28. Selected country experiences during the pandemic: Policy responses and CGIAR support

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With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CGIAR pivoted its research planning to better support countries as they responded to the crisis. Despite the unprecedented, highly disruptive nature of the pandemic, CGIAR's collaborative country work has enhanced engagement across the agrifood sector, leveraged existing capacities, and improved awareness of vulnerabilities within value chains. The insights gained from this experience may ultimately prove useful in addressing other longstanding challenges as well. In this chapter, we recount selected country experiences during the pandemic and the response of the international agricultural research system to support these countries. In the section on country experiences, we draw from IFPRI's COVID-19 Policy Response Portal (CPR) to focus on lockdown policies in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria.[1] We describe the steps taken by governments in these countries to address challenges in the agrifood sector and provide social protection to the vulnerable.

The COVID-19 crisis forced almost every sector to engage with the policy responses instituted across the developing world, and ministries of agriculture were no exception. Although initially excluded from early decisions in some countries (Resnick 2020), policymakers in agriculture reacted to the crisis – and its supply and demand shock for the agrifood sector – by searching for solutions to the most immediate problems. Urgent problems included the need to keep agricultural inputs flowing to farms and production centers; make the best agricultural technologies available to ensure that local food production could fill gaps caused by border closures and food export bans; guarantee that agricultural products could move from farms to consumers; and ensure that food markets remained functional.

After recounting the country experiences, we focus on the response of the international agricultural research system to the pandemic by highlighting select work led by CGIAR.[2] We provide brief sketches of CGIAR's responses in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, Myanmar, and Nigeria.[3] Lastly, we provide some initial lessons learned from the responses that could inform strategies for the international research system to address longstanding shocks such as drought, climate impacts, and conflict and insecurity.

1 We focus on the policy responses in these three countries for which Pauw and Thurlow measure impacts on agrifood GDP, poverty, and diet deprivation in Chapter 2. In this way, this chapter provides additional context for the findings reported in Chapter 2.
2 CGIAR consists of 15 advanced Research Centers working in and for developing countries, and 16 multi-institutional research programs and platforms working in more than 75 countries. More details on the CGIAR COVID-19 response are available in a report by the CGIAR System Organization (2020).
3 These five countries were the focus of the CGIAR COVID Hub work in 2021.

Selected country experiences: Lockdowns, agrifood policies, and social protection measures

Bangladesh was one of several economies in South Asia that suffered a major blow during the pandemic. Poverty is estimated to have reached 30 percent in 2020, 7 percentage points higher than projected under a non-COVID-19 scenario. Bangladesh was one of the first countries to implement nationwide closures, starting with all educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) on March 16, 2020. In late March 2020, Bangladesh banned all social and cultural gatherings for the rest of the year, including public state events such as the annual Independence Day celebration. The government also ordered all public and private offices to close. This measure was combined with a recommendation from the government to stay home and restrictions on transport, except for vehicles carrying goods or undertaking emergency services. In April 2020, the measures were extended to a nationwide curfew from dusk to dawn. Businesses were allowed to resume operations on May 27, but the curfew remained in place until it was modified on August 3 and finally lifted in September, and school closures continued until December. By mid-March 2021, cases and death rates had started to rise sharply again and, on April 14, another strict one-week lockdown was imposed. This lockdown was repeatedly extended until August 11, 2021, when it was lifted. During this lockdown period, Bangladesh was under various restrictions, including total curfew, which were eased only temporarily for the celebration of Eid al-Adha.

As part of the government's COVID-19 response program, the agriculture sector received lending support of US$588 million and additional support for the mechanization of farming (more than $378 million), as well as other subsidies worth $1.1 billion. In April 2020, the government formulated two main policies to address impacts on the agrifood sector: a farm subsidy allocation of 90 billion Bangladeshi taka (approximately $1 billion) for fertilizer, irrigation, mechanization, and marketing of products, and a fund of $500 million for loans to small- and medium-scale farmers producing grains, fruit, flowers, fish, poultry, and dairy. Bangladesh also boosted the agriculture sector by adjusting trade policies, specifically by waiving advance taxes on imports of raw materials such as soybean meal for livestock feed.

Social protection measures were a major part of Bangladesh's response to the economic downturn caused by the pandemic lockdowns. These measures included cash transfers, food subsidies, waivers of fines for late utility bill payments, and unemployment benefits. Bangladesh implemented a large-scale nationwide cash transfer to every family through mobile financial services, as well as support to students and youth.

In **Kenya**, the first COVID-related restrictions were announced by the government in mid-March 2020 and consisted of a nationwide dusk-to-dawn curfew, school and university closures, and the suspension of public gatherings in churches, mosques, and other venues for public gatherings. This curfew lasted until late 2020. International travel was restricted to cases of absolute necessity, and public transport services were limited to 60 percent of vehicle capacity. Instead of a nationwide lockdown, Kenya relied on targeted restrictions in cities that were hotspots for disease transmission. On April 22, 2020, the government implemented a ban on movement in the Nairobi Metropolitan Area, Mombasa County, Kilifi, Kwale, and Mandera County. Lockdowns continued in 2021: on March 26, a 30-day lockdown in the counties of Nairobi, Kajiado, Machakos, Kiambu, and Nakuru was announced. Travel from these areas to other parts of the country was banned.

Kenya provided support to the agrifood sector through farm input subsidies, direct procurement, and price regulations. Farm input subsidies amounting to 3 billion Kenyan shillings (US$26.5 million) were distributed to 200,000 smallholder farmers through e-vouchers. Due to limitations on air travel, the government also provided approximately $13 million in support to horticultural farmers in order to facilitate access to international markets.

Nigeria closed all schools and universities in mid-March 2020, and some states and local authorities instituted bans on public and social gatherings. Nigeria initially instituted bans on travel from 13 countries and, by late March, the government had closed its borders to all travelers for an initial period of four weeks and suspended passenger rail services within the country. Like Kenya, Nigeria did not institute a nationwide lockdown, opting instead to implement lockdowns in specific hotspots. On March 29, 2020, President Buhari announced restrictive policies for the Federal Capital Territory (including Abuja) and Lagos and Ogun States, which represent about 14 percent of Nigeria's population. These measures restricted the movement of residents, who had to stay home, led to business closures, and sealed regional borders linking lockdown areas with the rest of the country. Exemptions were provided for medical services, agricultural activities, food manufacturers and retailers, telecommunications, and limited financial services. Passenger air travel was also suspended nationwide.

Nigeria's support for the agrifood sector included input subsidies such as a 10 percent reduction in fertilizer prices (in April 2020), a seed price subsidy for up to 81,000 metric tons of seed, and a grant of US$41.2 million administered through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to the Maize Farmers Association of Nigeria to procure fertilizers, seeds, and agrochemicals. The CBN also disbursed loans at zero interest through its Anchor Borrowers Programme and Targeted Credit Facility.

Social protection measures in Nigeria included an innovative approach to the country's Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), which, in light of school closures, delivered food to homes in Abuja and Lagos and Ogun States. Along with the movement restrictions imposed in March 2020, the president also introduced some palliative measures, mainly food distribution and a two-month advance payment of conditional cash transfers to vulnerable citizens. In April 2020, the government announced it would pay for two months of electricity for all Nigerians. The government also expanded its social protection coverage during the period, adding 1 million poor and vulnerable households to the existing list of 2.6 million households eligible for immediate assistance (within two weeks) and releasing 70,000 metric tons of food from the national grain reserve for distribution. With the relaxation of lockdowns and other restrictions in late 2020, people working in both farm and nonfarm sectors gradually returned to conducting business as before. However, loss of income due to the economic recession and high inflation rates in the wake of the pandemic continue to diminish the purchasing power of many households in Nigeria.

Country engagement through the international agricultural research system

With support from the international network of agricultural research centers, national agricultural research systems helped meet the need for evidence-based policies and technologies to assist countries through the crisis. CGIAR's efforts to respond to COVID-19 challenges were built upon years of previous work. Using past CGIAR investments in economywide tools and social accounting matrices,

CGIAR researchers used multiplier models to assess the short-term impacts of COVID-19 and policy responses on the agrifood system. Initial results suggested that lockdowns would have severe adverse impacts on the agrifood system, despite exemptions for agricultural activities, which led to a demand for research evidence to help governments grappling with these impacts. In the early stages of the pandemic, CGIAR work also included guidance on emergency response measures such as social protection; awareness raising regarding policy impacts on production, consumption, and nutrition; rapid phone surveys of households and value chain actors to identify key risks; and policy tracking to enable comparative analysis across countries.

CGIAR responses and country engagement

When the pandemic first began in early 2020, CGIAR immediately pivoted its research plans for the remainder of 2020 and for 2021. As a first step, COVID-19 was incorporated as an analytic factor in existing lines of research. Second, CGIAR leveraged existing projects focused on technology and institutional strengthening in select countries and regions, and third, CGIAR reallocated resources to COVID-19-related work. Beyond these immediate steps, CGIAR designed a COVID-19 response based on four research pillars: (1) food systems; (2) One Health (recognizing the linkages between human, animal, and environmental health); (3) inclusive public programs for food security and nutrition; and (4) policies and investments for crisis response, economic recovery, and improved future resilience.

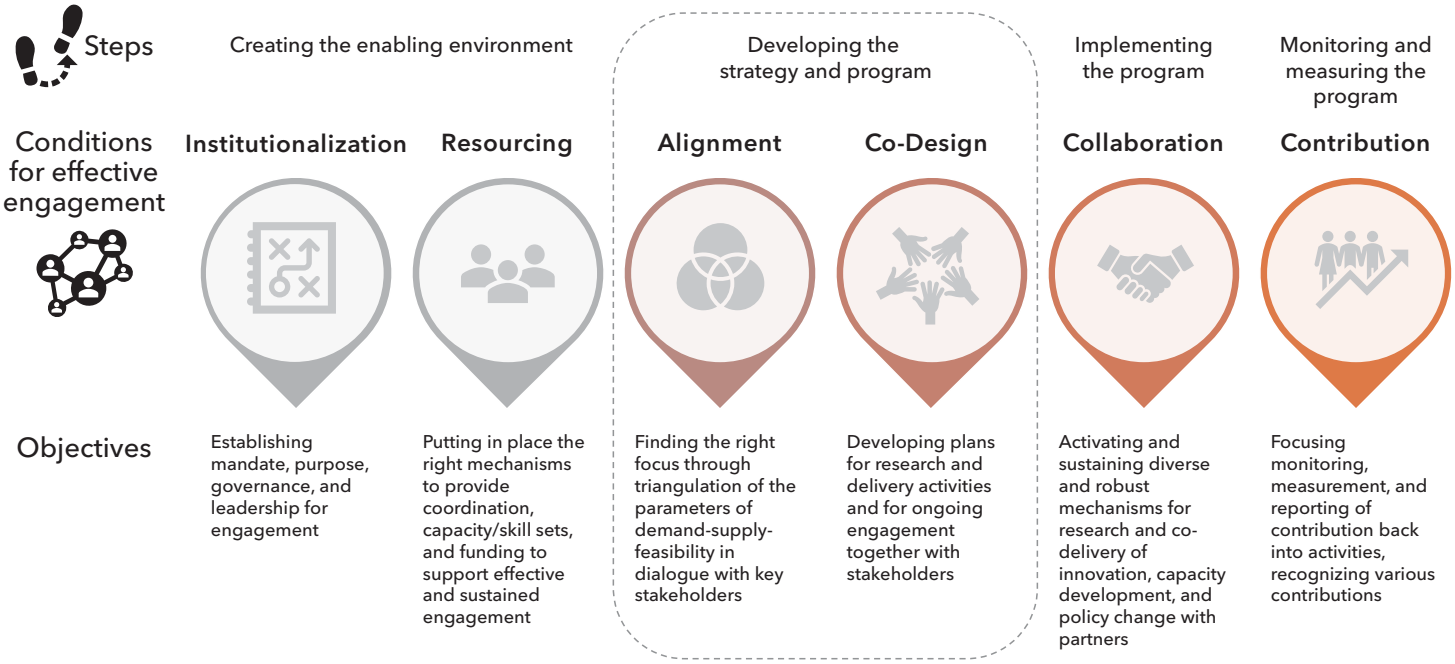
In June 2020, CGIAR launched a COVID-19 Hub in partnership with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) with the aim of working across CGIAR and with key partners to coordinate major streams of relevant research, engagement, and communications. The Hub coordinated work across four areas that mirror the initial CGIAR research pillars:

- Work Area 1: Addressing value chain fractures
- Work Area 2: One Health
- Work Area 3: Supporting country responses
- Work Area 4: Resilient food systems and building back better

The Hub was established to provide high-level coordination in order to ensure that relevant research results, drawn from across the international agricultural research system, would be packaged in appropriate formats for easy access by policymakers and stakeholders. Doing so would ultimately promote uptake of CGIAR innovations by countries most vulnerable to the pandemic's many societal costs.

In its five countries of focus, the Hub has provided timely support to global and country efforts during crisis response and recovery by establishing multidisciplinary research teams at the country level. It has also invested in the highest-priority areas where research results and enhanced coordination are most critical, including surveillance and modeling.

FIGURE 1 COVID-19 Hub country engagement process



Harnessing CGIAR technical capacity and setting country-level priorities

Though the CGIAR COVID-19 Hub had four work areas, this chapter focuses on Work Area 3, which supported countries in their contextual responses to COVID-19. In Work Area 3, the Hub country teams engaged with governments and other national partners to respond to country demands (across different population groups with a focus on the vulnerable) and to design cross-CGIAR interventions targeted to specific country and subnational needs (Figure 1). CGIAR country teams, which were comprised of CGIAR Center representatives in each country, played a key role in planning and delivering the research outputs under Work Area 3. The coordinated multidisciplinary responses from the various CGIAR research areas were led by the country teams and, in close collaboration with national partners, based on a mapping of country demands to CGIAR capabilities. Country teams played a facilitating role in this process, linking country demand for COVID-19 relevant research with the supply of CGIAR data, knowledge, evidence, innovations, and capacity development. To contribute to these efforts and ensure a multidisciplinary research response, Working Group 3 members with expertise in economic modeling, food production and supply, nutrition, gender, social protection, and One Health provided methodological support and specific research inputs to guide CGIAR work supporting country responses to COVID-19.

Figure 1 depicts the country engagement process that led to setting priorities, engaging in the program of work, and ensuring that findings would be included in the policy response process.

Country case studies of CGIAR responses

Bangladesh

The CGIAR COVID-19 Hub's work in Bangladesh focuses on digital systems for crop, livestock, and fish health. The information gathered by this work has enabled faster decision-making and intervention by government agencies. The Hub's research priorities in Bangladesh include setting up a dashboard to monitor food systems, developing a nutrient-secure homestead app,[4] and conducting a feasibility study for digital markets accessible to women. The dashboard also monitors weather for crop and fish production, farm stress, satellite data–based planting/harvesting information, and floods.

Ethiopia

CGIAR's work in Ethiopia aligns with the Ministry of Agriculture's responses to COVID-19, which have prioritized five key components: business continuity of agricultural services; safe and timely distribution of agricultural inputs; increased production of agricultural products, including grains and vegetables; support for both domestic and export commodity supply chains; and food support to the most vulnerable communities.

The CGIAR COVID-19 Hub has leveraged CGIAR's research capacities in Ethiopia as well as existing partnerships. The urgency of responses to the pandemic has fostered new partnerships and models of collaboration in the country. The active participation of CGIAR scientists and experts in various policy dialogues, platforms, and forums means that the COVID-19 Hub is well-placed to disseminate and support the adoption of research findings.

Malawi

The pandemic has generated new challenges for agricultural production in Malawi, which was already threatened by drought, flooding, and pests such as the fall armyworm. CGIAR's response in Malawi focuses on three main workstreams: updating the economic models used to assess COVID-19 impacts; conducting studies on seed system improvement and related implications for food security and diets; and establishing demonstration plots that use climate-resilient technologies.

Myanmar

The COVID-19 pandemic and the coup d'état on February 1, 2021, dealt a double blow to Myanmar. Interviews conducted from February to July 2020 suggest that demand for production inputs and

4 This application collects household-level information and calculates nutrient demand using the recommended daily allowance of micro- and macronutrients. It can collect household diet data for seven days and calculate nutrient supply. It can also address missing nutrients by comparing demand and supply and suggesting possible crops and fish raised in homesteads to address deficiencies. It is expected to redefine nutritional security from a focus on national balances to household-level nutritional deficits.

consumer goods was substantially affected even after the initial lockdown and movement restrictions were eased. CGIAR's response in Myanmar focuses on three main workstreams: assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on agrifood supply chains; determining the impacts of COVID-19 on women's agribusiness and value chains in the Gulf of Mottama; and outlining policy options to build recovery and resilience in Myanmar's food, land, and water systems. The work of the COVID-19 Hub in Myanmar focuses on generating research findings that can be adopted by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners. Key partners in delivering COVID-19 research include the Department of Fisheries, Myanmar Green Way Apps, the Myanmar Fisheries Federation, and local NGOs.

Nigeria

Key outputs from CGIAR's COVID-19 response in Nigeria include the production and distribution of agricultural inputs; educational trainings, particularly for women and youth; and research to better understand the impacts of COVID-19. These outputs specifically include the production and distribution of high-yield adapted sorghum and millet breeder seed, distribution of breeder seeds for four climate-resilient rice varieties, and distribution of farmer-preferred chicken breeds. Other outputs include the demonstration of a crusher for increased utilization of crop residues and the identification and training of five decentralized vine multipliers to boost production and supply of commercial orange-fleshed sweet potato vines to households. Training of women and youth focused on agribusiness, with distribution of agribusiness starter packs to trainees and on sorghum and millet processing for household nutrition and income generation. Research outputs include analytical work from phone surveys conducted in July/August 2020 and July/August 2021 to understand the economic impacts of COVID-19. A second-round phone survey was also conducted with fish supply chain actors to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on the availability and price of aquatic foods and production inputs.

Lessons learned from CGIAR responses

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is unique and unprecedented, the lessons learned from the agricultural research system's work in these countries offer a template for addressing longstanding problems such as malnutrition, drought and climate impacts, and conflict and insecurity. The CGIAR COVID-19 Hub ensured that the full range of the CGIAR expertise — including research, technological innovations, and policy support on agrifood system issues — could help decision-makers around the world address the unique challenges of the pandemic. The Hub also created an opportunity for more integrated collaboration and coordination across CGIAR entities.

A few key conclusions emerge from this experience. First, by enhancing coordination across CGIAR, the COVID-19 Hub's structure improved effective engagement with value chain actors in various countries. For example, although CGIAR Centers in Bangladesh and Nigeria had communicated with their respective governments about CGIAR service offerings in early 2020 and were exploring collaborative research options, progress in their coordinated work significantly improved after the COVID-19 Hub was established. Second, given the mobility restrictions and other measures taken in response to COVID-19 and the lack of face-to-face interaction, CGIAR entities would have faced

serious challenges in building new partnerships for their work. By working under the Hub arrangement, researchers were able to build on existing partnerships, with the Hub providing an opportunity for engagement and discussion with more partners. Third, by bringing CGIAR Centers together, the Hub approach helped the Centers gain a better understanding of the vulnerabilities and resilience capacity of food system actors, especially in subsectors outside their particular mandates, which subsequently led to more awareness of the interactions across value chains. There is strong interest in continuing this type of CGIAR collaboration in a coordinated manner and with distributed leadership, and possibly setting up coordination hubs at country, regional, and global levels to be ready at all times for when crises emerge. This is vital for matching country demand and urgent needs with CGIAR supply, especially during crises and emergencies.

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