

THE GAMBIA BUREAU OF STATISTICS



PRICES AND GOVERNMENT FINANCE STATISTICS UNIT

CHALLENGES FACED DUE TO COVID-19

FOREWORD

We wish to applaud this joint initiative by Africa Union Commission (AUC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for coming up with this idea of **VIRTUAL WORKSHOP VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES** to enable National Statistics Institutions (NSIs) to share their experiences in terms of challenges faced by NSIs in conducting price surveys and producing the Consumer Price Index and solutions envisaged in **RESPONSE TO COVID-19** with peer NSIs. We also wish to congratulate other sister NSIs for their painstaking efforts and patience in compiling their National Consumer Price Indices in this difficult era of COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

The first case of COVID-19 was reported in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Human-to-human and patient-to-medical staff transmission of the virus have been confirmed. Cases of the virus have been confirmed in numerous countries and territories worldwide including The Gambia. On March 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global outbreak a pandemic.

GAMBIA'S STATE OF EMERGENCY DECREE (SOE)

Effective March 23, 2020, the Government of The Gambia closed Gambian airspace and the land border between The Gambia and Senegal and imposed the first State of Emergency on 27th March 2020. Gambia's National Assembly voted on Friday, April 3, 2020 to extend the current State of Emergency for another 45 days. Under the State of Emergency, all bars, casinos, cinemas, event halls, gyms, night club, public swimming pools, and other non-essential businesses are closed. Restaurants are allowed to operate but only sell food for customers to take away. Additionally, all public gatherings, including **OPEN MARKETS** are suspended, along with school and university classes.

ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY THE GAMBIA FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CONSUMER PRICE INDICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

The State of Emergency decree announced by the Gambia Government on 27 March 2020 and extended 1 April 2020 for another 45 days by National Assembly has undoubtedly almost brought normalcy into a standstill including the production of The Gambia National Consumer Price Index.

Initially about the ending of March 2020, we advised our price data collection field staff to observe the SOE decree by the government and stop the price survey for March 2020 till further notice.

One week later observing how the situation of the SOE was unfolding in The Gambia; relaxed restrictions and people going about their normal business, we then consulted with the price data collection field staff and we sought their opinion on the way forward for the monthly price survey and the team consented to proceed with the monthly price data collection, but adhering to COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

Besides, we provided for each price data collector; a facial mask, hand sanitizers, one price collector per motorbike and no more sharing ride on a motorbike and we also advised price data collectors to maintain a distance of at least two meters with market vendors whilst collecting the price data.

As for the month of March 2020, the price survey went on despite all odds such as the risks involved. The price data collected for March 2020 is near par with the price data collected during the normal periods before the COVID-19 lockdown in The Gambia.

Though, we have experience few cases of missing prices of some nonfood items in some of the price data collection market centres, but manageable.

REMEDIES FOR CASES OF MISSING PRICES OF SOME NONFOOD ITEMS

At the Consumer Price Index compilation level, we could impute for temporary missing prices of these nonfood items for March 2020. This imputation is the **AVERAGE PRICE CHANGE** method in built in the **EXCEL-BASED INDEX COMPILATION TEMPLATE**. And we hope this is an International best practice.

For the case of The Gambia, we do not expect the inflation rate to show a huge upward trend during COVID-19 era as at now because the government of The Gambia has a introduced strict restrictions on induced price hikes; hoarding of items and re-export of items. As for now prices are fairly stable.