

Gender Dynamics and Household Resilience in Combating Food Insecurity in Nigeria

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Incorporating gender dynamics into the choices available to build resilience capacity is crucial to combating the food crisis in Nigeria. However, little is known about variations in resilience capacity indicators between male and female household heads and how these differences influence food security in Nigeria. This study employs data on household heads from the 2024 Nigeria General Household Survey to evaluate gendered resilience capacity as it relates to food insecurity using the Food and Agriculture Organisation – Resilience Index Measurement Analysis (FAO-RIMA II). This report documents that building household resilience is instructive to combating food insecurity amongst households in Nigeria. Moreover, female household heads exhibit greater resilience than their male counterparts. This indicated that more gendered mainstreaming policy efforts should be intensified to invest in female access to basic services, adaptive capacity, asset ownership, and social transfers to strengthen capacity to withstand shocks and rebound from a food crisis, thus creating an avenue for promoting food security and zero hunger. Policy actors are encouraged to subsidise internet access and smartphones for disadvantaged groups, and to offer alternative power sources to improve electricity access in food processing to reduce losses. The government should enforce gender-aware programs that de-emphasise patriarchal norms in acquiring asset ownership. Conclusively, an overhaul of programs' dissemination strategies is required to enhance effective resilience capabilities to tackle food insecurity.

Introduction

Nigeria, despite its abundance of natural, physical, and human resources, is among the least secure countries in terms of food security. The country moved from its 103rd position in 2022 to 115th among 123 countries in 2025, with a global hunger index of 32.8. – A state categorised as serious¹. More disturbingly, 31.8 million Nigerians suffer from acute food insecurity, and 33.1 million are projected to be food insecure between June and August 2025². Reports from the 2024 5th wave Nigerian General Household Survey revealed that three out of every five households had insufficient access to healthy, nutritious meals, and about one-third of household heads had to restrict their children's meals.

The prevalent food crisis disrupts child development, subjective well-being, adequate functioning and preparation for adulthood. Findings from the 2024 Nigerian General Household Survey (NGHS) suggest that 51.0 percent of children under 15 could not perform their daily tasks effectively; 23.3 percent could not proactively plan their tasks due to low cognitive development. Also, women lacking minimum dietary diversity are prone to low reproductive functioning and maternal mortality. Furthermore, 85.0 percent of women between 24 and 60 years old are in acute nutritional shortages.

Aside from the antecedent crisis of food insecurity, households tend to face other forms of shocks, such as social, economic, and environmental shocks. Illustratively, the death of family sponsors may impose an unbearable financial and mental instability burden on the household, thus undermining their ability to adjust to the consequences of the loss (Barboza and Seedall 2023). Also, volatile macroeconomic indicators such as inflation, exchange rate shocks, and high unemployment may impair households' ability to rebound. An environmental sustainability crisis may further aggravate household responses to post-harvest shocks, livelihood and asset losses due to erratic temperature changes, drought, irregular rainfall, and exposure to pollutants (Zamasiya and Nyikahadzoi 2025).

In addressing the food crisis and its antecedent consequences, building household resilience becomes essential. This involves improving households' livelihoods through income diversification to non-farm enterprises and employing strategies to maintain home-grown innovative agricultural practices to avert the antecedent shocks of the escalating food crisis. Concerted efforts are in place to build household resilience capabilities across the country.

¹The 2025 global hunger index reported a serious rate of food insecurity, with key indicators showing 19.9 percent of the population undernourished, 33.8 percent of children under five stunted, 11.6 percent of children under five wasted, and 10.5 percent under-5 mortality. The case is more pronounced in the North-Eastern region, with the highest rate of displacement of persons who are food insecure. More information: <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/download/all.html> and <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/nigeria-emergency>

²Ezenwajobi (2025). Tackling Food Insecurity and Boosting Agricultural Productivity and Food Access in Nigeria: Areas for Legislative Intervention. <https://ir.nilds.gov.ng/bitstream/handle/123456789/1696/TACKLING%20FOOD%20INSECURITY%20IN%20NIGERIA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2024, November 6). 33.1 million Nigerians projected to be food insecure in 2025. FAO in Nigeria. [FAO in Nigeria. 33.1 million Nigerians projected to be food insecure in 2025. https://www.fao.org/nigeria/news/detail-events/en/c/1720792/](https://www.fao.org/nigeria/news/detail-events/en/c/1720792/)

Some of these policies include Operation Feed the Nation, the 2016 Green Alternative, the Anchor Borrowers Programme, the National Social Safety, and the Presidential Fertilizer Initiative. It is, however, evidence that most of these policies are implemented without adequate consideration of women's specific needs and concerns. Notably, female household heads often face challenges in accessing credit and extension services due to limited information and inadequate collateral. The stereotyped social norms against women may also be one of the contributing factors to the unequal parity.

Substantial empirical evidence is documented on building resilience capacities to address food insecurity, albeit with inconclusive outcomes. Research suggests that building household resilience enhances food security status in Uganda (d'Errico et al. 2018). In analysing the enablers of resilience, scholars argued that adaptive capability, social safety intervention and basic access enhance the ability of households while asset possession worsen it in Tanzania. On the contrary, Ado et al. (2019) concluded that asset ownership and adaptive capacity are more influential in gauging households' resilience in Niger. Olawuyi and Ijila (2023) established that assets and social safety nets do not improve Nigeria's households' resilience to food insecurity. Despite inconsistent findings in the literature, a significant gap remains in establishing the gender dimensions that enable resilience in coping with household food security shocks.

Given this gap, it is therefore instructive to assess household resilience to food insecurity from a gendered perspective in Nigeria. It is important to provide evidence-based solutions to develop policy measures that improve household resilience through gender-diverse options for food security. The other sections of this brief succinctly examine the extent to which the food crisis disproportionately affects Nigeria's demographic structure.

This brief provides a gender-disaggregated analysis of the food crisis within Nigerian households. It estimated the resilience capacity index and its influence on food security using the Food and Agriculture Organization Resilience Index Measurement Analysis II (FAO-RIMA II). Finally, the brief is a step towards formulating clear policy guidance to improve household resilience through gender-diverse options.

Demographic disparities and key drivers of food crisis amongst households in Nigeria

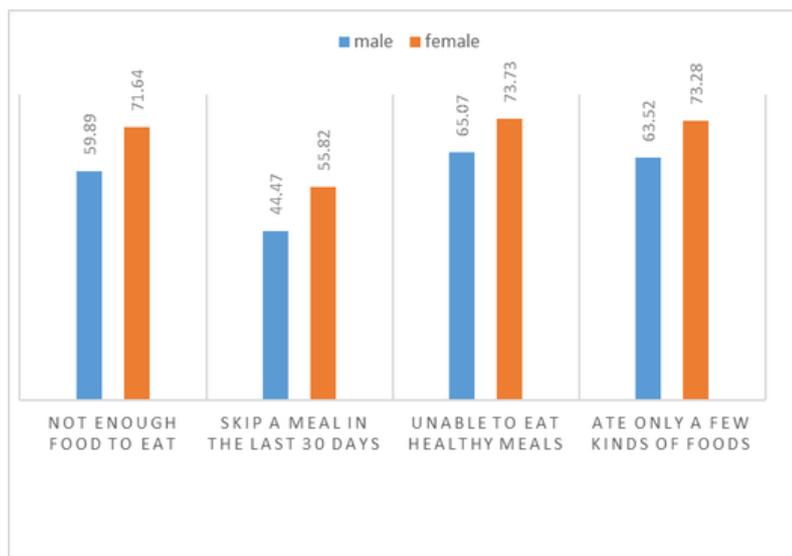
Nigerian households face episodes of food crises, increasing their exposure to food insecurity. Evidence from the Nigerian General Household Survey (NGA-GHS), Wave 5 (2023/24) revealed the state of the food crisis and consumption shock in 2024. The survey indicated that a greater percentage of Nigerian households experienced hikes in food prices, insufficient access to nutritious meals, and deprived themselves of food to allow their children's food consumption.

Figure 1: Household Difficulty and Severity Levels Due to Rising Food Prices (GHS Wave 5, 2023/24) (%)



The survey revealed that 78.9 percent of Nigerian households are battling with rising food prices. Disaggregating the data, the findings show that the South East (87.5 percent) and South South (87.4 percent) regions are the worst hit by the food crisis. Closely following are households in the Northeast, Northcentral, and Southwest, with 76.4 percent, 71.1 percent, and 72.1 percent of households facing food consumption difficulties due to rising food prices. Regarding the severity of the hardship, 58.3 percent of Nigerian households reported extreme severity, while 40.5 percent reported somewhat severe or actual severity. Only Southwest and North Central experienced marginally low levels of extreme severity due to rising food prices. Northeast was the most affected by the rising food prices, with 66.0 percent of respondents reporting extreme severity and shocks.

Figure 2: Gender Disparities in Food Crisis Impact Across Nigerian Households (GHS Wave 5, 2023/24)



In analysing the gendered implications of the food crisis, it is observed that female household heads are generally worse off due to the food crisis. The chart revealed that 71.6 percent of female respondents do not have enough food to eat, compared with 59.9 percent of their male counterparts. Similar instances were observed in terms of skipping meals, inability to consume healthy meals and having access to fewer types of food. More importantly, the difficulty faced by households in terms of rising food prices is equally unbalanced from the gender perspective.

The survey revealed that 81.9 percent of female respondents as compared to 79.4 percent of male counterparts face difficulty in food consumption. This indicates that women household heads often face more challenges in accessing food due to rising food prices, with a 2.5 percent gap in the level of difficulty they face. Also, 60.3 percent of female household heads faced extreme severity, 27.5 percent severe difficulty and 11.5 percent somewhat severe in handling food crisis as a result of the escalating food prices. As compared to their female counterparts, 57.3 percent faced extreme severity 27.3 percent were moderate and 13.8 percent were somewhat severe.

The ongoing food crisis in Nigeria is intensified by varying factors such as inflationary pressures, climatic shocks, insecurity and currency volatility among other concerns. Unequal access to financial resources and rising food prices reduce citizens' purchasing power, pushing more vulnerable populations into food insecurity. The country experienced a sustained increase in inflationary pressures, from an average rate of 11.4 percent in 2019 to 33.7 percent in June 2024, before falling to 23.7 percent in April 2025. Inflation profoundly impacts households' ability to shop, which women mainly undertake. Globally, women tend to do the majority of household grocery shopping, which in turn leads to higher inflation expectations than among their male counterparts. Inflation, particularly food inflation, further bears down on elderly women due to the rising cost of healthcare, the pay and pension gap, as evidenced by the average 20.0-30.0 percent lower wage rate in 2020 and the 45.0 percent pay gap in 2024.³

³The International Labour Organization affirmed that Nigerian women earn 20-30% less than their counterparts in the same job roles. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund reported that women earn 45% less, contribute to poverty and exhibit increased inflation expectations. <https://www.africanliberty.org/2025/06/02/addressing-the-gender-pay-gap-in-nigeria/>.

Erratic climatic conditions reduce agricultural productivity and food production, thereby worsening food security in Nigeria. Extreme heat, irregular rainfall patterns, and prolonged drought reduce agricultural output by up to 40.0 percent, totalling 3.5 trillion naira. More importantly, persistent heat waves shorten livestock lifespans, stunt growth, and increase their vulnerability to disease, thereby disrupting food production and social stability. Consequently, climate change exerts gender vulnerability to the food crisis in Nigeria. Women often face the severe burden of climate change by prolonged the distance to water, and firewood thereby threatening household security. It also increases heat stress and acute malnutrition in pregnancy and childbirth while worsening menopausal symptoms. In the same vein, climate change reduces the woman's; ability for household security due to income losses and livelihood.⁴

Amidst other factors, insecurity, conflict and cultural imbalance heighten the food crisis in the country. The devastating impact of the farmers-herder clashes, Boko-haram insurgencies, and other social insecurities in the country disrupts the optimal functioning of the different dimensions of food security. Food production fell by 82.0 percent (Sorghum), 55.0 percent (Millet) and 67.0 percent (Rice) in 2016 due to the insurgency and herder-farmer clashes. Given that 70.0 percent of farm labourers are women, the massive internal displacement pushed more women into homelessness and disrupted about 3 million livelihoods, hence deepening violence and the food crisis in Nigeria. More so, the gendered social norms further inhibit women's access to formal training and education, either through cultural perception or prolonged hours spent on care work for their family, folks and community.

⁴ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/fd1918e9-aafe-47f7-a404-e2f95e7c7891/content#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20responding%20to,chronic%20vulne%2D%20rabilities%20and%20risks.>

Measuring Household Resilience Capacity to Food Insecurity in Nigeria

The improved version of the Food and Agriculture Organization Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (FAO-RIMA II) model was used to construct an index on household resilience to food insecurity in Nigeria (Ladaninezhad et al. 2023; Mossie et al. 2024). The index is based on responses to three questionnaire items for each of the four resilience pillars: Access to basic services, adaptive capacity, assets, and social safety nets (Sibrian et al. 2021). Each of these pillars, based on responses from the household heads on their perception in handling resilience⁵ was calculated using the 2-stage factor analysis (FA)⁶ shiny developed by FAO. Data from the 2023-2024 5th wave of the Nigeria panel General Household Survey (GHS-LIMS) were adapted for the study. The survey included initial responses from 3901 households, but there were many missing responses and outliers. The final dataset comprised 20 male and 13 female household heads after the initial dataset was cleaned, rescaled, and outliers winsorised. In establishing the model appropriateness, the Turker-Lewis index, comparative fit index and the root mean square error of approximation were considered. The examination indicated data model fit above minimum requirements, with statistical, hypothetical, and observed covariance values of 1.19, 1, and 0, respectively. Furthermore, the correlation between the three strata of each pillar was moderate, with absolute values of 0.15 and 0.45 in the pillars of access to basic services and adaptive capacity, while asset and social safety nets exhibited weak correlation, thereby mitigating potential redundancy in the pillars.⁷ The RIMA-II model further allows for gender comparisons, which is the thrust of this research.

Figure 3 presents a snapshot of the findings from factor analysis using RIMA-II. The first quadrant indicated an aggregate household resilience score of 44.76, indicating a below-average resilience capability. Also, the second quadrant revealed that the latent variable for social transfers had the highest weight of 39.7 percent, followed by asset acquisition (37.0 percent), adaptive capability (13.8 percent), and access to basic amenities (9.5 percent) in the aggregate resilience pillar distribution. Finally, the last quadrant presented the path analysis of the sub-resilience pillars and its influence on the food insecurity indicators.

⁵ Household resilience is described in the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis Short questionnaire as the quantitative approach to establishing the cause-effect relationship between resilience and its determinants. The questionnaire consists of at least three questions on each of the pillars. Considering the uniqueness of the Nigerian Household survey dataset, resilience is measured on questions available and closely related to those itemised in each pillar in the questionnaire.

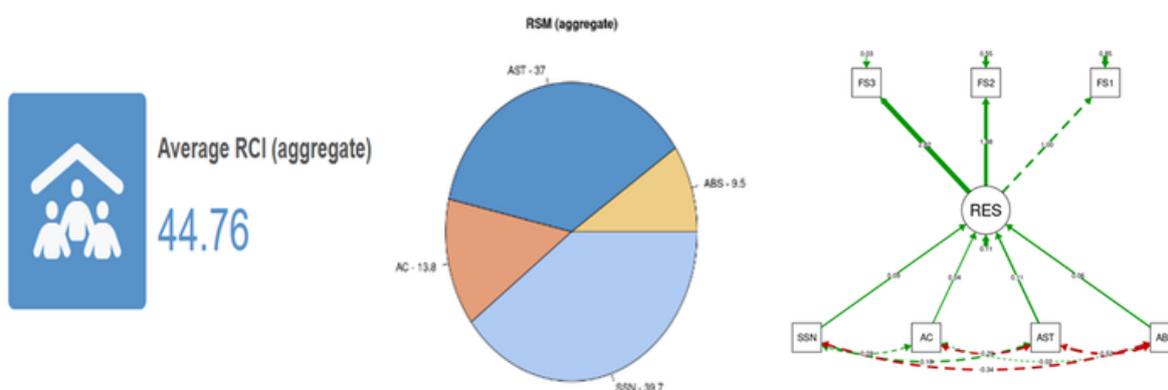
<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/381c85aa-9de1-434b-8928-f6c92ee633b0/content>

⁶ The first phase estimates the resilience pillars based on observable factors in the FA model through the reduction of the set of variables into a single index- pillar of interest. Then, appropriate weights are assigned to each pillar. The method assigns estimates to the latent variables that are not directly observable. The second phase forecast the latent outcome by using the FA to estimate the household resilience capacity index (RCI) using the inputs from the pillars estimated in the first step through aggregated pillar measurements. <https://www.fao.org/agrifood-economics/areas-of-work/rima/shiny/en/>

⁷ "The correlation analysis expects the inter-item correlation values to range between 0.15 and 0.5. higher coefficients suggest high similarity and potential redundancy in measuring pillars" The RIMA-II standardised questionnaire was adopted and adapted to suit this study based on the availability of responses on the key pillars. The three questionnaire items for the ABS pillar are yes or no responses on households' access to drinking water, electricity and internet access; AC pillar - ability to read and write in local language, English language and the highest qualification attained; ASS - asset ownership was proxied with house ownership, business ownership and trading. This metrics allows households to rebound after shock. SSN- cash assistance received, kind received and its frequency. The food security measures are household meal restriction for their kids, skip meals and worried about having food shortage.

The figure revealed that all the pillars had a positive impact in enabling household resilience to food insecurity. Asset ownership has the most significant potential for resilience, closely followed by social transfers, while access to basic services and adaptive capacity are the least important. The outcome of the factor loading analysis suggests a causal path which reflects that household resilience is a potent antidote to achieving food security in Nigeria. The low factor loadings of 0.11 (AST), 0.09 (SSN), 0.06 (ABS), and 0.04 (AC) indicate the need to further intensify efforts to build households' resilience capacity.

Figure 3: Aggregate Resilience capacity index and its path analysis to food insecurity pillars, FAO-RIMA II computations, 2025

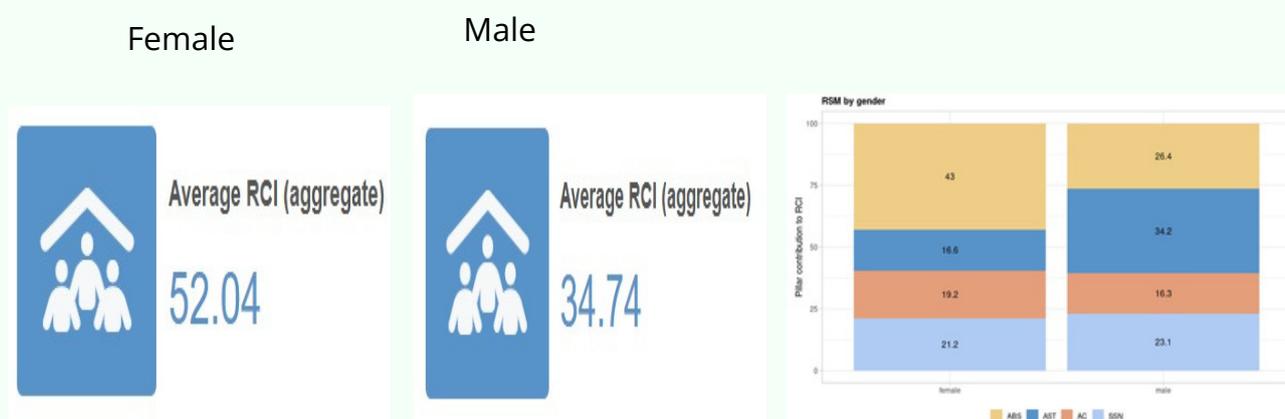


The findings suggest that household resilient capacity to food security exhibited a path coefficient of 2.82, indicating the most significant influence of household resilience on cushioning the effect of meal restriction (fs3) on households. The path suggests that a higher resilient capacity is associated with the possibility of consuming a more diversified variety of meals. Similarly, the path coefficient to the second food security index is 1.08, indicating that a more resilient structure may reduce the likelihood that households will skip meals. The third path suggests an indirect relationship with the baseline factor loading. The indirect relationship may be linked to other factors, such as household members' behavioural patterns. In sum, the path analysis affirmed that building a household's resilient capacity will most likely ameliorate the negative implications of the food crisis in the country.

Engendering Household Resilience Capacity to Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Figure 4 revealed the gender-disaggregated analysis of household resilience capacity. It was shown that females displayed a higher resilient capacity index score of 52.0 as compared to males with an RCI score of 34.7. Further, the chart reveals that female household heads exhibited a higher potential to utilise two of the four pillars than men.

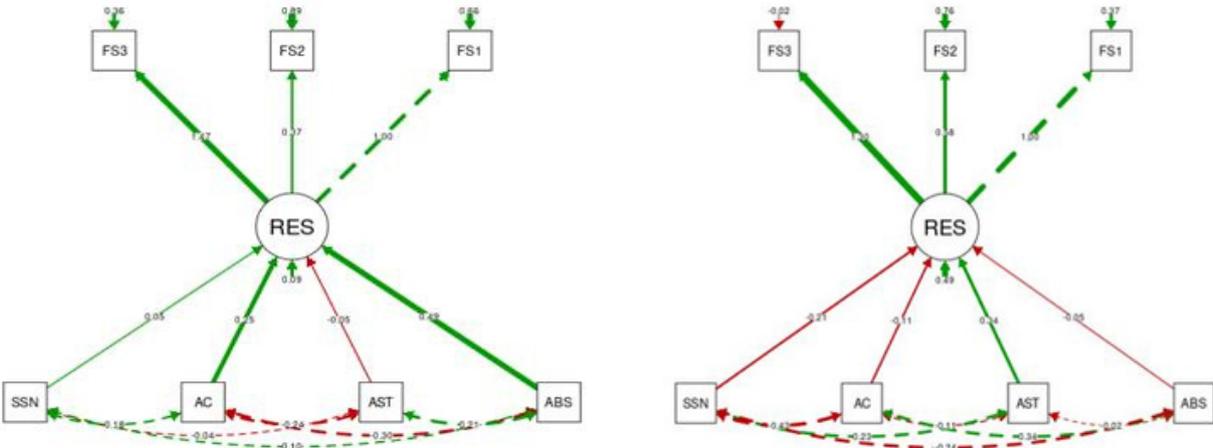
Figure 4: Gender disaggregated resilient structure matrix, FAO-RIMA II, 2025



Women outperformed in the ABS pillar with 62.9 percent, while men were more prominent, with about 206.0 percent higher in the asset acquisition (ASS) pillar. This reaffirmed the empirical evidence that women's engagement in basic service provision and fewer opportunities for asset acquisition are due to prevailing social norms, limited financial resources, and patriarchal restrictions on asset ownership within households.

The gender-decomposed path analysis of the relationship between household resilience and food security, however, revealed some interesting findings. The first chart showed that adaptive capacity, social transfers, and access to basic services improve their ability to withstand food insecurity.

Figure 5: Gendered path analysis on the relationship between household resilience and food security in Nigeria



However, asset acquisition further aggravates their capacity to absorb food shocks. The factor loading values of 1.1, 0.4, and 1.1 indicate strong signals for enabling capacity to recover from a food crisis. Surprisingly, only asset acquisition positively influences resilience capability among male household heads. Other pillars showed a negative path to resilience. This indicated a significant policy issue to be addressed.

Policy Discussion, Options and Recommendations

This research aligns with the theoretical and empirical position on achieving zero hunger by 2030 by establishing the potential influence of household resilience capacity on combating food insecurity in Nigeria. The study finds that building household resilience is crucial to alleviating the consequential impact of the food crisis on households. This empirical position aligns with previous submissions in rural Tanzania, Uganda, and Niger (D'Erico et al., 2021; Egamberdiev et al., 2023; Zerihun et al., 2024), but contradicts the position of Mossie et al. (2024), which found a negative influence of basic services on food insecurity. More instructively, the outcome showed that female household heads exhibit greater resilience than their male counterparts. This piece aligned with findings confirming higher women's resilient capacities to improve livelihoods by adjusting to climatic shocks and adopting climate-smart agricultural practices in Nigeria (Olumba & Olumba, 2025) and sufficient capacity to handle vulnerability to food insecurity (Nkwana & Mazenda, 2025). Nevertheless, Beyene et al. (2023) pointed out that male household heads are more resilient in addressing food security in Ethiopia.

Arising from this discussion, the following policy prompts are advised.

- Policy actors should provide alternative power systems to improve electricity supply and enhance processes to reducing food losses. Also, internet access and the provision of smartphones should be subsidised for disadvantaged groups and in underdeveloped areas. This will bridge gaps in information dissemination, promote efficient extension services to avert food shocks.
- Moreover, adaptive capacity must be strengthened by developing effective literacy channels, strengthening technical competencies, and increasing educational attainment.
- Furthermore, solution-focused social transfers should be initiated while actively embracing entrepreneurial drive, business ownership and asset acquisition. Moreover, the government should promote inclusive and innovative social assistance networks to promote efficient utilisation of kind and cash social transfers.
- Enacting a gender-aware approach to address resilience is instructive. Policies that prioritise targeted programs and identify abnormalities in the implementation of programs in each of the policy stratum is essential. Government should enforce gender-aware programs that deemphasises patriarchal norms in acquiring asset ownership.
- The negative impact of the three pillars on male household heads' resilience to food insecurity demands a strategic overhaul of delivery channels and the efficiency of initiatives to address the embedded implementation anomaly in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The research conducts a gender-disaggregated analysis of the influence of household resilience on food security in Nigeria using data from the 5th wave panel of the General Household Survey (GHS) through the Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA II) e-toolkit developed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The index indicated that the sampled household heads are resilient, with an index score of 42.76. The factor loading analysis suggests a strong, positive causal relationship between the household's resilience capacity and food security across all four pillars. The gendered dimension of household resilience to food insecurity suggests that female household heads are more resilient in handling the shocks associated with food insecurity.

The study therefore recommends that key coping strategies, such as the deliberate attempt to pay attention to access to basic services, adaptive capability and social transfers, be used to ameliorate the food crisis in Nigeria. Moreover, deliberate efforts should be made to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to delivering policies and programs that strengthen the resilience pillars while addressing factors that inhibit the strategic pillars that enhance resilience among both female and male household heads. That said, inconsistencies, such as missing responses, may limit this research, and observed outliers may impair its generalisability. It is therefore suitable to conduct this research on regional basis using new set of responses, thus establishing the regional differences in household resilience across gender specific approaches. Again, unexplored segment of this research lies in how particular shocks impart food security. Hence, future research may explore the extent to which each resilience pillar could address the different shocks influencing food security in Nigeria.

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