

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RURAL WOMEN AND MEN IN KENYA

COVID-19 in Kenya

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kenyan government declared a nationwide dusk to dawn curfew in March 2020 that was lifted in large parts later in the year, followed by off-and-on reinstatements of curfews and limitations on mobility largely for the capital region. The government also banned religious and other public gatherings and encouraged people to work from home and practice social distancing. It also extended social protection programs, including public works programs and stipends and cash transfers, often targeted to women and single-parent households and other vulnerable members of society to support them through the pandemic.

The first wave of COVID-19 cases occurred between June and August 2020. A second wave occurred between October and December 2020 and by the end of December 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases was 92 459. A third rise in cases occurred between January and March of 2021 and partial lockdowns were reimposed in the most affected counties of the country, including mobility restrictions and curfews. The pandemic and associated lockdowns caused the Kenyan economy to contract in 2020, by -0.1 percent, relative to a growth rate of 5.4 percent in 2019 (IMF, 2021).

KEY FINDINGS

- More than 65 percent of rural households experienced a change in food access due to the pandemic.
- Women were more likely to be worried about not having enough food and skipping meals in earlier survey rounds. In the last round, men were more worried.
- Minimum dietary diversity for women declined slightly by round 4 of the survey to 43 percent
- A small share of households reported receiving government transfers, especially during earlier survey rounds. Women were more likely than men to report receiving government transfers in round 1, when 20 percent of women reported receiving this support, compared to 10 percent of men

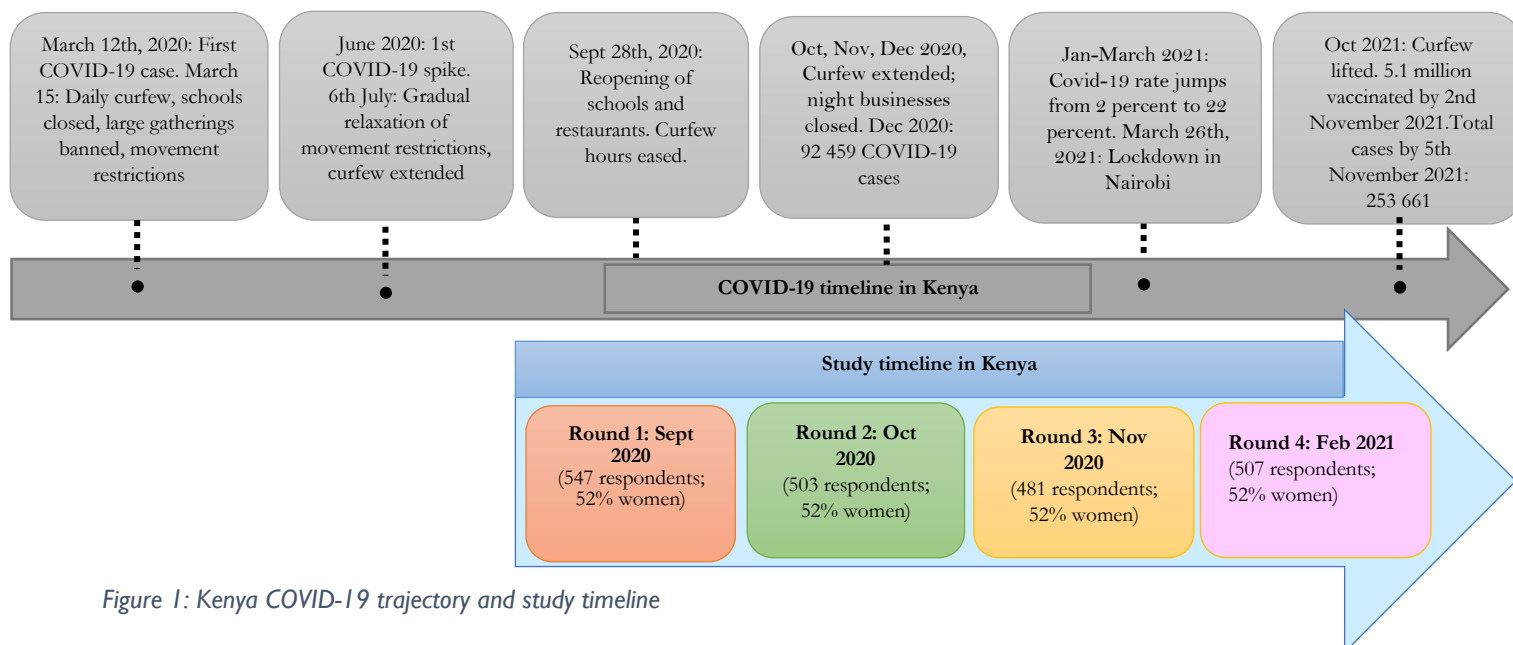


Figure 1: Kenya COVID-19 trajectory and study timeline

Study description

To understand the gendered impacts of the pandemic, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) conducted phone surveys with rural women and men in Kenya with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The study was designed as a longitudinal panel with four rounds of data collection in Busia, Laikipia, and Nakuru counties in Kenya. The first round of the phone survey was completed in September 2020 when COVID-19 cases were declining and the government eased restrictions throughout the country. The second and third rounds were conducted in October and November 2020, respectively, as the caseloads in the capital city, Nairobi, were high but low in rural areas. The last round was conducted in February 2021 when the COVID-19 case rate jumped from 2 percent to 22 percent across the country. The study uses primary quantitative data collected using structured questionnaires administered through a phone-based survey. The sample was drawn using systematic random sampling from a baseline household survey conducted in early 2020 among a larger sample of rural farmers just before the start of the pandemic. Women comprised 52 percent of the study sample across all rounds. Figure 1 provides a detailed description on the COVID-19 situation and study timeline.

Study findings

a. Economic impact

Respondents were asked about their occupation in the first and last survey rounds. Farming (crop production and livestock raising) was reported as the main occupation for the majority of both men and women respondents in both of these rounds, with 78 percent and 79 percent of men and women in round 1, respectively, and 75 percent and 73 percent of men and women in round 4, respectively, engaging in this activity as their main source of livelihood. Men were more likely than women to report engaging in off farm activities in round 4 (14 percent compared to 3 percent), while women were more likely to report casual labor as their primary occupation (15 percent compared to 7 percent in round 4). Women were more likely to report being unemployed (4 percent and 5 percent in rounds 1 and 4) compared to 1 percent of men in both rounds.

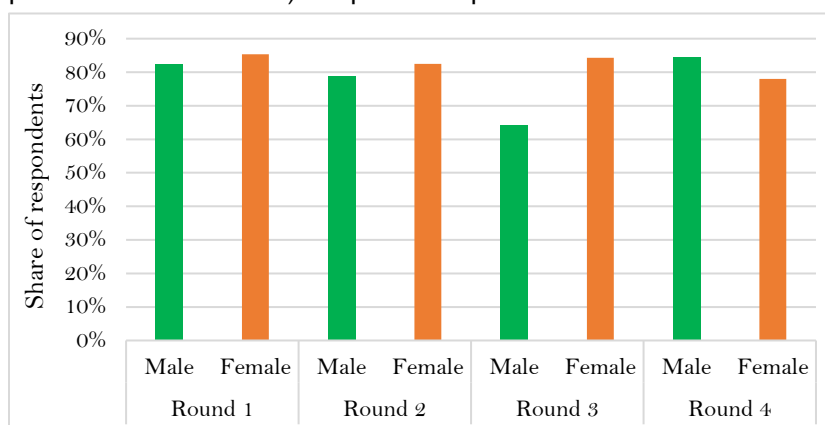


Figure 2: Share of households that experienced income loss due to COVID-19, by gender of respondent

A high share of households experienced income losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). Women were slightly more likely to report pandemic-related income losses in the first 3 rounds (and especially in round 3, November 2020), while men were more likely to report income losses in round 4 (February 2021) when COVID-19 cases were spiking during the second wave. The small share of women who were primarily engaged in casual labor, processing, marketing and trading activities, were more likely to report experiencing income losses compared to women (and men) who reported farming as their main occupation in round 4, suggesting that these livelihood activities were more vulnerable to the income shock of the pandemic.

In later survey rounds, fewer respondents reported being engaged in productive work in the week preceding the survey; and a significantly smaller share of women reported working for income. This could be linked to the spike in COVID-19 cases around rounds 2 and 3 (October-November 2020). At that time, people may have chosen to stay at home despite the relaxation of restrictions. By round 4, the share of respondents reporting that they worked in the last week had risen to the same level as in round 1 (85 percent). In rounds 1 through 3, respondents were more likely to report working less than before the pandemic while by round 4 more respondents reported an increase in time spent working compared to pre-COVID times, presumably to recover income losses experienced during the crisis.

b. Coping strategies

Use of savings was the most common coping strategy for both men and women across all rounds. The share of respondents reporting to have used savings declined over time, from 67 percent in round 1 to 37 percent in round 4. Selling assets was an important strategy for both men and women in round 1 with 51 percent of men and 57 percent of women reporting to have sold assets to deal with income losses. The share of respondents that reported asset sales declined in later rounds. As with savings, assets may have been depleted later in the pandemic. Borrowing remained a relatively stable coping strategy for men and women across rounds with between 42 percent of and 51 percent of men and women reporting borrowing in each round. The primary sources of borrowing were friends and family followed by self-help and village savings groups. Some respondents reported receiving funds through lending apps. Very few borrowed from commercial banks or money lenders. A small share of households reported receiving government transfers, especially during earlier survey rounds. Women were more likely than men to report receiving government transfers in round 1, when 20 percent of women reported receiving this support, compared to 10 percent of men. Reduced consumption remained a stable coping strategy for men and women across rounds, with between 32 percent of and 46 percent of respondents reporting reduced consumption in each round.

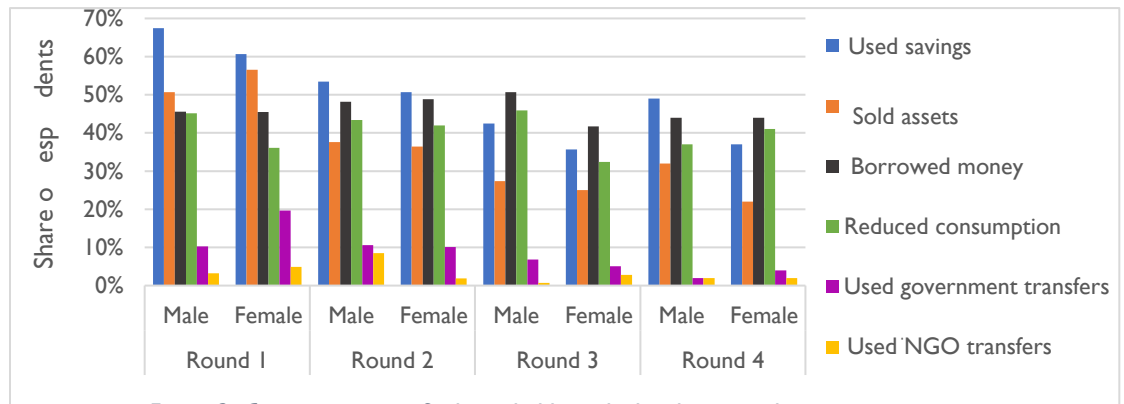


Figure 3: Coping strategies for households to deal with income loss

Selling assets was an important strategy for both men and women in round 1 with 51 percent of men and 57 percent of women reporting to have sold assets to deal with income losses. The share of respondents that reported asset sales declined in later rounds. As with savings, assets may have been depleted later in the pandemic.

The share of both men and women respondents who reported reducing consumption remained between 32 percent of and 46 percent of respondents across rounds. Borrowing remained a relatively stable coping strategy for men and women across rounds with between 42 percent of and 51 percent of men and women reporting borrowing in each round. The primary sources of borrowing were friends and family followed by self-help and village savings groups. Some respondents reported receiving funds through lending apps. Very few borrowed from commercial banks or money lenders. A small share of households reported receiving government transfers, especially during earlier survey rounds. Women were more likely than men to report receiving government transfers in round 1, when 20 percent of women reported receiving this support, compared to 10 percent of men.

c. Impact on food security and dietary diversity

More than 65% of households across all rounds experienced changes in food access due to the pandemic. The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) was used to track changes in food security across survey rounds. Figure 4 presents selected indicators from this scale. Across all three survey rounds, respondents reported being worried about not having enough food, having to skip meals, and eating only a few kinds of foods. These concerns persisted across survey rounds. Women were more likely than men to report eating only a few kinds of foods and worrying about not having enough food (rounds 1 through 3). In some rounds, men were more likely to report skipping meals (rounds 2 and 4) and worrying about having enough food (round 4).

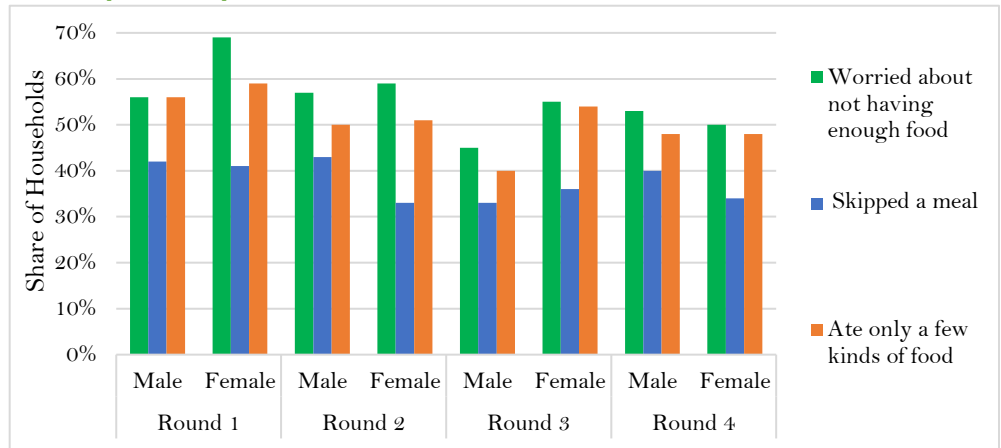


Figure 4: Food insecurity in the 2 weeks preceding the survey, FIES indicators

Minimum dietary diversity for women (MDD-W) was also calculated for men and women respondents based on a 24-hour recall period to assess impacts on nutrition. Men only answered questions about diets in rounds 1 and 2 of the survey. In these early rounds, men were slightly more likely to report achieving diet adequacy--having consumed at least five food groups in the previous 24 hours. The share of women with adequate diets was 47 percent of in rounds 1 and 2, 59 percent of in round 3 and 43 percent of in round 4. The most common food groups consumed were grains, dark leaf vegetables and dairy products. Around half of respondents reported consuming roots and tubers, pulses, and other vegetables across rounds. Around one-third reported consuming vitamin-A rich fruits and vegetables and less than one-fourth consumed meat, poultry, or fish; eggs; or other fruits.

d. Impact on children's education and care burden

On March 15, 2020, the Kenyan government ordered all schools and higher education institutes closed as a precautionary measure to contain the spread of COVID-19. Although the surveys in Kenya commenced after the partial reopening of schools in September and October, findings suggest that children's education continued to suffer. Around 98 percent of boys and 99 percent of girls in the age group of 5 to 18 years were attending school before the lockdown. The proportion of students in school fell considerably to 33 percent of boys and 29 percent of girls in November 2020. Lower attendance in November and other months is attributable to the surge in COVID-19 cases around this time. As a result, parents felt it was unsafe to send their children to school. Only a very small proportion (4.5 percent of) of students were attending online classes during the Nov/Dec 2020 survey round. In the fourth survey round (February 2021), over 75 percent of respondents reported that the schools were open. Among those who reported that schools were not open, 98 percent of said they would send their children back to school once they opened.

Across survey rounds, women reported spending more hours caring for other members of their household compared to men. When asked about how the time spent caring for other household members compared to pre-pandemic times, roughly half of respondents reported that the care burden had increased while one-third reported that it had not changed substantially.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on people in Kenya, including losses in income, depletion of savings and assets, and reduced access to food. Women were more likely to report COVID-19-related income losses in the first 3 survey rounds, while more men reported losses in the last round, during the most severe surge of cases. Both men and women engaged in coping strategies to deal with the loss of income including using savings, selling assets, borrowing, and reducing consumption. The results suggest that savings and assets may have become depleted over time, especially for women. More than 65 percent of households reported that their food access was affected as a result to the pandemic. Men and women reported experiencing food insecurity challenges differently across rounds.

In response to the pandemic, the Government of Kenya allocated temporary special benefits for single-parent households and expanded cash transfers under the National Safety Net Program to elderly people, orphans, and other vulnerable groups. However, few households in the survey received government or NGO assistance during the pandemic and had to resort to coping strategies, such as depleting savings and assets, which can have long-term negative effects. These effects may be worse for women given that their savings and assets may be depleted more quickly. Addressing these negative impacts will require both short- and long-term strategies to help men and women cope with the ongoing pandemic and begin to restore income and accumulate assets to build resilience to future shocks.

This publication was originally prepared by Muzna Alvi, Shweta Gupta, and Prapti Barooah, and has been updated with more recent data by Elizabeth Bryan, Harriet Mawia, and Claudia Ringler of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), with support from Feed the Future through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Gender, Climate Change, and Nutrition Initiative (GCAN) as well as with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under the project "Assessing the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture, food security and nutrition." Mike Ndegwa (Pioneer Research and Empowerment Center- PiorEC) led implementation of all survey rounds. The fact sheet has not been peer reviewed. Any opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IFPRI, USAID, or FAO.

IMF. 2021. *World Economic Outlook Database, April 2021*. Washington DC. (Accessed 10 November 2021).
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/April>