

# Poverty, Hunger and Jobs: Pandemic Update and Recovery Prospects

Policy note, June 2023

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and intersecting crises— including climate change, conflict, debt, and the ‘triple F’ crisis (food, fuel, finance)— have reversed progress on a range of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), increasing the number of people in poverty, contributing to a dramatic rise in hunger and food insecurity, increasing gender inequalities, and constraining the effectiveness of interventions to promote pro-poor livelihoods and decent jobs. In many countries, the post-COVID-19 recovery has been slow and incomplete.

To promote the joining up of SDGs (1- no poverty, 2- zero hunger, 8- decent work and economic growth), CPAN/IDS, IFPRI, Southern Voice, and the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development co-convened a three-day virtual international workshop in June 2023 on “poverty, hunger and jobs”. Its aim was to synthesise latest knowledge and data about the effects and the effectiveness of policy responses on these issues, and to work out its policy/programming implications to re-establish positive development progress on hunger, jobs and poverty. This brief outlines key takeaways and recommendations from the workshop presentations and discussions.

## Key takeaways

**A. Eradicating poverty and hunger during and since COVID-19 requires rethinking current policy, programming and the underlying measures and evidence base used to inform these.** A suggested way forward is outlined below.

**A1. A stock of better measures to address vulnerability and promote resilience is needed for future crises.** Not least given the large share of ‘new poor’ emerging during Covid-19, and the continued confluence of crises, people-centred policy and research should look at vulnerability as well as poverty, for example through insurance mechanisms, livelihood diversification, and other means of risk management beyond social protection.

- **A1.1 When crises do occur, policymakers need to be more attuned or willing to mitigate not only its negative impacts in terms of poverty and hunger, but also the negative consequences of policies implemented in response.** The closing down of markets with large shares of informal food sellers during the pandemic is a key example that affected both sellers and buyers. Many sellers in informal economies were in poverty or vulnerable to it, and reliant on these markets as a key source of livelihood. Moreover, when local markets were closed, an important source of access to nutritious food for buyers, with the ability to purchase it on credit and have some degree of confidence in food safety for people in and near poverty was lost, driving food insecurity.
- **A.1.2 Social protection remains critical for targeting crisis responses,** whether through forms of cash transfers or adaptive social protection. There are modalities that have seen success in recent years, including targeted food vouchers rather than broad food subsidies of staples. There is promise in supporting and scaling interventions that fill known gaps in child diets, and scope

to improve delivery mechanisms and address structural challenges in social protection delivery and funding. There is also potential to take bold action to promote universal social protection, and scope to improve gender-sensitive programming of current social protection including in relation to the infrastructure of care.

- **A1.3 Recovery programming should go on for longer than it currently does, such that we begin to more seriously think about ways to promote recovery during crises.** Crises are leading to a host of long-term negative impacts—restructuring of labour force, wages and working conditions, loss of skill acquisition potential and increased early marriages (school closures/disruptions), cognitive and income implications of nutritional deficits, care burdens and semi-permanent exits from the labour force.

**A2. Our data and measures of poverty also need to become more nutrition- and gender-sensitive.** Our international measures of extreme poverty we know are too low, but they are especially low when considering what constitutes a healthy diet and when attempting to take into account the value of unpaid work often done by women and girls. Including such considerations in a Vulnerability measure would be a useful complement to the monetary and multi-dimensional poverty measures.

- **A2.1 Improved data on nutrition in household surveys beyond the Food Insecurity Experience Scale is needed, alongside recognition that food security alone does not ensure a diet conducive to good health.** Food insecurity cannot be framed only in terms of caloric supply and demand and individual experience, as these miss important dimensions of democratic agency (decision-making power – as food security can also be conceptualised at the collective level) and sustainability (environmental resilience). At the same time, the data we have is not sufficiently disaggregated; with less than 1 in 5 surveys on food insecurity during COVID-19 reporting gender-disaggregated results, and 1 in 3 having unclear sampling methods.
- **A2.2 The Basic Care Basket, which aims to estimate the costs of care production, suggests that households meeting a minimum care standard employ multiple times the poverty line to address their care needs (3x the poverty line in Argentina).** This might be a large share of the population especially in contexts where resources are already stretched, but given that caring challenges are only going to increase in the future as the world's population ages, thinking through the resources-care-capability linkages will be crucial.
- **A2.3 In all of this, there is a role for supporting local groups to produce 'community-collected data' and to demand access to data generated by researchers from their communities, so that they can engage with policy makers and help in monitoring impacts of crises.**

**B. Jobs are critical transmitters of effects of COVID-19 and intersecting crises to poverty, wellbeing and food security. Improving quality of and access to jobs can help break the link between crises and deprivation.** For this to happen...

**B1. Policies must be differentiated according to the status and context of households,** taking account of prevailing social and gender norms, and precarity of work, especially amongst the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and informal work which is currently less amenable to policy interventions.

- **B1.1 Some of this requires targeting intersecting inequalities.** For example, youth urban workers and female internal migrant workers are amongst groups that were particularly affected during the pandemic, even more so in households in and near poverty. Young people and women in poverty more broadly suffered disproportionately from the fall-out from the pandemic and related crises. They often have less resilience capacity to respond to them because of limited assets (including land and working capital), and lower levels of education and skills training.
- **B1.2 We need ‘Gender Action Plans’ and similar ‘Youth Action Plans’ to drive this response.** This could include considerable support and investment in training and capacity building, including through investments in quality of secondary education and alternative education models. In addition, in rural areas this would also involve supporting increasing access to and control of land/resources, credit/capital, extension and advisory services and new technologies.
- **B1.3 Responding to heterogeneity within sectors is also critical.** Currently, heterogeneity is found in rural labour markets where there are many low-skill, low-wage agricultural jobs and a small number of higher-skill jobs that offer workers pathways out of poverty; in the non-farm economy, low productivity self- and wage-employment coexists with employment in dynamic micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs); and in the outcomes of migration, which lifts some of the rural poor out of poverty and supports some households who remain through remittances, but it takes others to urban squatter settlements and continued poverty.

## **B2. There are sector-wide efforts needed to complement differentiated responses.**

- **B2.1 Efforts could be targeted to promote recovery in the non-farm economy (urban and rural), which has been more disrupted and slower to recover than the rural farm-based economy.** This requires a better basket of support for non-farm MSMEs especially in low- and lower middle-income countries. A gendered lens is critical, as COVID-19 for example affected women’s businesses in particular, due to the often more informal or smaller size of these enterprises.
- **B2.2 Efforts to improve labor market transitions, the creation of decent jobs, and improvements in the quality of jobs for example through wage and skill upgrading are needed.** During the pandemic we saw some reallocation of low-skilled jobs for example through digital platforms, but which did not contribute to improved quality.
- **B2.3 Policies need to address climate change and weather shocks urgently, for example through climate smart and/or environmentally sustainable agriculture and more broadly through efforts to transform agrifood systems,** making use of green ‘easy-tech’ applications for LICs and low-income workers. Within this, there is an urgent need to rebuild extension services. Given the preponderance of women farmers it would be essential to recruit and train women, to go beyond the current spread of extension services largely ‘by and for men’. Moreover, given the role of agriculture as a buffer for households who lost their main sources of income during the pandemic, we need to ensure that this transition is not to subsistence-level agriculture. For individuals remaining in the sector over the longer-term, there is a concurrent need for interventions that can

help women and men invest, expand, or accumulate value-addition in climate smart agriculture.

**B3. A big push on early childhood care and education is needed following the pandemic where there such negative effects both on children and their carers (generally mothers and other women in the household).** At the moment, the lack of affordable childcare drives many women to stay at home and also has negative effects on household diets as women try to manage productive and reproductive responsibilities. A big push could be in both public and private sector provision. In the informal economy, this investment would need strong government support.

- **B3.1 As part of this, huge investment in early childhood education in LICs and LMICs is needed.** School-feeding responses during the pandemic were an important intervention targeting hunger and poverty, with links to jobs by retaining children in school thus improving longer-term prospects. However, these efforts were largely out of reach for younger children not in schools, contributing to huge estimated losses in lifetime earnings and development. Efforts to improve mental health for populations across the life course are also important, and can have intergenerational consequences where poor maternal mental health also affects child malnutrition.
- **B3.2 Links between the Care Economy and the formal and informal economy should be better acknowledged and supported.** This may be done through investing in institutional infrastructure (social security; social protection; skills training; labour rights protection), targeted and gender-sensitive policies and legal frameworks, as well as reconceptualizing the economy to include the care economy as well as the informal economies more centrally. Practically, we need a multidimensional assessment of economic systems similar to how we consider a multidimensional assessment of poverty.

**C. To achieve the above and address intersecting crises during and since COVID-19 requires improved a multidimensional, multi-sectoral multi-agency approach** – working both at the regional/national scale and from the community-level up, and engaging women and men.

**C1. Resourcing this will necessitate a hike in social expenditure levels.** This might be through ensuring that domestic public resources are directed to social spending, which continue to remain inadequate in many LICs and LMICs. It also requires international solidarity and support to help finance social protection systems in ways that can help prevent future impoverishment and increases in hunger.

**C2. There is some potential for resourcing through redistribution measures,** including in LICs, in part to mitigate high wage inequality. Reforming tax policies can help increase domestic tax revenue and promote more equitable revenue collection through progressive taxation. In turn, reducing wealth, urban-rural and gender inequalities may also have positive implications for mitigating food insecurity and vulnerability to shocks.

**Acknowledgments**

We acknowledge the financial support of the Covid Collective, convened by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and financially supported by Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Research and Evidence Division as a social science contribution to the pandemic.

This note was co-constructed by the following workshop conveners, presenters, discussants and participants: Abid Suleri, Adeniran Adedeji, Alejandro Grinspun, Amanda Lenhardt, Andrew Shepherd, Blessings Chinsinga, Carlos Oya, Corinne Mitchell, Dan Gilligan, Florencia Caro Sachetti, Ginette Azcona, Isabelle Deganis, James Tayler, John Thompson, Madina Guloba, Maria Guran, Mariame Maiga, Maurizio Navarra, Michelle Tang, Minuri Perera, Nick Nisbett, Nikka Rivera, Nilupa Gunaratna, Nisha Arunatilake, Nishant Yonzan, Raghav Chakravarthy, Ramiro Albrieu, Ricardo Fort, Sabina Dewan, Sajid Amid Javed, Tania Vasquez Luque, Tassew Woldehanna, Tracy Mamoun, Vanesa d'Alessandre, Vidya Diwakar.

For further details, please email [v.diwakar@ids.ac.uk](mailto:v.diwakar@ids.ac.uk)

**Suggested citation:**

CPAN. (2023) Poverty, Hunger & Jobs: Pandemic Update & Recovery Prospects, CPAN, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/CPAN.2023.013](https://doi.org/10.19088/CPAN.2023.013)

© Crown copyright 2023