

Building Confidence Bridges: A Requisite for Rural Prices Inflation and Agricultural-Food Production

Esekpa, Ofem Ibor, PhD

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences
University of Calabar-Calabar, Nigeria
EMAIL – ofem_ibor@yahoo.com

Eno Itobo Ibiang, Ph.D

Department of Environmental Education and Entrepreneurship, Akamkpa Cross River State,
Nigeria

Salvation Eteng

Department Of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Sciences
University of Cross Rive State Calabar, Nigeria
Email: salvationeteng@unicross.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Human decision-making has historically been viewed as an activity sustained by rational calculation, which fosters self-efficacy and confidence in beliefs, choices, rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production. In this context, confidence building bridges, particularly within rural communities, constitute an important prerequisite for rural development and may influence the availability and pricing of consumable goods, household spending, demand, inflation, and agricultural-food production. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, drawing on books, reports, and online journals. A target population of 168 respondents was identified from three selected local government areas, with each local government area representing a senatorial district, and the information obtained was used in the analysis. The findings show that confidence-building bridges can positively influence food production, employment generation, and socioeconomic welfare. The study concludes that government policies should prioritize the provision of fertilizers and improved seedlings to enhance agricultural-food production. It recommends, among other measures, that land should be allocated and protected for agricultural purposes as a major strategy for building confidence bridges in rural communities, promoting effective price mechanisms, and improving the production and distribution of goods and services.

Keywords: Confidence Bridges, Rural Pricing, Inflation, Agricultural-Food Production, Rural Development, Food Security.

INTRODUCTION

In a bid to build confidence bridges for rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production and to promote the socioeconomic development of the nation, there is a need to accord greater priority to food production and agricultural development in various localities and rural communities. Confidence building, according to the World Bank, can be understood as a process of fostering a sense of self-efficacy, belief, and capacity among individuals and communities. In the context of agricultural development, confidence is crucial for motivating farmers and facilitating sustained food production among rural people. It is aimed at extending the gains of sustainable development through improved decision-making, resilience,

motivation, and rural capacity. These features, according to the World Bank (2020), include changes in the availability of resources, socioeconomic and political support systems, skills and knowledge, and accessibility to markets.

An integrated food-production approach is therefore centred on farmers, women, children, landlords, and tenants who depend on institutional, physical, and social infrastructure to achieve their livelihood and development goals. Such an approach brings together quality and affordable education, healthcare delivery, modern and sustainable agricultural practices, and confidence-building initiatives capable of improving living standards while addressing rural pricing and inflationary challenges. Agriculture, for its part, involves a range of socioeconomic and cultural activities associated with the cultivation of soil, crop production, animal husbandry, and the marketing of agricultural products. To avoid the exhaustion of natural resources, agricultural production should emphasize the sustainable cultivation of land, production of crops, and breeding of animals for food, medicinal plants, fibre, and other products that enhance human life. These activities are particularly important for rural pricing, food availability, and inflation management.

Rural socioeconomic confidence is a means of ensuring that rural communities benefit from socioeconomic opportunities and resources. It provides a pragmatic approach to bringing government facilities and services closer to rural people through subsidies, fertilizer application, improved seedlings, crop-variety improvement, reduction of food wastage, efficient irrigation, and the implementation of modern farming techniques across agricultural supply chains.

The World Bank (1990) observed that many rural areas are characterized by a lack of infrastructure, poor electricity supply, inadequate roads, limited access to potable water, and weak healthcare facilities, resulting in low per capita income and limited economic opportunities. The continuous neglect and absence of basic infrastructure and confidence-building mechanisms, coupled with high commodity prices, inflation, and poverty, make the productive potential of rural communities and agricultural-food production difficult to realize. In Cross River State, it has been observed that more than 75% of the population resides in rural areas, where major occupations include farming, fishing, and cultural crafts. In Nigeria, the development of rural communities has increasingly become a development priority. However, efforts to enhance food production have been constrained by market-price instability and inflation, as well as administrative bottlenecks that can result in the abandonment of development projects. There are also challenges associated with unrealistic goals, vague reporting, persistent poverty, and hunger. These challenges are compounded by inadequate government commitment to implementation, weak legislative support, and other socioeconomic and political factors.

Against this background, there is a need to examine ways of building confidence bridges as a requisite for rural pricing, inflation management, and agricultural-food production in Cross River State. Such an examination is necessary to assess the socioeconomic challenges confronting food production and to propose appropriate measures for improving pricing mechanisms, reducing inflationary pressures, and strengthening agricultural-food production. It is on this basis that this paper examines building confidence bridges as a requisite for rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper is organized into the introduction, conceptual insights, theoretical framework, market price indices, inflation, and the way forward.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For a nation to build confidence bridges, attention must be given to agricultural commodities derived largely from rural areas. Notwithstanding this reality, Nigeria has witnessed, even in the not-too-distant past, considerable neglect of rural areas and their populations. The recent massive importation of food products, together with the growth of cities, slums, and associated social, economic, and political consequences, has contributed to the challenges confronting the rural economy and infrastructural development (Obiukwu, 1992, p. 57, in Paul, Agba, & Chukwurah).

There is little doubt that the nation has experienced more challenges than dividends from the absence of effective confidence bridges. Robe (2014) claimed that several policies and programmes aimed at closing the rural development gap relating to prices, inflation, and agricultural-food production have been implemented in many countries, with limited success. Rural areas nevertheless remain underdeveloped in terms of adequate social and physical infrastructure. This situation can be linked to rural-urban migration, unbalanced government policies, socioeconomic inequalities, income disparities, unemployment, limited access to economic services, poor funding, low levels of technology, inadequate fertilizer application, traditional factors and beliefs, low levels of education and literacy, and limited access to improved seedlings.

These challenges can reduce rural agricultural production and contribute to rural depopulation, declining contributions to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), famine, malnutrition among rural residents, social isolation, underdevelopment, inflation, ignorance, poverty, and the absence of effective price-control mechanisms for agricultural commodities in rural areas.

The paper therefore examines confidence bridges as a requisite for rural pricing and inflation in Cross River State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on addressing causal factors associated with agricultural-food production, inflation, rural pricing, poverty, and hunger.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to examine the role of confidence bridges in addressing rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production challenges in Cross River State, Nigeria. According to Eze and Agbo (2005, p. 26), once research objectives are achieved, the research problem is expected to be adequately addressed.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the impact of building confidence bridges on rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Nigeria.
2. Identify the factors responsible for confidence bridges, rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Nigeria.
3. Establish the socioeconomic role of confidence-building bridges in rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Nigeria.
4. Ascertain the role of government and non-governmental organizations in addressing challenges associated with confidence-building, rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Nigeria.
5. Make appropriate recommendations and propose a way forward.

CONCEPTUAL INSIGHTS

There are basically five concepts that merit clarification in relation to this research: confidence building, bridges, rural pricing, inflation, agricultural-food production, and food insecurity.

(a) Confidence Bridges

The concept of confidence bridges occupies a central position in this study's discussion of rural development. The entire argument is situated within the socioeconomic, practical, and cultural improvement of human life and the well-being of rural people, particularly as these relate to rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production. The concept focuses on improving food production and production methods, reducing mortality rates through affordable and accessible healthcare facilities, providing roads that facilitate the movement of agricultural products to markets, enhancing agricultural profitability, and discouraging rural-urban migration. Food production also stimulates the growth of agricultural commodity exports in Nigeria and provides a basic foundation upon which confidence bridges can be built for sustainable agricultural production.

Agricultural-food production remains an important component of the Nigerian economy and a major source of food for both rural and urban populations. It provides livelihoods, serves as a source of raw materials for agro-allied industries, and has the potential to generate foreign exchange (World Bank, 1998; Okumadewa, 1997). Over the years, rural communities have experienced significant setbacks in commodity pricing, inflation, and their contribution to national development. For example, the contribution of rural engagement in agricultural-food production reportedly declined to approximately 45–50% in 2023. This development has contributed to the prevailing difficult conditions associated with rural pricing, inflation, and hunger. The inconsistency in government policies has also constituted a major disruption to agricultural-food production. Several scholars have observed that agricultural growth and food production in Nigeria have followed a socioeconomic trend characterized by regressive growth, rural pricing challenges, inflation, and hunger in relation to agricultural output per capita and time trends (Okumadewa, 1997).

Rural farmers are predominantly characterized by strong economic dependence on agricultural labour, often with limited investment, savings, storage facilities, and access to improved agricultural technologies. Traditional practices and cultural factors may further constrain productivity. These conditions contribute to high food prices, inflation, underdevelopment, poverty, and socioeconomic vulnerability. In an agrarian economy, agriculture provides food production, supports healthy and productive lives, supplies raw materials for local industries, reduces dependence on expensive food imports, creates opportunities for surplus production for export, generates employment, and provides income and returns to farmers.

The agricultural system in Nigeria encompasses production, storage, marketing, processing, research, training, and extension services. Food production depends on the effective combination of the factors of production—land, capital, entrepreneurship, and labour which together determine the magnitude and socioeconomic efficiency of agricultural production from subsistence farming through to processing, distribution, and consumption. The effective combination of skills, technology, research, and capital is therefore essential to improving agricultural productivity. Research provides the basis for generating knowledge, developing improved production methods, and addressing spatial, material, and temporal challenges affecting agricultural production. Training, both formal and informal, is equally important for developing the skills required by farmers and other agricultural actors.

Sanni (2000) observed that multifactorial agricultural-food production should be encouraged with a deep sense of national responsibility as a means of building confidence bridges, enhancing institutional reliability, establishing stable institutional frameworks, and reducing inflationary pressures.

In order to encourage agricultural practices in Cross River State, there is a need to promote sustainable agricultural performance. Such performance can be reflected in a vibrant agrarian

economy that significantly contributes to the overall economic prosperity of the state and nation. A strong agricultural sector can contribute to rural economic development through efficient production systems, employment generation, income creation, and improved food availability.

A sustainable agrarian economy should therefore be characterized by high agricultural yields and the efficient use of resources through improved food production and value addition. This can include subsistence farming practices complemented by improved technology, mechanization, irrigation, extension services, and modern farming techniques. The agricultural production process can be represented as an interconnected system involving land, labour, capital, entrepreneurship, technology, research, storage, transportation, marketing, processing, and consumption. Strengthening these components can contribute to increased agricultural productivity and provide a foundation for building confidence bridges in rural communities. The agricultural sector, however, has yet to fully regain its central role in Nigeria's socioeconomic development because of material, financial, technological, and human-capacity constraints. Addressing these challenges is therefore essential to confronting the persistent problems of rural pricing, inflation, hunger, ill-health, and malnutrition.

(a) Inflation and Rural Pricing

In Nigeria, the headline inflation rate reportedly surged to about 33.19% in 2024, marking one of the highest levels recorded in recent decades (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The upsurge in inflation occurred alongside significant economic policy changes, particularly the removal of fuel subsidies and the adoption of a floating exchange-rate regime. The depreciation of the domestic currency subsequently exerted upward pressure on prices across several components of the inflation basket, particularly food, beverages, housing, utilities, and other essential goods and services.

Inflation has therefore remained a persistent economic concern in Nigeria, with fluctuating rates producing significant economic and sociopolitical consequences. These fluctuations are associated with a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include fiscal deficits, government borrowing, structural weaknesses in critical sectors such as agriculture, industry and infrastructure, and inefficiencies in public expenditure. External factors include fluctuations in international commodity prices, government revenue, oil prices, export earnings, and other developments in the global economy. Collectively, these factors influence the cost of production, distribution, and consumption and, consequently, the prices of goods and services in rural communities.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (2020) stated that interest-rate adjustments and monetary-policy measures can be adopted as mechanisms for controlling inflation, stabilizing prices, and promoting economic growth. The National Bureau of Statistics and the Central Bank of Nigeria, as key economic institutions, rely on inflation estimates to monitor changes in the general price level. Headline inflation is primarily measured as a year-on-year percentage change in the prices of goods and services included in the consumer basket. Such measurement is particularly important in understanding price volatility associated with food, rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production (Omotosho & Doguwa, 2012).

The effects of rising inflation in Nigeria are far-reaching. One major consequence is the erosion of consumers' purchasing power, as the prices of goods and services increase faster than household incomes, particularly in rural areas. Persistent inflation can also weaken the stability of the naira, affect exchange-rate conditions, and undermine macroeconomic stability. Changes in currency values and interest rates can affect rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food

production in interconnected ways, thereby contributing to parallel movements in prices (Hildebrand, 2019).

Rural pricing and agricultural-food production are closely interconnected through supply-chain networks involving production, transportation, distribution, and marketing. Changes in production costs and transportation expenses can therefore be reflected in rural commodity prices (Donaldson & Hornbeck, 2016). Similarly, government economic and financial policies relating to taxation, subsidies, regulation, and other fiscal measures can significantly influence prices in rural communities. Improvements in communication, transportation, and technology can, however, help reduce transaction and distribution costs and improve the movement of agricultural products from rural production centres to markets.

Changes in the prices of essential goods and services can also affect household consumption, business activities, and market behaviour. Furthermore, events such as natural disasters, pandemics, international economic shocks, and changes in global income can simultaneously affect rural prices, inflation, and agricultural-food production, thereby generating synchronized price effects across rural markets (World Bank, 2020). Within a state, price movements for particular commodities may differ across rural communities because of variations in transportation costs, trade barriers, market access, and communication infrastructure.

Cicchetti, Nelson and Sonora (2000) observed that market segmentation can lead to variations in commodity prices across different villages and communities. However, the search for profitable market opportunities and increased market participation can contribute to the gradual convergence of prices across different rural areas. Rural prices therefore reflect the interaction of demand and supply conditions, production costs, transportation expenses, market access, and other socioeconomic factors.

The rural pricing and inflation basket encompasses a wide range of goods and services. These include food and non-alcoholic beverages such as fish, bread, cereals, meat and soft drinks; alcoholic beverages and tobacco products; clothing and footwear; housing, electricity, gas and other fuels; water supply; education-related items such as stationery and books; hotels and restaurants; healthcare services and pharmaceutical products; communication services and equipment; household equipment and furnishings; transportation services; and miscellaneous goods and services such as insurance, personal-care products, hairdressing, jewellery, and other personal services.

Saliv (2021) views rural pricing in terms of the prevailing prices of goods and services within particular communities or geographical areas. From a development perspective, rural pricing is closely related to agricultural-food production, production inputs, market prices, demand and supply, household income, and food security. High prices of essential goods can reduce affordability and increase vulnerability to food insecurity, particularly among low-income rural households. Food insecurity is often associated with inadequate access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food and may be intensified by poverty and hunger. At the macroeconomic level, monetary policy can be directly or indirectly influenced by rural food prices and inflationary volatility (Karali & Power, 2015). Consequently, understanding the relationship between rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production is essential to building confidence bridges and strengthening the socioeconomic conditions of rural communities.

MAJOR FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CONFIDENCE BRIDGES, RURAL PRICING, INFLATION AND AGRICULTURAL-FOOD PRODUCTION

Agricultural-food production constitutes a major economic activity among rural populations. However, several interrelated factors constrain agricultural productivity, rural development,

price stability, and the capacity to build sustainable confidence bridges within rural communities. The major factors include the following:

1. Environmental Factors: Environmental factors include pollution, desert encroachment, pests and diseases, soil erosion, harsh weather conditions, and drought. UNESCO (1995) observed that agriculture contributed significantly to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and export earnings, with agriculture accounting for about 75% of exports in 1980. However, the country's agricultural performance subsequently declined, contributing to increased dependence on food imports. Food imports reportedly increased from about N3.48 billion in 1990 to N114.64 billion in 2000. Similarly, food imports as a percentage of total imports increased from 3.5% in 1991 to 11.9% in 2000.

Food imports remained relatively low during the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period between 1987 and 1993. However, the gains in reducing food imports were not sustained, as food imports began to increase from 1995 onwards. This development illustrates the difficulty of sustaining agricultural self-sufficiency in the presence of environmental and structural constraints.

Nigeria continues to face complex challenges that impede the realization of increased agricultural output. Sustainable food production depends not only on the availability of natural resources but also on the capacity of rural populations to effectively utilize those resources within an enabling institutional and economic environment. Rising inflation and increasing food prices have further affected agricultural production, food processing, and the purchasing power of rural households. Given that agriculture remains a major source of employment and livelihood in rural communities, strengthening agricultural production is essential for building confidence bridges and improving rural socioeconomic conditions.

2. Economic Factors: Economic factors include both input and output conditions affecting agricultural production. Input-related factors include the prices and availability of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, improved seeds, machinery, and other production materials. Increases in the prices of these inputs raise the cost of production and can adversely affect agricultural output and crop yields. On the output side, farmers face challenges such as inadequate income, limited access to credit facilities, high interest rates, increasing production costs, weak market participation, and inadequate linkages between government institutions and rural communities. These constraints reduce the capacity of smallholder and subsistence farmers to invest in improved production methods and limit their ability to respond effectively to changing market conditions.

3. Infrastructure and Amenities: Rural communities continue to experience inadequate infrastructure, including poor electricity supply, inadequate roads, insufficient farm and off-farm storage facilities, poor feeder roads, limited irrigation facilities, and inadequate healthcare services. These infrastructural deficiencies increase the cost of agricultural production and transportation while limiting the ability of farmers to move their products efficiently to markets. Infrastructure deficiencies also contribute to rural migration, particularly where rural development programmes are poorly implemented or fail to provide adequate economic opportunities. Rural communities are consequently affected by hunger, poverty, inflation, high prices of goods and services, limited accessibility, underdevelopment, and poor health conditions. These challenges negatively affect agricultural-food production and hinder the pace of socioeconomic development in rural areas. Roberts (2014) affirmed that rural migration can result in shortages of skilled, unskilled, and semi-skilled labour in rural communities. As economically active populations migrate to towns and cities in search of better opportunities, rural areas may be left with limited human resources, inadequate equipment, weak access to

development information, insufficient scientific and technical training, and traditional practices that constrain their effective integration into the modern economic system.

4. Socio-cultural Factors: The land-tenure system in many rural communities can limit farmers' access to productive agricultural land. This challenge may particularly affect landlords, tenants, and women and can result in uneconomic landholdings and limited agricultural investment. Religious, cultural, and traditional practices may also restrict women's participation in certain socioeconomic activities and contribute to low household incomes. Agricultural practices in rural areas often revolve around communal ownership, collective management, family structures, and individual organizations. Although these arrangements can provide social cohesion, they may also create challenges relating to access to land, gender inequality, resource allocation, and conflicts. Building confidence bridges within such communities therefore requires an appropriate institutional and legal framework capable of protecting rights, improving access to productive resources, and promoting inclusive participation in agricultural development.

5. Government and Regulatory Policies: Government plays an important role in agricultural-food production and in building confidence bridges relating to rural pricing and inflation. This role is exercised through agricultural policies, regulations, subsidies, infrastructure provision, research and development, extension services, land administration, financial incentives, and other intervention programmes. However, ineffective policy frameworks, import tariffs, land-use regulations, inadequate extension services, low investment in agricultural research, limited access to agricultural finance, frequent policy changes, and weak implementation mechanisms can undermine agricultural development. Effective policy should therefore focus on achieving greater self-sufficiency in basic food crops, improving agricultural productivity, providing raw materials for industries, diversifying exports, protecting land and the environment, and generating rural employment and income.

Specific agricultural interventions may include quarantine services, rural infrastructure, financial incentives, agricultural education, extension services, storage facilities, input subsidies, automation and mechanization, training, and research. Nigeria has implemented various agricultural policies and programmes over the years, including the Back-to-Land Agricultural Policy (1983), the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (1973), the Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) (2016–2020), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Scheme, and the Green Revolution Programme. The effectiveness of such interventions, however, depends substantially on policy continuity, institutional capacity, effective implementation, accountability, and the ability to reach the intended rural beneficiaries.

6. Manpower and Skill Development: Nigeria's agricultural sector continues to face challenges relating to manpower and skills development. These challenges include inadequate extension-service delivery, limited availability of experienced professional and technical personnel, weak storage and processing capacity, and limited purchasing power among rural households. From a manpower-development perspective, confidence bridges can be built by strengthening connectivity among different categories of the workforce, communities, organizations, and institutions. Such efforts can help bridge skill gaps, promote cooperation, and encourage more cohesive approaches to agricultural-food production and rural development.

Building effective socioeconomic relationships among organizations and individuals also requires continuous training and development. Effective relationships depend on appropriate leadership structures, open dialogue, supportive policies, and inclusive legislative frameworks. Skill development should therefore include the identification of emerging skills, continuous

learning, cultural adaptability, and the capacity of workers and farmers to acquire and apply new knowledge and technologies.

In rural areas, confidence bridges relating to prices, inflation, and agricultural-food production can be strengthened through cooperation aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities. Such cooperation can create learning environments and support stronger rural-development activities through training, internships, agricultural enterprises, and business ventures. Ultimately, building confidence bridges requires the integration of human capacity, institutional support, infrastructure, agricultural production, market access, and effective socioeconomic relationships within rural communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on the Cost-Push Theory of Inflation, developed by Sir James Steuart (1767). The theory is based on the assumption that the prices of goods and services are largely determined by production costs, while the availability and movement of money provide the purchasing power that sustains demand. The theory explains inflationary pressure as a circumstance arising from increases in the cost of production. Such pressure may become continuous through the interaction between rising wages and rising prices, commonly described as the wage-price spiral.

Leoning (2009) applied this theoretical perspective to the development of an agrarian food-price economy in rural areas by presenting an inflationary experimental model that incorporates diverse factors capable of influencing rural commodity prices. The model recognizes the peculiar economic, social, political, and cultural characteristics of rural communities, particularly those that are predominantly engaged in agricultural-food production. Within this context, rural pricing and inflation emerge through market adjustments associated with imports, production costs, demand, and supply.

The theory places particular emphasis on rural market sectors, monetary conditions, and external influences. These include the prices of tradable goods and services, consumable goods, agricultural products, and non-food products. Attention is therefore given to changes in the prices of consumable goods arising from long-run monetary-market equilibrium, as well as changes in external agricultural commodities and other food and non-food products.

Rural inflation is influenced by conditions within rural markets and the level of agricultural-food production. These conditions are affected by changes in supply and demand, together with other important economic factors such as crude-oil prices, import-induced inflation, fertilizer prices, and other agricultural inputs. In other words, the theory suggests that agricultural-food production can influence the cost of producing particular commodities, which subsequently affects their market prices and may transmit inflationary pressures throughout a particular environment or market.

The relevance of the Cost-Push Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how increases in the cost of agricultural inputs and other production-related factors can influence rural commodity prices and, ultimately, inflation. Where the prices of fertilizers, transportation, energy, labour, and other inputs increase, farmers and other agricultural producers may transfer some or all of these additional costs to consumers through higher commodity prices. This relationship provides a useful theoretical basis for examining the interaction among confidence bridges, rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Cross River State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The empirical foundation of this paper on confidence bridges as a requisite for rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production is associated with the work of Ngegovan and Simin (2020), who examined inflationary conditions and rural pricing within the context of food production. They observed that declining food-production capacity, combined with continuous population growth, creates increasing pressure on food supply and prices. Changes in food production consequently affect rural pricing and the operation of market mechanisms in Nigeria.

Manzamasso (2020) observed that the balance between consumer preferences and market outcomes is largely determined by demand and supply. The study emphasized the need to improve the availability and variety of food products consumed by both rural and urban populations while strengthening seed-to-food value chains. This perspective demonstrates the importance of linking agricultural production with effective market mechanisms in ensuring food availability and price stability. Fang and Zibo (2019) used data covering the period 1960–2013 to examine factors influencing world food prices. Their findings indicated a negative relationship between certain changes in food prices and world agricultural-food production. The study also examined the relationship between world food production, foreign exchange rates, crude-oil prices, and food production, with the findings indicating no significant relationship between crude-oil prices and food production in the period examined. The study further emphasized the economic relationship between agricultural-food production, rural prices, inflation, and market performance, particularly as increases in the prices of consumable goods affect agricultural producers and consumers.

Mouzibo and Ugiene (2017) argued that the application of panel data could provide useful insights into the economic significance of changes in rural markets and agricultural production. Their study emphasized the strong association between marketers and rural producers, suggesting that changes in market conditions can have significant implications for agricultural producers and rural commodity prices.

Akpa and Udoh (2009) estimated the socioeconomic movement of consumable goods and services, rural prices, and inflation-rate trends under different government policies in Nigeria. Using data covering the period 1961–2009, the study employed ANOVA and GARCH (1,1) models alongside OLS estimation techniques. The findings revealed that inflation affected the prices of consumable goods and services and had significant implications for rural food prices and socioeconomic development.

Mesike, Okoh, and Inoni (2010) examined the economic effects of government agricultural policies on commodity and rural food prices and the extent to which inflation influenced food-production prices in Nigeria. Using historical data covering the period 1970–2008, the study employed Error Correction and cointegration approaches. The findings showed that relative prices were positively and significantly affected by inflation in both the short run and the long run. The study particularly highlighted the influence of inflation on agricultural commodity prices and the implications for agricultural production.

Based on these observations, this paper examines confidence-building bridges in relation to rural pricing, inflation, and agricultural-food production in Nigeria, with particular attention to the economic factors influencing rural prices, agricultural-food production, and inflation. These factors operate within the socioeconomic, political, and cultural environments of rural communities and have implications for food production and rural prices in both the short and long run. The study therefore seeks to examine confidence building as a requisite for addressing changes in food prices and strengthening market mechanisms (Manzamasso, 2020).

Esekpa and Eki (2017) agreed that rural pricing and agricultural-food production are significantly influenced by factors such as fuel-subsidy removal, financial policies, and the ineffective utilization of human resources. These findings reinforce the argument that rural prices and agricultural-food production cannot be examined independently of broader economic and policy conditions. The reviewed empirical studies therefore demonstrate important relationships among agricultural-food production, rural commodity prices, inflation, market mechanisms, and government policies. However, there remains a literature gap concerning the economic relationship between rural pricing, inflation, agricultural-food production, and the building of confidence bridges within Nigeria's political and socioeconomic system. This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap by examining these relationships within the context of Cross River State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between rural pricing, inflation, agricultural-food production, and confidence-building bridges in Cross River State, Nigeria. The data used in the study were obtained from published books, World Bank databases, online journals, articles, and Cross River State statistical reports. The study covered the period from 2020 to 2023 and focused on a target population of 168 rural communities distributed across the three senatorial districts of Cross River State, Nigeria.

The empirical analysis employed multiple regression and correlation analysis to examine the relationships among the variables under investigation. Autocorrelation was tested using the Durbin-Watson statistic, while variance-related diagnostics were employed to assess the suitability of the regression estimates. The Cost-Push Theory of Inflation provided the theoretical basis for understanding the relationship among agricultural-food production, rural commodity prices, and inflation. The analysis covered data relating to agricultural-food production, rural commodity prices, and inflation.

The study adopted this quantitative approach because it provides an opportunity to examine measurable relationships among the variables and to make appropriate inferences about the population based on the selected data. The approach also facilitates the examination of the distribution, incidence, and interrelationships among rural commodity prices, agricultural-food production, and inflation.

The study focused on three selected local government areas, with each representing one of the three senatorial districts of Cross River State. These include Calabar Municipality (Asikima), Ikom (Okuni), and Ogoja (Bansara), with the selected villages or rural communities indicated in parentheses. The study examined rural market commodity prices and related economic indicators over the period 2020–2023. The selected commodities and their respective market prices are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Annual average detail prices of selected local building materials in the three senatorial districts in Cross River State, 2020

S/N	Description of commodity/item	Brand	Unit Measurement	UNIT PRICE (₦)			Averages (₦)
				Calabar	Ikom	Ogoja	
1.	Cement	-	50kg	5,500	6,000	6,000	5,830
2.	Iron rods	-	6mm	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
3.	Ceiling (PVC China)	-	Bundle of (10)	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000
4.	Ceiling (PVC Nig)	-	Bundle of (15)	14,500	14,500	14,500	14,500
5.	Zinc Nig.	-	Bundle	17,000	18,000	18,000	17,667

6.	Zinc Cameroun	-	Bundle	120,000	100,000	120,000	113,330
7.	Nails 6 inches	-	Bag	15,500	17,000	17,000	16,500
8.	Nails 5 inches	-	Bag	35,000	30,000	35,000	33,330
9.	Nails 4 inches	-	Bag	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
10.	Tiles 30 by 60	-	Carton	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000
11.	Tiles 40 by 40	-	Carton	6,000	6,000	5,500	5,830
12.	Glass windows	-	Double	95,000	100,000	100,000	98,330
13.	Door glass	-	Single	150,000	150,000	15,000	105,000
14.	Wooden door hardwood	-	Single	70,000	75,000	160,000	101,667
15.	Wooden door softwood	-	Single	35,000	45,000	50,000	43,330
16.	Frame hardwood	-	Single	17,000	17,000	19,000	17,667
17.	Frame softwood	-	Single	13,000	14,000	40,000	22,330
18.	Soft sand	-	10 tone	90,000	100,000	100,000	96,667
19.	Cheepings	-	10 tone	170,000	180,000	180,000	176,667
20.	Granites	-	10 tone	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
21.	Emulsion paint Nig. Delux	-	20 litres	6,500	6,000	6,000	6,330
22.	Oil paint	-	4 litres	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,167

Table 2: Annual average detail prices of selected local building materials in the three senatorial districts in Cross River State, 2021

S/N	Description of commodity/item	Brand	Unit Measurement	UNIT PRICE (₦)			Averages (₦)
				Calabar	Ikom	Ogoja	
1.	Cement	-	50kg	3,500	4,000	4,000	3,833
2.	Iron rods	-	6mm	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
3.	Ceiling (PVC China)	-	Bundle of (10)	15,000	16,000	17,000	16,000
4.	Ceiling (PVC Nig)	-	Bundle of (15)	15,500	15,500	15,500	15,500
5.	Zinc Nig.	-	Bundle	18,000	18,500	19,000	18,500
6.	Zinc Cameroun	-	Bundle	120,000	120,000	125,000	121,667
7.	Nails 6 inches	-	Bag	16,500	17,500	18,000	17,333
8.	Nails 5 inches	-	Bag	35,000	32,000	35,000	34,000
9.	Nails 4 inches	-	Bag	12,000	13,000	13,000	12,667
10.	Tiles 30 by 60	-	Carton	6,500	6,500	7,000	6,667
11.	Tiles 40 by 40	-	Carton	6,000	6,000	5,500	5,833
12.	Glass windows	-	Double	95,000	100,000	100,000	98,333
13.	Door glass	-	Single	150,000	150,000	15,000	105,000
14.	Wooden door hardwood	-	Single	75,000	75,000	70,000	75,667
15.	Wooden door softwood	-	Single	35,000	45,000	50,000	43,333
16.	Frame hardwood	-	Single	17,000	17,000	19,000	17,667
17.	Frame softwood	-	Single	13,000	14,000	15,000	14,000
18.	Soft sand	-	10 tone	90,000	100,000	100,000	96,667
19.	Cheepings	-	10 tone	170,000	180,000	180,000	176,667
20.	Granites	-	10 tone	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
21.	Emulsion paint Nig. Delux	-	20 litres	6,500	6,500	6,000	6,333
22.	Oil paint	-	4 litres	9,000	9,500	9,000	9,167

Table 3: Annual average detail prices of selected local building materials in the three senatorial districts in Cross River State, 2022

S/N		Brand		UNIT PRICE (₦)	
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	Description of commodity/item		Unit Measurement	Calabar	Ikom	Ogoja	Averages (₦)
1.	Cement	-	50kg	4,500	5,000	5,000	4,833
2.	Iron rods	-	6mm	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
3.	Ceiling (PVC China)	-	Bundle of (10)	16,000	16,000	17,000	16,333
4.	Ceiling (PVC Nig)	-	Bundle of (15)	16,500	15,500	15,500	15,833
5.	Zinc Nig.	-	Bundle	20,000	20,000	21,000	20,333
6.	Zinc Cameroun	-	Bundle	130,000	140,000	140,000	136,667
7.	Nails 6 inches	-	Bag	17,500	19,000	19,000	18,500
8.	Nails 5 inches	-	Bag	37,000	36,000	37,000	36,667
9.	Nails 4 inches	-	Bag	13,000	14,000	15,000	14,000
10.	Tiles 30 by 60	-	Carton	8,000	7,000	8,000	7,667
11.	Tiles 40 by 40	-	Carton	8,000	8,000	8,500	8,167
12.	Glass windows	-	Double	105,000	110,000	110,000	108,333
13.	Door glass	-	Single	170,000	175,000	175,000	173,333
14.	Wooden door hardwood	-	Single	70,000	75,000	160,000	101,667
15.	Wooden door softwood	-	Single	45,000	50,000	55,000	50,000
16.	Frame hardwood	-	Single	20,000	23,000	22,000	21,667
17.	Frame softwood	-	Single	15,000	16,000	17,000	16,000
18.	Soft sand	-	10 tone	90,000	100,000	100,000	96,667
19.	Cheepings	-	10 tone	170,000	180,000	180,000	176,667
20.	Granites	-	10 tone	350,000	350,000	300,000	333,333
21.	Emulsion paint Nig. Delux	-	20 litres	8,500	8,500	8,000	8,333
22.	Oil paint	-	4 litres	11,000	10,500	10,000	10,500

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the economic outcomes associated with agricultural-food production in Cross River State, Nigeria, particularly in the context of rising inflation and increasing rural food prices. The findings suggest that fluctuations and reductions in agricultural-food production are associated with the expansion of rural communities, rural-urban migration, inadequate mechanization, inefficient patterns of resource utilization by rural farmers, and the increasing costs of agricultural inputs. As the prices of production inputs and rural commodities continue to rise in the Nigerian market, the ability of rural farmers to sustain and expand food production becomes increasingly constrained.

The findings further indicate that rural farmers face significant challenges relating to inadequate investment, limited access to appropriate technology, low savings, poor market access, insufficient credit facilities, and inadequate counterpart funding from the Federal Government for agricultural development programmes. These constraints have implications for food availability, household welfare, nutrition, and food security. The situation is particularly significant because rising food prices can reduce the purchasing power of rural households and increase their vulnerability to malnutrition, poverty, and food insecurity. In the livestock and fishery subsectors, however, the findings indicate increases of approximately 2.5% and 11.3%, respectively, between 2020 and 2023. These increases occurred within a context characterized by population growth, inadequate transportation systems, limited processing facilities, and insufficient storage infrastructure.

The findings are consistent with the position of the World Bank (1990), which identified several measures through which rural welfare and food-production capacity can be strengthened. These measures include:

- i. Economic transfer of physical assets to rural people to improve their productive capacity and livelihood opportunities.
- ii. Increasing demand and improving the economic returns from factors of production available to rural dwellers, thereby providing incentives for agricultural production.
- iii. Provision of essential social services, including healthcare centres and educational facilities, to improve the quality of life and productive capacity of rural communities.
- iv. Transfer of current income to rural people through mechanisms such as food subsidies and cash transfers to cushion the effects of rising prices and declining purchasing power.

The findings further demonstrate that economic growth can serve as an important mechanism for reducing inflationary pressures, strengthening production incentives, and improving agricultural output. Economic expansion can directly benefit farmers through increased demand for agricultural products and indirectly benefit landless rural residents through increased demand for labour and the expansion of agricultural marketing activities. Labour-intensive agricultural growth is particularly important because agricultural-food production has the potential to create employment and income opportunities in rural communities, thereby contributing to the building of confidence bridges.

To achieve these outcomes, cooperative societies should be encouraged and adequately supported by government and other stakeholders. Cooperatives can provide rural farmers with opportunities to pool resources, access credit, obtain agricultural inputs, share knowledge, and improve their bargaining power in agricultural markets. There is also a need to increase access to productive land, develop rural infrastructure, improve evaluation and extension services, strengthen transportation systems, and increase agricultural output in rural areas.

Cicchetti, Nelson, and Sonora (2000) affirmed that building confidence bridges requires improvements in the availability and accessibility of rural agricultural inputs, including the commercialization of suckers, improved seedlings, and enhanced cultivation practices supported by appropriate private-sector incentives. Other important agricultural inputs include insecticides, fertilizers, and herbicides. The availability and affordability of these inputs are essential to improving agricultural productivity and reducing the pressure of rising rural commodity prices.

Eze and Agbo (2005) further affirmed the importance of providing relevant market information to rural farmers through farmers' associations, informal education, and other communication mechanisms. Improved access to market information can enable farmers to make better production and marketing decisions, identify profitable markets, understand prevailing commodity prices, and improve their incomes. Such measures can contribute to strengthening confidence bridges between rural producers, markets, government institutions, and other stakeholders in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

As an integral part of confidence-building bridges, improving the diet and nutritional well-being of Nigerians should be regarded as an important economic and developmental strategy. This position is consistent with Duke and Ogbinyi (2017), who argued that much of what may be regarded as "consumer investment" constitutes an important component of confidence-building. In this context, improving the quality and affordability of rural goods and services, together with strengthening human productive capacity, should be directed towards increased

productivity and improved living standards. Investment in human capital is particularly important because it contributes to the effective utilization of goods, services, and productive resources.

The study establishes that agricultural-food production and per capita income remain important components of the socioeconomic development of Cross River State. However, challenges associated with improving the nutritional value and availability of food are compounded by inflation, subsidy removal, high agricultural production costs, inefficient transportation systems, weak distribution networks, and inadequate government support for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas where farmers often have limited access to markets, infrastructure, technology, credit, and institutional support.

The study therefore concludes that building confidence bridges in rural communities requires an integrated approach that connects agricultural production with rural pricing, inflation management, infrastructure development, human-capital development, and effective government intervention. Strengthening these connections can improve agricultural productivity, increase rural incomes, enhance food security, and reduce the vulnerability of rural households to inflationary pressures.

In Nigeria, the economic goal of confidence-building bridges is also consistent with the objectives of national development planning, particularly the promotion of economic growth and improvement in living standards through the effective utilization of national human and financial resources. This requires specific agricultural interventions, including quarantine services, rural infrastructural development, financial incentives, agricultural education, research, extension services, storage facilities, and improved access to agricultural inputs.

The study also recognizes that weak implementation of government policies and programmes, inadequate investment, and low levels of saving continue to constrain the development of rural agricultural communities. Based on the secondary-data analytical approach adopted in this paper, rural prices of goods and services remain closely associated with agricultural-food production and broader inflationary conditions. Building confidence bridges therefore requires sustained policy attention to the structural and institutional conditions that influence rural agricultural production and commodity prices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Government should strengthen and sustain agricultural policy frameworks and programmes such as the Back-to-Land Agricultural Policy (1983), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (1973), Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) 2016–2020, and Operation Feed the Nation. The emphasis should be placed not merely on introducing programmes but also on ensuring their effective implementation, continuity, monitoring, and evaluation.
- ii. Research, storage services, agricultural inputs, subsidies, automation, mechanization, and training should be strengthened. Greater investment in agricultural research and extension services will facilitate the development and adoption of improved production techniques, while adequate storage facilities can reduce post-harvest losses and contribute to greater stability in the supply and prices of agricultural commodities.
- iii. Government should improve farmers' access to fertilizers, improved seedlings, herbicides, pesticides, credit facilities, and appropriate agricultural technologies. Affordable and timely access to these inputs can reduce production constraints and improve agricultural productivity.

iv. Rural infrastructure should be given greater priority, particularly feeder roads, transportation, electricity, irrigation, water supply, healthcare, and market facilities. Improved infrastructure can reduce the cost of moving agricultural products from rural production centres to markets and consequently contribute to improved rural pricing.

v. Cooperative societies and rural farmers' associations should be strengthened to facilitate access to credit, agricultural inputs, market information, training, storage facilities, and collective marketing opportunities.

vi. Government and relevant stakeholders should strengthen agricultural-market information systems so that rural farmers have timely access to information on commodity prices, demand, supply, production costs, and market opportunities. This can improve farmers' bargaining power and contribute to more efficient rural price mechanisms.

vii. Land should be allocated and protected for agricultural purposes, particularly in rural communities where agricultural production constitutes a major source of livelihood. Secure and accessible land arrangements can encourage investment in agricultural production and contribute to the building of confidence bridges among rural populations.

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