



The COVID-19 pandemic and the social-distancing policies put in place to contain the virus have led to a reduction in economic activity around the world. Families in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), many of whom work in the informal sector and lack social safety nets, face potentially stark threats to their livelihoods. However, little data exists on how these communities are being affected. During April-July 2020, researchers collected data on the early socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 using phone surveys of over 30,000 households (containing over 100,000 people) in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Philippines, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.

Key Findings



Across all countries, widespread drops in employment and income were observed. Fifty to eighty percent of respondents in samples from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone report income losses during the COVID-19 period.



In most countries, a large share of respondents reported reduced access to markets, consistent with lockdowns and other mobility restrictions implemented between March and June 2020.



By April, many households were unable to meet basic nutritional needs. Forty-eight percent of rural Kenyan households, 69 percent of landless agricultural households in Bangladesh, and 87 percent of rural households in Sierra Leone were forced to miss meals or reduce portion sizes to cope with the crisis.



Social support received varied widely across samples. However, the consistently reported high rate of missed meals and reduced portion sizes suggests that even when these efforts were present, they were insufficient.



Where there is data, results show that firm revenue and profits were approximately halved during the COVID-19 crisis. There was also a pronounced decline in household expenditures. Households appeared to be cutting back non-food consumption in an effort to maintain funds for food.

RESEARCHERS

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TIMELINE

April-June 2020

SECTOR

Health, Social Protection

SOURCE

Egger et al., *Sci Adv* 2021; 7

STUDY DESIGN

Quantitative surveys of a combination of nationally and sub-nationally representative samples

Falling Living Standards and Food Insecurity during the COVID-19 Crisis

This plain-language brief summarizes the findings in the paper [Falling living standards during the COVID-19 crisis: Quantitative evidence from nine developing countries](#) published in *Science Advances*.

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