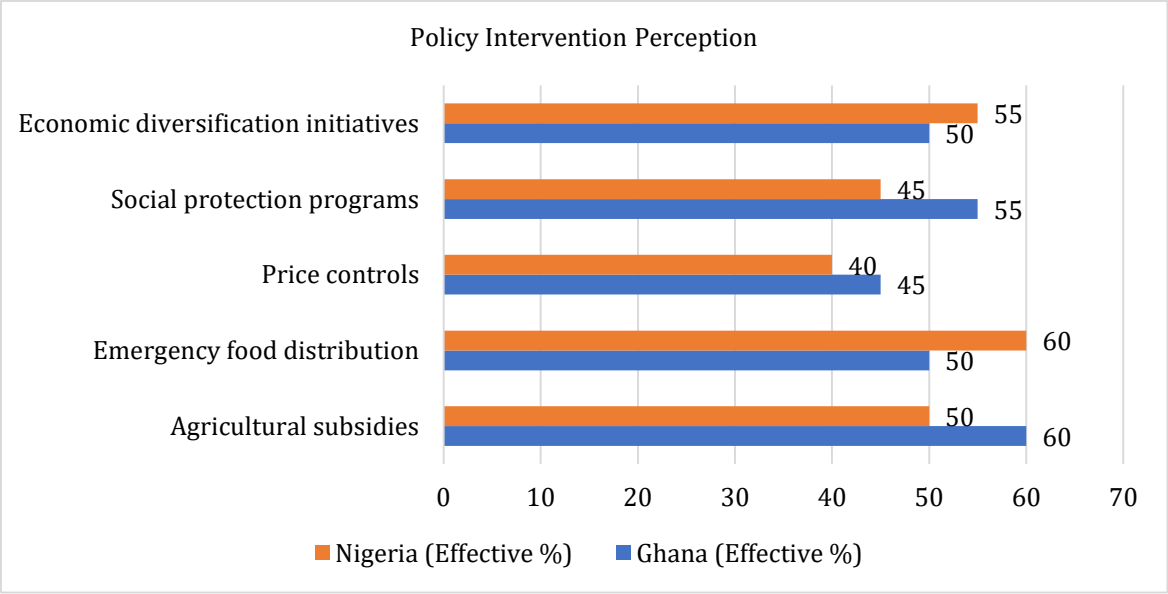


Figure 1. Policy Intervention Perception

As indicated by Figure 1, the findings reveal that agricultural subsidies are viewed as effective by 60% of the households in Ghana, as opposed to 50% in Nigeria. This indicates that Ghanaian families tend to think of subsidies as one of the healthy policies towards improving agricultural productivity and food security. The low effectiveness score in Nigeria demonstrates that although subsidies are beneficial, their effectiveness can be reduced by the problem of implementation or some circumstantial issues in influencing agricultural production.

In Ghana, 50% of households, and in Nigeria, 60% of households, consider emergency food distribution to be effective. The improved effectiveness rating in Nigeria demonstrates how significant the emergency food aid is in alleviating acute food crises. It demonstrates that the food distribution programs in Nigeria have a comparatively high acceptance and significance in the realization of the food needs in immediate terms, but the program requires constant improvements to achieve the maximum effect.

In Ghana and Nigeria, 45% and 40% of households, respectively, perceive price controls to be effective. The comparatively low effectiveness scores indicate that although price controls may be effective in stabilizing the food prices, the effectiveness may be constrained by the market dynamics and enforcement issues. Ghana and Nigeria demonstrate the average level of trust in price control measures, which implies that supplementary measures are required to ensure that there is affordability and availability of food.

In Ghana, 55% of households and 45% of households in Nigeria rated their social protection program as effective. The score difference of Ghana indicates that programs like cash transfers, food vouchers, and other social safety nets have been implemented and have a stronger effect in supporting the vulnerable groups. In Nigeria, the lower effectiveness rating indicates the possible lack of coverage, targeting, or implementation that is necessary to improve the effectiveness of social protection measures.
In Ghana and Nigeria, there is a rating of 50% and 55%, respectively, in economic diversification initiatives. The improved rating in Nigeria demonstrates an appreciation of the need to diversify the economy to limit reliance on unstable sectors like agriculture and oil. This practice is regarded as advantageous to resilience to economic shocks and enhancement of food security, but the full potential might need long-term devotion and investment.

They discovered that agricultural subsidies and social protection programs are especially appreciated in Ghana, and emergency food distribution and economic diversification are more appreciated in Nigeria. Ghana and Nigeria characterize moderate confidence in price controls, which implies a need to adopt a multifaceted policy on food security, including both short-term relief and structural adjustments.
Impact of Policies on Food Security

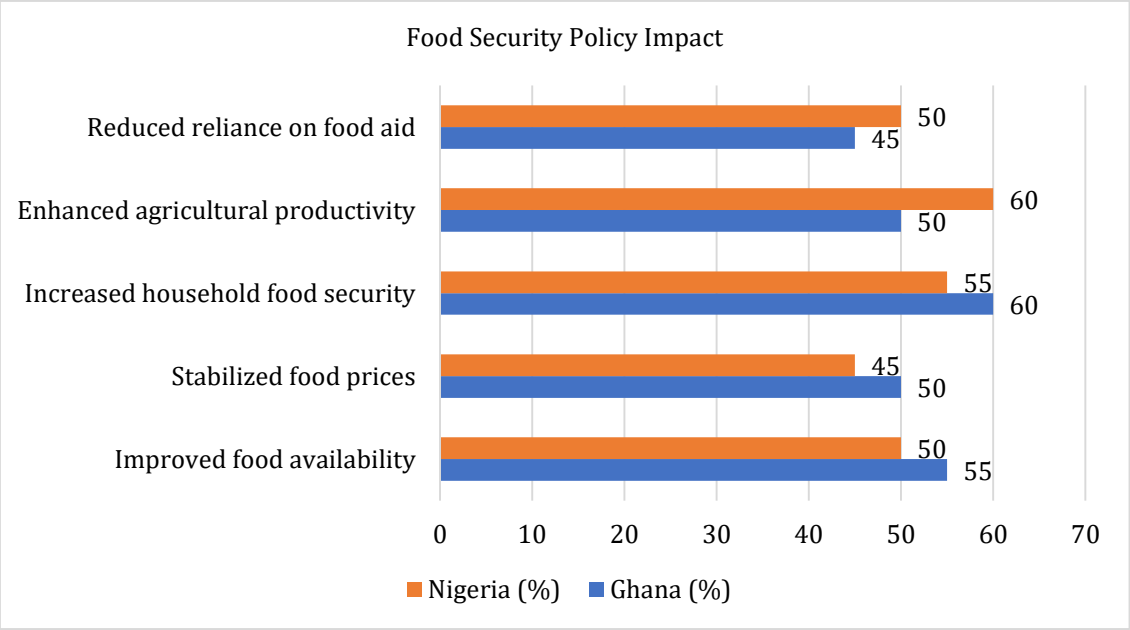


Figure 2. Policy Impact on Food Security

Figure 2 indicates that, in Ghana, policy interventions in households lead to better food availability, which is 55% compared to 50% in Nigeria. This indicates that Ghanaian policies can be more successful in ensuring that food becomes more easily accessible, perhaps because they are more successful in implementing agricultural subsidies and social protection schemes. The comparatively high percentage in Ghana and Nigeria is indicative that the policy measures are positively influencing, but there is still an opportunity to improve them.

The 50% and 45% of Ghana and Nigeria households, respectively, exhibit stabilized food prices. This indicates that 50% of the Ghanaian households believe policy intervention measures are effective in regulating the volatility of food prices, whereas a smaller number of Nigerian households believe so. This may be because the effectiveness is lower in Nigeria because of difficulties in implementing price controls, or it may be because food prices are more severely impacted by high inflation rates.

In Ghana, 60% of households and 55% of households in Nigeria have improved household food security. This increased percentage in Ghana indicates that the overall food security is more appropriately being increased by policy instruments, including social protection programs and agricultural subsidies. This indicates that interventions are assisting the houses to address their nutritional needs more reliably, even though a substantial part of the Ghanaian and Nigerian population still needs additional assistance.

Policy interventions in Nigeria have increased agricultural productivity in 60% of households as compared to 50% in Ghana. This increased percentage reflects the success of the economic diversification efforts and emergency food distribution in Nigeria in improving agricultural production. The huge effect on productivity indicates that the policies are indeed tackling some of the issues that lie behind the agricultural sector, resulting in improved food security.

Fifty percent (50%) of Ghanaian and fifty percent (50%) of Nigerian households indicate reduced dependence on food aid. The larger percentage in Nigeria indicates that the policy interventions are slowly reducing the emergency food assistance requirement, and demonstrates increases in food availability and household food security. Nevertheless, the reality that almost half of the households in Ghana and Nigeria continue to depend on food assistance demonstrates the necessity of strong social protection instruments and sustainable farming practices.

The study reveals that policy interventions have positive results in food security in Ghana and Nigeria, and some of the areas are better than others. Ghana has achieved a significant advancement in food availability and household food security, whereas Nigeria has achieved a significant advancement in agricultural productivity and dependency on food aid.

4.1 Discussion

The study findings reveal that food insecurity is a major issue in both Ghana and Nigeria, particularly when there is an economic crisis. The figures indicate that the food insecurity experienced by the households in Nigeria is worse than in Ghana, as evidenced by more frequent food shortages, reduced average meals per day, and increased dependency on food aid in Nigeria. Results are in line with previous research. Indicatively, [14] noted that economic instability in Nigeria has a more adverse impact on food security than in most other West African countries because of the high inflation rates and lack of accessibility to the food market. The food accessibility in Ghana is also better, as the average number of meals per day in Ghana (2.1) was more than that of Nigeria (1.8). This is as [15] described, that social support systems such as LEAP contributed to the ability of vulnerable families to stay at the basic level of nutrition even in harsh economic periods. Nigeria, however, has a far greater population and ranks higher on the scale of poverty; it is more difficult to effectively give food aid to all people in need. As food is made scarcer, different coping mechanisms are used by households.

The most frequent ones reported in this study are making fewer meal portions, forgoing meals, borrowing money, selling possessions, and using food aid, which are similar to the strategies found by [16], who observed that during economic stress, families tend to either eat less or sell items to make ends meet.

It is worth noting that the coping strategies employed by more Nigerian households were harsher. This once again demonstrates greater food insecurity and a lack of local support.

The policy perception data reveal that various strategies are effective in different countries. Agricultural subsidies and social protection programs were seen as positive in Ghana. This confirms [16], who established that in Ghana, the Planting for Food and Jobs program enabled small farmers to produce more and supply more food in their country. Emergency food distribution and economic diversification were more positively received in Nigeria. As per [17], [18], programs such as the ABP have contributed to the growth of food production in Nigeria, but there are problems in the delivery of the programs and equity.

Considering the real outcomes of policies, Ghana achieved greater enhancement in food provision and domestic food security, whereas Nigeria received more successful outcomes in agricultural output and less food dependence. The results indicate that both nations are on the right track, but Ghana is stronger in terms of household protection, whereas Nigeria is stronger in terms of production. Nevertheless, policy success is not as much dependent on emergency reactions as it is on long-term planning, as [19], [20] notes. This discussion demonstrates that policy interventions can be used to alleviate food insecurity, but they have to be country-specific.

5. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that Ghana and Nigeria have severe food security issues, though with varying degrees of intensity. In Ghana, a higher percentage of households are affected by food shortages, though it is worse in Nigeria, where a greater percentage of households suffer food shortages, skip meals, and depend on food aid. Ghanaian and Nigerian households use different coping mechanisms to cope with food insecurity, and Nigerian households more often use extreme coping mechanisms like downsizing meal portions and selling assets. The effectiveness of policy is somewhat perceived differently, with agricultural subsidies and social protection programs especially being appreciated in Ghana, and emergency food distribution and economic diversification being more appreciated in Nigeria. The effects of the policy are positive, and there was a significant improvement in food availability, food price stability, and household food security. Nevertheless, large sections of the population continue to be dependent on food aid, which means that they remain vulnerable. In Ghana and Nigeria, to combat food insecurity, it is advised to increase the agricultural subsidies and the social protection programs, ensuring that they are more implemented and covered.

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Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Jemima Jennifer Acquah Donkoh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

There is no potential conflicts of interest, funding sources, or affiliations that might bias the study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and how their data would be used and protected.

Ethical Approval

The study followed all relevant ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review boards in both Ghana and Nigeria prior to data collection.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request. Due to privacy and confidentiality agreements with participants, individual-level data cannot be publicly shared.

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