

## **Selected Food and Nutrition Related Strategies for Reducing the Challenges of Economic Recession among Low-Income Households in Abakaliki Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

This study explored ways selected food and nutrition-related strategies could reduce the challenges of economic recession among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis. Specifically, the study identified ways home gardening, nutrition education, and proper meal planning could reduce challenges of economic recession among the households. It was a survey research. The populations for the study were low-income households in the area of study. A random of 200 low-income households was selected. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire and focused group discussion guide. Data were analysed using frequency and means. The findings reveal 16 ways home gardening, 18 ways nutrition education and 17 ways proper meal planning could help to reduce economic recession among low-income households. It was recommended among others, that the low-income households should engage in home gardening.

**Keywords:** Strategies, Economic Recession, Low-income, Households, Challenges

### **Introduction**

The economic recession is a notable challenge in Nigeria (Nwuzor (2016). Michael (2016) noted that poor economic management is a cause of Nigeria current recession. The well-being of households especially the low-income households is often negatively affected. Such households need to look for alternative sources of income to support themselves in order to improve their well-being

(Robinson, 2016). Low-income households are those households whose annual income may not be sufficient enough to provide their needs such as clothing, shelter, health care and food (Igba, 2008). Due to the hardship being experienced within such households, Osalor (2016) suggested coping strategies such as home gardening, Nutrition Education and Meal Planning strategies to help

cushion the effect of economic recession within the family.

Home gardening provides to nutrition and household food security by implementing quick and immediate access to various foods that can be harvested, prepared and eaten by family members daily thereby reducing their spending in household foods during the period of economic recession (Agwu, 2012). Home gardening helps families that practice it to spend less on purchasing foodstuffs from the market while maintaining a healthy and nutritious lifestyle. Agwu (2016) stated that the low-income households in the urban area should learn from the rural dweller's survival techniques by adopting the strategy of home gardening to increase their food security, improve their nutritional intake for healthy living and reduce their spending on foods. Noko (2016) observed that the time of economic recession should be viewed as the period of improvisation for the households to cope with the menace. Through home gardening, households can have greater access to a variety of plant items that lead to an overall improvement in dietary intake and boost the bioavailability and absorption of essential nutrients (Talukder, 2012).

Nutrition Education is another way of reducing economic recession within the households. Nutrition education involves many activities that are not usually called nutrition education, such as promoting the

production of micronutrient-rich foods, nutrition counseling for mothers, cooking demonstrations, health promotion, the production and dissemination of dietary guidelines, as well as ensuring that schools and workplaces offer healthier meals (Nwuzor, 2016). Nutrition education according to Smith (2004) is any system of communication that teaches people to make a better use of available food resources. Gussow and Eide in Igba (2008) proposed the way for a nutrition educator as that of helping people of whatever social, economic or political circumstances to meet their need for nutrition's food.

Nutrition education is a tool to enhance awareness, as a means to self-efficacy, surrounding the trigger of healthy behaviours, (Pius, 2017). Nweze (2015) observed that during the period of economic recession the low-income families' income is reduced drastically such that they cannot provide some primary care facilities. Adegboye, (2014) noted that nutrition education can help in improving the healthy lifestyle of the poor during the period of economic hardship. Due to the challenges of economic recession, there is need for proper meal planning.

Adegboye, (2014) noted that proper meal planning by the households would help in achieving food security in Nigeria. Meal planning involves choosing a menu or a list of foods that will be included in a meal (Anyakoha, 2016). Anyakoha, (2015) also noted that meal planning is

the process of designing adequate diets in which all the essential nutrients are present in the right proportions, for specific person or groups of people. A well-planned meal should meet the nutritional needs of a given individual and thus promote health. An ill-planned meal, on the other hand, can retard good health. Adegboye, (2014) observed that most households waste resources in food purchases, some even waste the prepared meal including the low-income households because of inadequate or lack of meal planning.

The multiple hardships experienced during the period of economic recession especially the low-income households often lead the policymakers and the government in the constant search for the strategies of resolving the problem of economic downturns on the low-income households (Adegbite, 2016). There are also cases of child abandonment in exchange for food, prostitution, kidnapping among others. The problem of this study is what are the ways three selected strategies can help low income households reduce the challenges of the economic recession?

**Purpose of the Study:** The general purpose of the study was to explore ways selected food and nutrition-related strategies could reduce the challenges of economic recession among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis. Specifically, the study determined ways each of the following selected food and nutrition

related strategies could reduce the challenges of an economic downturn among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis

1. home gardening
2. Nutrition education
3. proper meal planning

**Research Questions:** The research questions guided the study

In what ways can each of the following food and nutrition strategies reduce the challenges of economic recession among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis?

1. Home gardening?
2. Nutrition education?
3. Proper meal planning?

## Methodology

**Design and Area of the study:** The study used a survey research design. Abakaliki metropolis is the area of the study. Abakaliki is the capital of Ebonyi State. Many low-income households in Abakaliki metropolis over time may no longer meet their needs such as sending their children to school, provision of shelter for the family, feeding of the family with three square meals, ability to take care of health problems as they arise among others which could lead to social decadence as noted by FGN (2014).

**The population for the Study:** The Population for the study comprised all the the father, mother and children of low-income households in Abakaliki metropolis.). Low income as used in this study is the households that do not often have enough to meet their

basic needs or live below USD 1 (#360) per day. They live in too little or wrong kind of food, spending as much as 80% of their income on food, leaving little or nothing on housing, health or education (Mbanefor in Igba, 2008). Furthermore, a household occupies a single housing unit and is the medium for foods provision in the family (Anyakoha, 2015). Thus this constitute the focal point for the study. The total population of Abakaliki metropolis consist of 72,518 male, 77,165 female (children inclusive) making a total population of 149,683 (NPC, 2006)

**Sample and sampling Techniques:** The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the sample for the study. The first stage Abakaliki metropolis was stratified into seventeen districts/areas. The second stage involves purposive sampling of eight districts/areas. This is because the households in these selected districts/areas best suit the definition of low income-households (ghetto areas). The third stage involves random sampling of 25 respondents from each of the eight districts/areas given a total sample size of 200 respondents. Finally a home-maker was randomly selected from the two hundred households given a total of 200 home-makers used for the study.

***The instrument for Data Collection:***

Instrument used for data collection were questionnaire and focused group discussion (FGD). The questionnaire was validated by three experts. Two in the Departments of Home Economics, and one from Arts and Social Science Education, all in Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient indicating high reliability.

***Method of Data Collection:*** The researcher distributed questionnaire with the help of two research assistants to the respondents. They explained the information to the members of the low-income households to enable them answer the instruments correctly. 196 copies of the questionnaire were duly filled and returned representing 99.2% return rate.

***Method of Data Analysis:*** Research questions were answered on individual item basis using mean and frequency. Items that scored 3.0 were accepted while items that scored less than 3.0 were rejected as the decision rule.

**Findings of the study:** The followings findings were made as summarized in tables 1-3.

**Table 1: Mean responses on ways home gardening could help to reduce the challenges of the economic recession on low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis.**

S/N	Ways home gardening could help to reduce economic recession	$\bar{x}$	Remarks
1.	Home gardening could contribute to family income generation.	4.05	Agreed
2.	Contributes to increase family food supply	3.74	Agreed
3.	Source of fresh and organic food	3.64	Agreed
4.	It saves money to buy other items	3.97	Agreed
5.	Help to bridge pre-harvest food gap.	3.90	Agreed
6.	Increase food availability.	3.74	Agreed
7.	Help to reduce erosion/ runoff	3.35	Agreed
8.	Good for physical and mental exercise	3.40	Agreed
9.	Facilitate household solid waste management	3.65	Agreed
10	Family members learn gardening skill	3.55	Agreed
11	It creates gainful self employment for family members	3.09	Agreed
12	Reduces poverty and improves food security		
13	Caring for plants offers families the chances to work together	3.10	Agreed
14	Home gardening offers sense of satisfaction	3.01	Agreed
15	Enhance adequate nutrition	3.42	Agreed
16.	Tending to veggies can lower blood pressure and reduce stress	3.53	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.53	

Table 1 shows the ways home gardening could help to reduce economic recession in Abakaliki metropolis. The result of the analysis in Table 1 implies that all the items are the ways home gardening help in reducing economic recession within the low-income households.

**Table 2: Mean responses on ways nutrition education could help to reduce the challenges of the recession on low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis.**

No	ways nutrition education could reduce economic recession	$\bar{x}$	Remarks
1.	Understand classes and importance of food nutrients.	3.76	Agreed
2.	Understand nutritional needs of family members.	3.90	Agreed
3.	Plan family meals.	3.85	Agreed
4.	Prepare family meals effectively.	3.55	Agreed
5.	Purchase wholesome foodstuff.	3.17	Agreed
6.	Process food effectively.	3.61	Agreed
7.	Preserve and store food.	3.36	Agreed

8	Prevent food spoilage	3.25	Agreed
9.	Prevent food losses and wastage	3.51	Agreed
10	Improve shelf life of foods	3.44	Agreed
11	Influences food choices and eating habits	3.90	Agreed
12	Prevent childhood obesity	3.80	Agreed
13	Focuses on overall health and wellness	3.56	Agreed
14	Focuses on eating right	3.92	Agreed
15	Teaches difference between nutritious and unhealthy foods	3.80	Agreed
16	Reduces fast food consumption	3.62	Agreed
17	Encourages physical activity	3.56	Agreed
18	Increases fruits and vegetables intake	3.61	Agreed
Grand mean		3.50	

Table 2 shows that all the items are the ways nutrition education could help to reduce the economic recession among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis. This reveals that the respondents agreed with these items as ways nutrition education could help to reduce economic recession among low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis.

**Table 3: Mean responses on ways proper meal planning could help reduce the challenges of the economic recession on low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis.**

S/ N	Ways proper meal planning could help to reduce economic recession	$\bar{x}$	Remarks
1.	Ensure a more adequate menu.	3.58	Agreed
2.	Help in making culinary discoveries.	3.61	Agreed
3.	Simplify life and reduces stress and anxiety	3.85	Agreed
4.	Optimizes purchases and saves money.	3.33	Agreed
5.	Maximizes time.	3.56	Agreed
6.	Help to avoid unhealthy choices.	3.57	Agreed
7.	Saves energy.	3.44	Agreed
8.	Foster family cooperation and information exchange	3.15	Agreed
9.	Promotes healthier lifestyle	3.50	Agreed
10	Decrease unwanted behaviour like food cravings, over-eating and reduce weight gain (obesity).	3.49	Agreed
11	Reduces food wastage	3.92	Agreed
12	Reduces grocery trips/ wandering at the grocery	3.94	Agreed
13	Add variety to your diet	3.85	Agreed
14	Help to buy, prepare and eat healthier food	3.72	Agreed
15	It saves money	3.80	Agreed
16	Shopping more efficiently	3.65	Agreed
17	It helps to consider likes and dislikes of the family member	3.72	Agreed
Grand mean		3.62	

Table 3 shows that all items recorded mean criterion which is above 3.0. The implication is that the respondents agreed with all the items are the proper meal planning strategies for reducing the challenges of the recession in low-income households within Abakaliki metropolis.

### Discussion

The result from this study indicated a lot of ways home gardening can play in reducing economic challenges facing low income households in Abakaliki Metropolis. These ways among others include contribution to family income, family food supply, produce from the home gardening can be sold to generate more money for the family. It helps to fill pre-harvest food gap, increases food availability and better nutrition through food diversity. It can also enhance rural employment through additional or off-season production. This agrees with Agwu (2016) who encouraged the low-income households in the urban area to learn from the rural dweller's survival techniques by adopting the strategy of home gardening to increase their food security, improve their nutritional intake for healthy living and reduce their spending on foods. Nweze (2015) also noted that for low income earning families that are unable to afford expensive animal products to fulfill their nutritional needs, home gardens offer a cheap source of nutritious foods. Through home gardening, households can have better access to a

variety of plant and animal food items that lead to an overall improvement in dietary intake and boost the bioavailability and absorption of essential nutrients (Talukder, 2012). Igba (2013) noted that home gardening will help families to produce most fruits and vegetables which are naturally low in fat, low in calories and cholesterol free. In her own view, Anyakoha (2015) reiterated that it is cheaper to grow one's own vegetables. Any surplus vegetables can be sold for money, thus gardening can be a source of family revenue.

The result from the study also revealed among others things that nutrition education is an effective strategy for reducing the challenges of the recession on low-income households in Abakaliki Metropolis. It helps in lowering low-income households' expenditure on health and drugs during the recession. Nutrition education helps families to understand the classes and importance of food nutrients, nutritional needs of the family members. This is in line with Anyakoha (2015) who stated that the health of the family depends to a large extent on how effectively the nutritional needs of each family member are met. An understanding of the characteristics of different group of people in the family and their nutritional needs is necessary for effective planning and preparation of family meals. Owoo, (2016) also noted that nutrition education is concerned with information on how to attain

good well-being and nutritional state. It also helps to prevent childhood obesity (Bree, 2015). Nkan (2015) also noted that proper nutrition and eating habits are crucial to maintain quality of life, control blood sugar levels, maintain good vision, contribute to positive mood, provide good sleep, energy, bone and muscle strength, digestion and good elimination which are severely affected with poor diet. Nutrition education helps the household to find out what kind of foods they should plant in their garden. It also gives information on how they can preserve their foodstuff (raw or cooked), thereby reducing wastage and also help them to make the best choice of foods for an adequate diet using locally available foodstuff. Levine (2013) noted that needy families are the most vulnerable in the society and call for the better enlightenment of the household on nutritional intakes.

Furthermore, the result revealed the ways proper meal planning could help to reduce economic recession to include, ensuring a more balanced menu, help in making culinary discoveries, simplifying life and reduces stress, optimizes purchases and saves money, maximizes time, help to avoid unhealthy choices, foster family cooperation and information exchange, promotes healthier lifestyle among others. This is in line with <http://mealz.com/artices/user-1154-theimportance-of-meal-planninh> observed that meal planning helps households to buy, prepare and eat

healthier food and also saves money, time and reduces stress and anxiety. Adegboye, (2014) noted that proper meal planning by the households would help in achieving food security in Nigeria. He argued that most households waste resources in food purchases, some even waste the prepared meal including low-income households because of inadequate or lack of meal planning. Nweze (2015) observed that during the period of economic recession the low-income family's income is reduced drastically such that they cannot provide some primary care facilities. He maintained that nutrition education can help in improving the healthy lifestyle of the poor during this period of economic hardship through proper meal planning. In the same vein, Kelvin (2012) stated that extravagant costs for entertainments and social activities should be curtailed during the period of economic recessions.

### **Conclusion**

The following conclusions were drawn. Economic recession affects the well being of the members of the low-income households because they are the most vulnerable in the society. It was also revealed that the use of home gardening, nutrition education and proper meal planning would reduce the challenges of economic recession among the low-income households.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ Members of low-income households should engage in home gardening because the products got

from it can help to generate more money thereby reducing the challenges of economic recession.

- ❖ Home Economist/Extension workers should organize workshops and seminars for low-income households on nutrition education as a means of reducing economic recession among low-income families.
- ❖ Members of low-income households should be encourage to practice proper meal planning as it will help them to buy, prepare and eat healthier food, saves money, time and reduces stress and anxiety.

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