

ORGANIC VERSUS CONVENTIONAL FARMER CRISIS RESPONSES: IMPLICATIONS UNDER COVID AND RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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Introduction:

The study on “Organic Versus Conventional Farmer Crisis Responses: Implications under Covid-19 and Russia-Ukraine War”, was conducted under the African Union-led Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) in October 2021, to establish the impact of the pandemic three on agriculture and food systems in Africa. The study assessed how farmers practicing organic and conventional agriculture were affected by the pandemic, and how they were responding to it (adaptation). The study covered the five regions of Africa, with countries in Eastern Africa (Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia), two in West Africa (Mali and Senegal), two in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe and Zambia), two in Central Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon) and two in Northern Africa (Morocco and Egypt).

Methodology:

The study employed a cross-sectional design and a mixed research approach guided by participatory tools and techniques for data collection. For objective comparison 11 Focused group discussions (FGDs) were held with organic farmers and 11 with conventional farmers. The study was enriched by interview perspectives from 106 Key Informants drawn from government departments, development partners and donors. Additionally, 129 KIIs were conducted with traders who included wholesalers, transporters, processors, retailers, and exporters. A survey was conducted with 620 farmers (75% male and 25% female) using a mobile-based digital data collection platform, KOBO Collect. Twenty-three (23) enumerators were recruited from the 11 countries of interest and trained virtually. This process and data collection in the ten countries was led by 11 country focal points. The survey data was collected, cleaned, decoded, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23, providing valuable descriptive findings.

Key findings and results:

The study revealed that the majority (86%) of the producers, both organic and conventional were significantly negatively affected by the pandemic and the inevitable subsequent government restrictions and public health measures. The impact was significantly ($p < 0.05$), felt by more, 95% conventional producers than organic producers (83%). Whereas everyone was affected, more women (90%) than men (85%) were more vulnerable to the pandemic, though this difference was not statistically significantly different ($p > 0.05$). The impacts cut across; access to farming support services, trade and access to food.

Impact of Russia-Ukraine war on livelihoods: The advent of COVID19 pandemic in 2020 reversed decades of hard-won macroeconomic, socioeconomic and governance gains in Africa, leading to loss of human life, livelihoods, and incomes. The situation has worsened by Russia invading Ukraine in an unprovoked act of aggression on February 24. This has led to suspension of commercial shipping at its ports by Ukraine military, leading to supply disruption from the largest grain and oilseeds exporters. The prices of wheat have increased by 42% in Egypt, 31% in Tunisia, 25% in Nigeria, 24% in Tanzania, and 17% in Kenya.

Conclusion:

The findings suggest that more organic producing households better cushioned themselves against the pandemic, leading to less impact on their livelihoods compared to their conventional counterparts.