

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

COVID-19 in Kenya

Due 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. The government has extended social protection programs, including public works programs and stipends and cash transfers, which are often targeted to women and single parent households and other vulnerable members of society to support them through the pandemic.

Study description

The study was designed as a longitudinal panel study with three rounds of data collection in Nakuru, Busia and Laikipia counties in Kenya. It uses primary quantitative data collected using structured questionnaires administered through a phone-based survey. The study sample was drawn using systematic random sampling from a baseline household survey conducted in early 2020 among a larger sample of rural farmers. Women comprised 52% of the study sample across all rounds. Figure 1 provides a detailed description on the study timeline and sample size covered in each round.

KEY FINDINGS

- While loss of income from the pandemic affected most households, more women reported income losses than men.
- Households often relied on women's savings at the start of the pandemic, whereas by Nov-Dec 2020, households used men's savings to cope with income loss. Households also had to sell assets and borrow money to cope.
- More than 65% of households experienced a change in food access due to the pandemic. Women were more likely to be worried about not having enough food, eat less than required, and not eat despite being hungry.
- While most households reported increased levels of water consumption during the pandemic, 20% of households still faced water insecurity, which is worrisome given the role of domestic water in fighting the disease.

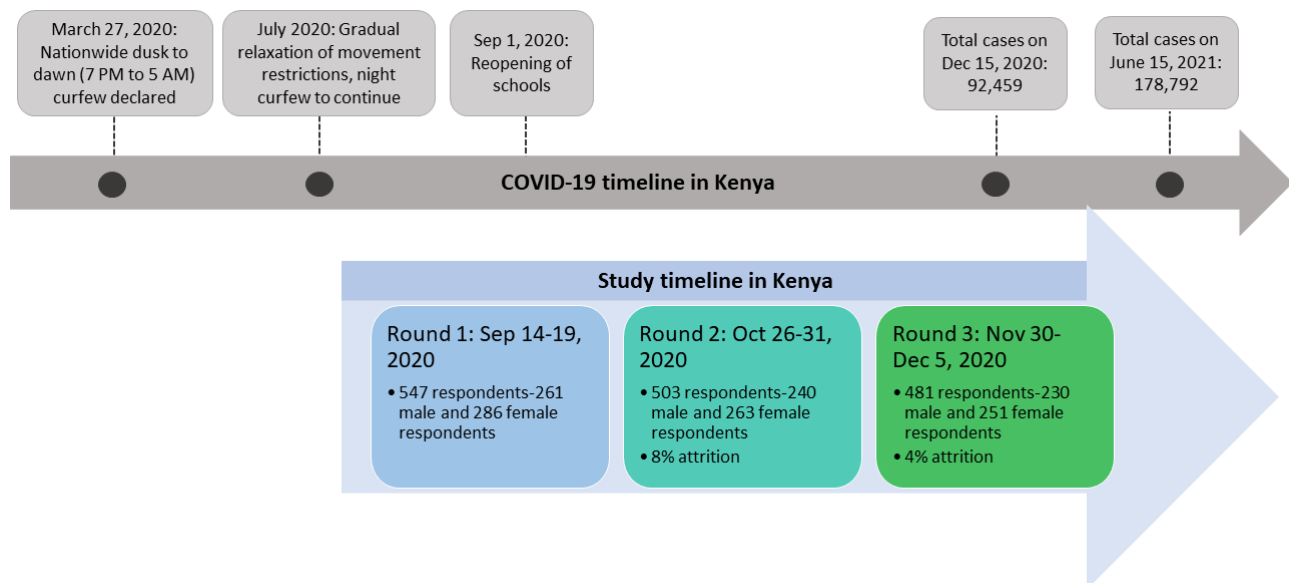


Figure 1: Kenya: COVID-19 lockdown and study timeline

Study findings

a. Economic impact

Farming, predominantly staple crops, and livestock rearing were the primary sources of livelihood for more than two-thirds of the sample households. Men reported that their spouses were mostly engaged in farming and raising livestock (80%), while women reported that only 44% of their spouses were engaged in agriculture. A considerably higher proportion of women reported that their spouse was unemployed (11%) compared to men (3%).

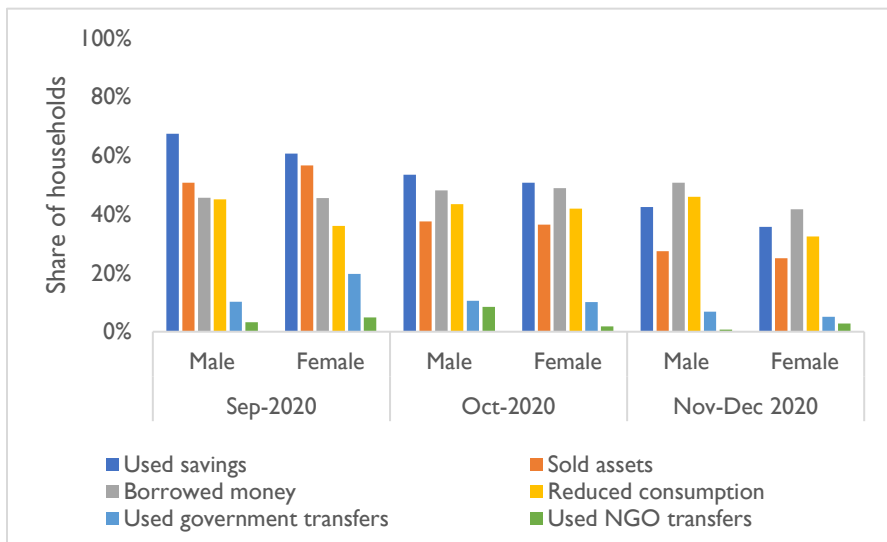


Figure 1: Coping strategies for households to deal with income loss

used their own savings. The primary sources of borrowing in September were neighbors/friends (42%), followed by village saving and loan associations (22%), microcredit institutions (18%), family members/relatives (14%), and phone-based lending applications (11%). The reliance on neighbors and friends increased further by Nov/Dec (59%) but reliance on village associations reduced significantly (5%). A significantly higher proportion of men borrowed money from commercial banks in the first round, compared to women.

Women earned less than men across all rounds of the survey. Most respondents across all rounds shared that they themselves decided how to use their personal earnings in the past two weeks. A considerably higher share of women the later rounds reported no personal earning in the two weeks preceding the survey.

A high share of households experienced income losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Use of savings (64%) and selling assets (54%) were the primary coping strategies used by households in the Sep 2020 survey round to deal with the income loss (Figure 2). More women than men reported suffering incomes losses and receiving government transfers. By the third round (Nov/Dec 2020), fewer households used savings, sold assets, or received government transfers compared to earlier rounds.

While an equal share of men and women (68%) reported using their own savings in the first round (Sep 2020) to cope with income loss, a significantly higher share of men also used their spouse's savings (24%), compared to women who reported using their husband's savings (11%). By Nov/Dec, more men than women noted that they

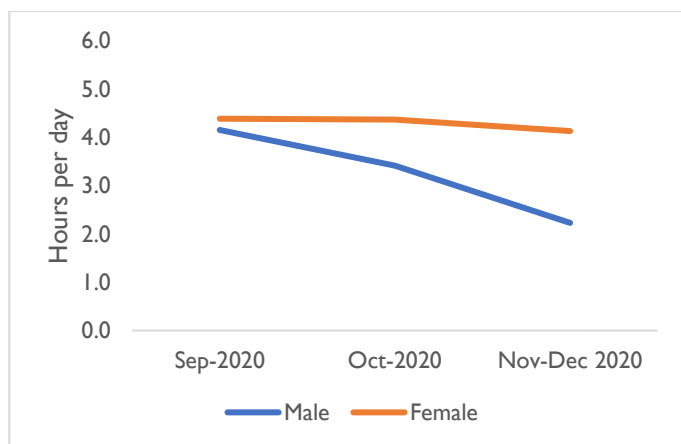


Figure 2: Comparison of average hours of care work- Respondent

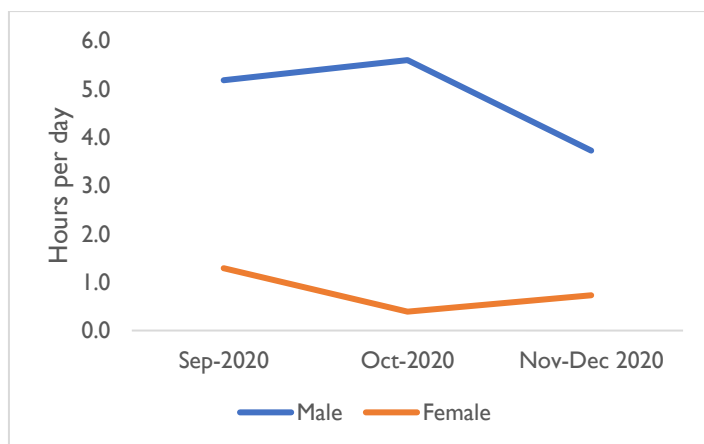


Figure 3: Comparison of average hours of care work- Spouse

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. Moreover, women spent disproportionately more hours in a day caring for other household members (Figure 3). The invisibility of this work is reflected in Figure 4 which presents spouses' assessment of daily hours spent caring.

b. Impact on mobility

In September 2020, more than 80% of households stated that they had gone out to buy food in the two weeks preceding the survey (Figure 5). However, less than one-third of respondents reported going out for work or attending group meetings. This scenario changed in the subsequent rounds with fewer men going out to buy food, but instead went out to work, attend group meetings, and to visit friends and relatives. Over 45% of respondents had to go out to collect water with women mostly being responsible for this task.

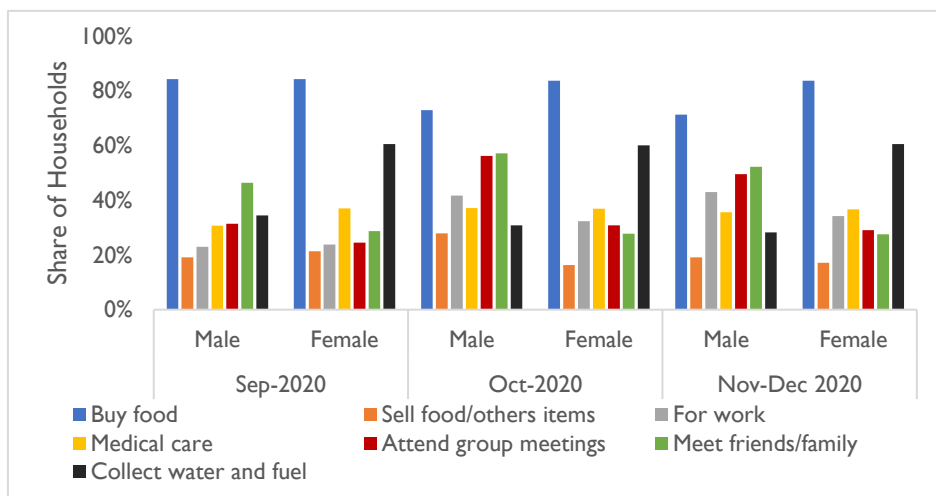


Figure 4: Mobility in the 2 weeks preceding the survey

c. Impact on migration

Around 24% of households had migrant members who lived away for work in the last year. More households reported having male migrants (78%), compared to female migrants (38%). In the first survey round, 20% of the male migrants and 10% of the female migrants had returned home due to COVID-19, while a further 30% reported that migrants had not returned. The majority of households with active migrants (55%) were receiving remittances although remittance levels had declined for three quarters of the households compared to before the pandemic.

d. Impact on food security and dietary diversity

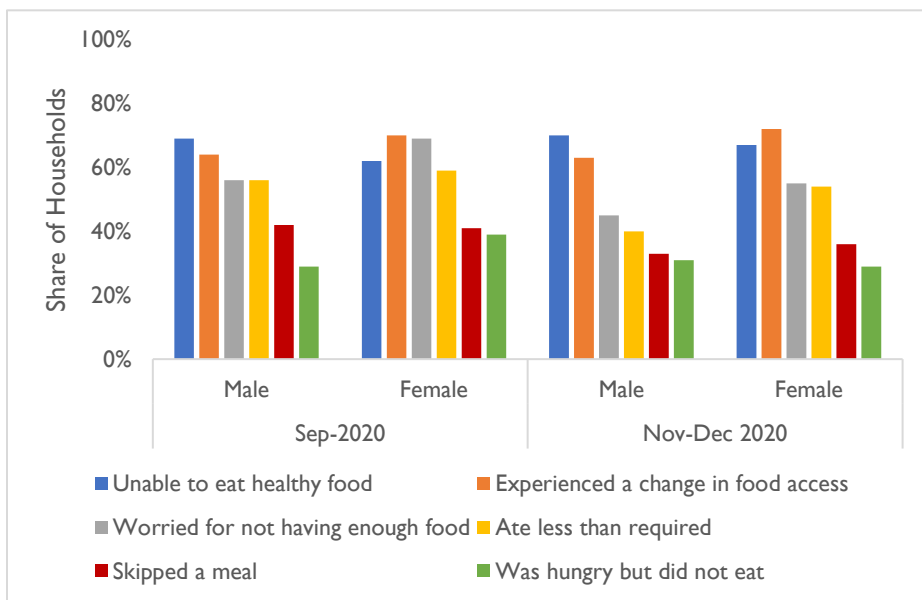


Figure 6: Food insecurity in the 2 weeks preceding the survey

More than 65% of households across all rounds experienced changes in food access due to the pandemic.

Across all three survey rounds, respondents were concerned about not being able to eat healthy and nutritious food, not having enough food, and eating less than they should (Figure 6).

These concerns persisted across survey rounds. A higher share of women, as compared to men, were worried about not having enough food, eating less than required, and not eating despite being hungry.

In terms of dietary diversity,¹ around 63% of women did not have minimally adequate diet diversity in the first survey round; by round 3, this reduced to 53%.

¹ Minimum dietary diversity for women (MDD-W) was calculated for female respondents based on a 24-hour recall period to assess impact on nutrition.

e. Impact on water security

Around 29% of households relied on surface water (spring/river/lake/canal) as their primary source of drinking water in the Sep 2020 survey round. Other important drinking water sources were borewells/tube wells (19%), dug wells (17%), piped water (17%), and rainwater (15%). Around 53% and 64% of households in the later two rounds, respectively, perceived that their water consumption had increased compared to the same time last year. Of those who perceived changes in their water consumption levels, 61% in October and 66% in Nov/Dec felt that the change was to a large extent due to COVID-19. Less than one-fourth of households pay for water and, among those who do, almost 40% reported a change in their expenditures on water compared to pre-COVID-19 times, an increase in most cases.

Almost all households had heard about hand washing recommendations to prevent infection from COVID-19. Water insecurity was not a major problem for most households across all rounds and indicators with around 80% of households reporting that they never faced water challenges. However, that leaves around 20% of households who still faced water insecurity during a pandemic when accessing water is an important risk prevention measure.

f. Impact on children's education

On March 20, 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 Sep/Oct, findings suggest that children's education continued to suffer. Around 98% of boys and 99% 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% of boys and 29% 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%) of students were attending online classes during the Nov/Dec 2020 survey round.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on people in Kenya, including losses in income, remittances, and access to food. Women were also more likely to report food insecurity challenges and many lacked access to healthy diets. Vulnerable groups with limited adaptive capacities to deal with sudden shocks have been disproportionately affected and this, in turn, has magnified existing inequities.

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 were drawn down first. 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 prepared by Muzna Alvi, Shweta Gupta and Prapti Barooah, all at the New Delhi office of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), under the Gender, Climate Change, and Nutrition Initiative (GCAN). Mike Ndegwa (Pioneer Research and Empowerment Center- PioREC) led implementation of all survey rounds. We appreciate comments from Elizabeth Bryan, Emily Larkin, Aslihan Kes and Claudia Ringler. GCAN was made possible with support from Feed the Future through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and is associated with the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, which is carried out with support from CGIAR Fund Donors and through bilateral funding agreements. 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 Feed the Future. Copyright ©2021 International Food Policy Research Institute. Licensed for use under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)